

Annotated Bibliography

Alexander, Elizabeth. "Can You be BLACK and Look at This?: Reading the Rodney King Video(s)." *Public Culture* 7 (Fall 1994): 77-94. Web. 18 Jan 2013. <http://gateway.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/openurl?url_ver=Z39.882004&res_dat=xri:bsc:&rft_dat=xri:bsc:ft:keyresource:WALL_16>

Elizabeth Alexander is a Professor of African American Studies, English, and American Studies at Yale University ("Elizabeth Alexander"). She is the author of four collections of poems, including *The Venus Hottentot* and *American Sublime* ("Elizabeth Alexander"). Since this article was published in a scholarly journal called *Public Culture* and found online in the Black Studies Center of the Proquest database, two of its intended audiences are Black Studies scholars and Cultural Studies scholars. Alexander titles this article with a quote from Pat Ward Williams' critique of the representation of black life in documentary photography: "Can you be BLACK and look at this?" (93). Alexander examines the ways in which black people might see ourselves as a group through shared stories, such as the murder of Emmett Till or the beating of Rodney King, that represent the "abjection" of blackness yet offer "creative space for group self-definition and self-knowledge" (78). This subject is pertinent to my research because the stories that shape black people's collective memory include the narratives of slavery I wish to examine. Also, more contemporary stories/representations of blackness often are clearly direct results of slavery.

Alexander says the consumption of stories about black bodies by black people creates "a traumatized collective historical memory" which is then called to bear on adverse contemporary circumstances (79). She argues that groups develop and maintain collective memories through both a "storytelling tradition" and personal experience (Alexander 80). Most interesting to me is

Alexander's exploration of what it means for black people as an audience of a violent historical narrative to be “witnesses once removed” rather than participants in or spectators of the violence (81). From her analysis of an 1845 narrative by Frederick Douglass, she defines a witness as one whose empathetic response to violence is bodily imprinted upon him or her through the aural and ocular senses (Alexander 81-82). I can use these ideas to evaluate whether or not a story about slavery is more likely to make witnesses or participants out of its audience.

Broeck, Sabine. “Enslavement as Regime of Western Modernity: Re-reading Gender Studies Epistemology Through Black Feminist Critique.” *Gender Forum: An Internet Journal for Gender Studies* 22 (2008):1-11. Web. 17 Jan 2013. <<http://www.genderforum.org/issues/black-womens-writing-revisited/enslavement-as-regime-of-western-modernity/>>.

Sabine Broeck is a Professor of “(African)American Studies,” Black Diaspora Studies and Gender Studies at the University of Bremen in Germany, and belongs to both the European American and African-American Studies communities (“Sabine Broeck”). She is the author of the book *White Amnesia – Black Memory? American Women's Writing and History* (Broeck 10). This article, published in *Gender Forum*, is targeted toward Gender Studies scholars. Broeck's main argument is that Eurocentric gender studies must re-evaluate the usefulness of the category “woman” by giving attention to the history of the term (10). Because white women in modernity asserted their womanhood by declaring themselves separate and opposed to slaves, black women have always been excluded from the term “woman” (Broeck 2). Moreover, the subjectivity claimed through womanhood gave white women property rights, including the right to own black women (Broeck 7). Therefore, gender concepts have been complicit with formations of whiteness as opposed and superior to black human property (Broeck 8).

Most relevant to my research is Broeck's analysis of Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* and "Venus in Two Acts." She identifies and evaluates some of the strategies Hartman uses in telling the counter-history of slavery. For example, Broeck notes the strategy of interrupting the narrative with self-reflection to address and perhaps decrease the dangers of looking at such violence (5).

Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007. Print.

An African-American professor who researches slavery and is a descendant of slaves, Saidiya Hartman has both personal and academic interest in the history of slavery (6). Hartman is currently a professor of English and Comparative Literature and the Director of the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at the University of Columbia in New York ("Saidiya Hartman"). She visited Ghana to conduct research for this book about her search to uncover traces of her ancestors in the barracoon (*Lose Your Mother* 6). *Lose Your Mother* is a counter-history of slavery in which Hartman weaves together the extensive archive of the past, and her present-day visit to Ghana in order "to reclaim the dead...to reckon with the lives undone and obliterated in the making of human commodities" (6).

In *Lose Your Mother*, Hartman offers many theories on telling the story of slavery. For instance, she mentions the importance of honesty to counter the uncritical tendency for African-Americans to see a trip to Africa as "returning home" (33), the importance of reflection on the multicenteredness of (pre-colonized) Africa, especially in terms of class (30), and that forgetting the past can sometimes be disguised as "memorializing" the victims of slavery (164).

