

The Practice of Philosophy: Truth-Telling, Vulnerability, and Risk

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To locate some of the personal and metaphilosophical lineaments that are linked, in one way or another, to my book *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly about Racism in America*, a little background is necessary. The practice of philosophy, for me, has always involved a form of suffering. As a young boy, perhaps about eleven years old, I was consumed with the reality that at some point in the future I would die. I knew implicitly that people died, but I had not given honest thought to the fact that *I will die*. I recall, with this shameless but profoundly serious attitude, confronting my mother: “I wish that I had never been born now that I know that I will, at some point, not be.” As I recall the moment, there was, on my part, a sense of deep anxiety and anger. I had not signed up for what felt like a meaningless and cruel existential arrangement, perhaps even a joke. You mean, I *really* have to die? My mother and sister, too? It made no sense. In retrospect, this had to be hard on my mother. After all, she gave birth to me only now to hear me wish that she hadn’t. Yet, this was an important moment for me.

It was one of those moments that, when looked at retrospectively, spoke to me of my philosophical proclivities. I had not formally encountered the field of philosophy until I was seventeen years old. In fact, I don’t recall having used the term. So, discovering that philosophers asked questions about the meaning of death, the existence of God, the meaning of life, the limits of human knowledge, the meaning of justice, and the nature of reality, I was hooked. Philosophy was what *I had to do*. And while philosophy as a site of wonder resonated with me, the affect of suffering had deeper meaning and deeper resonance. I would say that I was filled with a certain melancholy, a kind of sorrow. As a teenager, I found it hard to think about the existence of God without also thinking about, indeed suffering over, the fact that God’s existence was so hidden; this was God as *Deus Absconditus*. But why hidden? I wanted to know if God existed and I wanted to

know this with some level of certainty. Otherwise, I was left with a choice precisely predicated on uncertainty. Should I believe or not? That was the question. That question, being raised a Baptist, was, as William James would say, momentous. Yet, for me, that was the problem. Why would a loving God make it so hard to know? Feelings of abandonment, of being orphaned, have continued to haunt me to this day. And even as I refer to myself as a *hopeful* theist, one who hopes in the face of profound uncertainty and in the face of a daunting cosmic abyss and profound silence, I continue to carry the weight of what feels like a foundling, an orphan, aching to know its cosmic parent, as it were.

So, it is hard for me to do philosophy and not to suffer. The existential gravitas of the questions, the sense of personal responsibility, hit me hard. Pedagogically, this is what I want for my students. I want them to be hit hard with what it means to be, to exist. In fact, I want them to be surprised, startled, and dazed by the sheer fact *that* they are. Hence, when I teach, I bring that passion, that suffering into the classroom. Students have left my classes in silence after really engaging the fact that we will all die, that we are finite, and that we will become rotting corpses. It is my way of letting them know that what they do between birth and the grave is so incredibly important, that what they do today could be their last act, their last performance on the stage of life. “100 years from now none of us will be alive, *we will all be dead!*” Moans are heard throughout the classroom. Faces look a bit grim. It is as if I have unmasked something too early, something that they would rather not face. I see it as a relatively empty sociological fact being made painfully personal, existentially front and center. So, at the end of some of my classes, there is very little discussion. Whispers are heard along with the movement of chairs. My students exit with a weight that they had not carried upon entering my classroom that day. This, however, is what it means, for me, to practice philosophy, to be philosophical. It means to engage in truth-telling, vulnerability, and risk. So, for me, philosophy is about suffering. I don’t mean this in any morbid sense. Rather, I mean this in the sense that James Baldwin speaks of love. His conception of love is about removal, of rendering ourselves stripped of the masks that we wear, or the games that we play, to avoid the truths of life. It is about removing the masks that we fear that we cannot live without. He writes, “I use ‘love’ here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth.”¹

At the end of the day, then, I am not left weak and defeated, but far more transparent, though I’m sure that there is too much opacity, too many masks, to ever see through entirely. Yet, this is no reason for despair. I want my students to conceptualize their lives as a mission, one that is filled with truth-telling, vulnerability, and risk. To engage in truth-telling involves courageous speech, to practice vulnerability involves being open to be wounded, and to risk involves being in

danger. Baldwin writes, “To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger.”² By “danger,” Baldwin isn’t referring to being violent, irresponsible, or reckless. Rather, he is referring to the danger involved in acts of unmasking, of seeing ourselves as we are. While not acts of violence, there is a necessary violation, a violation of a form of problematic common sense that sustains forms of bad faith, denial, indifference, and ideological sycophancy. “All of us know,” according to Baldwin, “whether or not we are able to admit it, that mirrors can only lie, that death by drowning is all that awaits one there.”³

I refuse to allow my students to drown in the river of *Lēthē*, the river of oblivion or concealment. *Lēthē* is one of the rivers in the underworld of Hades. The word *Alētheia*, which means truth in the form of being unconcealed, which challenges and rejects oblivion or concealment, is important within the context of how I teach philosophy. My objective is to model for my students what it looks like *to be present* in the face of the suffering of others, of social injustice, of gratuitous violence, and not to hide their faces or to flee in desperation because they fear that they will see something about themselves that is ethically unpleasant or even revolting. So, in class it is hard to remain still as I teach. I must walk around. Teaching while in motion can be freeing. In fact, literally, movement challenges tunnel vision. And it is hard to deploy a discourse that isn’t harsh. Beautiful words lie in the face of so much suffering. So, through my pedagogy, I encourage my students to make themselves as sensorially present as possible and cognizant of the precarious nature of their embodiment when practicing philosophy. Sensuality is a word that has gotten a bad rap. Baldwin writes, “To be sensual, I think, is to respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be *present* in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread.”⁴

My article “Dear White America” was a letter of love, and it asked white America to be present, to engage in truth-telling, vulnerability, and risk. Indeed, it was a request to break bread together. The lesson was a hard one. It is one thing to suffer under the weight of deep existential questions for which there are no easy answers, but it is another to be a target for death. The response to “Dear White America” was clear. I was told to kill myself. I was told to leave for Africa. I was told that I would find myself on a cold slab. I was told that my mouth should be shut permanently. I was called a “nigger” hundreds of times. I was referred to by vile and racist stereotypes that I would not share with my mother. I was told that I was “a piece of shit,” and threatened with meat hooks and having my head knocked off my “motherfucking” shoulders. I was even told that I should be beheaded “ISIS style.” All of this by white people who refused to risk, who dared not to see themselves through the eyes of someone who refused to lie about himself and about them. This has become another layer of suffering for me. It is a form of suffering that takes its toll. I want to live. Yet, part of the crime is that many of

those white people who read “Dear White America” wanted me silenced, ostracized, punished, even dead.

