

# Recovering a Black American Tradition of Animal Advocacy

Lauren May McCarthy

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

This thesis examines multiple understandings of animals and their oppression, foregrounding black-authored sources to recover a black American tradition of animal advocacy. It explores the complexities of advocating for animals when black women and men, from the mid-nineteenth century through to the early twenty-first century, fought for their own survival in the Abolitionist movement, through Black Feminist activism, and in the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. Ideas communicated by black Americans that encouraged empathy and respect towards animals, and challenged their use and abuse by humans, are placed into conversation with secondary Black Feminist and Critical Animal Studies literature. Demonstrating that black Americans shaped the *thinking* as well as the *doing* of animal advocacy, this thesis contends that the documenting of ideas was activism as much as attending protests or hosting fund-raising benefits.

This thesis identifies four themes to showcase how black Americans understood animals, in changing political contexts. It discusses how black writers used animalising language to condemn whiteness and the institution of slavery, how they frequently described animals using anthropomorphism, to construct more-than-human-families and blur the categories of human and animal, how they perceived exploitative labour to be a shared site of oppression between racialised humans and animals, and how consuming animal bodies as food fit within anti-racist, feminist struggles.

The central contribution of this thesis is its placing of black American *thinking* on animals and their oppression at the forefront of discussion, challenging perceptions that historically animal advocacy was an issue predominantly forwarded by middle-class, white men only. It paints a nuanced picture of black American animal advocates and considers how black American thinkers held ideas that were regressive and progressive for animal lives, across lifetimes moulded by experience

of and resistance to white supremacy, enriching understandings of the black American intellectual tradition.

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                                                                            |                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| <b>Acknowledgements</b> .....                                                                                                              | <b>I – III</b> |
| <b>Abstract</b> .....                                                                                                                      | <b>IV – V</b>  |
| <b>Table Of Contents</b> .....                                                                                                             | <b>VI</b>      |
| <b>List of Figures</b> .....                                                                                                               | <b>VII</b>     |
| <b>List of Abbreviations</b> .....                                                                                                         | <b>VIII</b>    |
| <b>Introduction</b> .....                                                                                                                  | <b>1</b>       |
| <b>Chapter One: Confronting ‘The Beast’: Solidifying And Subverting Animalising Discourse In Nineteenth Century Slave Narratives</b> ..... | <b>50</b>      |
| <b>Chapter Two: Humanising Animals: Subverting And Solidifying The Human/Animal Divide In Black Women’s Writing</b> .....                  | <b>88</b>      |
| <b>Chapter Three: Animals, Labour and the Land: Unequally Yoked Together?</b> .....                                                        | <b>139</b>     |
| <b>Chapter Four: ‘Eating Misery’? Explorations Of Black American Ideas On Consuming Animals As Food</b> .....                              | <b>201</b>     |
| <b>Conclusion</b> .....                                                                                                                    | <b>267</b>     |
| <b>Bibliography</b> .....                                                                                                                  | <b>283</b>     |

## List of Figures

|                                                                                                                                               |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Figure one:</b> Be Sargent, 'A Wall of Respect for Animals' mural, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2000).....                                    | 20  |
| <b>Figure two:</b> 'All Mine: African American family photo with their cat', circa 1890.....                                                  | 105 |
| <b>Figure three:</b> 'African American family in front of a wooden building, with a dog', undated.....                                        | 105 |
| <b>Figure four:</b> Invitation to Mu Sacred Union Ceremony, Temple Jook, California (2007).....                                               | 124 |
| <b>Figure five:</b> Photograph of Alice Walker and Surprise-the-cat at Mu Sacred Union Ceremony, Temple Jook, California (2007).....          | 128 |
| <b>Figure six:</b> Marley-the-dog being led down the rose-petal-lined aisle at Mu Sacred Union Ceremony, Temple Jook, California, (2007)..... | 128 |
| <b>Figure seven:</b> 'Unequally yoked together: African American men with an ox and mule cart and slabs of wood'.....                         | 143 |

## List of Abbreviations

|                                   |                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ASPCA                             | American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals                        |
| <i>Cookin' With Mother Nature</i> | <i>Dick Gregory's Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat: Cookin' With Mother Nature</i> |
| FFC                               | Freedom Farms Cooperative                                                        |
| <i>Incidents</i>                  | <i>Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl, Written By Herself</i>                 |
| MOVE                              | The MOVE Organization                                                            |
| <i>My Bondage</i>                 | <i>My Bondage and My Freedom</i>                                                 |
| NAACP                             | National Association for the Advancement of Colored People                       |
| PETA                              | People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals                                      |
| SNCC                              | Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee                                        |
| <i>The Dreaded Comparison</i>     | <i>The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery</i>                          |
| <i>Their Eyes</i>                 | <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i>                                              |

## Introduction

### **Why and how should we recover a black American tradition of animal advocacy?**

In September 2016, a California-based artist, Elaine Plesser, uploaded a painting to *Pixels*, an online art and merchandise selling website, bearing the image of three greyhounds looking pleadingly toward the viewer, emblazoned with the words 'GREY LIVES MATTER TOO! ADOPT'<sup>1</sup> The ends to which Plesser's painting was aimed towards were financial profit and consciousness raising about animal welfare, specifically the exploitation of dogs in entertainment industries and the need to rehome such animals when they are considered 'spent' by racing establishments. The key message that this slogan sought to communicate was centred on animal advocacy.

However, the three-word slogan on which this animal advocacy campaign is dependent, is saturated with a troubling racial politics that co-opts the ideas of Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, who originated #BlackLivesMatter in 2013, in response to Trayvon Martin's killing. What does it mean when individuals with an animal advocacy agenda repurpose #BlackLivesMatter for their own aims? Using Grey Lives Matter as an animal advocacy slogan can be interpreted as an act of appropriating a key part of anti-racist discourse, born out of continuing racial violence. Not only does the slogan casually change the subject of whose lives matter, diluting the seriousness of the #BlackLivesMatter declaration, but by replacing blackness with animality, the Grey Lives Matter website perpetuates a history of race-based animalisation.

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<sup>1</sup> Elaine Plesser, 'Grey Lives Matter Too! Adopt!', *Pixels*, (2016) <<https://pixels.com/featured/grey-lives-matter-too-adopt-elaine-plesser.html>> [accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018].

The use of 'Grey Lives Matter' as a catchy slogan in certain animal advocacy circles demonstrates a willingness to draw upon anti-racist political discourse for an animal welfare and animal rights agenda, without working to dismantle white supremacy. I chose this small but significant example to open the discussion in this thesis, as it illuminates that in 2019 animal advocacy work is shaped by race as well as by gender and class. It demonstrates the need to think more about the longer histories of race and animal advocacy in the U.S., moving beyond a critique of whiteness in animal advocacy and shifting towards a history of black thinking on animal oppression. Slogans such as 'Grey Lives Matter' reflect a legacy of failure to tend to the complex histories of black ideas on animal advocacy and its relationships to antiracism struggles.

This thesis foregrounds black-authored sources to explore the multiple understandings of animals and their oppression, as communicated by black women and men, in changing political contexts. In doing so, it traces a black tradition of animal advocacy. Earlier white-centred histories of the development of animal welfare and animal rights politics in the U.S. have erased or underexplored black thinking and ideas around animals and their status in society. Yet, black women and men enslaved by an institution that did not recognise their humanity, also documented positive representations of animals through the written record. Understandings of animals, forged in the context of slavery, were not straightforwardly anti-speciesist. At times, black American writers and thinkers, such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Solomon Northup and Sojourner Truth, used animal imagery to critique the violence of individual white profiteers from slavery and the institution as a whole. Further, authors of slave narratives presented animals raised for food in plantation societies as living a life of relative luxury, compared to the food and accommodations afforded to enslaved men and women. However, across the slave narrative genre, writers also communicated flashes of empathy

with animals, recognising that animals used to work the land and those raised for slaughter were also exploited beings.

The scope of this research project starts in the antebellum period and traces a diverse range of source material through the mid-late twentieth century, up to the first decade of the twenty-first century, to recover ideas about animals from writers in changing contexts of black American history. Exploring black-authored ideas across a time-span of over one hundred and fifty years requires a diverse set of source material and enables an understanding of how specific black American writers understood animal oppression in relation to other social justice struggles that they were fighting, from abolition through to participation in the Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Movement and Black Feminist and Womanist activism. Grounding this project across a broad span of time allows insight into how the changing political contexts of slavery, segregation, and continuing racist and sexist discrimination, along with resistance to these circumstances, shaped black American ideas about animals and animal oppression. Moreover, I will identify broad thematic patterns and put ideas into conversation with each other, across time and place. The scholarship of Mia Bay and others in *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women* shows the advantages of constructing histories that take in a long arc of time. As black Americans, and black women specifically, have often been erased as knowledge-makers, focusing on black American ideas and theorising writ large is a radical counter move.<sup>2</sup> Bay and others question whether we can ‘recover the intellectual traditions of thinkers who were often organic intellectuals and whose lives and thoughts are only modestly documented’?<sup>3</sup> Within this project, the intellectuals and thinkers that I foreground took great pains to document their lives, experiences and ideas through the written word, and these acts of documenting

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<sup>2</sup> Mia Bay and others, *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p. 3. I interpret Bay and others’ phrase ‘organic intellectuals’ to mean the living, breathing people behind an idea or theory, and the ways in which changing life circumstances can alter thought processes and knowledge-making.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.



have resulted in a written record of changing ideas about animals, whether the document was centred on animals or otherwise. However, as Bay and others urge us to consider, an individual's ideas are not static, and so constructing histories within a longer time span provides the space to explore how the changing circumstances of their lives, from the political context, their occupation and wealth, through to personal relationships, moulded their attitudes towards and interactions with animals.

Through a close reading of sources, I contribute towards recovering ideas communicated by black Americans on the significance of animal symbolism, specifically 'the beast' or the dangerous animal, as an antiracist tool to represent the violence of white supremacy. I examine how black American writers represented animals as human or human-like and their use of anthropomorphism as an animal advocacy strategy in black cultural contexts. In addition, I explore how black American writers express cross-species solidarity with animals as sources of exploited labour and also the complexities of challenging the practise of eating animals, across changing food systems.

Within the last decade, much exciting scholarship has emerged which has explored the relationship between race and animal advocacy in a twenty-first century, U.S. context. Amie Breeze Harper's *Sistah Vegan* anthology, published in 2010, undertook important work to give voice to black women contributing to animal advocacy and vegetarian and vegan activism in the early 2000s. Harper and other contributors highlighted that in spite of discomfort, distress and, at times, outrage caused by the tactics of leading white figures and organisations involved in animal advocacy, primarily People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), black American women were sharing ideas and taking steps to dismantle the institutionalised exploitation and killing of animals for human gain.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Amie Breeze Harper, *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health and Society*, ed. by Amie Breeze Harper (New York: Lantern Books, 2010), p. XIV.

Harper's edited collection increased the visibility of black American women working at the intersection of anti-racist and anti-speciesist work in a twenty-first century context. In this study, I seek to document a long history in which black Americans have carved out spaces to communicate their own ideas about animals and their relationship with humans. In restrictive and dangerous circumstances, that changed guise across the decades, black Americans created opportunities to voice and record their attitudes towards, and interactions with, animals. This thesis is therefore part of a project of recovering black American thinking around animals, and the risks and obstacles to documenting those ideas. It is a study that carves out space to present the importance of black American ideas on animals, in their complexity and, at times, in tension with what would be traditionally viewed as animal advocacy work. I hope that readers who are interested in histories of black American intellectualism, histories of the theory and practise of animal advocacy (and the overlaps of theory and practise), and histories of intersectional social movements will find fresh insights in this work. I adopt the position throughout this thesis that undertaking the work of thinking, and documenting ideas for posterity, was a form of activism by the several writers whose work I foreground. In Bay and others' intellectual history of black women, the editors ask a series of questions that should be considered when recovering or recuperating ideas:

What forms do ideas take? What are their modes of expression? Under what conditions may ideas be produced? And where should we look for them? What is the relationship between lived experience and the production of ideas? And what happens when ideas exceed or break apart social or analytic categories?<sup>5</sup>

Such questions allowed me to probe further how I defined a black American tradition of animal advocacy. Was it enough that the thinker producing the ideas to improve the lives of and minimise harm to animals identified as, or was categorised as, a black American? Or did I envision that the conditions and lived experiences of being

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<sup>5</sup> Bay and others, p. 9.

a black woman or black man in the U.S. across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would structure the production of knowledge on animals, in a way that was distinct from ideas produced by white Americans, who held racial power and privilege? Would commitment to anti-racist and Black Feminist struggles lead to a desire to deconstruct speciesist oppression, or was this placing an unfair burden of expectation on black Americans to challenge all unequal power relations? I ask these broad questions across each of the four chapters, in order to explore the commonalities and tensions between social justice movements for humans and animals.

This thesis pulls out the nuances of advocating for animals whilst black, in changing contexts of white supremacy in the U.S., where it remained necessary for black Americans to advocate for their own freedom, rights to full political participation and bodily autonomy, and right to a life free from state violence. As a starting point, I draw upon the slave narrative genre to demonstrate that in the U.S., the depths of racial oppression perpetrated through slavery meant that black Americans did not have the same opportunities as white Americans to think through, communicate to a listening audience, and take action to minimise the suffering and exploitation of animals. In a context where black bodies were not considered to be fully human, and were subjected to unremitting toil and physical and sexual violence, ideation on how to improve the lot of animal beings was not a priority. Survival and hastening the end of the institution of slavery was an overriding impulse.

I argue that black American writers and orators, such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Solomon Northup and Sojourner Truth, flipped the narrative of animalising discourse, which associated beastliness and animality with blackness, back onto their white oppressors. Throughout their narratives, the terms 'beast' and 'brute' are deployed readily, along with allegories relating to snakes and tigers, to communicate the fear, danger and violence associated with white masters and

overseers. Redeploying animalising discourse to articulate white behaviour and, more broadly, the violence of slavery as a 'bestly' system was part of a black-authored abolitionist strategy to convince a Northern white audience to fight against the continuation of slavery in the South.

Examining how thinkers like Douglass, Jacobs, Northup and Truth employed, shaped and cemented conceptions of the category of 'the animal' as wild, dangerous and fearsome may seem antithetical to a project dedicated to recovering a black American tradition of animal advocacy. I argue that when black abolitionist writers constructed discourse that links animality to negative traits and encouraged fear of animals as a homogenous category, they did so to strengthen their case against slavery. The act of writing down ideas that linked whiteness to animality was a conscious effort by black abolitionists to flip white supremacist discourse that characterised blackness as less-than-human. Entrenching a speciesist worldview was therefore a thread in the fabric of black abolitionist arguments, kindled by the terror of slavery, which compelled black writers to craft diverse arguments that could potentially cease the misery of millions of black Americans. However, language that depicts the 'dangerous beast' construct coexists alongside discourse that conveys empathy and respect for animals, and disapproval of and resistance to, the exploited status of animals in plantation societies. Frances Negrón-Muntaner's reflections on the obstacles of constructing a black radical tradition, in her research relating to the life and work of Arturo Schomburg, stirred my desire to write a more all-embracing history of black American ideas on animals, that included both anti- and pro-animal sentiments, often from the same writers across their lifetimes. In a roundtable discussion on the 'strictures and elasticity' of using the idea of 'a black radical tradition' to help frame research on black writers and black writings, Negrón-Muntaner articulated that:

When I tried to use the "black radical tradition" to think about [Arturo] Schomburg, it became confusing because I was not able to produce *that* Schomburg. So one of the things that I ended up thinking with in order to

move forward was the difference between *agency* and *radicality*. Schomburg was obviously doing a lot of different things, and he was opening options and he was exploring. He was *engaging* in a series of practices, some of which were arguably not radical, and using discourses that were not radical, and sometimes *antiradical*, if you will. So in that regard, it [the idea of a black radical tradition] took me only so far before I had to come up with other ways of conceptualizing what I was looking at in order to try to give some account of it.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout my research to recover a black American tradition of animal advocacy, I encountered ideas that did not necessarily fit within the remit of improving the lives of animals and/or defending animals from exploitation and systematic killing. When undertaking a close reading of the primary source material, I came across passages that revealed frustration and hostility towards animals, actions complicit in the furtherance of the use and abuse of animals, and struggles to adapt to vegetarian and vegan diets and lifestyles. I was met with the dilemma of whether to ignore and erase these ideas because they did not reflect the tradition of animal protection that I sought to construct. Nonetheless, ideas that were not radical or antiradical were part of the thought processes that determined black American attitudes towards and engagement with animals across divergent epochs. If I only presented the ideas that articulated empathy and solidarity with animals as exploited sources of energy and food, as members of a more-than-human family, and as intelligent beings with their own desires, then I would be misconstruing black American theorising about animals, which was much more complex throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This could have led to an act of ventriloquism, wherein I used the source material and the images of celebrated black intellectuals and writers to show a neat version of defending animals, rather than the messier process of multiple understandings of animals and their place in U.S. society that is documented. Negrón-Muntaner's argument, that using the framing device of a tradition to link ideas together can only take us so far, is compelling, as the black writers

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<sup>6</sup> Nijah Cunningham, 'A Queer Pier: A Roundtable on the Idea of a Black Radical Tradition', *Small Axe*, 17 (March 2013), 84 – 95 (p. 88).

foregrounded here in this thesis held a spectrum of ideas relating to animals, from the antiradical to the radical.

In addition to exploring how the slave narrative genre employed animalising language to human beings, as an abolitionist tool, this thesis also examines how black American thinkers humanised, or anthropomorphised, animals that they encountered.<sup>7</sup> Although recent post-humanist scholarship has largely discredited the act of describing animals as *like* humans, or *as human*, as it reflects an anthropocentric worldview that keeps human beings as the reference point, I argue that through analysing black-authored literature and supporting photographic sources, viewing animals as *like* humans or an extension of humankind, could lead to a desire to protect and respect animals.<sup>8</sup> Perceiving and representing certain animals through an anthropomorphic lens enabled black American writers to construct more-than-human families, to understand their relationship with some animals as mutually supportive and as a site of care.

Black-authored anthropomorphic writing was rooted in an oral folk tradition in black communities, in which humanised animal characters took center stage in folktales. The prevalence of animal characters in black American folktales can be

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<sup>7</sup> Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, 'Introduction', in *Thinking With Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, ed. by Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 1 – 14. Daston and Mitman define anthropomorphism as 'the word used to describe the belief that animals are essentially like humans, and it is usually applied as a term of reproach, both intellectual and moral. Originally, the word referred to the attribution of human form to gods, forbidden by several religions as blasphemous' (p. 2).

<sup>8</sup> Rebekah Fox, 'Animal Behaviours, Post-human Lives: Everyday Negotiations of the Animal – Human Divide in Pet-keeping', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7 (August 2006), 525 – 537. Fox offers a useful summary of the scholarly turn against anthropomorphism in animal studies, arguments which claim that the just treatment of animals should not be based on likeness to humans and that anthropomorphic language leads to hierarchies of 'higher' and 'lower' animals, depending on perceived similarities to humans. This closeness or distance from humans then determines willingness to exploit such animals (p. 527).

Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014). Nayar defines the field of critical posthumanism as a 'new conceptualization of the human', which 'rejects the view of the human as exceptional, separate from other forms of life and usually dominant/dominating over these other forms' that seeks to show humans as 'co-evolving with other forms of life, enmeshed with the environment and technology' (p. 4).

explained partly through their utility as a mask.<sup>9</sup> They enabled black women and men in largely illiterate communities, in the era of slavery and segregation, to challenge a white supremacist, patriarchal political order. In the guise of apolitical animal stories, black Americans could communicate scenarios in which the oppressed became the holder of power, through a combination of trickery and wit. In an environment where white violence was an ever-present threat, deploying animal characters to envision the overthrow of white supremacy, enabled black Americans to voice anti-racist ideas, with a layer of protection to fall back on, by claiming that these were innocuous stories about animal capers, purely for entertainment.

Furthermore, the tradition of black American folktales, with animal protagonists, reveals an imagined world where animals have voices, agency, desires and the capacity and intelligence to act on their desires. Although folk tales were works of fiction, performed orally and later recorded in writing, they show openness in black American communities to the idea that animals possessed their own forms of intelligence and an understanding of uneven power relations between humans and animals. I use the tradition of the animal trickster in black American folktales to explore the longer arc of anthropomorphic understandings of animals in black writings, offering a nuanced discussion of the relationship between animal advocacy and anthropomorphism.

This thesis also examines how labour exploitation was a key issue through which black American writers expressed solidarity with animals. Through enslavement and in the post-emancipation era through to the mid-twentieth century, black women and men in the U.S. South worked grueling hours in agriculture, trades

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<sup>9</sup> See Lawrence W. Levine's chapter "'Some Go Up and Some Go Down': The Animal Trickster", in *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro American Folk Thought From Slavery To Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 102 – 121. Also, Alice Walker's essay 'The Dummy in the Window: Joel Chandler Harris and the Invention of Uncle Remus', in *Living By the Word: Selected Writings, 1973 – 1987* (London: Phoenix, 1988), pp. 25 – 32, for an exploration of the white appropriation of black folktales, wherein Walker asserts that black folk culture has been 'tampered with' by figures like Harris, who framed folktales through the character of Uncle Remus and a backdrop in which slavery was portrayed as benign.

and domestic service, for either no financial compensation during slavery or for low wages in the post-bellum period that led to cycles of poverty and indebtedness to local white landowners. Jacqueline Jones affirms that across the centuries, whether toiling in agriculture, industry, or domestic service, black women 'felt the weight of racial discrimination compounded by sexual prejudice'.<sup>10</sup>

In a largely pre-industrial agriculture, Frederick Douglass, in the nineteenth century, and Zora Neale Hurston, in the early twentieth century, discussed labouring alongside animals to work the land. Douglass recounted his own experience of being tasked with commanding a team of oxen to collect firewood and the resistance of the animals to follow his orders.<sup>11</sup> At risk of being violently punished if he were not successful in this task, Douglass communicated his frustration with the oxen for not behaving as he desired. This frustration led to a presumption that animals were unintelligent and inferior beings. In circumstances of white supremacy, working with animals had higher stakes for black Americans. If an animal resisted human instruction, then it would be constructed as obstinate or stubborn. However, during slavery and in sharecropping and tenant farming communities, if an animal did not labour as desired, then this could result in violent punishment and reduced agricultural efficiency leading to a loss of profits, and deeper poverty and debt.

Expressions of hostility and frustration with animals occurred together with an understanding that draft animals were caught up in a cycle of exploitation in the U.S. South. Both Douglass and Hurston made space for the idea that species as well as race was an axis along which oppression and exploitation occurred, within their writings. By advocating for the 'kind treatment' of animals in agriculture, Douglass and Hurston sought to improve the living and working conditions of draft animals, foster an independent and economically sustainable black-led agriculture,

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<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014 [originally published by Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855]), p. 168 – 169.



and reduce suffering through labour extraction, from a black standpoint that opposed wearing down certain bodies for the gain of another.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the use of animals as sources of energy and labour in agricultural communities, I explore the spectrum of ideas documented by black American thinkers on animals as sources of food, from slavery-era plantations to industrialised agribusiness. The chapter dedicated to exploring eating animals as food demonstrates a commitment to understanding the complexity, flexibility and multiplicity of attitudes held by black women and men on consuming animals. I foreground ideas that convey a discomfort with eating animal bodies, and examine transitions and obstacles to vegetarian and vegan diets for black Americans in changing epochs. However, these anti-speciesist black ideas, which challenged the eating of animals to promote a healthier diet and to reduce and bring about an end to animal suffering, are placed into a longer history, in which hunger and the withholding of meat from black Americans was part of white supremacist control. Douglass' proclamation that meats were under a 'stringent monopoly' in the slaveholder's house epitomises how consuming animal flesh was part of the demonstration of racial power dynamics.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, in the era of slavery, meat and dairy consumption signified power and status. Different cuts of meat from different animal bodies were distributed to the enslaved and the enslavers to reinscribe drastically uneven power relations in the U.S. South. In Jessica B. Harris' personal exploration of African American culinary journeys, she opens with a folktale that bears the name of her text, based on eating 'high on the hog'.<sup>14</sup> This tale communicates a shift in power relations centered on food, and specifically on

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<sup>12</sup> Frederick Douglass, 'Address Delivered by Hon. Frederick Douglass, at the Third Annual Fair of the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association', *New National Era and Citizen Print* (1873), Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed Material, p. 12 – 13 and Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (London: Virago Press, 2007 [originally published by J.B. Lippincott Company, 1937]), p. 75 – 76.

<sup>13</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 90.

<sup>14</sup> Jessica B. Harris, *High on the Hog: A Culinary Journey from Africa to America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011), p. 4.

consuming meat, between John and Old Master, a formerly enslaved man and his enslaver. Though John assists Old Master in 'killing forty or fifty hogs every year', he is only provided with the head, feet and ears to consume, whilst the more desirable cuts of animal flesh were retained for whites.<sup>15</sup> Over the years, John is able to carve out a degree of self-sufficiency for himself on the plantation and raises three hogs. During the winter, as it draws closer to 'hog-killing time', Old Master demands that John labours to slaughter the animals for him. When John enquires how Old Master will compensate him, he responds that 'I'll pay you like I always did', with the cuts of meat considered lowliest.<sup>16</sup> As a satisfying shock to Old Master, John refuses this offer, proclaiming that:

Well, Old Master, I can't, because I'm eating higher on the hog than that now. I got three hogs of my own an': I eat spare ribs, backbone, pork chops, middling, ham, and everything else. I eat high on the hog now.<sup>17</sup>

This tale communicates a clear message about the importance of independence, self-sufficiency and everyday resistance to white control, for black Americans who sought to escape the reinstatement of the conditions of slavery after emancipation. Following the traditional pattern of black folktales, John is positioned as relatively powerless at the beginning, and emerges holding the power at the conclusion. Moreover, the tale illustrates that food was a key site over which power was contested in antebellum and Jim Crow societies. John's declaration that he eats 'high on the hog', represented a newly achieved, higher social standing. His listing of the various cuts of meat available to him and his assertion that he eats 'everything else', demonstrates that he found power in choice. He could *choose* what to eat, not be told by Old Master what he was allowed to consume. Consuming animals, on one's own terms, therefore became aspirational and a signifier of self-possession, in post-bellum black American communities. The desire to eat animal

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

bodies, for some black Americans, was understood as an act of resistance against white supremacist control and confinement of the black diet. Exploring black-authored texts that consider animal suffering in food systems, need to be placed into historical contexts in which constructed hunger was a reality and the politics of race shaped black American access to food.

I argue that across slave narratives, black writers understand animals as competitors for food, and use them as a literary device to convey to the audience how paltry their diet was. Black authors frequently painted a picture wherein animals on the plantation were fed in greater quantities and with higher quality produce than enslaved men and women, to craft an abolitionist argument that in the slaveholding South some human beings ranked below animals.<sup>18</sup> Douglass' image of himself as a child, fighting with a dog to consume the scraps of food that fell from the slave master's table, worked to powerfully convey the extreme race and species power imbalances in this era.<sup>19</sup> By placing himself on a level with a dog in this scene, Douglass demonstrated that through the system of slavery, blackness was equated with animality.

However, alongside understandings of animals as rivals for food on the plantation, Douglass also considered that animals were victims of a white supremacist system of excess and abundance. Juxtaposing the slaveholder's dinner table with the meager rations allotted to enslaved women and men, Douglass introduced the image of a 'huge family net', in which numerous animal bodies were caught, to be served up and devoured.<sup>20</sup> Douglass articulated an understanding that non-human bodies were entrapped and exploited for the gain of white Americans. A key abolitionist text, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, thereby communicates a

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<sup>18</sup> See Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave: A True Story* (London: Collins Classic, 2014 [originally published by Derby & Miller, 1853]), p. 117; Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 82; Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Dover Publications, 2001 [originally published by Thayer & Eldridge, 1861]), p. 14

<sup>19</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 62.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

moment of empathy and acknowledgement that animals were oppressed through the site of food production.

