Black Body Memory: A Philosophy of the Talk

Autumn Redcross

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BLACK BODY MEMORY: A PHILOSOPHY OF THE TALK

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Autumn Gibson Redcross

May 2019
BLACK BODY MEMORY:
A PHILOSOPHY OF THE TALK

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ABSTRACT

BLACK BODY MEMORY: A PHILOSOPHY OF THE TALK

By

Autumn Gibson Redcross

May 2019

Dissertation supervised by Pat Arneson

This project offers the term Black body memory to point toward the threatened existential disposition of Black people in society today. Moreover, Black body memory becomes metaphorical to the narrative paradigm of a shared experience. While popular conceptions theorize race as a social construction, the lived reality of Black people is frequently imbued by racialization and racism. Black body memory emerges from the intersection of the Black body articulated by Franz Fanon, Charles Johnson, and George Yancy, among others and body memory, as described by Edward Casey and Thomas Fuchs. Black body memory is a culturally-laden and sedimented lived reality. The Black body receives and maintains memories reflective of her raced disposition. Such knowledge or memory becomes a tool for navigating the social sphere and at times, for survival. Black body memory is rhetorically transferred through the talk which is the
artifact discussed in this project. The talk has recently come to attention with the current state of affairs concerning the vulnerability of Black lives as shared on social media. In the interest of teaching self-protection, the talk includes a variety of directives on how to respond to potential confrontations with police and self-deputized individuals.
I dedicate this endeavor to my grandmothers, Beatrice Clark Gibson and Marie Knox-Hammit Peeler, who rubbed their pennies together to fund my first years as a college student. I will always be thankful to both Grandma Bea and Granny. May the reader know the worth of their investment. I pray to pass along their conviction and generosity to my children’s children. I carry you always in my heart.
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Chapter 1: Race and Racism

A scientific constitution of race has been outdated for some time (P. C. Taylor 89). Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue that biologically determined concepts of race diminished in the 20th century (24). In 1951, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) took a stance against the notion of race as biologically determined. UNESCO published *The Race Concept, Results of an Inquiry* stating, “that all men living today belong to a single species. *Homo sapiens* are derived from a common stock” (12).

Contemporary thought no longer recognizes race by genetic provision. To that end, President Bill Clinton ceremoniously announced that "all of us are created equal” (Clinton n.p.). Clinton's genome project (re)confirmed that humans are very much the same as one another. Stressing the equality of all people, the former president stated, “After all, I believe one of the great truths to emerge from this triumphant expedition inside the human genome is that in genetic terms, all human beings, regardless of race, are more than 99.9 percent the same" (n.p.). There is but one race—the human race. Instead of a biological concept, race is popularly understood as a social-historical construct (Omi and Winant 24).

The election of President Barack Obama in 2008 set in motion hopes of a “post-racial” society (Alexander 2–3). “Commentators and pundits wondered aloud whether the nomination and eventual election of President Obama signified that we, as a nation and a culture, had finally purged the miasma of our original sin of racism and had even transcended race” (MacMullan 93). That a Black person could achieve the highest office in the land gave hope that the social-economic playing field, where Blacks had previously been unable to participate, would finally be made even. However, the current racial disposition of this nation indicates that race still matters (Omi and Winant 2). Moreover, today’s racial climate is showing signs of social
upheaval. Although the outlook of racial stratification is moving toward a minority-based population by the year 2050, society continues to operate with race in mind (Allen 69). While the biological determination of race has been replaced with understanding race as a social construction, effects of the racist agenda still permeate society today.

Race and racism inform the notion of Black body memory and therefore are discussed first in this project. The focus of this chapter is to explore concepts of race and racism. The Black body is a raced body and one through which I encounter the world. Race is initiated through social construction informed by racist ideology embedded in human communication. The chapter proceeds in three key turns. First, I define and offer conceptualizations of race as articulated by key western philosophers. Second, I frame race as a part of social identity and human communication. Race has become embedded in language and has given way to race-thinking and racism. Third, I illustrate the effects of race and whiteness in America by describing social issues created by race, race thinking, and systemic racism. Race can be explained as emerging from a social construct. The conception of race is derived from racist ideology. While popular thought has moved away from a biological account of race, centuries of racism have created a foothold in American culture, which cannot be easily dismissed.

Conceptualizing Race

Race is one of the most salient characteristics of the human person. In terms of Black and white, race is a notable factor of identity. America’s cultural legacy is informed by the concept of race. Because of this, “the ubiquity of race is inescapable across nearly every social domain” (Omi and Winant 2). According to critical race philosophers Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott, modern conceptions of race point to “a major division of humanity displaying a distinctive
combination of physical traits transmitted through a line of descent” (xiii). However, race and racial categories have varied tremendously over time and between different societies (Omi and Winant 5). The meaning of race and racial ideologies present within the realities of everyday experiences. Race is therefore in flux.

Ultimately, “race is a way of ‘making people up’” (qtd. in Omi and Winant 105).

Moreover, race is a way of othering. Scholars forming and writing on racial ideologies sought to identify races and define their significance. Their work had great impact, which still can be seen today. “The very act of defining racial groups is a process [that continues to be] fraught with confusion, contradiction, and unintended consequences” (Omi and Winant 105). This project benefits from a look at the ways the idea of race developed in western philosophy.

The search for a declarative beginning to the question of race proves to be an involved task.

Some [scholars] have tried to find it in the “Purity of Blood” statutes of fifteenth-century Spain, which were employed against the conversion of Jewish people. Jews had converted to Christianity but were still not accepted because of their Jewish blood. Others had sought the origin of the concept of race in debates of sixteenth-century Spain when the opponents of Bartolome de Las Casas justified the mistreatment of Native Americans on the grounds that they were not human. Still, others have sought it in the Atlantic slave trade. (Bernasconi and Lott viii)

The notion of race has long been employed.

Two narratives attempt to describe the origin of the races. The earlier and more popular conceptualization of race attempted to reconcile a literal, monogenetic reading of the Bible (McClintock 49; Bernasconi and Lott viii). According to monogenesis, all races of people have come from “the single creative source in Adam” (McClintock 49). Anne McClintock explains for that for theorists writing prior to 1850, degeneration of the purest race occurred as a result of falling “unevenly from the perfect Edenic form incarnated in Adam” (49). The second competing
narrative on the division of the races was that of polygenesis. According to polygenesis, variations of the original race sprang up from different regions on earth, marking various “centers of creation” (McClintock 49). Distinct to either narrative, scholars sought to pursue explanations of the races of people from two fields of interest. One conception of race was interested in racial distinctions for the function categorizing people according to their biologically shared attributes, according to their lineage and geographical location (Bernasconi and Lott viii). The second conception of race was concerned with not only how races of people related to one another, but also sought to determine what role each race played within the whole of humanity. I begin a survey of conceptual thought on race in 1684 with Francois Bernier (1620-1688) who, according to Bernasconi and Lott, was the first to use the term race in his findings (viii).

Many Europeans had written about varied physical characteristics among the people encountered during their travels. However, not until Bernier, had anyone divided people into races based on those traits. Bernier’s essay “A New Division on the Earth” did just that. Anonymously published in 1684, scholars later discovered that the writer was indeed Bernier. He was born in Anjou and died in Paris only after extensive travel through Egypt, India, and Persia. Bernier’s essay begins,

Geographers up to this time have only divided the earth according to its countries or regions. The remarks which I have made upon men during all my long and numerous travels, have given me the idea of dividing it in a different way. Although in the exterior from their bodies and especially in their faces, men are almost all different one from the other according to the different districts of the earth which they inhabit so that those who have been great travelers are often never mistaken in distinguishing each nation in that way; still I have remarked that there are four or five species or races of men in particular whose difference is so remarkable that it may be properly made use of as the foundation for a new division of earth. (Bernier 2)
With this early use of the term race and the description of biological distinctions of the races, Bernier’s conclusions served as a base-point for the term race. Although biological determination is widely rejected, people’s physical traits still determine modern conceptions of race. People trace their lineage to determine the groups or race from which they came (Omi and Winant 104–05). Bernier’s work influenced writers after him, including Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Quintessential German philosopher Kant was known for his engagement in comprehensive and profound thinking on aesthetics, ethics, and knowledge. Kant has had an immense impact on modern philosophy throughout the world. In his 1777 essay, “Of the Different Human Races,” Kant offered a scientific conception of race supporting a biblical account of a monogenesis. According to Kant, Black and white people are of the same species, and share a “common lineage of descent” (Kant, “Human Races” 9). However, Blacks and whites are not just separate races, but, “for obvious reasons” Kant notes, Negroes and whites are the base races (“Human Races” 12).

Kant laid out his understanding of the origins of the races. He insisted on a permanence of racial characteristics over generations (Kant, “Human Races” 20). Kant explained that from an original, lineal root genus, with white or brownish color, four races were born: the first is the noble blond of northern Europe, the second is the copper red race of America, the third race is the Black found most strongly in Senegambia, and the fourth race is the olive-yellow Asian-Indian. According to Kant, the original root genus carried the seeds of four races which could, by way of environmental conditions, be actualized over time. For Kant, this theory fully substantiated that all men and women of the world have come from Adam.
Kant’s ideologies on race were not neutral, however. Physical characteristics of the races indicated something beyond their biology. Although the physical attributes of each race were a result of environmental conditions (including diet), each race’s attributes dictated that race’s overall character. For the members of the Black race, who acclimated to the extreme humid heat and warm climate of Africa, Kant writes,

The growth of the spongy parts of the body had to increase in a hot and humid climate. This growth produced a thick, turned up nose and thick, fatty lips. The skin had to be oily, not only to lessen the too heavy perspiration but also to ward off the harmful absorption of the foul, humid air. The profusion of iron particles, which are otherwise found in the blood of every human being, and, in this case, are precipitated to the net-shaped substance through the evaporation of phosphoric acid (which explains why all Negroes stink), is the cause of blackness that shines through the epidermis. The heavy iron content of the blood also seems to be necessary in order to prevent the enervation of all parts of the body. The oily skin, which weakens the nourishing mucus necessary for growth of the hair, hardly even allows for the production of the wool that covers the head. Besides all this, humid warmth generally promotes the strong growth of animals. In short, all of these factors account for the origin of the Negro, who is well-suited for his climate, namely, strong, flashy, and agile. However, because he is amply supplied by his motherland, he is also lazy, indolent, and dawdling. (“Human Races” 17)

For Kant, the physical manifestation of race indicated one’s essence. Additionally, Kant’s text, *Observations of the Feelings of the Beautiful and the Sublime*, Kant remarked, “to be Black from head to foot” was to be stupid (Kant, *Observations* 111). Kant’s observations were later refuted by Johann Gottfried von Herder.

Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803) denied Kant’s assertions in his essay, “Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humankind.” This is the essay for which he is best known (Herder 23). Herder was interested in the contributions that people of every nation gave to humanity. A diversity of people and their kind is not a reason for hierarchical classifications, according to Herder. But distinctions of the races served as an opportunity to appreciate differences and the diversity of a people for the uniqueness of their qualities, and what they might contribute to humanity overall.
Herder likened the differences of people of the world to leaves on a tree. As each leaf on a tree is separate and original, everyone in the world is different and has his or her unique characteristics. The physical characteristics of people, “are nothing other than containers, shells, and holders . . . through which we enjoy and live” (Herder 23). Herder wrote, “no matter how different the forms in which humankind appear on earth; it is still everywhere one and the same human species” (23). For Herder, people’s various characteristics, including “the humans with the backward feet on Malacca, the probably rickets-diseased nation of pygmies on Madagascar, the men dressed as women in Florida” are all a reflection of earth’s innumerable diversity (25).

Herder argued that all of humanity is a brotherhood which deserves honor among and from one another. Even “the Negroes remain completely human,” he said (Herder 25). For the Negro and the American, Herder argued, “you should not oppress him, nor murder him, nor steal from him; for he is a human being just as you are. . . .” (26). For Herder, injustices against any race of people are indicative of the destruction of humanity on the whole (Bernasconi and Lottix). For example, forced baptism, colonialism, or the slave trade might interfere with a group’s capacity to fulfill their historical mission. Because of Herder’s rejection of a Kantian conception of race, sometimes Herder is considered the founder of the concept of race. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1830) was interested in similar issues.

Blumenbach was 23 years old in 1775 when he wrote, “On the Natural Variety of Mankind.” The focus of Blumenbach’s project was not on essences as Kant’s had been. Instead, the thrust of Blumenbach’s project was to divide races of people according to the geographic areas in which groups of humans thrived. In doing so, Blumenbach expanded the notion of racial clusters from Kant’s original four groups to five groups. In his essay, Blumenbach recounts the contributions other theorists had given to the study of the races. He described people as “races
according to groupings of physical attributes, such as their hair texture, facial, and bodily characteristics” (Blumenbach 28–29). For Blacks, Blumenbach noted their puffy lips, their knotty bones protruding from the sides of their faces, and their “banged legs” (28). Their physical traits, he said, were common for all Africans, except for those living in the Northern regions of Africa (29). The most notable contribution Blumenbach gave to the study of the races, was the term Caucasian.

Blumenbach explains,

I have taken the name of this variety from Mount Caucus, both because its neighborhood, and especially its southern slope, produces the most beautiful race of men, I mean the Georgian, and because all physiological reasons converge to this, that in that region, if anywhere, it would seem we ought with the greatest probability to place autochthones of mankind. (31)

For Blumenbach, the Caucasian, with his or her fine symmetry of features, was the race the most “handsome in appearance” (28). Blumenbach described that Caucasians displayed facial characteristics such as rosy cheeks, oval face, narrow nose, small lips, mouth, and white complexion. The Caucasians were the earliest inhabitants of Europe, and also the ancestors of parts of East Asia and North Africa (Blumenbach 28). In this way, Blumenbach’s project, therefore, went beyond mere categorical divisions of the races of man. His assertions concerning the natural history of man coincide with the writings of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).

Hegel was a professor of philosophy in Berlin during the blooming of the 19th century. Hegel’s caricature-like depictions of the African had far-reaching influence on racial ideologies throughout the western world ("Anthropology" 41). Hegel’s contributions were less about lineage or bloodline, and more about a hierarchical manner of classification. Hegel’s characterizations of peoples according to their races had to do not only with how races were
different from one another, but also his writings had to do with a racial group’s impact on human history. His assertions would work to resolve some people’s concerns surrounding race, humanity and the ethics of colonialism.

In his essay in the 1845 entry to the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* titled “Anthropology,” Hegel wrote, “Negroes are to be regarded as a race of children who remain immersed in their state of uninterested naivete. They are sold and let themselves be sold, without any reflection on the rights or wrongs of the matter,” he said (38). “For Hegel, the decisive historical category was not race, but people . . . . It was as peoples that the Caucasian race participated in history” (Bernasconi and Lott x). Hegel’s attitude about Blacks was that they were a people outside of history, and therefore not human.

Hegel wrote, “With respect to the diversity of races of mankind it must be remembered first of all that the purely historical question, whether all these races sprang from a single pair of human beings or from several, is of no concern whatever to us in philosophy” (49). According to Hegel, the dialectical history of the world included those of the Caucasian race. Africans had only a small, if any, role in the history of the world. For Hegel, to not have a history, was to not have personhood. Therefore, for Hegel, Black people of Africa were not people at all.

Western philosophies of race penetrated the American colonies, which led to the growth of racial ideology and the cementation thereof. The United States “sought to maintain an alliance of people of European descent by maintaining a specifically white identity” (Bernasconi and Lott x). Racial distinctions deepened during America’s youth and the forming of the nation. Racial ideologies substantiated the logic for racial slavery.

Founding father, Virginia statesman, and third president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence. He had been
elected and served as the nation’s second vice president under John Adams. Jefferson belonged to American Philosophical Society which led scientific thought in the new country. During that time, Jefferson wrote his only full-length book. Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* was published in 1784 and included his poignant observations on the races:

> To our reproach, it must be said, that though for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the races of black and of red men, they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history. I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications. (Jefferson 169)

While he may have believed in the inferiority of Blacks to whites, Jefferson’s original draft of the Declaration of Independence decried slavery as a “cruel war against human nature itself,” which violated “sacred rights of life and liberty.”

A prominent figure in American political culture, Jefferson had an ongoing and personal association with Black and mulatto people among whom he lived. Jefferson fathered children with the bi-racial enslaved woman, Sally Hemmings. Jefferson was deeply entwined with the nation’s beginning and its stance on slavery. However, during his lifetime, and in his will, Jefferson emancipated only a small number of his slaves. The writings of Jefferson gave nuanced and intimate details and his beliefs about Black people. The use of racial slavery, in America helped to propel America’s strong standing in the global economy as a world economic leader.

Towards the end of racial slavery, Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) became a prominent figure. Douglass was the son of a white, slave-owning father and a Black mother. Douglass ran away from his enslaved condition and became an outspoken abolitionist throughout the rest of his life. Among others, Douglass met with John Brown who staged a notorious revolt at Harpers’ Ferry in 1859. Although unsuccessful, Brown's revolt worked to move northern sentiments
towards a need for slavery’s end. Douglass also sat with the Great Emancipator, Abraham Lincoln, under whose presidency a Civil War would split the nation. The Civil War was fought to settle the discord over racial slavery. Lincoln said as much to an audience of Black leaders in 1862, stating, “but for your race among us there could be no war” (qtd. in Barton 372).

Douglass lived through the Civil War, which to this day, produced the largest casualty list to this day, resulting from any American military conflict. Douglass also witnessed the Emancipation Proclamation and the ratification of the 13th Amendment during his lifetime. Philosophizing on the concept of race in America, Douglass wrote “The Color Line.” In his article, Douglass argues,

Few evils are less accessible to the force of reason, or more tenacious of life and power, than a long-standing prejudice. It is a moral disorder, which creates the conditions necessary to its own existence, and fortifies itself by refusing all contradiction. It paints a hateful picture according to its own diseased imagination and distorts the features of the fancied original to suit the portrait. As those who believe in the visibility of ghosts can easily see them, so it is always easy to see repulsive qualities in those we despise and hate. . . . Of all the races and varieties of men which have suffered from this feeling, the colored people of this country have endured most. They can resort to no disguises which will enable them to escape its deadly aim. They carry in front the evidence which marks them for persecution. They stand at the extreme point of difference from the Caucasian race, and their African origin can be instantly recognized, though they may be several removes from the typical African race. (Douglass 567–68)

Douglass argued that racism had come unfairly to Black people from a flimsy rationale. The broad divisions dividing Europeans from Blacks did not ‘hold-up to’ good logic. The crux of the rebukes from Douglass directly challenges rationale for racial ideologies and prejudices.

Douglass wrote,

The office of color in the color line is a very plain insubordinate one. It simply advertises the objects of oppression, insult, and persecution. . . . The color is innocent enough, but things with which it is coupled make it hated. Slavery, ignorance, stupidity, comedy, servility, poverty, dependence, our undesirable conditions, when these shall cease to be coupled with color, there will be no color line draw. (575)
For Douglass, race is a common universal truth. Four-fifths of the world’s population, he claimed, were people of color. However, Douglass’s philosophical conception of race questions and ultimately rejects the notion that the presence of race necessitates racism. The line of color, separating the sensibilities of people, is therefore fictitious and unnecessary. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) pushed off from ‘the color line’ which Douglass had rejected.

Born in Massachusetts, Du Bois studied at the University of Berlin before becoming the first African American to earn a degree at Harvard University. He taught at Atlanta University and was also one of the founders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Capturing in part the sentiments of Douglass, Du Bois is well known for his statement, “the problem of the 20th century is the problem of the color-line” (*The Souls of Black Folk* 13). He wrote from his own experiences. Consequently, Du Bois is the known designer of ethnographic research that privileges the subjective experience. Du Bois shared that “being a problem is a strange experience” (*The Souls of Black Folk* 4). Du Bois’s discussions on race substantiated theories on the potentiality of bloodline as the determining factor of the races. Ultimately, the work of Du Bois goes beyond a conceptualization, and characterization of the races, however. Du Bois also talked about ‘what it is like to be’ Black in America.

Du Bois gave us rich vocabulary, to discuss how he feels as a Black man in America. Du Bois coined the term *double-consciousness*, which is the dichotomy of living as both an American and as a Black man during the height of Jim Crow segregation in the United States (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 5). Du Bois also describes *the veil* as a metaphor for the desire to put on the acceptable ‘face’ in a white society while knowing one’s essence is Black (Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* 5).
Du Bois’s interest in racial groups develops as an interest in promoting human progress. As a Black person, Du Bois is intent on finding what collectively his people can and ought to contribute to human development. In his 1897 address to the American Negro Academy, “Conservation of the Races,” Du Bois argued that there is truth in the notion of race. According to Du Bois, race is real. Du Bois concedes that physical attributes previously proposed, such as color, hair, and cranial measurements, have contributed to racial definitions in the past (“The Conservation of the Races (1897)” 51–52). What is more, is that race determines the social experience of a Black person. According to Du Bois, the reasons are behind subtle forces that pull races tightly together.

While physical commonalities among groups of humans may include common blood and language, the race has family connections which are deeper than and transcendent to physical commonalities. Races emerged as a vast family of human beings. A race of people manifests in a spiritual manner, according to Du Bois. Race is reflective of a common history, common traditions, and common impulses. These attributes of race are both voluntary and involuntary. Commonalities of a people ought to serve as a unifying tool to work together to produce particular high ideals of life (Du Bois, “The Conservation of the Races (1897)” 53). Blacks ought to gain pride in and through the reality of race. When mindful of their greater role in their society, as a part of a race of people, Black people can propel their race forward. Black people, therefore, shape how others perceive them, as well as how they are perceived—not merely as individuals, but as an entire race of people.

“The Conservation of the Races” remains relevant in critical race philosophy today. In fact, a re-emergence of Du Bois’ work is in large part owed to the critical response written by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1954-). Appiah is a British born, Ghanaian-American, philosopher,

Appiah’s project expands on the race concept articulated by Du Bois. However, pushing off of Du Bois, Appiah denies the fact of race at all. Appiah writes, “The criterion Du Bois actually uses amounts to this: people are members of the same race if they share features in virtue of being descended largely from people of the same region” (33). Appiah implies that for Du Bois, common histories, common biological characteristics and common inclinations all can be ascribed to one’s race. Appiah argues that sharing commonalities like those remarked upon by Du Bois do not lead to a common conception of race. Overall, Appiah’s main critique is that Du Bois failed to transcend a scientific definition of race.

Appiah’s thesis brings attention to the notion of a Black racial identity over and above the possibility of race. For Appiah, Du Bois’ “The Conservation of ‘Races” simply reifies the biological distinctions between races. Racialism manifests from Du Bois’ article and is the belief in the existence of race as dictated by physical traits. Attention to physical distinctions, as Appiah believes Du Bois has accomplished, does little for raising a people’s mind above racism. In other words, Racism emerges in three ways: racialism, extrinsic racism, and intrinsic racism. Extrinsic racism is based on oppressive and suppressive beliefs regarding a hierarchical categorization of people. Intrinsic racism is the inclination to prefer a person of your own race over another. Intrinsic racism creates a notion of ethnocentrism. Du Bois makes room for the notion of intrinsic racism. Such racial privileging, according to Appiah, is a moral wrong.

Appiah strongly differed with Du Bois in his insistence on how to attain improvement of a people. Appiah believes that Du Bois’s project involved prescribing norms for the social reconstruction of personal and social identities. Moreover, Du Bois pushed for self-appropriation
among a people who suffer from racialized subordination. Du Bois’ interest was to mobilize members of the Black race in their efforts to realize emancipatory social transformation, which would ultimately lead to a flourishing humanism (Outlaw 28). For Appiah, however, instead of investing in the notion of race, and identifying ourselves accordingly, one ought to “define ourselves in ways that ignore the myth of race and affirm our shared humanity as well as the equal value of all” (Jeffers 209). Appiah is not petitioning for a post-racial situation, where diversity is not acknowledged, however. Appiah implies that discernable racial and ethnic communities are highly desirable. Instead, for Appiah, the goal ought to be a dismantling of the racial prescription altogether. Overall, people ought to acknowledge the ultimate human equality (35).

The debate on the concept of race is still ongoing. Racial ideologies have a long and involved history—some of which were included above. Scholarship on race largely divided people, one from the other, and created privileged groups according to their anthropological characteristics. The writings surveyed served to ascertain what racial ideologies and concepts were circulated from the 17th century forward. Conceptualizations of race largely developed during the Enlightenment period, race has become deeply embedded in American culture. Because of its hierarchical constitution, race dictated social and economic practices from the nation’s start. Institutionalized racism is still present today. “Given the ways in which intergenerational culture transmission can benefit individuals and communities, . . . [race] could remain a feature of human life indefinitely” (Jeffers 209). Race emerges as an aspect of social identity.
Race and Social Identity

The concept of race is derived from physical characteristics and varied ideologies assigned to people of a common lineage and geographic region. Race is a classification system used to categorize humans into large, distinct populations based on anatomical, ethnic, cultural, and other factors. As such, race provides a basis for people to recognize the other and reference their actions and experiences. Race allows for a shared sense of the familiar and of belonging. Race grouping assists in the determination about who one is. Therefore, race is a factor of one’s identity.

A person shapes his or her identity in interaction with other people. Identity is social. Social identity, of which race is a part, is manifested by human communication. Brenda J. Allen asserts that social identity “centers on communication” (10). We engage the world by communicating with others (Arneson 7). Allen privileges the verb “communicating to refer to the dynamic nature of the process that humans use to produce, interpret, and shape meaning” (Allen 10). Communicative identity is therefore produced, shared, and interpreted by oneself and by others. Identity emerges, within the statement, “who I am” (Allen 11). But in asking such, one answers from within a social context, “who am I in relationship with others?” (11). One’s self-image emerges in relation to grouped social worlds, resulting from categorizations, comparisons, and senses of belonging.

Race is a product of a social endeavor (Butler 25). Humans interact with others creating narratives and sharing group identities. “As social beings, we must categorize people so as to be able to navigate the world” (Omi and Winant 106). A strategy for survival, race thinking is coded into language and human communication. Humans think in categories. Without a penchant for categorical thinking, humans would struggle to contemplate, communicate, or create meaning.
Communication scholar Stuart Hall argues that categorization is inherent in human communication (Hall, “Floating Signifier” 2). As one develops language, so too does one apprehend several categories that culture has created to define and attribute order to the world. Such categories become automatic and unconscious. In human language, words group people, animals, physical objects, and events by organizing and categorizing them according to sameness and differences.

How one talks about race is important. Paul Taylor states, “in addition to shaping our experiences, languages are shaped by our experiences: they are not just interpretive but also expressive devices” (6). Language development is a reciprocal endeavor. A person is influenced by what they hear and how they interpret it. But a person is also impacted by what they say and how they say it. How someone speaks about something manifests both as becoming the thing and at the same time becomes of the thing one describes. A disposition of race which points to a classification of people is also known as a racialization of people. Racialization is accomplished through communicating social identities through language and discursive categorizations (Allen 10). Racialized categories ascribe meaning and, positive or negative attributes. Categories are a shorthand in that one fails to think beyond our learned assumptions regarding an object of inquiry. Visual differences among races become signifiers of that race. Thus, when matching perceived “discursive positions” to internally discerned assumptions about a person, racialization becomes activated. Moreover, the signifiers become mechanisms by which “the culture spins,” as myths and stereotypes are born (Hall, “Race, the Floating Signifier” 2). Communications scholar Stuart Hall insists that race manifests as a floating signifier.

Hall's notion of a floating signifier seeks to explain the descriptive phenomenon that is caught up in race. A signifier is that which holds meaning. Pertinent to race, one considers
anthropological factors such as “color, hair, and bone” (Hall, "Race, the Floating Signifier’” 1). In terms of making meaning, the signifiers of race become a communicative tool. As with many descriptive words, Hall’s conceptualization of race pertains to a kaleidoscope of values and meanings that people have learned to associate with both race and racial categories. Such discursive positioning allows people to gather metaphors, anecdotes, stories, and jokes to describe and explain racial differences. Yet, these narratives and tales take different political positions at various moments in time. Along with temporal and spatial variations, meanings of the anecdotes and jokes change. “There is nothing solid or permanent to the meaning of race. It changes all the time. It shifts and slides” (Hall, “Race, the Floating Signifier” 1). Thus, racial characteristics (Du Bois, “The Conservation of the Races (1897)” 52) carry over from our descriptive language and become indications of racialized thinking. One equates those signifiers of race with the people who present them--as a whole, and individually as well.

Conceptualizing race as the floating signifier, Hall warns that race ought not to be used to reduce one’s character to a singular expression or typecast. Instead, racial differences ought to be articulated and challenged:

The essentialized moment is weak because it naturalizes and de-historizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic. The moment the signifier “black” is torn from its historical, cultural and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorize, by invasion, the very ground of racism we are trying to deconstruct. (Hall, Thinking 127)

To take heed of Hall’s advice is to avoid reification of the concepts of race and racism.

Race is cemented via social construct through discursive practices embedded in human communication. Race is a factor of one’s identity. However, unlike other identifying concepts, race is not a culture, nor is race an ethnicity. Race is not synonymous to one’s religion, one’s nationality, nor has race anything to do with civic organizations. Race is not a standard by which
good, bad, better or worse can be measured—in any dimension, whatsoever. Instead, race divides people largely based on common lineage and visual cues (Omi and Winant 105; Allen; Du Bois, “The Conservation of the Races (1897)” 53). Although race cannot be scientifically substantiated, society has been conditioned to see race as real. People communicate both through their identities (ascribed and assumed) and through language. Discursive positioning makes room for racialization. This active engagement of thinking about race unveils floating signifiers, of which Hall speaks. Asserting value to floating signifiers makes room for “commitments and practices averring racial hierarchies” (Gordon, “Race” 2). Racialization is accomplished through race thinking (Gordon, “Race Theory” 1; P. C. Taylor 6).

Race Thinking

Lewis Gordon cites the notion of self-conscious race thinking as necessarily perpetuating an ongoing conception of race (“Race” 1). Gordon’s articulation of race points to a “prototypical history” of human differences stretching from the earlier theorists, some of which were cited in this essay. Race thinking points to the ways one thinks about races where “familiar tropes of centered groups of human beings counting as truly human versus those who were not fully human” emerge. Racially oppressive ideologies make room for race thinking (“Race Theory” 1). Gordon writes,

Black people and white people needn’t have been historical Black and white people. As long as a group defines itself as white in such a way that it becomes the standpoint from which other races are judged on the basis of the degree to which they are less white, a slippery slope downward begins until the unreal figure of Blackness looms at the point beyond which there is only nothing. Since, however, there is also a point beyond whiteness which is also nothingness, the ascription of whiteness also becomes unstable. (Bad Faith 70)
Categories become meaningful over time according to the qualities ascribed to them. Today in an era of postmodernity, philosophical scholarship acknowledges a phenomenology of whiteness (Ahmed 149). Moreover, the concept of race hinges on the subtleties constituted by whiteness.

According to Sara Ahmed, “whiteness could be described as an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up’ space, and what they ‘can do’” (149). Even in an era long after the disappearance of governmental and military imperialism, whiteness and the issues it perpetuates continue to maintain a societal stronghold (Nakayama and Martin 20). Whiteness is a phenomenological issue living as a background to all human experience (Ahmed 150). Even more, “whiteness is a category of experience that disappears as a category through experience” (150). Whiteness functions as a portal through which some people journey throughout their quinoidal actions and activities. However, because these everyday actions are non-remarkable, Ahmed argues that whiteness “is an effect of racialization, which in turn shapes what it is that bodies ‘can do’” (150). The portal of whiteness (the white body) then fades away, while the actions present themselves as independently accomplished.

Yet, the success of whiteness maintains and makes way for itself. “Evidence of the reproduction of whiteness” maintains the favorability of whites over non-whites in the everyday functions of society (Nakayama and Martín 20). Despite societal claims of reaching toward the non-existence of race, efforts to “move toward a race-blind society” has not yet led to an overthrowing of white privilege that comes with whiteness (20). A post-racial society is not in reach (MacMullan 93; Alexander 2). Instead, “the ideology and rhetoric behind race blindness serve to work well with the contemporary ‘invisibility of whiteness’” (21). Whiteness has its privilege for those who are white—so much so that whiteness and privilege cannot be easily
seen. The two exist in ubiquity as if whiteness holds an essential yet tacit dimension of privilege (Polanyi 4).

The invisibility of white privilege maintains a feature that Michael Polanyi describes as tacit knowing. He explains that a tacit dimension underlies a field of knowing, which takes its place as an “indwelling derived from the structure of tacit knowing” (Polanyi 4). Humans have a quiet way of knowing but are not always be able to communicate it. “We can know more than we can tell,” (4). Attempting to define tacit knowledge, Polanyi writes, “any definition of a word denoting an external thing must ultimately rely on pointing at such a thing” (5). The disposition of a silent, tacit knowledge communicates “something left behind” (Polanyi 6). In Polanyi’s words, “Our message had something left behind that we could not tell, and its reception must rely on it, that the person addressed will discover that which we have not been able to communicate” (6). The notion of tacit knowledge silently left behind corresponds with Ahmed’s characterization of a whiteness. Ahmed writes on the notion of whiteness as something that “trails behind” and is often unseen (149). Polanyi gives us a knowing-how and a knowing-what that are intellectual and practical and simultaneously present (7). Polanyi argues, “The importance of tacit knowledge has implications for the impossibility of depersonalizing knowledge and the difficulty of seeking objectivity in the form of personal detachment” (Polanyi xiii). A person cannot separate from his or her social environment in which one communicates. Therefore, like the tacit dimension, whiteness easily goes unnoticed by those who possess it.

Whiteness-as-tacit presents a dilemma pertinent to this project’s investigation of race. “Power and knowledge operate recursively,” according to Allen (27). Moreover, “the exercise of power creates knowledge and conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power” (Allen 27). Whiteness emerges as a quiet, power-filled political social process—ever so difficult to
detect. The value of tacit knowledge is that such knowledge provides the confidence to believe in what is unseen. Three areas of empirical relevance are: “(1) a valid knowledge of a problem, (2) the scientist’s capacity to pursue it, guided by his sense of approaching solutions, and (3) a valid anticipation of the yet indeterminate implications of the discovery arrived at in the end” (Polanyi xi). A construct related to tacit knowledge is the notion of implicit bias. One can both know and not know whiteness, its power, and privileges, which whiteness simultaneously projects. Peggy McIntosh theorizes on the invisibility of whiteness by arguing that white people are “carefully taught not to recognize” their privilege (McIntosh 1). Often, beneficiaries, who leave whiteness behind, may be unaware of its power (Ahmed 154). Yet, as the theory of a tacit dimension affords, whiteness can be empirically evidenced. Whiteness is a tacit dimension of race thinking which must be illuminated so that we, as a people can engage with one another in more truthful spaces.

The concept of race and racial ideologies were developed among European scholars. Social identities emerged based on the concept of race. Racialization provoked through discursive practices occurs in contradistinction to whiteness and race thinking keeps race intact. I argue that ideologies surrounding whiteness sought need for a designation of races. I have shown, racist ideologies gave way to the notion of race, and not the other way around (Battalora 1). Moreover, current racist ideology emerges as a form of bad faith.

Racism as Bad Faith

In America, race is seen as a “central cue for perceptions about others: temperament, sexuality, intelligence, athletic ability, aesthetic preferences, and so on are presumed to be fixed and discernible from the palpable mark of race” (P. C. Taylor 67). Owing to original conceptions of race, Blackness is infused by racial stereotypes. Assumptions about a person according to their
perceived race, creates racial inequality where particular racial norms (usually white), linguistic codes, and communication styles are privileged over non-white people (Johnson, “Black Body” 599–600). Such discursive practices give way to race thinking. Race thinking reifies race and racial stereotypes (Hall, “Floating Signifier” 1–17). Holding to the course of race thinking, racialization occurs, as one’s assumptions about another make up the way one interprets and interacts with that person (Gordon, Bad Faith 70). Racism insists that the behaviors of a person are biologically influenced. Despite research showing that racially designated activities such as dancing, athleticism, intelligence, and hard work are not to be dictated by social categories, a racist imagination would have one believe otherwise (Gordon, “Racism” 1). Gordon notes, that “logic stops, so to speak, where contradictions to black inferiority are a concern” (Gordon, Bad Faith 70). When arguments assert the inferiority of Black people, bad faith is present.

Gordon has determined that racism is a form of bad faith (Gordon, “Racism” 1). Gordon applies the of Sartre concept of bad faith to the concept of racism. “Bad faith, in existential-phenomenological language, is a flight from freedom” (Gordon, “Racism” 1). Bad faith is an act of self-negation (Sartre 48). Bad faith functioned as a shutting off one’s options through a denial of self-truth According to Sartre, bad faith is the effort to hide from human reality, the effort to hide from ourselves. Gordon frames bad-faith through embodiment (Garrett 8). Gordon writes, “a racist is a figure who hides from himself by taking false or evasive attitudes toward people of other races” (Bad Faith 94). The philosophy of bad faith asserts that the racist has a choice between being truthful in their actions and not. In bad faith, the racist remains a racist, which is to the detriment and violence of himself and others.