No one told me that practicing philosophy would demand so much. I knew that Socrates drank the hemlock, but I don’t want any part of white racist violence cutting my life short. Yet, truth-telling is necessary. And therein lies the paradox. I must engage in acts of truth-telling; *we* must tell the truth. So, it is with great humility and honor that a critical cadre of philosophers have helped, in the pages of *Philosophy Today*, to bear the weight of truth-telling, vulnerability, and risk. Engaging *Backlash: What Happens When We Talk Honestly about Racism in America* is to position oneself in the muck and mire of twenty-first century racism. The book is daunting, alarming, and raw. Its telos is to unconceal.

Alison Bailey’s “Newark Lessons”⁵ reflects “Dear White America” and, by extension, *Backlash*, back to me with self-disclosure and courage. It is important and not unreasonable to be skeptical of white courage, especially when that courage is demonstrated on behalf of Black people and people of color. It is so easy for white people to see themselves as the white “savior”-figures of Black people and people of color; it is easy to slip into *doing* whiteness as one attempts to *undo* or challenge whiteness. The white racist myth of “manifest destiny” can subtly render white good intentions toxic. Historically, I know that white feats of soteriological intent have involved re-inscriptions of white power and privilege, along with the death of Black people and people of color. Bailey, however, clearly recognizes what she calls “the false promise of whiteness.”⁶ It is a promise that is inextricably linked to the relational destruction of Black people and people of color.

In her review essay, Bailey’s invitational salutation, “Dear George,” not only is couched within the context of noting the weight of a form of far-right xenophobia and white neo-fascist populism extant within the US, but opens with her daring to engage in a process of embodied unsuturing. It is an opening that is unafraid to admit the weight of the gift that I offered white America. The letter is personal, honest, and humble. The process of what I have called unsuturing isn’t easy. As the word suggests, one becomes wounded, touches the wound, and lingers and tarries with the wound. What is clear to me is that Bailey is prepared to tarry; indeed, she tarries.

Bailey also recognizes, and politically and philosophically appreciates, what I see as a deeper relational and corporeal ontology without edges, a social ontology that implicates the two of us within a relational dynamic of touching, though one that privileges her racially. As a site of institutional power, historically perpetuated discursive and nondiscursive forces, acts of interpellation, and habituated modes of being, whiteness is a constituted social ontology, a racial integument or skin that profoundly and adversely touches the lives of those deemed the “wretched of the earth.” In short, Bailey’s white body is always already haptic vis-à-vis my Black body. White racism then is a matter of being-in-the-world as embodied as

white, where white embodiment itself, on this score, constitutes a relational social vector that marks and impacts Black bodies and bodies of color within quotidian social spaces. Such a contiguous reality raises the issue of white racism beyond the doxastic (the ideological, prejudicial). Bailey also powerfully states, "My body is white, but whiteness is also *in* my body."⁷ I agree with Bailey that this is a hard truth. In fact, she calls it "the hardest truth of all."⁸ It is the hardest because it suggests that whiteness is profoundly insidious; it hides and rationalizes. To use a term indicative of disgust, Bailey is aware that white people's *vomit*, consisting of their internal lies, is projected onto Black bodies and bodies of color only to have that projection denied by white people. Hence, Black bodies and bodies of color are said "to stink" in virtue of their constitutionality, not because of the actions of white people.

Bailey critically and insightfully engages the concept of white fear, which is another form of projection. White fear manifests itself through a white embodied mode of traversing space; white fear shapes the direction in which white bodies move, places where they refuse to go, their proxemic positioning, desires that they may or may not express, and love that they may or may not possess. Through a moving personal narrative about being a little white girl in West Orange, New Jersey and watching Newark burn, Bailey communicates *to me* the vulnerability of a young white girl who learns how to be white; one who learns to fear Black people. That short genealogy, that performance of giving an account of herself, that courage to dig deep, is what I ask of white people. Bailey learned this fear because, as the anti-Black logic goes, Black people burned down their own neighborhoods; they must be feared. This unsuturing on the part of Bailey is what "Dear White America" was asking. This is what *Backlash* is asking where I discuss the importance of risking the white self and accepting the gift.

Bailey goes on to deepen that risk when she shares how she came to internalize not only what it meant to fear "the Negroes" in Newark, but how it metastasized. Deploying the *clicking* sounds that I have written about elsewhere,⁹ where white people lock their car doors when they catch a glimpse of me walking past their cars (*click, click, click*), Bailey talks about learning the importance of *clicking* down the car door locks when driving through Newark. These early learned white habitual physical gestures, the simple movement of an index finger, accompanied by *clicking* sounds, grew out of a form of "Negrophobia" that leaves a trace long after in one's unconscious and *in* one's body. Pulling from the work of Lillian Smith, Bailey writes, "A deeply tragic sadness occurs when the Newark lessons are triggered by friends, colleagues, and neighbors. I feel their pull when I see a dark face at my front door one evening and my body jumps. It's my neighbor with some mail. He notices my body jump. I notice that he notices. We are doing the dance that cripples the human spirit. It's not good for either of us."¹⁰ That is the power of white vigilance, of being watchful. Bailey knows that vigilance is necessary on the

part of white people to begin to challenge the false forms of life that sustain their identities, their modes of being, their fears. Yet, there is an important difference to be noted. While I agree with Bailey that this relational dynamic isn't good for either one of us, at least, historically, she would come out of that encounter alive. White American history is filled with gruesome stories of white male bloodlust vis-à-vis Black men who were accused falsely of catcalling, eyeballing, or raping a white woman. Not too long ago, I would have been lynched had I made Bailey, as a white woman, jump. Looking at her for too long would have entailed my lynching, possible castration, and my body being burned to death. All of this because she jumped or was startled. That is a fate for which she would not suffer.