In a vastly different context of black resistance, in the second half of the twentieth century, writers such as Dick Gregory and Alice Walker advocated for limiting or eliminating animal flesh and byproducts from their diet, as part of a strategy of nonviolence. Both writers acknowledged historic and contemporary obstacles relating to racialised poverty and the embrace of a meat-centric soul food as cultural resistance, which made it more difficult and less appealing for black American communities to adopt vegetarian and vegan lifestyles.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, they argued that rejecting the consumption of animals through food was *part of* the black freedom struggle, by improving health through a plant-based diet, and that not participating in the oppression of animals by eating them created a stronger, more holistic liberation movement that considered human and non-human bodies.

Throughout the thesis I have drawn upon both archival and published sources to construct a complex history of black-centered animal advocacy. The key archival collections that I researched were: the Alice Walker Papers at Emory University's Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library; the Zora Neale Hurston Papers at the University of Florida's George A. Smathers Library; and the digitised Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress. I began my archival research with the Alice Walker Papers, as Walker remains the most celebrated black American advocate for animals. Her essay, 'Am I Blue?', published in *Ms.* magazine and later in her edited collection, *Living By The Word*, was well-known in animal rights circles and appeared on reading lists for organisations such as Feminists for Animal Rights.<sup>22</sup> In Walker's renowned essay, she explored the loss

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<sup>21</sup> Dick Gregory, *Dick Gregory's Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat: Cookin' With Mother Nature* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973). p. 4-5 and p. 12 -13; and Alice Walker, *The Chicken Chronicles* (London: Phoenix, 2011), p. 1 -2.

<sup>22</sup> Trisha Lamb Feuerstein and Marti Kheel, 'Feminists for Animal Rights Bibliography, 1993 – 1994 edition', Animal Rights Network Records, MC00351, Box 319, Folder 1, p. 9, at Special Collections Research Center at North Carolina State University, Raleigh.

of connection and understanding between humans and animals, and how distancing becomes a mechanism to dismiss and disregard animal pain and suffering. Blue, a horse residing in an adjacent pasture to Walker's home in Northern California, was separated from his mate once the mare had been impregnated, and Walker documents the ensuing separation anxiety that she perceives in Blue, noting that he 'galloped furiously...he whinnied until he couldn't. He tore at the ground with his hooves. He butted himself against his single shade tree'.<sup>23</sup> The acknowledgement of familial bonds between animals and recognition of animal suffering in this text led to Walker's growing reputation as a defender of animals in the 1980s. Walker concluded at the end of this essay that, 'as we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks. I am eating misery, I thought, as I took the first bite. And spit it out'.<sup>24</sup> This was a powerful statement urging those involved in social justice movements to consider the lives of animals. Spitting out the steak symbolised Walker's rejection of contributing to the misery and oppression of a living being. She voiced her feelings of hypocrisy of theorising about freedom and justice, whilst supporting industrialised meat and dairy production, which treated living animals as commodities. This essay communicated Walker's position that freedom and justice *for all* must include non-human as well as human lives.

Through research with the Alice Walker Papers, I asked how Walker's animal advocacy extended beyond her most-celebrated animal rights essay. I was keen to explore how Walker perceived animal advocacy as fitting with her commitment to a multitude of social justice issues, including the black freedom struggle, women's rights, and the anti-nuclear movement. The papers were acquired and catalogued by archivists at Emory University in 2009, and, as such, materials relating to Walker's 'animal rights' work were organised together. The cataloguing of Walker's papers at a time when the field of Critical Animal Studies was burgeoning

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<sup>23</sup> Alice Walker, 'Am I Blue?' in *Living By the Word: Selected Writings, 1973 – 1987* (London: Phoenix, 1988), pp. 3 -8 (p. 7).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

in academic institutions internationally was timely for this project. Accessing these materials worked as a helpful springboard to delve into Walker's animal advocacy, providing insight into campaigns and other animal-centered writings that Walker contributed to. Researching materials explicitly categorised as relating to animal rights led to a snowballing effect, signposting me to other sources, for example on Walker's literary campaigning against Premarin, which involved exploiting horses in injurious living conditions, for the pharmaceutical industry.

Through archival research with the Alice Walker Papers, I sought to understand more fully how Walker used her literary talent to create a space to converse about creating more harmonious relationships with animals that respected their lives. Moreover, access to these papers enabled me to probe how Walker's relationships with, and advocacy for, animals changed over her lifetime. I was eager to interrogate how Walker's changing status in U.S. society, from the daughter of impoverished sharecroppers in rural Georgia to a multi award-winning writer who amassed significant wealth and prestige, shaped her involvement in animal advocacy.<sup>25</sup>

The archive of Walker's expansive personal papers included drafts of animal advocacy essays, printed interviews with animal rights magazines, campaign letters, fan mail detailing Walker's role in inspiring transitions to vegetarian diets and animal defense work, and photography documenting Walker's relationship with several companion animals that she lived alongside. This offered insight into the interactions that shaped Walker's ideas about animals, how physical proximity to certain animals, such as Blue-the-horse, Marley-the-dog, and feline companions, Frieda and Surprise, led her to expand her concern for animals suffering in agribusiness

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<sup>25</sup> Evelyn C. White, *Alice Walker: A Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. 23 – 25. This section of White's biography illustrates the hardships experienced by Walker's family, like many other black American families in the South, in the 1930s and 1940s. White notes that according to U.S. census data, in the mid-1930's black families earned on average just under \$500 per year, whereas white families earned approximately \$1300 per year on average. This sizeable annual income discrepancy rendered it incredibly difficult for black Americans to raise a family without experiencing poverty.

and the pharmaceutical industry. Rather than consuming material from white-led animal welfare and rights organisations, Walker came to animal advocacy through her own encounters with animals that impressed upon her the capacity for animals to suffer, and the spectrum of ways that humans inflicted systematic violence upon animals. Thus, the Alice Walker Papers were a window into how a celebrated and castigated black American writer used her literary platform to raise the consciousness of her audience on issues of animal oppression. Furthermore, the papers document how wider white-dominated animal advocacy publications and organisations sought to incorporate Walker's image into the movement, without supporting and furthering her commitment to the freedom of black people and women of color internationally.

Within the thesis, I also analyse archival material from the Hurston Papers at the University of Florida Smathers Library, these include manuscripts of her later fiction, correspondence with white-controlled publishing establishments, and photography of and by Hurston, all of which illustrate her fascination with animal characters and recurrent use of animal symbolism in the black folk speech that she drew upon. I was motivated to research with these papers to unpack how Hurston's wider theorising on animals fitted with her animal based metaphor, which likened black women's exploited status with that of the overburdened mule, in the U.S. During her later life, Hurston experienced dwindling financial security, diminishing interest in her literary output, fabricated sexual assault allegations and derision in the black press. The materials relating to Hurston's tumultuous final decades assisted my growing understanding of how companion animals helped Hurston survive a traumatic time and acted as a non-human muse upon which she could base her writings, at a time when she felt largely abandoned.<sup>26</sup> The correspondence to literary agents, in which Hurston outlined her companion animal-centered tales,

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<sup>26</sup> Virginia Lynn Moylan, *Zora Neale Hurston's Final Decade* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011). This text provides useful context to the Hurston Papers at the University of Florida, during a period of her lifetime in which her literary talent was seen to have waned.

were between a black woman writer and white gatekeepers of the literary establishment, who could determine which ideas were intellectually important and commercially viable. Through this source material, I was able to probe how the white supremacist grip on the publishing industry in the mid-twentieth century limited the ability of black writers to theorise on and communicate their animal advocacy ideas to the reading public in the U.S. For a study produced at the intersection of critical race studies and animal studies, the Hurston Papers at the Smathers Library were a fruitful well of material on how the white supremacist infrastructure of publishing silenced black ideas about animals. Therefore, opportunities for figures such as Hurston to become recognised as an advocate for animals, through the written word, were limited.

When I began this project, I aimed to explore Frederick Douglass' understandings of animals and their role and status in plantation societies. In Marjorie Spiegel's problematic text, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, she included a 'What Others Have Said', section, wherein she reprinted animal advocacy ideas from historical figures.<sup>27</sup> The first quotation was from Frederick Douglass, wherein he declared that violence was inflicted upon animals during slavery, and that this agricultural system fostered the mistreatment of animals. This material was unreferenced by Spiegel, and it sparked my curiosity as a researcher to locate the source of these arguments by Douglass, to understand in greater depth the context in which he produced and communicated these ideas about animals. Subsequently, I accessed the digitised Frederick Douglass Papers online. Through this research, I sought to consider the scope of Douglass' writings on the status and treatment of animals, and think more deeply about how he was able to theorise and write about protecting animals from violence in a context where millions of black American women and men were denied their freedom and

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<sup>27</sup> Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (London: Heretic Books, 1988), p. 94.



humanity, and subjected to daily violence. Would advocating for animals, when the circumstances in which black Americans were held were so dire, seem frivolous and even dangerous? Did Douglass frame his ideas about animals as part of a vision for black freedom in the U.S.? Can Douglass be labelled as an advocate for animals? Certainly, writers like Spiegel and organisations such as the New England Anti-Vivisection Society (NEAVS) claimed Douglass as a defender of animals in the last decade of the twentieth century. By quoting Douglass, without including references to the longer speech, Spiegel cherry-picked the ideas that portrayed Douglass as an animal welfarist. Moreover, by incorporating pro-animal ideas from a leading black abolitionist, she sought to give credibility to her argument that compared the suffering of animals through the meat and dairy industries, in scientific experimentation and through hunting and other forms of leisure and entertainment, to the centuries of violence experienced by enslaved black men and women in the U.S. The Douglass excerpt, showcasing a black-centered understanding of animal exploitation in the antebellum and Reconstruction era, was used by Spiegel as a posthumous stamp of approval for an argument that drew upon historical black trauma to make an animal rights argument.



**Figure one:** Be Sargent, 'Wall of Respect for Animals' mural, Cambridge, MA.

In November 1999, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a mural titled *A Wall of Respect for Animals*, was unveiled, featuring Frederick Douglass, Dick Gregory and Alice Walker as the representatives of black America that advocated for animals.<sup>28</sup> Be Sargent, a political muralist, created the piece, which was funded primarily by NEAVS, although donations were sought from the general public to assist Sargent with the continuation of her work. The mural contains images of animals that were caught up in factory farming, laboratory animals, and animals that were native to the North American landscape. The animals are surrounded by an arch of twenty-nine human figures, chosen for their opposition to vivisection and/or, more widely, cruelty to animals. The caption to the mural, declared that 'We Speak for Those Who Can't' and was intended to raise the consciousness of passing motorists in Cambridge, seeking to encourage passersby to interrogate how their consumer habits and diets supported the continuation of institutionalised animal abuse.<sup>29</sup> An accompanying booklet contained statements from each of the human figures in the mural, wherein they expressed animal advocacy ideas. The quotations from Douglass and Alice Walker were lifted from Spiegel's *The Dreaded Comparison*, which suggests limited engagement with the breadth of black American ideas about animals, and how the ideas about animals that these figures held were intimately linked to the continued fight against white supremacy. Should we interpret the presence of three black American figures as animal defenders in the Wall of Respect for Animals as an attempt by NEAVS to illuminate that histories of animal advocacy in the U.S. were not the sole preserve of white Americans? Or does the inclusion of Douglass, Gregory and Walker (along with figures such as Mahatma Gandhi and Cesar Chavez), strike of tokenism by a white-led animal welfare organisation? In a post-

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<sup>28</sup> Be Sargent, 'A Wall of Respect for Animals, 2000', Animal Rights Network Records, MC00351, Box 46, Fol. 15, at Special Collections Research Center at North Carolina State University, Raleigh.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Civil Rights context, it appears that NEAVS sought to portray the animal welfare and rights movements as racially diverse, showing a handful of black and brown faces in the mural, claiming these figures as animal advocates, without having to engage with or support racial justice, women's rights and labour rights, that these figures were most celebrated for. Claiming black American writers as animal defenders, without acknowledging the wider racial politics in which these figures produced their ideas, perpetuates racist violence up to the present day.

Accessing the digitised Frederick Douglass Papers, online through the Library of Congress, exposed one of the obstacles to recovering a black American tradition of animal advocacy. The collection at the Library of Congress contains 7,400 separate items, amounting to approximately 38,000 images, including his diaries, correspondence, speeches and articles, primarily from the 1860s.<sup>30</sup> With such a vast body of material to scour through, keyword searches were paramount. However, the primary terms that I used to search the papers, which I thought could direct me to material on Douglass' understandings and relationships with animals, such as: *animals*, *beasts*, *agriculture*, *farming*, *oxen*, *horses*, *dogs*, *meat*, and so on, offered little return. Use of the broadest term, *animals*, only returned one item, which was a copy of the Pasteur Commission Report, published by the Victoria Street Society for the Protection of Animals, in London. This report doubted the effectiveness and morality of experimenting on animals to produce inoculation against rabies, highlighting the suffering of animals involved in the experiments and the differences in physiology between humans and dogs.<sup>31</sup> Though Douglass did not pen it, this source suggested that he was aware of and/or had made connections with animal welfare organisations internationally.

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<sup>30</sup> 'About This Collection: Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress', <<https://www.loc.gov/collections/frederick-douglass-papers/about-this-collection/>> [accessed on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019].

<sup>31</sup> Victoria Street Society for the Protection of Animals, London, 'Pasteur Commission', Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed Material <<https://www.loc.gov/resource/mfd.19001/?sp=3>>, p. 3.

Use of the search term *agriculture* returned two items, a report from the Department of Agriculture on its history and objectives, authored by James M. Swank, and a speech authored and performed by Douglass, to the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association. This source proved to contain rich material on Douglass' vision for working with animals, and is explored in detail in Chapter Three, focused on animals and labour. Within this speech, urging the kind treatment of animals was the first instruction that Douglass offered recently emancipated black agriculturalists, and was the most unambiguous animal advocacy argument that he made, and yet this material was not categorised under the search term 'animals'. This illuminates that the categorisation of Douglass' papers, and the subjects that were considered to be representative of his key interests and concerns, impacted upon the research process. Douglass' iconic status as a preeminent black abolitionist and campaigner against racial injustice has resulted in materials relating to these issues being placed front and center, and easily accessible, within the archive. However, as recent work has argued, over Douglass' lifetime his intellectual output was not limited to the issue of slavery, and we should be open to exploring the multidimensional facets of his activism.<sup>32</sup> David W. Blight rightly articulated that across a lifetime, 'Douglass was many things', a 'radical thinker and a proponent of classic nineteenth century political liberalism... a ferocious critic of the United States and of all its hypocrisies, but also, after emancipation, became a government bureaucrat, a diplomat, and a voice for

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<sup>32</sup> John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed Man* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015). Stauffer, Trodd and Bernier discuss how it may seem 'strange, if not implausible' that a formerly enslaved black American wrote more on photography than any of his American peers (p. IX). This important, recent scholarship challenged the historiographical erasure of Douglass' passion for photography, and the perception that a man devoted to 'ending slavery and racism and championing civil rights', could not also be a pioneering intellectual on the power of this developing technology (p. X). Such research is part of a scholarly turn towards acknowledging that black Americans, even during enslavement, sought to document ideas beyond their experiences of racial oppression.

territorial expansion'.<sup>33</sup> The extracts of Douglass' writings on creating more harmonious and less violent relationships with animals can be seen as, to employ Gene Andrew Jarrett's phrasing, 'anomalous' ideas, and therefore such ideas can become obscured in a monumental archive.<sup>34</sup>

I am keen to highlight the equal value of both published sources and archival material within this thesis. Across the published material from the antebellum period through to the mid-twentieth century, ideas about animals and challenges to their oppression appear only as threads, in a much wider fabric on separate themes such as slavery, black folk culture and black urban life. The published material, spanning from slave narratives, to Hurston's folktale collections, and Walker's short story and essay collections, to lesser-known works, such as Ellen Tarry's children's literature and Dick Gregory's part memoir/ part recipe book, enable us to perceive a loosening over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the subject matter that it was deemed appropriate for black American writers to cover. Ideas about animals in slave narratives help us to understand a spectrum of emotions from resentment and frustration through to empathy and respect. However, these ideas were worked into the text primarily to convey the degraded position of enslaved black women and men, and the violence of a system that held people as property, to a Northern white audience that had remained largely indifferent to black suffering.<sup>35</sup> Whereas in a post-Civil Rights/Black Power context, writers like Gregory and Walker had greater literary freedom to be able to overtly theorise on the suffering of animals in

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<sup>33</sup> David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018), p. XV.

<sup>34</sup> Gene Andrew Jarrett, *African American Literature Beyond Race: An Alternative Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> In Lydia Maria Child's introduction to Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, the white abolitionist and women's rights activist proclaimed that the publication of black women's experiences during slavery were necessary to arouse 'conscientious and reflecting women at the North to a sense of their duty in the exertion of moral influence on the question of Slavery, on all possible occasions. I do it with the hope that every man who reads this narrative will swear solemnly before God that, so far as he has power to prevent it, no fugitive from Slavery shall ever be sent back to suffer in that loathsome den of corruption and cruelty' (p. 5). This statement clearly laid out that the primary impetus for publishing slave narratives was to cajole Northern whites to challenge the institution of slavery in the South, and to break the Fugitive Slave Law, introduced in 1850.

industrialised societies, and to integrate compassion for animals into a wider vision of non-violent practice. The growing wealth and status that Gregory and Walker accrued over their lifetimes, as a comedian and acclaimed writer respectively, gave these individuals a platform from which to communicate their animal advocacy with a multi-racial audience, but one which specifically sought to capture the attention of black Americans, whom they believed could further the black freedom struggle by eliminating the consumption of animals.

Viewed together, the archival and published materials build up a picture where black writers, at times, expressed understandings of animals that were damaging either to a particular species and/or animals as a homogenous group, whilst at other times they communicated the necessity of considering the lives and welfare of animals. I do not take the position that archival sources reveal a truer or deeper sense of a particular individual's thinking around animals, but that each figure could hold a multiplicity of ideas across a lifetime, some that complimented each other and others that were in tension with each other. Moreover, shifting ideas about animals documented by black Americans were also shaped by the audience that each figure sought to communicate with. Indeed, a text urging a Northern white audience to take a stand against slavery in the mid-nineteenth century would shape vastly divergent ideas about animal oppression to a campaign letter written specifically for the purpose of raising consciousness about living conditions for animals in late-twentieth century factory farming. Audience and political contexts were key in molding a black American tradition of animal advocacy that encapsulated multiple understandings of the place of animals in society, from the anti-radical to the radical.

I argue that the contexts of racial oppression, racialised poverty and the wider majority-position of relying on animal exploitation for food, transport and energy, without considering the consequences for animal lives, in the U.S., shaped interactions with animals, and that the expression of speciesist standpoints does not

nullify progressive animal advocacy thinking in other moments. For example, Douglass' frustration with the team of oxen that he was tasked with breaking under Covey's command, in a context of great physical danger, does not invalidate his later advice in a Reconstruction era context that kindness to animals will benefit both working animals in agriculture, and the prosperity of black farmers.

Moreover, I am not interested in enforcing a strict bar, which a figure must surpass, in order to be considered an advocate for animals. Douglass and Hurston consumed meat across their lives, and Walker was open about her continued consumption of small quantities of animal flesh, once she had transitioned largely to a vegetarian diet. Nonetheless, they expressed significant ideas about forging more respectful relationships with animals, which should be considered radical in their respective eras. The idealised animal advocate, who has never partaken in actions that cause harm to non-human animals, does not exist in white histories of activism for animals, and nor does it exist in the black tradition that I have constructed here. I do not aim, therefore, to either disguise or hold up to the spotlight behaviours that would exclude the figures included here, as evidence that they cannot be considered as advocates for animals, but to encourage readers to be more generous in understanding the complexities of the lives of individuals included in this project, and how interactions with animals intersected in those lives of struggle and resistance. Theorising about animals and expressing these thoughts through the written word, whether published or not, was a remarkable act of black American intellectual work, in contexts that sought to restrict black modes of expression and dehumanise black American intellects.

This thesis is primarily focused on how black Americans documented their understandings of and interactions with animals through the written word, however, I also discuss photographic material. Photographs comprise only a small part of the source base for this project, and yet they have deepened my understanding of how, in changing economic and political contexts, black men and women sought to

represent their relationships with animals. In recent decades, much-needed scholarship on the significance of the medium of photography to the black resistance struggle in the U.S. has emerged. Leigh Raiford's study of the role of photography in the Civil Rights Movement captured the efficacy of the technology in showcasing the 'naked truth' of the brutality of white supremacy, through images of fire hoses and police dogs trained on non-violent protestors, to 'watching and judging audiences'.<sup>36</sup> Raiford appreciates the capacity of photography to help change public opinion, and to galvanise support amongst white Americans to challenge Jim Crow laws. However, she also encourages us to ask questions about the limitations of photographs as documentary sources, asserting that the photograph 'provides the illusion of seeing an event in its entirety as it truly happened'.<sup>37</sup> She urges scholars to consider 'what work does the photograph as a "disciplinary frame" perform'?<sup>38</sup> For example, should we reflect on what was occurring outside of the shot, and how does the photograph fit with the processes of meaning-making that the photographer and the subjects of the photograph sought to convey?

In a *TIME* article celebrating the release of *Through the African American Lens*, a text introducing iconic photographs from across black American history, Rhea Combs broached the issue of agency within photography, and the interplay between the subject, the photographer and the viewer of the photograph, in making meaning from an image. Combs takes the position that the subject of photographs possessed more agency, using the example of Frederick Douglass, who meticulously checked photographs before distribution, to demonstrate the importance of controlling an image for black Americans. She claims that 'I think the

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<sup>36</sup> Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), no page number given, cited in Introduction.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, no page number given.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, no page number given.



agency was definitely in their gaze at the camera instead of the gaze recording them'.<sup>39</sup>

The theoretical discussions provided by Raiford and Combs on the uses of photography as a technology of resistance, helped me to ask more nuanced questions of the photographic sources in this project. The photographs that I include primarily depict black American domestic life, with one further image showing the close working relationships between animals and black American agriculturalists. The photographic sources were accessed through the Alice Walker Papers and the Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection at Emory University. The latter collection consists of over 12,000 images of black American life and culture, from the 1840s through to 2000. Langmuir is a private collector of rare books from Philadelphia, who amassed the photographs through antique book shows, auctions and networking over the past thirty years and attributed his interest in black culture to the influence of his black American childhood caretaker.<sup>40</sup> Unnamed photographers captured the images that I analysed from the Langmuir collection, and so I can only speculate on the racial dynamics between the subject and photographer, and how it could change the meaning of the images. Further photographic sources from the Alice Walker Papers are explored, documenting Walker's 'Sacred Union', or faux-marriage ceremony with her companion animals in June 2007. The sources drawn from these collections enrich the construction of a black American tradition of animal advocacy by demonstrating the close working and familial relationships that black Americans formed with certain animals, sites in which a range of feelings, from frustration and resentment, through to solidarity, admiration and respect, played out.

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<sup>39</sup> Eliza Berman, '9 Iconic Photographs from African American History', *TIME*, (February 25<sup>th</sup> 2015) <<http://money.com/3686708/through-the-african-american-lens/>> [Accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019].

<sup>40</sup> 'Finding Aid for Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection, circa 1840 – 2000', (2013) <<https://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/langmuir1218/>> [accessed on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2019].

## Race and Animal Studies

Within the last decade, critical literature on the relationship between race and animality, and the role race has played in shaping animal advocacy has flourished. Amie Breeze Harper's edited collection, *Sistah Vegan*, was a seminal text that created a space for black women's voices and experiences within animal advocacy circles. Harper opened the text with a discussion of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals' (PETA) 2005 exhibition, 'Are Animals the New Slaves?' and the subsequent outcry from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and others in black communities across the U.S.<sup>41</sup> The images used in this exhibition captured moments of violence inflicted on black American, Native American and Jewish bodies, spanning slavery, indigenous genocide, segregation, acts of lynching, and the Holocaust. These images were placed alongside photographs of herds of animals that were being led to slaughterhouses or animals confined in cages in factory farms. The NAACP argued that such images were offensive, placing black Americans on 'the same level as animals' and that thereby PETA was an organisation 'filled with white racists', documenting recent tension between white-led animal advocacy and traditional Civil Rights organisations.<sup>42</sup> Harper rightly articulated that PETA's use of the images of human suffering within this campaign showed an insensitivity, and even a callousness, to the ways in which racialised groups have been dehumanised and equated with animals through systems of white supremacy. She declared that:

the wounds and scars of United States's sordid history of violent racism, in which Black Americans were *derogatorily* categorized as animals within a racist colonial context (I understand that outside of this context being called an "animal" isn't derogatory), need to be addressed and reconciled at a national level that I have yet to see.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Amie Breeze Harper, 'Introduction', in *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health and Society*, ed. by Amie Breeze Harper (New York: Lantern Books, 2010), p. XIII-XV.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XIII.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XV.

Harper thereby alluded to the complexities of advocating for animals against a historical backdrop in which racial oppression has been rooted in a pejorative comparison to animals. PETA's provocative questioning about whether 'animals are the new slaves', suggests that the suffering of animals in industrialised food production in the present day is akin to the centuries-long trade and possession of black bodies. This question implies that animals have replaced black Americans at the top of the pyramid of suffering. Indeed, the posing of the question itself is evidence of the perpetuation of white supremacy by white-led animal rights organisations, as it erases the multiple manifestations of black oppression in the U.S., in the twenty-first century. Contributors to Harper's edited collection discuss experiences of racism in white-led organisations such as PETA, and also hostility for advocating for animals within black communities.

Ain Drew's role as 'Urban Marketing Coordinator' at PETA, wherein she was tasked with animal rights outreach in black communities, through approaching animal rights issues from a black perspective, demonstrated the organisation's unwillingness to take on board a black woman's ideas for the best way to frame animal rights to a black audience. Drew articulated that marketing vegetarian and vegan diets to black communities as a way to improve the health of the community, whilst simultaneously reducing animal suffering, would be the most effective inroad to outreach. However, Drew ran into a brick wall when advancing this approach, and her colleagues and superiors pushed her towards exploring 'how to make fur "less hip", leading her to conclude that 'black folks wearing furs to the club was more of a problem than the health problems that plague us'.<sup>44</sup> PETA's favored approach sought to shame black American celebrities for their fashion choices that involved wearing animal skins, rather than improving health outcomes in black American communities through the gradual adoption of a plant-based diet.

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<sup>44</sup> Ain Drew, 'Being a Sistah at PETA', in *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health and Society*, ed. by Amie Breeze Harper (New York: Lantern Books, 2010), pp. 61 – 64 (p. 63).

Joi Maria Probus' contribution to *Sistah Vegan*, illustrated that black American vegetarians, vegans and animal advocates experienced hostility from within their own communities. She self-identified as an 'enigma' amongst black American friends, family and acquaintances, who were either bemused or openly condescending about her decision to transition to veganism.<sup>45</sup> To many in Probus' community, the notion of advocating for animal rights seemed preposterous, when many black women and men feel that 'we're still working on *our* rights!' The reaction to Probus' veganism demonstrates the perception that if a black American advocates for the protection of animal lives, they are not dedicating enough time and effort into activism for black freedom, viewing animal advocacy and anti-racist activism as mutually exclusive. Thus, the black women who contribute to the *Sistah Vegan* anthology illustrate a double jeopardy, wherein their specific perspectives were not respected in white-dominated animal rights spaces, nor in their own black circles of friends and family who did not take seriously animal welfare and rights.