Gordon explains that “the racist is a figure who hides from himself by taking false or evasive attitudes toward people of other races” (Gordon, Bad Faith 94). There is a hypocrisy in
anti-Black racist behavior. In fact, any racist behavior is guilty of bad faith. As Fanon argues, “Race prejudice, in fact, obeys a flawless logic. A country that lives and draws its substance from the exploitation of other peoples, makes those people inferior. Race prejudice applied to those people is normal” (qtd. in Gordon, *What Fanon Said* 86). Race is not an essence of the human spirit (Hord and Lee 179), however, poor treatment of others because of race or racial influences is an act of racism. “Racism is not a mere matter of fact but is instead a value” (Gordon, *Bad Faith* 67). However, all racist inclinations do not a racist make.

According to Gordon, racist inclinations may mount in early interactions as a matter of living with and among others (*Bad Faith* 94). Yet, the “initial encounter” with racist ideas or attitudes does not immediately “entail one’s being in bad faith” (*Bad Faith* 94). Immediate responses do not automatically make one racist. Instead, it is preservation and insistence of such an attitude represents “a form of bad faith” (*Bad Faith* 94). The goal is to push past racist inclinations to a place of fair, and true judgment. Distinctions nor categories themselves cannot sustain the force indicative of bad faith. Instead, *existential criticism* (*Bad Faith* 94) and *discursive practices* (Hall "Race, the Floating Signifier" 2) are the master’s that gives racism its foothold.

While discussing the nature of the terms race, race thinking, whiteness, and racism, one ought to keep at the forefront the notion that these ideas stand as discursive measures, that is, modes of discourse through which one interacts with the world (Hall, “Floating Signifier” 1–3). Race is a part of our communicative identity. Race thinking keeps the ideals of race in mind, while whiteness slips into a tacit dimension (Polanyi 4). Race thinking evokes racism which is a form of bad faith (Gordon, “Racism” 1). In all of this, the concept of race is widely understood as a social construction. Social construction is a manifestation of human communication.
A Social Construction of Race in Human Communication

Battalora’s text, *Birth of a White Nation: The Invention of White People and Its Relevance Today* is a descriptive history on the emergence of white people as a race. Her text follows American ideals and how their rights and privileges based on the racial concept and then woven into American culture and law. Battalora traces the discourse of race through the founding of America and discusses how race informed the national ethics which substantiated slavery. Her research unfolds as a genealogy of the categorization of race in America by describing an invention and perpetuation of the white race. Ultimately, Battalora unveils the process of social construction of race in America.

Battalora uses social construction to guide her project. She states, “Social constructionist theory guides what is fundamentally a project concerning epistemology, or the study of how we know what we know” (Battalora xxi). Social constructionism rejects essentialist claims that position race as natural or inevitable. Instead, social construction acknowledges “the constitutive nature of language in the production of social reality” (Jenkins 16). According to the social constructionist philosophy of race, race exists for social reasons and not because of biology; therefore, race is a socially constructed concept through which human beings actively categorize one another.

Social constructionism delegates meaning to social systems where knowledge is obtained by way of larger social discourses based in dominant social, political, and historical systems. As I have shown, racial ideologies explored in the works of various enlightenment figures became centememented over time. Racial constructions manifested from discourse and discursive practices in human communications through categorization. Racialization, upheld *hanging signifiers*, comprised of physiological features of skin color, hair texture, body type, and facial features
Hall, “Floating Signifier” 1–3). We understand such anthropological markers to be in flux (Omi and Winant 4–5). However, our society is overcome by a disposition of racial thinking, and the tacit dimension of whiteness (Ahmed 156). Still, “social constructionism rejects essentialist claims that position race as natural or inevitable” and instead acknowledge "the constitutive nature of language in the production of social reality" (Jenkins 16). Social constructionism delegates meaning to social systems where knowledge is obtained by way of larger social discourses based in dominant social, political, and historical systems.

The construction of race is clearly traceable and evidenced by the text and discourse which guided the "role of white people as ideology and social structures in organizing the new republic and shaping its citizenry” (Battalora 49). Race is understood as a ‘socio-historical’ concept (Omi and Winant 104–05). Conceptual ideologies, as well as social histories, are “unavoidably likened to language and representation” (Jackson and Givens 165).

Conceptualization of race, and racial assignments have philosophical touch points in western thought. As this section seeks to define race, we first perform a historical canvassing of racial formations (Omi and Winant 105). Hall notes, “In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to the entire complex of formal ‘rules’ by which language signifies. As Hall explains, the event must become a story before it can become a communicative event” (Hall, Thinking 127). In other words, the actualization of an event must occur for its story to be told.

The end of this chapter includes a sweeping history on the effects of race in America. This account illustrates what has occurred following the adoption of racial ideologies which gave validity to racial discrimination and racial slavery. Race became the basis of the economic strength for America which propelled her to super-power status. The enslaved, and those who
share their lineage, still wreak the havoc of racism today. Following an overview of racial relationships in America’s youth, I briefly touch on the work of Carol Anderson and Michelle Alexander to weave in aspects of inequality, oppression, and violence sustained by Black Americans since slavery’s end, through the Civil Rights era and up through today. Although slavery has been practiced throughout the history of humanity, racial slavery in America created the bitter legacy that this project, in small part, attempts to address (Battalora 49).

A Short Story of Race in America

In 1619, early in the history of the American colonies, what would become Jamestown, Virginia, received its first shipment of people who would be indentured servants. Although the ship carried 100 Africans, only 20 survived. Forced servitude of Blacks would morph into a process which converted the widely practiced of indentured servanthood, to racial slavery, with the notion of building a stable colony, with a stable labor force to farm and produce goods. Racial slavery would provide the means. In truth, slavery had existed on every continent and was now at the center of the major business of the new colonies. Slavery could be characterized as involuntary immigration with racism, servitude, and forced illiteracy. How is one to understand what it is like to lack of agency and power over one’s own body; you are not your own when enslaved. Raping, beating, being sold and separated from family were all daily possibilities. Men were relegated to ‘boy’ for the rest of their lives, even when too old to work anymore. Slaves were taught that as slaves, only those who were white held control, while Blacks themselves owed obedience to those who were white. As described in the preceding narrative, race became a qualifying mark of permanent enslavement. Moreover, enslaved Blacks provided the lion-share of labor and capital upon which this country was built.
Racial slavery was at the heart of America. Regarding American expectations and culture, slavery is quintessential to what America has become. Slavery has afforded her great economic power and political stature. By 1840, well after the American Revolution, but before the Civil War, cotton had become America’s most important export, more valuable than all of the nation’s commodities combined. Without racial slavery, America would not stand today as a global force and economic power that she is. Designation of Africans as eligible, nonetheless, necessarily “slaves,” marks the starting place for the historicity of race, and the history of people in the mind of America. This early branding of Black capital has carried through history. “The label ‘white’ reflecting a group of humanity appears nowhere in the law until 1681” (Battalora 2). Still, the construction of whiteness was in counter distinction to Blackness-- it's polar opposite.

Whiteness emerged tacitly with a social construction of “white” people (Battalora xix). Battalora argues that whites played into the belief that they were “a biologically occurring, distinct group of people,” whose qualities are inheritably genetic (xix). Divisions of race emerged deliberately through policy and legal regulation. “Law is a legitimizing institution giving preference to one version of events over others, to one description among many, to a specific policy or practice among others” (Battalora 2). Anti-miscegenation laws began to appear towards the end of the 1600s. Bacon's Rebellion spurred policy which actively separated indentured servants and slaves according to their races in order to prevent further rebellions. Then in the year 1790, Naturalization Law offered citizenship to the "white person," thus the integration of whiteness in language and law had become commonplace. Law moves “within a large social context, in dynamic interaction with prevailing social forces and pressures.” American law does not work within a vacuum.
Racial slavery in America diminished Blackness and elevated whiteness as the standard by which to measure ideal citizenship. The result is a systemic state of oppression which represents American nationalism. The question of whether racism produced slavery or slavery produced racism is largely contested among scholars (Battalora xvii; Coates 7). The failure to address deaths and damages as a result of racial slavery have left this society enslaved to its memory. By 1865, four years of Civil War saw five million injured casualties, 620,00 deaths which included 20% of white southern males (Anderson 11). As an attempt to pursue their freedom, 10%, 179,000 of the Union soldiers were African American, and an additional 19,000 were in the Navy (13). As the consequence of victory for the union, and the assassination of President Lincoln, author of reconstruction, deconstruction of reconstruction ensued: lenient penalty to treasonous leaders of the Confederate States of America, reversal of several protections to formerly enslaved Black people, and revoking of their rights to vote and participate in the democratic process. A reconstruction of the Reconstruction saw to it that following the abolition of slavery, African Americans would have neither citizenship, land, nor the right to vote (18). European Americans had become accustomed to think of their white identity as racially pure. Mulattoes were counted as Black. The issues of racial purity increasingly came to dominate the European and the European-American conception of race (Bernasconi and Lott x). The declaration of race and the perpetuation of racial roles became an important strategy in American ideology.

From Social Construction to Systemic Racism

In this historic moment, The State of the Union is one emboldened with discourses of hatred and racism ("Hatewatch"). Racist discourse throughout the public sphere, “produces, and/or resists systems of power and inequality” and has led to racist ideology in the United States
Culture creates people as much as people create culture. In other words, people socially construct their reality, which manifests as everyday life that presents itself as “subjectively meaningful within a coherent world” (Berger and Luckman 19). Contemporary American society is “systematically ordered according to biology of racial groups with social meaning . . . [and is] wrought in very real and concrete consequences” (Battalora xv).

Communication discourses, therefore, construct the world in which we live and frame our interactions with one another. In this historic moment, our world is steeped in racist thought and ideology. The result of social construction has led to the problem of systemic racism.

In her book titled *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, Carol Anderson deconstructs American policy and legislation which reflect systematic methodology to prevent and oppress Black achievements and societal progress. Her work identifies and calls out a manifestation of a systemic undermining of the reconstruction amendments to the Constitution. Anderson claims that white rage emerges from a fear of a false narrative of a potential zero-sum game for those who have for long ruled the land, occupying a position of power and privilege. Anderson explains that this racism does not come cloaked in a white sheet, nor is it a racism that burns the cross. Instead, racism within the structure of governing bodies and legislation. White rage is often invisible and cloaked under a banner of respectability. Anderson’s argument implies that white rage rests tacitly within is the policy formulated to cut out and oppress Black achievements and societal progress. It rests in a tacit dimension that is the policy in the land of opportunity.

Anderson devised the concept ‘white rage’ to correct a misinterpretation of the demonstrations, looting, and rioting shown on the major broadcasting stations she watched during the events at Ferguson. No matter how conservative or liberal, those television stations
reported being perplexed by the burning of “their own” neighborhoods. Broadcasters characterized the behavior as Black rage. No, Anderson counters, this is ‘white rage’. A sense of rage becomes palpable when systemic forms of structural racism underlying the nation’s core, bubble-up against those who pursue achievement, equal rights, and freedom. However, the social fixation for the dramatic like the burnings at Ferguson by fire, less attention is paid to the kindling which every fire is built upon. The kindling is the systematic racism embedded in the core of America. White rage is the kindling; it substantiates whiteness. White rage is historically derived anti-Black racism perpetuated by policies that govern America.

Upon the abolishment of racial slavery, four million people were released from being property. Their status evolved through the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the United States Constitution from property, to humans to citizenship with voting rights. These amendments sandwiched between the Emancipation Proclamation and efforts from the Freedmen's Bureau were to give liberty and freedom to Africans in America. This initial show of African-American achievement and progress was met with resistance, according to Anderson.

Laws that had restricted the movement and freedom of African Americans prior to the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War, morphed into Jim Crow laws and a peonage system exasperating the exception to slavery in the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery and involuntary servitude, with exception to those “duly committed of a crime.” Blacks seeking to take control of their destiny began fleeing the South in droves. An estimated 1.5 million people moved from the suffocation of the South heading above the Mason-Dixon Line in the early 20th century. In the years leading up to and following WWI, the industrial revolution was calling to Blacks who sought not only safety from violence but also an opportunity to work for fair wages. However, the sentiment of white rage as documented by Anderson, “the powerful,
respectable elements of the white South rose up, in the words of then-Secretary of Labor, William B. Wilson, to stop the Great Migration and interfere with the ‘natural right of workers to move from place to place at their own discretion’” (42). Loss of the African-American presence in the South sounded an alarm. After all, the “black labor was the foundation of the region’s economy and African-Americans were also the sine qua non of the South’s societal and political structure” (46). The South was afraid of losing economic grounding. Their response was swift and legalistic. First, they would accuse and condemn any agency appealing to the sensibility of the Black flight north by either promoting ideals of agency, offering job opportunity and even tickets to board the train. Second, they began to interrupt the trains themselves (51). Despite the need for efficiency in train routing, moving people and resources during WWI, trains were held-up and stopped to slow and prevent the movement of African-Americans north. “In addition to strangling interstate commerce and being willing to hijack the legal system to Blackmail the railroads into submission, authorities went after African Americans directly” by ripping up their tickets and arresting them for vagrancy at the desire to not allow Blacks to pursue better job opportunity (52).

Most telling of the racial inequality and white supremacy that exists in our America and underscores the notion of white rage for Anderson is the promise of education. For her, education is at the root of progress for people individually and for the good of the nation. But for the African American, the pursuit of education, both private and public, had been difficult and nearly out of reach. Plessy v. Ferguson would determine that separate but equal would be the standard for racial segregation of American people in line with the 14th Amendment. However, both Northern and Southern states proved resistant to live up to the call of equality. Public funding for Black schools was not a priority. Anderson gives several examples. In the entire state
of Delaware, there was only one high school for Blacks between 1910-1950. “By 1950, African American adults in Delaware had finished, on average, only 7.2 years of school; whites had finished more than ten years. Only 505 Blacks in the entire state had earned at least a bachelor’s degree. Not surprisingly African Americans’ income was ‘barely one-third of white families’ earnings’” (68).

Across the Mason Dixon line in Prince Edward County, Virginia, “no high school for Blacks existed until 1939, and by 1947 Robert Morton High ‘was jammed with more than twice the number of students it was designed to hold’” (68-69). Despite the population being 45% Black, the county “refused to use their tax dollars to relieve the overcrowding” (69). Eventually, the county erected three tar-paper shacks with no insulation, electricity, or plumbing. Overall, Prince Edward County maintained fifteen facilities for 2,000 African American students—valued at $330,000, while their 1,400 white children attended brick and mortar facilities complete with indoor toilets, modern furnaces, valued at $1.2 million.

In the Deep South, the disparity in student-to-teacher ratios in the mid-1930s was staggering. For Blacks in Atlanta, there were 82 students to each teacher compared to the whites who had one teacher for every 35 students. Also, the school board there allocated “$75 more in support per capita for white students than for Black students,” which, by 1946, the number climbed to almost $80. Like figures were not uncommon across the Deep South. In the early 1950s, South Carolina spent close to five times more per capita on school buildings for whites than it did for Blacks and had no high school whatsoever for African Americans in nineteen counties. . ..” (70). Black children had to make their way to school with little to no formal transportation. In Clarendon County, for example, there were no buses for Blacks, but thirty for whites. “In 1947 a soft-spoken Black preacher asked the all-white school board for just one bus.
The chairman, R.W. Elliott, fired back, ‘We ain’t got no money to buy a bus for your nigger children” (70). Separate but equal was far from a reality at this point in history. Anderson calls these examples white rage. White rage is systemic anti-Black racism which has embedded itself into the nation’s core.

“The NAACP launched a campaign in the courts to destroy Jim Crow, and overturn Plessy v. Ferguson that had made ‘separate but equal’ the legal cornerstone of racial segregation” (Anderson 67). Through a successful demonstration of “widespread disparities in funding that the U.S. educational system, despite the demands of parents and students craving high-quality schools, had deliberately produced a sprawling, uneducated population,” Brown v. Topeka Board of Education was won. Racial segregation had violated the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth, as well as the due process clause of the Fifth Amendment (71). Blacks celebrated, believing, “If segregation is unconstitutional in educational institutions, it is no less unconstitutional in other aspects of our national life” (75). It seemed that citizenship, true citizenship was in reach. However, the imagery of white rage persisted in the mutilated body of Emmett Till, the angry mob surrounding Elizabeth Eckford on the first day of school at Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the Norman Rockwell painting of six-year-old Ruby Bridges as she walked up the steps, surrounded by National Guardsmen to desegregate her elementary school in New Orleans.

“None of that violence would have happened, however, and certainly would not have been given the broader societal stamp of approval, if the respected elements in white society—governors, legislators, U.S. senators, congressmen, and even, more tepidly, the president of the United States—had not condoned complete defiance of contempt for the Supreme Court and the constitutional provision that its decisions are the law of the land” (Anderson 75–76). The
mandate to desegregate schools was met with violence on the surface, but also with anti-Black racist policy in governing legislation. One of the early actions of the Southern states was to “ensure that only those who felt threatened by Brown could vote (76). “By 1944, in the states of the old Confederacy, only 5 percent of age-eligible African Americans were registered to vote.” The idea was that only those who could vote would be those who could influence--and the South would have none of that (77). Following Brown v. Board, various state legislatures aggressively pursued suppression of the Black vote. Ironically, the trend has resurfaced recently with the Voters Rights Act being said to be calcified and unnecessary following the elections of President Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012. The election of 2016 was the nation's first since the expiration of the Voters Rights Act. Whereas popular reporting espoused a low Black turn-out to the polls, voters were discouraged by required ID laws and making polling places virtually inaccessible for Southern Blacks. These tactics amounted to something akin to voter taxes.

Anti-Black racism is responsible for the nation’s response to the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision, where integration was met with the shutting down of public schools throughout the South while taxpayer dollars financed segregated white private schools. White rage contributed to the “Southern Strategy” put in place following the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. The War on Drugs that disenfranchised millions of African Americans while propelling Presidents Nixon and Reagan into the White House was an act of White Rage. Following the election of America's first Black President, systematic strategies were employed, to prevent access to the voting polls.

Overall, since 1865 and the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment, every time African Americans have made advances towards full participation in our democracy, the white reaction has fueled a deliberate and relentless rollback of those gains. The end of the Civil War and
Reconstruction was greeted with the Black Codes and Jim Crow; the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision was met with the shutting down of public schools throughout the South while taxpayer dollars financed segregated white private schools; the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965 triggered a coded but powerful response, the so-called Southern Strategy and the War on Drugs that disenfranchised millions of African Americans while propelling Presidents Richard Milhous Nixon and Ronald Reagan into the White House, and then the election of America's first Black President, led to the expression of white rage that has been as relentless as it has been brutal. Anderson’s thesis uncovers the anti-racist reactions to Black progress through a historical time line. Current issues of systemic racism are still apart of systemic racism today.

**Contemporary Effects of Racism**

The thesis of Michelle Alexander’s book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness*, rejects the notion that election of a Black man to the highest office of the land has neutralized, or even nullified, systemic racism in America. To be colorblind is to refuse to acknowledge race in an effort to acquiesce to the notion that there are no races--only the human race. However, even colorblind racism has its consequence. Alexander argues that a caste system, like the one seen during Jim Crow, has re-emerged in today’s prison industrial complex. The problem is synonymous to white rage. Alexander’s work focuses on the rate of incarceration particularly among Black and brown men and women. The disproportionate imprisonment rates of minorities, most of which are Black bodies, reflects the effects of racist ideology and systemic racism in the United States. About half of America's prison population is African American, reflecting the racial targeting and bias of current drug sentencing laws. "For example, Blacks comprise only 13 percent of monthly drug users, yet they are arrested five times..."
as often as whites on drug charges, and once arrested, they are twice as likely to receive a prison sentence as their white counterparts, and on average, that sentence will be 20 percent longer than one doled out for the white offender" (Department of Justice Report on the Ferguson, Mo. Police Department). Nearly 80% of those being sent to prison today are minorities (Wright and Herivel 1–2). Blacks are filling the prisons at a rate ten to one over whites (Mauer 23).

Incarceration rates are rising most frantically by the imprisonment of Black women at twice the rate of men (Wright and Herivel 1–2). Two out of every three women in prison are mothers, leaving one and a half million children with a parent behind bars; as one-quarter of the Black men in America are likely to be imprisoned at some point in their lives (Mauer and Chesney-Lind 3). One in every three Black boys born today can expect to go to prison. Since the inception of racial slavery, the Black body has been primed and branded as a noncitizen, pre-criminal and precarious. The growth in the number of convicted criminals, despite dips in crime, read as an assault against humanity, community, and social justice. However, because of the nation's disposition towards the Black race, this phenomenon has occurred without significant opposition, further highlighting the idea of 'the criminal.' Together with those incarcerated, on probation and parole, America's criminal justice system contains more people today than enslaved in 1850--a decade before the start of the Civil War. Although they are less than 15% of the American population, Blacks account for half of those incarcerated (Mauer 23). The last two decades have seen an explosion in the prison population from 300,000 to over 2.3 million people. There is not another society in human history which has imprisoned so many of its citizens. The U.S imprisons more than a half million more people than does China, and China has a population five times greater than the U. S. Accounting for 5% of the world population, America contains 25% of the worlds' imprisoned people (Mauer 22). The current rate of prison expansion is not
sustainable. Our nation would see some six million people incarcerated within the next 20 years, effectively causing implosion if the prison numbers continue to climb as they have (Dyer 4). Suffice to say, such an expansion "would eventually consume nearly every dollar of every state budget in the union..." leaving room for no "public education, no infrastructure, no anything except for prisons..." (Dyer. 7). It is difficult to imagine such a course being laid were the numbers reflecting white people and not those who were Black. Not only is systemic racism apparent in the U.S. prison system, it is also visible in policing.

The United States Department of Justice (DOJ Report Ferguson) report on Ferguson, Missouri, further illustrates the issue. Unconstitutional policing was found by the DOJ. Tickets and arrests disproportionately favored Blacks over whites. Their report found that law enforcement practices in Ferguson, Missouri, were shaped by revenue over public safety. The Black population served as a revenue-generating machine, accounting for over 25% of the city’s income. With a focus on revenue generation, the municipal court in Ferguson violated “the Fourteenth Amendment’s due process and equal protection requirements” (DOJ Report Ferguson 6). Instead of being a venue of neutral arbitration or fair policing conduct, the municipal court positioned itself “to compel the payment of fines and fees that advance the city’s financial interests” (DOJ Report Ferguson 6). The DOJ reported that in 2013 alone, the court issued over 9000 arrest warrants, stemming in large part from minor violations such as parking infractions, traffic tickets, or housing code violations. Ferguson’s Municipal Court routinely issued arrest warrants for a person’s failure to pay infraction related fines and fees promptly. The court imposes severe penalties for missed appearances and missed payments, exacerbating citizens’ efforts to satisfy their debts to the court. Moreover, “the court often fails to provide clear and accurate information regarding a person’s obligations” (DOJ Report Ferguson 6).
arm of justice that is law enforcement in Ferguson was found to be guided by racist sentiment and by disservice to the Black population. The statistics are targeted at African-Americans. According to the United States DOJ, data collected by the Ferguson Police Department [FDP] from 2012 to 2014 show that African-Americans account for 85% of vehicle stops, 90% of citations, and 93% of the rest made by FPD officers despite comprising only 67% of Ferguson's population. African-Americans are more than twice as likely as white drivers to be searched during vehicle stops (DOJ Report Ferguson 8).

More than an inconvenience, or an economic burden, over-policing Blacks emerges as an assault too often paired with physical violence. “Nearly 90% of documented force used by FPD officers is against African-Americans. In every canine-bite incident for which racial information is available, the person bitten was African-American” (DOJ Report Ferguson 8). In Ferguson, Missouri, as Mike Brown’s Black body lay dead in the hot summer street for four and a half hours, his parents were kept away from the body of their son—at gunpoint, and with dogs (P. C. Taylor 153). Such documented incidents, including the DOJ report on law enforcement in Ferguson, Missouri, provide witness to the impact of systemic racism in one American community. But Ferguson is not alone, and the fate of Michael Brown is not uncommon. Names of Black people meeting a violent death, unarmed and in the face of police violence include, but are not limited to, Amadou Diallo (1975-1999), Timothy Stansbury Jr. (1985-2004), Sean Bell (1983-2006), Tarika Wilson (1982-2008) who died holding her 14 month old son--also shot, but survived, Oscar Grant Oscar Grant III (1986-2009), Danroy Henry (d. 2010), Aiyana Stanley-Jones (2002-2010), Trayvon Martin (1995-2012),Kendrec McDade (1993-2012), Ramarley Graham (c.1994-2012), Jonathan Ferrell (1989-2013), Dontre Hamilton (c.1983-2014 ), Akai Gurley (c. 1986-2014), Eric Garner (1970-2014), Michael Brown (1996-2014), Yvette Smith

The violence instigated against Black bodies even unto death has been traditional in the course of history in America. Corporeal violence inflicted against Black people demonstrates the depth and pervasiveness of anti-Black racism in our country. Unfortunately, anti-Blackness is not limited to only white Americans. So deep in the fabric of the nation, anti-Blackness is as a phenomenon to which no community is immune. The website for the movement, Black Lives Matter (#BlackLivesMatter), states that lives like these are taken every 28 hours. Yet even this dynamic evolved from a historical culture of anti-Black racism that privileges whiteness and subjugates Blacks. The state of race in America is grave. America has not yet transcended the concept of race. Instead, anti-Black racism, a system of mass incarceration and violence against Black bodies are often suffered by people of the Black race. In some cases, white rage prevails and causes incredible pain at the loss of unarmed Black People by the will of police and self-deputized, governing bodies and leaders of the land.

Conclusion

A narrative of race and racism in America has been explored in this essay. In this chapter, I have shown a list of philosophical conceptions of race. As a factor of one’s identity, race transmitted through human communication. Racialization occurs through discursive practices pouring over from racial ideologies. Race thinking sustains the lifeline of race. The race concept is underscored by a ubiquitous whiteness and when left unchecked, can lead to racism. Race is largely understood as a social construct. A racist history can be clearly traced from the early
enslavement of African people until today. Although race is indeed derived from a social-historical construct, racism is the object of problematic social conditions today.

Giving to a disposition that race is a social construct, and nothing more, allows room for an attitude of passivity. As a means of countering the effects of anti-Black racism, the notion of race as social construction ought to be challenged. I argue that the progression of ideologies dictating a social construction of race, allowed for whiteness to set the ceiling for racial hierarchical order has resulted in raced ideology and anti-Black rhetoric. Acceptance of race as a social construction nullifies explanations to account for the current temper of racial strife in the American communities today. Differences must be meaningfully acknowledged in order for the greater community to move productively beyond anti-Black racism and racism overall. As Taylor said, “when Black people get free, everybody gets free” (194). We cannot get free alone.

This project is a call for action, a demand for attention, an invitation to conversation and a mandate for the cause. This essay strives to bring attention to the rhetoric of anti-Black racism. Bringing attention to anti-Black racism and the ways it traverses the spirit of Americans, is a work that strives to benefit all marginalized and oppressed people. In other words, freedoms sought to require the engagement of the greater community—beyond ‘the color line,’ and in all of its diversity. In this historic moment, the relationship between Blacks and justice is one that reflects a lack of such freedoms. The greater project here describes a phenomenological disposition of the raced Black body which is indeed lived and alive. I offer the metaphor Black body memory as the condition that I continue to occupy despite current precarious, non-post-racial moments. Black body memory seeks to describe the existential reality of the raced Black body. It is the fundamental ideologies of the two with which the Black body must reckon.
Chapter 2: The Black Body

The Black body is a racialized body in the context of essential science. Discursive practices have associated distinguishing anthropological characteristics with presumptions about who a person is. Implicit and explicit racism occurs through the mode of racialization. A phenomenology of the Black body reveals a person’s experience according to their raced disposition. The existential condition of my Black body is one that cannot be escaped. Though I pursue a sense of agency and autonomy in the ways I navigate the world; I am ever defined and given to my body and the ways I am perceived. My entrance into the world was one already caught up in a historical narrative of violence cast towards Blacks and the suffering endured by Black people. The same injuries can be seen today despite declarations of race as a social construct. Systemic anti-Black racism continues to be a consequence for Blacks.

The Black body is a raced body. The conceptualization of race assigned people according to categories, including those of the nations of Africa. The whole of the continent, except for those of northern Africa, was said to be of the Negroid race. Though dated, the term Negro relates to the same category of people as it did when it was first employed. Through the short history of America, Black people have been called and referred to themselves as Negro, Colored, Afro-Americans, Blacks, African Americans and a host of variations of the N-word. Because of their geographical origins, and anthropological markers like the shape of their head and physical features, their body types, and their color, Black people were frequently deemed inferior to other races of people. The progression from racial categorization to racial ideology instigated a racial hierarchy among races of the world. Race-thinking and racial ideologies paired myth and assumptions about Black people. The stigma that ensued from the adoption of the racial and
racialized ideology of the Black body has had great impact. The purpose of this essay is to elucidate the phenomenology of the Black Body.

This chapter proceeds in three parts. First, I locate the Black body in the philosophical movement of phenomenology. Second, I define Africana existentialism and discuss particular scholarship of the field. Finally, I portray instances of the constructed Black body. The racialized Black body situated between a constructive hermeneutic and a lived experience illustrates the precariousness of being Black. The phenomenology of the Black body combined with body memory make up the premise for this project. I move forward to conceptualize and explore the phenomenology of the Black body.

Phenomenology of the Lived-Body

Phenomenology emerges as a philosophical movement with the work of Edmund Husserl. Husserlian phenomenology seeks to arrive at a truth about the reality of the life world. In modernity, scientific engagement attempts to arrive at a Cartesian model of reality. Distinct from understanding the world according to empirical evidence, phenomenology strives to get behind the object of study according to one’s experiences. “Our experience properly described must acknowledge that it presents itself as the experience of engaging directly with the world” (Moran 6). Phenomenology is a pre-theoretical first-person account of ‘what is.’

“Phenomenology inspects more closely what it sees in order to see better what it sees” and is, therefore, a way of looking at things of the world (Smith 6). Overall, “the essential task of phenomenology is to . . . uncover and restore to everyday light the true nature of our human world” (11). Phenomenology is a task of applying vision to vision. Through phenomenology, one attempts to get behind the modern subject to see the things themselves. Because, in the area of phenomenology, there is no way to form an understanding of a thing without interpretive
engagement, phenomenology is a hermeneutic task. In human communication, phenomenology serves to prompt discovery, interpretation, and meaning within the social world.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the method through which meaning is made in the world. Our world is pregnant with meaning. As humans, we are ever trying to make sense of our social world. Being in the world is something that is always up for the process of interpretation. Phenomenology “wagers that the lived can be understood” (*Black Skin* 12). Phenomenology asserts that meanings are accessible and “out in the open before my eyes” (Smith 6). One enters a hermeneutic circle, and never leaves it. “Human life and behaviors are social and communal in a profound sense” (10). Reality is grasped in and through experiencing the world, and in assigning meaning to those experiences. Rather than an analytical approach to reality, the primary task of phenomenology is to understand human experiences as objects of the social world present themselves.

Existential phenomenon exists as objects of the social world revealing themselves to us (Wrathall 32). Quite often, “the term phenomenology is used to indicate any thing or object, any kind of entity” (Smith 12). The phenomenological process requires that one isolate the focus of study by bracketing expectations or suspending ontological judgment or presuppositions. Epoché is accomplished through bracketing. “Consequently, the effectuation of the epoché does not imply an exclusion (*Ausschaltung*) of the world, but rather a suspension of our naive belief concerning the nature and character of its existence” (Zahavi 2). The phenomenologist is encouraged to “return to the things themselves” (Smith 6). In achieving this, phenomenology is attentive to the structure of consciousness.

For phenomenologists, “consciousness is not just one thing among other things in the world . . . but it is intending” (Smith 10). The structure of consciousness in Husserlian
phenomenology is *bipolar*, in that there are two poles of consciousness. Husserl points to an “intrinsic link between the subject pole (noesis) and object-pole (noema) of any reality appearing to consciousness” (Smith 12 qtd. in). The feature of intending is the “famed [Husserlian] thesis of noesis-noema” (Mohanty 72). Noesis emerges as the process by which the object of study becomes the thing of which meaning is made—which is the noema. Noesis-noema emerges as the correlate of consciousness and its content. "A rule for phenomenology,” Johnson articulates, “is that there is never an object without a corresponding subject” (“Black Body” 600). In every act of consciousness, there is always something of which one is conscious. Intentionality, therefore, “is essential to all experience” (600). To clarify, intentionality does not suggest “common meaning of deliberate or on purpose, as when we say someone does something intentionally” (Smith 12). Instead, in phenomenology, intentionality indicates that there is an orientation or focal point within one’s consciousness.

People experience the world through their bodies (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 94). Therefore, a phenomenology of the body is constituted by intentionality. One exists as a subjective body within a material world. Reality is grasped in and through one’s focus of attention. In phenomenology, the lived-body is accounted for experientially and is the means by which one interacts with the world. A phenomenology of the body, as ‘poetic’ flesh can be found among the work of various philosophers including the “incarnate cogito” of Paul Ricoeur, Marcel Gabriel’s notion of incarnation, and also Francois-Pierre-Gontier Maine de Biran’s analysis of “embodied cogito” (Davidson and Vallée 31–32). Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s lived-body moves away from Husserl’s discussion of *corpses proper*. However, Merleau-Ponty’s lived-body as emerges as “a radical . . . departure not only from Husserl’s theory of intentionality generally but more specifically from his account of the intentional constitution of the body and
its role in perceptual experience” (Carmen 205). Perception is not a rote, nor static-mechanical, process. Instead, perception is living, dynamic, and embodied.

A phenomenology of the lived-body is concerned with our bodily existence in the world. Further, the body is one’s “center of vision and the center of action for engaging tasks” (Arneson, *Communicative* 24). Only in and through our lived/living bodies are we engaged with the world. Moreover, the lived-body of Merleau-Ponty emerges as that by which and from which all-natural objects are experienced. “Our experience properly described must acknowledge that it presents itself as the experience of engaging directly with the world” (Smith 19). As Pat Arneson explains, the lived-body gives way to corporeal and linguistic expressions of human communication (*Communicative* 2). Human communication is bound-up by our lived-body. Embodiment necessitates communicative action (Arneson, *Communicative* 24). The lived-body anchors us to the world without presuppositions. Perception is central to experience and frames everything observed.

The lived-body is not an object to be had in terms of ‘having a body,’ for the body cannot be reduced to a set of organs. Therefore, one cannot separate oneself from one’s body as in ‘I am a body.’ People never view their lived-body as another object, simply because the lived-body is the essential factor of every natural experience. "Everything in the world is seen from the perspective and situatedness of one's own body; the lived-body thus constitutes an irreducible standpoint for any natural experience” (Stewart and Mickunas 65). As one’s most “basic mode of being in the world,” the lived-body is the center from which all is observed. The lived-body combines the concepts having and being. We are bodily. The body embodies consciousness. As such, the body and consciousness are unequivocally linked. The body is the consciousness incarnate.
Charles Johnson wrote “A Phenomenology of the Black Body” where he sought to articulate his raced experience. As a Black man, Johnson notes that his commentary on the topic is an ambiguous situation with “harrowing constraints” (“Black Body” 599). The Black body is a raced body. Theories on racial formation frame race as a “way of making people up” (Omi and Winant 105). According to Omi and Winant, race emerges as a “process of othering” (Omi and Winant 105). As a raced body, the Black body is steeped in stereotypes and preconceived ideas rising from its anthropological markers (“The Conservation of the Races (1897)” 52; Johnson, “Black Body” 599–615). The complexion of Black people is just one anthropological marker that gave rise to the notion of race in the first place. Anthropological markers including skin color, hair texture, and physical features have long been associated with Black people (The Souls 53). Attention to such physical attributes gave way to racial distinction, race thinking, and ultimately racism.

Johnson reiterates the basis from which phenomenology emerges. Johnson’s articulation is grounded in the universality of structures of consciousness. “What is essential to all experience—the correlate of consciousness and its content, noesis-noema, or subject and object” (Johnson, “Black Body” 600). As a Black man among white bodies, Johnson declares, “I am my body” (“Black Body” 602). The body “is that which reeves the subject to a world, anchors him in history, individualizes him, and makes possible perception and ‘meaning’” (“Black Body” 602). Johnson’s Blackness, therefore, informs his grasp of reality. “Experience without ‘embodied consciousness’ is as unthinkable as experience without the noesis-noema correlate: it is the irreducible way we are in the world” (“Black Body” 602). All people embody their own consciousness. We are conscious of the world in and through our bodies. What then, does it
mean for the Black person to experience the world through a Black body? This question is what Johnson confronts in his article, “A Phenomenology of a Black Body.”

Phenomenology of the body “recognizes that the directly perceived intending-meanings of reality bear a cultural history” (Smith 10). As a Black man, Johnson writes according to his own bodily experience. While “there is neither an impenetrable ‘white’ or ‘black’ experience. . . , there are diverse human variations upon experience which can always be communicated imaginatively or vicariously across racial, political, and cultural lines through language” (“Black Body” 600). The meaning of the Black body emerges from a historic narrative. “Not that all Black people have the same experience; . . . rather . . . a remarkable similarity, a repetition with a difference, exists among embodied Black experiences” (Young 5). The Black body has a distinct phenomenological presence that informs one’s shared experiences.