In the scenario above, there is the differential phenomenological return of the two bodies. Her body is returned as one to be "protected," one "justifiably" in fear of the Black body at the door carrying the mail. My Black body, however, is returned as the feared "Black object," "the beast," "the criminal," "the Nigger," "the hypersexual." This discursively violent return disrupts my bodily familiarity, forcing my body into the foreground. In short, I would undergo a phenomenological process of corporeal disorientation. The power of the white gaze is felt, thus producing the feeling of embodied malediction. I am forced to ask myself: Where is this body that she so fears? Where is *my body*? That is an act of violence and destabilization that I should not have to feel or ask. Bailey understands the history of such white fear and the ways in which it hardens the white body, habituates its racist movements, and terrorizes Black bodies. She says succinctly, "White supremacy is terrorism."¹¹ And it is that terrorism that is predicated upon white fear, a fear that white people created and then in terms of which they elide the truth about its origin. Think here of the fear on the part of white male Theodore Wafer, who shot and killed nineteen-year-old Black female Renisha McBride in 2013 when she knocked loudly on Wafer's door because she was lost and needed help. McBride was not the problem; Wafer's white fear was the problem.

Bailey is correct that there is a price to be paid by white people. White fear does not keep us safe, as she writes, it "erodes our humanity."¹² And as Baldwin notes, "White people cannot, in the generality, be taken as models for how to live."¹³ Yet, here we are, inextricably tied, touching within the matrix of a social ontology of no edges. The fact of the matter is that we rise and we fall together. Baldwin knew this to be true: "The price of the liberation of the white people is the liberation of the [Black people]."¹⁴ In our contemporary moment, white people continue to benefit from white power and privilege; and even poor whites continue to benefit from psychological wages and embodied presumptions of "innocence" as they walk through the world. And if their stomachs are empty, clarion calls of "making American great again" will provide them with sustenance. I walk with a suit and tie and I'm still denied my innocence. You see, my request that white people accept my letter of love came from a place of racial suffering, disempowerment,

and a history of white terrorism against people who look like me. So, my act of asking, the entreaty, spoke from a location within the racial hierarchy where I'm deemed disposable.

Through a powerful distinction, Bailey writes, "I realize that your request places an unequal burden on each of us: speaking truth about whiteness *to* power comes at an exponentially greater cost than speaking truth about whiteness *from* power."¹⁵ This is one reason why self-ascribed white supremacists would more than likely label Bailey "a Nigger lover." Yet, I would definitely be called *the Nigger*, pure and simple. The evidence is there. *Backlash* tells the story about "me" through the nasty words of white people and does so unabashedly. Bailey received the letter and is willing to tarry with its weight, its discomfort, and its suspicion of (but hope for) white people. And it is there that I welcome tarrying together, a place where whiteness gets to be in crisis, where it falls apart.¹⁶

Shannon Sullivan's "Raced and Gendered Scripts in Public Backlash against Critical Philosophers of Race"¹⁷ captures at the very beginning the affective intensity of *Backlash*. Sullivan is correct that it is not an easy book to read. It was not an easy book to write! There was much delay even to get started on it; I went over the specified deadline for its completion. My sense is that I was too close to the text, too close to the weight of the white vitriol, though I believe that much of this was unconscious. However, once I sat with calm determination, I wrote the manuscript until it was finished, which took just a little over two months. And in the writing, came catharsis. The difficulty of writing *Backlash* may have been tied to earlier embodied states of feeling: Mood swings. Irritability. Trepidation. Disgust. Anger. Nausea.

Sullivan bears witness to my point about how words do indeed *impact* the body. After being discursively assaulted so many times, especially when it came to the deployment of the term "Nigger," and having my life threatened, the body wears down. I was told not to listen, but I felt the need to, to hear what white America thought *of me*. Of course, it was never simply about me, but about Black people. I was resisting a larger and historically grounded white racist imago of the Black body. However, I became the specific target of all of that white rage, white fear, white hatred, white hysteria, white vomit. Anger played an important part in keeping me grounded, though none of that anger was communicated to the readers of "Dear White America." Yet, being the target of so much white vitriol generated, for me, a depth of feeling, of profound sadness, and grief for Black people who faced such white racist hatred on a daily basis. The difference, of course, is that Black people actually faced that hatred-in-the-flesh vis-à-vis white faces, flushed deep red, clenched fists, and mouths filled with spit. And they were dared to speak a word in return. My body shakes when I think of the inviolability, though precarious nature, of my body.

We are, though some of us don't really get this, very fragile. Our flesh can be easily damaged, can be easily bruised, and easily destroyed. And it is this flesh that is extended, braided, through social actions, social institutions, social history, social discourse, and nonhuman actants. You would think that we would be more careful with each other, expressively gentle in the light of our collective fragility. You would think that we would act with a form of loving kindness that is aware and respectful of our shared corporeal entanglement. "Dear White America" was a letter of love. *Backlash* is a continuation of that love. Yet, the flesh-mongers, with their fantasies of meat hooks, still write to me. They want to silence me. As Sullivan points out, "Yancy was burned by the corrosive crap slung at him, and the injuries inflicted upon him were intentional."¹⁸ It is during times such as these that I ask Baldwin's question: "Do I really *want* to be integrated into a burning house?"¹⁹

Sullivan raises a very important *gendered* issue regarding the ways in which the two of us, I a Black man and she a white woman, are differentially attacked by white readers of our work within the area of critical philosophy of race. She explicitly speaks to the point that Bailey raises with regard to my speaking truth about whiteness *to* power as opposed to speaking truth about whiteness *from* power. Sullivan occupies the latter position. Then again, perhaps she is somewhere in between, speaking *to power* while speaking *from power*. That, for me, is why white allyship must involve a continuous process of unsuturing. As white people courageously speak truth to power regarding whiteness, to their own whiteness, they also speak from the power of whiteness, from their own whiteness. There is no simple exit from this complication. However, there are essential fissures within the structure of whiteness to be created by white people. That is part of the important work that Sullivan is doing.

The gendered difference in terms of racist modes of attack suggested above is one that Sullivan brings into focus through the insights of Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Sullivan writes, "The angry/violent/dangerous Black man supposedly is a threat to the innocent/naïve/pure white woman, who in turn needs to be protected/corrected by white men, thereby 'justifying' white (male) terror waged against Black men." She raises an important point, especially in light of some of the twisted responses sent to me in response to "Dear White America." For example, some responses took the form of white male phallic fantasies of white women performing fellatio on me or just having sex with me. The claim was that I wrote "Dear White America" for the purpose of deceiving "simple-minded" white women to engage with me in acts of sexual intimacy. Sullivan importantly marks a racialized gendered divide, which is buttressed by white supremacist fantasies, in order to call out white supremacy and to empower white women to unsuture the ties that bind them to white supremacy. She notes, and I think correctly, that the responses sent to me were unadulterated forms of white terror. In contrast, she says that the comments that get sent to her are mean, but never threatening. She writes, "In-

stead I am criticized for being gullible, duped, and/or an idiot, and the comments often aim to correct me with a condescending lesson about white people's 'real' interests that I somehow am too simple-minded or too clueless to understand."²⁰ Sullivan also notes that she has received responses that simply included "facts" about Black people or other racialized groups. The aim here suggests that if only she were "enlightened" she would be proud of being a white woman. So, as the white woman, Sullivan lacks intelligence; as the Black man, however, I am the Black terror out "to plunder," sexually, white women.