Professor Claire Jean Kim's work is also pertinent to this study, through her explorations of the '*entanglements* of species, race and sex'.<sup>46</sup> Her role, alongside Carla Freccero, in facilitating a special issue of *American Quarterly* in 2013, which discussed critically the complexity and messiness of studying species simultaneously with race and sex, was of great significance. That one of the leading academic journals in American Studies dedicated an issue to exploring the intersections between race, species and sex, gave legitimacy to scholars who sought to look more closely at ideas about animals, their oppression, and how the exploitation of animals fits with understandings of human forms of domination. Kim and Freccero, urged scholars working at the intersection of species/race/sex to 'take seriously [the] specificity' of each form of domination, whilst also acknowledging that

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<sup>45</sup> Joi Maria Probus, 'Young, Black, and Vegan', in *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health and Society*, ed. by Amie Breeze Harper (New York: Lantern Books, 2010), pp. 53 – 57 (p. 56).

<sup>46</sup> Claire Jean Kim and Carla Freccero, 'Introduction: A Dialogue', *American Quarterly*, 65 (2013), 461 – 479 (p. 461).

'species meanings have played a momentous role in underwriting and energising various categories of human difference over the millennia'.<sup>47</sup> Such an approach has shaped this project, as I adopt the position that forms of human and animal oppression are not the same, but that derogatory understandings of animals have constituted part of the basis of white supremacy and patriarchy globally, and that therefore histories of speciesism are intertwined with histories of race and sex discrimination. The special issue highlighted the richness of using race, species and sex as analytic guides to understand U.S. histories.

Kim's text *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species and Nature in a Multicultural Age* built upon her arguments set out in the introduction to the *American Quarterly* special issue. She articulated a position wherein one must deconstruct race and species difference together, asserting that 'our interpretive success depends on our ability and willingness to engage with these two taxonomies of power, race and species, at once – *and to understand their connectedness*'.<sup>48</sup> As Kim does, I accept as a starting point that, in the U.S., various narratives of 'racial and cultural persecution' and narratives of 'human domination over the animal' have marked history and that these two narratives are 'interwoven in important ways'.<sup>49</sup>

Throughout the thesis, I adopt the position that categories of difference, including race, sex *and* species, are 'historically and socially constructed rather than given by nature'.<sup>50</sup> Acknowledging that race, sex and species are *constructs* does not imply that they are imaginary, or that they do not have felt impacts in lived realities. Kim's definition of race conveys that constructing categories of difference is intertwined with unevenly carving up and preserving power in society, claiming that "race" is a historically and culturally mediated way of reading, classifying, and ranking bodies, of assigning some more worth than others on the basis of physical

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 465.

<sup>48</sup> Claire Jean Kim, *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species, and Nature in a Multicultural Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 15.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

variation. It is a means of producing and disciplining different and inferior bodies'.<sup>51</sup> In addition, species has been over-constructed, as Kim notes that 'it is human classification that insists that humans stand alone, apart from and above all other "animals"'.<sup>52</sup> Kim recognises that there are countless physical variations between humans, rodents, primates and insects, but instead of celebrating the differences that mark the animals that inhabit the earth, these differences have been seized upon to organise beings hierarchically.

I find Kim's theoretical move beyond dualisms to a more complex system of organising power useful to this project. She notes that race cannot be reduced to the dualism of white over non-white, but that a more complex web exists wherein non-white groups have 'differential proximity to and participation in racial power', across historical and geographical contexts.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Kim affirmed that species should not be oversimplified to human over animal, but that it should be viewed as 'a taxonomy or complex hierarchical ordering of different animal kinds'.<sup>54</sup> This theoretical interjection, wherein complex webs of power replace dualisms, enabled a more nuanced analysis of the multiple understandings of animals held by black Americans since the mid-nineteenth century. For example, Douglass' struggle with his master's dog for scraps of food differ greatly from his interaction with a team of oxen that he is tasked with breaking. Here, it is the classification of the animal that shapes the human-animal interaction. The dog's categorisation as a pet fuelled Douglass' resentment toward the animal and feelings of injustice that an animal was closer to the circle of power than he was, as an enslaved man. Whereas the status of the oxen, as working animals, fostered a more empathetic understanding from Douglass, even though in this context he was forced to exercise human domination over the animal. Moreover, Douglass' perceptions of pets held on the plantation

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

were in stark contrast to Walker's relationships with her companion animals in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The scenario in which Douglass struggles with the slave master's dog for morsels of food to fend off hunger is at the opposite end of human-dog interactions, from Walker's hosting of a faux-marriage ceremony with her companion animals, to guarantee their continued nurturance in the event of her death. Though Douglass and Walker shared in the experience of being black in America, the change in racial politics across the decades and the interaction of shifting class status with race, altered their divergent understandings of the dog, from one based on competition to one rooted in care and comfort.

I seek to build upon the scholarly work of Harper and Kim, by creating a space for black ideas on animal oppression, from a historical perspective. As their scholarship documents, in the twenty-first century, some white-led animal advocacy work remains structured by white supremacist thinking, and yet black American women and men still make opportunities to challenge the suffering of animals, on their own terms, alongside their commitments to undoing racism and sexism. Examining how celebrated and lesser-known black American thinkers from across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries theorised about animals, documented those ideas and how they intersected with or furthered the movement for black freedom, adds a layer of depth to the field of research established by scholars such as Harper and Kim.

### **A White Tradition of Animal Advocacy**

Traditional timelines of animal advocacy in the U.S. chart the development from efforts for animal welfare, beginning in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, to the emergence of theory and actions promoting animal rights, in the last decades of the twentieth century. The key actors in these traditional narratives are white and mostly male. The historiographical erasure of black ideas relating to animal oppression has contributed to a perception, identified by Amie Breeze Harper, that

ethical consumption and animal advocacy in the U.S. is a 'white thing'.<sup>55</sup> In Harold D. Guither's *Animal Rights: History and Scope of a Radical Social Movement*, the emergence of animal advocacy in the U.S. was traced to the immediate post-bellum period, when national and regional societies for the protection of (some) animals were founded, in response to the founding of similar societies in Europe.<sup>56</sup> Henry Bergh founded the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in 1866. The focus of these early societies has come to be defined as 'welfarist' work, with an emphasis on 'the humane treatment of all animals without concern for their ultimate use'.<sup>57</sup> Reform is the key to a welfarist position, where legislation is created and (to varying extents) enforced, to protect certain animals from acts of *cruelty*. Emily Gaarder's research has discussed white women's roles in early animal welfare organisations, noting that activities on behalf of animals ranged from opposing animal experimentation in laboratories, collecting stray animals from the streets, creating and maintaining watering stations for working horses and founding a 'rest farm' for horses considered to be spent.<sup>58</sup> Such activities aimed to improve living and working conditions for animals, primarily in urban centres, without challenging their institutionalised use in transport, agriculture and food production.

Historiographical overviews of animal advocacy in the U.S., such as Guither's, jump from this flurry of activity in the late nineteenth century, when reform organisations sought to reduce cruelty, or at the very least the spectacle of public forms of cruelty to animals, to the emergence of *animal rights*, which is portrayed as an idea and corresponding social movement arising in the 1970s. Animal rights is demarcated from animal welfare through its emphasis on the belief that animals are

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<sup>55</sup> Amie Breeze Harper, 'Social Justice Beliefs and Addiction to Uncompassionate Consumption', in *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health and Society*, ed. by Amie Breeze Harper (New York: Lantern Books, 2010), pp. 20 – 41 (p. 35).

<sup>56</sup> Harold D. Guither, *Animal Rights: History and Scope of a Radical Social Movement* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>58</sup> Emily Gaarder, *Women and the Animal Rights Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011), p. 8 – 9.



'not ours to eat, wear or experiment on' and an acceptance that animals are sentient and can experience pleasure and pain, and that therefore animal suffering should be considered and challenged.<sup>59</sup> In charting the development of the animal rights movement in the U.S., traditional historiographies rely on the publication of two main texts, to provide the theoretical underpinnings. The first text was *Animal Liberation*, published in 1975 by Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher. Guither claimed that 'some regard it as the bible of the new animal rights movement, since it presents many of the basic philosophical concepts for ethical treatment of animals'.<sup>60</sup> *Animal Liberation* deconstructed the idyllic image of the family farm as the site of food production in the U.S., and documented the experiences of animals in industrialised, profit-driven farming systems. The text pressed its audience to confront the uncomfortable reality of converting a live animal into a food item, a procedure that the agribusiness industry was keen to keep behind closed doors in large, windowless sheds. Alongside acting as an exposé for the U.S. public, on the conditions experienced by animals in industrial farming and medical and scientific experimentation, *Animal Liberation* laid out a utilitarian position for the ethical treatment of animals. Singer's primary claim was that animals, like humans, can feel pain and pleasure, and that they therefore have the capacity to suffer, and that subsequently 'if a being suffers there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration'.<sup>61</sup>

Tom Regan, the late philosopher and proponent of a deontological approach to animal ethics, is also celebrated as a leading scholar who 'expanded interest and support for animal rights'.<sup>62</sup> In his distinguished text, *The Case for Animal Rights*, published in 1983, he argued for the ethical treatment of animals centered on the notion that humans and other animals alike are 'subjects of a life', in that each of us

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<sup>59</sup> Guither, p. 9.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (London: Pimlico, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Guither, p. 17.

has a life that matters to us, regardless of whether another group believes that it matters. Regan claims therefore that animals have absolute worth or 'inherent value'.<sup>63</sup> All beings that possess inherent value have the basic right to be treated as an end, rather than as the means to an end, according to Regan. As such, Regan argued that the human use of animals for food, clothing and entertainment did not respect their status as subjects of a life and used them as means to an end, rather than as ends in themselves, and so must be challenged.

The ideas of Singer and Regan were significant to the growing conversation about just relationships between humans and animals in U.S. society, but focusing exclusively on their theories suggests that only white privileged men working within the academy worked towards reshaping human attitudes towards animals. Anthony T. Fiscella's research on The MOVE Organization (MOVE), a black liberation group that 'espoused an uncompromising defense of land, animals and people from pollution, prisons and police', founded in the early 1970s, challenges the traditional timeline of the emergence of animal rights activism.<sup>64</sup> Fiscella noted that in June 1973, two years before the publication of Singer's *Animal Liberation* and seven years before the founding of PETA, members of MOVE protested outside of the Bronx Zoo, to challenge the confinement of animals.<sup>65</sup> Fiscella rightly asserted that this act of protest was an 'historical occasion', for two reasons: as they were the 'first such protests ever to, 1) take place on location at such institutions and 2) protest not only the physical harm of animals but the very concept of confining them'.<sup>66</sup> MOVE's use of direct action tactics and theoretical move away from a welfarist standpoint, to a position that advocated for the freedom of animals, to open the cages rather than make the cages roomier, was not enough for them to receive

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<sup>63</sup> Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams, *Beyond Animal Rights: A Feminist Caring Ethic for the Treatment of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1996), p. 37.

<sup>64</sup> Anthony T. Fiscella, 'Removing MOVE: A Case of Intersectional Invisibility within Religious and Legal Studies', *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, 7 (2016), 3 – 41 (p. 4).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

credit for their anti-speciest work in the majority of animal rights and environmental scholarship. Fiscella's research is pertinent to this thesis as it is one case study of a black-led, anti-racist organisation undertaking animal advocacy work, as part of their larger strategy for liberation in the U.S., that was largely written out of earlier, white-authored histories of animal welfare and rights activism. MOVE's Bronx Zoo protest preceded some of the key milestones credited with the emergence of animal rights in the U.S., and yet their combination of anti-racist and anti-speciesist work has been largely overlooked.

The animal rights movement was a microcosm of wider U.S. society, structured by white supremacy. An interview with Alice Walker, first published in 1988, disclosed the vulnerability of being a black woman entering into white-dominated animal advocacy spaces. Ellen Bring, a white Oakland-based law professor and animal rights activist, opened the interview by asking Walker 'What would be your vision of the purpose and outcome of a benefit for animal rights'? Walker conveyed a discomfort at the idea of being involved in social, fund-raising events for animal advocacy, due to her experience of racism from a leading male figure within the movement. She responded, stating:

I'm not really sure, because I don't know that many groups. I'm really happy to see you. The contacts that I have had with at least one other person, who is very noted in animal rights' circles, was not a very positive one. This man, who feels for animals, was extremely condescending to me as a Black person. I had to defend my integrity as a Black person trying to work with a white man who I thought was really stunted in his ability to include the feelings of human beings as well as other animals.

I don't know how big a problem that is or how big it would be. I think it is imperative for people in whatever movement they feel rooted in, to at least be able to relate to people in other groups, of other colors, races, cultures, in a way that is not offensive.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ellen Bring, 'In the Midst of All Beings', *Woman of Power*, (1989), Alice Walker Papers, MSS1061, Box 147, Folder 9, P. 26. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.

A footnote for the interview explained that ‘for the present, Alice has chosen to make personal contributions to animal rights groups, rather than do a benefit’.<sup>68</sup> This footnote is telling, as it suggests that Walker needed to explain herself, for her hesitancy to hold an animal rights benefit. Such a remark created the impression that a reluctance to raise funds community-wide required more explanation than the pervasive racism that led to Walker’s reluctance. Walker’s openness about her experience of racism within the animal rights movement demonstrated that many white activists did not take an intersectional approach, where human and animal oppressions were challenged simultaneously. The male activist that Walker referred to, took a single-issue approach to animal advocacy, and in his attempt to challenge human supremacy over animals, he dismissed the reality that humans are not equally endowed with power, and that race, gender, class, sexuality and disability shape an individual’s access to power. Walker’s description of collaborating with white animal rights activists as ‘not...very positive’, ‘condescending’ and one in which she was pushed into defending her identity as a black woman, reflects what Bénédicte Boisseron termed the ‘systematic precarity of black life’ in the U.S.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, Walker could not enter white-dominated circles and simply advocate against issues like the exploitation of animals in industrialised food systems or entertainment venues, but had to meet with so-called progressives who, directly or indirectly, questioned her fight for justice as a black woman in America.

Ellen Bring responded to Walker’s revelation by stating ‘that incident was very unfortunate’.<sup>70</sup> The inference that it was bad luck that had led to Walker encountering a leading figure’s problematic racial politics and use of the term ‘incident’ to individualise the experience, demonstrates a tendency within animal

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, Box 147, Folder 9, p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> Bénédicte Boisseron, *Afro-Dog: Blackness and the Animal Question* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. xv.

<sup>70</sup> Ellen Bring, ‘In the Midst of All Beings’, *Woman of Power*, (1989), Alice Walker Papers, MSS1061, Box 147, Folder 9, P. 27. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.

rights circles to play down systematic racism. Bring acknowledged that ‘in terms of public activism, the animal rights movement is predominantly white and middle class’ and probed Walker on why she thinks that is.<sup>71</sup> At this point in the interview, Walker articulated that the leisure time of white, middle-class people is ‘bought by the people of other colors, other classes’.<sup>72</sup> She thereby highlighted that the animal advocacy work of white, class-privileged sectors of society is dependent upon an exploitative, racist labour market. Walker expanded that:

nobody in my family has time to think about these things... and I can understand it because I know their lives. I know that they work at awful jobs with long, horrible hours. I know that nobody has the time or energy to search out food that’s other than what they’re used to, which is lots of meat.<sup>73</sup>

Here, Walker suggested that exploring and adopting alternative diets that do not include, or minimise, the consumption of animal proteins requires time, time that many low-income, black American communities did not have. Through the opening fragments of this interview, Walker explained that both the macro and micro aspects of white supremacy shaped the capacity and desire of black women and men to move in white-led animal rights circles. The wider structures of a labour market that confined a lot of black Americans to low-paying industries with long hours, combined with micro-aggressions, wherein black Americans met with hostility in white-dominated organisations for animals, created an environment where the animal advocacy *movement* was perceived as an unappealing use of valuable leisure time, and a space that was unreceptive to the struggle for black freedom in the U.S.

Walker’s interview with Bring, exploring her journey to animal advocacy, appeared in two publications. The extract in which she discussed the racism of a leading male figure in the movement was only published in *Woman of Power*, in the Winter 1989 issue. This publication was devoted to exploring the interconnections between feminism, spirituality and politics, and was not centred on animal advocacy

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, Box 147, Folder 9, p. 27.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, Box 147, Folder 9, p. 27.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, Box 147, Folder 9, p. 27.

issues. The year prior, in April 1988, the interview was published in *The Animals' Agenda*, the bi-monthly magazine of the Animal Rights Network. This publication was dedicated to publishing original content on animal rights issues and helping smaller animal rights organisations within the U.S. to network with each other.<sup>74</sup> Significantly, within this published version of the interview, Walker's comments on internal racism within the animal rights movement did not appear. This illustrates that in the late 1980s, certain white-led animal rights organisations were unwilling to acknowledge that their movement was saturated with white supremacy, as much as wider U.S. society. To protect their image as a progressive organisation, *The Animals' Agenda* silenced Walker, using her as a token representative of black America's take on animal rights. Whilst they were keen to note that 'race and gender issues are... important components of Walker's narratives', they were unwilling to validate her experiences as a black woman confronting racism and sexism when they occurred within the animal rights movement.<sup>75</sup> Decolonising a social justice movement requires as a very first step the recognition that racial privilege structures progressive as well as regressive political causes. Refusing to hear experiences of racism within animal rights spaces perpetuates systems of white supremacy, rather than deconstructing a human form of oppression that maintains historical and contemporary entanglements with the exploitation of animals.

These extracts reveal that within white-led traditions of animal advocacy, white activists and scholars were willing to discuss race in so far as it furthered the ends of animal rights, for instance to use historical examples of racial trauma, such as slavery and segregation, to demonstrate how future generations may come to view industrial farming as a moral abomination. However, when it came to being

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<sup>74</sup> Animal Rights Network Records 1903 – 2003, *Collection Guides: Archival Collections at NCSU Libraries*, (2003), <<https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/findingaids/mc00351>> [accessed January 28th 2019].

<sup>75</sup> Ellen Bring, 'Interview with The Animals' Agenda', (1988) Alice Walker Papers, MSS1061, Box 87, Folder 28, P. 8. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.

open about how race shaped the uneven distribution of power within the movement itself, an eerie silence lingered. The aforementioned interview demonstrates that whilst black American advocates for animals like Walker felt a discomfort with the white-dominated movement for animals, this does not erase their ideas of respect and empathy, and desire to improve the lives of animals.

### **Black American Literary Traditions: Creating a Space for Black American Ideas on the Connections Between Human and Animal Oppressions**

Since the era of slavery, the act of putting pen to paper has been a radical act for black Americans. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay affirmed the 'heroic proportions' of 'registering a black voice in printed letters' during enslavement.<sup>76</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, teaching an enslaved person to read or write was criminalised. Gates Jr. and McKay noted that following the 'Stono Rebellion of 1739, the largest uprising of slaves in the colonies before the American Revolution', obtaining literacy became outlawed for enslaved women and men, and those who taught or employed the enslaved to write would 'forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money'.<sup>77</sup> A pivotal scene in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* emphasised how denying literacy to enslaved black Americans was a central component of keeping this population subjugated. At the age of seven or eight, Frederick Douglass was sent to Baltimore to live under a new master and mistress, Hugh and Sophia Auld. Sophia was characterised by Douglass as a kind woman, made rotten through the institution of slavery. Initially, Douglass recalled that 'she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning to spell words of three or four letters'.<sup>78</sup> Hugh Auld's reaction to Sophia's tutoring was telling to Douglass, as he forbade her to continue

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<sup>76</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), p. xxxviii.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p. xxxix.

<sup>78</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, 1845), p. 32.

and cautioned her that it was both 'unlawful, as well as unsafe'.<sup>79</sup> In his master's words, 'learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world'.<sup>80</sup> Hugh Auld's view represented the position of many slave-owners in the South, that the possession of literacy by the enslaved would spoil their obedience and subservience to white masters and mistresses. Through this interaction, Douglass became aware that the skills of reading and writing would make him 'unfit to be a slave' in the eyes of oppressors, and so the power of literacy as a tool of resistance was impressed upon him. Auld's insistence on denying literacy led Douglass to declare that 'from that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom'.<sup>81</sup>

The beginnings of black American literacy were forged in violent and dangerous circumstances, where black women and men put pen to paper, in spite of tremendous risk to their bodies and lives. In Solomon Northup's narrative, *Twelve Years a Slave*, he recalled the threats of physical violence pledged by his master, Edwin Epps, if he was caught in the pursuit of literacy (a skill that he already possessed due to his status as a free born man, kidnapped into slavery). Northup recounted that 'he assured me... if he ever caught me with a book, or with pen and ink, he would give me a hundred lashes'.<sup>82</sup> The risk of physical violence combined with a lack of access to the implements necessary for writing, meant that even for a man who had already developed his literacy before becoming ensnared in slavery, practising this skill was a near-impossibility.

Although several legal and physical barriers were put in place to hamper the development of black American literacy in the antebellum period, white supremacist discourse claimed that the possession of reason, demonstrated through reading and writing, was lacking or absent in enslaved black Americans, signifying an innate

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 32.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p. 33.

<sup>82</sup> Northup, p. 162.



less-than-human status.<sup>83</sup> Thus, whilst the infrastructure of white supremacy would not allow enslaved black Americans to gain literacy, it was widely promulgated that black men and women were biologically incapable of such a task. This explains the inclusion of white-authored prefaces, and phrases such as ‘written by himself’ or ‘a true story’ in the titles of slave narratives, as publishers anticipated disbelief that black Americans were capable of authoring such texts.

Whilst the origins of black American literature are rooted in slave narratives, the scope of black American literature from the post-bellum period through to the post-Civil Rights era is vast in form and content. The phrase *black American literary canon* refers to efforts by scholars to encapsulate the most significant texts written by, for and about black Americans. Texts that are included in edited collections and anthologies, taught in schools and on college curricula become canonized texts. The impetus behind constructing a black American literary canon was intertwined with the wider struggle for black freedom in the U.S., to stress the talent of black writers and the importance of their ideas in a white supremacist society that sought to represent black culture as inferior. Although the inclusion of black-authored literature in American Literature survey courses, and the development of courses specific to black American Literature has markedly improved since the 1980s, in the initial post-Civil Rights and Black Power era, significant resistance to the study and celebration of black American texts reigned. Gates Jr. and McKay noted that, in 1970, Leonard Deutsch, who later became Professor of English at Marshall University, wished to produce a doctoral dissertation on the works of Ralph Ellison. This request was eventually approved, but met with disdain from one well-known scholar on his thesis committee, who claimed that:

a doctoral dissertation implies substance, weight... and spread...One could, for instance, write about Hemingway, Faulkner or Bellow...because men like them have established a respectable and accepted corpus of work ranging sufficiently to call for comment.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Gates Jr. and McKay, p. xxxix.

<sup>84</sup> Gates Jr. and McKay, p. xliii.

Such remarks demonstrated an entrenched view held by some in the academy, that only white men were capable of producing great works of literature, and that this was the only material suitable for study. Thus, although black-authored literature existed for consumption in the U.S., Eurocentric scholars acted as gatekeepers, limiting and/or barring the study and reach of such texts.

Black American women undertook much of the recovery work, showing black American communities and wider U.S society that black American literature existed since the eighteenth century. In 1976, Alice Walker penned an essay on the importance of models for writers, affirming that the rediscovery of black women writers, who had gone before her, smoothed her passage and emboldened her to continue as a professional writer. She asserted that she was:

mindful that throughout my four years at a prestigious black and then a prestigious white college I had heard not one word about early black women writers, one of my first tasks was simply to determine whether they had existed. After this, I could breathe easier, with more assurance about the profession I myself had chosen.<sup>85</sup>

Here, Walker indirectly signposted one issue with canon constructing: which texts, ideas and authors are included and which are left out? Black America is comprised of a multiplicity of identities and voices. Experiencing blackness in the U.S. is, and was historically, shaped by several other intersecting points of identity, such as gender, sexuality, class and geographical location. Walker's struggle to locate literature penned by someone who embodied both her race and gender identity, illustrates that in the early-mid twentieth century, even within black literary circles, gender discrimination worked to exclude a writer from being considered as serious and talented. Alongside her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Color Purple*, Walker is renowned for her efforts in recovering and rehabilitating the reputation of the

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<sup>85</sup> Alice Walker, 'Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life', (1976) in *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, ed. by Alice Walker (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 3 - 14 (p. 9).

anthropologist and writer, Zora Neale Hurston. Whilst researching black American folklore for a short story, Walker stumbled across Hurston's name in a 'footnote to the white voices of authority'.<sup>86</sup> Thus, in the mid-twentieth century, despite Hurston's extensive ethnographic work with black communities in the U.S. South and the Caribbean to record folktales and hoodoo practices, white male researchers and writers were still seen as the authoritative sources of knowledge on black culture.

Hurston's most celebrated novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, is now viewed as a core text of the black American literary canon. Nonetheless, in 1937 the leading black American novelist, Richard Wright, dismissed Hurston's novel as carrying 'no theme, no message, no thought'.<sup>87</sup> Black male intellectuals such as Wright saw Hurston's representation of her own community of Eatonville, Florida only as an attempt to cater to a white reading audience, to satiate their perceptions of black Americans as 'exotic primitives'.<sup>88</sup> This example highlights that what is considered the "best of" or most significant pieces of black American literature is subjective and changes over time. It took the labour of women like Alice Walker and other black women writers and scholars doing black feminist work, to rehabilitate the works of early black women writers like Hurston, Nella Larsen and Jessie Fauset, amongst others. Walker's journey to place a headstone on the site of Hurston's grave in the Summer of 1973 was a physical act of canon-constructing, of communicating to the world that although Hurston died in poverty, with Spot-the-dog as her 'only companion', her legacy of collected folklore, plays, novels, short stories and essays mattered and should be remembered.<sup>89</sup> Walker placed upon the 'field full of weeds where Zora is' a simple headstone that read 'A Genius of the South',

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<sup>86</sup> Walker, 'Saving the Life That Is Your Own: The Importance of Models in the Artist's Life', p. 11.

<sup>87</sup> Richard Wright, 'Between Laughter and Tears', *The New Masses*, (October 1937) <<http://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam358/wrightrev.html>> [accessed 1st February 2019].

<sup>88</sup> Daphne Lamothe, "Vodou Imagery, African American Tradition, and Cultural Transformation, in *Zora Neale Hurston: New Edition*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007), pp. 159 - 180 (p. 172).

<sup>89</sup> Alice Walker, 'Looking for Zora', in *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, ed. by Alice Walker (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 93 – 116 (p. 115).

deconstructing a racist and sexist position of what merited great American literature.<sup>90</sup> Through the example of Walker and others' recovery of Hurston's literature, we can see the necessity of repeated expansion of the black American literary canon, to reflect the multiplicity of ideas and experiences held by black women and men.<sup>91</sup> A novel that contained 'no message' to Wright, was overflowing with ideas to Walker, about the importance of black love in sustaining people in a society structured by white supremacy, and a narrative that charted a black woman's journey to self-definition, breaking out of both race and gender restrictions placed upon her.

Gene Andrew Jarrett's research, which probes whether the content of literature by black American writers must unambiguously explore race in the U.S., to be considered part of the black American literary canon, is pertinent here. He affirmed that 'the mere fact that African American literature even exists, that African Americans over the centuries have demonstrated an unwavering commitment to the idea and act of literary writing, is enough to signify racial progress'.<sup>92</sup> Jarrett argues against the idea that the "best of" African American literature must 'only portray the realities of black life' and depict the race in a positive light, to counter the white supremacist tradition of minstrelsy.<sup>93</sup> Instead, he articulates that African American literature 'should be defined in the broadest possible way'.<sup>94</sup> Texts do not have to uphold respectability politics to contribute towards racial uplift, nor do they have to contain material explicitly devoted to documenting and resisting racism in the U.S. to be considered a great work of black American literature.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 115.

<sup>91</sup> Walker did not singlehandedly rescue Hurston's literary reputation. Robert E. Hemenway's biography of Hurston in the late 1970s was vital in renewing critical interest in her corpus of work.