Cultural assumptions interrogate the Black body as symbolic. “Their corporeal expression as well as their linguistic communication” coincide (Arneson, Communicative 2). Western philosophy and literature traditionally overlook the diversity of experiences as articulated by Johnson and Yancy. Within the discipline of philosophy, "the white philosopher/author presumes to speak for all of 'us' without the slightest mention of his or her 'raced' identity" (Yancy, “Whiteness” 215). Philosophical texts speak from a position of assumed neutrality. Thus, "the embodied self is bracketed and deemed irrelevant to theory, superfluous and cumbersome in one's search for the truth" (“Whiteness” 215). In this way, whiteness becomes a transcendental signifier; Blackness must announce its coming.

Phenomenology is an interpretive method through which to see the world. In phenomenology, one attempts to understand objects in the world according to the way in which it presents itself. One engages the subject hermeneutically according to the contents of
consciousness. Phenomenology meets existentialism in consideration of the Black body and lived experience. The human experience is central theme for existential phenomenology. Existential phenomenology is concerned with “the concrete situated experience of human beings” (“Black Body” 600). Moreover, the body manifests as a unique way of being in the world, which “I cannot surpass” (Existentia Africana 120). In existential phenomenology, we are concerned with the phenomenon of being. The question persists: “What is to be understood by Black suffering?” (Existence in Black 1). Africana Existentialism proposes answers.

Africana Existentialism

While phenomenology focuses on the structure of thought and how things affect our consciousness from a first-person view, existentialism emerges within the school of phenomenology as that which is concerned with the meaning of being human. Existentialist inquiry emphasizes the human being. However, for existentialism, “the human is a paradox, as she is a contradiction between mind and body” (Dreyfus and Wrathall 2). As a branch of phenomenology, existentialism privileges the individual, asking ‘what is unique to her?’ Existentialism rejects rationality and empiricism and generalities. Instead, existentialism holds to a belief “that what it is to be human cannot be reduced to any set of features about us. . . . To be human is to transcend facticity” (5). Freedom, responsibility, and living authentically are interests of existentialism.

Moreover, existential philosophy addresses the problems of not only freedom and responsibility, but also “anguish, dread, . . . embodied agency, sociality, and liberation” (Gordon, Existentia Africana 7). Existentialism emphasizes an individual, engaged in a particular world, in their human condition. Affectivity rather than rationality is the interest of the existentialist, which offer the occasion for many questions including “What are we?” and “What shall we do?”
Living is a hermeneutic endeavor. Existentialism underscores a human’s *interwovenness* to the world.

Black existentialism arrived as a set of inquiries regarding Africans and their “hybrid and creolized forms in Europe, North America, Central, and South America, and the Caribbean” (Gordon, *Existentia Africana* 1). Afro-Caribbean existentialism is both structural and representational: “the dominance of inner nature, the ways in which it influences human actions, its basic patterns of organization were all important to structural characteristics inherited from Africa” (*Existence in Black* 17). Comparatively, Africana existentialism comes out from the morphed roots of the nations of Africa. The African diaspora, which led to the displacement and enslavement of millions of Black bodies, has resulted in an array of experiences. Africana existentialism “the lived, existential reality of the day-to-day situation of their denied humanity and the historical irony of the world that denied their historicity” (*Existentia Africana* 2).

Africana philosophy distinguishes itself from Black existentialism in the acknowledgment that not all Black people have African roots, as exemplified by the indigenous people of Australia (*Existentia Africana* 6). Overall, Africana existentialism asks “*Who*, in a word, are African peoples” (*Existentia Africana* 4)? For *what* ought such a people be striving?” as well as, “*How* might the peoplehood of dehumanized people be affirmed” (*Existentia Africana* 4)? The philosophy of Africana existentialism explores the lived experiences of Black people. Africana existentialism is specifically linked to a raced experience of Black people, vis-a-vis the Black body.

Gordon explains the Black phenomenological body by comparing consciousness and its intent concerning objects and perspectives. “A world without objects is also a world without consciousness. A consequence of conscious’ requirement of an object is the reality of
perspective” (Gordon, *Existencia Africana* 120). Objects exist within a sphere called ‘there’ while the consciousness of such an object is simultaneously ‘here.’ Perspective is constituted by the ‘here’ which is the body. Moreover, existentially, the body is “understood in three dimensions: the body as one’s perspective on the world. The other two are the body as seen by others, and the body’s (consciousness’) realization as it is seen by others” (Gordon, *Existencia Africana* 120). These are the ways the body is understood according to existential phenomenology.

This project seeks to explore the phenomenological Black body in the context of American racialized experience. Africana existential writings reveal “the historical project of conquest and colonization that has emerged since 1492 and the subsequent struggles for emancipation that continue to this day” (Gordon, *Existencia Africana* 7). Contextualizing the crux of Africana philosophers and their works, Gordon writes, “On the representational level, these African roots are to be found in the mythic, religious, genealogical, and ritual discourses that were used to code the spiritual happenings and demands of inner nature, and to empower human agency in the face of these occupancies and pressures” (17). Existentialist writers “see themselves as carrying on a tradition” that precedes a formal, philosophical movement (Dreyfus and Wrathall 3). Africana existentialism recognizes Frantz Fanon as crucial in its commencement. Africana existentialism emerges as a philosophical movement through the work of Fanon.

**Franz Fanon (1925-1961)**

Martinique native Franz Fanon became a psychiatrist working to understand European ethno-psychiatric model which at that time sought to understand the psychology of non-
European people. Fanon looked at the effects of colonial racism perpetrated by France during and following the Algerian war.

Fanon’s text *Black Skin, White Masks* was the first book to investigate the psychology of colonialism. The text is foundational for the Black phenomenological inquiry. Fanon wrote from his perspective as a colonized subject, examining colonized people, who internalize colonialism. Fanon argued that “an inferiority complex is inculcated, and . . . through the mechanism of racism, Black people end up emulating their oppressors” (*Black Skin* 12). Fanon developed a conviction that “what is called the Black soul is a construction by white folks” (*Black Skin* 1). This outcome is a pragmatic effect of colonization. Beginning with language, the Black body exists, in part, in a dimension of being-for-others. Fanon explained that “to speak is to exist absolutely for the other” (*Black Skin* 1). He remarked, “not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man” (Fanon, “Fact” 257). The Black body emerges as symbolic among others.

Fanon offered a socio-diagnostic interpretation of group racial identity. The formation of race and the juxtaposition of races leads to a mental condition where both races communicate within racial constraints. “The white man is sealed in his whiteness. The Black man is sealed in his Blackness” (Fanon, “Fact” 9). However, the Black person is ever trying to be rid of his suppressed situatedness. Although the skin of a Black man binds him his Blackness, the Black person wears a white mask. Fanon’s use of the medical term for skin, epidermis, becomes a metaphor for what the skin signifies. Thus, the Black body is epidermalized. The Black body is wrapped up in and bound by the marking of its skin. For Fanon, Black identity is marked by self-division, which may ultimately lead to a pathological sense of alienation. To see oneself as an ‘other’ as indicated by the marking of the skin, is therefore problematic. An “internalization or
rather epidermalization” of inferiority results from a self-reflective, brute awareness of an economic and social alienation of the Black body among society (Black Skin xv). “The inferiority complex can be ascribed to a double process: First economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of this inferiority” (“Fact” xv). Epidermalization emerges as the phenomenon upon which identification of Blackness is made manifest. The focus of Fanon’s text ultimately centered around the formation, meaning, and effects colonization had on Blackness.

Lewis Gordon describes Fanon’s project in a way that reveals “the lived experience of Blacks in the face of sociogenic sedimentation of their identity and political possibilities” (Existential Africana 4). When Black people are seen by others as Black, they are faced with presumed limitations of presumed cultural conditions and social structures. Gordon finds that the epidermalization of the Black body often “make ethical demands on transformation futile, if not irrelevant and silly” (Existential Africana 4). Fanon noticed that the more he interacted as a member of western society, the more he became representational of the societal ideal. For Fanon, a system’s affirmation depends on denying that the system has legitimately excluded Black people. A Black person is “a reminder of injustice in a system that is supposed to be wholly good” (Gordon, Existential Africana 4–5). The Black body is locked into their bodies, in ways that cannot be undone (Gordon, Existential Africana 120).

In his book, The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon gathered his earlier writings on formations of racial identity, exploration of dialectical history and colonialism, liberation ideology, political prophecy, and critiques of Manichean thinking. He extended these ideas to the phenomenon of decolonization, particularly as it affects African nations. There is an urgency in Fanon’s text, for whom Jean-Paul Sartre argues, “is not written for us” (Wretched 10). As the title suggests, the book is written about, but not for, people seen as the wretched of the earth. For Fanon, the needs
of the nation’s poor are central to building. “decolonization and liberation occur after …”
revolution (Wretched 35). Fanon believed that the revolution against colonization occurs from
work done in thinking, planning, and acting “from the bottom up” (Wretched 35). Fanon’s
project draws attention to the Black body as one with potentially powerful linguistic expression
(Arneson, Communicative 2). His work is communicatively engaged and engaging (Arneson,
Communicative 2, 24).

Although his language may be interpreted as militant and advocating revolutionary
violence, Fanon’s work inspires his scholars through a challenging plea for revolutionary
humanism. Fanon spent most of his life struggling against French racism. He distinguished
between “a country simply conquered and occupied and a colonized country” (Fanon, Black Skin
1). The former refers to the treatment of the land in relationship to what people seize. The latter
implies that the colonized country loses its people in the process of colonization. A people’s
identity becomes usurped as well. Fanon did not live to see Algeria acquire full independence.
He died of leukemia December 6, 1961. His work and legacy thrive in those who seek liberation,
both physical and mental, in acts of protest and scholarship. Johnson looks to the work of Fanon
for his wealth of knowledge and understanding.

Charles Johnson (b. 1948)

Charles Johnson was a student of psychology in 1976, he wrote “A Phenomenology of
the Black Body” (Artist 119). Johnson was tasked with utilizing either an analytical, pragmatic,
or phenomenological method of study for the project. He chose the latter. Following completion
of his Ph.D., Johnson became a talented essayist, reviewer, scriptwriter, cartoonist, and novelist.
His work is in the existential tradition.
Johnson’s “A Phenomenology of the Black Body” progresses from Husserl’s interest in knowledge and understanding, to Martin Heidegger’s, who seeks “thought on Being,” to the existential commitments of Jean-Paul Sartre, and then to the lived-body of Merleau-Ponty (*Being and Race* iix). Johnson perceived Merleau-Ponty as the scholar “who most significantly advances Husserlian thought by developing his central notion of the Lifeworld, and he is distinguished by his work on dialectical theory, language, perception and the body as our foundation for all perceptual experience” (iix). Johnson makes the philosophical entry to his discussion on the Black body certain, speaking from his experience. “To say that the body is our anchorage in the world is to bring this discussion to a consideration of ‘intentionality,’ the structure which gives meaning to experience” (“Black Body” 602). Phenomenology is the study of structure of consciousness. Intention is at the heart of consciousness; consciousness is embodied. One is caught up in ‘to what’ he or she is paying attention.

In “A Phenomenology of a Black Body,” Johnson sets out to “trace the cartesian bifurcation of res cogitates and res extensae, and of course to the more primordial Platonic dualism, indicating how Western ontological divisions between higher (spirit) and lower (body) coupled with Christian symbologies of light and dark develop the Black body as state of ‘stain’” (*Being and Race* 27). The use of the word stain explicitly implies that the Black body is a problem. In his essay, Johnson draws on the notion of Du Bois’ double consciousness which is representative of the existential dilemma of a person’s experience of being perceived by others, according to one’s Blackness (*Artist* 110). Johnson also echoes the sentiment and cognisance of Fanon, “that there are times when the Black man is locked into his body” (“Black Body” 601). This, Johnson explains, is a consequence of being Black.
Johnson’s essay weaves philosophy with experience to describe a phenomenology of the Black body. As a Black writer, Johnson is concerned with his own experiences. Johnson writes, “the meaning of the Black world, and this concern in literature and life has led to the creation of various racial ideologies for the African experience” (*Being and Race* 26). Johnson turns to literature and folk tales to substantiate his work and to highlight his experience. In the first chapter of his book, *Being and Race*, Johnson explains.

Life is baffling enough for every novelist, and for writers of Afro-American fiction it presents even more artistic and philosophical questions than for writers who are white. Few writers, black or white, bother with such questions, and in the long run they may have importance only to a few people who wonder, as I have for twenty years, about the forms our stories have taken, what they say about the world, and what they don’t say. These are not idle questions. Our faith in fiction comes from an ancient belief that language and literary art—all speaking and showing—clarify our experience. Our most sacred cliché in contemporary criticism, and also in creative-writing courses, is that writers should “write about what they know,” and for the Afro-American author that inevitably means the “Black” experience. (Johnson, *Being and Race* 3)

Johnson hoped to expound on the situatedness of the Black body and to “examine the Black male body as a cultural object and to inquire how it has been interpreted, manipulated, and given to us, particularly in popular culture” in his essay (*Artist* 119).

Johnson details how cultural assumptions, folklore, and myth lock Black people into their body (“Black Body” 601). His assertion about ‘locking’ people into their body highlights the notion of the constitution of the lived-body as an object. The Black body is locked into its epidermalized condition where his or her exterior informs his or her experience. Gleaning from Fanon, Johnson talks about epidermalization as what produces the *Black-as-body*. In this way, Johnson describes how one is given to the world through one’s Black body:

My world is epidermalized, collapsed like a house of cards into the stained casement of my skin. My subjectivity is turned inside out like a shirt cuff. “And so it is not I who make meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me,” much like a mugger at a boardwalk’s end. (“Black Body” 606)
Black-as-body connotes the existential distinction of the Black body whose presumed essence is presupposed by the body. “Epidermalization spreads throughout the body like an odor, like an echoing sound” (Johnson, “Black Body” 606). Metaphorically, the Black body becomes an object. Black-as-body is reflective of stereotypes, thematized over time. The Black body is type-caste and locked into its condition according to the intentions of others.

Black-as-body is a representation of who I am in a social world. In a public sense, “’The gulf between the Mind and Body will be seen to coincide with the gulf between the two races.’ … to focus on one aspect of our lived experience of the body, . . . Blacks were stripped of a mental life, leaving them only a bodily existence in the West—the way Blacks are culturally intended by whites—though this bodily existence is a superior one” (qtd. in Johnson, Being and Race 26–27). As a Black body, in the world—potentially reduced to Black-as-body, Johnson offers three responses: acceptance, vindication, and claiming. The first response, acceptance, is that I accept how I am seen by others and “use this invisibility of my interior to deceive, and this to win survival” (Johnson, “Black Body” 608). The second response is vindication, where the Black uses charm and eloquence to demonstrate their internal self and that they do have a soul (Johnson, “Black Body” 609). The third response is a radical claiming of the situational standpoint of the Black body. This stance is one of empowerment. For example, I call out Black is beautiful! Here, one rejects negative connotations of him or herself and makes it into something wondrous and powerful.

Johnson’s responses discussed above, he says, are “a general human possibility based upon the ability of embodied consciousness to be made a problem for itself within a racial class system” (Johnson, “Black Body” 610). Not until an existential revelation is met, does a person deliberate on their course of response to the situated Black body. Still, “the Black body remains
an ambiguous object in our society, still susceptible to whatever meanings the white gaze assigns to it” (“Return” 215). “A Phenomenology of the Black body” is one that interrogates the Black body as a symbol but also as point radix for interpreting racial experiences. Following Johnson’s scholarship, George Yancy cites Johnson in his early essays, “The Return of the Black Body: Seven Vignettes” and “Black Bodies, White Gazes.” The two essays grounded Yancy’s dissertation, which was later published as the book, Black Bodies White Gazes.

George Yancy (b. 1961)

Yancy is a professor of philosophy at Emory College. Before his academic initiation into philosophy, he recollects frequent contemplations on ideas of existential inquiry. He worked in family counseling and includes a theocratic bent in some of his works. Yancy has written or edited more than twenty books and articles. He writes regularly for the Rolling Stone magazine and the New York Times. Yancy is also the "Philosophy of Race" Book Series Editor at Lexington Books.

After Fanon and Johnson, George Yancy writes about his experiences as a Black man. For Yancy, his race precedes him. That is to say, he is perceived by others according to his Black condition. His racialized existence precedes his coming. In the style of Africana existentialism, Yancy writes concerning his own lived experience:

I write out of a personal existential context. This context is a profound source of knowledge connected to my "raced" body. Hence, I write from a place of lived embodied experience, a site of exposure. In philosophy, the only thing that we are taught to "expose" is a weak argument, a fallacy, or someone's "inferior" reasoning power. The embodied self is bracketed and deemed irrelevant to theory, superfluous and cumbersome in one's search for truth. It is best, or so we are told, to reason from nowhere. Hence, the white philosopher/author presumes to speak for all of "us" without the slightest mention of his or her "raced" identity. (“Return” 215)

In a manner similar to Fanon and Johnson, Yancy speaks to a phenomenology of a Black body as usurped, given to the “historical construction of whiteness as the norm” (“Return” 218). In other
words, his existential reality is tied to his racialized condition. He maintains that his work is compared to accessing a standard purported by whiteness. Yancy writes “about race in a style that captured the lived reality of race, the dynamic process of racialization, and the deep embodied social spaces and social transitions in which racism permeates” (*Black Bodies* xvii). His approach sustains a philosophical treatment of Black embodiment. In his writing, Yancy theorizes on both the contemporary and historical “structural violence of the white gaze” (Johnson, “Black Body” 606). Yancy’s project brings attention to the effect of racism in his field of scholarship and in his everyday life.

Yancy explains that in recounting his experiences, he requires something additional which is the consideration of his Blackness. “Hence,” Yancy writes “my emergence upon the historical scene requires that I engage in a battle that is not only iconographic and semiotic but is also existential” (*Black Bodies* 117). The narrative that Yancy is born into began with the conception of race and racial ideology positioning the Black body as subordinate among others. “The black body has been historically marked, disciplined, and scripted materially, psychologically, and morally invested in to ensure both white supremacy and the illusory construction of the white subject as a self-contained substance whose existence does not depend upon the construction of the black qua ‘inferior’” (“Elevator Effect” 17). The Black body constitutes and experiences a different reality than a white body. His experience is informed by the racial profile of the Black body in America. The Black body is a racialized body. America’s racial narrative reverberates through quotidian tasks of the day.

Yancy’s articulation of a phenomenological Black body includes the notion that his Black body is not wholly his own. According to Yancy, “the Black body has been confiscated” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 17). “This confiscation occurred in the form of the past brutal enslavement of
Black bodies, the cruel and sadistic lynching of Black bodies, the sexual molestation of Black bodies on Southern plantations, the literal breeding of Black bodies for white exploitation, and the unethical experimentation on black bodies. . . . “ and more (Johnson, Artist 610). In the historic timeline evidencing the Black body as one confiscated, Yancy mentions the mass incarceration, construction of sexuality and quotidian interactions on a social level as well. The notion of a confiscated body is also discussed in the contemporary work of Ta-Nehisi Coates.

Ta-Nehisi Coates (b. 1975)

Ta-Nehisi Coates is currently a correspondent for The Atlantic magazine. He has written several bestselling books and also works as an author for the Marvel comics “The Black Panther” and “Captain America.” Coates is among current thinkers who write in accordance to their lived experience.

In Between the World and Me, Coates offers a love letter to his son. He moves the discussion of Black phenomenology full circle to the public sphere. On the first pages of his letter, Coates describes being questioned in a television interview concerning the condition of his body—more specifically the show host asked, “What it is like to lose your body?” (Coates 5–6). His answer unfolds throughout the book. Coates discusses a heritage within his body as a site of memory and tradition that links the past to the present both symbolically and literally through language. He affirms that the history of the body is the history of The United States. More specifically, the history of the body rests within the reality of race in America with those who self-identify as white, ascribing racism to “bone-deep features [of Black] people and then [seeking to] humiliate, reduce, and destroy them” (Coates 7). For Coates, to be white “means to be a part of an encoded mind-body-world system that through symbolic and memory recollection reinforces certain beliefs within certain material orders and linguistic patterns” (Hale 499).
Within the context of this white world, Coates attends to his son by recounting what it is to inhabit a Black body and how to navigate the world in and through his own Black body.

The phenomenology of the Black body is approached through Africana existentialism. Africana existentialism considers the lived experience of the Black body among others. Just as existentialism existed prior to a formal formation of the movement, Black existentialism acknowledged the voices of those who wrote and worked with keen attention to their everyday existence and communicative engagement (Arneson, *Communicative* 2). There are many who wrote on their experiences and called attention to their own lived reality as raced Black bodies who are not named here. However, their voices have contributed to the discipline. Included previously were Fanon, Johnson, Yancy, and Coates whose projects have described some ways by which existential Blackness is experienced. Their articulations served to animate the phenomenological Black body. Having discussed some phenomenological juxtapositions of the Black body, and its lived existence, I now move to look at ways the Black body is interpreted.

**Interpreting the Black Body**

The phenomenological Black body of Yancy expresses that Blackness is made “meaningful” through a structured, and structuring space (*Black Bodies* 19). “Whites ‘see’ the black body through the medium of historically structured forms of ‘knowledge’ that regard it as an object of suspicion” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 9). Suspicion and stereotype of the Black body flow from a historic synecdoche of interruption and confiscation of the Black body. These existential conditions have rendered the Black body as alienated and as subject to the white gaze through which the surface of the Black body is read. The white gaze acting upon the body of a Black person, according to Yancy, is “an act of constructing my black body” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 41). The phenomenological Black body embodies a perpetual constructive hermeneutic.
As the body is seen by others, so is the body experienced. The white gaze interrogates and defines the Black body. Moreover, a construction of the Black body proves docile to the aggression of the androcentric culture of the white gaze. The Black body is interrupted by both white and Black people from this disposition. Thus one becomes locked into the Black body.

The existential Black body emerges from three dimensions: how I see myself, how I am seen by others, and a realization of how I am seen. The region between these dimensions provides a hermeneutic space for interpretation (Arneson, *Communicative* 26). While simultaneously being all three, one’s hermeneutic disposition is subject to shift. Moreover, the space in-between is “contested ground of interpretation” (*Communicative* 28). Perception and experience shape and frame one’s reality. “For example, if interrogated” the Black body “should disclose a racial experience wrought” by folklore and myth (Johnson, “Black Body” 600). There is a tension between the social construction and the existential hermeneutic notion of reality. Peter L. Berger explains the occurrence of social construction in three movements. These are “externalization, objectivation, and interpretation” (Berger 4). A person’s sense of knowledge and information is put out into the world of others. This information is vetted, circulated, and deemed as relevant. Finally, the information is adopted and internalized. The three-step process of social construction is then re-set to occur again and again. How the Black body is seen impacts how the Black body is constructed. This small project proceeds in part to explore three manners by which the Black body is thematized: (1) the Black body as capital, or Black Capital (2) the Black body as gendered, and (3) the Black body as a battle ground.
Black Capital

In a word, capital is money—a tool used to establish economic security, pay debt, and promote gain. We understand capital to be “an object outside of us, a thing, that by its properties satisfies human wants of sorts or another” (Marx and Mandel 125). Black capital comes to mind when ascertaining value matching the economic power that Black people, as property, held in the marketplace. Considering American racial slavery, the proposition is clear. Black capital refers to the economic value of the Black body in the marketplace. For America, the first African cargo meant for slavery arrived in Jamestown in 1619 (Washington 27). Some twenty Black bodies were sold in exchange for tools and supplies by the Portuguese who commanded the ship. By 1807 there were 20,000 Blacks in the colonies. As the slave trade flourished, 20,000 more arrived each year (Washington 27). Additionally, childbearing of Blacks helped to sustain slavery, which added to slave owners’ economic incentive to force procreation of Black bodies (Roberts 23).

Although the original people were held only as indentured servants, this early situation marked the beginning of racial slavery. Still, those twenty odd Black bodies, whose years of life were wagered for their labor, marked the beginning of commodification of the Black body. From then, throughout the history of racial slavery, Black bodies became a form of capital and were possessed and sold based on the value of their production, and the reproduction of their bodies. Slavery evolved into a brutal practice. Enslavement meant that these men and women had no ownership of their bodies. Instead, according to law, they, as property, belonged to someone else. Evolution of the practice in America resulted in extremely brutal racial slavery—for life. By 1776, when the nation was formed, Blacks made up 20% of the population. The importation of
slaves was legally prohibited by 1807, but just before the Civil War, in 1860, “the nation’s four million enslaved blacks had a value equivalent to four billion dollars today” (Washington 27).

_The Black Body as Chattel_

Commemorating the twenty-third anniversary of the “West India Emancipation” in Canandaigua, New York during the month of August, 1857, Frederick Douglass delivered an address. His speech focused on the fundamental role that the enslaved played in their own fight for freedom. Douglass also spoke about the history of British efforts toward emancipation. The call was to American Blacks, who like Douglass, were oppressed by racial slavery, and whose oppression might be overcome through struggle. I read in his words a struggle that may be moral or physical but is clearly embodied. The oppressed Black body is already laden in pain. However, the hope of freedom from an oppressed condition called for resistance, rejection of their situation, and counterforce. The call from Douglass that day was a call for resolve. The Civil War was on the horizon. “This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and it never will” (n.p.). Yet even after slavery’s end, the struggle for racial equality and autonomy continued.

Enslaved, Black people “were chattel, defined as ‘a moveable item of personal property,’ and as chattel, slave owners were free to do with them as they pleased” (DeGruy 75). Emancipation of slavery did not nullify the value placed on race, nor the commodification of a raced people. Instead, the phenomenon of racial capitalism morphed according to the ways by which society operated.

The process of racial capitalism relies upon and reinforces commodification of racial identity, thereby degrading that identity by reducing it to another thing to be bought and sold. Commodification can also foster racial resentment by causing non-white people to feel used or exploited by white people. And the superficial process of assigning a value to
nonwhiteness within a system of racial capitalism measures that would lead to meaningful social reforms. *(Leong 2152)*

The raced Black body emerges as capital to be bought and sold by non-Black people.

Douglass had once been considered *chattel* according to racial slavery in America. Born to a white father and a Black mother, Douglass was born under the policy of *Partus sequitur*. According to rule, the condition of the children of enslaved people would follow the condition of their mother. *Partus sequitur* had been implemented in Britain and adopted by the American colonies. Men engaging in sexual relations with African women were then no longer made to be financially responsible for both mother and child. Instead, the children would take their enslaved condition from the mother—making the act of procreation with enslaved women a means for increasing their property holdings. Douglass did not experience freedom until he ran away in his teenage years. He fought for abolition in Massachusetts and New York. Still, “racialization and capitalism are ultimately never separable from each other” *(Melamed 78)*. The trend of racial capital is evident in the notions of the performative Black body explored by Harvey Young.

*The Black Performative Body*

“Exhibition of the Black body, as a captive body, in the United States began with boxing lessons on southern plantations” *(Young 81)*. Boxing for sport during the antebellum period made for an opportune venture for the slave-owning South. The Black boxing body was put on display for the purpose of increasing the skills of white sportsmen. Black captives for sparring practice would become “analogous to punching bags that were placed within the ring for the amusement (or exercise) of the white body” *(Young 82)*. Sparring with enslaved men positioned opposition in a precarious situation. “Under the guise of instruction, the plantation owners repeatedly reaffirmed their racial dominance” *(Young 82)*. Thus, the sport of boxing forced participation which, in turn, reified racial ideology of the time.
In addition to the show of strength a boxer might demonstrate (by defeating their captive contestant), the boxing ring became a lucrative indulgence for Southern plantation owners. Much like a cockfight, boxing events featuring enslaved fighters were pitted against each other, drawing wide audiences and another income stream for their masters, who claimed ownership of their bodies. Harvey Young points out that these moments in the boxing ring with each other were a time for the Black body to enact full control of his own body, and his mastery of the sport (82). Sometimes these benefits came with manumission and money of their own. But this was accomplished through the performance of their Black bodies and exhibition of their embodied skill. A performative Black body brought value to the market and stood as an example of racial capital. But the animated body is alone in its ability to draw attention and a price. Because of a base fascination with what is different, the Black body established value as a ‘freak oddity.’

*The Black Body as ‘Freak Oddity’*

Saartjie Baartman who was called Hottentot Venus, was put on display as a carnival freak oddity. Her condition, identified today as steatopygia, was marked by the large amount of fat that had accumulated around her buttocks. Although typical for people of arid parts of southern Africa, Baartman’s form “endowed her with a shape that fascinated men and women” during her lifetime, and even after her death. Born in 1789 to the Griqua tribe, young Baartment was coaxed from her home on the Eastern Cape of South Africa to profit by exhibiting herself as a freak oddity. She traveled the English carnival circuit with South African anatomist Phillip Tobias under the stage name Venus Hottentot. “Arriving in Piccadilly in 1810, the Hottentot appeared on a ‘stage two feet high, along which she was led by her keeper and exhibited like a wild beast, being obliged to walk, stand or sit as he ordered’” (Young 122). Except for a tiny feather-lined apron tied around her waist, Baartman was naked during the entire show. Additionally, Baartman
was hired out for private sessions during which times it is likely that she was prostituted. Baartman was “sold to an animal trainer in 1814. . . and taken to France where she continued to appear as an oddity, on display for both public and private consumption” (Young 122). A year later Baartman would die from what seemed to be syphilis, tuberculosis, and alcoholism. But the display of her body would not end with her death. George Cuvier, who had observed, displayed and experimented with her during her lifetime, also “dissected her body—preserving her genitals and brain in a glass jar”—and reassembling her skeleton (Young 122).

Her body was one that proved profitable. “Having the opportunity to examine Ba(a)rtman(n)’s body after she died, Cuvier’s ‘objective scientific gaze’ revealed the ‘truth’ about her Black body,” Yancy writes (Black Bodies 96). For Yancy, the truth of Baartman was fundamentally linked to the French male gaze and imagination (Yancy, Black Bodies 93). Her body shape and mass had attracted the white gaze initially while she was still in her hometown, before moving overseas. The Frenchmen’s’ European gaze was bound up in “discourses of power, dominance, a and hierarchies” (Yancy, Black Bodies 94). Yancy argues that the gaze of the European man, made Baartman into a typograph of the Black body, sexualizing her according to her physiological cartography. Cuvier’s findings would serve as medical notes and the basis for lectures which he delivered around the world and later published.

Yancy argues that the display and examination of Baartman after her death became a reenactment of the experience of the Black body (“The Return” 119). Plaster casts and physical remains of Baartman’s body parts were exhibited at the Musse de L’Homme in Paris. The Hottentot remained on display until the 1970s. Not until 2002, were the cast of Baartmen, her skeleton, and remains returned to her native South Africa land for burial. By that time, Venus Hottentot had sustained 150 years accessibility to the watchful eye of onlookers. Even in death,
her Black body succumbed to the European gaze and imaginative constructions that defined her.

The Black body is a gendered body.

**The Black Body is Gendered**

In 1851, Sojourner Truth rose from her seat to speak at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio.

Well, children, where there is so much racket, there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the Negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about? That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Sojourner)

Born enslaved and freed upon the abolition of slavery in the state of New York, Truth travelled extensively, speaking her truth to power. She was an evangelist and an abolitionist. The speech she gave at the convention exemplifies the narrative of intersectionality. Truth represents the legacy of intersectionality prior to its start as a movement. Her speech describes the existential disposition of intersectionality before the word was termed.

**The Intersectional Black Body**

Critical race theorist Kimberly Crenshaw coined the term ‘intersectionality’ to represent overlapping social identities. At the time, Crenshaw’s attention was drawn to issues addressing intragroup differences. Crenshaw found that some members of certain groups had various identities which shaped their experiences. For example, Black women had sometimes gone overlooked because of their double-minority status. Crenshaw’s project brings to light intersections of race and gender to point out “the need for multiple grounds of identity when
considering how the social world is constructed” (358). Black women do not stand singularly in the category of race, as does the Black man, nor is she fully understood based on the experience of the Black man. “The intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking separately at the “race or gender dimensions of experience” (Crenshaw 358). The lived reality of the Black woman’s body is not the same as that of the Black male. Instead, the Black woman occupies a place off-center from the Black male identity generally thought of in discussion surrounding the Black body.

*The Black Woman Body Politic*

The body politic emerges according to four definitions, including the people of a nation, state or society considered collectively as an organized group of citizens. Second, the body politic can be seen as a metaphor that likens a nation to a corporation. Third, body politic could be understood as a group of persons organized under a single governmental authority, and fourth, the body politic could be all the people of a nation considered as a single group because of their combined power. The intersectional Black body can be identified according to each of these.

The body politic is recognized, in one sense, as the people of a nation, state, or society, whereas they collectively make up its citizenry. In those terms, the people, *en masse*, are synonymous with a governed group of people. In applying this metaphor to the Black female body, I am compelled to consider the spatial relationship that Black woman have to America. Edward Casey asserts that “place serves as the condition of all existing things” (Casey, *Getting Back into Place, Second Edition* 15). Moreover, “place belongs to the very concept of existence” (Casey, *Getting Back into Place, Second Edition* 15). From the standpoint of spatial phenomenology, Radhika Mohanram conceptualized the female Black body according to
biogeographic materiality where the Black female body manifests from the gathering together of both gender and nationality.

Mohanram insists that “bodies are specifically linked with nations,” and still further that there is a close relationship between body and home (4). However, discourses of nationalism subscribe to a “different form of embodiment (as in race/ethnicity)” and race is a part of a nationalistic discourse (Mohanram 7). Her female Black body emerges as a theory of identity, situated in a place and space. Not just diasporic, but women of indigenous identity are raced, but placed, and displaced (Mohanram 34). We understand ourselves through a sense of rootedness which we demonstrate through discursive practices. “Whiteness has the ability to move. . .” which resulted in the unmarking of the body (Mohanram 4). In contrast, “Blackness is signified through marking and is always static and immobilizing” (Mohanram 4). To be a Black body is to be contorted in space.

According to Mohanram, “the Black man embodies the Body. . . [whereas] “the white man transcends and transforms the [Black woman’s] body into will and rationale, a perception and a perspective” (27). Out from a system of difference, embodied characteristics collide. “Male and female are not arbitrary distinctions. Physiological differences can be expected to affect their ways of responding to the world” (Tuan 53). For Mohanram, the male body is a democratic body and participates in citizenship (59). The woman’s body is representative of sexual pleasure in the same democratic nation. Her female Black body is likened to nature, whereas the white body stages a relationship with knowledge. Therefore, it is a natural disposition for the white male gaze to construct the Black body according to their hegemonic imagination. Racialization, and also feminization, of the Black body, is therefore outside of one’s own agency.
The notion of Blackness itself emerges as a confluence of history, culture, economics, geography, and language. Black womanhood is necessarily connected to the same themes. According to Mohanram, the notion of ‘Black’ can only resonate with the meaning demonstrated by a historical narrative when it is “considered to be geographically and socially in or out of place” (56). For Mohanram, the Black body is intrinsically linked to place—if not a manifestation of place itself. After all, “to be is to be bounded by place, limited by” as we are through our bodies (Casey, *Getting Back into Place, Second Edition* 15). The meaning of a Black body is therefore situated within a context particular to a location. In enslavement, “working in conditions where the body was regarded solely as a tool. . . the way the body was represented became more important than the body itself” (hooks 38). Mohanram connects the notion of woman in the nation and construction of femininity and she also discusses the embodiment of Blackness as a raced body without a culture (50). The Black female body is raced and also out-of-place.

The Black female body politic is representative of the western nation—which supports the first characterization of the body politic. Body politic is also a medieval metaphor that likens a nation to a corporation. With the Black body politic in mind, the Black female body has been held as a corporation throughout her American history. With the aim of a corporation being to produce profit, Black women were profit-making machines during slavery (Washington 23). The act of slave women giving birth was reduced to a function of replenishing the enslaved labor force of plantation owners. “Black women bore children who belonged to the slaveowner from the moment of their conception” (Washington 23). Slave women were both a “producer and a reproducer,” with no legal claim to their own children (Washington 39). Yet they frequently were caregivers and wet nurses for white women’s children. It was common for the enslaved
female to be “victims of sexual exploitation at the hands of their masters and overseers”
(Washington 29). As part of an institution that afforded her no rights, “white slave masters
exercised their ‘sexual privileges’ on slave girls...” some of whom had barely reached their
early teens (DeGruy 77).

Rape was not the only sexual violence held against women. Their Black bodies were used
as subject of medical experimentation. One example is the work of James Marion Sims
(Washington 61). He is credited for developing the vaginal speculum in the 1800s (DeGruy 78–
80; Washington 61–68). To the benefit of science, Sims grew his practice and wealth of research
knowledge by conducting “surgical experiments on countless unanesthetized African slave
women. Sims reasoned that slave women were able to bear great pain because their ‘race’ made
them more durable, and thus they were well suited for painful medical experimentation”
(DeGruy 78). As a business entity, slave women were a cog in the wheel of the institution of
slavery. These treatments of the Black female body politic have had repercussions throughout
history.