Sullivan suggests that there were relatively few responses that referred to me as "dumb" or an "idiot," ways that she is characterized as a white woman in response to the work that she does in critical philosophy of race, although she does mention that animal imagery, specifically regarding monkeys and baboons, and the frequent use of the "N" word, was deployed to describe me. She argues that all of the nasty responses sent to me were meant to do more than insult me. I agree. However, I argue that it is such simian discourse that precisely marks the line of incommensurability between Black bodies and the capacity to reason. So, while it is true that she has not received white terroristic threats, I received both white terroristic threats and had my capacity to reason called into question through being described as a "sub-person" or as "infrahuman." Indeed, the term "Nigger" also signifies my "sub-humanity," my "congenital inferiority," and my "inborn stupidity."

Sullivan's larger point, which I think is incredibly important, is that white women need to become much more cognizant of the ways in which white men attempt to keep us (black men and white women) within our proverbial places. Sullivan sees this as a larger pattern to be critically engaged. Like Bailey, she critiques the ways in which white women's fear functions. It is this learned white fear by white women that has implicated them in the terrorization of Black males. In this context, white terrorism, as Sullivan notes, has been committed in their name. She insightfully writes, "Rather than play the childlike role of being scared (e.g., of Black men encountered on an elevator or approaching on a sidewalk), white women need to grow up and realize that their racialized fear makes them an active tool of white terrorism."²¹ I wonder, though, to what extent white women have not been "duped" by an otherwise paternalistic white male supremacy, but rather have been *willing participants* who embraced their power precisely as white women. Sullivan's project is essential as it stresses the importance of "paying intersectional attention to the gendered (and other/related) dynamics of that criticism"²² directed at those of us who engage in both public scholarship and critical philosophy of race. I would also argue that it is imperative to hear from Black women and women of color to see how their experiences differ from both Black men and white women. Moreover, I would also suggest that we explore the ways in which white women, even those who do critical philosophy of race,

perpetuate fear of Black women and women of color and the ways in which white women also depict Black women and women of color as “inferiors” in need of white women’s intellectual care or epistemic discernment.

Sullivan interprets *Backlash* as an important interruption of part of the racist historical pattern that stereotypes Black males as “violent.” As she notes, *Backlash* “interrupts this pattern in a different way: by emphasizing love, mutual vulnerability, and understanding.”²³ Her argument is that *Backlash* is, like the letter “Dear White America,” a gift, one that is a gift of love and that calls for mutual wounding and mutual trust. As such, then, *Backlash* functions as a textual entreaty, an illocutionary gesture that belies white racist assumptions of Black men as “uncaring,” “cold,” and “brutal.”

Sullivan interprets *Backlash* as a powerful counter-narrative to the white supremacist view that Black men are violent, angry, and unruly. Given the violent anti-Black racist responses that I actually received, one can only wonder what sort of responses I would have received had I shown real anger and righteous indignation. Sullivan is correct about the historically sedimented false pattern of stereotyping Black men as angry, uncontrollable brutes. After I had come to the conclusion of a talk on race that I had given years ago, a white man’s hand went up immediately, animated with a sense of what I thought to be appreciation. Literally, his first words were, “I see an angry Black professor!” Well, I suspect that he didn’t like the fact that I was talking about how Black bodies are stereotyped by white gazes. In fact, his interpellation of me as an “angry Black professor!” justified my point about the distortive dimensions of white gazes. By “angry Black professor!” he didn’t mean that I justifiably showed passion given the multiple ways in which Black bodies are the targets of white assumptions and habitual and rigid embodied perceptions. From his perspective, my talk was motivated solely by irrational and unnecessary anger. I seem to be stuck in an insufferable bind. On one white supremacist website a white male implied that I was a “wuss” (a term I don’t use) for calling out my sexism in “Dear White America.” Calling out my sexism was my way of trying to get white readers to show their vulnerability regarding their racism. I thought that if I was honest, then perhaps white readers would reflect my honesty and talk courageously about their racism. However, in this case, the white male reversed the racist stereotype of the Black male as “hypersexual, superstud” by saying that I was “weak” and “ineffectual.” What is intriguing, though, is that in doing so he was, in his own imaginary, able to occupy the position of a “real man,” a *real white man* who would never publicly call out his sexism. In a peculiar way, though playing on the racist stereotype, he became “Blacker” than me. So, I can neither speak truth to whiteness without being reduced to an “angry Black professor!” nor can I be honest about my sexism (really our collective male sexism) without belying my “naturally” voracious Black male sexual virility and thereby being reduced to a “wuss.”

Toward the end of her reflections, Sullivan draws a very important distinction. She argues that while it is true that there was no show of “Black male aggression” or “danger” in *Backlash* or in “Dear White America,” my work “is ontologically dangerous by threatening to upend white people’s sense of self.”²⁴ I agree. Baldwin writes that “the danger, in the minds of most white Americans, is the loss of their identities.”²⁵ Baldwin, in short, is also offering something that is *ontologically* dangerous, which involves an overturn of white identity as we know it. I would argue that *Backlash* is *not* an invitation to white people to enter “an established [social] ontology,”²⁶ to use Judith Butler’s phrase. Rather, *Backlash* proposes “an insurrection at the level of [social] ontology,” it proposes a critical engagement of whiteness that encourages white people to dwell within embodied precarious spaces of vulnerability, of critically reorienting their white modes of being. In short, *Backlash* asks that white people seek to be radically otherwise than they are, through the gift of the Black gaze. That, indeed, is an ontologically dangerous proposal, especially as it will involve the process of being wounded, of suffering. There is nothing masochistic about the process; no space for self-flagellation. It’s about growth, daring, and being, though counterintuitive, and unsafe. It requires a form of suffering that results from an act of unflinching vigilance vis-à-vis one’s own toxicity. *Backlash* and “Dear White America” function as scaffolds to help white people see beyond aspects of their white opacity. Baldwin writes, “And if the word *integration* means anything, this is what it means: that we, with love, shall force our [white] brothers [and white sisters] to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it.”²⁷ Baldwin also writes, “But people who cannot suffer can never grow up, can never discover who they are.”²⁸ So, yes, what *Backlash* asks for is ontologically dangerous and epistemologically perilous; it is a risk worth the taking.