<sup>92</sup> Gene Andrew Jarrett, *African American Literature Beyond Race: An Alternative Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

Jarrett used the phrase 'anomalous texts' to refer to literature that has been excluded when forming the canon or building a tradition of black American literature.<sup>95</sup> He rightly notes that anthology editors play a role in dictating 'what is seen as the canon', and that 'aesthetic, discursive and thematic priorities' determine which texts are included, along with more pragmatic issues such as book length and cost.<sup>96</sup> However, it is necessary to look beyond anthologies to see that the texts included are not the only ones that matter.

Jarrett's idea of *anomalous texts*, and his commitment to exploring 'moments of literary defiance' by well known and lesser-known black American writers is a useful lens through which to think about a black American tradition of animal advocacy in literature.<sup>97</sup> He affirmed that 'some of our most celebrated African American authors had written remarkable, even beautiful, literature resisting prevailing conventions of racial representations, despite the cost of critical dismissal and commercial failure'.<sup>98</sup> This was certainly the case for Hurston, whose desire to move away from writing about black communities in the U.S. South, in the last decades of her life, was met with coolness and derision from publishers and critics. Hurston's exploration of whiteness in the South, in her novel *Seraph on the Suwanee*, and revisionist conception of King Herod in her unpublished manuscript, *Herod the Great*, were dismissed by her contemporaries and in early scholarship on her work, who claimed that these texts symbolised a 'talent in ruins'.<sup>99</sup> It is clear that when Hurston strayed from writing about 'her race', it was assumed that she was crossing the borders of what it was possible for her to know. Her literary pathway was restricted to writing about the people that she had grown up with, and the black men and women she met on her travels, whilst it was assumed that observations

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), p. 345.

about white Americans and theological theorising should be left to white men. Hurston's attempt to publish literature on human-companion animal relationships were thwarted also, as her editor claimed that such content was not in vogue with publishers.<sup>100</sup> This was one example in which a black woman tried to shape ideas about animals but was discouraged, and yet Hurston drafted this material anyway, within her correspondence. Her humorous studies of her pet's behaviour, which shifted between frustration at their destructive patterns, and admiration of a more-than-human intelligence, can be interpreted as an act of literary defiance and an anomalous text.

Engaging with Jarrett's research enables a nuanced understanding, across the four chapters within this thesis, of ideas considered anomalous, that did not fit into the remit of what black American thinkers and writers *should* be theorising on, or did not fit the mould of white-led visions of animal advocacy. Ultimately, the project of recovering a black American tradition of animal advocacy underlines the tangled intersections of race and species oppression throughout U.S. history, and demonstrates the determination of black American writers to document arguments rooted in empathy and solidarity with animals as oppressed beings, and the obstacles to doing so without white privilege.

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<sup>100</sup> Jean Parker Waterbury, 'Letter from Jean Parker Waterbury to Zora Neale Hurston, dated 1<sup>st</sup> July 1952', Zora Neale Hurston Papers, MS Group 6, Box 2, Folder 25, University of Florida George Smathers Library, Gainesville.

## **Chapter One:**

# **Confronting ‘The Beast’: Solidifying And Subverting Animalising Discourse In Nineteenth Century Slave Narratives**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I seek to document how the use of animal symbolism and animalising language, which represented human beings as either specific animals or falling under the category of umbrella terms ‘beast’ or ‘brute’, abounded in nineteenth century slave narratives. It has long since been recognised in scholarship, and in broader public knowledge, that white supremacist arguments were dependent on the comparison of black Americans to animals, who were considered an inferior category of being, to justify the continued control and exploitation of black American women and men for the benefit of white Americans.<sup>101</sup>

However, across this chapter, I am interested in exploring the myriad ways that black American writers deployed and constructed the trope of ‘the dangerous animal’ to characterise the behaviour of powerful whites in slaveholding communities, and fellow enslaved men and women. By examining how Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Solomon Northup and Sojourner Truth drew upon animal symbolism to represent whites in their narratives, I will illuminate how enslaved black Americans were not only subjected to animalising discourse and dehumanising treatment, but how they used this approach themselves to further their political aims in gathering momentum against slavery. Black American writers

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<sup>101</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981). See chapter two for discussion on how emerging white racist scientific experiments, such as craniometry, argued for the biological inferiority of black men and women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

characterised white Americans as animals when describing the deception practised by slave-owners and overseers, and also acts of physical and sexual violence that were routinised during enslavement. In contrast to white supremacist arguments, which articulated that the institution of slavery was necessary to civilise and control black Americans due to their less-than-human status, black American writers asserted that the system of slavery did the opposite of civilising, it turned white men into animals.

By repurposing animal symbolism to convey the negative behaviour and attributes of whites, did black American writers reinforce an association between animality and inferiority that had been central to their own experience of oppression? I am mindful that, in the fight to abolish slavery, deconstructing speciesism was not a priority for black writers. By using negative animal imagery in slave narratives, the writers communicated to an audience the danger of white supremacy, and subsequently speciesist ideas became a useful weapon of resistance to racism. In individual accounts of slavery, and at varying moments within these narratives, animalising language was deployed to solidify the argument that animality was linked to wildness, violence and danger and that these attributes were most explicitly identifiable in white Americans.

This chapter will analyse extracts from four texts within the slave narrative genre, illustrating how each text employed animalising discourse against the white slave-holding power structure, and how such an approach shaped ideas about 'the beast'.<sup>102</sup> It will explore Sojourner Truth's *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (1850), Solomon Northup's *Twelve Years a Slave* (1853), Frederick Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

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<sup>102</sup> See Dominik Ohrem, 'Introduction' in *American Beasts: Perspectives on Animals, Animality and U.S. Culture, 1776 -1920*, ed. by Dominik Ohrem (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2017), pp. 9 - 48 for discussion of the ways that terms such as *animal*, *beast*, *brute* and *savage* have been deployed to describe animal beings, but also to refer to the 'animal within' or the 'animal nature' of certain humans, and to hierarchically organize human bodies as closer to animals, according to race, gender and class identities.



(1861). These texts document the heterogeneous circumstances of the enslaved in the U.S and how gender, geography, the local economy and literacy levels, to name but a few factors, shaped experiences during slavery.

Truth's narrative was the first to be published, and is significant among the texts discussed here for a multitude of reasons. She is most celebrated for the 1851 'Ain't I a Woman?' speech, performed at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in which she purportedly claimed both her blackness and womanliness as equally significant to her identity and experiences of oppression. At an event dominated by white women, it was claimed, Truth would not allow the audience to forget the millions of black women ensnared in the system of slavery, who were not 'helped into carriages' or 'lifted over ditches', but were worked unremittingly and beaten viciously, alongside black men.<sup>103</sup> She articulated that pitting women's rights against black men's rights erased the position of black women, who were subjugated because of their race and gender, which intersected to shape their lives in slavery. As Deborah Gray White asserted, 'black women did not experience sexism the same way white women did. Owing to their color white men saw black women differently and exploited them differently'.<sup>104</sup>

In the 1990s, Gray White unearthed that the content of the speech given by Truth may have been misreported and embellished by Frances Gage, the white presiding officer of the Akron women's convention, when she documented the performance twelve years after the event. Whether the famous question 'Ar'n't I a Woman?' was uttered by Truth or added by Gage is still subject to debate.<sup>105</sup> Gray White raised the important point that what mattered was not the historical accuracy of the 1851 speech, but why Truth was mythologised in this way. She noted that 'we

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<sup>103</sup> Sojourner Truth, 'Ain't I a Woman? December 1851', *Modern History Sourcebook*, <<https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/sojtruth-woman.asp> > [accessed 6th November 2018].

<sup>104</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> Carleton Mabee and Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), p. 67-68.

have the history but much prefer the myth – the idea that a strong powerful black woman, in defiance of vehement opposition, and by sheer force of character, overcame illiteracy, and mesmerized many a hostile audience with a wisdom that defied the logic of America’s racists and sexists’.<sup>106</sup> Ultimately, Gray White’s argument that ‘we know enough about Truth to celebrate her on her triumph over physical and sexual abuse, her religious commitment, and her fight for her children’, rings true and her contribution to knowledge on black women’s lives under slavery, in the North, is valuable regardless of the authenticity of the ‘Ar’n’t I A Woman?’ speech.<sup>107</sup>

To add some context to Truth’s subject position, she was born of enslaved parents in the North in 1797, in New York State, before state law required that the enslaved be emancipated beginning in 1827.<sup>108</sup> Throughout her enslavement, she laboured for both Dutch and English slaveholding families, working in both domestic and agricultural environments, with a shorter stint assisting a tavern-keeper. Following her escape and emancipation, Truth undertook to travel West and work as a preacher, ‘exhorting the people to embrace Jesus and refrain from sin’.<sup>109</sup> Though she was a powerful orator, it has often been a subject of curiosity that throughout her life as a freewoman she remained illiterate, declaring that ‘I can’t read a book, but I can read de people’.<sup>110</sup> As such, when Truth came to record her experiences during slavery, she required the assistance of a friend, Olive Gilbert, a white abolitionist-feminist, to pen her narrative.<sup>111</sup> Although this source was recorded by a white woman, Mabee affirmed that Gilbert’s role was to ‘listen to Truth tell the story

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<sup>106</sup> Gray White, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>108</sup> William Kaufman, ‘Introduction’, in *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, Unabridged* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), pp. iii -vi (p. iii – iv).

<sup>109</sup> Olive Gilbert, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth, Unabridged* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), p. 59.

<sup>110</sup> Mabee, p. 64.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, p. 53.

of her life' and to 'write it down' and was keen to keep her name off the title page.<sup>112</sup> Clearly, Gilbert wanted to impress upon the audience that this was Truth's story and she was only a necessary intermediary to bring it to the wider public. It is important not to dismiss Truth's storytelling as central to this narrative, whilst also being considerate of Gilbert's role in recording, arranging and to an extent, censoring, the material of Truth's life. Specifically within this text, animalising language used to describe whites can be viewed as part of Truth's style of speech, but also as a means of describing sexual violence in a manner considered modest enough by the white editor.

Solomon Northup's narrative was considered significant within the genre because it emphasised the feebleness of freedom for black Americans in the U.S. Northup had been born free in New York state in 1808, became a 'self-made success' through his work as a celebrated violinist and yet was kidnapped and sold into slavery, labouring for over a decade on the plantations of Louisiana.<sup>113</sup> Like Truth's, the text was given less attention than Douglass' and Jacobs' narratives on black literature courses, though it received renewed exploration following its adaptation into a feature film, directed by Steve McQueen in 2013. In Tara T. Green's research on gender within *Twelve Years a Slave*, she outlined how this text also was the product of collaboration between Northup and a 'graduate of Union College'.<sup>114</sup> The editor of the original publication of Northup's narrative, David Wilson, was keen to emphasise that the text had been written exactly as he had received it from Northup's lips. However, Green was astute in her analysis that the text reveals a 'complex narrative voice'.<sup>115</sup> By writing the narrative, or collaborating to write the narrative, Green argues that we can see the re-emergence of Northup

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 52.

<sup>113</sup> Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave: A True Story* (London: Collins Classics, 2014), p. v.

<sup>114</sup> Tara T. Green, 'Black Masculinity and Black Women's Bodies: Representations of Black Bodies in *Twelve Years a Slave*', *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender and the Black International*, 4 (2015), 1 - 23 (p. 2).

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

from the dehumanisation of slavery. His identity as Northup the violinist, as opposed to Platt (the name allotted to him by a slave-owner), is recovered through his reclamation of the written word as a tool of power and agency.<sup>116</sup> The text is significant to this chapter for the way that it deploys animalising language to represent white behaviour, and how it questioned whether wild animals or white 'civilisation' posed a greater threat to black Americans in the South.

Frederick Douglass' first published work, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, has often been cited as the archetypal text of the slave narrative genre. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay identified Douglass as 'the most highly regarded African American man of the nineteenth century'.<sup>117</sup> Douglass' *Narrative* recounted the details of his accommodation, diet, labour and the character of his masters and mistresses during his time in bondage, and his escape to relative freedom after his self-emancipation. Gates Jr. and McKay noted that his writings were entwined with the construction of an ideal image of black masculinity, claiming that he 'devoted his literary efforts primarily to the creation of a heroic image of himself that would inspire in blacks the belief that color need not be a permanent bar to their achievement of the American Dream'.<sup>118</sup> When Douglass first recalled his experience of slavery, in the 1840s, he was eager from the outset to undermine racial inequality in the U.S., and that meant going beyond the abolition of slavery, to challenging white perceptions of black men. Within the *Narrative*, both his physical prowess and intellectual abilities enable him to survive and eventually escape, thereby challenging the white supremacist binary that white Americans were endowed with faculties of the mind, whilst black Americans possessed greater physical strength.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, 'Frederick Douglass', in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 385 – 387 (p. 385).

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. 385.

Following the publication of the *Narrative*, Douglass went on to record and publish two further accounts of his life under slavery and freedom. Rachel A. Blumenthal noted that Douglass was ordered by white abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, to concentrate on the facts in his first narrative, whilst they [white abolitionists] would “take care of the philosophy”.<sup>119</sup> Douglass’ second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, has been interpreted as his attempt to overcome his feelings that ‘it did not entirely satisfy me to *narrate* my wrongs, I felt like *denouncing* them’, and thereby contained an ‘updated politics’ and ‘literary foci’.<sup>120</sup> David Blight, in critically assessing Douglass’ *My Bondage and My Freedom*, argued that the text was a ‘classic coming-of-age story within the extreme mental and physical anguish of slavery’ that needed to be told and re-told, which was produced in a ‘turbulent political and revolutionary context’.<sup>121</sup> Within this chapter, I will explore whether Douglass’ use of animalising language formed a part of his approach to ‘denounce’ rather than simply ‘narrate’ the oppressive circumstances of slavery.

In the 1980s, Harriet Jacobs’ *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was hailed as a text that re-defined the slave narrative genre, for its exploration of the specific gendered experiences of enslavement and interweaving of discussions of sexual violence, however coded these passages were. Though the text was published in 1861, it was not until 1981 that Jean Yellin published historical evidence that established Jacobs’ authorship.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, the text was originally published under the pen name Linda Brent. Gates Jr. and McKay explained Jacobs’ decision to use an alias, by stating that ‘given the harrowing and sensational story she had to tell,

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<sup>119</sup> Rachel A. Blumenthal, ‘Canonicity, Genre, and the Politics of Editing: How We Read Frederick Douglass’, *Callaloo*, 36 (1) (2013), 178 – 190 (p. 178).

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, p. 180.

<sup>121</sup> David Blight, ‘Introduction’, in *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. by David Blight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), pp. ix – xxx (p. xi).

<sup>122</sup> Joanne M. Braxton, ‘Harriet Jacobs’ “Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl”: The Re-Definition of the Slave Narrative Genre’, *The Massachusetts Review*, 27 (2) (1986), 379 – 387 (p. 382).

the one-time fugitive slave felt she had little alternative but to shield herself from a readership whose understanding and empathy she could not take for granted'.<sup>123</sup> Certainly, enslaved women were not afforded any protection from sexual assaults at the hands of white men, and to speak of this routinised abuse was considered to be immodest. Giving voice to these 'incidents', as Jacobs did, was more likely to garner anger and disgust towards the survivor, than the perpetrator. Joanne Braxton encapsulated the literary importance of *Incidents*, declaring that the 'twin themes of abolition and feminism are interwoven in Jacobs' text'.<sup>124</sup> Out of the four slave narratives drawn upon in this chapter, the Jacobs' extracts most frequently employ animalising discourse to depict the sexually predatory behaviours of white men in slaveholding societies. The construction of sex as an animalistic behaviour was the product of a society that wanted to project an image of humans, and specifically human women, as pious and asexual. Nonetheless, such associations between animality and sexuality provided formerly enslaved women with a coded language through which to voice the trauma of sexual exploitation, in a context that tightly constricted discussion of both consensual and non-consensual sexual encounters. Though each text was shaped by factors that offered a distinct perspective on the institution of slavery, they all share a common theme in the use of animalising language, both to describe the dehumanising effect of slavery on black American women and men and also to describe the behaviours of powerful whites.

### **Flipping The Narrative: Reviewing The Literature On Animality And Race In Recollections Of Slavery**

Using animalising language that described racialised human beings as animals, or as like animals, formed part of the foundations of racism in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>123</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, 'Harriet Jacobs', in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 279 - 280 (p. 279).

<sup>124</sup> Braxton, p. 384.

Several scholars have noted that widely held beliefs in the inferiority of animals and the concurrent willingness to use and abuse animals for human gains, known as speciesism, aided the perpetration of racial violence in the ante- and post-bellum eras. Marjorie Spiegel's 1988 text *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* presented the overlaps in the mechanisms used to oppress black Americans throughout slavery, and those used to exploit and kill various animals in industrialised farming, scientific experimentation, and entertainment. Spiegel's text lacked a critical race consciousness. She argued that 'comparing the suffering of animals to that of blacks (or any other oppressed group) is offensive only to the speciesist', which entirely dismissed the trauma of racist animalisation experienced by black women and men in the U.S.<sup>125</sup> Discussions of race and species always occur against a backdrop in which the conflation of race and species, or the animalisation of black Americans through language, was a weapon of violence used to uphold white supremacy. However, Spiegel was right to acknowledge that there was a link between speciesism and racism, asserting that 'because society's opinion of animals was so low, racist authors propagandised against blacks by comparing them to negative stereotypes of non-human animals'.<sup>126</sup> Thus, in this context, one form of oppression facilitated another.

Scholars such as Christopher Peterson and Brigitte Nicole Fielder have explored the close histories of racism and speciesism. Peterson claimed that far from being separate ideologies, racism and speciesism are 'logically and historically enmeshed'.<sup>127</sup> Fielder expanded upon this, claiming that race and species were categories of power and difference constructed at the same historical moment, in the nineteenth century. She rightly argued that the description of black Americans as animals was not 'mere metaphor', but that the 'construction of race as a concept'

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<sup>125</sup> Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (London: Heretic Books, 1988), p. 25.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.

<sup>127</sup> Christopher Peterson, *Bestial Traces: Race, Sexuality, Animality* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 2.

was presented as 'a mode of difference akin to difference in species'.<sup>128</sup> White supremacist theories, masquerading as science, 'entertained questions of whether racial differences constituted species differences'.<sup>129</sup> Mark S. Roberts, a philosopher with expertise in the connections between human and animal oppression, explained the politics bound up in the animalising discourse of scientific racism, noting that:

'comparisons to lower animals served an important function. The portrayal of the black as more or less a separate creature falling outside of the family of man was the perfect pretence for keeping the slave in his or her position of dependence and inferiority – that is, as a justification for the continuation of slavery'.<sup>130</sup>

Deploying animalising discourse against racial others was thereby a key tool of white supremacy, one that enabled whites to claim that slavery and post-bellum subjugation were necessary to control and develop a so-called wild, dangerous and inferior population.

Representing black Americans as animals, or as like animals, was part of a system of racial violence in the mid-late nineteenth century. However, this chapter seeks to go beyond the well-documented instances of animalisation of black Americans, through 'scientific' discourse and treatment during slavery, to foreground the myriad ways that black American women and men described whites through animalising language. Turning the weapon of animalising discourse back onto whites enabled black Americans to disrupt and resist racist theories that purported that black bodies were inherently and biologically animal in a way that white bodies were not. Formerly enslaved, black abolitionist writers represented whites and white behaviours as beastly, brutish and creaturely, as well as recurrently likening whites to dogs, snakes, and tigers.

Extracts from within a range of texts from the slave narrative genre demonstrate that black American writers relied upon animal metaphors and

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<sup>128</sup> Brigitte Fielder, 'Animal Humanism: Race, Species and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth Century Abolition', *American Quarterly*, 65 (2013), 487 - 513 (p. 492).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, p. 492.

<sup>130</sup> Mark S. Roberts, *The Mark of The Beast: Animality and Human Oppression* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2008), p. 74.



animalising language as a device to communicate to the audience that white slaveholders and overseers were devious, predatory, dangerous and violent, traits regularly attributed to animals in U.S. society. Read in this way, black Americans used pre-conceived fear and hatred of animals, to condemn whiteness and the institution of slavery, and thereby solidified beliefs in an identifiable essence that made something or someone a 'beast', where animality was harmful and dangerous.

However, an alternative reading of animalising language in slave narratives demonstrates that by applying 'beastly' terminology to powerful whites, black American abolitionists demonstrated that animality and species, much like race, were constructs used to enhance and preserve the power of those who invented these categories. Through this approach, the application of animalising language to whites, and specifically white American men, challenged what it meant to be an animal and illustrated that whoever held the power of the pen, and possessed the power to amplify their theories, could define the parameters of overlapping race and species categories. As such, slave narratives have simultaneously solidified and subverted conceptions of 'the beast', at times cementing associations between animality and danger, whilst also questioning the borders of race and species categories that were at the root of oppressive systems for both black Americans and animals held and used on plantations.

It is necessary to elucidate why considering the application of animalising language to white Americans is so significant to the history of the slave narrative. Pre-eminent scholars of African American Studies, such as Henry Louis Gates Jr. have emphasised the importance of the act of writing, of enslaved and formerly enslaved people recording their own experiences for posterity, and how the production of slave narratives was part of claiming humanity for those who had gone through the system of slavery. As it was a crime to teach an enslaved person to read or write, Gates Jr. affirmed that 'the slave wrote primarily... to demonstrate his

or her membership in the human community'.<sup>131</sup> Partaking in communication through a written language had therefore become a marker of humanness, and denying enslaved men and women the opportunity to learn to read and write was one means of keeping this population subjugated, by claiming that they were closer to animals.

The slave narrative has often been presented, in traditional historiographies, as a vehicle for communicating the argument that enslaved black women and men were human and deserved to be treated as such, rather than being held as property and denied all freedoms. However, the research of Fielder, which explores the overlapping discourses of race and species in the long nineteenth century, made the meaningful interjection that abolitionist texts were more multi-layered and complex, than always and only claiming that the enslaved were people and not animals. Fielder foregrounded the ways that abolitionist literature, particularly abolitionist children's literature, used comparisons with animals to advocate for the emancipation of enslaved people. Specifically, such literature employed analogies relating to pet-keeping in an attempt to generate opposition to slavery. Fielder articulated that 'rather than reduce non-white people to the lower status of animals, they used the particular status of beloved animals – family pets – to compensate for what they viewed as a potential failing of white, Northern sympathy: the inability to feel across racial lines'.<sup>132</sup> Fielder documented how abolitionist tales about caged birds, trapped flies, and ensnared squirrels was one mode in which white children in the North, distanced from the institution of slavery, could be educated on the moral problems associated with holding beings in captivity 'against their will'.<sup>133</sup> Fielder's research offered a deeper understanding of abolitionist texts, evidencing how one facet of the abolitionist strategy was to use caged animals, familiar to Northern white

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<sup>131</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 128.

<sup>132</sup> Fielder, 'Animal Humanism: Race, Species and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth Century Abolition', p. 498.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, p. 497.

children, to extrapolate why enslaving black Americans was a sin that needed to be challenged. Fielder noted that this mode of comparing black Americans to animals was not identical to that found in the discourse of scientific racism, indeed it was analogical. However, she acknowledged that there was ‘something unsettling’ about comparing enslaved people to flies – ‘an animal generally considered a pest’, and that comparing black Americans to domestic pets, even through analogies, ‘risked reinscribing racist arguments about enslaved people’s dependence on white benevolence and the necessity of interracial stewardship’.<sup>134</sup> Fielder’s research is significant to this chapter, for demonstrating that abolitionist texts relied upon animalising discourse, alongside more prominent humanist arguments.

#### **‘The Cunning Of The Serpent’: Animal Symbolism And White Deception**

Within the texts, the snake was employed as a symbol to convey the cunning and deceptive behaviour of whites that maintained the system of slavery. Most prominently, in Douglass’ *My Bondage*, he repeatedly referred to Edward Covey, his master and self-identified Maryland ‘Negro-breaker’, as ‘the snake’, noting that he and a fellow enslaved companion, ‘never called him by any other name’.<sup>135</sup> Douglass used the snake as a metaphor to communicate to a Northern white audience the reality of constant, dangerous surveillance that characterised his experience of slavery. In the following passage, Douglass recalled how Covey acted in a devious manner in order to maintain a watchful eye on enslaved labourers, stating that:

He would creep and crawl, in ditches and gullies; hide behind stumps and bushes, and practice so much of the cunning of the serpent...he was, to us, behind every stump, tree, bush and fence on the plantation. He carried this kind of trickery so far, that he would sometimes mount his horse, and make believe he was going to St. Michael’s; and, in thirty-minutes afterward, you might find his horse tied in the woods, and the snake-like Covey lying flat in the ditch, with his head lifted above its edges, or in a fence corner, watching

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, p. 497.

<sup>135</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 173.

every movement of the slaves...He did not seem conscious that the practice had anything unmanly, base or contemptible about it.<sup>136</sup>

This passage contains rich insights into constructions of gender and species in the mid-nineteenth century. Significantly, it shows that Douglass deflected Covey's deceptive practices onto an animal figure. Negative behavioural traits were associated with animality: in this particular scene, the snake. Douglass drew upon widely held perceptions of snakes as sneaky, poisonous and dangerous creatures here, and, as such, contributed to the continued derogation of snakes as a menace to humanity, that needed to be driven from the land or exterminated. As Catherine Carter noted, within Christian doctrine, the snake has a 'traditional association with sin'.<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, Carol J. Adams asserted that 'according to the Bible, the fall of *mankind* and the introduction of death [are] blamed on a woman and a nonhuman, a snake'.<sup>138</sup> Thus, Christian belief in the nineteenth century upheld the view that snakes were a corrupting force, which had revealed the weak-will of women. Boria Sax's research is also pertinent here, for outlining the relationship between humans and rattlesnakes in North America since colonisation. He noted that interactions with snakes were often shaped by myth rather than reality, and were rooted in European ideas surrounding the legend of the basilisk, a 'diabolical creature' that had the 'ability to kill at a distance, either with venom or a glance'.<sup>139</sup> Sax acknowledged that despite the rattlesnake's reputation for seeking out unsuspecting humans to bite, the rattler is in reality 'a rather retiring creature, which is very unlikely to strike a person unless attacked'.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid, p. 173.

<sup>137</sup> Catherine Carter, 'The God in the Snake, The Devil in the Phallus: Biblical Revision and Radical Conservatism in Hurston's *Sweat*', *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 67 (4) (2014), 605 – 620 (page number not given).

<sup>138</sup> Carol J. Adams, *The Pornography of Meat* (Brooklyn: Lantern Books, 2015), p. not given.

<sup>139</sup> Boria Sax, 'The Basilisk and the Rattlesnake, or a European Monster Comes to America', *Society and Animals*, 2 (1) (1994), 3 -15 (p. 4).

<sup>140</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

Symbolism attached to snakes was more powerful than lived encounters, which contributed to a culture where Douglass found the snake to be a useful device to represent sneaky and threatening behaviour. Douglass' intention in *My Bondage* was to convince his Northern white audience that holding millions of black Americans, as property, was immoral and required immediate action to gain their emancipation. In this context, the snake functioned as an important literary device. As mentioned previously, Fielder's research documented how abolitionist literature used caged pets as an analogy to explain the 'cruelty' of slavery to children in the North. In a similar manner, Douglass utilised the snake metaphor as a device to communicate fear that Northern whites could understand. Distanced from the plantations of the South, Northern whites could not experientially understand what it was like to fear a slave master, but could more likely relate to fearing venomous creatures like snakes. By drawing upon and reinforcing this demonisation of snakes, Douglass was able to harness animalisation as a force to resist enslavement. The snake's association with fear, danger, and poison worked as a device to generate cross-racial empathy with enslaved women and men. By describing Covey, and by extension the institution of slavery, as a snake, Douglass momentarily presented slavery as an issue of animal versus man, rather than white versus black. The use of animalising language enabled Douglass to have a conversation with a white audience about fear: knowing that such an audience could not be relied upon to understand the fear of whiteness, he substituted it for the fear of animality. In this extract, Douglass deployed animalising discourse against whites as an instrument of abolition. However, using such devices solidified the link between certain animals and danger. Therefore, Douglass not only deployed constructs that encouraged negative perceptions of animals, but played an active role in constructing these ideas. Certainly, the construct of the cunning serpent required a constructor, and Douglass undertook this work throughout his narrative, to craft an abolitionist argument for a white audience. By using speciesist and anthropomorphising ideas

of snakes as deceptive, Douglass was able to critique the system of slavery. Nonetheless, in this instance, Douglass left the construct of the ‘dangerous animal’ intact, a construct that had been used in the service of white supremacy.