The political identity of the Black woman has traditionally not been a site of attention.
Despite the feminist movements that sought to bring attention to the oppression of women
overall, issues unique to Black women’s experience have gone unnoticed or overlooked among
many of her white counterparts. The body politic aptly applies to a group of people organized
under a single governmental authority, the third definition of the body politic manifests under the
guise of feminism and the feminist movements. And the fourth definition, for the body politic is
a single group of people of a nation considered according to their power, also emerges in the
feminist movements. I will consider the Black female body and her reproductive rights, in the
next section.
**A Reproducing Body**

The contemporary feminist movement has been illuminated by the judgment of Roe v. Wade, women’s ability to choose. Many women consider the right to choose as paramount to exercise of rights over our own bodies. However, a discussion on the procreative freedoms of Black women invite even more issues. The Black woman has historically had little reproductive rights. Black women have at times had lesser access to contraception and abortion than their white counterparts. Moreover, Black women have been sterilized, and made unable to procreate, without their consent (Threadcraft 5). Black women have been systematically targeted and prosecuted for fetal crimes and risking fetal health when in accidents, attempting suicide and using drugs when pregnant (Roberts xii). Currently Black women are being incarcerated at record numbers (Mauer 22; Threadcraft xvii). Incarcerated mothers give birth shackled and in chains during their entire delivery. Their newborns are taken from them and automatically placed in foster childcare just after being born (xvii). Rhetoric and policies questioning the capabilities of Black women and their families to raise productive families continue to be raised. “Norplant and Depo-Provera in the arms of Black teenage mothers—paints a powerful picture in the link between race and reproductive freedom in America” (Roberts 4). Reproductive rights extend beyond the right to choose for the Black woman. She has long been struggling for freedoms simply for autonomy and privacy.

Shatema Threadcraft writes,

Benhabib notes that the term ‘private’ refers to three distinct concepts or zones of privacy in the Western tradition. The first is the sphere of moral and religious conscience, set apart from public power in the modern era. The second refers to economic liberties. The final sphere refers to the ‘domain of the household, of meeting the daily needs of life, of sexuality, reproduction, of care for the young, the sick, and the elderly. (ctd. in Threadcraft 22)
The third type of privacy is most relevant policy sought by feminist movements and is also particularly nuanced for Black women. Historically, feminist movements have not had the Black female at the forefront of discussion. “The feminist focus on gender and identification of male domination as the source of reproductive repression often overlooks the importance of racism in shaping our understanding of reproductive liberty and the degree of choice that women really have” (Roberts 5). To that degree, the feminist movements have frequently missed the mark for attending to the needs of Black women.

The first feminist movement rose on the heels of abolitionists, as white women sought to be included in the fight to end slavery. The second feminist struggle was born out of an interest in the rights of American citizenship found in property and the right to vote. Whereas Black men had supposedly accomplished these, white women had not until the passing of the 19th Amendment. However, Blacks overall would struggle to participate in the democracy promised through the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Around this time, the third wave of feminism sprang up with the drive for sexual freedom and freedom from traditional family roles. Black women, however, were already working and wanted more time for their family. Now in the fourth wave of feminism with the “Me Too” era, intersectionality is the operative word, #BlackLivesMatter led the way with queer and straight Black women at its helm. More than the traditions of feminism, womanism describes the passions of a Black woman.

Alice Walker in her book, *In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens*, places the womanist at the intersectionality of race and gender. Walker gives us this lush definition:

Womanism: 1. From womanish. (Opp. Of “girlish,” i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A Black feminist or feminist of color. . . 2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non sexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values teasers as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves men, sexually and/or non sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except
periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, . . . . Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Regardless. 4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender. (xi)

One understands feminism as an expression for seeking equality for women; a series of movements tracing where women have been throughout history. In comparison, womanism is a metaphor for the Black, indigenous, and people of color who stake their rootedness in love and concern and compassion not just for the people, but for all of the earth and its creation. She is a Mother Nature, a captive maternal, an eternal female who is uniquely in touch with and invested in her people and her earth.

She is a provider and an artist. When Walker writes on In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens, she is calling attention to “the mule of the world” (237) who has lowered her status simply to be. Walker writes, “I notice that it is only when [her] mother is working in her flowers that she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible—except as Creator. Hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have” (241). It’s our mothers and grandmothers, Walker went “in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the Black woman has inherited and that pops out in wild and unlikely places to this day” (239). The gardens are what she grows despite the hardships she encounters, as her bodily identity affords.

The metaphorical threads of womanism permeate the notion of the Body politic as Black women organized under a single governmental authority. The womanist houses a “genius of a sort” (Walker 239). She is a creator and yet steps in and up to caring for more than just her own (237). Here we consider the intersectional Black woman’s body as one rooted in nature. She is self-empowered despite a sociopolitical position of marginality. For Walker, the womanist is a Black woman. She is an artist, and creator, given to caring for more than her own. She may be a
mother, and she may be a grandmother. It is the possibility of reproduction that adds to the
dynamic intersectionality of the Black body.

Body politic accounts for a group of people considered as a single group because of the
power they collectively represent within the framework of nation. This dimension of the body
politic emerges with the notion of the body of the Black woman and reproduction. Since slavery,
Black women have faced reproductive issues, which included being targeted and punished for
having babies (Washington xi). Because of racist beliefs, Black women were thought to be, not
only degenerate, but hyper-sexual, and unable to care for their young. Fears fueled by racist
rhetoric provided for forced institutional eugenics, birth control, and sterilization. The right to a
safe abortion only adds to her list of reproductive justice demands. The need for reproductive
agency for the female Black body will carry into reproductive justice for all. The Black body is a
gendered body. She is intersectional and interpreted according to a manipulated, spatially
displaced construction. Her needs have gone overlooked by non-Black bodies of her gender.
Still, the Black woman is intrinsically capable of being a womanist, an artist, and keeper of a
garden.

In conclusion, I refer to the postscript of Johnson’s “Phenomenology of A Black Body,”
where Johnson includes a message about the Black female body (Artist 120). He writes,

In an amazing and revolutionary feat of cultural reconstruction, contemporary black
women have made dominant the profile of the female body as, first and foremost,
spiritual: a communal-body of politically progressive, long-suffering women who are
responsible, hard-working and compassionate who support each other in all ways, protect
and nurture their children and live meaningful lives without black male assistance. The
black female body is, in fact, frequently offered to us as the original body of humankind
descended from a Black Eve of Africa. (Johnson, Artist 120)

All of his words stand as a tribute to the female Black body. Her past experience and survival
pay testimony to her handsome will, love, and glory. Black women are succeeding in defining
themselves on their own terms rather than a racial or gendered other. Women, as with all people of the universe, are not to be understood as static, but in process in the world, and thus, becoming.

The Black Body as a Battle Ground

W.E.B. Du Bois wrote on the lived experience of being Black in America. From his discourse, we are given a metaphor of the veil and double consciousness (Du Bois, *The Souls* 1–5). The veil is a rhetorical language for the disconnection one has between how the nation sees oneself and the essence of being human. The double consciousness speaks to an understanding that Blacks are both Black and American. How does one navigate in a country accounting for both identities together and all at once? These articulations describe the notion of the battleground full well. Contending with the notion of self, yet despite one’s racialized condition, works to capture the tension caught up being Black in America.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others or measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (Du Bois, *The Souls* 5).

His lived experience describes the dichotomy of thought and being, of consciousness and embodiment that illustrates a dichotomy of being within a battleground.

The Black Body as Site of Violence

The metaphor of battleground frames the context through which recent events are seen by the media. The #BlackLivesMatter movement brings attention to these grievances. The movement forged a beginning when the poignant motto was tweeted between friends upon the judgment deeming George Zimmerman not guilty for the death of Trayvon Martin. In response, Alicia Garza wrote a letter to her Facebook community to which another co-founder Patrisse
Cullors responded with the hashtag which now titles the movement. According to Jesse Williams, “#BlackLivesMatter became a brilliant set of marching orders, slash slogan slash plea.” Writing on the #BlackLivesMatter movement, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor states,

The killing of Mike Brown, along with an ever-growing list of other unarmed Black people, drove holes in the logic that Black people simply doing the “right things,” whatever those things might be, could overcome the perennial crises within Black America. After all, Mike Brown was only walking down the street. Eric Garner was standing on the corner. Rekia Boyd was in a park with friends. Trayvon Martin was walking with a bag of Skittles and a can of iced tea. Sean Bell was leaving a bachelor party, anticipating his marriage the following day. Amadou Diallo was getting off from work. Their deaths, and the killings of so many others like them, prove that sometimes simply being Black can make you a suspect or get you killed. (13)

Even the most quotidian actions are oddly treacherous when enacted by the body that is Black. The Black body as a site of violence has elicited and received racial hatred manifesting in many forms. Received unto the body, this dimension is informed by an apprehensive societal environment.

Writing on race in crisis, Yancy describes a record number of 867 reported cases “of hateful harassment or intimidation in the United States” within the first ten days after the election of President Trump (Yancy, “Dangerous Conversations” 2). Rather than a continuation of hope for progress after the election of the nation’s first Black president, the mind of society seems to be going in reverse. Many might argue that 19th and 20th-century lynchings can be compared to today’s killings; thus, violence against Black bodies persists. “The black body has been historically marked, disciplined, and scripted and materially, psychologically, and morally invested in to ensure both white supremacy and the illusory construction of the white subject as a self-contained substance whose existence does not depend upon the construction of the black qua ‘interior’” (Yancy, Black 17). According to Yancy, the lived reality of the Black body, and the
conditions that define it, are inherited. The Black body as a battleground immediately stages it as ready for violence and war.

Black deaths at the hands of police and the self-deputized are only one means by which the Black body succumbs to violence. The anthology titled *Violence Against Black Bodies* demonstrates several atrocities brought against and contributing to the constructing spaces of whiteness determining the constructed Black body. In his collection of edited essays, Joe R. Feagin brings work into his text that “frames black pain and suffering within the context of anti-Black racism, where Black bodies are marked for death, treated as sub-persons, and deemed disposable, where Black joy continues to be slashed away despite the reality that we are living in the twenty-first century” (1). Both primary and secondary sources ‘call out’ racialized violence in his writings within the text. As a battleground, the Black body is a site of violence both from the outside and in. In other words, the historic significance of our racial identity has situated our experience in the world, and such will remain so under the constructing space of the white gaze until activist efforts diminish the effects of white superiority.

The Black body as a site of violence is taken up in the text, *Embodying the Black Experience*, by Harvey Young. Illustrating the Black body as a battleground, Young acknowledges the multiplicity of forms assumed by violence, including “epithet, racial profiling, incarceration or captivity, and physical/sexual assault” (5). Yet, the Black body is taken as threatening, thus deserving of the violence it attracts.

*The Black Body as Criminal*

Following a painful history of systemic lynching and burning of Black bodies, Young discusses a consistent Black embodiment of racial violence which emphasizes his insistence on the internal, experiential overlapping (171). Moving from Young’s descriptions of the displayed
Black body in whole or in parts--alive or inanimate, one is compelled to interject the story of Mary Turner and the lynching of her eight-month pregnant body. *The Crisis* of September 1918 reports that Turner was lynched by the mob seeking revenge for the murder of a white farmer. In search of the guilty party, the angered mob lynched eleven African Americans over a two-week period. One of the murdered men was Hazel Turner, Mary’s husband.

Mary Turner made a target of herself by publicly complaining about the lynching death of her husband and promising to have those responsible prosecuted. But the angry mob, determined to teach her a lesson, would kill her first. Although she tried to flee her home for fear of her life and that of her unborn child, the mob apprehended her, hanging her by her feet from a tree. They shot her, set her body on fire, and cut the unborn child from her womb. The baby fell to the ground, let out a cry and was crushed underfoot by one among the mob that night.

The display made in hanging a person to death is particularly hostile. This popular form of execution of Black bodies was enacted to terrorize and threaten to other Black bodies. Externally, for Young, the Black body emerges (in)visible and (mis)recognizable according to the imagined projections of others. From this point of view, Young describes the Black body as one arriving at the intersection of racial fantasy and lived reality. His contribution to ideas surrounding a constructed Black body work in tandem to the constructed Black body within an ecology of whiteness. The experience of the Black body is cut-down, according to the perspective (imaginative or not) of others.

In the vein of the Black body as battleground, I end this section with the text, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* by Kelly Brown Douglas. As a mother of a Black son, Douglas sought to understand how her son had moved from one looked upon through *natural law* to a notion of chattel, hypersexualized, dangerous, and criminal. Ultimately, she
insists, the Black body is situated as “Guilty of Something” (86). Her book is a response to the perceptions of the Black body that makes her son a threat to society. *Stand Your Ground* is an exploration of “the social-cultural narratives that have given birth to our stand-your-ground culture and the religious canopies that have legitimated it,” (xiii). She describes the killings of four Black unarmed teens by white men with weapons within a two-year period. She begins with 17-year-old Trayvon Martin who died at the hands of a neighborhood watchman in 2012. She wrote about 17-year-old Jordan Russell Davis who died when the car he was riding in as a back-seat passenger was fired into while driving away from a white man who thought their music was too loud. In 2013 Jonathan Ferrell was killed by a white police officer after he knocked on the door of a home near where he had, had a single car crash (viii). Two months later that year, 19-year-old Renisha Marie McBride died in a similar manner after knocking on a door following her car accident. The author writes that incidents like these are becoming all too frequent. She is a mother of a Black child and was compelled to find an answer as to why Black people continue to be killed at the hands of white people.

**Conclusion**

This essay has attempted to elucidate the notion of the phenomenology of a Black body. Scholarly discussions about a phenomenological Black body are emerging from Merleau-Ponty’s work on the lived-body. In the vein of existentialism, the Black body is represented in tri-fold. I am, I am seen, and I know I am seen by others summarizes the three dimensions explicated in existentialism. Black phenomenology acknowledges an existential Blackness where encoded language defines space/time relations through meaning and value (Haile 498). Africana Existentialism accounts for those Black bodies whose geographic roots derive from the African nations.
The constructed Black body results from the creation of race. The Black body is a racialized body. Racist ideology gave birth to racial ascriptions dividing peoples from one another. Race is a way of othering (Omi and Winant 104). This nation’s discourse on race points to anti-Black rhetoric and anti-Black racism. American history is wrought with racism—the consequences of which have not been without suffering for the Black people. Discussed in this essay was the phenomenology of the Black body, the Black body’s existential condition, and the ways by which the Black body has been interpreted. In this essay, I offer three examples of the constructed Black body which include the Black body as capital, the Black body as a gendered body and the Black body as a battleground.

The phenomenological Black body emerges as a point of human communication. “For Black phenomenology, the very being of the human is a dynamically embodied consciousness whose embodiment itself affects and shapes not only its wills and desires but also its concepts and the very structure of consciousness itself” (Haile 498). Moreover, corporal expression emerges from the center from which we engage the world. The phenomenological Black body is central to this project. Black body memory is based first on the notion of an embodied consciousness. One’s consciousness shares its space with memory. Memory is the topic of the next chapter. For it is this author’s contention that memory, moreover Black body memory and its content, is that which prevents the Black body from moving beyond its constructed condition.
Chapter 3: From Memory to Body Memory

Memory, a canon of rhetoric, is discussed throughout the history of philosophy of communication. Remembering has to do with a recall of the past. However, a phenomenology of memory does not necessarily rely upon direct recall. “Our memories are the powerful but fragile products of what we recall from the past, believe about the present, and imagine about the future” (Krell and Farrell 5). Our memories become us.

Communicatively, we move our experiences from the past into the present and even the future through memory. Memory accounts for a person’s attempt to make sense of the world. Moreover, all actions arrive according to memory. Memories propel our everyday activities. “Obviously, everyday life is a continuous stream of actions and everyday memory is thus largely a memory of actions” (Krell 57). There are various types of remembering powers that one engages daily. Among these is body memory. Body memory is a phenomenological memory, not found merely within one’s mental psyche. Instead, body memory is inherited through experiences impressed through and by our corporeal schema. One’s lived-body is the way by and through which we live. People communicate in their everyday world through their bodies. One brings the past forward as “linguistic and corporeal expressivity” (Arneson, Communicative 2). Communication is bound up in our body. Body memory “comes home to us most vividly precisely when [other forms of recollection] . . . fails us” (Casey, Remembering 147). Moreover, there is no memory without body memory.

The goal of this chapter is to discuss the phenomenology of memory. First, I will walk through a history of the treatment of memory according to key philosophers of four historical moments: antiquity, the Middle Ages, modernity and postmodernity. The canvas of historic periods will direct this discussion towards the notion of body memory in postmodern
scholarship. The chapter will move from a historical overview of memory to the concept of body memory. Finally I draw upon Casey and Fuchs to conceptualize a merging of collective and traumatic memory that will premise my conception of Black body memory. Black body memory is a combination of the phenomenological Black body and body memory.

Memory in Antiquity with Plato and Aristotle

Memory has a clear history in the philosophy of communication and rhetoric. I begin a survey of memory in the historic era of Antiquity (c.750 BC-475 AD). Philosophers contributing to the discussion include Plato (428-348 BC) and Aristotle (348-322 BC). Plato discusses perception and knowledge in ways that are related to memory. Aristotle’s conception of memory brings the notion of affectivity and time in remembering. There is also a sense of affectivity coming from his writings.

Plato

In antiquity Plato grappled with the notion of memory and the relationship that memory has to knowledge. Plato's dialogues, Theaetetus and Meno, reveal his particular understanding of memory in terms of knowing. For Plato, coming to know, or learning occurs as a recollection of what one’s had known in his soul, but forgotten upon birth. Plato’s Theaetetus puts forward three possible definitions of knowledge. Three ways of knowing include empirical manifestation of a thing, how one perceives the thing, and judgment of that thing. Plato’s concept of perception is most applicable here.

In Theaetetus, Plato ventures to describe how perception occurs. His explanation involves a metaphor. Plato explains that perceptions function like impressions pressed into a block of wax. The metaphorical block of wax is in one’s mind (Plato, Theaetetus 13). As everyone is different so too is the block of wax in one’s mind. Some people’s wax may be more soft or firm,
large or small. Blocks of wax vary and so do the ways that people gain and retain knowledge. Experiences a person has are metaphorically pressed into the block of wax leave an impression. For Plato, the impression left in the block of wax is synonymous with perception.

One relies on his or her sense of perception as a form of knowing. An original encounter with a person, like Socrates (470-399 BC), for example, leaves an impression in the mind. To revisit and recognize Socrates, proves one’s perception to be accurate. To encounter another person, who resembles Socrates, indicates that the person’s form works as a reminder. In an attempt to remember, one compares the form of Socrates, to the impression in their block of wax. As a signet ring is pushed to hot wax, creating a seal when cooled, so too are memories stored as impressions in the wax block within the mind of the perceiver. One calls on this impression to perceive whether or not a man is indeed Socrates, or simply ‘looks like’ Socrates. The block of wax is a metaphor to illustrate how perception works as a type of memory.

There is a nuanced difference between having and possessing knowledge to account for the error in judgment. Plato explains the difference between assured knowledge, and mistaking information is the difference between “having” and “possessing” knowledge (Theaetetus 76). Plato uses an analogy of an aviary to illustrate having and possessing knowledge. He says it’s like reaching through aviary doors. One opens the aviary doors intending to take hold of a specific bird. However, the bird one grasps is not the bird one intended. Application of the aviary analogy is meant to show that error in judgment of what one thinks they know has to do with ability. Incorrect recollection is not caused by blurred perception, nor by a confused memory. Instead, having and possessing knowledge is a function of fully attaining what is within one’s reach. To have the knowledge, for Plato, is to be in the aviary with hands outstretched.
possess the knowledge is to hold a bird in one’s hand. Seeing a man who ‘looks like’ Socrates is informed by one’s perception, even when the man turns out to be not Socrates at all.

Plato’s treatment of memory is shown through his understanding of perception in Theaetetus. A second dialogue in which Plato discusses memory is Meno. In Meno, memory has a direct correlation with knowledge (Plato, Meno 102). His dialogue Meno, in contrast, asserts a conception of knowledge where learning is an act of collecting information and is not discovery. To account for this relationship, we are presented with the learner’s paradox (Plato, Meno 100). The learner’s paradox concedes that in pursuit of knowledge, the philosopher must ask questions. Yet, the one who asks the question would have to already know the answer sought, otherwise how could he or she be confident in the answer found, if it were not for an ability to recognize the answer. This is the learner’s paradox. For Plato, there is “no such thing as learning, only remembering” (Meno 102). Similar to his ideas on having or possessing knowledge, according to Plato, one both does not know, yet already knows that which one seeks.

In Meno, we come again into contact with Plato’s disposition towards memory as knowledge through his interrogation of the slave boy (Meno 103–11). This seemingly uneducated boy is able to recognize certain truths about geometry. The boy does so without external sources or any prior knowledge. Plato theorizes about the boy’s ability and the problem of inquiry. How could the uneducated slave boy perform geometric calculations, if not for some prior knowledge? Prior knowledge for Plato reaches beyond one’s lifetime. Indeed, according to Plato, through his characterization of Socrates, one’s soul maintains knowledge and understanding from one’s past lifetimes (Meno 101–02). The soul is eternal, yet the body is subject to time and space. The soul enters a body and is possibly informed by other lives it has experienced. Memories within the soul remain and awaken when activated. The slave boy is able
to produce geometric equations because of what he knows in his soul (Meno 103–11). The good of philosophy is asking questions, which facilitates remembering (Plato, Meno 109). Plato’s Meno situates knowledge as recollection. Therefore, growing in knowledge and understanding of the truth is not a function of learning. Instead, recognizing the truth is an act of recall (Meno 101–02). Therefore, for Plato, knowledge is a product of memory.

Aristotle

Aristotle, too, is a philosopher of antiquity after Socrates, and Plato. While Plato distinguishes memory as knowledge from previous experiences of the soul, sometimes before of one’s current life (Meno 101–02), Aristotle’s discussion of memory focuses on the act of remembering events within one’s singular lifetime. For Aristotle, “memory is of the past,” not the present where there are only sensations, and not the future, which is not yet experienced (25).

Moreover, in his treatise On Memory, Aristotle wraps his understanding of memory in the notion of time. Memory pushes off from the past and emerges, however, in one’s present. “When one has scientific knowledge or perception apart from the actualization of the faculty concerned, he thus remembers” (Aristotle 25). Memory fetches an object of knowledge, perception, or sensation from the past, and places it into the present moment. The phenomenon of remembering, therefore, occurs within the present, yet is representative of the past. Aristotle writes, “Memory then is neither sensation nor conception, but a state of having one of these, or an affection resulting from one of these when time elapses” (27). Conceptualizing memory in this way exposes is proclivity towards producing a re-manifestation of the past. However, these perceptions may not occur in logical order or sensible form. Moreover, memory is void of matter.
Aristotle's *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* represents an articulation of memory that brings together the actual, with the intangible. What is the connection that the real has with what is remembered? Aristotle responds to this question by pivoting from the notion of memory as an act of remembering to memory as the object of memory. An object of memory refers to what is being actualized through remembering. For Aristotle, the object of memory may also be understood as an essence. Here, Aristotle compares abstract memory of something to the empirical thing itself. Aristotle articulates two aspects of remembering. There is affectivity brought about through remembering. In other words, perception is manifested by recollection, but also there is also a form to the original thing remembered (Aristotle 33). Aristotle illustrates affectivity by using an example of a picture on the wall. The picture is both a thing itself and a representation something beyond. When observing the picture on the wall, focusing on its representation, ones remembering functions become engaged. Aristotle argues that through recollection, one is moved beyond the picture itself, and becomes engaged with what is recognizable. Through recall, one remembers what the picture points to. Memory is activated by the picture and what the picture represents. One’s memory is in the person’s mind, while the picture hangs on the wall. The object of the picture triggers the memory of what the picture represents. What emerges from the trigger is synonymous with affectivity, and the object remembered accounts for its form. Intersecting the coordinates affectivity with form brings about a transcendental notion to the experience of memory. One is transported from a present moment, where his or her attention is turned to a picture on a wall, to a moment originally experienced in the past. According to the example, one experiences memory transcendentally. To experience the picture with imminence, no external references like that of a picture would be needed.
This survey began in antiquity with the notion of rhetoric including the necessity to utilize memory. For Plato memory has a relationship with knowledge. For Plato, however, there is a difference between having and possessing knowledge. Also knowing extends experiential learning. There are aspects of knowledge found within one’s memory that were deposited prior to one’s lifetime. Plato refers to this phenomenon as memory of the soul (101-102). Aristotle, who also writes during antiquity, emphasizes the form and representation as well as the measurement of time (27-33). I now move this survey on memory from antiquity to the Middle Ages.

Memory in the Middle Ages with Augustine

Adding to the treatment of memory through a survey of historical figures, I turn to Augustine (354-430 AD), in the Middle Ages (350-1500 A.D.). Augustine writes *Confessions* with a particularly theological disposition (43). Book 10 of Augustine’s *Confessions* is titled “A Philosophy of Memory” (229–75). As Augustine begins his discussion on memory, he explains in that a confession is not merely an admission of what one has done, but confession is also an acknowledgment of what one is (232). A humble admission of such, can lead to spiritual growth and enlightenment (233). Augustine’s theories on memory resonate most closely with affectivity.

For Augustine, “there are fields and spacious places of memory” (236). These memories are filed away in the recesses of one’s mind and then retrieved upon recall. Some memories, though, have been covered over and forgotten. These buried memories within one’s lifetime return only with great effort. In all of our recollections, memory provides a canopy of imitation (236–37). Through memory, colors, sounds, and odors are not only recollected but simultaneously experienced without actually being experienced. Compared to other mental and sensory faculties, memory is particularly mysterious for Augustine. Reading about memory in
Augustine’s *Confessions* makes one acutely aware of the affectivity imbued in memory. Yet, through memory, one "transcends immediacy of direct perception and experience [to] achieve a degree of distance toward the remembered that is not possible in the original" (Straus and Griffith 13). For Augustine, one is able to relive an experience without its true actualization. Augustine’s Confessions exposes the reader to a phenomenology of memory, as his account of memory is wholly existential (237). The co-immanence of past and present embolden memories with strong affectivity. Working through the philosophical and rhetorical treatment of memory through the historical periods, we continue our deliberation on the treatment of memory with a large step forward in time to modernity.

Memory in Modernity

Our canvas of a history of memory in the philosophy of communication and rhetoric takes a large step forward to modernity (1500-present). This section will overview the contribution so Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Henri Bergson (1859-1941), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961). Husserl’s contribution to this discussion on memory surrounds the relationship that time has with memory (Husserl xx). Bergson articulates his theories on habit memory and Merleau-Ponty contributes his conception of the lived-body.

**Edmund Husserl**

Philosophers of the past have pondered the relationship between time and memory, but perhaps none so as astutely as Husserl. Phenomenology, a branch of philosophy, prioritizes the subjective experienced to determine the truth of objects in the social world. Phenomenology is concerned with how things present themselves. Following phenomenology, intentionality is the central structure of any experience (xx). In other words, phenomenology maintains that consciousness as always being directed toward something. The Husserlian phenomenological
methodology calls for bracketing of the natural attitude in order to get at the essence of the object of intention—including memory.

In his work *The Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893-1917), Husserl attempted to engage the subject of time from the standpoint of phenomenology. Whereas philosophical trends have related time metaphysically, with relation to motion, and/or contemplates through a psychological lens comprised of past and future moments, Husserl’s project works to describe time as one is conscious of time (Husserl 3). A phenomenology of time emerges as a series of now-points (Krell 494). In other words, time observed phenomenologically, accounts for the way things are perceived in temporality. Moreover, Husserl’s internal time consciousness works to understand how time appears as a continuity of moments as a whole. Sentences and melodies are examples of occurrences which unfold through independent stages over time, and yet leave behind a compounded comprehension. The ways in which people make sense of such meaning relies on the function of remembering. In fact, “Husserl’s approach takes memory to be a source of phenomenological evidence” (Krell 493). Therefore, memory is fundamental to the phenomenology of time. For Husserl, a phenomenology of memory, and that of time are interdependent (59).

Husserl asserts that time is *lived* (3). This is to say that rather than utilizing time as a tool for measuring, time is experienced with a presupposed impression or perceptual consciousness (Husserl 34). Time emerges not as transcendent and therefore separate from oneself, but imminent within and radiating out from oneself. Husserl’s project moves an understanding of time as represented by the present, the past and the future. Through observance of time through the lens of phenomenology, that is, how one experiences the world, we regard time as *no longer,*
now, or not yet (74). Husserl, therefore, argues that time is regarded according to one’s experience.

However, in time, even one’s now is bound by memories of the past (Husserl 62). “The very fact that one can place the event in relation to preceding and succeeding events implies both that one never experiences the now in isolation from the past and future and that one experiences the relation between now, past, and future without collapsing these three modes of appearing” (31). In other words, for Husserl, there is a oneness in experiential time that prevents a clear, definitive separation in time as it is experienced. Rather than viewing the past as a container in which particular events belong, Husserl’s approach to time consciousness attempts to articulate time as lived—and all at once. Rather than distinguished moments, time becomes collapsed and is represented in the wholeness of experience. Now is, therefore, alive and is pregnant with the past (74). A phenomenology of time acknowledges memory as that from which experience is derived.

Henri Bergson

In his text, Matter and Memory, Bergson directs his attention to the Cartesian dualism of mind, and body (Bergson, Matter 10). By way of Descartes, matter and consciousness are understood to be two fundamental, yet distinct substances. Matter is something that extends itself into space while, consciousness is verified by a statement of self-consciousness. The Cartesian anthem I think, therefore I am, becomes a rhetorical device, confirming one's own existence. Such Cartesian ideas, however, bring about particular problems.

‘How do the two separate entities meet?’ is the question of primary concern for Bergson. In other words, how does one bridge the gap between the material world of the body and the consciousness of the mind? Bergson negotiates this controversy by attempting to narrow the previously conceived distance between matter and thought. Imagining the two on opposite ends
of the spectrum, *Matter and Memory* works to bring "thought-like aspects of matter and some matter-like aspects of thought," thus revealing their bond (Bergson, *Matter* 15). Therefore, Bergson's contribution to the discussion on memory is in the way he uses memory to close the previously conceived distance between matter and the mind.

Bergson’s text, *Matter and Memory*, establishes two types of memory. One type of memory Bergson pinpoints is a memory emerging from “motor mechanisms whose function it is to react to current stimuli with the aid of habit which brings into the present the accumulation of the past” (Bergson, *Matter* 16). The past is not represented as sedimented and stagnant, however. Instead, the past is a transcendent, yet simultaneously current, motor response. Another type of memory dealt with by Bergson is one that brings the past into consciousness. This memory he refers to as a pure memory. With Bergson, things remembered are within one’s reach. Memory concerning motor mechanisms is more so memory of the body, pure memory is that of the mind (*Matter* 35). Motor, habit memory, and pure memory are not completely independent of one another. Memory, according to Bergson, is not limited to remembering events, thoughts, and actions. Instead, memory is action oriented. Memory enables one to respond to the challenges of the present. Bergson writes that “the characteristic of the man of action is the promptitude with which he summons to the help of a given situation all the memories which have reference to it” (“Persistence” 162). In this way, memory is the precipice upon which one survives.

With no physiological evidence to support memory as spatially situated in the brain, Bergson claims memory as the essence that allows for a synergist connection between matter and consciousness (*Matter* 15). Time is the continuum upon which habit and pure memory rest. Ultimately, Bergson’s consideration of the relationship time and duration, have to memory are foundational to his conception of memory. Although one may speak of the past and the present,
and the present and the future as distinct fields of time from one another, for Bergson, “past and future. . . reside in a metaphysical shadow-land into which consciousness penetrates by means of memory and anticipation” (Matter 18). In other words, the past, the present and the future exist simultaneously within the consciousness. However, memory persists from what was past, and the future manifests through anticipation. Both memory and anticipation reside in one’s consciousness. Memory is called forward through remembering, while anticipation, the reverse of memory leans one’s thinking into what is yet to come. In the case of anticipation, there is a greater negative ontological status as the unknown, than the events of the past which have been known to us. That is to say, that the future is less real than the past. In the present, we are poised to deal with events that are both presently non-existent and never have been. Overall, “Both memory and anticipation bring into the present, and therefore the real, representations of what no longer is or of what is not yet. Memory is, therefore, that which preserves in the present a version of the past, even if not the past itself” (Matter 18). Either in the case of remembering or in the case of anticipation, our conscious is imbued in memory in the present, despite the possibility that either might be dismissed as not real.

For Bergson, “Nothing is less than the present moment if you understand that the indivisible limit which divides the past from the future. When we think this present is going to be, it exists not yet; and when we think it as existing, it is already past” (Bergson, Matter 193). The present is an indivisible instant with no duration. However the present divides the past from the future. According to Bergson, “memory is not a faculty that transports into the consciousness of the present an image of the past, but it is a constituent dimension of temporal consciousness itself without which consciousness as we know it would not be possible” (Matter 19). In other words, for Bergson, memory is not merely about an impression, or perception, nor about
reflection or recollection. Instead, memory intervenes for the present. Memory allows for the successful negotiation of one’s own life.

In summary, Bergson rejects Cartesian dualism (*Matter* 15). Bergson’s project works to bring together body and mind through memory. For Bergson memory is action oriented and exists for the benefit of the present (*Matter* 33). Motor functioning and pure memory stand at opposites ends of a continuum and come together in that instant of time which is found in reality. Bergson’s memory rests between anticipation of the future and remembrance of the past. Memory is bodily. “The bodily memory made up of the sum of the sensorimotor systems organized by habit is then a quasi-instantaneous memory to which the true memory of the past serves as base” (Bergson, “Persistence” 161). Having declared the intersection of mind and matter as expressly found in memory, Bergson explicates on the evolution of bodily perception to action (Bergson, *Matter* 33). This occurs through a gathering of psychic imagery to the motor accompaniment manifested through the body. Bergson theorized on how one can remember the past without actual, mental reproduction. This remembering by way of habit memory challenged the view that memory is separate from the body. Habit memory is accomplished in and through the body. Merleau-Ponty theorizes the body in a way that contributes to this discussion on memory.

**Maurice Merleau-Ponty**

French philosopher Merleau-Ponty brings attention to the body and its relationship to the world to account for perception in the way one experiences the world. His work *Phenomenology of Perception* rejects a Cartesian model of the subject-object, mind-body dualisms with a phenomenology of the lived-body. Dismissing the conceptualization of the body as a thing in space, Merleau-Ponty guides us to consider the lived-body as that which presupposes all possible
experience. In phenomenology, intentionality constitutes a means for being-in-the-world. For Merleau-Ponty, there is no mind-body separation. Instead, the lived-body is the mode by which everything else is observed (Perception 78). The lived-body unconsciously grounds perception and thought. The body embodies consciousness; the body and the conciseness are unequivocally linked. Moreover, the body is the consciousness incarnate. Merleau-Ponty’s contribution to this discussion on memory is in how he brings attention to the role of the body as one’s capacity for all perception.

Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the lived-body, we take the body “not as the visible, touchable and sentient physical body but first and foremost as our capacity to see, touch, sense. . . “ (qtd. in Fuchs, “Unconscious” 91). Memory is therefore deemed by the entirety of these bodily predispositions as they have developed through the course of one’s existence. Phenomenology of the lived-body situates the body as one characterized by one’s ‘duration,’ inhabiting space and time. Perception becomes foundational in observation. As with methods of empiricism and scientific thought, observation necessarily indicates truth and falsity. However, “perception is not just a fact within the world, … [instead] perception is the capacity whereby there is a world it cannot be just another fact in the world (Merleau-Ponty, The World of Perception 10). Given that “we cannot conceive anything that is not perceived or perceptible,” Merleau-Ponty has us reckon with the notion that the world is given to us through our perception of it (Merleau-Ponty, World 6). Moreover, the world is as we perceive it.

For Merleau-Ponty, “the perceived world is the ‘real’ world, as compared with which the world of science is just an approximation, i.e., an appearance” (Merleau-Ponty, World 14). As Immanuel Kant held that a prior concept takes precedence over imperialistic observations of the world. Merleau-Ponty adds that:
Kant saw clearly that the problem is not how determinists shapes and sizes make their appearance in my experience, and since any internal experience is possible only against the background of external experience. But Kant’s conclusion from this was that I am a consciousness which embraces and constitutes the world, and this reflection caused him to overlook the phenomenon of the body and that of the thing. (World 8)

Although we consider ourselves in our world of sense, we must keep foremost in our philosophizing of the sensing, that it is through and by our body that sensing is given to me.

The lived-body contains and is made of a historical dimension. The lived-body, therefore, produces and is a product of memory, that “does not take one back to the past but conveys implicit effectiveness of the past as present (Fuchs, “Unconscious” 91). The lived-body emerges as an “ensemble of organically developed predispositions and capacities to perceive, to act but also to desire and communicate” (“Unconscious” 91). Not only is the lived-body constituted by experiences anchored in the body, but the lived-body is also “our permanent means of ‘taking up attitudes’ and thus constructing virtual presents’ with which to actualize our past and to make us feel at home (Merleau-Ponty, The World of Perception 181). Further, regarding human communication, “in the bodily experience structures, the other is always already included, he is understood in expression and intended desire” (Fuchs, “Unconscious” 92). One considers the communicative body in a manner where “before I can reflect on what I am communicating through my gestures or speech, my body always already creates the feeling of being-with; it expresses itself through attitude and gestures, and at the same time reacts to impressions of others” (“Unconscious” 92). Being in and of the world, all actions, reaction, and memories are owed to the lived-body.

Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of the lived-body allows for a conception of the body, presupposing even an empirical description of the body. The body itself is reflective of my thoughts. For it is through the lived-body that we understand how our perception of all
perceptions come to us. When it comes to memory and its phenomenology, we give that memory is apprehended and carried by and through our living body. The lived-body emerges as a habitual body. Moreover, a habitual body gives to habitual body memory (Casey, “Habitual” 51).

Moving through a history of philosophy in modernity, we become acquainted with the memory of phenomenological movement ushered in by Husserl. Memory is bound up in the internal time of the consciousness. Husserl asserts that the now in which one resides is contingent to one’s past. The moments that manifest as a whole do so by compounding upon one another, resulting in a singular composition. Phenomenologically, memory is experienced perpetually and all at once, as the intentionality of the consciousness allows. Bergson contributes to this project on memory his rejection of the mind-body dualism and an articulation of a habituated body memory. Finally, Merleau-Ponty gives us the lived-body from which every experience is had. With the fields through which memory is considered, this essay will now move into postmodernity with a conception of memory that is intrinsic to the body.

Phenomenology of Memory in Postmodernity

Postmodernity is understood as an age where all historic ages are present. Body memory emerges in the postmodern scholarship of Edward Casey (b. 1939) and Thomas Fuchs (b. 1958). Casey writes poetically on the notion of body memory in his work Remembering. Casey argues that body memory is central among all forms of memory (Remembering 147). Moreover, he adds that all memory emerges from body memory. Fuchs also writes on the phenomenology of body memory and moves this project to an understanding of collective body memory. “Memory is a global term signifying a manifold of aspects including remembering and recalling, recording and recognizing, learning and knowing, encountering the familiar and the strange, the habitual and the new, and forgetting not to be forgotten” (Straus and Griffith 45). A phenomenology of
memory emerges from experiences of the past. “Our memories are the powerful but fragile products of what we recall from the past, believe about the present, and imagine about the future” (Magnussen and Helstrup 5). Memory accounts for a person’s attempt to make sense of the world. Moreover, all actions emerge from memory. “Obviously, everyday life is a continuous stream of actions and everyday memory is thus largely a memory of actions” (Krell 57). Memory is engaged in our everyday activities, of which body memory is always a part.

Edward Casey

Body memory is in the never-forgetting-how-to as with riding a bike or driving a stick-shift vehicle, tapping the melody on a piano or typing a note on a keyboard or phone (Casey, Remembering 148). Body memory recalls pain and trauma, and body memory likewise draws on episodes of pleasure and eroticism. Yet, body memory is not to be confused with the memory of the body. The difference between the two is that in the case of body memory we are "representing ourselves as engaged bodily in that situation and being in the situation and feeling it through our bodies" (Remembering 147). Whereas in memory of the body, there is the recollection of oneself in place and time. Casey writes,

Body memory alludes to memory that is intrinsic to the body, to its own ways of remembering, how we remember in and by and through the body. The memory of the body refers to those manifold manners whereby we remember the body as the accusative object of our awareness, whether in reminiscence or recognition, in reminding or recollection, or in still other ways. (Remembering 147)

In summary, memory of the body arises as would a chronotropic snapshot (Bakhtin 42), whereas body memory is enduring and “comes home to us most vividly precisely when [other] memory fails us” (Casey, Remembering 147). Moreover, there is "no memory without body memory" (Casey, Remembering 173). As such, body memory grounds one’s world.
Body memory supersedes mental confinement that recognition, reminding, and reminiscing implies (Casey, *Remembering* 147). Events and images stored away among the mental recesses and capacity of my mind hide as impressions on the body as well. According to Casey, one’s memory is intrinsic to the body; it is pivotal and presupposed. Body memory is the paramount location for all remember. Put poetically, body memory is in one's bones.

Casey’s conception of body memory arrives at the intersection of Bergson's habitual memory and the lived-body of Merleau-Ponty (“Habitual” 39). Casey’s articulation of body memory is a composite of the nuances of memory found in the history of philosophy of communication and rhetoric. As observed in this essay, a timeline on memory moves from a canon of rhetoric to a metaphor for knowledge and manner of regarding time in antiquity. In the Middle Ages, memory becomes a marvel bearing sight, sounds and smells and in modernity, memory is a phenomenon which evidences the experiential crux of manifestation of time. Through these movements, philosophers also recognize the forgotten as a part of one’s memory. Body memory contains each of these memory functions. As a conduit for all memory functions, body memory goes beyond the types or remembering reviewed in this essay.

In his articulation of body memory, Casey utilizes Merleau-Ponty’s existential perception through the lived-body. As interwoven to the world, the body “anchors perception and thought, imagination and memory—and habit” (Casey, “Habitual” 44). Casey remarks on the difference between the habit memory of Bergson and habitual memory steeped within the lived-body. What is habitual becomes so as a result of repetition and is a product of familiarity. Most outstandingly, habitual body memory carries a notion “of being ‘on tap,’ or being ready to activate: so ready that conscious deliberation or decision is not called for and would even act to inhibit the action to be undertaken” (Casey, “Habitual” 43). Habitual memory presents a *holding-
in-readiness and is part of an unconsciousness which may also be understood as precociousness. Habitual memory of the lived-body oversteps any act of virtual recollection and moves, straight-away to the actual. The past is given in and through the body. Such is the same with habit. “The body is the ‘general medium’ for habit past and the past” (‘Habitual” 44). As Casey insists, there is “no habit or past without body; nobody without habit or past (“Habitual” 44). “Through Merleau-Ponty’s project of “situating habit in the body, Merleau-Ponty gives to habit a new depth of meaning and function” not fully worked out by Bergson (Casey, “Habitual” 44). In short, one’s lived-body serves as an anchor to our temporal being. We are grounded by the past, which “subtends a hectic present and projected future” through our lived-body (“Habitual” 44).

Habit situates itself in the body as "mediator of a world" (Casey, “Habitual” 44).

Moreover, memory constitutes the link between mind and matter (Bergson, Matter 9). Memory's depth is further held by the past as "anchor [to] our temporal being. In particular, it subtends a hectic present and a projected future" (Casey, “Habitual” 44). Body memory acts as an activator situated between the moment and the future. The lived-body gives root to the consciousness linking a time past to a distended present, and in anticipation of the future. The grounding of this temporal canopy is done via the body where "past is given to us in and through the body as much as habit is" (“Habitual” 44). We acknowledge there is neither "habit or past without body; nobody without habit or past" (Casey, Remembering 218). As such, the lived-body “established itself in every situation and attaches us to the world by the invisible threads of its ‘operative intersectionality’” (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 10). Threads of operative intentionality have formed already in our earliest contacts with the world. Through the lived-body operative intentionality intersects with habitual formations (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 10).
Habit memory is enacted through "steps in which I believe that I take the initiative and that it fades and disappears as soon as my activity, by becoming automatic, shows that consciousness is no longer needed" (Bergson, *Matter* 9). “Habituated” memory emerges as "both at once, thoroughly mental and yet wholly bodily" (Casey, “Habitual” 40). Memory is characterized by habit, both habitually and virtually. Habitual body memory moves from the repetitive to the familiar, to virtual, to actual. Simultaneously memory becomes internal, perceptual and actual. This is the space where conscious action fades into marginality. As Casey notes, "It is precisely because of this marginal-yet available position that so many of these memories arise in an unrehearsed way" (“Habitual” 43). From our memory pool, we glean our readily accessible resources for being-in-the-world through action and functionality.

Within habitualization of the lived-body, Casey features the notion of *sedimentation* as is implied by one’s very nature of one’s being-in-the-world (Casey, “Habitual” 44). According to Casey, sedimentation is a necessary complement to spontaneity and accounts for aspects of acquiring worlds. Although *sedimentation* may begin with a person, place or thing, the phenomenon moves towards depersonalization and generalization. Only through the actualization that *sedimentation* provides is one able to “develop those patterns of behavior that identify us as a continuous person over time and make meaning possible in our lives” (“Habitual” 44–45). This concept represents a coordinate for Bergson and the means in which habit memory brings “the past fully immanent in the present” (Casey, “Habitual” 44). But it is only through the lived-body that *sedimentation* is ever in play.

For Casey, *sedimentation* must not be understood as an accumulation of experiences, per se, but active precipitation of the past into the present. Sedimentation results from *a settling* in of activity within oneself, whereas activity emerges without conscious recall. Sedimentation allows
for an “activity of passivity” that is integral to habit memory and is a means of effecting sedimentation. Yet the habitual ought to not be understood as a locking-in of routine or routinized behavior (“Habitual” 44). Instead, the active sedimented behavior is accomplished through *active habituation*. Casey writes, “Habituation here takes its most concrete form in the body’s inhabitation of the world, its active insertion into space and time. . .” (“Habitual” 45).

Instead of considering our bodies in space and time, we come to understand through Merleau-Ponty that the lived-body inhabits space and time (*Merleau-Ponty, The World of Perception* 140). Habituation involves a dialectic involving the body’s enclosure in space and time and one’s ability to navigate the same field of space and time. Therefore, it is true to say both that “I belong to [space and time]’ and that in turn ‘my body combines with them and includes them” (qtd. Casey, “Habitual” 45). For Casey, “Inhabiting taken as a paradigm of the bodily expression of habit memory, is at once ‘wholly active and wholly passive,’ with the world and of it. It is made possible by *sedimentation* even as it carries *sedimentation* itself to new depths” (“Habitual” 45).

The lived-body of Merleau-Ponty actualizes as effectuation of active *sedimentation* while both in the world and of the world. Its representation of memory is bodily, as the lived-body is the material by and through which what is past makes connection to the present, and what is present reaches for the future. Through my body, I belong to my past (“Habitual” 50).

In our lives, body memory is pivotal and presupposed (Casey, *Remembering* 146). Casey argues that body memory is of “central most concern in any adequate assessment of the range of remembering powers” (*Remembering* 147). As the natural center of any sensitive account of remembering “body memory is a privileged point of view from which other memorial points of view can be regarded and by which they can be illuminated” (*Remembering* 148). The body memory reflective of habitual activity, Casey describes as “performative remembering”
“Performative remembering” requires no deliberate recollection. Instead, performative memory is learned and becomes a way of doing things. In the case of body memory of the sort where actions, operations, and movements have become spontaneously enacted, one need not have “recourse to other levels or kinds of experience beyond that in which one is presently engaged” (Remembering 148). This type of memory is “pre-reflective and presupposed in human experience” (Remembering 149). As such, body memory makes up “the connective tissue that ties us to the world in the first place” (Remembering 149). Body memory is a performative memory and is described by the notion of remembering how one is continually at work in our daily experience.

Thomas Fuchs

Fuchs also writes on the notion of body memory. Fuchs uses the metaphors embodied knowledge and embodied memory. Fuchs considers that an investigation of implicit memory is what has given embodied knowledge a larger stake in the field of knowledge. Fuchs writes, “This kind of memory is formed in the course of the interaction of organism and environment” through communication and overtime (Fuchs, “Embodied” 215). Body memory becomes a sedimented form of implicit knowledge as one interacts with the world through and in one’s own body.

Fuchs’ approach to implicit memory illuminates the difference between knowing how and knowing that. Knowing how is acquired through direct interactions; however, knowing that is obtained in a less direct manner— “namely based in propositional language, for example through description or explanation” (Fuchs, “Embodied” 215). Recurring patterns of interaction are sedimented in the form of sensorimotor, but also affect-motor schemes. We may speak of an implicit “body memory” that underlies our habits and skills, connecting body and environment.
through cycles of perception and action. This embodied knowledge is actualized by suitable situations or by overarching volitional acts, without necessarily being made explicit (“Embodied” 215). Believing that “we always know more than we can tell,” Fuchs taps into Michael Polanyi’s explanation of tacit knowledge. Embodied knowledge is a function of knowing which “may in principle not be completely converted into declarative or symbol-based knowledge” (“Embodied” 216). Body memory is, therefore, an endeavor of human communication which resonates in and through our bodies.

As Fuchs explains, embodied knowledge/embodied memory proceeds out from a space of familiarity and everyday relation to the world. What becomes of us is a “skillfulness acquired [through] early infancy before the development of symbolically and verbally mediated knowledge” (Fuchs, “Embodied” 216). In one’s early life stages, knowing how proceeds knowing that. Fuchs argues that the knowledge that when framed in this manner assumes that acquiring knowledge, “means to form an idea, a representation or a model of the object or of the other, on which basis one can then proceed to action” (“Embodied” 216). For Fuchs, perception and action are inherently connected through the medium of the body where the representational mind and the external world are linked. Though sometimes acquired through training, embodied knowledge emerges as an implicit way of knowing, and cannot be reduced to a set of propositions (“Embodied” 218).

Fuchs illustrates body memory with examples to describe how implicit knowledge is engaged. His examples include dancing the tango, perception of anger in one’s face, and the intuitive diagnosis of a patient. Fuchs says these examples demonstrate how implicit knowing is engaged. There is a gestalt factor in implicit knowing which “integrate[s] different sense modalities and bodily movements into a holistic experience,” with others (Fuchs, “Embodied”
Animation of activity is results as a whole, although parts of the body function in parts. “Our primary experience consists of holistic impressions, encompassing gestalt of perception and movement, whereas the single elements are only explicated secondarily” (“Embodied” 220). Communicative interaction with attention to the whole body prevents the loss of nuance and meaning. In other words, Fuchs explains, “if we focus on a body part, it often no longer functions as a component of implicit capacities” (“Embodied” 220). Fuchs describes scenarios to explain the unconscious disposition of body memory, including the following: “A musician who pays attention to his individual fingers during a passage will easily make a mistake, and a tango dancer will look ridiculous once he moves his legs deliberately like a beginner” (“Embodied” 220). In this way, Fuchs explains how self-conscious thought can disrupt and impede the body’s implicit disposition or demonstration of knowing.

Implicit knowledge and embodied memory are not manifested as a property of the body, but instead, these forms of body memory are developed and are in flux throughout one’s lifetime. In other words, body memory is learned. As an acquisition of practices and skills developed throughout one’s lifetime, body memory is represented through the medium of the lived-body without the need to remember. Body memory presents in “habits formed through repetition and practice” which are then activated of their own accord (Fuchs, “Embodied” 221). Fuchs defines body memory as “the totality of implicit dispositions of perception and behavior mediated by the body and sedimented course of earlier experience (“Unconscious” 86). He points out that body memory resides in the unconscious, and manifests as that which “preserves, not in the form of an explicit memory, but as a ‘style of existence’” (“Unconscious” 86). As a “corporeal and intercorporeal unconsciousness,” body memory manifests through patterns of repeated behavior. “The unconscious of body memory is thus characterized by the absence of forgotten or repressed
experiences, and at the same time by their corporeal and intercorporeal presence in the lived space and in the day-to-day life of a person” (“Unconscious” 86). Fuchs considers body memory as a horizontal dimension, intersecting the lived-body, the space it inhabits and intercorporeality. This unconscious, procedural memory presents as “well-rehearsed sequences of movements [that] have been incorporated” into and subsist in one’s body (“Embodied” 221).

Fuchs offers two ways in which body memory is acquired. The first is by way of synthesis of perception and movement with deliberate training. The second means of gaining body memory is in a learning by doing with repeated practice like the first. However, the second way of gaining body memory is unintentional and free of deliberate training. Overall, body memory is based on a habitual structure of the lived-body (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 9). As Fuchs writes “indeed, the most fundamental skills which have disclosed the world for us and upon which our everyday practices are based have sedimented into our body memory” without one even knowing (“Embodied” 222). In other words, “most of what we have experienced and learned is not made accessible to us in retrospect but is reenacted through the practices of everyday life (“Collective” 335). The lived-body holds an entirety of nuances, behaviors, and skills that are animated daily without the need for conscious recollection. “Body memory is thus the ensemble of all habits and capacities at our disposal” (“Collective” 335).

As Fuchs explains, embodied knowledge and, or embodied memory proceeds out from a space of familiarity and everyday relation to the world. Implicit knowledge and embodied memory manifests not as a property of the body; instead body memory is something developed and in-flux throughout one’s lifetime. As the acquisition of practices and skills developed throughout one’s lifetime, body memory is represented through the medium of the lived-body without the need to remember. Body memory is unconscious and arrives through repetition of
skill and behavior. Embodied knowledge is a concept-based implicit knowing how that cannot be reduced to a set of propositions (Fuchs, “Embodied” 218). Further, embodied knowledge allows for a holistic perception of bodily events. Communicative interaction with attention to the whole body prevents the loss of nuance and meaning. Were one to focus on the features of the face rather than an expression in and on the face, the meaning is lost. Therefore, an additive approach, a constructive hermeneutic is regarded in the communicative endeavor. In the same way, Fuchs explains how self-conscious thought can disrupt and impede the body’s implicit disposition or demonstration of knowing.

Casey’s lists four types of body memory which include performative, habit, trauma and eroticism as a source of pleasure. In comparison, Fuchs, describes six types of body memory. They are procedural, situational, intercorporeal, incorporative, pain and traumatic. Procedural memory has to do with kinesthetic and sensimortal faculties that are realized in the dynamic process as with playing an instrument (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 12). Situational body memory expands into space which we inhabit (“Phenomenology” 13). Intercorporeal memory is characterized by ways in which our bodies interact and understand each other (“Phenomenology” 14). Fuchs calls the shaping of bodily habits instigated early in the course of life incorporative memory (“Phenomenology” 15). The affectivity of pain is described as a form of body memory (“Phenomenology” 17). And finally, traumatic memory is listed by both Casey and Fuchs as a form of memory. Ultimately, “the structures accrued in body memory are an essential basis of our experience of self and identity: The individual history and peculiarity of a person are also expressed by his or her bodily habits and behavior.” (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 9). We consider further trauma as a body memory below.
Body Memory and Trauma

Both Casey and Fuchs write on trauma as a form of body memory. Traumatic memories assume many forms (Casey, Remembering 154). Moreover, “the most indelible impression in body memory is trauma” (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 17). Although psychology and psychiatry view trauma to explore the dynamics of mental health, my interest here is how memories impress themselves on and in the body. All traumatic body memories “arise from and bear on one’s own lived-body in moments of duress” (Casey, Remembering 154). In Fuchs’s discussion on trauma, he admits that “the traumatic event is an experience that may not be appropriated and integrated into a meaningful context. As in pain memory, mechanisms of avoidance or denial are installed in order to isolate, forget, or repress the painful content of memory” (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 17). Casey described traumatic pain as particularized, and according to the location of the body. Additionally, he discussed the prospect of fragmentation of the lived-body—where the body is broken into uncoordinated parts and has no conscious, spontaneity allowing for operation of the whole. Fuchs, however, warns that “the trauma withdraws from conscious recollection, but remains all the most virulent in the memory of the lived-body. At every turn, the traumatized person may come across something that evokes trauma” (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 17). For Casey, however, the form of body memory that is trauma may be wrought with emotion both negative and positive. Casey also describes an afterglow which can be associated with traumatic body memory. He describes this by pointing out that while an experience may be originally devastating when returned to body memory, the experience may be “acceptable, even pleasurable” thus, afterglow (Casey, Remembering 156).

Within the realm of traumatic body memory, Casey describes the nuanced pleasurable body memory. This character of body memory may involve eroticism and a sensuality (Casey,
Casey discusses nuances of body memory including both a narrative and a sense of marginality. The notion of narration is found within particular variations of body memory. The narrative of body memory alludes to the story surrounding the memory evoked. Casey asserts that while performative body memory calls upon no narrative, traumatic body memory evokes an experiential narrative. Also, characteristic of Casey’s body memory is the notion of marginality. For Casey, body memory stays out of the way, and in the background (Remembering 163). These memories, body memories, are so deeply ingrained within the body that no recollection is involved. Here, I recall the notion of active precipitation described in the former pages. “Particular bodily activities can be regarded as condensations of precipitations out of the habitual body” (Casey, Remembering 184). Although marginal, and synonymously peripheral, Casey’s body memory is also felt with a “high specific gravity” (Remembering 165). Casey explains, “this density is experienced in such qualities as the massive, the opaque, the involuntary, the inarticulate. It is as if the density of body memories, their rootedness in the heft, the thick palpability of the lived-body, rendered them mute” (Remembering 165). The depth, the density of body memory remains so integrated to our being, that it is difficult to grasp, in a way so as to tease out its full essence.

While Casey gives us a model of memory that is body memory, the work of Fuchs allows the scholar to consider communicative implications of body memory from a subjective standpoint. Fuchs asserts, “the life-long plasticity of body memory enables us to adapt to the natural and social environment, in particular, to become entrenched and to feel at home in social and cultural space” (“Phenomenology” 9). Both Casey and Fuchs write on issues concerning traumatic body memory and pain, however, it is Fuchs work which guides this essay through the
notion of a collective body memory where groups are impacted through body memories which hold the possibility of trickling through generations and family constellations.

Collective Body Memory

In “Collective Body Memories,” Fuchs maintains that people share and maintain memories in groups. In groups bodies embody culture. While “human bodies are similar all over the world, their habits, postures, and comportment are to a large extent shaped by culture” (Fuchs, “Collective” 333). Such principles of the body emerge beyond the grasp of consciousness. “Cultures preordain and suggest certain ways of sitting, standing, walking, gazing, eating, praying, hugging, washing, and so on” (“Collective” 333). Culture is largely what differentiates bodies throughout the world. It is a collective body memory which escapes conscious recollection and arrives from a group. In this way, cultures presuppose embodied “dispositions and frames of mind” directly associated with particular bodily states and explicit behavior (“Collective” 333).

As we read from Fuchs, “the life-long plasticity of body memory enables us to adapt to the natural and social environment, in particular, to become entrenched and to feel at home in social and cultural space” (“Phenomenology” 9). As an actualization of ensembled habits and skills, body memory proves essential for the basis of a unision experience of self and identity. Beyond the individual, however, there is a body memory of groups. When grouped collective bodies demonstrate a capacity to unconsciously house memory. Bodies are in fact embodied by culture.

Fuchs describes collective body memory noting Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002). Fuchs writes, “cultures are thus ‘treating the body as memory; they entrust to it in an abbreviated and practical, i.e., mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of culture’” (qtd. in Fuchs,
“Collective” 333). Bourdieu gives us a notion of habitus which is owed to body memory. People collectively embody habits. The way culture becomes embodied is a particular type of memory free from actual recollection. For Bourdieu, “embodied habitus presents as a set of socially learned dispositions, skills, styles, tastes, and ways of acting which are often taken for granted or ‘go without saying,’ and are acquired through the activities and experiences of everyday life” (qtd. in Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 16). Habitus, therefore, emerges as a system of internalized patterns that are in large part manifest as ‘tastes,’ and specific to the economic class. Although essences of habitus are often thought to be individual, they are shared among others of the same group (Bourdieu 56).

Collective body memory escapes conscious recollection. In groups, people adopt ways of being and doing according to their habitus. Habitus implies a way of knowing informed by community norms, rules, and values inscribed on the body. Noting Bourdieu, we understand habitus to be an “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past which it is the product” (Fuchs, “Collective” 333). A group’s “cultural unconsciousness’ . . . naturalize[s] certain behaviors while making others seem ‘out of place’ or even unthinkable” (“Collective” 346). Naturalized behaviors among groups is a manifestation of habitual activity. Habitus is an implicit way of knowing within the context of a collective group of people. Habitus is reflective of collective body memory in the way that both contain the disposition of knowing how, rather than knowing that.

Collective body memories are driven by social interaction and often are directed towards a shared goal. These body memories also follow certain patterns, styles, and rhythms, according to Fuchs (Fuchs, “Collective” 333). Such coordinated, and synchronized forms of memory present as embodied interaction which become ritualized and habituated. “As a conduit for
building culture, collective body memory sustains the coordinated movement and a sharing of feelings and has played a profound role in creating and sustaining human communities” (“Collective” 333). Fuchs’ exploration of collective body memory posits an interbody “we-experience” memory formation (“Collective” 333). Ultimately, a collective body memory spans from “particular forms of interaction such as play and ritual, and, on the other hand, patterns of interaction and behavior in families, social classes, or cultural communities as a whole” (“Collective” 334). Collective memory is shared and passed by way of “cultural practices, rituals, roles, and artifacts that the lived-body adopts or assimilates to” (“Collective” 334). Like group memory, collective memory points to memories shared between people for the preservation of the cultural collective past, and physiologically embodied nuances.

**Trauma of a Collective Body Memory**

For this project, I consider the merger of trauma and collective body memory to build on my explanation of Black body memory. Trauma is a type of body memory, “as the collection of automatically stored memories that form the map that guides subsequent interaction with the environment” (Casey, *Remembering* 159). For trauma, “the intercorporeal memory of the traumatized person changes deeply” (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 19). Wide realms of scholarship discuss trauma as having to do with “intense personal suffering” (Caruth vii), however the trauma discussed here and in relationship to body memory, focuses on the narrative of how the trauma was inflicted and the affectivity brought forward through a co-immanence of time.

Intersecting the traumatic body memory with the collective body memory is important to this project. The Collective body memory is “an ensemble of behavioral and interactive dispositions characterizing the members of a social group which have developed in the course of earlier shared experiences and now prefigure similar interactions of the group” (Fuchs,
As a grounding pretext for any generalized group of people, embodied identities are increasingly regarded as an “existential ground of culture and self” (“Collective” 341). Fuchs, argues that “body memory may serve as the mediator between one’s embodiment and the history of culture” (“Collective” 341). Collective body memory however is indicative of the habits we embody. Collective body memory is subjective and embodied and concerns the way bodies inhabit their spaces.

Concerning memory and the ways memories circulate among a group I argue that the people pass embodied ways of knowing, embodied was of being, and embodied habits to one another and from generation to generation through various forms of communicative engagement (Arneson, *Communicative* 2). Social knowledge is produced collectively and through human communications of various forms. Collective bodies are formed because of a memory of a common past, a common linguistic and cultural background which enables communication between the group, and a conception of unified bodies that create an identity (Ahmed 155). This occurs as performative practices of socialized bodies. “habitual memory [is] sedimented in the body” (“Collective” 340). Collective memories are individually bound up in the body, and bodies are fused together by spatial-temporal, and cultural commonalities tend to demonstrate a group phenomenon characterized by habits and ritual.

I offer the possibility of the raced Black body as a traumatized body. I argue that the effects of race have impacted the Black body as would any trauma. And that the effect is not limited to an individual Black body but is a shared experience between those who are Black. The conceptualization of race promoted a racial ideology and racialization of the Black body has been perpetuated through discourse, discursive practices and anti-Black racism.
Summary

This essay has served as a survey of memory through a list of philosophers during historic periods. In antiquity, I considered manners of knowing, intrinsically and explicitly, as with the philosophies of Plato. From Plato, one gleans the difference between having and knowing (Plato, *Theaetetus* 76). Contributions of Aristotle are identified by the way memory is experienced in the present, as too with Augustine in the Middle Ages (Aristotle 25). Augustine’s writings call attention to one’s sense of affectivity delivered through memory, and how memory envelopes our experiences (Augustine 237). In modernity, we focus specifically on approaching memory phenomenologically. This essay considered the work of Husserl and how he deconstructs time according to experience. For Husserl, the points between the past and the future are both fueled by memory (Husserl 77). Bergson’s project helped to bring together the capacity of memory and the mind. Bergson helped to do this through his discussion on pure memory and motor memory and how those contribute to habit. Finally, the work of Merleau-Ponty allows for an understanding of perception as always grounded in the lived-body.

Postmodern scholarship leads to the discussion on body memory. For Casey, body memory emerges as “active immanence of the past in the body that informs present bodily actions in an efficacious, orienting, and regular memory” (*Remembering* 148). This type of memory involves “immanence of the past in the body” (*Remembering* 149). In other words, memories of one’s past emerge as embodied actions. These memories ground us and orient our way of doing life. Casey argues that body memory “supersedes the mental confinement that recognition, reminding, and reminiscing imply.” Body memory comes to us through habit and situates itself through the body. Body memory is performative and is the never-forgetting-how-to.
Fuchs’ work on body memory moves from metaphors of embodied knowledge and embodied memory to an articulation of body memory and eventually to, the revelation of collective body memory. Like Casey, Fuchs’ work is explored through phenomenology and grounded by habit memory and the lived-body. Adding his work to this project allows for a fuller picture of the subjective lived-body. Fuchs’ approach to embodied knowledge and embodied memory are underscored as an implicit memory which he determines fades into a tacit dimension (“Embodied” 215). Fuchs’ body memory, as an embodied, implicit memory, illuminates the difference between knowing that, as is found in retention of knowledge, and knowing how where skills and behaviors are acquired early in one’s lifetime and often subconsciously (“Embodied” 215). Through a vetting of his research in body memory, we gain that body memory is a form of knowing, through which one interacts with the world through and in their bodies. Body memory is, therefore, an endeavor of human communication which resonating in and through our bodies.

Conclusion

Bringing together rhetorical and philosophical manifestations of the memory throughout the ages, we arrive at a conception of memory representative of all of these in body memory. There is a knowledge base within one's experience which is encapsulated by the body. Those experiences are pressed into the body as impressions. One both has and possesses an embodied sense of knowing. Senses as perceptions emerge with affectivity those impressions in performance, recognition, pleasure and through the suffering of trauma in and through our bodies. The notion of collective body memory asserts that memories can be shared (Fuchs, “Collective” 333) through corporeal and linguistic expressivity within collected groups of bodies (Arneson, Communicative 2). Moreover, people are born into a narrative (MacIntyre 266–67).
Not only do we engage the world from our bodies, but we also engage the world rhetorically in and through our bodies. By way of memory—which is housed by the body, one brings the past into the present moment before casting the present into the future. Our memories come alive with bodily reaction to presently appearing stimuli. Although the original experience may seem to be forgotten, one may find in the now moment, since their inception, the memory was always already there. The phenomenology of memory goes beyond the deliberate acts of recall. Rather than a distinct function of the mind, memory belongs to the body.

The body is the paramount location for all types of remembering and is central most concern regarding memory. Body memory is intrinsic to memory. Body memory is pivotal and presupposed. Moreover, when confronting death or the end of life, concerning remembering, "body memory is the very last to go" (Casey, *Remembering* 146). Paramount to this project, is the notion of trauma and trauma within a collection of people. However, I seek to distinguish the rhetorical quality of trauma as a metaphor for racialization. Pairing the previously discussed rationale for race in America, I argue that racialization is a form of traumatization to the Black body. The Black body is a racialized body, which I cannot surpass (Gordon, *Existentia Africana* 120). The trauma that is race remains with me, and thus I have formulated the concept of Black body memory.
Chapter 4: Black Body Memory

Black body memory is a merger of a phenomenology of the Black body and the concept of body memory. A phenomenology of the Black body privileges the lived experience of those who are Black. This essay is largely grounded in the philosophical contributions of the Africana existentialism of Franz Fanon, Charles Johnson, and George Yancey, who reveal the Black body as a variant among other bodies. Scholarship on Africana existentialism explains the lived experiences of people whose lineage derives from Africa.

Body memory is explored through the work of Edward Casey and Thomas Fuchs. Casey argues that body memory is presupposed and pivotal. Body memory points to memory beyond the mind (Casey 243). There is also a phenomenon called collective body memory. Both Fuchs and Casey write on trauma memory. Therefore, the lived-body may share collective, traumatic, habitual memories. Black body memory is an amalgamation of the notions of the phenomenology of a Black body and that of body memory. The Black body is a raced body. Racial ideologies significantly developed and fostered during the enlightenment period brought about race thinking and the social construction of a Black body.

Given that body memory grounds habit, habits can be shared by members of a group (Fuchs, “Collective” 133). The legacies of racial ideologies and racialization are still being felt today. As such, Black people have developed habitual activity to respond to anti-Black racism. The crux of this chapter is to question and to articulate a theory substantiating Black body memory.

As a composite of the research visited in the earlier chapters, this chapter will summarize the thought project and development of the term Black body memory. The focus of this chapter is to discuss communication literature on an existential hermeneutic of the raced Black body.
Also, I explore the trauma of racialization and how anti-Black racism has produced Black body memory. Finally, I close with contemporary communication scholarship discussing habitual racism. Considering the lived Black body and the gaze to which it succumbs, the goal of this chapter is to frame and describe Black body memory as an overlooked nuance of human communication. Recognition of Black body memory can aid in human liberation and freedom from the stigma brought about by the Black body.

An Existential Hermeneutic of the Raced Black Body

“A Phenomenology of the Black Body” calls attention to "what is essential to all experience—the correlate of consciousness and its content, noesis-noema, or subject and object” (Johnson, “Black Body” 600). As phenomenology asserts, consciousness is always conscious of something. Phenomenology is a branch of philosophy that privileges the experiential over empirical observations. Rather than describing a world according to empirical facts, existential phenomenology is concerned with how things are lived. The Black body is a raced body, and although everybody has their way of being in the world, the Black body is given to a world with “harrowing constraints” (Johnson, “Black Body” 599). Black body memory is a term pointing to the existential hermeneutic of the raced Black body. Following a brief discussion of an immediacy of experience, I discuss various philosophical terms which resonate with Black body memory. Theories included below are the notions of existential homelessness, dispossession, double consciousness, epidermalization, a repository of experiences and discursive practices.

Immediacy of Experience

The lived-body is one’s way of being in the world. As the center of perception and the means of experiencing the world, the body is immediately communicative. Our corporeal being and linguistic expression expose us to others in the way we engage the social world (Arneson,
The world is experienced through the perspective of the lived-body. The lived experience for the Black body is subject to not only racial ideologies resulting in trauma, but also a perpetual form of racism propelled by racial discourse, discursive practice, and the like. The body’s subjectivity constitutes its lived reality. Existentialism views the lived-body as given to the world through a tri-fold disposition. The existential lived-body is comprised of how one sees the world, how one is seen, and a realization of being seen by others. Despite being Black, however,

Our first phenomenological act in [a] thematization of the black body involves a suspension or bracketing of all sociological and scientific theories concerning race. We wish to purify a field in which the body becomes the primary focus of racial consciousness. Whether black or white, the body is still experienced as having an ambiguity, a non-coincidence of mind and matter. I am my body (Johnson 603).

We are rooted in the world through our bodies (Arneson, Communicative 23). “The body is not a ‘thing’ separated from itself as an object among other objects” (Communicative 23). Immediately, one does not consider the body in space according to its likeness. One moves through the world ambiguous to this concept.

Considering this aspect of being, I write the following. This body I am is the only body I know: I write these words on a laptop. I am seated at the dining room table. I look only at the document on the screen because of my familiarity with the keyboard, embodied knowledge— knowing how and body memory. I smile because I think myself clever. The irony. I am referring to the words on the page and the concept of body memory while I write, I type this full project on body memory. It excites me.¹

Charles Johnson continues, “however, despite my uninformed perspective, I am Black to the world” (Johnson, “Black Body” 604). In the moment, Johnson is unaware of how he might

¹ Italicized comments are an attempt to illustrate the phenomenological method applied subjectively. I am speaking in first person to reveal my “embodied subconsciousness” for the reader (Johnson, “Black Body” 602).
be seen by others. At the moment, Johnson gives no attention to discursive practices that racialize him. His existential disposition is outside of his grasp. Such is my own. Despite being, and inhabiting his body, he writes, “I do not see what the white other sees in my skin. . .” (604). I continue my exploration of my phenomenological Black body: *I watch the words appear on the screen. I am typing these words and using my hands to do so. I look at my hands and confirm they are mine. I am doing the work—writing these words that you are reading.* “Saying that I have a body is thus a way of saying that I can be seen as an object and that I try to be seen as a subject that another can be my master, so that shame and shamelessness express the dialectic of the plurality of consciousness and have a metaphysical significance” (605). *These hands are Black.*

The third dimension of the existential Black body is represented by a revelation. One is confronted by the notion of how her or his body is viewed by others. Moreover, one recognizes how he or she is viewed. Johnson continues, “but I am aware of [the other’s] intentionality, and—yes—aware that I often disclose something discomfiting to him” (604). *Does it matter that they are Black . . . these Black hands, typing? Why, many hands could do the same. Then again, could they? The act of typing is common. However, less so for the completion of a doctoral dissertation. Moreover, this work is being done by someone who is Black. Not that the story is only for me to tell, or others like me. It is because I am Black, I write. I write this story. I write my story.*

*The meaning of this act and content of this composition reifies my Blackness.* “The Black body’s ‘racial’ experience is fundamentally linked to the oppressive modalities of the ‘raced’ white body” (Yancy, “Whiteness” 216). *My project surrounds the profound concept of*
race. My subjective, raced Black body is my reality. It is not a function of being Black that compels me to write this thesis, instead it is who I am doing the writing.

“To theorize the Black body one must ‘turn to the [Black] body as the radix for interpreting racial experience’” (Johnson qtd. in Yancy, “Whiteness” 216). The Black body “is reduced to instantiations of the white imaginary . . . where experiences “embedded within and evolve out of the complex social and historical interacts of whites’ efforts at self-construction through acts of erasure vis-à-vis Black people” (“Whiteness” 216). I wonder, how I ‘look.’ I wonder, how does my work compare? I wonder, do you find this project important? I am authentic. I work from a bubble, that is my body. I demand that my body not fail me. I am aware of the signifiers which I comport. I claim my Blackness. The way I make meaning of my Blackness, and indeed take pride in who I am, is a function of the ongoing significance of race and admission on my part that race matters. Despite the progress made by Black people, and social action taken by folks of all sorts (Yancy, “Whiteness” 216). The Black body emerges among whiteness.