Eduardo Mendieta’s “Habits of the Racist Self: On George Yancy,”²⁹ insightfully locates *Backlash* squarely within the inverse of the important ontologically dangerous space that Sullivan identifies. Before I speak to that, though, a word about Mendieta’s magical realist play. He opens his response with a definition of “Yancy” that defines my work, my philosophical efforts at building a collective future, a futurity that is generative of an interlocking and mutually open future for us all. By extension, of course, Mendieta is interpreting *Backlash* through that reference to the future. In a personal message, he wrote, “As I was reading your book, I kept notes, and one of them said: polyglot of futurity . . . you invite us to construct different futures, futures in which our children will be able to construct their own futures, together, and based on their promise and dignity and not on their exclusion and branding.”³⁰ In his magical realist epigraph, he also says that “some works are apocryphal.” I am honored for this, especially as he interprets this to mean that some works are just too radical to be accepted or tolerated. There are times when being tolerated may mean that one’s voice has been consumed,

digested, and excreted without leaving any trace of transformation. And while I want white readers to be transformed by my writing, yet, as strange as it may seem, it is an important indicator when the addressee of one's critique fails to stomach the content and form³¹ of that critique, of that bit of truth-telling. In the case of "Dear White America" and *Backlash*, I must have done something right.

Mendieta proceeds to meditate on the toxicity of white suturing, where suturing resists the ontologically dangerous space that Sullivan marks. He writes, "Racism is the sclerosis of sociality, a suturing (to use Yancy's expression) of our existence in common, one that aims to foreclose who gets to inherit our past and share in our future. Racism is a circumscription of the 'we' that expels some, while embracing others."³² Within the context of whiteness, there is indeed what I see as a structural sclerosis, an abnormal hardening of vicious ideological positions, lockstep forms of embodied comportment, and rigid affective attitudes. One way that I conceptualize what I've called un-suturing vis-à-vis whiteness involves fissuring those socially constructed binds that divide us. Within this context, unsuturing is a deep corporeal attempt to undo the binds that tie, the binds that legitimate artificial and perfunctory distinctions between a "superior them" versus an "inferior us." While such a distinction can be critically engaged across economic, ethnic, religious, gendered, sexual orientation, and geopolitical lines, I'll tarry here within the space of the racial, especially where whiteness constitutes the ridged "we" and where the US is facing a profound antidemocratic moral crisis as it is unabashedly driven by a poisonous form of neofascism, white nativism, and xenophobia at the "highest" office in the land. As Mendieta states, Trump is "a grotesque joke of the worst excesses of both sexism and racism." Given Trump's emergence to power, it is clear to me that the stringency of whiteness is both "recuperative" and recursive.

Based upon the white vitriol literally mailed to me, it has become clearer to me that whiteness is a hardened binary structure, one that is normative, hierarchical, and parasitic. Whiteness is normative as it assigns values: I am the "Nigger." It is hierarchical: I am the "wretched of the earth," the "sub-person," the "ersatz." And it is the parasitic: The Black body (my Black body) is the "host" upon which the white body (the white body politic) feeds. Whiteness gains its historical power, hegemony, and privilege through the denigration of Black people and people of color. It is through a process of negation that whiteness defines itself, which, on my reading, suggests that at the very heart of whiteness is a dimension of vacuity, emptiness. So, therein lies a biopolitical paradox: the simultaneous need for the "Nigger" and yet the extrusion of the Black body from the space of the living, where whiteness constitutes the "sanctity" of life.

Consistent with my understanding of whiteness as a binary structure, Mendieta writes, "Racism is thus also an ordering of the social, one that creates scales of privileges and burdens, such that a few share in the benefits, while a

large group shoulder the burden of the ‘we.’” Mendieta’s understanding of racism forms the backdrop of his critical meditation that insightfully takes the reader through his conceptualization of institutions, bodies, futurity, and dignity, each of which mines and expands upon important aspects of *Backlash*. An institution, which etymologically suggests “to cause to stand,” has the function of undergirding, perpetuating, and normalizing various performances. Institutions are, as Mendieta writes, “ways in which a certain form of life extends itself across time and space.”³³ And this temporal and spatial movement should, ideally, be open, allowing for a collective “we” that refuses the manifestation of a single and exclusive “we.” Mendieta writes that “No ‘we’ can inoculate itself against its own future redefinition.”³⁴ What is clear, though, is that the dynamic possibilities inherent within an inclusive and inviting demos is currently being truncated under a form of white racist leadership that is in fact attempting to “inoculate itself.” This is why it is important that institutions are conceived and treated as embodied porous structures capable of being unsutured; indeed, better yet, as constantly unsuturing processes that are inviting and generative of fecundity. The reification of institutions in the name of hatred has no place here. Mendieta writes, “Racism distorts our social imaginary so that we perpetuate the suturing that closes in some, while leaving out others from the ‘we.’”³⁵

Mendieta’s explication of the phenomenologically engaging presuppositions embedded within my work on the *lived* Black body is very insightful and rich. He writes, “Every human body is always already an *inter-body*.”³⁶ This captures my understanding of an ontology of no edges. Hence, white bodies that move with ease within socially constructed spaces that were meant for them impact my Black body in problematic ways. On this reading, there are no “innocent” white bodies as such bodies are always already haptic, impacting my Black body within the most mundane social spaces, shopping, walking across campus. Such spaces are filled with white normativity, white normative assumptions, forces, and discourses, that provide important social, ontological, institutional, and discursive affordances to those white bodies. In *Backlash*, I theorize what it means to be mutually embodied (or *enfleshed*) within the context of a white semiotic world where surfaces and edges seem only to matter. Within such a world, Black bodies (Black flesh) suffer, they are denigrated and fixed temporally as “a problem.” Mendieta asks, what does it mean to be enfleshed as Black “in the U.S. if not precisely to be the locus of an unassailable sovereign privilege to kill, to maim, to injure, to violate, to denigrate, to expropriate?”³⁷ In fact, I would argue that to be Black in the US feels like being placed within the jaws of death in virtue of being defined metaphysically as a problem, as a disposable *thing*. To treat someone as a *thing*, however, is precisely to attempt to denude a person of their humanity, that interior sense of being an existential project, always already on the move toward an open future. “To be human,” as Mendieta writes, “means to be-with co-temporalizing.”³⁸ As a

thing, though, there is no “co-,” no together, no mutually cooperative projection for the future.