Douglass’ characterisation of Covey’s snake-like behaviour as ‘unmanly’ requires additional unpacking. It was a moment where Douglass questioned the relationship between race, gender, and species. By detailing Covey’s deceptive practices and labeling them ‘unmanly’, was Douglass arguing that Covey was less-than-human, failing to meet an idealised masculinity, or both? In the 1990s, scholars, such as Richard Yarborough, explored how masculinity shaped Douglass’ narratives, by claiming that ‘no nineteenth century Afro-American thinker was more concerned with the issue of manhood than Frederick Douglass’.<sup>141</sup> A recent study by Josep M. Armengol, focusing on how masculinities are racialised, claimed that ‘while it may be argued that Douglass’s usage of the terms man and manhood simply stand for human and humanity, respectively, there is little doubt that they are charged with gender-specific connotations’.<sup>142</sup> As such, when Douglass described Covey as unmanly he was both questioning the humanity of his behaviour, but also his masculinity. Characterising Covey’s behaviour as both ‘snake-like’ and ‘unmanly’, he suggested that dishonesty and deception were actions that barred one from an idealized manhood. Far from accepting the premise that whiteness equaled manliness, Douglass used animalizing discourse to unsettle constructions of gender. Douglass’ narrative of resistance centered upon his decision to physically fight back against Covey. He declared that ‘this battle with Mr. Covey... was the turning point in my “life as a slave”. It rekindled in my breast the smoldering embers

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<sup>141</sup> Richard Yarborough, ‘Race, Violence and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass’s “The Heroic Slave”’, in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed. by Eric J. Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 166 – 188 (p. 172).

<sup>142</sup> Josep M. Armengol, ‘Slavery in Black and White: The Racialisation of (Male) Slavery in Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* and Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy*’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 20 (2017), 479 – 493 (p. 479 - 480).

of liberty... and revived a sense of my own manhood'.<sup>143</sup> Within this statement, Douglass made a direct link between manhood, freedom and the ability to assert physical strength. Using modes of deception such as hiding under tree stumps to gather information, were therefore perceived as less-than-manly by Douglass. Thus, the snake metaphor worked to challenge nineteenth century ideals of gender, as the snake represented a creeping form of cunning to deceive people, rather than an honest display of physical power. In this context, snake symbolism worked to emasculate Covey, and white male power, rather than serve as a symbol of virility.

Douglass' use of the snake metaphor to capture and condemn Covey's cunning behaviour needs contextualising within the black tradition of folk tales and the figure of 'the trickster'. Lawrence Levine's exploration of black American folk culture in the nineteenth through the twentieth centuries noted that one element of black oral culture during slavery was comprised of tales centered on animal characters, 'featuring the victories of the weak over the strong'.<sup>144</sup> Levine included a saying recorded amongst enslaved women and men in South Carolina, as an epigraph, which stated that 'De buckruh [whites] hab scheme, en de nigger hab trick, en ebery time de buckruh scheme once de nigger trick twice'.<sup>145</sup> This saying demonstrated a viewpoint amongst the enslaved that despite white domination of economic and political power, enslaved communities were able to survive and resist subjugation through cunning and trickery. In an environment where cunning and deception were some of the only weapons available to enslaved black Americans, the ability to outwit an opponent was to be celebrated. However, in Douglass' exploration of Covey's cunning behaviour, his trickery was condemned. In this scenario, it was not a case of the oppressed using cunning to overcome an oppressor, but the oppressive slave master, who already had an arsenal of

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<sup>143</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 197.

<sup>144</sup> Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 83.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p. 81.

weapons to control the enslaved population, relying on trickery to observe the labour of the enslaved, which only deepened the terror inflicted on the oppressed. Thus, in a departure from the tradition of animal-based folktales, Douglass used animal symbolism to condemn white trickery, rather than applaud black cunning.

### **'It Was Difficult To Determine Which I Had Most Reason To Fear': 'Wild'**

#### **Animals and White Violence**

In addition, the most prominent use of animalising discourse within slave narratives occurs in descriptions of the violence perpetrated by whites upon the enslaved populace. Similar to Douglass' narrative, Solomon Northup relied upon imagery of the serpent to convey the threat of violence posed by John Tibeats, a fearsome man that he was sold to when his master encountered financial instability. The serpent was used as a motif for ascribing the danger associated with enslavers like Tibeats. In Northup's narrative, the serpent was deployed to describe acts of physical violence, not simply cunning behaviour. Northup, a freeborn black man, described the environment in Louisiana as entirely hostile to enslaved men and women. He declared that Bayou Boeuf, the area in which Tibeats' plantation was located, was 'one of those stagnant bodies of water common in that region', comprised of a 'sluggish stream'.<sup>146</sup> The use of language such as 'sluggish' and 'stagnant' did not merely refer to the geographical features of the landscape in this region, but alluded to the politics upheld by the white power structure in Louisiana, where the continuation of slavery benefited whites in multifarious ways and thereby this strata of society intended to preserve the status quo.

To describe the all-encompassing danger of slavery in the South, Northup noted that 'large cotton and sugar plantations line each shore, extending back to the borders of interminable swamps. It is alive with alligators, rendering it unsafe for

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<sup>146</sup> Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave: A True Story* (London: Collins Classic, 2014 [originally published by Derby & Miller, 1853]), p. 70.



swine, or unthinking slave children to stroll along its banks'.<sup>147</sup> Here, Northup conjured up an environment for his audience that was dangerous in its totality: the bayou represented an untamed animality, where the threat of alligator attacks lurked; whilst the cotton and sugar plantations represented the violence of white supremacy that sought to pass itself off as 'civilised' economic progress. Through a survey of the landscape, Northup framed his encounter with Tibeats as a means of pondering whether wild nature or white civilisation was more dangerous to black Americans.

Northup made clear that Tibeats was a highly volatile individual, with a penchant for arbitrarily punishing enslaved men and women for misdemeanours that he invented. His narrative recorded how, following an incident where he defended himself physically from Tibeats, making it known that he had not committed any offence, Tibeats attempted to lynch him. Rescued from death, Tibeats bided his time before it was opportune to launch a second violent attack on Northup. Whilst labouring to complete some joinery work, Tibeats accused Northup of making a mistake and flew into a rage. Employing animalising language, Northup affirmed that on this day, Tibeats was 'more disagreeable and venomous than usual'.<sup>148</sup> In an act of physical resistance, Northup fought back and seized Tibeats by the throat. To convey the fear that marked this moment, Northup described that 'I felt as if I had a serpent by the neck, watching the slightest relaxation of my grip, to coil itself round my body, crushing and stinging it to death'.<sup>149</sup> After a protracted struggle, Northup again overpowered Tibeats and placed his hands around his throat. Repeating the serpent metaphor, he recalled that Tibeats 'became pliant and unstrung. His face, that had been white with passion, was now black from suffocation. Those small,

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, p 89.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

serpent eyes that spat such venom, were now full of horror – two great white orbs starting from their sockets'.<sup>150</sup>

The recurrence of the terms 'serpent' and 'venomous', and references to 'crushing', 'stinging' and 'death' when describing Tibeats, communicated to Northup's audience that he perceived the violence of slavery to be inhuman. As explored earlier, snakes were familiar animals, particularly in the U.S. South, in the nineteenth century, and regardless of whether the threat they posed to human communities was embellished, the fear of such animals was real. Northup harnessed these feelings of fear towards snakes to capture the terror that he felt when fighting for his life against Tibeats, a figure who represented the violence of the system of slavery. Pre-existing fear and characterisation of snakes as dangerous and aggressive was necessary for snake symbolism to work as a metaphor for white violence. This passage supports the argument that black abolitionist authors, at times, used speciesist ideas to critique white supremacy. Indeed, redirecting the dangerous animality associated with the snake onto powerful whites was one mode of resisting racism in nineteenth century slave narratives.

Moreover, Northup deployed the image of another animal familiar to the plantations of the U.S. South, when communicating the violence of Tibeats. He recorded that, during his act of physical resistance, he was torn between continuing a fight to the death or fleeing from Tibeats' plantation. He asserted that 'there was a "lurking devil" in my heart that prompted me to kill the human bloodhound on the spot – to retain the grip on his accursed throat till the breath of life was gone'.<sup>151</sup> Significantly, within this passage, Northup characterised Tibeats as a 'human bloodhound'. This phrase, which merged human and animal categories, supports the argument that, within slave narratives, black authors recurrently challenged the human status of powerful whites. Though some dogs were constructed as 'man's

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

best friend' within U.S. society across the nineteenth century, this was by no means monolithic. Fielder's research complicates the picture of who kept pets in the antebellum era, noting that white, middle-class Americans were not the only group cultivating domestic relationships with dogs. She affirmed that 'pet dogs were known to be held not only by the black middle classes, but by enslaved black people as well'.<sup>152</sup> Although enslaved black Americans did form bonds of affection with animals on the plantation, dogs were also used as a weapon of terror by the white power structure against the enslaved. Fielder rightly acknowledged that 'the use of dogs to hunt self-emancipated people has a long history in the Americas'.<sup>153</sup> The threat of hunting dogs was another mechanism deployed to limit the mobility of enslaved people. However, as Fielder noted, 'the violence dogs could inflict when hunting people as prey inspired fear, but did not entirely deter people from risking their lives to escape'.<sup>154</sup> Bloodhounds were capable of inflicting great harm by tearing flesh from the body, which demonstrates the courage and yearning for freedom amongst the enslaved, who were willing to attempt an escape from the plantation. Whilst dogs, especially bloodhounds, symbolised the violence of slavery, it is significant that these animals were themselves victims of abuse perpetrated by the slave-holding classes. Fielder interjected that 'dogs used to hunt slaves might be better understood as working animals' who were 'deliberately starved and beaten in order to 'train' them to behave even more viciously toward their prey'.<sup>155</sup> Thus, although bloodhounds were undoubtedly dangerous animals, and enslaved men and women were right to fear them as part of the system of white supremacy, this was an instance where speciesism and animal abuse was used in service of facilitating racial violence.

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<sup>152</sup> Brigitte Fielder, 'Black Dogs, Bloodhounds, and Best Friends: African Americans and Dogs in Nineteenth Century Abolitionist Literature', in *American Beasts: Perspectives on Animals, Animality and U.S. Culture, 1776 – 1920*, ed. by Dominik Ohrem (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2017), pp. 153 - 173 (p. 168).

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, p. 161.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, p. 161.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid, p. 164.

Northup's characterisation of Tibeats as a 'human bloodhound' illustrates how he sought to compare his master to an animal that had been trained to rip at the flesh of runaway slaves, as punishment for their resistance to the system of white power. However, in this instance, Northup did not wholly animalise Tibeats through language. The term 'human bloodhound' suggested that Tibeats was both human and animal, or that he was a human acting like an animal. This application of animalising terminology to Tibeats demonstrates that whilst white racist discourse in the nineteenth century argued that an inherent, biological link existed between black Americans and animals, when black Americans employed animalising discourse, they often linked the *behaviour* of white oppressors to animality, rather than forging a biological association between whiteness and animality. In this example, Northup constructed animality as behavioural rather than biological. Michael Lundblad, a researcher on animality in Progressive Era U.S. literature, noted that towards the turn-of-the-twentieth-century white discussions of animality sought to differentiate between 'the animal' and 'the savage', where:

the cruelty of the "savage" rapist [was] distinct from the cruelty of an animal – the "torture" [was] constructed as being forced to submit to miscegenation, in which the "savage" delights in the infliction of "rage and hatred", rather than a supposedly straightforward – and dispassionate – enactment of a biological instinct to either reproduce or kill off a rival.<sup>156</sup>

Lundblad's discussion of the white construction of the myth of the black male rapist demonstrates how categories and definitions of human, animal and the type in-between known as 'the savage' were altered by powerful whites to fit the politics of the time. During slavery black Americans were largely represented as animals that needed to be controlled and 'civilised', whereas in the post-emancipation era white racist discourse presented free black Americans as more dangerous than animals, because of their capacity to calculate and delight in violence, rather than acting instinctually. Lundblad explored how in Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Tarzan of the Apes*

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<sup>156</sup> Michael Lundblad, *The Birth of a Jungle: Animality in Progressive-Era U.S. Literature and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 142.

(1914) the idea of 'the beast within' was foregrounded, where white men 'claimed animals rather than savages as their immediate ancestors'.<sup>157</sup> This enabled white men to argue that their acts of dominance over white women and people of color were natural, rather than considered manoeuvres aimed at preserving their own power. In Northup's narrative, his use of the phrase 'human bloodhound' represented Tibeats as occupying an in-between space between human and animal, he is human but also animal, much like the construction of 'the savage'. By aligning Tibeats' violent behaviour, which he planned at opportune moments to seek revenge on Northup, with the human as well as the animal, Northup argued that this form of violence during slavery was comprised of both the ferocity of the bloodhound, but also involved calculation, and could not be dismissed as merely the result of animal instinct. When discussing the various applications of animality across the turn-of-the-twentieth-century, Lundblad asserted that constructions of animality in this era remained 'complex and inconsistent'.<sup>158</sup> Complexity and inconsistency marked the use of animalising discourse by black abolitionist writers in the antebellum era also. Though Northup used an animal metaphor to dramatise the violence of white slaveholders, he was not willing to let go of his conviction that violence was a defining character of white humanity too. In this instance, therefore, Northup would not deflect entirely the violence of the slaveholding classes onto the animal other.

A further instance that conveyed Northup's fear of both the violence of animality and white humanity occurred when he fled Bayou Boeuf plantation, following the second physical altercation with Tibeats. Within this scene, Northup suggested that there were three predators hunting him: Tibeats and his accomplices, a pack of bloodhounds, and the alligators that inhabited the Great

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, p. 156.

Pacoudrie swamp, where he was forced to seek refuge. Demonstrating how his life was at risk, Northup stated that:

the dogs used on Bayou Boeuf for hunting slaves are a kind of bloodhound, but a far more savage breed than is found in the northern states. They will attack a negro, at their master's bidding, and cling to him as the common bulldog will cling to a four-footed animal.<sup>159</sup>

Within this extract, Northup recognised that the bloodhounds doing 'their master's bidding' were an extension of white human violence. Moreover, Northup conveyed that the act of hunting was a key method of dehumanising enslaved black Americans, to make them feel less than fully human, by re-creating a situation where white supremacists were the predator, and the enslaved were the prey, to be caught, maimed, and/or killed. However, Northup employed a simile, that the bloodhound clung to the enslaved runaway like a 'common bulldog will cling to a four-footed animal'.<sup>160</sup> Though Northup was primarily describing the behaviour of the bloodhound on the hunt, he implied that all those partaking in the hunt, including the white human orchestrators, were like the common bulldog, in their infliction of violence. Once again, in this extract, Northup did not confine animalisation through language to the enslaved population, but created a linkage between white supremacist violence and animality.

Northup observed that at one moment, the bloodhounds were almost upon him and 'expected to feel their long teeth sinking into ...[his] flesh'.<sup>161</sup> In view of this imminent danger, Northup lowered himself into the waters of the swamp. He explained that this environment was far from a safe haven, noting that:

For thirty or forty miles, it is without inhabitants, save wild beasts – the bear, the wild cat, the tiger, and great slimy reptiles, that are crawling through it everywhere... I saw hundreds of moccasin snakes. Every log and bog – every trunk of a fallen tree over which I was compelled to step or climb, was alive with them. They are poisonous serpents – their bite more fatal than the rattlesnake's. Besides, I had lost one shoe, the sole having come entirely off...

I saw also many alligators, great and small, lying in the water, or on pieces of

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<sup>159</sup> Northup, p. 93.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

floodwood. The noise I made usually startled them, when they moved off and plunged into the deepest places. Sometimes, however, I would come directly upon a monster before observing it. In such cases, I would start back, run a short way round, and in that manner shun them. Straight forward, they will run a short distance rapidly, but do not possess the power of turning. In a crooked race, there is no difficulty in evading them.<sup>162</sup>

Northup likely included this description of the animal life inhabiting the region to emphasise that his hideout was awash with danger – one misstep or wrong move could have resulted in being mauled by a bear or wild cat, bitten by a venomous snake, or attacked by an alligator. For enslaved men and women residing on plantations that were surrounded by areas of wilderness, interactions with certain animals in the wild posed a risk to their life. The location of plantations amongst areas of wilderness, inhabited by predatory animals, helped to maintain the institution of slavery, as the perilousness of the journey for self-emancipating slaves worked as a mechanism of control, to deter attempts to escape. In a context where Northup was forced to encroach upon the natural habitat of animals, such as moccasin snakes and alligators, to temporarily escape the violence of white supremacy, it is understandable that he would perceive such creatures as monsters, as he faced the dual threat of being attacked or killed by these animals, or being exposed to the slave-owners hunting him.

Northup further expanded upon his fear of wild animality and white humanity in the following passage, documenting that:

I staggered on, fearing every instant I should feel the dreadful sting of the moccasin, or be crushed within the jaws of some disturbed alligator. The dread of them now almost equaled [sic] the fear of the pursuing hounds. The moon arose after a time, the mild light creeping through the overspreading branches, loaded with long, pendent moss. I kept traveling forwards until after midnight, hoping all the while that I would soon emerge into some less desolate and dangerous region. But the water grew deeper and the walking more difficult than ever. I perceived it would be impossible to proceed much farther, and knew not, moreover, what hands I might fall into, should I succeed in reaching a human habitation. Not provided with a pass, any white man would be at liberty to arrest me, and place me in prison until such time as my master should 'prove property, pay charges, and take me away'. I was an estray, and if so unfortunate as to meet a law-abiding citizen of Louisiana, he

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

would deem it his duty to his neighbour, perhaps, to put me forthwith in the pound. Really, it was difficult to determine which I had most reason to fear – dogs, alligators or men!<sup>163</sup>

Most significant here, is Northup's reluctance to emerge from the Pacoudrie swamp, despite the risk of attack from the animal inhabitants. By placing men, specifically white men, on the same level as dogs and alligators, Northup again turned the weapon of dehumanisation onto whites, to critique racial violence. As such, Northup represented 'wild animality' and white 'civilisation', presented as antithetical in white supremacist discourse, as equally menacing to enslaved black Americans. For Northup, 'reaching a human habitation' was not a comforting prospect, as he alluded to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, which put self-emancipated enslaved men and women, and free black Americans, at risk of recapture for their entire lives.<sup>164</sup> As Northup noted, assisting individuals who had run away from the plantations was a crime, and a 'law-abiding citizen' was required to apprehend and return formerly enslaved men and women to the relevant authorities. Thus, although Northup acknowledged his own fear of certain animals in the wilderness areas of Louisiana, he knew that the institution of slavery was more threatening to the lives of black Americans. Northup employed the fear of wild animals to convey the danger linked to the inherent violence of slavery. Though Northup did not explicitly animalise white men within this extract, by asking whether he should fear dogs, alligators, or men more, he disrupted the white racist theories that sought to place white humans as being entirely separate from animals, linking whiteness to violence and refusing to deflect the specific white violence of slavery onto a constructed beast.

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<sup>163</sup> Northup, p. 96.

<sup>164</sup> Eric Arnesen, *Encyclopedia of U.S. Labor and Working-class History Volume 1* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 490.



## Using Animalising Discourse To Voice Experiences Of Sexual Violence

Within slave narratives, authors also used animalising language to navigate discussions of sexual violence. Since the 1980s, black feminist writers and academics have emphasised that sexual violence was not an aberration during slavery, but that slavery was built upon this gendered form of terror. White supremacist discourse often promulgated the myth of the black male rapist and the counterpart to this myth: the lascivious black woman. The purpose of these racial stereotypes was to provide white Americans with justification for upholding slavery, claiming that the black population needed controlling in order to 'protect' the virtue of white women. In addition, such stereotypes worked as a smokescreen to cover up the systematic rape and sexual assault of black women (and black men) on plantations and in slave-owning domestic residences. As Angela Y. Davis noted, in her seminal text *Women, Race & Class*, 'despite the testimony of slaves about the high incidence of rape and sexual coercion, the issue of sexual abuse has been all but glossed over in the traditional literature on slavery'.<sup>165</sup> By erasing this part of slavery's history, early scholarship removed the historical culpability of white men for routinely inflicting sexual trauma onto enslaved black Americans. Davis critiqued Eugene Genovese's 1974 study of society under slavery for misrepresenting rape as miscegenation. Since the nineteenth century, the term miscegenation was used to refer to interracial sexual relations, cohabitation, and/or marriage. By referring to sexual relations between white men and black women during slavery as miscegenation, Genovese implied that these encounters were consensual. During slavery, where black bodies were owned as property, consensual sex was impossible between the enslaved and the enslaver, as choice and the capacity to consent or refuse did not exist. As Davis rightly affirmed, 'it was as oppressors – or, in the case of non-slave-owners, as agents of domination – that white men

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<sup>165</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), p. 25.

approached black women's bodies'.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, bell hooks rejected the notion that enslaved black women could demonstrate agency in their sexual lives, arguing that:

any suggestion that enslaved black women had a choice as to their sexual partner is ludicrous. Since the white male could rape the black female who did not willingly respond to his demands, passive submission on the part of the enslaved black women cannot be seen as complicity. Those women who did not willingly respond to the sexual overture of masters and overseers were brutalized and punished.<sup>167</sup>

Encapsulating Davis' position on institutionalised sexual violence during slavery, hooks summarised that rape was not 'a case of white men satisfying their sexual lust, but was in fact an institutionalised method of terrorism which had as its goal the demoralisation and dehumanisation of black women'.<sup>168</sup>

Andrea Livesey's research, focusing on the effect of rape on the mother-child relationship during slavery, documents the scale of sexual violence in slavery-era Louisiana and considers the difficulties that formerly enslaved black Americans encountered when recalling and recording their experiences of sexual violence. Livesey's research drew upon ex-slave interviews collected as part of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in Louisiana in the 1930s. Livesey characterised the widespread discussion of sexual violence in the Louisiana WPA interviews as 'remarkable', considering that these interviews took place in the Jim Crow South, and were primarily conducted by white interviewers who regularly employed manipulation to shape the content of the discussion.<sup>169</sup> Livesey noted that 'openness around the discussion of sexual violence, and a willingness to share at least some of the details with enslaved children, helped to preserve the lack of stigma attached to rape in slave communities, and fulfilled a key role assigned to all enslaved mothers – that of ensuring that their child was prepared for the realities of enslaved

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>167</sup> bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), p.25.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>169</sup> Andrea Livesey, 'Conceived in Violence: Enslaved Mothers and Children Born of Rape in Nineteenth Century Louisiana', *Slavery & Abolition*, 38 (2017), 373 – 391 (p. 377).

life'.<sup>170</sup> Livesey argued that because of the routine nature of sexual violence during slavery, there was little stigma attached to rape, and therefore discussing such acts of violence were not taboo. Rather, it was seen as an enslaved mother's duty to educate her children about surviving institutionalised sexual violence.

Nonetheless, a survivor's willingness to discuss this traumatic aspect of slavery did not easily translate across to historical records. Livesey discussed an incident in Louisiana during the WPA interviews where Zoe Posey, a white woman from Louisiana, interviewed Mary Harris, a formerly enslaved woman. When Harris attempted to discuss the 'cruel treatment of slaves' she was pressed into retracting her statement by Posey, who clearly wanted to use the interviews as an opportunity to present slavery as a benign institution, where masters and mistresses were held in high regard, and were even loved, by the enslaved.<sup>171</sup> Significantly, Harris was the daughter of a slaveholder. She was born as a result of the rape of her mother, and was subsequently sold away from the plantation. When the white interviewer returned to continue the discussion with Harris, Harris' son refused to let his mother's experiences be dismissed, stating that 'a brute like that who could sell his own child into unprincipled hands is a beast – the power, just because he had the power, and thirst for money'.<sup>172</sup> This extract not only revealed that white Southern women silenced black women who found the courage to speak out about routine sexual violence during slavery, but that despite the risk of retaliatory violence, families formed through rape spoke out anyway, and they, at times, relied upon animalising discourse to do so. Harris' son's description of his grandfather – a white, slave owning perpetrator of rape – as a 'brute' and a 'beast' demonstrate that in the 1930s using animalising language gave black Americans a mode through which to talk about genealogies forged through trauma and violence. Though Harris and her son knew all too well that white men systematically committed acts of sexual

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p. 374 – 375.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid, p. 378.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid, p. 378.

violence against the enslaved population, to maintain their social and economic power, it was still useful for survivors of trauma to conceptualise routinised sexual violence as belonging to an animal other. By characterising the slave-owner's behaviour as beastly and brutish, Harris' son communicated to the interviewer that he perceived this form of abuse during slavery to be subhuman. Deploying animalising terminology against white slave-owners here provided a counterbalance to the white supremacist discourse that presented black Americans as physiologically similar to animals, which was at the root of anti-black stereotypes.

Women who recorded slave narratives in the third quarter of the nineteenth century faced similar obstacles to women providing oral testimony in the WPA interviews in the 1930s, when attempting to voice their experiences of sexual violence. Davis noted that:

white women who joined the abolitionist movement were especially outraged by the sexual assaults on black women. Activists in the female anti-slavery societies often related stories of brutal rapes of slave women as they appealed to white women to defend their black sisters.<sup>173</sup>

In Davis' account, abolitionist societies used institutionalised sexual violence against enslaved women to condemn slavery and harness white women's indignation in the North to bring down slavery in the South. Caleb Smith's research explored the politics of editing in abolitionist circles in the late 1850s and the removal of Harriet Jacobs' final chapter relating to John Brown. Smith noted that in the 1850s, William Lloyd Garrison and others 'articulated a well-developed theory of how literature should move reading publics to action. Its appeal to the sympathetic heart would inspire a feminine readership to exercise a moral influence over the male authorities who made and enforced the law'.<sup>174</sup> Smith argued that the power of literature to work as a moral call-to-action led Lydia Maria Child, a prominent white abolitionist, to steer Jacobs away from discussions of armed insurrections and to foreground

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<sup>173</sup> Davis, p. 27.

<sup>174</sup> Caleb Smith, 'Harriet Jacobs Among the Militants: Transformations in Abolition's Public Sphere, 1859 – 1861', *American Literature*, 84 (2012), 743- 768 (p. 744).

'those melodramatic and sentimental parts illustrating the destruction of families and especially the sexual victimization of girls and women under slavery, along with the devastating effects this abuse brought to their grieving mothers'.<sup>175</sup> Smith's account of discussions of sexual violence as the sentimental, 'safer' option works to depoliticise the act of writing about experiences of rape and sexual abuse. Jacobs' account of the prolonged phase of sexual harassment and the rape committed by Dr. Flint against her was a radical form of resistance, as it contributed to the process of holding white men accountable for a history of entrenched sexual terrorism.

Despite Davis' and Smith's assertion that formerly-enslaved abolitionist writers were encouraged to document the incidence and impact of sexual violence during slavery, Sojourner Truth's narrative revealed that writing about rape and other forms of sexual assault and harassment were not so straightforward at this historical moment. Indeed, Olive Gilbert, who penned Truth's narrative, affirmed that 'there are some hard things that crossed Isabella's life while in slavery, that she has no desire to publish', noting that such things were 'not for the public ear'.<sup>176</sup> Considering that Truth's narrative documented a series of violent beatings and traumatic life events, it is likely that the 'hard things' that Gilbert referred to were related to episodes of sexual violence. Gilbert's contention that certain things were 'not for the public ear' points to the issue of delicacy and the intended audience of slave narratives: white, Northern women. P. Gabrielle Foreman made the important clarification that in the third quarter of the nineteenth century 'societal sanctions... weighted 'sexual' in 'sexual abuse' over 'abuse' and thus enveloped this common form of slave women's... abuse into the terrain of the unspeakable'.<sup>177</sup> In addition, Barbara Welter noted that in the mid-nineteenth century, the development of the 'cult of true womanhood' forged a set of characteristics for the 'ideal woman': piety,

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, p. 744.