Fanon writes, “In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity . . . the body is surrounded by an atmosphere of uncertainty” (“Black Skin” 110). A Black body among whiteness takes on assigned meanings. To quote George Yancy, “the hermeneutics of the body, how it is understood, how it is ‘seen,’ its ‘truth,’ is partly the result of a profound historical, ideological construction” (“Whiteness” 216). The Black body is read like would be a text and is interpreted by the one who reads it. Moreover, “hermeneutics, the study of the problems of textual interpretation, is clearly linked to communication . . . [and] is a ‘practical philosophy’ in which the model for human interpretation, learning, and communication is found” (Gadamer
Theoretical Metaphors for Black body Memory

Black body memory points to an existential disposition of the raced Black body. Through research and an exploration of ideas, I have identified several ideologies which resonate with notion of Black body memory. Below, I articulate philosophical and communicative terms which give to the notion of Black body memory. These include, existential homelessness, dispossession, double consciousness, epidermalization, Black body memory as a repository of experience and communicative discursive practices. Inclusion of these descriptive terms serves to more accurately describe Black body memory.

Existential Homelessness

Ronald C. Arnett describes the rhetorical conditions of existential homelessness in his work, “Existential Homelessness: A Contemporary Case for Dialogue.” According to Arnett, existential homelessness takes root within the context of an insecure communicative environment. I argue that the disposition of Black body memory is one formed from a lack of confidence in how others view me. The third dimension of the lived Black body leaves him or her vulnerable to how one is viewed by others. The hermeneutics of the Black body amount to “a hermeneutic of suspicion” (Arnett, “Existential Homelessness” 238). A hermeneutic of suspicion underscores existential homelessness in that there arises a lack of trust between people. For the Black body, the “‘raced’ body” subjects one to cultural assumptions resulting from social-historical constructions (Yancy, “Whiteness” 215). A generalized lack of trust in existence encourages us to interpret daily communicative actions from a vantage point of mistrust and doubt” (Arnett, “Existential Homelessness” 238). “When hermeneutic of suspicion becomes the
usual interpretive framework, a person rejects the surface explanation of information and seeks a deeper, more ‘true’ analysis of the information” (Arnett, “Existential Homelessness” 238). Distrust is appropriate in some circumstances, but when it becomes the norm for everyday interaction, the foundation for dialogue is at risk.

Existential homelessness resonates with the disposition of Black body memory. Existential homelessness emerges from “an era of significant uncertainty and mistrust” (Arnett, “Existential Homelessness” 229). Black body memory is representative of a lack of trust in existence. “When a lack of trust in the future is fundamental to the background of communication ecology, interpersonal mistrust of one another is likely” (Arnett, “Existential Homelessness” 238). Black body memory acknowledges the current anti-Black racist environment as one steeped in racial inequality. The Black body too is perpetually threatened by anti-Black racist rhetoric and violence. When “social, cultural, and individual assumptions that frame the background of our communication ecology are under considerable challenge,” existential homelessness emerges (Arnett, “Existential Homelessness” 230). Black body memory is a response to existential homelessness bred from a hermeneutic suspicion and interpersonal mistrust.

**Dispossession**

The notion of existential homelessness positioned as a ‘lack’ relates to the idea of dispossession. One does not entirely own their body, in the public sphere. Judith Butler argues that there is a public dimension to the body which renders some in a mode of dispossession (26). Feminist philosophers Butler and Athena Athanasiou discuss the notion of dispossession. Butler and Athanasiou construct an ideology of ‘dispossession’ built first from the concept that “the self
is the ground” and subsequent cause of one’s own experience (4). Their concept situates experience in place, that is in the lived-body.

For we are beings who can be deprived of place, livelihood, shelter, food, and protection, if we can lose our citizenship, our homes, and our rights, then we are fundamentally dependent on a mode of governance and a legal regime that confers and sustains those rights. And so we are already outside of ourselves before any possibility of being dispossessed of our rights, land, and modes of belonging. In other words, we are independent beings whose pleasure and suffering depend from the start on a sustained social world, a sustaining environment. (Butler and Athanasiou 4)

The logic of dispossession “originally referred to practices of land encroachment” which has occurred through various oppressive modes throughout history (Butler and Athanasiou 10). Butler and Athanasiou explain, “Colonial and racist assumptions have been historically mobilized to justify and naturalize the misrecognition, appropriation, and occupation of indigenous lands in colonial and post-colonial settler context” (10). The ontological state of being dispossessed occurs only because one is already dispossessed.

Butler’s reference to dispossession in Precarious Life is directly tied to sex and gender which, she says is not a possession, but rather a “a mode of being disposed” (24). Butler states dispossession is in this way, is a way of being for another, by virtue of another. Butler notes that an apprehension of dispossession can occur through a process of grief and grieving, which, she says, is fundamental to who we are as people in a world of other (Butler 28). There is grief and grieving in the essence of Black body memory. Fear of unreasonable violence to our children surrounds the need for the talk. “This possibility does not dispute the fact of my autonomy, but it does qualify that claim through recourse to the fundamental sociality of embodied life, the ways in which we are from the start and by virtue of being a bodily being, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own” (Butler 28). Being, becoming, and being made dispossessed are a matter of language.
The term Black body memory is language given to the lived experience of the Black body as one that is displaced. Black body memory points to a sense of displacement and embodied grief. The ontological disposition of the Black body is one that cannot be undone (Gordon, *Existentia Africana* 120). The Black experience in America is one conditioned by an early displacement from the land and then situated in another land where we often continue to experience a sense of being out-of-place. Black body memory points to a “radix for racial experiences and biomaterial landscape representative of the confluence of history, culture, economics, geography and language” (Mohanram xiv). Since we do not simply possess our Blackness, Black body memory resonates with the notion of dispossession.

*Double Consciousness*

Black body memory is in the form of “double consciousness” (Du Bois, *The Souls* 5). Double consciousness is the phenomenon of being seen as other than the perspective through which one views his or her own body. Double consciousness, in Du Bois words, “is a sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (*The Souls* 5). Defined in this way, double consciousness occurs as a result of the gaze of others.

The white gaze marks the Black body as a racialized other (Ilmi 218). Whiteness deems the Black body as docile, and that might “be subjected, used, transformed, and improved” (Foucault 136). I use the metaphor from Foucault’s “docile body” to describe the potential damage that the white gaze wields (136). Whereas Foucault’s docile body is a “manipulated, shaped,” and “trained” object, the (136), the Black body “has been historically marked, disciplined, and scripted” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 17). The Black body becomes an object and target of power under the white gaze. The white gaze threatens to inflict structural violence upon
the Black body (Johnson, “Black Body” 606). According to the white imaginary, the white gaze marks the Black body (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 7). “Their look” materializes as “an intending beam focusing my way” (Johnson, “Black Body” 606). Once aware, of the white gaze, I am cast into an awareness of myself, both as I am and as I am perceived. This is a form of double consciousness.

Yancy articulates an episode of double consciousness where he is, in a manner of speaking, confronted with himself (*Black Bodies* 22). In a moment of taking in the meaning of his presence in an elevator ride with a white woman, Yancy describes how he is jolted and simultaneously aware of the intersection of a phenomenological being-for-myself and the third account of his existence. She fears him. Yancy writes, “Her body language signifies, ‘Look, the Black!’ On this score, though short of a performative locution, her body language functions as an insult” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 20). Yancy writes:

> I catch a glimpse of myself through her eyes and for just that moment, I experience a form of double consciousness although what I see does not shatter my identity or unglue my sense of moral decency. Despite how harmless my actions might be constructed within her right white racialized framework of seeing the world, I remain capable of resisting the white gaze’s entry into my own self-vision. I am angered. Indeed, I find her gaze disconcerting and despicable. As I undergo this double consciousness, my agency remains intact. My sense of who I am and how I am capable of being—that is, the various ways in which I’m capable of playing an oppositional form of representation has not been eradicated. I know that I’m not a criminal or rapist. At no point do I either desire to be white or begin to hate my dark skin. And while I recognize the historical Power of the white gaze, a perspective that carries the weight of white racist history in everyday encounters of spoken and unspoken anti-black racism, I do not see white recognition, this is, the white woman’s recognition. Though I would prefer that she did not see me in terms of black imago in the white imaginary, I am not dependent upon her recognition. Indeed, to “prefer” that she sees me differently does not bespeak a form of dependency. Rather, my preference is suggestive of my hope of a radically different world. On another day, for example, I might say, “To hell with it. I simply don’t care if she changes or not.” Today I would rather that she stand and deliver. The subtext is a moral critique that she gets her shit together. (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 22)
Black body memory is in the revelation of the double consciousness Yancy describes. Originally given to us by W.E.B. Du Bois, double consciousness is a disposition of dual identities which the Black body must vacillate between in his or her daily interactions in the social world (Du Bois, *The Souls 5*).

**Epidermalization**

Black body memory emerges from the term epidermalization, philosophized by Fanon. Fanon writes that racial inferiority is “ascribed to a double process: First, economic. Then, internalization or rather epidermalization of the inferiority (Fanon, *Black Skin* xv). Black body memory strikes as a disposition of being locked into one’s body (Johnson, “Black Body” 601). Black body memory is the awareness that my general medium of being in the world is overcome by my epidermal encasement. “I am aware of each of my limbs through my body image; similarly, I am aware of my skin surface, my epidermal encasement through my body image, and particularly when I am ‘seen’” (Johnson, “Black Body” 604–05). I am an “embodied consciousness” (Johnson, “Black Body” 602). I am my body.

Fanon warns that “Jean-Paul Sartre has forgotten that The Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man” (qtd. in Johnson, “Black Body” 605). The alienation of the Black man is not an individual question, but one that takes into account a collective experience which moves through time. Epidermalization has a relational context where the Black body is vulnerable to the gaze. Performance of the white gaze is a reading of the surface of the body which results in a “black-as-body” construction (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 41). “Black-as-body” manifests from the historic imagery of the perceived disposition of those who share the experience mapped by the Black body. Black body memory is epidermalization, resulting in the situatedness in the “black-as-body” notion (604).
“Black-as-body” amounts to a simple reference of an epidermalized body. When I am ‘seen for what I am,’ according to being Black, I experience epidermalization. “The reality is that I find myself within a normative space, a historically structured and structuring space, through which I am ‘seen’ and judged guilty a priori” (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 19). Black body memory emerges from a recognition of being locked in-to, wrapped-up and bound by the process represented in the notion of epidermalization.

*Repository of Experience*

Finally, Black body memory is inferred from Harvey Young’s metaphor of the Black body. Young says the Black body is a *repository of experience* (23). As a repository of experience, Black bodies “carry within themselves a history, a memory, and, indeed a legacy of inequality associated with the ‘color line’” (20). Black body memory sees this history as a process of racialization forced into and onto a collective group. Young agrees in the impact of collective memories, writing that because of a collective body memory (habitus), Blacks are taught to continually be ourselves as “a Black person” (20). According to Young, this is where our sense of belonging comes from. Additionally, habitus of the Black body develops over time to include contemporary events.

Beyond immediate communal and familiar matters, Black habitus has been shaped by the legacy of Black captivity and other manifestations of discrimination within society: racial profiling and employment discrimination, among others. These experiences and memories structure our behavior. The past, memories, and previously learned lessons, “survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself in the future. (Young 21)

Young suggests that the notion of habitus as explanation for the experience of the Black body, creates a circle of Blackness. “If habitus re-creates a prior experience in the present moment, then the question arises whether the Black body in the present is merely a clone of the Black body in the past with the same experiences and same outlook” (21). Young challenges a
conception of the reliance on the past, to determine the explanation for the current lived experience of a Black person. He asserts that Black people ought to change their behaviors to free themselves from the circle of Blackness. Young suggests that the notion of habitus as an explanation for the experience of the Black body creates a circle of Blackness. It is my conviction, however, that a greater consciousness and collective voices are needed to move beyond current violence’s hurled towards the repository of experience that is the Black body.

Black body memory arises from a shared reality brought on by the inhabitation of the Black body. As Young describes, these experiences and memories structure behavior. Through the body, those behaviors become futured, “the present and future understood from a past perspective” (21). Young argues, “Black bodies have projected upon themselves a series of contradictory images premised upon the disjunction between their daily lived realities and societal assumptions” amounting to, “the myths of the Black body” (23). Throughout the course of history, Blacks have both worked against and under the shadow of these projections, he argues.

**Discursive Positioning**

The phenomenal Black body carries with it stereotypes and assumptions linked to a socially constructed racial identity. Anthropological “floating signifiers” such as one’s skin color and hair texture operate as racial markings (Hall, “Floating Signifier” 1–3). Even one’s language emerges to represent fields of race. “In addition to shaping our experiences, languages are shaped by our experiences: they are not just interpretive but also expressive devices” (P. C. Taylor 6). The ways by which such expressive devices are articulated manifests as discursive positions. When one matches their discursive position(s) of varying expressive devices, to what had been assumed, the notion of racialization becomes activated. The attitude towards race that has to do
with classification or categorization of people is also known as a racialization of people. Through this process, discursive positioning of race makes room for “commitments and practices [and animation of] racial hierarchies” (Gordon, “Race Theory” 2). Whether race gave way to racism or the other way around is contested. In either case, a disposition of bad faith allows for external racial representations to produce racist ideology. “Racism is the given, historically constituted and lying in wait for black consciousness, concealing the ethical dualism which has--over long centuries of Western cultural development--made white ‘good’ and black ‘evil’” (Johnson 600). A process of racialization denotes the Black body as “a value-laden ‘given,’ object presumed untouched and unmediated by various discursive practices, history, time and context” (Yancy, “Elevator Effect” 19). Race and racialization are therefore accomplished through humans communicating social identity (Allen 10). Race emerges from racial ideology and discursive practices.

Black body memory emerges as more than a racial disposition or consciousness of oneself. The self-constructed Black body and a phenomenological memory manifest as a way of surviving a world of whiteness. How the body “is seen” substantiates one’s lived reality (Yancy, “Whiteness” 216). Moreover, experience dictates how one responds to the world and others. The self emerges among others. The emergence of the Black body is dictated by othering and racialization through the course of western and American history. Racialization emerges as a form of collective trauma where anthropological markers forged social identities. Through the development of racial identities, the Black body finds itself “positioned between historical practices, discourses, and as such, the meaning of the Black body emerges as symbolic” (Yancy, “Whiteness” 216). The process of othering began centuries ago.
Black body memory is situatedness within the context of existential homelessness in that there is fear and suspicion surrounding the Black body. Black body memory has a relationship with the notion of dispossession. The Black person is responsible for the way her Blackness juxtaposes her in society. Black body memory is found at the revelation of double consciousness. The Black person stages his identity according to the environmental conditions he is presented with. Black body memory is reflective of an epidermalization that occurs, and she can see herself as locked into her body and operating from a Black-as-body phenomenon. Black body memory is also like a repository of experience. Black body memory points to a collective body memory that rests within the continuum of now moments. There is a co-immanence of the past and the present due in large part to a cultural history. Finally, the discursive racial practices maintain race-thinking and racialization. Race is continuing to be relevant in human communications. Black body memory is a term for the lived reality of the unique Black body.

Black Body Memory and the Trauma of Racialization

Philosophical ideologies on race largely resulted from travel and discovery. “The term ‘race’ was first used in 1648 in something like its contemporary meaning of a major division of humanity displaying a distinctive combination of physical traits transmitted through a line of descent” (Bernasconi and Lott xiii). Designation of races came according to geography, climate and the way people looked. Their height, weight, and skin colors were taken into account, and most poignantly, their practices were described and taken note of. The question of how races related within humanity, rather than how races emerged, became a key racial ideology.

Western thought and European thinkers developed their theories on race. There were some writers who discounted the value of racial classification, such as Johann Gottfried von Herder. Herder’s “Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Humankind,” argued that people in
all their diversity were in line with the beauty of nature in that no two leaves of a tree are alike (Herder 23–26). However, hierarchical racial ideology, strongly influenced by Emmanuel Kant’s ideas on natural history and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s “discussion of degeneration” had a greater effect on those who purported racial neutrality. The notion of racial essences followed closely. Hegel took center stage.

In Hegel’s Lectures on the Philosophy of History, world history proper begins only with the Caucasians. The other races had either a provisional, that is to say, merely structural, role or in the case of Africans, no role at all. Nevertheless, for Hegel, the decisive historical category was not race, but people. It was as peoples that the Caucasian race participated in history. (Bernasconi and Lott x)

The hierarchical classification arrangements of the races, along with the notion that non-Caucasians were not people, gave credibility to a monogenesis, and therefore ethical cause for baptisms, colonization, slavery and segregation.

Bernasconi and Lott state the philosophy of race in America plainly:

The United States sought to maintain an alliance of people of European descent by maintaining a specifically white identity so as to forge a new national identity that excluded Blacks, Asians, and the Native-American population. Furthermore, as a consequence of laws going back to the slave population, European Americans had become accustomed to think of white identity as racially pure. Mulattos were counted as black. The issue of racial purity increasingly came to dominate the European and the European-American conception of race. (x)

_The Making of a White America_ ensued (Battalora). Racialization developed American policy and social relations.

**Instilling Racial Trauma**

Joy DeGruy theorizes on a post-traumatic slave syndrome which impacts the situatedness of Black people as having to face “ever-present racial tensions in America” (20). She cites the process of racialization and the substantiation of racial slavery as the progenitor of the nation’s current racial tensions.
With the endorsement of slavery as a legal, acceptable and justifiable institution, the founding fathers committed America’s original sin, a sin that continued to plague America. Allowing slavery to persist at America’s inception caused those who signed off on the sentiments so eloquently represented in their Declaration of Independence to perjure themselves in its face and doom the nation to a future of lies, pain, and struggle. (DeGruy 23–24)

Racial slavery, endorsed in the making of the new nation, forced a differential treatment between Blacks and whites in America. Differential treatment of Blacks continues to be an issue for America today because of how racism has been absorbed by modern institutions. Although slavery was an accepted institution for thousands of years throughout the globe, none was as brutal as slavery in America (DeGruy 46–47). DeGruy writes plainly. “The truth is American chattel slavery was very different from most varieties of enslavement that preceded it” (47). Differences between the world’s enslaved populations and those in America are easily seen. Slavery in America “was exclusively based on the ‘notion of racial inferiority’” which gave an air of logic to racial slavery (DeGruy 48). A hierarchical system of race was adopted in America which supported the American style of slavery (Bernasconi and Lott x). The way a person became enslaved, the treatment of the enslaved, the length of enslavement and how their masters viewed their slaves were poignantly different than what other slave societies practiced. Other slave societies did not sustain their enslaved population by instigating reproduction (DeGruy 48). However, breeding was a means of maintaining and increasing the labor force. Slave labor was of value. American slavery stood out from other forms of slavery also in the way that racial slavery developed along the lines of capitalism. In America, “Europeans, . . . systematically turned the capturing, shipping and selling of other human beings into a business, a business that would develop into the backbone of an entire economy providing the foundation for the world’s wealthiest nation” (DeGruy 47). This form of slavery downgraded Black people from fully
human to three-fifths of a person, and as a brutal institution, American slave owners were legally empowered to instigate criminal acts against humanity.

The three-fifths compromise rejected the notion of American slaves as fully human persons (DeGruy 48–51). Instead, slaves were to be considered as property, dependent on their owners, and less than capable of claiming full personhood like their European counterparts. This compromise, discussed at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, was struck to placate the southern farmers who wanted far greater representation in forming the government, but helped to ease northern delegates whose growing interest was the abolition of slavery altogether. Ultimately, the argument prevailed “that slaves should be considered property for tax purposes and individuals for the purpose of determining a state’s population” (DeGruy 51). The three-fifths compromise was written. The three-fifths compromise was legal confirmation of Black people’s status as less than human. The notion of racial inferiority supported this position. Therefore, there was a cognitive dissonance in the acts of crime staged against humanity.

“Although slavery has long been a part of human history, American chattel slavery represents a case of human trauma incomparable in scope, duration, and consequence to any other incidence of human enslavement” (DeGruy 73). The route of travel which brought men, women, and children from Africa to the Americas is known as the Middle-Passage. The Middle-Passage was a conversion period where people became cargo, and as cargo, people became objects of enslavement. During the years of slavery, “an estimated 40 million” slaves were transported through the Middle-Passage. Enslaved, people were chained aboard floating prisons in spaces barely 18 inches apart (DeGruy 73). “This place was where they slept, wept, ate, defecated, urinated, menstruated, vomited, gave birth and died” (DeGruy 73). In chains, Africans were denied their humanity, “deprived of any human comfort and shared a collective misery”
Black-African people were gathered together and treated on the whole as lesser than human.

Moreover, enslaved women were sexually vulnerable on the seas along the Middle-Passage (Washington 45). Harriet Washington cites the journal records of the ship’s surgeon, Alexander Falconbridge. In 1788 he wrote, “‘On board some ships the common sailors are allowed to have intercourse with such of the Black women whose consent they can procure’” (qtd. in Washington 45). Between 10 and 15 million people were likely living when they reached the American shores. However, the same number accounts for those who died during the Middle-Passage (DeGruy 74). Moreover, “it has been estimated that the millions of Africans that died en route exceeded the number of those killed in the Jewish holocaust of the 1930’s and 40’s” (DeGruy 73). However, the declarative number of those who died either in Africa prior to boarding ships, or en route will never be fully known. As DeGruy writes,

[T]he fact that millions perished is not difficult to conceive given the horrific and vile conditions aboard the slave ships. In some cases when there was an acute outbreak of disease like small pox or dysentery, ships were abandoned at sea with their human cargo chained helplessly below, destined to suffer a slow merciless death. Slaves who fought against their captors were murdered; others took their own lives rather than be resigned to a life of brutality and torture. And the suffering certainly didn’t end for those who survived the journey. (74)

For those who survived the journey to enslavement in America, their lives were bound to grief and suffering.

Bondage is anti-humanitarian and abusive in any form. Moreover, slavery is “abhorrent to the human spirit” (DeGruy 75). In America, constitutions and laws were written to magnify, develop and maintain slavery as an institution. As chattel, slaves were defined as ‘moveable items of personal property and their owners held the right to do with the enslaved as they pleased. The treatment of a slave may have included “Being whipped until skin peeled off. Being
worked to exhaustion day after day, Being beaten. Being deprived of food and water, Being raped repeatedly. Being considered less than livestock and treated worse” (DeGruy 75). Even having the right to kill without consequence was a privilege afforded to slave owners under law, and although this may not have been the narrative for each enslaved individual, the question rings out, “how many times a person has to be brutalized to be traumatized” (DeGruy 75)?

No less painful as the physical abuse to the enslaved Black body were the assaults against humanity, the soul, and the dignity of Blackness, a collective Black body. Racial ideologies produced during the period of Enlightenment worked to justify hundreds of years of trauma and dehumanization that still exists today. Following the end of slavery, racism moved from the foreground of America society, to the background of American ethics (Bernasconi and Lott x). Institutional oppression and race thinking permeated American societal hierarchies and institutional systems. Black Codes and exclusionary acts, sharecropping and the convict lease system, Jim Crow, were “all codified by our national institutions” (DeGruy 81–108). Moreover,

Lynching, medical experimentation, redlining, disenfranchisement, grossly unequal treatment in almost every aspect of our society, brutality at the hands of those charged with protecting and serving. Being undesirable strangers in the only land we know. During the three-hundred and eighty-five years since the first of our ancestors were brought here against their will, we have barely had time to catch our collective breath. That we are here at all can be seen as a testament to our will-power, spiritual strength, and resilience. However, three hundred and eighty-five years of physical, psychological and spiritual torture have left their mark. (DeGruy 108)

DeGruy’s project works to illustrate the horrors of Black people’s experience in America. That a collective people have experienced such atrocities born from racial ideologies still has an impression on individuals today. Racialization of the Black body is comparable to a collective, traumatic body memory. The stories of the past are moved along through our memory. Memory is grounded in our bodies, and the body accounts for linguistic and corporeal expression (Arneson, Communicative 2). The past is carried in the body, and is the link from the past, to the
present, to an unfolding future (Arneson, *Communicative* 61). Memories are rhetorically carried through one’s body. In this project, I focus on the Black body of a people, collectively.

**A Philosophy of the Collective Trauma**

Understood as a form of body memory, trauma is a memory with lasting effect. Fuchs describes trauma as giving an indelible impression on the body as a form of memory which does not go away (“Phenomenology” 17). Casey articulates that traumatic pain may be particularized according to location of the body (*Remembering* 154). Although the literature insists that traumatic body memories are born “from and bear on one’s own lived-body in moments of duress,” a wider understanding allows for the possibility for trauma to be sustained as an experience or event that may not be appropriated and integrated into a specific context (*Remembering* 154). The memory of pain and “mechanisms of avoidance or denial are installed in order to isolate, forget, or repress the painful content of memory” (Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 17). As Fuchs warns that “the trauma withdraws from conscious recollection, but remains all the most virulent in the memory of the lived-body” (“Phenomenology” 17). Traumatic events are not always forward in our mind. At every turn, the traumatized person may come across something that evokes trauma” (“Phenomenology” 17). Casey argues that trauma is wrought with emotion, both negative and positive (Casey, *Remembering* 154).

Racialization as trauma is a grouped phenomenon as it touches those with whom Blackness is shared. Because of their shared likeness, Africans from the continent’s coast were grouped and enslaved and so cursed despite their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and spiritual differences. Being Black remains a central means of identification. The Black body is nuanced by a vulnerability to and among others. The Black body is owed to a shared experience. The racialized body is a collective body. Thomas Fuchs writes on collective body memory saying.
“Collective body memories may be described by ‘an inactive or dynamical systems approach, considering the interacting agents as an integrated system that displays novel properties of its individual agents’” (Fuchs, “Collective” 347). As with the Black body, “collective body memories develop in social groups through recurrent shared experiences and lead to ‘spatial and temporal patterns or joint group behavior’” (Fuchs, “Collective” 347). Fuchs asserts that collective body memory emerges a “cultural unconsciousness” which becomes naturalized and permeates the way members communicatively engage the world (Fuchs, “Collective” 346). Those who share the racialized Black body are indirectly or directly tied to a particular possibility of experiences.

Unsatisfied with an explanation of social construction of race, I put forward the term Black body memory to create a vocabulary for an existential phenomenon that points to issues of racism in America. Although racial formations are clearly traced through statues and laws that have brought the nation from infancy through the 21st century, the social construction of race has since been institutionalized into the systems by which America operates, and cemented into American attitudes. To put it plainly, people are wrought in racism (Fanon, “Fact” 258; Wise 196). I believe that anti-Black racism contributes to the orientation of the phenomenological Black body. To see Black body memory as a descriptive metaphor for a traumatized collective body that is Black, is to stand against the anti-Black racism that threatens Black bodies everywhere.

Habitual Racism

A small body of contemporary scholarship has recently emerged concerning racist habits. Helen Ngo writes on habits of racism, as does Terrance Mac Mullan. Sharon Sullivan writes on the habits of white privilege as does Sarah Ahmed, whose article will be discussed closely. Their
writings on habitual racism opens conversations to consider the concept of race as something beyond the social construction—which is the goal of this dissertation. The purpose of my project in the whole is to give vocabulary to the disposition of the Black body beyond the popular conception of race as a social construction. Writings on habitual racism move in the direction which support my thesis.

Helen Ngo writes on a phenomenon of racism where racist habits emerge from a bodily orientation called habituation. In her article, “Racist Habits: A Phenomenological Analysis of Racism and the Habitual Body,” Ngo focuses on bodily gesture or response and racialized perception. Her argument suggests that “racism is habitual insofar as it is embedded in bodily modes of responding to the presentation of racialized ‘others’ and in sedimented modes of racialized seeing” (Ngo 847). She cautions that her thesis is not underscored by an assumption of passivity, however. Also, Ngo does not assert that behavioral change is not a possibility. Her study, like my own, largely rests on the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edward Casey.

In “Habits of Hate: A Pragmatist Analysis of Habits of Racism and Nativism,” Terrance Mac Mullan writes that racism may best be understood as a network of flexible, persistent, yet correctable habits. Mac Mullan insists that “The primary value of seeing racism in America as being a problem of bad habits rather than as conscious actions or attitudes is that it helps white people understand that we are all, to greater or lesser extents, vessels for hateful and uncivil habits even if we consciously reject the ideology of white supremacist racism” (93). His essay utilizes the moral philosophy of John Dewey to substantiate his claims.

Shannon Sullivan wrote Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege in which she discusses how “white privilege operates as unseen, invisible, even seemingly nonexistent” (1). Sullivan characterizes the privilege of whiteness as an unconscious
habit due to a white privilege of ignorance that benefits and supports the domination of white people. This ignorance, as she calls it, perpetuates the lie that a scientific basis for race is true and that racial dominance exists.

Because raced predispositions often actively subvert efforts to understand or change them, making themselves inaccessible to conscious and unconscious aspects of habit can be either limiting or enabling—or both—depending on the particular situation. . . . the habit of ontological expansiveness enables white people to maximize the extent of the world in which they transact. But in an instance of white solipsism, it also severely limits their ability to treat others in respectful ways. (Sullivan 25)

Sullivan also uses Dewey to ground her concept of habit. Sullivan urges members of the greater school of liberal arts to produce and project works that aim to illuminate racists habits and overcome racial domination (1). Within this limited list of scholars writing on the notion of habitual racism is Sarah Ahmed. We focus on the article below.

Sarah Ahmed and “A Phenomenology of Whiteness”

Feminist and independent scholar, Sara Ahmed was born in Salford, England and emigrated to Adelaide, Australia, with her Pakistani father and English mother early in the 1970’s. She taught at the Institute for Women’s Studies at Lancaster University from 1994 to 2004 and was appointed to the Department of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2004. She was the inaugural director of its Centre for Feminist Research until 2016. Ahmed’s article “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” has significance for this project. Ahmed frames whiteness with bodily phenomenon and habitual action. These are two coordinates that have a most direct correspondence to the term Black body memory. Because of the relationship that habitual whiteness has with Black body memory, what will follow is a discussion of Ahmad’s article.

Black body memory emerges from a landscape of whiteness. Communication scholarship treads carefully in whiteness studies for fear of reification. In an attempt to investigate, describe,
and explain the phenomenon of whiteness, researchers fear that the study of whiteness poses a risk of its own reification. Could taking notice of an otherwise ambiguous whiteness make the existence of whiteness hyper-real, fixed, and concrete? Does calling attention to whiteness cause whiteness to gain even more currency? In her article, “A Phenomenology of Whiteness,” Ahmed suggests that any work “which aims to dismantle systems of privilege and subsequent oppression may necessarily “be caught up in the object of critique” (150). Moreover, “We might even expect such projects to fail, and be prepared to witness this failure as productive” (150). Yet, according to Ahmed, one can get stuck in this position, endlessly caught up in describing what we are doing to whiteness, rather than what whiteness is doing (150). Concerning the hesitancy surrounding whiteness studies, Ahmed argues that, “whiteness becomes worldly as an effect of reification” (150). Additionally, she explains how “whiteness becomes the very ‘what’ that coheres as a world” (150). The need to discuss and describe whiteness, both in scholarship and everyday experiences, ought not to be avoided out of fear of its further calcification. In this sense, “reification is not then something we do to whiteness, but something whiteness does, or to be more precise, what allows whiteness to be done” (150). Her approach is phenomenological, and her aim is to offer vocabulary that will allow for discussion on whiteness. For Ahmed, “whiteness is a category of experience which disappears as a category through experience,” and thus becoming *worldly* (150). In her terms, whiteness has to do with corporeal disposition and habit memory. So too is Black body memory. The theoretical development of Ahmed’s article offers the communication scholar language and vocabulary to aid in identifying what whiteness is and how it presents in the world.

I begin this exploration of “A Phenomenology of Whiteness” at its apex, where the thesis lies. For Ahmed, whiteness is articulated as what *lags behind* the habitual white body (156). She
arrives at this characterization of whiteness through a phenomenological analysis. Whiteness is constituted by the action of the habitual white body. The habitual white body is one which acts in the world. “The body is ‘habitual’ . . . in the sense that it performs actions repeatedly,” Ahmed reports (156). Moreover, the habituated body does not command attention to itself. “Only when the body’s surface or exterior ‘encounters’ external objects do those objects feel stress as a result,” such as what the hands, for example, might lean on which would then feel the ‘stress’ of the body’s action(s) (156). As one’s corporeal existence, the body is separate from its actions. The body is habitual in so far as it ‘trails behind’ in the performing of action. For Ahmed, the habitual body is behind the action, and not of it.

For Ahmed, therefore, whiteness is something which is found trailing behind a habituated white body. To put it plainly, she writes, “whiteness could be understood as ‘the behind’” (Ahmed 156). Moreover, “white bodies are habitual insofar as they ‘trail behind’ actions” (156). With this, Ahmed purports a difference between a body marked by its habitual whiteness, and one that is not. Ahmed wrote,

[white bodies] do not get ‘stressed’ in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness ‘goes unnoticed.’ Whiteness would be what lags behind; white bodies do not have to face their whiteness; they are not oriented ‘towards’ it, and this ‘not’ is what allows whiteness to cohere, as that which bodies are orientated around. When bodies ‘lag behind’, they extend their reach. (156)

Such an extension, as Ahmed describes, makes a discussion of whiteness as a spatial concept possible. “Spaces are oriented ‘around’ whiteness, insofar as whiteness is not seen” (157).

Moreover, unlike, place which is given, space is created.

“As many have argued, whiteness is invisible and unmarked, as the absent Centre against which others appear only as deviants, or points of deviation” (Ahmed 157). Moreover, Ahmed continues, whiteness “is only invisible for those who inhabited it or those who get so used to its
inhabitants that they learn not to see it, even when they are not it” (Ahmed 157). A review of Ahmed’s article explains that whiteness is reproduced by the habituated actions, but also inherited by bodies not responsible for its creation. “Human beings make their own history, but they do not make it arbitrarily in conditions chosen by themselves, but in conditions always-already given and inherited from the past” (Ahmed 157). Conditions, or spaces for whiteness, then are made from what is always, already there before our arrival, and also handed down as a gift. According to Ahmed, “whiteness could be described as an ongoing, unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up space’” (150). Bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism, which makes the world white; a world that is inherited, or which is already given before the point of an individual’s arrival. As something that trails behind, and is therefore left behind, we do not have to face whiteness (157).

Ahmed characterizes the habituated body as in the notion of in-habit (153). She articulates habits as what occurs unconsciously and what is routine. Habits are second nature. However, “to describe whiteness as habit, second nature, is to suggest that whiteness is what bodies do, where the body takes the shape of action. Habits are not exterior to the bodies, as things that can be ‘put on’ or ‘taken off.’ If habits are about what bodies do, in ways that are repeated, then they might also shape what bodies can do” (Ahmed 156). Embodied habitual activity informs the way people inhabit and move through the world.

The habitual body is one that acts in the world and is oriented towards objects. According to Ahmed, whiteness is situated behind the body, and it compels the body to do what it does. The body does what it does not merely by habit, but through a capacity of implicit knowledge (Ahmed 152). According to Ahmed, bodies do their work or have the capacity to do so, “only given the familiarity of the world they inhabit: to put it simply, they know where to find things.
“‘Doing things’ depends not so much on intrinsic capacity, or even upon dispositions or habits, but on the ways in which the world is available as a space for action, a space where [things] ‘have a certain place’ or are ‘in place’” (153). Public spaces take shape through the habitual actions of bodies, such that the contours of space could be described as habitual (156). Their body’s “performance is an orientation towards the future, insofar as the action is also the expression of a wish or intention. . . [things ‘have a certain place or ‘in place’” (153). In other words, accessibility is a part of the conversation on whiteness. “What you come into contact with is shaped by what you do: bodies are oriented when they are occupied in time and space. Bodies are shaped by this contact with objects” (152). The lived-body inhabits space and is at the same time shaped by the space in which she is placed.

With an understanding of how habituated bodies involve the environment or space, the general corporeal scheme “extends into space through how it reaches towards objects already ‘in place’ (Ahmed 153). However, Ahmed points out that a corporeal schema spoken of in this way is also pre-racialized. Using Fanon’s notion of ‘historic-racial’ involvement with others, we understand that the dimensions of the racialized body are found beneath the surface of the body. Phenomenology, Ahmed says, accounts for what becomes of the body “by virtue of its own orientation” (153). The way of thinking about the body is no longer a matter of corporeal disposition and action but are replaced by the epidermal schema. One’s skin takes up space in the environment (157). While “whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things within reach” (154), the orientation of the Black body is interrupted, as well as its own mode of operation. The corporeal schema is a ‘body-at-home’ and oriented toward objects within its reach. “Orientations are about the intimacy of bodies and their dwelling places” (151). Being directed towards some objects, and not others involves a more general orientation towards the world. Ahmed argues that
“likeness is an effect of proximity, rather than its cause,” and that “we inherit proximities, although they can be refused” (155). Likeness, as in race are a result of a proximity of shared residence, according to Ahmed, for which the body is given to in space (155). “What you come into contact with is shaped by what you do: bodies are oriented when they are occupied in time and space. Bodies are shaped by this contact with others” (152). In other words, bodies take form according to the environment and the situational constraints.