The logics of white manifest destiny and white paternalism pervade such an anti-Black ontology. Hannah Arendt’s notion of natality, which Mendieta draws from, is belied by a white philosophical anthropology where Black people are always already assigned to the domain of nonbeing or always on the verge of not being. So, even when they are physically not, perhaps caused by a bullet shot from the gun of a white police officer or a proxy of the state (as in the case of George Zimmerman, the killer, who tragically shot and killed unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012), there’s a species of Black nonbeing prior to that physical not- or nonbeing. This is what William David Hart calls a “post-mortem event.”³⁹ Insightfully pulling from Kant’s categorical imperative and Adorno, Mendieta writes, “Adorno, in the shadow of Auschwitz, reformulated the categorical imperative thusly: act in such a way that Auschwitz will not happen, ever again.”⁴⁰ My rejoinder to Adorno is that we also act in such a way that the traumas and deaths of the middle passage never happen again, that the deaths of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin, twelve-year-old Tamir Rice, twenty-eight-year-old Sandra Bland, and three-year-old Syrian Alan Kurdi *never* happen again. If we are to follow Adorno’s myopic logic, then any and all tragic deaths of human beings caused by human brutality and senseless killing make all poetry barbaric. Then again, for many of us, poetry, song, and dance constitute the *sine qua non* of our collective articulation of our pain, our collective sanity, our collective soul-healing.

Part of what it means to live with dignity is to be treated as a human being, where one’s life is given value *a priori*. Indeed, dignity, as Mendieta argues, is a form of life that ought to be mutually sustained. Consistent with my conceptualization of an ethics of no edges, an assault on your dignity is an assault on mine. This is one reason why I dared to share the white racist vitriol directed toward me, its nastiness and appalling sickness. I wanted the reader to share that space where the words cut at the heart my dignity. Mendieta acutely picks up on this where he mentions what he refers to as the “striking aspect of Yancy’s book.”⁴¹ Sharing the white racist vitriol verbatim was my way of exposing both the violent messages sent to me and exposing readers of *Backlash* to those violent messages. Witnesses are essential as we endure pain and suffering, especially the pain and suffering that results from gratuitous white supremacy. So, the writing process itself, the structure of the text, demands unsuturing as a form of exposure. The writing takes seriously our social ontological touching, a touching that occurs beyond fictive edges. Mendieta understands what is at stake when he writes, “Reading Yancy demands that we allow ourselves to be exposed to the filthy language of white racist America, and to that extent to be exposed to a form of denigration, a form of symbolic and corporeal harm.”⁴² Through mutual exposure to our shared

and yet differential (non-hierarchical) forms of pain, we can, possibly, create a community composed of a non-excluding “we.”

Yet, this sense of “we,” for me, is what is damn near impossible to achieve within a country founded upon and that continues to perpetuate white supremacy. Yet, I continue to hope. It is not a hope, however, based upon white promises, white ethical collective behavior, or white political aspirations, but one based upon the social and existential historical example of Black people who refused and continue to refuse to be reduced to the status of the “Nigger,” who insisted upon loving themselves even as they were believed incapable of doing so. Baldwin writes, “But in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least that one can demand.”⁴³ Baldwin undergirds this aspirational demand—one that finds hope embedded within the impossible, which further makes the impossible possible—by reminding us that “American Negro history in particular . . . testifies to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible.”⁴⁴

Clevis Headley’s “Reading George Yancy’s *Backlash*: Afro-pessimism and the Conundrums of Liberalism”⁴⁵ concludes, “Despite the threats of nonbeing directed towards Black existence, Yancy represents the tradition of Black existential improvisation, the courage to affirm being.”⁴⁶ It is this affirmation that forms the fulcrum around which we, as Black people in North America, persist in the face of vile white supremacy, that we continue *to be* even as we are driven to face forces of interpellation and violence that render us existentially insignificant and ontologically nugatory. Headley’s treatment of *Backlash* involves a wide-ranging and engaging exposition. He interprets the text through both the lens of detailed precision and synoptic insight. Indeed, Headley draws deep and significant philosophical parallels between my work and other conceptual paradigms (like Afro-pessimism), and he exhumes many stated and unstated assumptions regarding *Backlash* in particular, and my work on existential phenomenology, embodiment, and Black *Erlebnis*, more generally. With conceptual verve, and with a Bakhtinian touch of making my words *his own*, Headley helps me to rethink the broader implications of *Backlash*. Given the depth and breadth of his analysis, there is the temptation to allow it to stand unencumbered by my remarks.

Headley locates my writing within the context of what it means to be a philosopher embodied as Black. After all, well into the twenty-first century, Black intelligence is still denied. Think here of Trump’s asinine and racist comments regarding Rep. Maxine Waters’s intelligence. At a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, Trump said, “And Maxine Waters, a very low IQ individual. Did you ever see her?”⁴⁷ Given the history of the denial of Black intelligence, Trump’s racism isn’t new; it is part and parcel of a vicious white supremacist imaginary that violently attacks Black cognitive and intellectual integrity. Within the context of philosophy, which has maintained its hegemonic whiteness within the academy, Headley is all too aware of the forms of violence and injustice that deny Black bodies the complexity

of their epistemic integrity. As Black philosophers, some of us know what it is like to walk into our classrooms at predominantly white institutions and feel the thickness of doubt in the air: “Is this *really* the professor for this course?” For women of color, the stench of doubt about one’s philosophical competence is compounded. Headley picks up on “the performative contradiction of conjoining ‘nigger’ and philosophy.”⁴⁸ Part of my aim in conjoining those two terms is to articulate not only the performative contradiction, but to lay bare the *lived* contradiction. I was after, as Headley is aware, the phenomenology of that contradiction: what it means (the *lived* experience of it) to move through an anti-Black social world as a philosopher (and to practice philosophy) and have that identity called into question through my interpellation as a “Nigger.” I want to expose what it means affectively for me to have my identity as a philosopher racially circumscribed, what it means for white people to mark consciously and unconsciously my intellectual performance as “fake,” as an act of prestidigitation.