<sup>176</sup> Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: Unabridged* (New York: Dover Publications, 1997), p. 46.

<sup>177</sup> P. Gabrielle Foreman, 'The Spoken and the Silenced in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl and Our Nig', *Callaloo*, 13 (2) (1990), 313 - 324 (p. 316).

purity, submissiveness and domesticity.<sup>178</sup> Specifically, the notions of being pious and pure promoted the view that if women were ‘chaste’ enough, then they could keep ‘male passion’ in check.<sup>179</sup> As such, it was a woman’s character that was brought into disrepute, whether a sexual encounter was consensual or not.

In an oft-cited remark, Harriet Jacobs communicated to her audience that, especially in the context of slavery, piety and purity were impossible standards to uphold, arguing that ‘I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others’.<sup>180</sup> As enslaved women were regarded as objects of property, with no legal protections to safeguard them against the slave-holding power structure, their capability to resist the sexual violence of white perpetrators was limited, if not non-existent.

Having outlined the pervasiveness of sexual violence during slavery, and the conflicts associated with recording these experiences in writing, I will now foreground how formerly enslaved women drew upon animalising discourse to navigate a subject often perceived as too delicate for open discussion. Within *Incidents*, Jacobs recalled the sustained sexual harassment that she was subjected to by her master, Dr. Flint. Jacobs noted that at the age of fifteen, Flint ‘began to whisper foul words in my ear’, which she met with ‘indifference or contempt’.<sup>181</sup> When describing the ‘unclean images’ that Flint attempted to fill her mind with, she referred to him as a ‘vile monster’, constructing an image of Flint and his behaviours as less-than-human. Following twelve months of being pursued and pressured into a sexual relationship with Flint, Jacobs pondered over accepting a proposal of marriage from a free-born black man, who worked as a carpenter locally. Though Jacobs had known the carpenter since childhood and felt that she loved him, she

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<sup>178</sup> Barbara Welter, ‘The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820 1860’, *American Quarterly*, 18 (1966), 151 – 174 (p. 152).

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>180</sup> Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl* (New York, Dover Publications, 2001), p. 49.

<sup>181</sup> Jacobs, p. 26.

knew that 'the laws gave no sanction to the marriage' as she was legally the property of Flint.<sup>182</sup> When Flint discovered that Jacobs was considering the marriage proposal, he raged that he 'had half a mind to kill ... [Jacobs] on the spot'.<sup>183</sup> This demonstrated how if enslaved women showed even the smallest degree of agency over their sexual lives, they were met with threats of violence and death by a patriarchal, white supremacist power structure. Though Jacobs declared that she and her childhood companion were 'mutually attached', it is important to note that part of her motivation for considering this marriage was a desire to escape the persistent sexual harassment perpetrated by Flint. Saidiya Hartman's assertion that 'if desperation, recklessness, and hopelessness determine 'choosing one's lover', absolute distinctions between compulsion and assent cannot be sustained'.<sup>184</sup> Though Jacobs' relationship with the carpenter made her feel as though she was exercising a degree of choice, choice was always 'shaped by the... pressures that the institution of slavery presented'.<sup>185</sup>

After Flint threatened to kill Jacobs, threats turned to physical violence, as Jacobs recalled that 'he sprang upon me like a tiger, and gave me a stunning blow. It was the first time he had ever struck me'.<sup>186</sup> Though Jacobs deployed this animalising simile to recount an act of physical violence, it was an act of violence rooted in sexual harassment, in the desire to maintain complete control over Jacobs' body, and concurrently maintain white power. By declaring that Flint was 'like a tiger', she drew upon associations with the tiger as a wild, dangerous, predatory animal. It is important to note here that tigers were not native animals to the North American landscape. Indeed, in the nineteenth century tigers held associations with the Asian continent. Joseph Sramek's research has explored how colonial discourse

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 34.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, p. 35.

<sup>184</sup> Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997), p. 111.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>186</sup> Jacobs, p. 36.

attached specific meanings to tigers in the nineteenth century. He argued that 'tigers...represented for the British all that was wild and untamed in the Indian natural world' and 'precisely because tigers were dangerous and powerful beasts, tiger hunting represented a struggle with fearsome nature'.<sup>187</sup> Sramek noted that tiger-hunting was bound up with notions of manliness, and proving British fitness to rule over and repress Indians.<sup>188</sup> Colonial symbolism of the wild and dangerous tiger was therefore part of the project of constructing a virile, strong, fearless image of British masculinity. Jacobs' use of the tiger simile to represent Flint's 'wild' and 'untamed' sexual behaviours exoticised whiteness, thereby disrupting the white supremacist association between blackness, the exotic, and the animal. Jacobs' articulation of the constructed image of the uncontrollable, oversexed animal to discuss white sexual violence during slavery to a degree challenged the racist animalization of black sexuality. However, continued usage of beastly terminology to describe sexual assaults during slavery had the consequence of implying that such actions were natural and irrepressible, rather than a deliberate, systemic pattern, designed to maintain white male power.

In another passage, Jacobs again linked the sexual harassment by Flint to animality. She asserted that 'no animal ever watched its prey more narrowly than he watched me'.<sup>189</sup> This characterisation was offered following a fortnight in which Flint refused to speak to Jacobs, after he struck her for considering the marriage proposal. Though he did not communicate with her verbally, Jacobs noted that Flint's 'eyes were very loquacious'.<sup>190</sup> Knowing that Flint had previously harassed Jacobs with 'foul words' and 'unclean images' and physically attacked her, this constant surveillance was extremely menacing, forcing Jacobs to fear when the next verbal, physical, or sexual attack would be.

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<sup>187</sup> Joseph Sramek, "'Face Him Like a Briton": Tiger Hunting, Imperialism, and British Masculinity in Colonial India, 1800 - 1875', *Victorian Studies*, 48 (2006), 659 – 680 (p. 659).

<sup>188</sup> Sramek, p. 659.

<sup>189</sup> Jacobs, p. 37.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.



Within this passage, Jacobs explicitly identified Flint as an animal, whilst she felt like the prey, anticipating that a predator could pounce at any moment. This is significant to a race and species analysis of slave narratives, as in the paragraph prior to this remark, Flint had attempted to dehumanise both Jacobs and the free black carpenter. After Flint had struck Jacobs, he threatened that ‘if I ever know of your speaking to him, I will cowhide you both; and if I catch him lurking about my premises, I will shoot him as soon as I would a dog’.<sup>191</sup> Animals were a fundamental part of Flint’s threat. Firstly, he spoke about using the body of the cow as a weapon of violence. This aspect of slavery, the use of the whip as a tool of control, was rooted in both speciesism and white supremacy. Cowhides were produced through the slaughter of cattle, either as a by-product of food production or specifically for their skins. Bound up in the use of animal skins to produce leather whips was a speciesist worldview, one that considered that humans were justified in using animal bodies for their own ends, regardless of the harm, being the cessation of life, inflicted upon the animal in the process. Moreover, the whip became a symbol of the horrors of the daily violence inflicted upon black women and men during slavery.<sup>192</sup> This was a case of one form of oppression, speciesism, facilitating racial violence. The subjugation and exploitation of animal bodies aided in the perpetration of white supremacist violence, where black bodies were mutilated to maintain terror and control in slaveholding communities. Flint’s assertion that he would shoot the free carpenter as readily as a dog illustrated that violence was an ever-present undercurrent to human mastery over animals, as well as white supremacy. Flint’s animalising threats reminded Jacobs that violence was never far away in slave-owning communities. As such, her subsequent characterisation of Flint as a predatory animal, communicated to her Northern white female audience the danger that sexual violence posed to enslaved black Americans, without having to

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>192</sup> Claude H. Nolen, *African American Southerners in Slavery, Civil War and Reconstruction* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2001), p. 58.

document the details of her sexual harassment in unambiguous terms, which publishers felt could upset so-called fragile sensibilities. Ultimately, Jacobs' authorial decision to deploy this animal-based metaphor, adjacent to her account of Flint's animal-rooted threats, shows an attempt to complicate the racial politics of animalising discourse, and reduce the power of the white supremacist association between animality and blackness.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated that, across the slave narrative genre, animalising language was a powerful mechanism, operated by black American abolitionist writers, to represent the deception, physical violence and sexual violence perpetrated by whites in slaveholding societies. In a context where enslaved black men and women described their experiences on plantations as akin to, or worse than, that of domesticated animals, and were represented in white supremacist discourse as animals or less-than-human, it was a significant act of resistance that authors of slave narratives challenged this racialised animalisation by turning the language of 'the beast' back onto white Americans.

Representing white Americans as animals in slave narratives was a risky strategy for formerly enslaved black writers. Ultimately, it encompassed the danger of reinforcing and solidifying the speciesist associations between animals and inferiority, animals and violence, and animals and sexual aggression. Read in such a way, by drawing on the weapon of animalising language that whites had used to attempt to legitimise slavery and other forms of racial oppression, black writers inferred that some truth existed to these negative associations. Representing the violence of slavery through animal symbolism thereby shifted the culpability of white Americans for upholding a system of racial terror onto an animal other.

Although shaping ideas that animals were dangerous beasts ran the risk of sharpening a valuable tool used in service of the oppression of black women and

men, abolitionist writers had an array of reasons for working such animalising language into their narratives. Firstly, the tradition of telling tales within largely illiterate enslaved communities was suffused with slippage between human and animal characters, and therefore describing an animal in human terms or a human as an animal was not uncommon in black folk speech. Secondly, the construct of the dangerous beast did not originate within slave narratives. Biblical teachings, specifically relating to snakes, crafted the perception of animal beings as deceptive and dangerous, and fears of non-domesticated animals were already present in frontier and rural societies, where the increased threat of an encounter with a wild animal could result in a fatality. Black abolitionist writers therefore could harness and enhance this fear of animals as an analogy to explain to a Northern white audience what it was like to live under the system of slavery. For whites in the North, who could not experientially know what it was like to live through racial violence, it was expedient for abolitionist writers to include a more familiar source of fear, of animals, that a predominantly white audience could relate to. By portraying slavery as a battle with a venomous snake or a fearsome tiger, ready to pounce at any moment, slave narratives crafted an association of animality with whiteness, and compelled white Northerners to support abolition through a more accessible analogy that demonstrated the danger that enslaved people faced daily.

Furthermore, the representation of white men as animals provided formerly enslaved writers with a coded language to voice experiences of sexual violence, in a society that deemed it improper for women to speak about coerced and consensual sexual relationships. Jacobs' metaphor representing Flint as a predatory animal, waiting for the opportune moment to strike its prey, combined with her use of symbolism relating to springing tigers to describe his attack, demonstrate that animalising language offered black women abolitionists a middle ground, where inferences were made to the sexual vulnerability of black women, without necessitating details of a sexual assault, which could likely be received as immodest

by an audience that prioritised piety and purity over black women's dominion over their own bodies.

The recurring application of animalising language to powerful whites in slave narratives, for the purpose of mobilising anti-slavery support, illustrates that recovering a black American tradition of animal advocacy, in the antebellum period, is not a straightforward endeavour. In an era when black abolitionist writers sought immediate emancipation for women and men who were considered objects of property, rather than human beings, using every weapon available to hasten the demise of slavery was worthwhile. By using beastly language, black Americans cemented ideas that certain animals, and broader understandings of animals as a group, were savage and dangerous beings, and thereby solidified a speciesist worldview. At this juncture, using animal metaphors to describe white behaviour in slavery challenged white supremacist arguments that linked animality to blackness. Speciesist characterisations of animals, shaped both within and beyond the slave narrative, formed part of the abolitionist strategy to condemn white violence. However, as subsequent chapters document, animalising language that encouraged fear and even hatred of animals that worked as literary stand-ins for white oppressors, sat alongside radically intersectional arguments about human and non-human exploitation, demonstrating that the slave narrative genre contained complex and contradictory ideas on race and species oppression.

## Chapter Two:

# Humanising Animals: Subverting And Solidifying The Human/Animal Divide In Black Women's Writing

### Introduction

Within this chapter I am interested in exploring the recurring trope of the humanised animal within the life and writings of Zora Neale Hurston, Ellen Tarry and Alice Walker. I will argue that each writer assigned what they perceived as 'human' traits to animals, or represented animals as human, for a spectrum of reasons, ranging from: employing the humanised animal as a mask to resist forms of human subjugation; to portray certain animals as family members as part of the institution of pet-keeping; and to challenge the borders between the 'human' and 'animal' and concurrently oppose the oppression of animals in U.S. society.<sup>193</sup>

I make the case that the practice of representing animals as *like* humans or as human by Hurston and Walker cannot be viewed as a monolithically progressive or regressive strategy for advancing the welfare and rights of non-human animals. I will document that throughout their bodies of work, Hurston, Tarry and Walker at times subverted the human/animal divide, whilst at other moments worked to solidify these constructed categories of being. It is important to note that the entire body of Hurston and Tarry's writings, and much of Walker's early writings on animals, were created before theories of 'post-humanism' were articulated within the academy. Nonetheless, some of their descriptions of animals as human or human-like can be

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<sup>193</sup> Within this chapter, I use the term 'pets', as opposed to 'companion animals' so that the power relations are more accurately captured when humans live alongside animals in a domestic setting. Russell W. Belk noted that in the mid-1990s it was 'in-vogue' to characterise pets as companion animals. He made the important point that 'these animals, even when we treat them as quasi-human equals, did not freely choose to be with us' and therefore employing the term 'pet' acknowledges that hierarchy and a sense of ownership was historically, and remains, a central part of this human-animal relationship. Russell W. Belk, 'Metaphoric Relationships with Pets', *Society and Animals*, 4 (1996), 121 – 145 (p. 123 - 124).

read as prefiguring post-humanist ideas, as they collapsed categories that previously understood humans and animals as distinctly separate.

However, it would be reductive to view Hurston, Tarry and Walker's anthropomorphic writings solely through the lens of post-humanism, considering only whether they attempted to decentralise and destabilise the category of the human. Indeed, their attribution of supposedly 'human' characteristics to animals formed part of a much longer tradition of voicing and anthropomorphising animals within black American folk tales, orally and later through the written word. Thus, when Hurston and Walker employed anthropomorphising language and undertook anthropomorphising actions, it served both to foster respect towards animals, but also to preserve and continue a black American cultural tradition.

The source material drawn upon in this chapter focuses exclusively on black women writers, primarily Hurston and Walker, with supporting analysis of texts from a much lesser known black female writer, Ellen Tarry. As black women living in a racist, patriarchal society, Hurston, Tarry and Walker were all 'on the borders' of the human-animal divide, to borrow a phrase coined by Syl Ko, a philosopher and proponent of black veganism.<sup>194</sup> Through the ingrained system of white supremacy in the U.S., Hurston, Tarry and Walker experienced, to varying degrees, that their race and gender rendered them less than fully human in the eyes of the white power structure. I therefore want to consider how occupying these borderlands, of being perceived as neither fully human nor wholly animal, shaped how and why black female writers in the early-mid twentieth century used anthropomorphic language to talk about animals and galvanise their audience to respect animal lives and bodies.

Throughout this chapter, I will draw upon a diverse range of sources, from folktales that Hurston collected and published in the late 1920s and early 1930s, to

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<sup>194</sup> Syl Ko, 'Notes from the Border of the Human-Animal Divide: Thinking and Talking About Animal Oppression When You're Not Quite Human Yourself' in *Aphro-Isim: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism*, ed. by Aph Ko and Syl Ko (New York: Lantern Books, 2017), pp. 70 -75 (p. 72).

the private correspondence that she penned in the last decades of her life, which were later collated and published by Carla Kaplan. Analysing these materials illustrates how the practice of attributing human characteristics and human forms to animals within black folk culture seeped into Hurston's personal writings and shaped how she represented and understood her relationship with her pets. These sources document how Hurston envisioned that animals were capable of resisting, and even seeking revenge against, their human oppressors. She asserts that the animals that lived alongside her were intelligent and independent beings, resulting in behaviours that simultaneously bemused and frustrated her.

Within the sub-section on the use of anthropomorphism to construct a more-than-human family, I also draw on passages from a largely forgotten text, *My Dog Rinty* (1946), penned by one of Hurston's contemporaries in the Harlem Renaissance, Ellen Tarry and her white co-author Marie Hall Ets. The obscurity of this text and relegation of Tarry to the footnotes of scholarship on the Harlem Renaissance reveal that certain genres of writing and subject matter were considered less important, or anomalous, when constructing histories and canons of black literature. Tarry described *My Dog Rinty* as a 'juvenile story', exploring the trials and tribulations of a black family living in Harlem, with a so-called 'mischievous' dog named Rinty.<sup>195</sup> This text was aimed primarily at children, and so it was easy to dismiss both the subject matter and intended audience as unserious and unworthy of critical attention. A heated discussion about children's literature at a meeting of the Negro Writer's Guild, at the home of Claude McKay, epitomised this mind-set when E. Simms Campbell, a black American cartoonist, exclaimed 'who wants to write a book for brats?' when learning of a scholarship awarded to Tarry.<sup>196</sup> This incident not only reveals the hostility that black women writers met when they

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<sup>195</sup> Ellen Tarry, *The Third Door: The Autobiography of an American Negro Woman* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1992), p. 250.

<sup>196</sup> Katharine Capshaw Smith, *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 277.

achieved success, but the belittlement specifically of crafting books for children, who were perceived as undeserving of literary talent by figures like Campbell.

However, *My Dog Rinty* offers a window into how black American communities, and wider U.S. society, at the mid-twentieth century characterised animal behaviour as 'good' or 'bad', depending on whether it made human lives easier or more difficult. Furthermore, the bond between the protagonists, a black American boy named David and Rinty-the-dog, demonstrated that black women writers like Tarry understood that the family home could contain more-than-human relationships, across species boundaries. By showcasing human-animal relationships through a realist frame, Tarry and Ets communicated to their audience the responsibilities and rewards that were bound up with pet-keeping, and advocated through the text for a society less exclusionary of animals kept as pets.

In addition, across this chapter I will foreground published and archival material relating to the most-celebrated black American advocate for animals: Alice Walker. To elucidate one of the most overt forms of anthropomorphism I draw upon a series of photographs from the Alice Walker papers, documenting how Walker held a 'sacred union' ceremony that she envisioned as a 'marriage' between herself and her pets, Marley-the-dog and Surprise-the-cat. These images and the accompanying event invitation can be read as an intense expression of Walker's love for the animals that she lived alongside. They also betray, through the ritualistic aspects of the wedding ceremony, Walker's inclination towards viewing her pets as human, who are capable of consenting to a marriage. I explore these images not to dismiss Walker's animal advocacy work as eccentric and unconventional, but to unpick why anthropomorphism moulded both the public writings and private, familial actions of a complex writer and activist.



## Posthumanism and Anthropomorphism

In order to underline the significance of Hurston, Tarry and Walker's use of anthropomorphism and its relationship to a black American tradition of animal advocacy, it is necessary to outline contemporary scholarly positions on the work of deconstructing speciesism and the act of anthropomorphising animals.

In recent decades, the developing post-humanist position has articulated that representing animals as like humans is detrimental to the cause of promoting respect and justice for animal life. Pramod K. Nayar, a scholar of postcolonial literature and ecocriticism, summarised the key tenets of the field of post-humanism, articulating that it comprised both the deconstruction and de-centring of the idea of the 'human' as a stable, natural, omnipotent category. Nayar pronounced that:

critical posthumanism rejects the very idea of anything innate to the human, arguing instead for a messy congeries of qualities developed over centuries through the human's interactions with the environment (which includes non-organic tools and organic life).<sup>197</sup>

Thus, at its heart, post-humanism aims to de-stabilise the notion that qualities or states of mind exist that make one uniquely human, and that these exceptional qualities embed humans with the superiority to dominate all other living beings and the living environment. Rebekah Fox, a geographer of human-animal relationships, delineated that 'particular qualities can no longer be seen as distinctly human'.<sup>198</sup> Hurston and Walker did not formulate their ideas about animals and their condition in U.S. society in a context where it was accepted knowledge that there may not be a concrete essence to human identity. Though the formal definitions of post-humanism would not be solidified within the academy until the 1990s, over three decades after Hurston's death, this does not mean that Hurston and Walker could

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<sup>197</sup> Pramod K. Nayar, *Posthumanism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. 11.

<sup>198</sup> Rebekah Fox, 'Animal Behaviours, Post-human Lives: Everyday Negotiations of the Animal-Human Divide in Pet-Keeping', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 7 (2006), 525 – 537 (p. 532).

not contribute to the conversation about animals and express ideas that would later be defined as the facets of post-humanism.

In a chapter that probes the trope of the humanised animal within black-authored sources, it is essential that I clarify key terminology. The act of linguistically or textually ‘humanising’ an animal has come to be known as anthropomorphism. James A. Serpell, a scholar of animal ethics, has written extensively on the practice of anthropomorphism, defining the term as ‘the attribution of human mental states (thoughts, feelings, motivations and beliefs) to nonhuman animals’.<sup>199</sup> The representation of animals as human, or as possessing human traits, is centuries old, even if it was not identified using the label of anthropomorphism.

Within recent decades, using anthropomorphism as a literary tool has fallen into disrepute. Eileen Crist, a scholar who has explored the place of anthropomorphism within scientific literatures, summarised the criticisms of anthropomorphism that have emerged, stating that ‘the label of anthropomorphism is used to undermine the credibility, or realist force, of accounts that in some way picture animal life and human affairs as permeable to one another’.<sup>200</sup> Crist points towards the perception of anthropomorphism as an overly sentimental and inaccurate method of representing animals. Additional criticisms of anthropomorphism relate to the rise of post-humanism. Describing animals as human or as possessing human traits keeps the human being as the reference point, as the centre of all things. Such critics state that representing all other animals as like humans solidifies the notion of human superiority, and denies the possibility that emotions, consciousness, memory and intelligence could belong to a plethora of living beings, rather than belonging solely to human beings. As Karla Ambruster

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<sup>199</sup> James A. Serpell, ‘Anthropomorphism and Anthropomorphic Selection: Beyond the “Cute Response”’, *Animals and Society*, 11 (2003), 83 – 100 (p. 84).

<sup>200</sup> Eileen Crist, *Images of Animals: Anthropomorphism and the Animal Mind* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), p. 7.

noted, critiques of anthropomorphism have forced us to 'question which aspects of being and consciousness are, after all, purely human'.<sup>201</sup>

Throughout this chapter I will acknowledge these criticisms but question whether, particularly in the black American literary tradition, anthropomorphism was *always* a pernicious force for shaping attitudes towards animals. I adopt the position of Bryan L. Moore, whose research has explored personification in ecology literature, who argued that anthropomorphism 'often is a tool to undercut anthropocentrism'.<sup>202</sup> In other words, Moore suggested that portraying animals as human did not necessarily send out the message that human beings were at the centre of the universe, but could undermine the rigid borders between human and animal, by showing fluidity and overlaps between human and animal characteristics. I foreground the texts of Hurston, Tarry and Walker to illustrate the complex ways that humanised animals within literature could both convey messages about human political agendas, and also challenge the lowly status of animals in U.S. society.

### **Anthropomorphism And The Animal Mask For Human Struggles**

As I examine the trope of the humanised animal within Hurston, Tarry and Walker's writings, and how this literary device fits into histories of animal advocacy, it is necessary to frame the analysis within a long history of talking animals within black American oral, and later written, folk culture. For example, the tales of Brer Rabbit contain multiple characters that take animal forms, whilst also assuming various human identities. Annie Ruth Leslie, a sociologist of black folk culture, described the multiple personas that Brer Rabbit affects throughout the tales, ranging from: 'accomplished musician, songster, and dancer, successful ladies' man, skilled

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<sup>201</sup> Karla Ambruster, 'What Do We Want From Talking Animals: Reflections on Literary Representations of Animal Voices and Minds', in *Speaking For Animals: Animal Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Margo DeMello (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 17 – 33 (p. 24).

<sup>202</sup> Bryan L. Moore, *Ecology and Literature: Ecocentric Personification from Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 13.

farmer'.<sup>203</sup> Much of the scholarly literature on these animal-centred folktales has focused on the trickster figure, a trope that Trudier Harris defined as 'animals or characters who, while ostensibly disadvantaged and weak in a contest of wills, power, and/or resources, succeed in getting the best of their larger, more powerful adversaries'.<sup>204</sup> Harris noted that 'enslaved African Americans created worlds in which animal actions mirrored human actions'.<sup>205</sup> Thus, from Harris' viewpoint, the animals within these tales were always and only a mechanism to tell stories about humans, within the violent and dangerous environments of slavery and the Jim Crow South. The animals within these tales acted as a mask that conveyed messages about the disadvantaged overcoming the powerful, using a combination of wit, cunning, and often violence. If these tales were told in the presence of white Americans, using a human character as the trickster, then the black American performer could have been evermore vulnerable to racist violence and so the animal mask worked as a safety mechanism.

The tales of Brer Rabbit and his animal friends and foes were undeniably expressions of resistance, creativity, and cultural pride in both the ante- and post-bellum eras when systematic white supremacy sought to reduce black Americans to their bodies and their labour. The Brer Rabbit tales are a central part of the history of black American thought concerning animals. However, if the writings of Hurston and Walker are viewed solely within the confines of this interpretation of black folktales, where animals only serve as a mask, then the radical potential of their thinking on animals and their capacity to suffer and be oppressed, is obscured. It buries a wider black American vision for liberation, which includes humans and

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<sup>203</sup> Annie Ruth Leslie, 'Brer Rabbit, A Play of the Human Spirit: Recreating Black Culture Through Brer Rabbit Stories', *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 17 (1997), 59 – 83 (p. 59).

<sup>204</sup> Trudier Harris, 'The Trickster in African American Literature', *Freedom's Story: Teaching African American Literature and History*, <<http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/freedom/1865-1917/essays/trickster.htm>> [accessed 21 February 2017].

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

other animals, if black representations of animals are only ever viewed as veiling a deeper, hidden message about human oppressions.

In a 1988 interview with Shelton Walden, a black American animal rights activist and radio host, Alice Walker situated her animal advocacy as emerging out of the tradition of animal-centred folk tales. Walden questioned Walker on why the animal rights movement in the U.S. was 'predominantly white' and 'doesn't have many black people involved'.<sup>206</sup> In the initial segment of Walker's response, she acknowledged reasons why black Americans may have felt unable to get involved in the white-led animal rights groups of the 1970s and 1980s, such as: having to prioritise your activist commitments when you are being oppressed yourself on account of your race, gender, sexuality, and class position.<sup>207</sup> However, in the latter half of her response she challenged the premise of Walden's questioning, that black Americans did not hold a collective history of caring for animals. Walker claimed that:

there have always been people in the South, black people, who did feel very close to animals. It comes out of a dual tradition, the African/Native American tradition, which is very Southern. African Americans and Native Americans mingled, and share animal folk stories. It's in these folk stories that you really see paying attention to animals and learning from animals.<sup>208</sup>

Referring directly to the Brer Rabbit tales, Walker asserted that 'in those stories you see that we have a tradition of learning from animals. And to learn from anything means that you appreciate them and love them and care enough to pay attention'.<sup>209</sup>

Departing from the accepted interpretation of animal-centred folk tales, which sees the animal as entirely allegorical and as a useful device for communicating human political grievances, Walker perceived these cultural outpourings as evidence of black respect for and close interaction with animals, throughout the era of slavery

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<sup>206</sup> 'Alice Walker Interview, WBAI, New York', (December 26, 1988), Alice Walker Papers, MSS1061, Box AV1. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

and into the early twentieth century. Whilst scholars like Harris perceived animal folk tales as revealing little about human-animal relations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Walker identified this cultural legacy as the wellspring from which her animal advocacy arose. Animal-centred folk tales support the argument that black American thinkers manipulated the categories of 'human' and 'animal' since the era of enslavement, and that therefore Hurston and Walker's writings on animals should be situated at least partly within this tradition.