The body is a habitual body, “not only in the sense that it performs actions repeatedly but in the sense that when it performs such actions, it does not command attention” (Ahmed 156). Not only is the body habitual, but also are the spaces the body inhabits. As Ahmed writes, “We can think about the ‘habit’ as in the ‘in-habit.’” I am compelled to consider the coordinates between habit worlds and public spaces. Whiteness holds its place through habits. Ahmed states that “public spaces take shape through the habitual actions of bodies” (153). The way people negotiate public spaces is dependent on their access to whiteness. Contours of space can be described as habitual. In effect, “spaces acquire the shape of the bodies that ‘inhabit’ them,” and not that bodies are shaped by spaces. People create spaces just as they do history and this we do inherently. “Whiteness could be described as an ongoing, unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they ‘take up space.” (150). Phenomenology helps us to show how whiteness is an effect of racialization, which in turn shapes what it is that bodies ‘can do’ (150).

I refer to this article as an example of the habitual body as a communicative demonstrator of race and racialization. Ahmed uses phenomenology to explain whiteness and what it does through acts of the phenomenological body. She, therefore, gives the communication scholar a platform and vocabulary by which to discuss whiteness without fear of its reification. According
to Ahmed, whiteness is a category of experience which disappears. Through the disappearance of whiteness, it is made worldly. Moreover, Ahmed argues that whiteness “is lived as a background to experience” (150). Black body memory emerges from a landscape of whiteness. The thrust of this chapter is to illustrate and make room for Black body memory as vocabulary to describe the lived experience of a Black person. As with Ahmed’s discussion, Black body memory is formed by a historic-racial Black lived-body, with the corporeal schema which has been racialized and therefore traumatized. Moreover, the Black body has been grouped according to its proximity to others with the same likeness. Unlike the white body-at-home with an orientation towards certain objects in its proximity, the Black body is housed by a skin which interrupts its potential for “familiarity of the world [it] inhabits” (Ahmed 153). The white body “extends into space through how it reaches towards objects that are already ‘in place’” (153). Space is a product of those who create it.

Ahmed’s article on habitual racism is contextualized according to a phenomenology of whiteness. Rather than understanding whiteness as a product of social construction, whiteness is living, and active. For Ahmed, whiteness amounts not to what is, but according to what is done. Whiteness trails behind the white person, creating a space contrary to the actions of people of color. Whereas non-white people’s actions call attention to themselves as corporeal beings, white people engage in activities that are not questioned, but instead, reify the spaces that give way to whiteness.

Summary

I recognize that race has been socially constructed; however, I also assert that race is a lived phenomenon. The phenomenological Black body cannot be willed away, as its experiences cannot be easily explained through empirical evidence which counters a scientific justification
for race in the first place. The dimensions of the Black body are wide and deep, and her experiences are such too. In this historic moment, the social construction of race is not a fully sufficient explanation to describe the state of race and racism in America today. I work from the notion that racism is “bad faith” (Gordon, Bad Faith 94–96). In his book Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism, Gordon writes, “From the standpoint of bad faith, racism is the ossification of human reality into a monadic entity identical with any one aspect of its assumed duality. The racist is a figure who hides from himself by taking false or evasive attitudes toward people of other races. The anti-Black racist is a person who holds these attitudes toward Black people” (94). In summary, the preservation and perpetuation of racist attitudes give form to bad faith.

The notion of racism begins with categorizing of people placed into races, racial ideologies, and race thinking. Racialization impresses signification of groups of people. Racism is the oppressive forces of racial hierarchies held by people and systems. What is not well understood is the relationship anti-Black racism has to race. Ironically, racism gives way to race, and not the other way around (Coates 7). In other words, racist ideology made a need for construction of race (Battalora 33). Both race and racism were foundational to the birth and development of this nation and the subsequent whiteness it embodies.

Peter Berger records that social construction results from external stimuli, which breeds internal adaptation, which in turn causes a recapitalization of the status stimuli (4). Race too is a result of social construction (Omi and Winant 106). Biological distinctions no longer account as a fact of Blackness (Fanon, “Fact” 257). Indeed, races are all a part of the human species (UNESCO 12). However, I argue that the racialization of the Black body is not something that could easily be stripped away. Race as social construction does not serve as a sufficient
explanation for the social disposition of the Black body in history and in this contemporary moment. To dismiss race as simply an act of social construction is to miss a lesson in humanity.

Black body memory is a constructive hermeneutic and accounts for the existential disposition of the Black body “within the context of whiteness” (Yancy, Black Bodies xxx). The context of whiteness is “replete with contradictions and mythopoetic constructions” in which the Black body becomes objectified, “interpreted, manipulated and given [back] to us” (Johnson, Artist 119). We perceive the world from the standpoint of embodiment (Merleau-Ponty, The World of Perception 62). Lived experiences become habit and are bound up in memories. Memory incites habits which are latent and embodied (Fuchs, “Unconscious” 86). Such Body memory is instigated through trauma (“Phenomenology” 17) and passed on through collective bodies (Collective 333). It is from the habituated lived from which one engages the world (Casey, “Habitual” 280). All actions are born of memory; nonetheless, all memory emerges from body memory (Casey, Remembering 147) and in this way, inform “corporeal expression” (Arneson, Communicative 2) and “communicative engagement” (6). The Black body I inhabit is one threatened by anti-Black racism. I argue that the concept of Black body memory is antithetical to anti-Black racism.

Black body memory is the term I give as an amalgamation of two philosophical theories: the existential Black body and body memory. A phenomenology of the Black body accounts for the tri-fold dimensions of an existential body (Gordon, Existentia Africana 120). Black existentialism arises first from the subjective experience. The second dimension is in how one is received in the world. And third, the phenomenological body comes to the realization of how one is seen. The Black body is one wrought by a historical narrative. Its history is one of racialization. Racial formation in the United States resulted from colonization, immigration, and
racial slavery. The designation of enslaved and ineligible for citizenship, compounded over time, has given a precarious identity to the Black body. Racial categories and hierarchical thinking have led to race thinking and systemic anti-Black racism.

The Black body as an othered body has sustained a large degree of trauma. We understand trauma to be a form of body memory where events of the past come near to the present in and through our bodies. In an attempt to bring the fullness of Black body memory to mind, I couple the racialized, traumatized Black body with the notion of the collective body. For it was a result of the African diaspora where various men, women, and children, were designated as one people. Africans, despite their differing tribes, cultural identities, separate languages, religion, markings, and hairstyles, were given a monolithic narrative through of Black enslavement.

As dispossessed and largely existentially homeless, the Black body shares a common experience (Arnett, “Existential Homelessness” 229–44; Butler and Athanasiou 5). Not that everyone who is Black has the same experience, but there are common experiences among us (Young 5). In the case of Black body memory, I argue that although social construction has given way to race, and therefore Blackness, there is another factor which currently keeps the race in place.

As a human society, we are largely the same, with not great biological differences among us (Omi and Winant 105). However, we have various lineages, narratives, and past experiences that have helped to define who we are. Furthermore, we are defined by, not only our past but the past of those from whom we came, who experienced the world before us (DeGruy 66). With both our pasts and those of our ancestors, collective habits have formed us and our way of being (Fuchs, “Collective” 1). Habits often occur subconsciously and emerge as constituted as a way of
knowing (Fuchs, “Embodied” 215). Such embodied knowledge is synonymous with body memory. Black body memory is termed to account for a way of being-in-the-world which is situated in a state of existential homelessness (Arnett, “Existential Homelessness” 229–44). I offer the term Black body memory. Black body memory describes the trauma wrenched from a racialized past and experienced by the Black body and to acknowledge the shared experiences brought forward by the sociogenic epidermal encasings which Blacks carry. The term Black body memory is a term which endeavors to communicate the situatedness of the Black body in the social sphere.

In conclusion, Black body memory points to a philosophy of communication situated between the constructive hermeneutic of the Black body, and an embodied knowing-how constituted by sedimented habit. This project began in the first chapter with a discussion on the concept of race. Born of social construction, race points to social identity and dresses the bodies we inhabit. The second chapter described the existential phenomenology of a Black body. The lived experience of the racialized Black body is a variant among others. Consciousness is embodied, and our experiences and expressions depend on our corporeal existence. The third chapter in this project focused on memory as not something simply made of recall, but grounded, phenomenologically in our body. These concepts come together here to give language to a habitual expressivity the Black body embodies. The remaining chapter will demonstrate the praxis of Black body memory in a rhetorical tradition, the talk.
Chapter 5: *The talk*

I learned about *the talk* in a room full of Pittsburgh educators. Engaged in an exercise on responsible conversations about race, people in the room were asked to share what they teach their children to do when stopped by the police. The responses were divided by the line of color. In fact, only the Black people had a ready answer. Their response sounded like this: “Address the officer as ‘Sir’ and do not look at the officer in the eye, as doing otherwise may be read as a sign of disrespect. Keep your hands on the wheel where they can be seen. Ask permission to reach for your identification, or the registration and insurance information on the car. Move slowly. And do not get out of the car.”

*The talk*, as it has come to be regarded, is between parents and their Black children. This conversation has come into public view with the recent publicity of police harassment and violence against Black bodies. *The talk* manifests as a giving-over, a sharing of body memory. *The talk* is a philosophy of “practical communication” (Arneson, *Perspectives* 139) emerging as “corporeal expressivity” and “linguistic communication” (Arneson, *Communicative* 2). The *lived-body* is an embodiment of consciousness. Body memory is derived from habit; Black body memory frames the need for *the talk* as a list of directives on how to conduct oneself when pulled over by police--that is, how to conduct one’s Black self.

*The talk* is not limited to vehicular police confrontation but is reciprocal, ongoing, and indicative of various scenarios. "There is . . . a tendency to see you first as 'here comes a Black man,' so we teach our Black children how to handle other people's problems” (McCants Lewis 156). Stereotypes and misconceptions of others frame how the Black body is discerned. The perspectives of others can sometimes lead to violent or deadly acts. My personal investment in this philosophy is my children and theirs.
The goal of this final chapter is to show Black body memory as the philosophy guiding the talk. Through the course of this project, I have endeavored to present the notion of Black body memory as an existential phenomenon. I began with a discussion of race and racism, showing that racial formations were born out of racist ideology. Although popular thought deems race as a social construct, racism has been forged so deeply in the United States, that it has become a part of societal systems, privileging, if not promoting the tacit dimension ofwhiteness.

The second chapter laid out a phenomenological description of the Black body. A body among others, the Black body emerges as a variant distinguished by dangling signifiers. The third chapter was a survey of memory among a cast of philosophers from antiquity through today’s post-modern era. Although the notion of body memory arises from modern era philosophy, characteristics of the phenomenology of body memory can be seen in theories of the earlier eras.

I brought the existential Black body together with body memory to give vocabulary to the phenomenon of a Black body memory. Black body memory goes above and beyond the notion of race as a social construction. If the idea of race is only a social construction, we would be more able to end the racial discord which continues to this day. Because of the history of America, anti-Black racism stands at the center of all racist agendas in this nation.

I end this project with this chapter on the talk. The talk can be understood as a rhetorical dispensation of Black body memory between parents and their Black children. The talk attempts to pass on to Black children an understanding of how their identity emerges among others, and the threat of violence their Blackness brings. This is Black body memory. In this historic moment, where violence and oppression threaten the health and safety of the Black body, the talk is an attempt to protect Black children with what agency they might have. Guidelines and stipulations within the talk fold out as ritualistic commands for which we ask our children to
abide. Repetition of the wisdom implored breeds pre-reflective habit. Habitual memory becomes embodied knowledge for the same Black body which is perpetually identified by others. Black body memory accounts for an intrinsic behavior, treatment by others, and need for the talk in the first place. The talk emerges as praxis of Black body memory--and is a ‘practical’ philosophy of communication that necessarily influences how people live in the world with one another (Arneson, Perspectives 139).

In this chapter, I will situate the existential dilemma I face as a mother of Black children. The proverbial ‘reality check’ given in the talk threatens to chase a child’s naivete away. I will deconstruct the talk as a communicative ritual which commemorates through grief, the constructed Black body. The talk emerges as a practice of common sense that offers to promote and protect the health of Black bodies in the face of anti-Black racism. I show the talk as a rhetorical endeavor both in content and in process. I will share from contemporary literature which underscores a philosophical grounding of the talk and how Black bodies are situated in the world. Ultimately, the talk seeks to keep Black people safe and alive through an intentional conversation propelled by Black body memory. The talk is a practical philosophy of human communication. I contend that Black body memory stands at the threshold of anti-Black racism.

A Mother’s Dilemma

For my children, the implications of their Black bodies were not self-evident. However, identity emerges among others (Friedman 82; Butler 26; Butler and Athanasiou 10–39). How others see them (as a Black body) is outside of their grasp. My children are left to navigate the world from an unyielding cast. The dilemma confronting parents of Black children is in wanting them to live lives free from social limitations but fearing that they will be confronted by anti-Black racism when they are outside of our protection. Unless we tell them, our Black children
might not otherwise know what anti-Black racism could look like, and what might occur as a consequence of being Black.

The Black body is a raced body. Through discourse and discursive practices, the Black body is perpetually racialized. Historically, the Black body has been subjected to a legacy of trauma and violence surrounding a Black social identity (Yancy and Jones 23; McCants Lewis 155–58; Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184–86; Douglas 44–47). Although we may hope that change is on the horizon, the current racial climate is turbulent still (MacMullan 93; Alexander 2). In the face of this threat, there are parents of Black children who choose to share Black body memory through the talk with their children.

George Yancy asks, “What does it mean to be pregnant, and to give birth to a problem?” The question echoes the words of W.E.B. Du Bois when he wrote The Souls of Black Folks early in the 20th century. Du Bois posed the question, “How does it feel to be a problem” (The Souls 4)? A hundred years later, Yancy responds for both Black people and Black parents, “That is a lie that functions to buttress the sanctity of whiteness, to instill in white people an insouciant disposition toward the dehumanization of Black bodies” (Yancy et al. 3). The dilemma facing parents of Black children is whether or not to tell them of the historic legacy of violence against their Black body.

A Justice Not for Us

“Slavery framed what it meant to be Black in the United States” (Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 183). Moreover, the doctrine of Partus sequitur patrem allowed for capitalist slave owners to increase their property by forcing reproduction onto their enslaved (Battalora 10–11). “The history of raising Black children in the United States has presented Black parents with a moral dilemma” (Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184). For mothers, “the bond between Black
parents and their children was complicated by the slavery experience” (Ferguson and McClendon 183). They were left to negotiate how to ensure their children’s humanity while facing a real probability that their child would die enslaved. In slavery “the value of the African American mother was not in her ability to nurture her offspring but in her ability to labor and produce workers” (McCants Lewis 158).

Enslaved mothers were situated in a “’pernicious system’ which devalued her position as a mother and ignored her natural and visceral maternal instincts and sensibilities for her own children” (McCants Lewis 158). Freed Blacks faced an equal challenge as parents still had to fight for rights for their children and contend with the threat that their freed children could be kidnapped and sold into slavery one day (Ferguson and McClendon 183). Overall, “children of slaves were customarily stolen, sold, punished, and, removed from their mother’s care” (McCants Lewis 158). The dilemma of Black parenthood during the slave era extended into the framework of the family.

The integrity of the family was not upheld for the enslaved. Members of an enslaved family could be bought and sold off along with other property their owners held. Marriages were not acknowledged by the law. Further, oftentimes Black men and women were paired to increase a labor force. Corporal punishment was a means of disciplining of the Black body. The Virginia Code of 1705 allowed for the legal killing of Blacks who were considered as property when the death was the result of attempts to control and discipline.

And if any slave resists his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction, it shall not be accounted a felony; but the master, owner and every such person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such accident had never happened. (DeGruy 61)
Corporal punishment was an acceptable means of handling Black bodies as a means of control and obedience. Additionally, slave patrols, beginning in 1704 and lasting throughout the slave era, morphed into the current day police force. South Carolina was the first state to organize vigilantes to monitor slave activity and discourage slave protests, revolts, and runaways. State militia was eventually placed to maintain control and discipline of the slave population. Punishments for the slaves found to be out of line could be torturous, with separation from the family being the worst.

Following slavery’s end, Black codes were replaced by vagrancy laws, which legally restricted and controlled the movement of Black bodies (Oshinsky 23–25). At the same time, self-deputized Ku Klux Klan movements sprang up in the South. Beginning just after the end of the Civil War, “The KKK and groups like them, vowed to suppress Blacks’ freedoms and proceeded to beat, exile and kill them” (DeGruy 89). As a means to keep a heavy hand of control over the freedom of Blacks, KKK members terrorized Blacks. Klan violence was often “random, spontaneous and poorly planned, but it spread quickly and took every imaginable form” (Oshinsky 26). Random acts of racial violence instigated by the Klan were often in the form of lynching of individual or multiple Black bodies. Lynching of women frequently occurred in the presence of police, and with wide support from the general public (Oshinsky 28).

White control of Black’s movements was also seen in the enforcement of peonage. Peonage was “the unlawful pushing of Blacks back into slavery through debt servitude” (DeGruy 83). An inability to pay fines for convictions of peonage crimes resulted in Blacks being forced back into slavery in the system of convict leasing; a clause in the 13th amendment allowed for involuntary servitude if convicted of a crime. Although the system of convict leasing was not “originally designated for Blacks, it eventually became another tool for their re-enslavement
after emancipation” (DeGruy 85). The loophole allowed for the reinstitution of slave-like conditions for people made out to be criminals. Much like the brutality of slavery, “in the state of South Carolina, the work was so perilous for those under lease, and the living environment so intolerable, half of the individuals that were leased died within the first twelve months. Some authorities have estimated that as many as a quarter of all Black-leased convicts through the South died while still under lease” (DeGruy 84). There is an irony in the fact that because racial slavery had ended, so too had any protections, albeit perverse, that ownership might provide. The Black population became more vulnerable than when they were enslaved. Both white mobs and white courts actively inflicted violence, separation, and death to members of Black families (Oshinsky 29).

During this period, Blacks “faced threats from two directions: white mobs and white courts” (Oshinsky 29). Having attracted “politicians, judges, law enforcement officials and business owners, as well as poor whites trying to make it in the post-war south,” white supremacist groups took a seat in the formal justice system (88). “Convict leasing was so successful that by 1898 nearly three-quarters of Alabama’s total state revenue came directly from the institution” (85). Convict leasing as a labor force was replaced by chain gangs, another brutal form of forced labor that depended on criminal charges, largely of Black people, to continue abusing Black bodies as free labor (85–86). The discipline of the Black body through corporal punishment remained the theme. The threat of violence and death which had been present for enslaved Black body, continued to follow her as a condition for living. Convict leasing and chain gangs’ practices subsided during the 1950’s as the modern Civil Rights movements rose. Still, advancement in policy and economics were met with continued abrasive force. “From 1883 to 1951, according to the most conservative estimates, 4,730 Blacks were lynched in the United
States” (Threadcraft 69). Police shootings of unarmed Blacks have exceeded those numbers in recent years (@samswey et al.). Police are trained to shoot to apprehend or shoot to kill when perceiving their lives are in danger.

Punishment and discipline to the Black body has long been equated to the justice system in America. The loophole created in the 13th amendment continues to ensnare Black bodies and separate them from their families. The self-deputized and police authorities largely stand as the antithesis of justice to Black people. Instead of receiving protection and service, Black people are largely criminalized and sentenced with fines and imprisonment—unequal to their white counterpart (Mauer 22–23). Ironically, Kevin Wehr and Elyshia Aseltine note, that “prisons do not reduce crime. Quite the opposite: detention in prisons causes recidivism, fosters the social learning of crime and culture and creates new criminals by throwing inmates’ families into destitution” (Wehr and Aseltine 1).

Families struggle to remain intact when a member goes to prison (Mauer 22). Currently, the rate growth of women in prison is increasing substantially and has nearly doubled over male imprisonment in the past two decades.

Two-thirds of the women in prison have one or more minor children. Many women in prison are custodial parents; who are lucky will have a friend or relative who is able to take on the care of the children while the mother is imprisoned. Those who are not so fortunate will see their children placed in foster care. And as a result of recent legislation (1997) mandating that parental rights can be terminated for children in the care of the state for fifteen months, it will be increasingly likely that the children will be placed for adoption. For African American children overall, the family experience of imprisonment is now almost commonplace, with one out of every fourteen having a parent in prison. (Chesney-Lind and Mauer 4)

The prison industrial complex has more Black and brown bodies incarcerated than were enslaved in the year 1850 (Mauer 23). There are more people imprisoned today in the United States than
in any other country on the globe (Alexander, *New Jim Crow* 6). The largest percentage of those inmates are Black (Wright and Herivel 23; Alexander, *New Jim Crow* 97).

“More than half of all young adult Black men are currently under correctional control—in prison or jail, on probation or parole” (Alexander, *New Jim Crow* 9). One in every three Black boys born today can expect to go to prison (Mauer 10). Black and brown men and women are far more than three times as likely to be charged and convicted for committing even nominal, non-violent crimes than their white counterparts (Alexander, *New Jim Crow* 11). *The New Jim Crow* illuminates the enormity of the current mass incarceration system as an institutional portal for the acquisition of Black and brown bodies in the name of justice.

The apprehension of Black people supposedly occurs in pursuit of maintaining law and order. “Contemporary police brutality has roots in a long history of racial violence against Black people by both the coercive apparatuses of the State (e.g. army, the police) and racist groups (Ku Klux Klan and many others) in addition to ‘random acts of violence’ by White youths and adults” (Ferguson and McClendon 43). Moreover, otherwise quotidian acts, like ‘driving while Black,’ arouse suspicion in law enforcement and far too often erupt in violence to the detriment of Black bodies. Overwhelmingly, “parents often cannot prepare their children for all of the ways in which issues of race and racial history can impact their child[ren]” (Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 188). Anti-Black racism has become embedded in the institutional systems of America—so much so that the nation’s justice system is dangerous to the Black body.

A Mother’s Fear

*The talk* makes for certain awareness about possibilities of violence and death at the hands of police violence. Death in the sense of perishing or demise as suggested in a natural sense of dying, the death of a child would not be the same matter. In *the talk* a parent speaks not
about death in a sense of “perishing,” or “demise” as “both suggest in ordinary language the ending of life” (Hoy 285). Death is as natural as life. For Heidegger reminds us that “As soon as a man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die” (Heidegger 289). One positions oneself as being-toward-death when we are conscious of death’s inevitable arrival (Hoy 283). However, the angst of the possibility of death and death without natural form or dignity, some mothers like me to choose to have The talk. Facing up to instead of fleeing from my own mortality becomes the key to an authentic life. The talk is a facing up to the risk of death at the hands of anti-Black racism and violence.

According to Martin Heidegger, my own death has priority over the death of others, and that Death is uniquely mine. Heidegger has written, “No one can take the Other’s dying away from him” (Heidegger 284), yet some mothers might argue otherwise. There is a profound love that parents have for their children. Yancy articulates the wonder that is in carrying and giving birth to the wondrous new life:

It is an intimacy that places the mother in a special epistemic, physical, and emotional relationship to her child. . . . It is our being-in their bodies that constitute the matrix (in Latin, ‘womb’) within which we first come to experience safety, to hear the beautiful rhythm of a heartbeat that is not our own, a voice that resonates through our bodies. I imagine that the process of being pregnant speaks to one of the most profound and mutually rich forms of relationality. It is this primary and intimate relationship between mothers and their [children] that bespeaks a different urgency of loving concern, different existential gravitas that is infused with powerful feelings of desperation, frightfulness, protectiveness, toughness, and yet unspeakable joy. (Yancy et al. 4)

Having carried our children in our womb, or not, mothers love their children. We fear a dominant white society who sees our children as potential sources of violence. The talk attempts to lessen the possibility of physical harm and even death.

“Profound grief is not simply for the objective loss of the person for the resulting restrictions on one’s own continuing possibilities. Instead, a more authentic form of grief would
be over the other person’s own sense of the loss of any continuing possibilities” (Hoy 281–82). The thought of death of our children is simply unimaginable. “That sense of vulnerability, that sense of finitude, that precarious sense of being here today, gone tomorrow is greatly impacted and magnified by how we are raced” Black people (Yancy et al. 4). Our existential disposition carries something more (Yancy and Jones 23). Patricia Williams writes, “how precisely does the issue of color remain so powerfully determinative of everything from life circumstances to manner of death” (Williams 15). The death that draws on fear and anxiety for the Black mother is a death void of dignity. “a senseless death makes life senseless as well” (Hoy 286). Black body memory, how I live and how I remember, affects my way of Being and seeing the world. Black bodies experience the past/present in their memories, their corporeal being, and their perceptions of everyday life. Black body memory has a relationship with a mood that informs the Black mother’s dilemma.

Moods are essentially bodily. Moods have a special role in prompting people to become self-reflective and to realize what is important in one’s life (Solomon 298). When thinking about life on the whole, sometimes the notion of death comes into view. “Angst is a mood initiated (knowingly or not) by our sense of our own impending death, that prompts us to self-reflection, self-understanding, and ‘authenticity’ (Elgentlichkeit). Moods help to ‘spur us to life-changing resolutions’” (Solomon 298). Moods hang over us, while emotions come out from us. “Emotions do not just happen to us, but instead, emotions emerge as ‘activities’ that we ‘do,’ strategies that work for us” (Solomon 298). Emotions are “magical transformations of the world” associated with how we see the world which helps to set us about our purposes in the world (Sartre qtd. in Solomon 298). In a Sartrean sense, “‘magical transformations of the world,’ means just this, that we alter our perceptions of the world in order to reorient ourselves and set in motion a different
way of understanding the world and its difficulties” (qtd. in Solomon 298). Emotions prompt us to do the things that we think we should.

Moods and emotions differ from one another in the way one is oriented to the object of stimuli. Emotions tend to be intentional and are (more or less) directed toward something. Moods are non-intentional and are not directed toward anything at all. In other words, emotions are “objective” and moods are “subjective.” A mood is overarching, whereas emotions are directed at someone or something. For me, the angst of death surrounds me like a mood. My love for my children dredges up profound grief and fear for what their Body may elicit. Because of my knowledge of the past and the demise of Black bodies at the hands of the self-deputized vigilante and the police, I am compelled to consider what could be, for not only myself, but much more so for my children. Only by seeing one’s entire life negated, does one comes, to have a sense of one’s life as a whole (Hoy 280).

“Morality is behind our sense of our finitude, and the recognition of finitude is what first makes some things matter more than others” (Hoy 283). Taking into account one’s mortality allows for a more authentic way of living. Thus, I take care of these children as they are greater than myself. I fear for their lives daily. “Through the encounter with the limit-Situation of being-toward-death, anticipatory resoluteness allows us for the first time to disclose the concrete situation authentically as our own, even if not our own creation” (Hoy 284). Seeing one’s life in entirety is at the core of Black body memory. Because of an understanding of the past, there is an anticipation of the future. The past informs one’s present moment. As Toni Morrison has urged us, “There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal. I know the world is bruised and bleeding, and though it is important not to ignore its pain, it is also critical to refuse to succumb
to its malevolence” (Morison). To navigate and cope in the world is a skill. *The talk* is just one tool. We are resolute in the face of finitude, and we continue to live.

In the face of aggressions hurled against the Black body and injuries even to the point of death, parents of Black children are confronted by a dilemma. What do we tell our children about their potential to be successful while we are aware of the racist environment that limits their possibilities and threatens their bodies? A parent wants for their child to have a positive self-vision and a good work ethic. But the objective of pursuing success can be painfully diminished by the reality that Blackness brings. Although we struggle for a sense of agency, freedom, and responsibility, history tells the story of our shared vulnerability within a hostile environment towards the Black body. Authentic resoluteness then involves thinking and acting differently to transform the world and to therefore change history (Hoy 284).

The lived experience of the Black body is infused with threat of violence. Parents cannot afford to overlook the possibility of their children being faced with anti-Black violence. The possibility of race, as a social construction, becomes diminished in the face of anti-Black racism and white terrorism. Choosing to talk with one’s children about the perpetual threat to their young Black bodies is a choice that reifies the harmful racial ideologies that have led ‘us’ here in the first place. *The talk* also may diminish Black children’s self-confidence in the sense that we may wound their self-vision. Despite this dilemma, many parents choose to have the talk.

*The Talk: Carrying Black Body Memory in Conversation*

In this historical moment, our Black children are in a perpetual threat of violence. There has not been a lull in America’s history of violence (legal and unlawful) against Blacks--both men and women. However, the recent technology of social media has given distinct imagery and attention to the problem. Though not new, what has been revealed recently through technological
advancements in cell phone devices and social media is of great concern. The indiscriminate whippings and killings of the enslaved, or the lynching of the free Black bodies between the World Wars, through hosing, gas bombings and use of attack dogs during the Civil Rights era, up through the beating of Rodney King and including more recent events. . . , many of the perpetrators of white terrorism have proven to be deputized whites and police--public servants who are charged to serve and protect. For a mother, however, the charge to serve and protect her children is instinctive.

My sons were not aware of the implications of being Black. The talk gives light to the ways by which they are defined by others and the meaning of our Black bodies. Our Blackness renders our bodies docile and vulnerable to how others see us (Foucault 136). The talk brings an awareness of self into view. Black bodies carry with them a particular history that reaches over and above the individual who is Black. We are born into narratives (MacIntyre 266–67), such as the narrative of violence which Black body memory describes. The talk is necessary to instill Black bodies with the awareness needed to defend ourselves in an environment where anti-Black racism looms. Racism is a belief system that yields separation. The talk entrusts our children with the skills to defend themselves against pervasive anti-Black racism which has become too common. Anti-racism yields the possibility of separation, loss, and death.

Black body Memory in Holding

The talk is an attempt to care for and provide Black children with informed responses to situations of distress. As long as the United States justice system perpetuates a ‘just-us’ practice that sustains white privilege and supports anti-Black racism, we will have a continued need for life-preserving conversation. The talk is an effort to account for “how should one live in the face of nitty-gritty material realities of White terrorism” (Ferguson and McClendon 44). White people
have been characterized according to particular violence of the past, which surrounds brutal attacks against the Black body throughout the history of Africans in America (described earlier in the essay). In the face of threat and violence against Blacks, allies and protesters have historically shown “a sense of indignation and with an ancillary struggle for self-respect,” freedom, and life (Ferguson and McClendon 44)! Abolitionists, freedom riders, protestors and organizations have helped to change the public mind concerning the treatment of Blacks and people of color towards justice and equality. *The talk* is a call to arms for the current environment of inequality and potential hostility Black people may face. Faced with a moral dilemma in raising hopeful Black children in an era of violence, many parents are compelled to engage in *The talk* with their children

*The talk* came to my home before the rise of #BlackLivesMatter. Since the movement, there has been increased attention to Blacks who have been harassed and killed by members of the police and self-deputized individuals. The conversation has recently come into public view with notoriety concerning the publicity of harassment and violence against Black bodies. Not that violence towards Black bodies is new, but that the immediate exposure on social media and new platforms render such attacks with immediacy not seen in the past. *The talk* is now code for awareness of the danger and protection amid the toxic anti-Black racist environment.

Those who engage in *the talk* also engage the notion of Black body memory and simultaneously protest anti-Black racism. As a means of countering the effects of anti-Black racism, Black body memory offers a thick description of the existential phenomenology of the Black body, set against the notion of body memory. Collectively, safety for the Black body is sought by the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Declaring that Black lives do indeed matter, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor explains, “The struggle for Black liberation requires going beyond the
standard narrative that Black people have come a long way but have a long way to go” (194). According to Taylor, Black liberation “requires understanding the origins and nature of Black oppression and racism more generally” (K.-Y. Taylor 194). Key to productively moving beyond a trend of hatred and violence and toward “human liberation and social transformation,” differences must be meaningfully acknowledged (194). According to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, “when Black people get free, everybody gets free” (194). However, he offers the caveat, “Black people in America cannot ‘get free’ alone” (K.-Y. Taylor 194). In other words, freedoms sought require the engagement of the greater community—beyond ‘the color line,’ and in all of its diversity. Abolitionists and the Civil Rights movements throughout American history have always included participation across the color line. The issues confronting Black people now concern the greater community and the whole of America. Once the nation at large is able to overcome racism, then we shall overcome!

Black body Memory Deconstructed

Black body memory is an amalgamated term. Black body memory brings a phenomenology of the Black body (Johnson, “Black Body” 599–615; Yancy, “Whiteness” 215–41) into conversation with the notion of body memory (Casey, Remembering 146–80; Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 9–22). Pat Arneson reminds us that humans are corporeal beings anchored to the world through lived bodies (Communicative 21–35). One’s body is an “ensemble of organically developed predispositions and capacities to perceive, to act but also to desire and to communicate” (Fuchs, “Unconscious” 91). The body is a sensorium intertwined with human communications (Arneson, Communicative 27). A person’s expressivity,(corporeal and linguistic) arises from being communicatively engaged in the world (Arneson, Communicative 25–29).
Body memory is intrinsic to the body. Body memory alludes to “how we remember in and by and through the body” (Casey, *Remembering* 147). Actions arise from memory, and body memory grounds all remembering functions (Casey, *Remembering* 146–47). There is a co-immanence of past and present characteristic of body memory (Casey, *Remembering* 167). However, body memory does not take one back to the past (Fuchs, “Unconscious” 91). Instead, through the lived-body, one “conveys an implicit effectiveness of the past in the present” (Fuchs, “Unconscious” 91). Our bodies manifest as a series of “now points” coinciding. What was, what is now, and what is not yet are demonstrations of a time continuum (Bergson, *Matter* 15), through which one’s “embodied consciousness” materializes as one’s lived-body (Johnson, “Black Body” 602).

Body memory emerges in various forms and is often habitual (Casey, *Remembering* 147; Fuchs, “Phenomenology” 9). Habitual body memories are explicitly or implicitly learned and seep their way into one’s lived existence (Polanyi 4; Casey, *Remembering* 147; Fuchs, “Embodied” 219–21). Sarah Ahmed has argued that whiteness is linked to habitual activity (Ahmed 156). Ahmed describes that “whiteness is an orientation that puts certain things in reach” (Ahmed 154). Moreover, race becomes a matter of what one has access to with which to do things (Ahmed 154). Habituated actions are a part of the body in that one cannot “’put on’ or ‘take off’ as they are repeated forms of what bodies do” (Ahmed 156). For Ahmed, whiteness trails behind habituated activities which have been inherited and can be reproduced.

The white body does not “command attention” when it moves throughout the social world (Ahmed 156). Whiteness becomes invisible with the spaces inhabited by white bodies (McIntosh 1–7; Ahmed 157). Black bodies stand out and are marked according to a precarious past (Ahmed 155). Existentially, the constructed Black body orients in the world according to
how they are seen by others (Gordon, *Existentia Africana* 120). Not that all Black bodies share the same experience, but as Black bodies, they experience a shared reality because of their sameness (Ahmed 155; Young 5). The Black body is a raced body arriving from racial ideology upon which the nation was built (Bernasconi and Lott x). Discursive positioning and race thinking have maintained the stigma of race and perpetuated anti-Black racism (Hall, “Floating Signifier” 2; Gordon, “Race Theory” 1; P. C. Taylor 67).

Black body memory is a collective memory based on the raced group of people (Fuchs, “Collective” 333–52). As raced people, Black bodies have historically suffered threat and violence based on traumatization of racialization of a Black people (DeGruy 1–244). Because of the shared memory of the collective Black body, many parents offer *the talk* to their Black children. *The talk* is a conversation, often including a list of directives on what behaviors one’s children ought to employ while they are in public view. In terms of body memory, *the talk* serves as phronesis to preserve and protect a community. *The talk* emerges as a communicative ritual and practical intelligence for the benefit of Black people.

*A Collective Black Body*

Collective body memories are demonstrated in groups of people who embody and habituate particular actions (Ahmed 155; Fuchs, “Unconscious” 334). Collective body memory might appear in benign behaviors, including the way one carries herself, the accent one uses as she speaks, and various traditions and rituals. Writing on collective body memory, Fuchs describes ritualistic behavior as “repeated patterns of interaction soon become familiar and result in pre-reflective, practical knowledge of how to get along with others--how to share pleasure, elicit attention, avoid rejection, establish contact, and so on” (“Collective” 338). *The talk* can be viewed as a ritualistic conversation.
Within collective body memory, people develop and incorporate shared practices as a way of being in the world. “Our basic attitudes, typical reactions, and relational patterns are crucially based on body memory” (Fuchs, “Collective” 338). Habituated activity involved in ritual is among the ways of promoting knowledge in an effort to instill a knowledge base which will become like second nature. Embodied skills and behaviors shape our comportment and ways of being in the world. A Black body among others demonstrates a different meaning (Fanon, “Fact” 257). Through the course of history, and too often in today’s contemporary setting, Black bodies are met with fear and subsequent violence when confronted by police and self-deputized individuals (Yancy and Jones 23; McCants Lewis 155–58; Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184–86; Douglas 44–47). The talk, as given by elders to Black children, seeks to remedy the possibility of injury to children and adults from potentially hostile public servants.

“A person’s typical patterns of posture, movement, and expression are comprehensible only as referring to actually present or imaginary others. Embodied personality structures can be regarded as procedural fields of possibility that are activated in contact with others and suggest certain types of behavior. They are therefore best accessible in the actual intracorporal encounter: the lived-body can be understood only given other embodied structures.” (Fuchs, “Collective” 338)

The talk offers a procedural list of “how-to’s” when taken captive by police.