On this score, one becomes a walking, talking monstrosity. It is a teratological weight that white philosophers qua white don’t experience. Headley writes, “Whites live in a world structured in accordance with the basic configuration of their existence, yet they stubbornly claim not to see how whiteness benefits them; indeed, they do not even see themselves as white but as *individuals qua individuals*.”⁴⁹ Headley also discerns the *racialization* of the threats directed toward me. For example, white prominent public intellectuals and philosophers that I spoke with have been attacked for truth-telling, but they were not attacked in terms of an historically and hegemonic *racist* discourse that dehumanizes them based upon their *racialized* identity. To avoid that form of racialized violence is an indicator of white privilege; privilege that allows them to move through the world as “atomic” and as persons as such.

Headley delineates my “critique of liberalism and its addiction to abstract individualism”⁵⁰ through a careful analysis of my understanding not just of what I call an ontology of no edges and an ethics of no edges, but he astutely links these two points to my understanding of the white subject as sutured. Hence, he characterizes my work as attempting to “recapture the importance of the relationality of the self.”⁵¹ He brilliantly explains it this way, “Sociality is not a whole composed of an arbitrary collection of discrete selves. Rather, sociality is a network of subjects connected through clusters of entangled relationships.”⁵² Along with the above, he understands the ways in which these conceptual moves are integral to an understanding of white racism as a dynamic relational process of intercorporeal touching. To come to understand that dynamic form of social ontology and to live under the weight of its meaning, white people must undergo a kind of death. Headley understands this process of death as a Baldwinian site of danger, of being called upon to be something new. Headley writes, “Yancy employs a sense of death as metaphorically grafted on psychological death, or at

least the kind of death that serves as the possibility for the coming into being of the new, the different, the other, etc.”⁵³ Headley’s use of the phrase “coming into being of the new” is indicative of a *process* and the pain that gives rise to the new, the other than.

Headley is also aware of a very significant part of the structure of *Backlash*, which he locates as the candidness of my writing. Such candidness is not simply about communicating the actual content of vile racist language used against me. Of course, though, the magnitude of candidness and the actual grotesqueness and nastiness of the discursive content written to me or about me or spoken to me are unusual to find within a philosophy text. Headley identifies what I see as a very significant metaphilosophical turn unique to what I aim to do, what I want words to do when I write philosophically. I transform *logos* (the word) into *sarx* (flesh). I construct the words on the page to communicate the messiness of the world, to reflect, or even embody, that enfleshed chaos that we live as embodied beings. I am driven to find a form of writing that unmoors philosophical prose, especially its form and content, from cold abstraction and a philosophical lingua franca that obfuscates the *shitty* reality of our everyday existence, one surrounded by so much social, political, interpersonal, and existential putrefaction.

Backlash is more than an account of white racism. I position the text, through the writing itself, as an exemplification of what philosophy doesn’t often look like. So, I issue an implicit charge to philosophers to attempt to write with a different philosophical form, a form that is true to our messiness, our pain and suffering. Like Samuel Beckett, I desire “to find a form that accommodates the mess.” Beckett continues, “this is the task of the artist now.”⁵⁴ Is this not the task of the philosopher now, which involves the task of accommodating the mess of global suffering, the reality of unarmed Black bodies killed in the streets of North America by the state, the collective killing of the earth, the indifference that we show toward refugees and migrants, the failure and refusal to end the sexual trafficking of women and children, the failure and refusal to end world hunger, the failure and refusal to be human in the face of so much inhumanity? Headley writes, “Yancy’s writing is ‘raw,’ in that it is not saturated with unnecessary theoretical processing and the kind of bland stylistic shading that would delude its rich existential core.”⁵⁵ It is the intense existential core of who we are, especially in all of our tragedy and moral ineptitude, that I refuse to sidestep philosophically.

In his detailed exegesis of *Backlash*, Headley perceptively draws out the conceptual family resemblance between Afro-pessimism and what I argue in *Backlash*. And while I have not self-ascribed as an Afro-pessimist, the shared conceptual trajectory is unmistakable. I’m indebted to Headley’s philosophical labor. Headley also critically offers an apologia on my behalf in relationship to those readers who actually (or who may potentially) misconstrue and distort my position in *Backlash*. I would argue that Headley offers the most insightful

analysis of the conceptual interdependency of my multifocal analysis in *Backlash*. And for this, I am grateful.

I would argue that my form of writing itself is linked to my Afro-pessimist philosophical leanings that Headley vividly delineates. To write out of a zone of nonbeing, one's writing style, its content and form, has to reflect the lived meaning of that zone. Of course, the act of writing is itself an act of resistance, of fighting against one's reduction to that zone or confinement within that zone.

In *Backlash*, as Headley realizes, I argue that the Black body within the grammar of white supremacy is constituted as the site of *the* "Nigger." I didn't create that term, but it was superimposed upon me. Historically, and within our contemporary moment, the Black body has been wounded and violated under the weight of that term. The term is part of the white racist *mise-en-scène* of white rituals of bloodlust: "Hang the 'Nigger'!" It is a term that has metaphysical implications; a "Nigger," always a "Nigger." Call me the "eternal 'Nigger.'" Headley writes, "Yancy, in agreement with the Afro-pessimists, acknowledges the deep roots of gratuitous violence in American culture."⁵⁶ As racialized as Black, my futurity, to return to the important theme raised by Mendieta, is frozen. Headley writes, "The prison house of being for Blacks, their metaphysical restriction to a low metaphysical status—thinghood, the slave—does not escape Yancy."⁵⁷ While temporality presupposes the possibility of change, as a "Nigger," based upon the white racist episteme, there is believed no possibility of change. Like a Platonic Form, being a "Nigger," within the white imaginary, is to be immutable. The Black body, then, as I argue in *Backlash*, which isn't lost on Headley, is the paradigmatic site of ontological nullification within the white/Black binary. As Headley points out, though, perhaps "the correct ontological formulation is the Black and the non-Black—Black/non-Black. Or, we could alternatively frame it as the human (the non-Black) and the non-human (the Black)."⁵⁸ Pulling from the work of Afro-pessimist Frank B. Wilderson, Headley quotes him as follows: "It is Blackness that is the dark matter surrounding and holding together the categories of non-Black."⁵⁹ On this score, then, the Black body is not simply the host for whiteness, but for all *racialized* identificatory categories of non-Blackness. Within this context, the Black body becomes the global monster, the universal site of suspicion, dread, and illegality.