Of particular interest is the chapter called "The Dead Book" in which Hartman gives an account of the torture and murder of one slave girl aboard the *Recovery* slave ship (*Lose Your*

Mother 136). This narrative is directly related to my research question about how the story of a black female captive in the Middle Passage might be written. Her technique in this chapter can be used as a model for telling a counter-history that resists the silencing of the dead.

Hartman, Saidiya V. and Frank B. Wilderson, III. "The Position of the Unthought: An Interview with Saidiya Hartman Conducted by Frank B. Wilderson, III." *Qui Parle* 13.2 (2003): 183-201. Web. 27 Dec. 2012. <<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20686156>>>

Frank B. Wilderson, III conducts this interview "as a black graduate student—a so-called aspiring academic—and as someone caught in the machine but not of it" (183). The focus of the interview is Hartman's book *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, published in 1997 (183). In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman discusses "a narrative for the slave as subject" with the purpose of examining who truly benefits from that narrative (184).

Hartman finds that attempts to build narratives around the slave inevitably lead to the slave's erasure, even if the attempt was made in favour of abolition (184). She also finds that "empathetic identification" in which white abolitionists imagine themselves as the oppressed slaves removes black bodies from view and provides a moral kind of pleasure for the white person who empathizes (184). There is a sort of violence still present if white abolitionists must place themselves within the narrative in order to reveal the humanity of the black slave (184).

With regard to resistance, Hartman discusses the constraints Harriet Jacobs faced in telling her personal story of being a slave girl (186). She explains how Jacobs "has to obliterate her lived reality so that her story can become "intelligible" to the white people she aims to convince (186). Hartman also critiques the counter-histories developed in the 1970s that sought to emphasize the agency of oppressed peoples, but instead turned out to be "celebratory

narratives of the oppressed” (185). Instead of remembering in order to celebrate, Hartman recognizes the need to link the violent defeat of slavery with the forms of subjection that exist for black people today (183). The theory Hartman uses to evaluate these types of problematic or limited narratives should be useful in theorizing a model for telling stories about slavery that enable resistance.

Hartman, Saidiya. “Venus in Two Acts.” *Small Axe* 26 (June 2008): 1-14. Web. 14 Dec. 2012.
< http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/small_axe/v012/12.2.hartman.pdf>.

Hartman writes this article to address what she did not in “The Dead Book” chapter of *Lose Your Mother* (5). “The Dead Book” focused on only one of two girls killed on the *Recovery* slave ship, and so “Venus in Two Acts” pays attention to the other girl known as Venus (5). In this article, Hartman offers the most comprehensive explanation of her counter-history writing process. Most significantly, she discusses both the dangers and inevitability of reproducing scenes of violence (7). This article is useful as both a model for writing a revisionist history and a source of theory with which to evaluate other counter-histories.

The strategy of “listening for the unsaid” (2-3) reveals a mode of analysis that considers the mult centeredness of the past that is under revision. A historical narrative must be multi-vocal and, if we wish to highlight the perspectives of the dominated, we must listen for or imagine the words that were drowned out in order to convey a more complete picture of history.

Imagination is also one of Hartman’s strategies because, as she says, “The dream is to liberate [slaves] from the obscene descriptions [in the archive] that first introduced them to us” (6). She recognizes the archive as oppressive, and so Hartman imagines new ways of narrating the horrors of the past so that the value of the oppressed might shine through.

McKittrick, Katherine. "On Plantations, Prisons, and a Black Sense of Place." *Social & Cultural Geography* 12.8 (2011): 947-63. Web. 22 Jan. 2013. <<http://www.katherinemckittrick.com/>>.

Katherine McKittrick is an Associate Professor of Gender Studies and Cultural Studies at Queen's University (*Katherine McKittrick*). The main areas of her research include "black studies, critical race and diaspora studies, and cultural geographies, with an emphasis on expressive cultures" (*Katherine McKittrick*). The audience of the journal her article is published in, *Social & Cultural Geography*, may cater to a wide range of scholars including those in Cultural Studies, Geography and Sociology.

In this article, McKittrick tells a sort of "otherwise" story in that she believes the plantation did not disappear with the "abolition" of slavery, but rather "provided the blueprint for future sites of racial entanglement" and so still influences geography (949). She argues for the usefulness of "a black sense of place," an analytic lens, which situates past and present resistance and the complexities of racial encounters (949). Such a lens highlights the connection between blackness and place, as well as how racial violences inform yet do not completely determine "black worlds" (947).

The framework McKittrick offers is relevant to my research because it forces one to witness conflict and domination yet also give attention to situated, grassroots resistance of the past and present. Geography, or the local, is a major factor in stories about the transatlantic slave trade and about present-day racial violence since "the marginalized naturally inhabit the margins of social spaces" from the slave quarters of the plantation to the cells of prisons or impoverished inner-cities (958). This article may be useful in evaluating how geography has been portrayed within particular narratives of slavery.

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