The Talk as Embodied Ritual

The talk suggests a dyadic body memory. “It manifests itself in shared patterns of interaction, which are actualized every time the two persons meet again” (Fuchs, “Collective” 339). The dyadic body memory is something which one may recognize in dyadic behaviors between siblings, friends, and partners where a certain way of speaking, a particular humor is manifested between them. However, this project writes about developing a ritual in the ways in which the Black body interacts with our criminal justice system, in our everyday lives, and on the street. “In this case, the respective intracorporal memories of the partners unite to form a
joint procedural field that suggests and preordains certain typical postures, interactions, and inner affective experiences” (Fuchs, “Collective” 339). Public spaces take shape through the habitual actions of bodies, such that the contours of space could be described as to what is produced by the bodies which inhabit them.

In recognition of the historical and discursive significance of the Black body and the way that it draws attention to itself, the talk has come to be a conversation by which practical philosophy is shared. That the talk is so popularly understood among families as a necessary conversation shows its significance for those who promote it. As a ritual, the talk is an enactment of ceremonial proper. The ceremony is an embodiment of epideictic rhetoric (Casey, Remembering 222, 231) and embodies belief. The ceremony is often prescribed through a ritual which serves as a “symbolic return” through corporeal expressivity “to achieve reactulization” of things of the past (Casey, Remembering 231; Arneson, Communicative 2). The ritual represents an “intensified remembering” (Casey, Remembering 257) that creates modes of interconnection “between past and present, self and other, one form of thinking or acting or speaking and another” (Casey, Remembering 251). The talk can be understood as a ritual. The ritual is a manifestation of body memory and is developed and practiced by a collective body (Casey, Remembering 220–23). The talk engages children with their parents to learn about how to behave in public. The likely perception of the Black body is a source of dread for many parents of Black children. The potential experience purported through the talk is its content, and the talk itself is the process or ritual through which the information is shared.

Fuchs writes, “Frequently, rituals function as explicit and prominent ways for a culture or society to form shared habitualities and to endow them with normative significance” (Fuchs, “Collective” 348). Behaviors suggested in this essay included in the talk focused ways to
respond to police confrontation, to move through public spaces, and to navigate the world of others (Ahmed 156; McCants Lewis 156). Other directives some parents include are: 1. Never Leave a Store without a Shopping Bag, 2. Never Loiter Outside; Anywhere, 3. Never Go Anywhere Alone, 4. Never Talk Back to Police. . . And Never Reach into Your Pockets, 5. Never Doubt Trouble May Strike Anytime; Anywhere, 6. Don’t Run in Public, 7. Don’t Run While Carrying Anything and following the death of Trayvon Martin, 8. Be Cautious What You Wear (McCants Lewis 157). For we know the hoodie could increase suspicion.

Tactical and intentional movements are meant to promote the idea that one is seen according to a historical narrative. The children on the receiving side of the talk are not a part of the construction of how they are perceived but stand to receive consequences born from their existence. “Throughout the literature, there remains a connection between understanding the past and making the present intelligible in light of the past. Although at various times this pragmatic task has held greater or lesser emphasis, historians have ‘never fully broken the connection between knowing the past and acting in the present’” (Arneson, Communicative 9). Through the talk, the children become equipped with an embodied acknowledgment of how a constructed narrative of the Black body impacts their very being. “Over time, these rituals gradually sediment in the individual body memories and are then performed as ‘second nature’” (Fuchs, “Collective” 348–49). The talk, as a conversation, presents as a ritual, as it is something performed by the collective body Black. Moreover, the content of the talk informs Black bodies of their situatedness in society.

In an encounter with another person, social practices hold meaning beyond that which would indicate a particular social practice. Through communicative engagement (Arneson, Communicative 2) and social interaction, Black parents recall violent actions intended to
discipline and punish Black bodies in the name of justice (Yancy and Jones 23; McCants Lewis 155–58; Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184–86; Douglas 44–47). While time and space have distanced grievable terrors enacted against the collective Black body (Butler 20), Black body memory implies an ever-present shadow and projection of the possibility of harm (Young 21). The talk is grounded by Black body memory and implores its hearers to handle themselves in particular ways. For example, while in the company of the police officer or self-deputized individual, the interaction between the former and a Black body indicates more than what is present itself in the moment. “An individual’s communicative practice points to meanings beyond the single practice, adumbrating the past, present, and future through members of the specific community as well as other communities” (Arneson, Communicative 31). An interaction between a Black person and a police officer is laced with a history which gives the presumption of meaning and outcome. Moreover, “The holistic matrix and referential interdependence of social practices and corporeal involvement transcend a particular discourse in actions of embodied agents” and individuals communicative practices” (Schrag 111). An individual exists within the fabric of society and human culture.

A person transcends cultural spheres where the person no longer exists in isolation from the cultural context in which she is situated. Through communicative practices, in ritual, one is taken out of “self-confinement as a body or a mind” (Casey, Remembering 239). Casey explains that when someone is involved in the communicative ritual, “instead of contemplating the past in a private mental space or experiencing it “in my bones” in an almost equally private room, I attend my commemorative aim only via an interpolated ritual and text in the co-presence of others” (Casey, Remembering 339). Body memory is saturated by the tradition of ritual until
recall is not needed. As one is transported to a physical space of uncertainty, one seeks assurance in one’s bodily comportment.

The holistic matrix in which members of society are embedded constitutes potential myriads of collective bodies (Arneson, *Communicative* 31). Forms of embodied interaction emerge in smaller groups and dyads among those collective bodies. Within the smaller social situations, “the intracorporeal memories of the individuals unite to form overarching procedural fields” (Fuchs, “Collective” 348). From embodied ritual, habits are formed. “Once the group joins again in a similar configuration and situation, their collective body memory is actualized” (Fuchs, “Collective” 348). Moreover, Fuchs explains that “the interactive processes develop an emergent dynamic involving the individuals in positions or behavior they would not participate in outside the formation” (Fuchs, “Collective” 338). There is a difference between a Black body among Blacks, as compared to a Black body within white spaces. Once group dynamics of this sort are established and stable, they “spread to larger communities where they are established as rites and norms” (Fuchs, “Collective” 349). Communicative gestures and habitual actions are evoked as the ritual, *the talk*, has demanded.

“When two individuals interact in such ways,” as might a Black body in police company or custody, “the coordination of their body movements, gestures, gazes, and so on can gain such momentum that it may even override the individuals’ intentions” (Fuchs 339). Body memory characterizes rituals like *the talk* as un-commemorative in character. Socially determined practices have as their minimal conditions an adequate time for reflection on the part of participants and an allusion, however indirect, to a pre-existing event or person. Ritual is a “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, [but] having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or [powers]. ‘Beliefs in mystical beings or powers’ may
well be commemorative in nature, but what matters for our purposes is the specific sedimentation of these” (Casey, Remembering 222). In some ways, *the talk* is a prayer for safety to a higher power to intervene when danger confronts any one of our children. *The talk* is, therefore, an embodied ritual grounded in Black body memory.

**Embodied Ritual as Human Communication**

*The talk* is a layered communicative endeavor. *The talk* demonstrates conversation, content, and practice as its objective. *The talk* unfolds like a non-fiction folk tale, relying on facts rather than fictitious characters. There is the act of conversation had between people and demonstrated by *the talk*. Traditionally, “the concept of communication takes place within a context of production, reception, and action” (Mangion 7). However, more nuanced than a mere linear progression, we understand that communication is a *meaningful experience*, and not simply an *informational exchange* (Arneson, Communicative 25). Moreover, communication is also embodied. Human contact both invokes and evokes being-in-the-world. Pat Arneson observes that communicative engagement is made up of the corporeal body and the linguistic sign (*Communicative* 7). Arneson describes that the two are inseparable. “Body and sign are united and actualized in expression” she argues (*Communicative* 70). Further, “a person's everyday habits and the enactment of her skill sets indicate an indivisible connection of corporeal linguistic expressivity” (*Communicative* 25). The habits and skills encouraged in *the talk* are those which make up the content of the conversation.

The body is the point of one’s communicative center. “The situated body-communicative practice includes meanings that comprise the experienced world” (Mickunas 144). The lived-body is described by a notion of *embodied subjectivity* (Polizzi 174). Embodied subjectivity manifests both as a theory of human perception, and ethics “which encounters the world from a
specific perspectival point of view” (Polizzi 174). From this vantage point, the lived-body constitutes our fundamental ways of engaging the world and being engaged by the world. Here subject and object, subject and subject, become redundant… communicative practices are therefore based in the “primacy of engaged bodily perception, which is always oriented toward, and intertwined with, the phenomenal field” through and by which we engage the world (Mickunas 144).

“Physical existence is central to the human condition” (Arnett 63). What is more, “without a body-lived and a lived-body there is no communication—no self, no meaning, no discourse, no community, no culture” (Arneson, Communicative 27). The body is an embodiment of consciousness, language is an embodiment of thought. The apparent fusing of the mind and body, therefore, afford a link or connection to another through communication. “[O]ne experiences, thinks, and feels the world as a sensorium” (Arneson, Communicative 27). Within such a sensational environment, the body is interwoven to the world. Human communication is wrapped up through the body by thought as language. A person’s expressivity emerges from a phenomenal field. In short, the world is not limited to what a person thinks. Instead, “people have developed social structures in the form of families, communities, and societies for ‘sharing-in-life’ with others” (Arneson, Communicative 29). Together, people live through the world. According to Arneson, “meaning arises in a lived experience, which is created, negotiated, and shared with others and embodied linguistic expressivity” (Communicative 27). My body opens me to the world.

“Through our lived bodies, we are connected to the social world which emerges as a holistic matrix of the past, the present and the future” (Arneson, Communicative 33). Our engagements with one another constantly point to a fuller, more dynamic interpretation of life
through both embodiment and symbolic communication. The body serves as essential access for life. Moreover, “one’s communicative engagements with others enlarge one’s experience. In an exchange with another person, the attitude or disposition of both people is modified” (Communicative 33). Ritualistic embodied actions gleaned from *the talk* inform Black bodies in the way they are perceived by others.

Human embodiment is fundamentally a making room for, a choreographing of figures, backgrounds, and selves “in the world.” (Arneson, Communicative 23). Embodiment necessitates performativity. Social rituals such as *the talk* become integral to human life. The everyday world is made through communication, which creates a social-political structure that shapes our everyday world. Human embodiment incorporates both oral and linguistic models of expressivity. Moreover, “embodiment necessitates communicative action” (Communicative 24). Everything we are, everything we do, is constituted by an embodied sense of being. Though a person may emerge in acts of expressivity, guided by her volition, however simultaneously “a person cannot become wholly independent of external influences” (Communicative 26). *The talk* exemplifies boundaries of communicative engagement when encountering white spaces, and otherness where anti-Black racism festers. And we take shared space seriously (Arnett, Communication Ethics in Dark Times 63).

Communicative engagement is an “acknowledgment of the multi-dimensional complexities of human expressivity” (Arneson, Communicative 13). There is an intimate unity between thinking, speaking, and language. Arneson argues that thoughts seek to express words which “one intends to say for others to hear” (Communicative 13). Language, thoughts, and speech exist in a company with one another. Communicative structures are interrelated. Without language; there can be no “thought; language is needed to reflectively consider one’s experience.
“While thought is infinite, language is finite, and words may not adequately express what one wants to say or what one feels when one must say” (Arneson, *Communicative* 13). Human language is caught up in the thinking being.

Thought is ‘put into’ or framed by language (Arneson, *Communicative* 13). People experience the world through language used to negotiate one’s “situatedness” within the world (Arneson, *Perspectives* 3). Attentiveness to communication has the power to change how one orients oneself (*Perspectives* 10). “We are always in language. We are embedded in language, and language is always at work in our lived experiences” (*Perspectives* 9). Language is therefore tied to the way we present to the world. Language is bound up in our sense of existence. “An openness to a density of meaning prompts an understanding of coexistence of self, other, and society in the ongoing construction of the human world” (*Perspectives* 10). Rhetoric allows for a universal connection to how one situates herself in the world.

Black body memory calls attention to how the Black experience is juxtaposed according to one’s bodily identity. There are a richness and a density to our communicative lives arriving from our experiences in the world. The Black body is a racialized body which categorizes social identity. The body communicatively engages in the world, and one’s habits are a manifestation of one’s experience. *The talk* emerges from Black body memory in that it represents one’s method of thinking and therefore “knowing” (Arnett and Holba 180). Black body memory is an embodied communicative awareness. In this way, one’s sense of knowing is embodied, as evidenced by habituated activity. “Our intellectual heritage provides ideas that can help us make sense of everyday life” (180). Black body memory provides a “capacity to think critically and consistently, to understand various points of view”(180). Within an environment that demonstrates anti-Black racism and violence to Blacks, “one accesses the unsettling of
boundaries of communication marked by tensions that are inherent to human interaction” (Arneson, *Perspectives* 1). Black body memory offers language for the disposition by which Black people encounter one another.

*Black Body Memory as a Phenomenology of Narrative*

Narratives are stories which collectives of people subscribe to which guide behavior and action (Arnett, Bell McManus, et al. 63). Black body memory speaks to the integral connection between embodiment and performativity (Arneson, *Communicative* 21). The everyday world is made through communication—in the ways showing the body to be bound up in thought and language. Social structures shape our everyday world. As such, narratives are guiding patterns that give meaning and structure to our speech, writing, and visual communication (Arnett, Bell McManus, et al. 63). Narratives are dwellings for what matters, sheltering the needs, concerns, and desires of individuals. A phenomenon of the Black body memory is concerned the *with what it is likeness* to be Black in a world of whiteness. Black body memory reflects the existential disposition of the lived body and her experiences. This project is based on my experience as a Black woman navigating life through a very localized everyday experience. Black body memory is a metaphor for a phenomenology or narrative.

Communicative endeavors, indicative in *the Talk*, emerge from within socio-historical contexts. Through location in space and time, the essential self comes into view. “You only really exist in a situation, and you become yourself in responding to that situation” (Friedman 82). Self emerges within a contextualized social world. Through the lived body, one engages with the world. I am interwoven to the world according to my unique disposition, which is my lived-body. Everything I encounter in the social world is perceived from the body which I have and am. Moreover, one encounters the world in time.
Time becomes human through narrative (Ricoeur 52). Attempting to measure time through tools and standards is a futile effort in terms of phenomenology. Time can only be measured as it is passing. Existentially, one moves along a series of now points. “The present is not simply travelled through, but ‘man’s attentive mind, which is present, is relegating the future to the past. The past increases in proportion as the future diminishes, until the future is entirely absorbed and the whole becomes the past” (Augustine 27:36). As noted by historic philosophers, and the existentialism of Paul Ricoeur, the past is found in the present (19). Moreover, there is a co-immanence of time past and present. The not-now becomes a past now during the present moment (Husserl 189). The past now set up in this moment, leans towards a future. Phenomenology makes room for a consciousness of internal time. Time is lived. Thus, time is embodied. A phenomenological view of time accounts for time as perceived by the lived-body. In this way the past is never fully past but remains in our bodies.

“Time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence” (Ricoeur 52). Black body memory is a metaphor representing a phenomenology of narrative embodied by a racialized people. Emily Bernard looks to James Baldwin and Simone De Beauvoir in her autobiographical work, Black is the Body. Bernard remarks that Blackness is a condition and the body is a situation (Bernard xiv). Alasdair C. MacIntyre writes, that “we enter upon a stage which we did not design and we find ourselves part of an action that was not of our making” (263). We are born into narratives. Black body memory reflects the situatedness of one’s place in the world of others.

Ethnography, a form of cultural critique, tries to get at the everyday life of an exotic existence (p. 184). The story of Black life can be told from a multiplicity of viewpoints.
However, ‘being there’ differs from ‘being there’ (Goodall, Jr. 184). A third person articulation of what is seen bares difference on the hermeneutic disposition of the subject-object corollary. Phenomenology privileges the subjective. “A consequence of consciousness’ requirement of an object is the reality of perspective. Consciousness always exists, that is, from somewhere; being other than consciousness, an object is always ‘there,’ whereas consciousness is always, simultaneously, ‘here’” (Gordon, *Existentia Africana* 120). Therefore, a first-person articulation of narrative is the perspective of the body. The lived-body is a metaphor for the phenomenology of metaphor.

*The talk* is a response to the question “of what story or stories do I find myself a part” (MacIntyre 266). Black body memory is a metaphor for the story held by Black bodies in this contemporary moment. Emily Bernard writes that “Blackness is an art, not a science. It is a paradox: intangible and visceral; a situation and a story” (Bernard xiv). Black body memory is represented by the story of being Black in a sea of whiteness and white supremacist activity. According to MacIntyre, we live out our lives both individually and in relationship to others with both the current moment and the possibility of a shared future.

There is no present which is not informed by some image or some future and an image of the future which always presents itself in the form of a telos—or of a variety of end or goals—towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present. . . Thus the narratives which we live out have both an unpredictable and a partially teleological character. (MacIntyre 265)

Constraints put forward according to the narrative carry us along in our shared future.

There is a unity of one’s character in the continuity of one’s narrative. Actions become integral to the narrative of which one is a part. “An action is a moment in a possible history or in a number of such histories” (MacIntyre 263). Moreover, “the notion of a history is as fundamental a notion as the notion of an action” (264). Actions are integrally linked to the
narrative. According to MacIntyre, action is equally as fundamental to narrative as that of history (264). Ultimately, a person emerges as a character in their narrative “who becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth” which is represented in the notion of Black body memory (MacIntyre 265). “But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question ‘What am I to?’” which is answered in the talk (MacIntyre 265).

From out of one’s narrative, the self emerges. “You only really exist when you exist in a situation, and you become yourself in responding to that situation” (Friedman 82). The narrative discloses the co-imminence of past and present within one’s existence. The narrative of the Black body is wrapped in the existence of a Black person. Black body memory is one which seeks to capture the totality of experience in language. “Man is a story telling animal,” and is alone able to tell his story, in attempt to disclose to others who he truly is (MacIntyre 265). “It is through the metaphors of language that the metaphors of self are manifested, and it is through this manifestation that the self exists” (Goodall, Jr. 190). The self is disclosed through language and communicative engagement. The self emerges as a “subject of a narrative that runs from one’s birth to one’s death” (MacIntyre 267). As MacIntyre writes, “personal identity is just that identity presupposed by the unity of the character which the unity of a narrative requires” (267). It is through the sedimentation and grounding of narrative that the self emerges.

Autobiography, as metaphor for self, is presented with particular limitations. In an attempt to place “one’s life experiences, personality, and character into a narrative form,” the author is subject to the “writing laws of gravity” and concerned with apt language and writing style (Goodall, Jr. 187). A second conception of the autobiography as a metaphor for self is a neo-Marxist critique reducing the articulation to a production and fragmentation of personal experience emerging as a convenient fiction. A third approach to the notion of the
autobiographical is an allowance for the possibility of reclamation of self and to admission of a meaningful creation of the truth in language form. H.L. Goodall argues that there is a natural connection between being and creation (Goodall, Jr. 195). To tell one’s own story is an extension of self if not self, itself. Self as metaphor for autobiography can only be achieved phenomenologically.

“One makes a self through the words one has learned, fashions one’s own voice and inner speech by a selective appropriation of the voices of others” (Emerson 215). The phenomenology of self begins with an attentiveness to voices of one’s world.

This is phenomenologically appropriate, for there is a primary listening which precedes our own speech. This is whether one considers that matter as an issue of personal history—I hear the voices of others, of things, of the World long before I speak my own words—or as a matter of correct phenomenological procedure which begins with noema before taking up noetic acts. Phenomenologically the “self” is modeled after the World which takes primacy in its first appearance. (Ihde 201)

The concept of self is presupposed by historic background, including actions played and spoken out by characters who are people in the worlds in which we belong. A concept of self is embedded in one’s narrative to the degree that I am subject to the history and people to which I belong. A person is able to make sense of the world and pursue a moral standing according to a narrative of self (MacIntyre 270). I am able to realize my responsibility in life and to give an account for my personal identity and that of my children. Although rejection of my narrative as integral to who I am is a possibility, I believe it is one in bad faith and is ultimately a show of moral standing, regardless. A phenomenology of narrative is what Black body memory is made of. The narrative from which one emerges gives to a pursuit of “goods” which transcend generations (271). “Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted. . . . Hence there is no way to give . . . an understanding of any society, including their own” (MacIntyre 266). Black
body memory as transferred through *the talk* attempts to protect and promote the good of life and survival for those vulnerable to anti-Black racism and violence.

*The Talk* as an Act of Communication Ethics

“Ethics” is understood as “practices that enact or support a good, a central value or set of values associated with human life and conduct” (Arnett, Fritz, et al. 55). *The talk* described here is thought to be fundamental to the life and survival of the person who is Black. We carry the experience of Blackness in our bodies. As a collective body, the racialized experience of the Black body is one of collective trauma. Although the embodiment of race may be of social construction, it has sedimented over time and cannot be easily undone. Those inheriting the Black body must become aware of its perception. *The talk* sets out a set of social practices to protect and promote the preservation of life for our children with Black bodies.

According to Arnett and Holba, common sense is not innate. Instead, common sense is a practice learned within communities that shape one’s life, both personal and professional (Arnett and Holba 211). However, understood in this sense, a person’s practices are informed by the public sphere. “Communication ethics in private life depends upon the strength of communication ethics in public life. Public and private communication ethics support and enhance one another” (Arnett, Fritz, et al. 105). Black body memory is not innate for those with a Black body. The common sense of it must be learned. “What generates common sense is the commonality of practices. When we do the same practices over and over again, they fade into the background moving from that upon which we must reflect before being able to employ (explicit knowing) explicit knowledge to what Michael Polanyi (1967) called tacit knowing (implicit knowing)” (Arnett, Fritz, et al. 65). Common sense is practiced communicative action and decision making, performed in multiple facets of our existence.
Common sense is a natural outcome, not of instinct, but of a meaningful set of communicative practices understood within a larger community. “Common sense is a byproduct of what we know and what we practice” (Arnett, Fritz, et al. 63). These practices require action, mistake, success, and communal relation, which texture the meaningfulness of given practices, moving beyond individual assessment and into the social life of being human. “Common sense is learned” through communicative practices in our daily interactions (Arnett and Holba 211). The goal of those sharing the talk is to shape a child’s everyday wisdom of the Black experience as common sense.

*The Talk* in Contemporary Literature

Not limited to vehicular police confrontation, the talk takes on various scenarios and is reciprocal as well as ongoing. Ta-Nehisi Coates dedicates his book, *Between the World and Me*, as a letter to his son concerning what it is like to inhabit a Black body. His articulation struggles with the notion that despite the false reality that race exists, one must discern how to live with, and “honestly reckon” with a racist history (Coates 7). Coates esteems America’s position among other nations as a powerful empire that has gained its position based on the ideas of race. The race idea has subjected the Black body to exploitation through slavery and segregation and today through incarceration and murder “out of all proportion” (Coates 7).

Coates’ talk to his son spans the length of his book. He begins, “Last Sunday the host of a popular news show asked me what it meant to lose my body” (Coates 5). Coates reflects on the history of America and the notion of personhood as something not obtained by those Black bodies living prior to 1863 at the Gettysburg Address delivered by President Abraham Lincoln (Coates 6). Coates then reels further back in history to the Middle-Passage and a discussion of an “othering” occurring for the people to be enslaved. “But race is the child of racism, not the
father” (Coates 7). A poignant metaphor for the father, carrying his Black body memory to his own son.

During the time of his writing, Coates and his son had seen violent acts inflicted against Blacks: “Eric Gardner choked to death for selling cigarettes. . . [and] Renisha McBride was shot to death for seeking help. . . [and] John Crawford was shot down for browsing in a department store,” and the twelve-year-old child, Tamil Rice, had been shot and killed by the uniformed police officers who had sworn an oath to protect and serve (Coates 9). Coates continues, “the same [men in] uniforms pummeled Marlene Pinnock, someone's grandmother, on the side of a road” (9). These were among the more highly circulated social and media broadcasted stories.

When the news show host asks Coates about “hope,” Coates feels that he has failed in his interview (10). Coates shares with his son,

and you know now, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates from a misunderstanding. It doesn’t matter if the destruction springs from a foolish policy. . . . The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions. And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include frisking, detaining, beatings and humiliations. All of this is common to Black people. And all of this is old for Black people. No one is held responsible. (Coates 9)

Despite their crimes, Coates says the destroyers are not uniquely evil. Instead, their grievous actions are propelled by the racist heritage and legacy of this America (Coates 10).

Rather than hope, Coates offers both the interviewer and, more importantly, his son his truth, “that this is your country, that this is your world, that this is your body and you must find some way to live within it all” (Coates 10–11). The title of his book, framed as a letter to his son, Between the World and Me, echoes the words of James Baldwin’s work, The Fire Next Time.
The Fire Next Time is comprised of two essays. The first is to Baldwin’s niece and nephew. Having lived long enough, Baldwin explains, he has gained a “strange perspective on time and human pain and effort” (Baldwin 4). He writes this letter with the goal being “to try to tell [his nephews] about how to handle [their countrymen]” (6). As a Black body in America, Baldwin reasons, “for most of them do not yet really know that [his niece and nephew] exists” (6). Baldwin accuses his countrymen “for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it” (5). Baldwin’s countrymen are the same as those of his nephew and our own as well. These countrymen have caused the conditions under which we all have been born. Although not all men and women make up the whole of countrymen which Baldwin talks about, he says, “it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime” (4-5). For Baldwin, this country, in sight of its claim of innocence, has set the spaces for Blacks to exist. “The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you” (8). Moreover, “You were not expected to aspire to excellence: you were expected to make peace with mediocrity” (7). Tacit whiteness keeps Black bodies in place.

As represented in the talk, Baldwin extols his nephews that they should proceed in life with an attitude of love. Love will “force our brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it” (Baldwin 7). The crimes of the innocent manifest from an inability to acknowledge the sins of America, according to Baldwin. “For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become” (7). Baldwin’s words constitute the talk as he speaks to his nephews about what they need to understand to truly live. The talk stings of
the reality of the past and the social conditions that have produced and continue to produce suffering for the Black body. Baldwin writes, Blacks have been “lost, and unable to say what it was that oppressed them, except that they knew it was ‘the man’ --the white man. And there seemed to be no way whatever to remove this cloud that stood between them and the sun, between them and love and life and power, between them and whatever they wanted” (19). Recognizing the Black body, the innocence of countrymen, and the limitations necessarily embedded into the environment ought to push against what might otherwise grow up like a “wall between the world and me” (Baldwin 27). Though painful, the talk aims to empower our young with an embodied wisdom to equip themselves with the power of discernment and common sense.

The mother of a Black son, Kelly Brown Douglas, writes about the power of the talk in her book, Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God. Douglas had reimmersed herself in the writings of Baldwin when her son was born. She recalled his writings on “negotiating the reality of being Black and male in a world where Blackness was not valued” (Douglas 45). Douglass sought insight from Baldwin’s wisdom “in order to equip [him] to be a proud and healthy Black man in America” despite the notion that his body is not valued nor cherished (45). Among the tirade of violence to the young Black body, and especially following the loss of Trayvon Martin, Douglas acknowledges the talk. She says, “We raise our Black sons to be aware of their surroundings and to know how they are being perceived--whether they are shopping in a store or walking down the street with a group of friends, or even wearing a hoodie over their heads” (xi). Trayvon Martin had been wearing a hoodie when he was perceived as dangerous by George Zimmerman, who consequently shot young Martin dead (xi).
Douglas was moved by the words from the parents of Jordan Davis. Davis’s mother, Lucia McBath, asked that “people pray for her son’s killer, given the torment that would plague him the rest of his life” (88). While his father added that although it did not “come out in the trial, but Jordan was a good kid” (88). Douglas notes that Ron Davis, Jordan Davis’s father adds, “none of our children deserve to be collateral damage,” as if their young Black bodies are in the middle of a war (89). But as they are, we move through instinct to look out for them. Douglas, in tears after viewing the press conference that day, called her son, who was in college at the time. Repeating the same words, she had spoken to him before. She said, “I am your mother, and like Trayvon and Jordan’s mother, I will defend you until my death. But, I don’t want to have to defend you in death. So, be safe because the world is not safe for a Black male body” (89). Even in death, even as victims of murder, the Black body is put on trial and made the object of violation and violence.

W.E.B. Du Bois writes about the death of his infant son. He pens, “all that day and all that night there sat an awful gladness in my heart--nay, blame me not if I see the world thus darkly through the veil--and my soul whisper ever to me saying, ‘Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bound, but free’” (Du Bois, The Souls 231). At risk of seeming remorseless, the words of Du Bois offers a powerful critique of white America (Yancy and Jones 237).

He suggests that there is a fate perhaps worse than the physical death of his son and death itself can function as an out, an escape, as an exit to an otherwise slow, painful, living death that is to be had within the bowels of America. Placed within the context of his critique of white supremacy, the death of Du Bois’s son functions as a blessing, as an avoidance of the inevitable process of dehumanization. (Yancy and Jones 237–38)

Metaphorically, dehumanization itself stands within a shadow of death. The American slavery that gave the Black body its persisting form also created an ethos which allowed for an existence which was “socially dead but biologically alive” (Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184). Even
during slavery, Black parents “wanted their children to have the best possible life they could have” (Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184). The authors continue, “accordingly, they knew that children must be taught to believe that they can succeed in their chosen life plan if they developed their abilities. And yet, they knew that their children must be aware of race and how racism can impact their life-chances” (184). Though legally not owning anything, not even their own children, there was an urge to cover over their children. Still, that need continues,

Nearly one hundred and fifty years after slavery, Black parents must still teach their children to believe in their own abilities, but at the same time must acknowledge that, in the United States, ability often is not enough. The specter of racism in the lived experience of Black children still presents problems for Black parents. This is and has always been the dilemma of Black parenting. The history of raising Black children in the United States has always presented Black parents with a moral dilemma. (Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184)

The goals of the talk are these: to minimize danger, and to strengthen the agency of our Black children. However, the dilemma to parents of Black children remains. To engage in the talk is to do so at the risk of reification of Blackness. If I acknowledge my Blackness as a symptom of, and a signal for incitement of racial violence, I engage in race-thinking (Hall, “Floating Signifier” 2; P. C. Taylor 67; Gordon, “Race Theory” 1) and stand to perpetuate the problem (Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184). If I reject the reality of race and hold firmly that race is a social construct, ephemeral, and untrue, I allow my imagination, and the imagination of my children, to dictate their actions and pursue their dreams unprotected and at the risk of meeting a hostile other for reasons that my child might not understand.

Many mothers are reconciled to offer the warning as Regina Sims Wright does in Our Black Sons Matter. She ends her talk in a love letter to her son like this:

As you can see CJ, there are no good answers for how to protect you. It is my intent as your mother to lay a foundation that will help to keep you safe. In the end, all we can do is surrender your protection to God and educate you about the reality of how the world may view you. You are warm and loving, but one day the world will fear you. You must
be warm and loving anyway. It will be up to them to make the right choices. . . (Sims Wright 166).

Black parents are in a painful position to take from a child her clean assumptions of possibility and freedom. Yet, some find *the talk* to be the clear and necessary course of action. For what other way can we keep the children well? Those who initiate *the talk* are aware of the socio-historic, lived experiences of the Black body and the Black body’s precarious relationship to socio-historical violence (Yancy and Jones 23; McCants Lewis 155–58; Sanders-Lawson and Lawson 184–86; Douglas 44–47). Because of the need for children to understand how they are seen in the world; parental figures choose to talk courageously to their children.

*The talk* manifests as a giving-over or a sharing of Black body memory. *The talk* is an act of phronesis, which is practical rhetoric, meant to instill knowledge and an understanding in our youth and those who will come after us. As identity emerges among others, *the talk* is a conscious discussion informing Black youth on the memory their bodies hold. For certain, a phenomenology of the body reveals that all things in the world are seen from the unique perspective and distinct situatedness of one's own body; the lived-body thus constitutes an irreducible standpoint for any natural experience. However, one’s own perspective accounts for only one of three dispositions of the existential body. As Yancey argues, the meaning of Blackness is not intrinsic to my natural pigment. Instead, Blackness is constructed under the white gaze. Blackness has become a value-laden “given,” object, cemented, untouched, unmediated by various discursive practices, history, time and context (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 19). *The talk*, then, emerges as an embodied ritual within the field of human communication.

**Conclusion**

This project is a manifestation of the need for my Black children to consider and know themselves as raced Black bodies. This orientation is gleaned from the objective view of the
other (namely white) body through history and includes whatever proclivity that epidermal logic (Fanon, *Black Skin* xv; Johnson, “Black Body” 606; Yancy, “Whiteness” 216) may entail. Was it not for the history of slavery in America, violence against Black bodies, and systemic racism, the current social reality might be different. However, in this moment of anti-Black racism and white terrorism against the Black body, undue harm continues to occur. For Black bodies, the corporeally sedimented narrative remains. When a mother like me is determined to corrupt her sons with the memory so haunting, she puts into language and transfers Black body memory to her sons.

The United States of America is socio-politically structured as a representative democracy, which theoretically includes all voices in the construction of the public sphere. The American Constitution states that any person, or group of people, is equal to another. “Yet, some groups of people within our society have been limited from achieving the standing that is available to others within the system—their voices are suppressed” (Arneson, *Communicative* 1). Groups that have met resistance by others who sought to limit their societal advancement include Black Americans (*Communicative* 1). Black body memory propelled by the talk represents a call of communicative engagement. During the talk, Blacks situate “themselves in society so that others would be exposed to their corporeal expression as well as their linguistic communication” (Arneson, *Communicative* 2). Moreover, Black body memory points to a phenomenology or narrative that the Black body comports. The presuppositions of the narrative paradigm dictate that common sense, or the “logic of good reasoning,” nonetheless rationality is determined according to morality built within the stories of one’s life (Fisher 1). As communicative beings, humans are born into narratives (MacIntyre 266–67). Black body memory is representative of a shared experience of the lived Black body.
Because of the social-historical narrative of the Black body, the racialized Black body maintains a disposition in a society where a legalized marginalization has had its impact. The threat of violence, oppression, and imprisonment surround us and tease us to snuff out the future for children who are Black. The experience is so common that a ritual has developed among those who have Black children. We teach our children that they are Black, and in doing so, disrupt their naive perception of themselves. For in order to appropriately respond to certain socio-historical challenges, they need to know how they might be perceived. From the talk, Black body memory is carried. The talk creates meaning in action because speaking is an “essential link between experience and being” (Arneson, Communicative 27). Moreover, meaning arises in lived experience, which is created, negotiated, and shared with others in embodied linguistic expressivity” (Arneson, Communicative 27). Such is the essence of Black body memory. The meaning of my body is given to my children, with whom I share a Black body, and I share the talk. “Each one of us is already a participant who lives with her narratives that have shaped tradition while also holding the possibility for future developments of self in society” (Arneson, Communicative 27). After all, the public domain is central to our understanding of the human condition.

We understand the public domain as a place of difference, contrasting opinions, and differing perspectives. In rejection of an erroneous commonplace assumption that the public domain defines its reality, “the public domain is a sphere for conversation and argument.’ Diversity in public domain matters. Our ability to enter and influence the public domain is central to our discovery of meaning in the human condition. “The public domain is the place of argument about practices that should guide us in a given historical moment. The public domain does not offer answers; rather, it is a conversational dwelling place for differences of opinion.”
(Arnett and Holba 180). Social identity emerges among others. Moreover, our private discourse and common senses are informed by the public sphere.

"This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away" (Butler xii). All bodies are subjected to the classifications as defined by the broad community and maintain a social vulnerability to one another. In fact, the body "implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch and to violence, and bodies put us at risk. . ." (Butler 26). Parents of Black children engaged in *the talk* acknowledge this truism. The Black body is a racialized, docile body in the public sphere (Foucault 136; Ahmed 156). Her embodied subjectivity determines her experiences throughout her life, and through her Blackness. History illustrates the meaning of the Black body. Her suffering has not yet ended.

"Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are not quite only our own" (Butler 26). Instead, there is a public dimension to our bodies--even the body from which we experience the world. "Constiuted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine" (26). From the subjective body we are, and we have, we experience the world and everything in it. The world that receives us remains objective, experiencing and defining the body in a way that we, ourselves, cannot. Though the self I see in the mirror is not the self they see, "I lay claim to my body as my own, if, in fact, I ever do" (26). It is within this exclusive paradigm from which we live and we remember. Parents who choose to share *the talk* are compelled to do so to minimize the risk of violence and death of our children. Their juxtaposition in the world calls for a communicative safeguard found in Black body memory, communicated in *the talk*. 
Epilogue

Within the two weeks of this writing, my son was pulled over for having an expired sticker on his license plate. It was after midnight. Although his vehicle was registered and in order, six officers in three police cars surrounded his car. He was alone.

As if to protect me from my worry and fear, my son waited several days before he told me. "Were you polite?" I asked, "Yes" was his answer. "Did you keep your hands where they could be seen," I asked, "Yes, mom," he responded. Did you ask permission to reach for your insurance card and registration?" Again, it was yes. But he was aggravated. "I know what to do when I'm stopped" he insisted. His physical response had become habitual and ingrained in his body memory. He had, therefore, a notion of "bodily point of view" (Casey, Remembering 173). The procedure had overtaken his recall. Ironically, my son no longer remembered that he had been taught those gestures by me during our discussion. They bore themselves into his body.
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