Like Afro-pessimists, as Headley contends, I do argue that the Black body is excluded from the category of the human and is socially dead. In terms of the latter, think of the accumulative impact of the school-to-prison pipeline. Under that anti-Black organizational oppressive regulatory scheme, Black bodies are removed not only from the social space of whiteness and locked away, but also severed from important family ties. Black bodies are disconnected and liminal. That is a form of social death. Headley, deploying the vocabulary of Afro-pessimism, understands mass incarceration of Black bodies as a form of natal alienation where family ties

are cut. In this way, Black bodies are exiled outside the category of the human. Black bodies are deemed sites of an undifferentiated Blackness. Connecting this to a critique of white atomic social existence, Headley writes “However, since the Black is excluded from the category of ‘human,’ the Black is structurally condemned to a discursive exile not immediately transferable into the grammar of liberal individualism, nor, for that matter, capable of being registered within the logic of liberal individualism.”⁶⁰ When informally having “the talk” with my Black sons, I want them to understand that through the procrustean lens of whiteness, they are not perceived as individuals. I tell them this because I love them. I tell them this because I don’t want to receive that call.

Headley’s tracing of the deposits of Afro-pessimism in my position is engaging and detailed. Hence, while there is far more to explore in his insightful comparison, I leave that for another venue. I would argue, though, that my sense of pessimism isn’t informed by a belief in a pre-established teleology. I don’t claim to possess any special insight into the future of the continued attempted ontological nullification of Black life under white supremacy. And I’m certain that Headley knows as much. But I do know that whiteness is not historically *necessary*, even as it raises itself to the status of a “god.” Whiteness is historically contingent all the way down. As such, it can fall apart, unsuture, be in crisis, and become undone. As Headley writes, “Yancy endorses unsuturing, confidently claiming that it has the potential to enable the white self to pursue a comprehensive shedding of its old self.”⁶¹ Yet, the hope that I have is informed by a different temporality. Whiteness relies on piecemeal “solutions” to the problem of anti-Blackness. That approach constantly looks to the future, hopeful for a little more “progress.” I have no idea if the arc of the moral universe bends. Indeed, it seems that the universe as such doesn’t give a damn about justice here on earth. There is no urgency for whiteness to undo itself. And given its deeply embedded nature, its narcissism, I have no reason to believe that it will fall apart anytime soon, or perhaps ever. *Backlash* is a gift, an intervention designed to communicate a different kind of hope, a post-hope, which stresses the urgency of now, of refusing to wait another day, another hour, another minute for change. That, for me, is what it would mean to achieve the impossible.

NOTES

1. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: The Modern Library, 1962/1995), 94.
2. *Ibid.*, 8.
3. *Ibid.*, 94.
4. *Ibid.*, 42.
5. Alison Bailey, "Newark Lessons: A Response to George Yancy's *Backlash*," *Philosophy Today* 62(4) (Fall 2018): 1213–17.
6. *Ibid.*, 1213.
7. *Ibid.*, 1214.
8. *Ibid.*
9. Regarding a phenomenological reading of these "clicking" sounds, see George Yancy, *Look, a White! Philosophical Essays on Whiteness* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), especially the introduction.
10. Bailey, "Newark Lessons," 1215.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, 1216.
13. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 96.
14. *Ibid.*
15. Bailey, "Newark Lessons," 1216.
16. For a philosophically engaging discussion of race and whiteness, especially in terms of what it means for whiteness to fall apart or be in crisis, see my conversation with Alison Bailey in *On Race: 34 Conversations in a Time of Crisis*, ed. George Yancy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 61–71.
17. Shannon Sullivan, "Raced and Gendered Scripts in Public Backlash against Critical Philosophers of Race," *Philosophy Today* 62(4) (Fall 2018): 1249–53
18. *Ibid.*, 1249.
19. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 93.
20. Sullivan, "Raced and Gendered Scripts," 1250.
21. *Ibid.*, 1252.
22. *Ibid.*
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*
25. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 8.
26. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2006), 33.
27. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 8.
28. *Ibid.*, 98.
29. Eduardo Mendieta, "Habits of the Racist Self: On George Yancy," *Philosophy Today* 62(4) (Fall 2018): 1243–48.
30. Message sent on May 28, 2018.
31. I thank my Australian friend and colleague Britt Munro for her emphasis upon and appreciation of the way in which my philosophical writing importantly challenges readers. For Britt it isn't just the content, but the form of my writing that is admired. The form, as she puts it, communicates the gravity of what is at stake existentially,

- makes the issues come alive, animates the text, and makes the words *do things* on the pages.
32. Mendieta, "Habits of the Racist Self," 1244.
 33. Ibid.
 34. Ibid.
 35. Ibid.
 36. Ibid., 1245.
 37. Ibid., 1246.
 38. Ibid. (italics removed).
 39. William David Hart, "Dead Black Man, Just Walking," in *Pursuing Trayvon Martin: Historical Contexts and Contemporary Manifestations of Racial Dynamics*, ed. George Yancy and Janine Jones (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), 91.
 40. Mendieta, "Habits of the Racist Self," 1246.
 41. Ibid., 1247.
 42. Mendieta, "Habits of the Racist Self," 1247.
 43. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 103.
 44. Ibid.
 45. Clevis Headley, "Reading George Yancy's *Backlash*: Afro-pessimism and the Conundrums of Liberalism," *Philosophy Today* 62(4) (Fall 2018):1219–41.
 46. Ibid., 1239.
 47. Sheryl Astrada, "Trump at GOP Rally: Maxine Waters Has 'Very Low IQ,'" *The Washington Informer*, March 12, 2008, available at <https://washingtoninformer.com/trump-at-gop-rally-maxine-waters-has-very-low-iq/>.
 48. Headley, "Reading George Yancy's *Backlash*," 1219.
 49. Ibid., 1228.
 50. Ibid., 1220.
 51. Ibid.
 52. Ibid., 1236.
 53. Ibid., 1229.
 54. Mary Taylor-Batty and Juliette Taylor-Batty, *Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2018), 31.
 55. Headley, "Reading George Yancy's *Backlash*," 1220.
 56. Ibid., 1231.
 57. Ibid., 1230.
 58. Ibid., 1224.
 59. Ibid., 1225. Quotation from Frank B. Wilderson, III, "Blacks and the Master/Slave Relation," in *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Racked & Dispatched, 2017), 9.
 60. Headley, "Reading George Yancy's *Backlash*," 1224.
 61. Ibid., 1237.