There is a strong case to view Hurston's writings pertaining to animals through the lens of black American folktales, considering that her early career was built upon recording and preserving the sayings, stories, games and traditions of black women and men, living in both the U.S. South and in Haiti and Jamaica. Both *Mules and Men* (1935) and *Tell My Horse* (1938) contained several references to animals in the titles of folktales.<sup>210</sup> From actions to appearance, animals within these collected tales were anthropomorphised. In a tale titled 'How Brer 'Gator Got His Tongue Worn Out' the various animals were 'havin' a ball down in de pine woods' and sought to create a musical assemblage to remember.<sup>211</sup> Though 'de dog said he'd be de trumpet in de band, and de horse and de frog and de mockin' bird...said they'd be there and help out all they could', the group struggle to find a bass drummer.<sup>212</sup> Additionally, in a tale titled 'How Brer Dog Lost His Beautiful Voice' Brer Rabbit and Brer Dog were locked in a competition pursuing the same girl, Miss Saphronie, who was not identified as belonging to any particular species. Aware that Brer Dog was close to winning over Miss Saphronie with his beautiful singing voice, Brer Rabbit employed cunning and violence to remove the dog's apparent advantage. Convincing Brer Dog that he knew a tried and tested method to make his voice even sweeter, Brer Rabbit inspected the dog's throat and just as his mouth

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<sup>210</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2009 [originally published by J.B. Lippincott, 1938]), p. v.

<sup>211</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008 [originally published by J.B. Lippincott, 1935]), p. 105.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

is wide open and eyes tightly shut, 'Brer Rabbit pulled out his razor and split Brer Dog's tongue and tore out across de mountain wid de dog right behind him'.<sup>213</sup> In both tales, the activities undertaken by the animals, such as playing musical instruments, singing to gain the affections of a romantic partner, and using a weapon to commit a violent act, are not realist observations of animal life, but stories of fantasy. Particularly in 'How Brer Dog Lost His Beautiful Voice' the classic format of the Brer Rabbit tale was used, as the disadvantaged character utilised all of the resources available to him to even the playing field and subvert power relations. Nonetheless, this tale concluded with the revelation that Brer Rabbit 'ain't had time to stop at Miss Fronie's nor nowhere else 'cause dat dog is so mad he won't give him time'.<sup>214</sup> This particular story fits the widely held interpretation of folk tales, that the animals within them are only masks, to communicate a hidden message or moral, in this case that resorting to trickery and violence will not necessarily win over hearts. As Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay affirmed, whilst respect for the cunning of the animals defined certain tales, others demonstrated that the animal characters 'can serve more as warnings than as exemplars of how to live'.<sup>215</sup> In these instances, animals were humanised through language but the animality was only a thin guise to enable stories of human subversion.

However, in Hurston's written description of the surrounding conversation that accompanied the tale telling in *Mules and Men*, it is possible to identify a degree of respect for animals that Walker perceived in the black oral tradition. In 'Why the Mocking Bird is Away on Friday' Hurston recorded the tale of a group of mockingbirds that worked together to rescue a 'wicked' man from the flames of hell. In the tale, the narrator revealed that:

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 110.

<sup>215</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, 'Folktales Introduction', in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 130 – 132 (p. 131).

de birds all hated it mighty bad when they seen him in hell, so they tried to git him out. But the fire was too hot so they give up – all but de mockin' birds. They come together and decided to tote sand until they squenched de fire in hell.<sup>216</sup>

Advice on moral human behaviour can be gleaned from this whimsical tale, such as: the power of working together; of perseverance; and of the value of granting mercy. Here, the animal characters once again were used as a vehicle to convey human lessons. However, Hurston recorded that when Joe Wiley, the tale teller, summarised the importance of its message, he stated that 'it goes to show you dat animals got sense as well as peoples'.<sup>217</sup> Wiley's recognition that intelligence was not the sole preserve of humans was an example of black men and women questioning the human/animal binary that placed all other living beings as hierarchically lower than humans. This extract from *Mules and Men* supports Walker's interpretation of black American animal-centred folktales and the idea that looking back to this tradition can stimulate compassion towards and respect for animals. Karla Ambruster's argument is pertinent here, as she noted that 'talking animals are particularly likely to function as literary ventriloquist acts, with heavily anthropomorphized animals voicing...human perspectives'.<sup>218</sup> Nonetheless, she recognised that 'speaking animals can remind us, at least, that other modes of being exist'.<sup>219</sup>

Through explorations of Hurston's folktale collections, it is clear that she had a close familiarity with the ways that anthropomorphised animals within folk culture could provide a means to safely communicate human messages of resistance, *and* also challenge perceptions of what it was to be an animal and whether animality was concomitant with inferiority. Such tales build a picture of how Hurston gained her literary inspiration in settings where fluidity between human and animal identities

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<sup>216</sup> Hurston, *Mules and Men*, p. 94.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.

<sup>218</sup> Ambruster, p. 21.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.



proliferated. Thus, although Hurston and Walker lived on the 'borders' of the human-animal divide, knowing how it felt to have their humanity questioned by an oppressive society, in these sources they did not shy away from challenging the rigidity of the borders between human and animal worlds, but instead looked inwards to black culture to locate a tradition where human and animal forms overlapped.

### **Anthropomorphism And The Construction Of A More-Than-Human Family Home**

Folktales were not the only site within which animals were humanised or anthropomorphised in black American communities. Pet-keeping has come to be recognised in recent historiographies as a practice shaped by race and class privilege. Indeed, keeping an animal in the home and possessing the resources to nurture her/him was a signifier of social status. Hilda Kean, a cultural historian of animals, asserted that in the British context, 'by the 1860s dogs had been established as both loving members of the family and as animals that could confer a form of respectability on their owners'.<sup>220</sup> Kean delineated how pure-bred dogs had long been associated with the British aristocracy, but throughout the nineteenth century they became evermore common in middle-class homes.<sup>221</sup> Owning and maintaining an animal within the home could act as a form of economic and cultural capital, by demonstrating that an individual had enough wealth to treat an animal as though it were a member of the human family.

Katherine C. Grier, a historian of pet-keeping in the U.S. context, noted a similar transformation in attitudes towards bringing animals into the home in the nineteenth century. Grier stressed that in the mid-nineteenth century, 'pet-keeping, an activity long interpreted and tolerated as a personal indulgence, was transformed

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<sup>220</sup> Hilda Kean, *Animal Rights: Political and Social Change in Britain Since 1800* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998), p. 88.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

into a morally purposive act'.<sup>222</sup> Grier argued that pets were particularly important for judging the moral character of children, particularly boys, as 'how children treated animals predicted how, as adults, they would treat other human beings'.<sup>223</sup> Grier extends this argument, claiming that companion animals were used as test cases to foretell whether boys possessed characters that could produce violent behaviour, stating that 'boyhood cruelty not only portended the private tyranny of domestic violence but also had worrisome implications for the future of the American republic'.<sup>224</sup>

This use of animals within the family home as an indicator of morality, or more importantly deviancy, is significant. If a boy committed cruel acts upon a pet, and was thereby viewed as capable of violence towards human beings, it was individualised and interpreted as something wrong with that particular child's moral character. This propensity for violence was perceived as something peculiar and out of the ordinary, when in actuality violence was weaved into the fabrics of race, gender and class systems in the U.S. in the mid-nineteenth century. Up until the mid-nineteenth century millions of black Americans were owned as property and lived under daily physical, emotional and sexual violence.<sup>225</sup> Further, though white women possessed racial privilege, they received no protection from marital violence under the law or any political representation.<sup>226</sup> Thus, at a time when the place of black women and men, and white women, was being deliberated in U.S. society, and attention was brought to the violence underpinning these systems of oppression, the practice of pet-keeping and its indication of morality was comforting to those who wished to confine violent tendencies to a couple of 'bad eggs'. The

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<sup>222</sup> Katherine C. Grier, 'Childhood Socialization and Companion Animals: United States, 1820 - 1870', *Society and Animals*, 71 (1999), 95 – 120 (p. 96).

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid*, p. 102.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, p. 105.

<sup>225</sup> Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), p. 15.

<sup>226</sup> S.J. Kleinberg, *Women in the United States, 1830 – 1945* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), p. 143.

construction of pet-keeping as a means to determine morality demonstrated the racism, sexism and speciesism of U.S. society in this era; such constructions rendered animals as experimental subjects for determining cruelty and provided a smokescreen for the systems of race and gender violence that structured everyday lives.

The historical relationship between black Americans and pet keeping is complex. A 2002 study by Sue Ellen Brown, a psychologist of human-animal interdependent relationships, on contemporary pet-keeping practices within black communities claimed that white Americans had more pets, of varied species, and were more attached to these pets, than were black Americans.<sup>227</sup> Brown summarised the hypothesis of her study, stating that ‘whites may tend to have a sentimental, anthropomorphic view of animals while African Americans may have a more instrumental or utilitarian view of animals’, basing her prediction upon prior studies.<sup>228</sup> Significantly, Brown made the important interjection that accepted concepts of ‘pet attachment’ could be biased towards white, middle-class populations, and that using criteria such as: whether an individual allows their pet to sleep on their bed or carries a photograph of their pet, may not be universally applicable and cannot accurately gauge whether a human is emotionally attached to a domestic animal.<sup>229</sup>

A review article in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* outlined potential reasons why racial difference could shape attitudes towards living with pets. The purported reasons why black Americans may have fewer pets, and become less attached if they had a pet, were intertwined with the economic and legal structures that shaped the lives of black women and men. The economic argument claimed that ‘black... [Americans] who are three times as likely to be poor

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<sup>227</sup> Sue Ellen Brown, ‘Ethnic Variations in Pet Attachment Among Students at an American School of Veterinary Medicine’, *Society & Animals*, 10 (2002), 249 - 266 (p. 258).

<sup>228</sup> Ibid, p. 260.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid, p. 261.

as whites, may be less inclined to have pets in the first place'; that feeding and caring for pets creates a financial burden; for black families living on low incomes in crowded housing there may be little room for pets; and prior experience of having to give up a pet due to financial reasons may impact levels of attachment in case circumstances repeat themselves.<sup>230</sup> Furthermore, the article articulates how the history of segregation in the U.S., barring black Americans from using certain public spaces, such as: 'parks; beaches, campgrounds, and other recreational areas' that were reserved for whites only, could have dissuaded black Americans from keeping pets historically, as fewer spaces would have been available to exercise and play with such animals.

As stated previously, the rise of pet-keeping emerged in a period in which the majority of black American women and men were enslaved and denied possession of their own bodies. Since black Americans were owned as property, they were therefore excluded from owning property themselves, including animals to be kept as pets.<sup>231</sup> Moreover, in the late nineteenth century, for black Americans who had survived slavery, or were descended from slaves, perceptions of one of the most cherished domesticated animals brought into the homes of class privileged families, the dog, were likely filtered by witnessing or hearing about the use of dogs as weapons by white slaveholders. In Solomon Northup's narrative of enslavement, he disclosed how dogs were utilised as an instrument of white terror, recapturing enslaved black men and women who had escaped from plantations, stating that:

Their long, savage yells announced they were on my track... Every few moments I could hear the yelping of the dogs. They were gaining upon me. Every howl was nearer and nearer. Each moment I expected they would spring upon my back – expected to feel their long teeth sinking into my flesh. There were so many of them, I knew they would tear me to pieces.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> No author cited, 'African-American College Students Show Less Attachment To Their Pets Than White College Students', *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 39 (2003), 58 (p. 58).

<sup>231</sup> Jeffery Clymer, *Family Money: Property, Race, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 39.

<sup>232</sup> Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years A Slave: A True Story* (London: Collins Classics, 2014), p. 94.

Northup's description of the fear evoked by the bloodhounds demonstrates the perception of dogs, amongst enslaved black Americans, as mechanisms of punishment and control by white slaveholders. Such an understanding likely created a lasting negative association between dogs and danger, which could have impacted upon the willingness of black American communities to welcome animals into their home and humanise them to become part of the family. In addition, writers such as Walker, who achieved success in the post-Civil Rights era, would have been aware of how some of the most powerful imagery documenting police brutality and protest suppression involved encounters between black Americans and weaponised animals. Bill Hudson's renowned photograph of a young black high school student, Walter Gadsden, being attacked by a German Shepard police dog that ripped at his torso during the Birmingham campaign, was published by the *New York Times* in May 1963 and went on to make international headlines.<sup>233</sup> This image could cement the idea that 'man's best friend' was in actuality the white man's best friend, and that well into the mid-twentieth century dogs were being used in service of maintaining white supremacy and inflicting violence on black populations. Associations of dogs and the maintenance of white power thereby complicated the relationship between black Americans and pet-keeping from the nineteenth century onwards.

Though encounters with dogs-as-weapons during slavery formed part of the relationship between black Americans and animals throughout the nineteenth century, this does not mean that some black American individuals and families did not form close bonds with animals and kept them as pets. Two photographs from the Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection illustrate how in some instances dogs and cats were humanised or anthropomorphised to the degree that they were considered to be members of the family.

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<sup>233</sup> Steven Kasher, *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954 - 1968* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1996), p. 95.





**Figure two:** 'All Mine: African American family photo with their cat', circa 1890.



**Figure three:** 'African American family in front of a wooden building, with a dog', undated.

The photographic family portraits, in figures two and three, include a cat and dog respectively at the centre of the image. Figure two is a photograph taken indoors in approximately 1890, featuring a black man and eight black children posing, while a boy at the centre of the scene holds a cat, directing the animal towards the camera. Figure three features a black family of nine adults and one infant posing for a photograph outside a wood-panelled building. Whilst eight of the adults stand for the photograph on the back row, an elder black woman is seated at the front, whilst a dog wearing a collar is seated next to her. Though this photograph is undated, the clothing in the image is consistent with the fashion of the 1890s or the turn of the twentieth century. Though figure three is slightly more formal than figure two, in the style of clothing worn for the photograph and the facial expressions of the subjects, the two images share the presence of a non-human animal at the heart of the scene.

In the introduction to the collection *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier outline the monumental significance of the development of photography to Douglass, a champion of freedom for black Americans. Stauffer, Trodd and Bernier argued that Douglass was so captivated by photography because he perceived the new technology to be: democratising; truth-telling; and humanising, three vital attributes for advancing justice for black Americans.<sup>234</sup> Douglass argued that photography was democratising because 'the humblest servant girl may now possess a picture of herself', unlike in decades prior when portraiture was restricted to wealthy elites.<sup>235</sup> He claimed that it was objective because it 'accurately captured a moment in time

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<sup>234</sup> John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American*, ed. by John Stauffer and others (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), p. x – xii.

<sup>235</sup> Frederick Douglass, 'Pictures and Progress' (1865), Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed material, p. 8

and space' and thereby helped to counter racist caricatures.<sup>236</sup> Finally, he asserted that photography 'highlighted the essential humanity of its subjects', because 'humans' proclivity for pictures is what distinguished them from animals'.<sup>237</sup> Thus, for Douglass, the value of photography as a tool of the resistance struggle for black Americans, hinged partly on its ability to evidence the distinction between humans and animals, which had been blurred by white supremacist discourse that sought to characterise black women and men as closer to animals than white Americans.

Douglass' arguments about the worth of photography to anti-racist struggles in the nineteenth century can strengthen analysis of the presence of the cat and the dog in figures two and three. These images were clearly intended to present the best version of two families, to be preserved for posterity. That the cat and the dog were brought into the frame to pose for these family portraits is therefore important. The black children in figure two and the black women and men in figure three considered these non-human animals to be a part of the family, or at least a part of the landscape of the home, and wanted them to be included in the visual record of their lives. Though figures two and three reveal only a snapshot of the lives of these two black American families, they demonstrate that in spite of the various economic and cultural impediments to living alongside a domesticated animal in the late nineteenth century, some black Americans were able to keep pets and develop strong attachments to these beings, to the degree that dogs and cats were considered significant enough to take centre stage in the family portrait. Further, the aforementioned photographs depict that, against the backdrop of white supremacy, some black Americans were able to foster relationships of care with domesticated animals, evidencing Walker's assertion that a history of love and respect for animals is identifiable within the black American tradition. A certain denial of the cat and dog's animality is identifiable, by controlling the animal's behaviour to pose for a

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<sup>236</sup> Stauffer and others, p. xi.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, p. xii.



formal family portrait-style photograph. However, this form of anthropomorphism, of incorporating the animal into the human family, betrays an attitude that far from humans and animals being wholly distant from one another, they can have meaningful relationships and that anthropomorphism has sometimes worked to show humans and animals living alongside one another.

These photographs support an understanding of animals as part of more-than-human families and homes, echoed in the writings and lives of Hurston and Walker. Both Hurston and Walker used anthropomorphism to demonstrate the ways in which their pets were moulded to fit the home and family, but also seemingly attached human traits to their cats and dogs to communicate that these animals were individuals and agents capable of shaping the landscape of the home. Emma Power, a cultural geographer who undertook a contemporary study of pets and family-making, articulated that much previous research portrayed animals as 'passive bodies that are shaped (domesticated) to fit within the home but rarely attends to the ways that animals live within or shape home'.<sup>238</sup>

In Hurston's correspondence from the 1950s, it is clear to see the legacy of the folktale tradition that she was brought up around, as she shifted between representing her cat and dog as animals, and as beings with human-like qualities and behaviours. Running through the correspondence in the final decade of Hurston's life were repeated allusions to the ways in which various animals constituted part of her home and were perceived as part of a mutually-beneficial familial support network.

A series of letters between Hurston and Jean Parker Waterbury, her literary agent in the 1950s, reveal the closeness that Hurston felt with more-than-human beings in the last decade of her life. A letter dated 9<sup>th</sup> July 1951 from Hurston to Waterbury depicted how Hurston found comfort in nature and her companion

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<sup>238</sup> Emma Power, "Furry Families": Making a Human-Dog Family Through Home', *Social & Cultural Geography*, 9 (2008), 535 – 555 (p. 537).

animals at a time of upheaval and vulnerability. In summer 1951 Hurston packed up her life and moved from Belle Glade to a one-room cottage in a white residential neighbourhood in Eau Gallie, Florida.<sup>239</sup> Though Hurston had rented the property previously, and had written *Mules and Men* within the cottage in the 1930s, in the intervening decades the demographics of the area had changed profoundly. Moylan, a scholar specialising in Hurston's final decade, asserted that it was a rarity to rent to a black tenant in a white neighbourhood in the 1950s, and rightly acknowledged the dangers of such a move in the South, stating that 'to do so could have put both the landlord and the tenant at risk of violence or worse'.<sup>240</sup> In view of this, Hurston divulged to Waterbury that she and the landlord were 'waiting on public reaction', but that so far her white neighbours had acted amiably and offered gifts to help improve the property.<sup>241</sup> However, Hurston disclosed that racist attitudes and stereotypes about black Americans lurked not far under the surface, as she informed Waterbury that 'in what was meant to be a compliment, I have been told twice, "You don't live like the majority of your people. You like things clean and orderly around you".<sup>242</sup> It was clear that Hurston's white neighbours would accept her in the neighbourhood because they viewed her as an exception. Interactions with Hurston did not push the white residents of Eau Gallie to examine their racist beliefs in the inherent dirtiness and chaotic nature of black life.

Hurston declared that 'I have always intended to come back' to Eau Gallie and divulged to Waterbury that she 'really would love to own' the property and land that she had previously rented and produced her art within.<sup>243</sup> Hurston's desire to return to the South, and specifically to reclaim the turf that had once been a black

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<sup>239</sup> Virginia Lynn Moylan, *Zora Neale Hurston's Final Decade* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), p. 86.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>241</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, 'Letter from Zora Neale Hurston to Jean Parker Waterbury, dated 9<sup>th</sup> July 1951', Zora Neale Hurston Papers, MS Group 6, Box 2, Folder 35, University of Florida George Smathers Library, Gainesville.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, Box 2, folder 35.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, Box 2, folder 35 – 36.

neighbourhood, demonstrates her courage and strength of character, but also a mixture of hope and naivety concerning the prospects for black Americans to own property in the South, against a backdrop of white supremacy that sought to eliminate such economic ambitions. Alice Walker aptly captured the relationship between black Americans and landowning in the South, when she declared that it was a 'history of dispossession' where:

we loved the land and worked the land, but we never owned it; and even if we bought the land, as my great-grandfather did after the Civil War, it was always in danger of being taken away, as his was, during the period following Reconstruction.<sup>244</sup>

Furthermore, Hurston's return to Eau Gallie, to reclaim her place within what had become a white-dominated neighbourhood, prefigured Walker's later resistance to efforts to disinherit black Americans from the South, in which she avowed that 'I would never be forced away from the land of my birth without a fight'.<sup>245</sup> These details of Hurston's life in the early 1950s are significant because they highlight the vulnerability of black Americans when making homes throughout the twentieth century, when violent racism lurked only doors away. In bell hooks' well-cited essay on homeplace as a site of resistance within black communities, she opened with recollections of her grandmother's home in a poor white neighbourhood. hooks recalled that the walk to her grandmother's home was characterised by fear, remembering that 'even when empty or vacant, those porches seemed to say "danger", "you do not belong here", "you are not safe"'.<sup>246</sup> Thus, it is important to stress that despite the degree of courtesy shown by Hurston's neighbours, she was constructing a homeplace in a site of significant vulnerability to racial terror.

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<sup>244</sup> Alice Walker, 'Choice: A Tribute to Martin Luther King, Jr', in *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*, ed. by Alice Walker (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 142 – 145 (p. 143).

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*, p. 144.

<sup>246</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics* (Boston: South End Press, 1990), p. 42.

The political scientist Bonnie Honnig noted that in wider literature on the meaning of *home*, the term has come to symbolise a 'safe haven in a heartless world', which writers like hooks argue are particularly important for oppressed peoples to affirm one another.<sup>247</sup> Honnig articulated the necessity of recognising the 'impossibility of the conventional home's promised safety from conflict, dilemmas and difference'.<sup>248</sup> Whilst for some black Americans home represented a space of sanctuary and political resistance to white racist violence, experiences of racist and sexist violence in domestic spaces illuminated that home did not monolithically represent safety and security, but could be quite the opposite.

The vulnerability of the black American family home to white terror and gender violence made the process of constructing a homeplace evermore complex and fragile. Considering this, it is understandable that Hurston constructed her sense of home through the relationships that she fostered with the animals that resided in and around her house. Betsy Klimasmith, a scholar of urban domesticity in the U.S., affirmed the association between *home* and 'a place of connection', demonstrating that definitions of home are about more than the physical structures of housing, and are bound up with personal relationships.<sup>249</sup> Despite Hurston's encirclement by white neighbours who were convinced of the inferiority of black Americans, she claimed that 'I am the happiest I have been in the last ten years'.<sup>250</sup> Part of Hurston's explanation for her newfound contentment was related to her immersion in the flora and fauna of Florida. She recalled that:

the birds, which I feed and who have begun to collect here already in large numbers, wake me up clamouring for their breakfast, and I dash out and place stale bread, etc. and watch the many colors and many behaviours of my feathered friends. Less than an hour ago, a male cardinal lit on the porch no

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<sup>247</sup> Bonnie Honnig, 'Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home', *Social Research*, 61 (1994), 563 – 597 (p. 585).

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*, p. 586.

<sup>249</sup> Betsy Klimasmith, *At Home in the City: Urban Domesticity in American Literature and Culture, 1850 – 1930* (Hanover: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>250</sup> Hurston, 'Letter from Zora Neale Hurston to Jean Parker Waterbury, dated 9<sup>th</sup> July 1951'.

more than five feet from me and complained that there was no more food outside, so I hurried to put some out.<sup>251</sup>

Alan Brown, a scholar of the role of nature in Hurston's fiction, argued that 'Hurston's natural surroundings acted as a catalyst for the development of her artistic sensibilities'.<sup>252</sup> Though Brown was right to contend that the natural world had a profound impact on inspiring Hurston's literature, it is clear that she enjoyed and admired the flora and fauna of her home state irrespective of their worth to her writing. In the passage cited above, Hurston conjured up the image of an interspecies conversation between herself and the birds residing in the vicinity of her cottage. Within this segment of the letter, she represented herself as a nurturer of the birds, answering their calls for sustenance promptly. Hurston perceived this setup as mutually beneficial: the birds were rewarded with food and she received the pleasure of watching and interacting with them.

Furthermore, Hurston articulated that she was cultivating more-than-human friendships. She referred to the birds as 'feathered friends' and boasted about the physical proximity of the male cardinal, indicating a relationship of trust. In an environment of racial hostility, Hurston perceived a friendly welcome from the more-than-human population. Hurston's construction of the interaction with the birds as a friendship led her to anthropomorphise, or assign human characteristics to, these creatures. Her assertion that the birds 'wake me up clamouring for breakfast' and her description of the cardinal's complaints for more food, invoke images of a dependent human infant, conjuring a scene where Hurston is viewed as a needed caregiver. Rebekah Fox, a geographer who argued that pet keeping incorporates daily challenges to the strict binary between humans and animals, affirmed that owners perceive 'the animal as emotional and capable of engaging in reciprocal

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Alan Brown, "'De Beast" Within: The Role of Nature in Jonah's Gourd Vine', in *Zora in Florida*, ed. by Steve Glassman and Kathryn Lee Seidel (Orlando: University of Central Florida Press, 1991), pp. 76 – 85 (p. 78).

social relationships...affording the animal a social place as a member of the family or close friend'.<sup>253</sup> Though the birds do not reside within the walls of Hurston's home, the daily feeding routine that she undertook transformed them in her mind into her pets, and thereby as part of her emotional support structure. This letter excerpt conveyed that she perceived birds as fellow residents to be considerate of, enjoyed and nurtured.

In a separate letter from July 1951 to Burroughs Mitchell, Hurston's editor and friend, she repeated her description of the close relationship that she cultivated with the local bird population. Hurston divulged that:

I have a bird bath and feed the birds, and dozens are always near the house. I know that they depend upon my protection, because the[y] set up a great clamor for me whwn a cat or a snake appears [sic]. I chase the cats and on two occasions, had to catch oak snakes and take them away...It amuses me to see with what satisfaction the birds watch the capture...I notice that when the snake disappears into the bag...the birds...burst into songs of joy.<sup>254</sup>

Hurston's interventions to protect the birds from predators within the ecosystem reinforce her identification with the role of nurturer and defender of these more-than-human beings. Moreover, Hurston's perception that the bird's clamour was specifically for *her* demonstrates a desire to be needed by the creatures. In addition, her references to the joy and satisfaction of the birds illustrates both that she anthropomorphised her 'feathered friends', through translating their behaviours and sounds into recognisable human emotions, and that these positive emotions were significant to her because they confirmed that she was having a beneficial effect on their lives. Such instances, where Hurston humanised the birds, were part of her efforts to construct home in Eau Gallie, to show that it was possible to create more-than-human connections and live productively alongside one another, and ultimately

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<sup>253</sup> Fox, p. 527.

<sup>254</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, 'Letter to Burroughs Mitchell, dated July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1951', in Carla Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. by Carla Kaplan (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), pp. 667 – 670 (p. 669).

to make her feel like a useful and wanted citizen, in a white neighbourhood where her presence was constantly under scrutiny and under threat.

Within the letter to Mitchell it is significant that Hurston maintained a separation between the animals that she welcomed near her home and those that were unwelcome. Creatures that were not welcome around her residence were not anthropomorphised. In this context Hurston constructed cats, snakes and rats as either predators or pests, and concurrently they were not anthropomorphised or considered to be a part of the home and family. The snake was described as 'the enemy', rats were depicted as 'invading the house', and Hurston recorded how she was pushed to 'chase...away' cats to protect the birds.<sup>255</sup> In this instance, anthropomorphism, or lack of, was employed to uphold a division and hierarchy between so-called good and bad animals, between those that enriched the lives of humans and those that posed a threat or inconvenience to human life. Mockingbirds occupied a liminal space between good and bad creature. Whilst they did not pose a direct threat to humans as the snakes and the rats did, they were not as tame as the jays and the cardinals, and so Hurston anthropomorphised them, but instead drew on negative human traits to humanise them, describing the mockingbirds as 'stand-offish' as they were not 'dependent on my grain', and as 'war-like' for defending their territory from crows.<sup>256</sup> Dependence on Hurston's nurturing activities was therefore a prerequisite to her use of positive anthropomorphism, and her perception of particular animals as forming part of her circle of friends and family.

In addition, *My Dog Rinty* helps to document how Ellen Tarry, a pioneer of black American children's literature, and her co-author Marie Hall Ets, a white picture book author, used fictional animals to contribute to a conversation on pet-keeping and document human attitudes towards animals, spanning from hostility to harmony. Professor Katharine Capshaw Smith, a scholar of children's literature in

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid, p. 669.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p. 669.

the Harlem Renaissance, affirmed that this text 'explores the life of a working-class Harlem family and their trouble-making pet'.<sup>257</sup> In 1999, Capshaw Smith conducted an interview with a ninety-two-year-old Tarry, to gather her memories of forging interracial writing partnerships and creating children's literature that centred on a 'here and now' perspective, rather than pursuing fantasy or fairy tale genres.<sup>258</sup> The narrative and accompanying photographs in *My Dog Rinty* depicted black urban life in a way that black American children could recognise and relate to. Explaining the shift from the use of illustrations in earlier children's books to photographs in *My Dog Rinty*, Tarry claimed that 'trends in illustrations would change, but pictures would remain'.<sup>259</sup> Not only did photography promise greater longevity for the text, but also the notion that 'pictures would remain' suggests that Tarry sought to document black urban lives for posterity, as a form of resistance to racist caricatures. Tarry understood that books for children were a medium through which to convey to future leaders of the race that poverty and racial injustice could be overcome in the U.S., demystifying black American home life and challenging racist misrepresentations that abounded in some white-authored children's literature.<sup>260</sup>

Although *My Dog Rinty* is testimony to the possibilities of interracial collaboration in 1940s New York City, as Tarry co-wrote the piece with a white author and formed a working relationship with the white publishing establishment at Viking Press, Tarry's interview with Capshaw Smith also revealed the vulnerability felt by working-class black Americans in Harlem when they interacted with whites. The photography was shot by Alexander and Alexandra Alland, a white American couple, whom Tarry had to vouch for before local families were willing to be

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<sup>257</sup> Katharine Capshaw Smith, 'From Bank Street to Harlem: A Conversation with Ellen Tarry', *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 23 (April 1999), 271 – 285 (p. 271).

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid*, p. 271.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid*, p. 278.

<sup>260</sup> Yolanda Williams Page, *Encyclopedia of African American Women Writers, Volume One* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), p. 543.



photographed.<sup>261</sup> Tarry stated that ‘black people were reluctant to allow anybody white to come into their homes. I had to convince them... and after all those years of working in Harlem, how could they not trust me’?<sup>262</sup> The photographs within *My Dog Rinty* are therefore testimony to the courage and trust of the black community in Harlem; in allowing their home lives to be documented.

Significantly, within the interview, Tarry and Capshaw Smith discussed the issue of authenticity in representing the lives of working-class black Americans in the text. Tarry noted that the child and family members who were photographed as David and his kin were of Haitian descent, and that his father was employed as a French upholsterer. As such, in their family home they possessed several pieces of French furniture, which was swapped out for the photographs, on the order of May Masee, a children’s book editor and head of the juvenile department at Viking Press. Tarry recalled Masee’s insistence that ‘we can’t have that. Nobody would expect to see all that French furniture in Harlem’.<sup>263</sup> This demonstrates that in a text that set out to document black American lives through a realist lens, the assumptions of a white-dominated publishing industry impacted on black creative output, by demanding that the aesthetics of the home in Harlem must show wear and tear and that a working-class black family could not possibly own beautiful objects.

Tarry’s work has received limited scholarly attention centred on her groundbreaking shift in genre for children’s literature and her relationships with white patrons. However, considering that two of Tarry’s children’s books featured animals as central characters, *My Dog Rinty* and later *The Runaway Elephant* (1950), scholars have not unpacked the significance of animal symbolism within these texts. Focusing on *My Dog Rinty*, I will explore how this source documents trends in black American children’s literature and what it uncovers about the relationship between

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<sup>261</sup> Capshaw Smith, ‘From Bank Street to Harlem: A Conversation with Ellen Tarry’, p. 280.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid, p. 280.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 279.

anthropomorphism and challenging non-human oppression in the mid-twentieth century.

Through the narrative, Tarry and Ets showcase the transformation in public opinion towards Rinty, from the perception that he is a 'bad dog' to a 'nice dog'.<sup>264</sup> The first part of the story details numerous occasions on which Rinty will not behave for David, a young black American child who acts as Rinty's primary caretaker and lives in Harlem with his parents and siblings. Following David to school, chasing nuns, chewing clothes and home furnishings, escaping from his kennel and causing damage at nearby businesses, along with the final straw, causing a commotion at the Sunday church service, all help to cement Rinty's reputation as a 'bad' dog. By characterising Rinty as a 'bad' dog, Tarry and Ets started a dialogue about the application of a human moral code to other animals. It is clear from the narrative that the behaviours that led Rinty to be chastised as 'bad' or immoral, are those that disrupt human routines, or cause damage to status or property. In the instance where Rinty caused a commotion at the church service, it is noted that 'Rinty was ashamed to look into David's face, but he was wagging all over'.<sup>265</sup> Here, Rinty's failure to meet David's gaze is taken as evidence that the animal feels shame for his actions, whilst the description of him 'wagging all over' infers that he is content to be in the presence of David. Jules Howard, a zoologist, warns against filtering animal behaviour through the lens of human emotions, asserting that we should 'consider what we know about animals and what we don't – and may never – know about their lives'.<sup>266</sup> He noted the tendency to 'squeeze a whole range of animal behaviours into

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<sup>264</sup> Ellen Tarry and Marie Hall Ets, *My Dog Rinty* (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 7.

<sup>265</sup> Tarry and Ets, p, 23.

<sup>266</sup> Jules Howard, 'The 'Grieving' Orca Mothers? Projecting Emotions on Animals is a Sad Mistake', *The Guardian*, (14<sup>th</sup> August 2018) <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/14/grieving-orca-mother-emotions-animals-mistake>> [accessed on 1st September 2018].

discrete categories of human emotion, thereby overlooking and failing to celebrate their unique brand of animal majesty'.<sup>267</sup>

Using a post-humanist frame to analyse Tarry and Ets' characterisation of Rinty as 'ashamed' would lead to the conclusion that these writers projected human emotions onto animals and, resultantly, kept the focus firmly on human beings. Indeed, in this setting, it seems as though David's feelings of shame are transferred onto Rinty, as it is revealed that 'David's father scowled and leaned forward. He looked very angry'.<sup>268</sup> His father's embarrassment at Rinty's disruptive behaviour caused David to feel ashamed, as it was his responsibility to keep Rinty under control. As the Sunday church service was a key site of performing respectability and forging community ties, the stir caused by Rinty could create a blot on the family's reputation. Thus, through this text, Tarry and Ets conveyed to their audience that living with pets was not always smooth sailing, and that it had the potential to create friction within the household. Moreover, it is possible to read this scene for a moral, where Rinty's bad behaviour is presented as a substitute for a child. Children's literature has long been perceived as a genre embedded with instructive guidance on how children should behave and, more specifically, children's literature of the Harlem Renaissance emerged from ideologies of 'racial uplift' that emerged in the 1890s. In this context, the 'good' behaviour of black children, understood as a commitment to studying, maintaining a neat appearance and acting with restraint, was perceived as having the potential to convince white Americans of the equality of the races and 'eliminate racial bias'.<sup>269</sup> Subsequently, a child engaging with this text could view Rinty as an example of the consequences if one were to behave in a disruptive manner. Read in this way, Rinty is used as a vehicle for teaching children about the importance of social order.

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<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Tarry and Ets, p. 23.

<sup>269</sup> Capshaw Smith, *Children's Literature of the Harlem Renaissance*, p. xv.

In the latter half of the text, David's parents become exasperated with the behaviour of Rinty and decide to offer him for sale in a local paper. As David places the advertisement for Rinty, a woman of high social standing, Mrs. Mosely, comes into the office and becomes smitten with the dog. At this point in the narrative, Rinty's characterisation begins to shift from being a 'bad dog' to a 'nice dog', as his new owner considers him to be 'adorable' and reads his attempts to lick her on the cheek as evidence that he likes her.<sup>270</sup> This section of the text emphasises the strength of the bond between David and Rinty, as both parties are represented as being distressed by the separation and severing of their trans-species friendship. When David and Rinty arrive at the newspaper office, it is acknowledged that 'he looked so sad and the dog looked so sad that the girl told the editor about them'.<sup>271</sup> Once the woman agrees to purchase Rinty and places him inside her car, it is recorded that 'when Rinty saw that David was not going, he stood up at the window and tried to get out'.<sup>272</sup> These emotive descriptions were employed to rally the audience to sympathise with David and Rinty and to acknowledge that humans can forge mutually supportive relationships with animals. By anthropomorphising Rinty as saddened by the separation, Tarry and Ets compelled their readers to long for a reunion of the child and dog, and the preservation of Rinty's status as part of the more-than-human family.

The conclusion to the story details the vindication of Rinty and his eventual reunion with David. Whilst living with Mrs. Moseley, Rinty continues to bite through his lead, chew holes into pillows and jump on friends who call by, much to her dissatisfaction. Accordingly, Moseley concludes that she will 'take him to the dog school to teach him how to behave'.<sup>273</sup> Rinty attends weekly dog school sessions and when David visits Moseley's apartment, to exercise Rinty after school, he

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<sup>270</sup> Tarry and Ets, p. 28.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid p. 38.

assists with the training process. It is recorded that David ‘learned just how to say, “Stand” and “Stay!” and how to give Rinty’s chest a little bump with his knee to keep him from jumping on people’.<sup>274</sup> Rinty’s training is depicted as a two-way process, where the dog and child learn alongside one another, as it is noted that ‘Rinty learned how to mind and behave, and David helped him’.<sup>275</sup> This passage is indicative that Tarry and Ets used animal characters to teach children about the responsibilities, as well as rewards, that were a part of pet ownership. As Russell W. Belk posits, pets can ‘serve as transitional objects and a locus of affection that helps children develop a humane caring sense of responsibility’.<sup>276</sup> Helping Rinty to learn how to behave appropriately when living alongside humans was therefore presented as part of David’s maturation, of learning to impart to others the importance of obedience and orderliness.

In the closing pages of the text, Tarry and Ets provide a twist in the narrative, revealing the problems with non-verbal communication between humans and other animals and the misreading of animal behaviours. Though Rinty has undergone his obedience training and become ‘the best-behaved dog anyone could imagine’ he persists with ‘making holes in people’s carpets and trying to tear up their floors’.<sup>277</sup> Whereas these actions had previously earned him the reputation as a ‘bad dog’, it takes the insight of the obedience trainer for Mrs Moseley and David’s family to realise that Rinty is ‘worth a fortune’, due to his skills as a ‘born ratter and mouser’.<sup>278</sup> At this point in the story, Rinty’s chewing and digging behaviours are viewed in a new light, as Mrs Moseley requests that the superintendent lift up the floorboards, and mice are subsequently discovered. By happenstance, or authorial convenience, Rinty is reunited with David permanently, as pets become prohibited in Mrs Moseley’s apartment building. Moseley decides to gift Rinty back to David for

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>276</sup> Belk, p. 122.

<sup>277</sup> Tarry and Ets, p. 39.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

his birthday, asserting that 'he's yours for keeps'.<sup>279</sup> Although David is delighted to be reunited with Rinty, his father is less than pleased, inquiring 'What about the money it takes for food and for his license and for the vet when he cuts his paw and things like that? With seven mouths to feed one more is too much. I don't think I can let you keep him'.<sup>280</sup> In reality, for a mid-twentieth century working-class black family in Harlem, the financial costs of maintaining a pet would be considered a luxury. As David's father communicates, he struggles to put food on the table for the human inhabitants of the household, and so eking out extra money to nurture an animal was perceived as out of reach and indulgent.

To allay his father's concerns about the financial implications of keeping a dog, whilst simultaneously channelling Rinty's scratching and digging behaviours, David crafts a plan to start a pest control service. Knowing that Harlem was full of old buildings, David reasoned that Rinty's services would be in high demand. It is noted that:

David would take Rinty into an old house or an apartment or a basement and let him wander around for a while by himself. Then all at once Rinty would go to a certain spot and start scratching and digging, and no one could get him away until they had pulled up a board or knocked out some plaster to see. And sure enough Rinty was always right.<sup>281</sup>

With time, 'everybody in Harlem knew about David and his dog' and those who had previously scalded Rinty were now eager to put him to work.<sup>282</sup> Significantly, Tarry and Ets imbued the story with social responsibility, as it is disclosed that 'the churches and the schools and the nurseries and the people who were poor and needed them most did not have to pay at all. But David and Rinty made lots of money, for the people who could pay had paid them well'.<sup>283</sup> This set-up is portrayed by Tarry and Ets as positive for multiple reasons: David is able to continue living and working alongside Rinty and maintain their bonds of affection, Rinty is able to

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, p. 42.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

practise his instinctual behaviours in accepted settings, David's family are not impoverished by the upkeep of a pet, and the neighbourhood is improved through the removal of 'pests' which were viewed as a threat to public health. *My Dog Rinty* is an invaluable source for this study of anthropomorphism and pet-keeping, as it presents a dog as a member of a black family, arguing that bonds of affection and love were experienced across species borders, whilst also highlighting that in low-income households it was not as easy to cover the costs of pet-keeping and so animals, like children, were expected to contribute to the economic survival of the family.

The text concludes with a message from Tarry and Ets on how urban areas like Harlem could be designed to accommodate the more-than-human. As stated previously, Rinty is forced to leave Mrs Moseley's apartment complex because pets are banned from the building. Earlier in the narrative, when David has been separated from Rinty, his mother suggests that they go and visit some friends of the family, in a new housing complex in another neighbourhood in Harlem, in an effort to lift David's spirits. It is disclosed that 'David always loved to go to those nice new River Houses. Once they had had a chance to move there themselves, but couldn't because of Rinty. No dogs are allowed'.<sup>284</sup> For families like David's, who were reliant on the rental market and did not possess the freedom that came with owning a home, living with a pet could significantly affect mobility and housing conditions, as pets were viewed by some as pests and problems, capable of damaging and decreasing the value of properties. As such, once David and Rinty's pest control business venture gains local publicity, property-owners in Harlem begin to transform their attitude towards living with animals and their value to society. The text states that:

Best of all, the owner of a block of old buildings where the poor people live in Harlem said: "David and Rinty have shown me that my old buildings are full of holes. I'm going to tear them down and build new ones. And the new ones will

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid, p. 31.

have a big yard in the center where children and dogs can play. For instead of 'No children or dogs allowed', I will put out a sign that says, 'Well-Behaved Children and Well-Behaved Dogs Are WELCOME'. And I hope David and his family *and his dog* will be the first ones to move in.<sup>285</sup>

This passage illuminates how *My Dog Rinty* concludes with a happy ending for human and animal characters alike. A new housing complex with planned leisure spaces offer improved living conditions for David and his family. Furthermore, the growing acceptance that both children and animals have something to contribute to society, and are not simply a nuisance to be excluded from public spaces is encapsulated in the landlord's decision to re-phrase the signs on his property. However, it is important to note here that the emphasis in this new signage is on control. Both children and dogs will only be welcome in this newly constructed yard if they are 'well-behaved'. Significantly, through this remark, both human and animal characters are lumped together, as beings at risk of always reverting to a wilder, uncontrollable nature, which requires policing. Ultimately, this product of interracial literary collaboration adds to the discussion on placing more value on the role of animals in domestic settings, the obstacles to pet-keeping arising from race and class position, and also on the values that mid-twentieth century writers were keen to instil in young black populations.

A further example where a black woman writer humanised animals as a mechanism for home and family-making is evidenced in an event that Alice Walker held in June 2007, at her home in Northern California. Walker invited her closest friends to witness a 'sacred union' ceremony between herself, a dog named Marley and a cat named Surprise that she lived alongside.<sup>286</sup> The image on the front of the invitation to this event depicts a black woman sitting with a dog and a cat, whilst the hands of the woman and the paws of the dog and cat are connected, touching three

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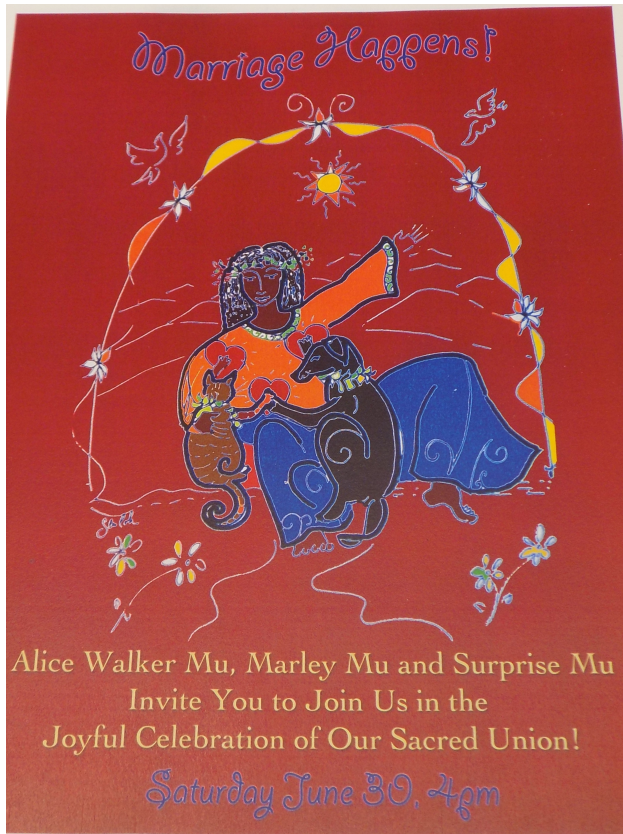
<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p. 48.

<sup>286</sup> Alice Walker, 'Photographs – Alice and Others, Mu Sacred Union Ceremony, Temple Jook, Philo, California, June 30 2007 (includes invitations)'. Alice Walker Papers, MSS1061, Box 251, Folder 16. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.



red hearts emblazoned on the woman's chest. This image symbolised how each being, both human and non-human, had touched the other's heart and illustrates the love and harmony that Walker perceived characterised their relationship.

Significantly, this event was not just labelled by Walker as a 'sacred union' between human and animal, but as a marriage, as the phrase 'marriage happens' is extoled on the front of the invitation.<sup>287</sup>



**Figure four:** Invitation to Mu Union Ceremony, Temple Jook, California (2007).

On the reverse side of the invitation, Walker explains the motivation and purpose of the ceremony, stating that:

I have  
With their  
Consent  
I am sure  
Called  
This Ceremony  
Of Commitment  
Of Sacred  
And  
Everlasting  
Union.<sup>288</sup>

<sup>287</sup> Ibid, Box 251, Folder 16.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid, Box 251, Folder 16.

Walker's satirical marriage ceremony between herself and her companion animals was the epitome of anthropomorphic activity, as marriage is a legal contract between two human adults who are capable of consenting. Indeed, marriage is defined as 'the legally or formally recognised union of two people as partners in a personal relationship'.<sup>289</sup> Black feminist and womanist scholarship has traced the multiple and varied meanings of marriage to black women, in slavery and freedom. Deborah Gray White noted that some slave-masters valued marriage amongst enslaved women and men, for its propensity to encourage reproduction and thereby increase their wealth in human property, whilst some enslaved women perceived marriage to offer the possibility of a 'haven in a heartless Southland'.<sup>290</sup> Patricia Hill Collins argued that across the twentieth century, Eurocentric masculinist thought prevailed, wherein it was judged that 'a woman's true worth and financial security should occur through heterosexual marriage', whilst single women were viewed as a failure or a threat.<sup>291</sup> Walker herself expressed to a friend that she felt 'unsuited to marriage', as her legal union faltered with Melvyn Leventhal, a white civil rights lawyer, in the 1970s, and interpreted her own misplacing of five wedding rings in a ten year period as symbolic of the state of their marriage.<sup>292</sup> Walker's personal and political reservations about the institution of marriage and her belief in the strength of loving relationships without a legal union provides some context to her hosting of a faux marriage ceremony with her pets. Walker's anthropomorphic act represented the animals as consenting to the 'sacred union' within the invitation, as the ability to communicate consent is a human behaviour. When Walker proclaimed 'with their consent I am sure', she assumed the consent of her pets to this formal blessing of their relationship. Acting without the consent of Marley and Surprise illustrates that,

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<sup>289</sup> 'Marriage Definition', *Oxford Living Dictionaries*, (2017)

<<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/marriage>> [accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017].

<sup>290</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 105.

<sup>291</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 77.

<sup>292</sup> Evelyn C. White, p. 278.

in this instance, Walker's anthropomorphism was anthropocentric, as she prioritised the desires of the human (herself) over the interests of her pets.

Walker outlined the motivation for the 'sacred union' within the invitation, stating that:

Should  
I be Absent...  
These Beings  
Are to Receive  
Priority  
In care  
In love  
In shelter  
And  
All things  
That make  
Them  
Happy. Forever.<sup>293</sup>

In addition to celebrating the harmonious relationship between human and animal within Walker's home, the 'sacred union' was meant to cement her promise to be 'Protector, Counselor and Guardian' to Marley and Surprise.<sup>294</sup> Walker's desire to have her closest friends witness her request for her pets to be given the best provision of care if she was no longer around, demonstrated a certain degree of anxiety around the vulnerability of all bodies, human and non-human animal, and the finite nature of life. It is clear that Walker held Marley and Surprise in high regard and, as one would with human children, she worried about their futures if something were to happen to her.

Towards the end of the invitation, Walker again employed anthropomorphic language by translating the emotions of her pets, affirming that:

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<sup>293</sup> Walker, 'Photographs – Alice and Others, Mu Sacred Union Ceremony, Temple Jook, Philo, California, June 30 2007 (includes invitations)', Box 251, Folder 16.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid, Box 251, Folder 16.

My love  
For them  
Is  
Boundless  
As theirs  
For me  
Is  
Palpable.<sup>295</sup>

Similar to Walker's assumption of her pet's consent to being formally blessed as a family, she also assumed how they felt. Though Marley and Surprise may or may not experience feelings of love towards Walker, it is impossible for either animal to communicate this through human language. Therefore, though Walker claimed that their love for her was tangible and profound, she extrapolated this emotion from reading particular behaviours in Marley and Surprise. The invitation to the 'sacred union' between Walker, Marley and Surprise, conveyed that Walker formed a strong attachment to the animals that she lived alongside, invested time and money into their nurturance, and aimed to guarantee the continuation of such care in the event of her death. Though Walker's impetus to hold this ceremony was rooted in feelings of love towards her pets, and ensuring the pragmatics of their care if they were ever to be separated, it demonstrates, to an extreme degree, the ways in which humans who keep pets assume that they know the wants and needs of the animals that they live with. In this case, anthropomorphism was thereby employed as a method to emphasise the love between owner and pet, and also, more troublingly, to show that the animals consented to being formally blessed as a family, which they were unable to communicate.

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, Box 251, Folder 16.



**Figure five:** Photograph of Alice Walker and Surprise-the-cat at Mu Sacred Union Ceremony, Temple Jook, California (2007).



**Figure six:** Photograph of Marley-the-dog being led down the rose-petal-lined aisle at Mu Sacred Union Ceremony, Temple Jook, California, (2007).

A series of photographs documenting the sacred union ceremony show Walker and a small group of close friends preparing food, sitting in the sunshine,

and using a shisha pipe. Additionally, there are numerous aspects of the ceremony that mirror a traditional Western wedding. For example, Walker wore a long, white dress and a garland of flowers in her hair.<sup>296</sup> Further, Marley-the-dog was led down an aisle of rose petals, and Walker posed for photographs with Marley and Surprise-the-cat in her white dress. In this respect, the sacred union between human and animals was markedly geared towards activities that humans enjoy. This collection of photographs can be read in two ways: firstly, as a serious celebration of the bond between human and animal and an indication that Walker believed that families were constructed of more-than-human members; secondly, as a parody of marriage and of vitriolic debates about what constituted marriage, in view of advancements in state legislations that legalised same-sex marriage. It was likely a mixture of the two. The invitation emphasised that Walker considered Marley and Surprise to be precious members of her family, though the pageantry of the rose petals and the white dress point towards a degree of humorous imitation, knowing that the blessing involved a cat and a dog.

Indeed, Walker's 'sacred union' ceremony in 2007 did not take place within a vacuum. The 2000s witnessed numerous iterations of 'slippery slope' arguments by conservative commentators, which argued that U.S. society would be degraded if the door was opened to same-sex marriage. For instance, an article in *The Economist* in 2005, titled 'The Slippery Slope to Bestiality; Mitt Romney and Gay Marriage' discussed how Mitt Romney aimed to build up a support base among religious traditionalists before mounting a presidential campaign for the Republican Party.<sup>297</sup> Citing the opinions of religious fundamentalists, the article stated that same-sex marriage 'will degrade the most important institution of a civilised society' and that "some even claim that it could open the door to legalised unions with

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid, Box 251, Folder 16.

<sup>297</sup> No author cited, 'Mitt Romney and Gay Marriage: The Slippery Slope to Bestiality', *The Economist*, (30<sup>th</sup> June, 2005) <<http://www.economist.com/node/4134046>> [accessed on 22nd March 2017].

horses'.<sup>298</sup> As someone who had experienced loving relationships with both women and men, declaring 'I'm bisexual. I don't think I have to phone in and tell everybody', Walker was likely aware of such dangerous, homophobic arguments equating relationships between humans and animals, with relationships between two, consenting adults.<sup>299</sup> It is possible therefore that Walker's 'sacred union' with Marley and Surprise was meant as a satirical form of spectacle, one that mocked the so-called nightmarish visions of the impact of legalising gay marriage.

Notably, the concept of falling in love with or marrying animals emerged elsewhere in the U.S. cultural landscape in the first half of the 2000s. In 2002 the play *The Goat or, Who Is Sylvia?*, by Edward Albee, premiered on Broadway. In Albee's play, a middle-class man named Martin, the protagonist, falls in love with and develops a sexual relationship with Sylvia, a goat. The play explores the impact on Martin's human relationships, of breaking laws and social taboos by committing bestiality. Deborah Bailin argued that within *The Goat or, Who Is Sylvia?*, 'the boundary that Martin crosses goes far beyond bestiality; his words are as transgressive, if not more transgressive, than his behaviour, for the way he understands and communicates the nature of his relationship destroys his world, more so than what he actually does with Sylvia in the barn'.<sup>300</sup> For Bailin, it is Martin's understanding of being in love with Sylvia-the-goat that challenges the idea of the strict boundaries between human and animal.

In addition, popular culture also satirized PETA, the white-led animal rights organisation, in 2004 through an episode of *South Park*. In the episode, one of the regular characters, Stan, is brought to a PETA compound, where a member of the organisation declares that 'we make friends with the animals, we coexist and we

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid, <<http://www.economist.com/node/4134046>> [accessed on 22nd March 2017].

<sup>299</sup> Evelyn C. White, p. 445.

<sup>300</sup> Deborah Bailin, 'Our Kind: Albee's Animals in *Seascape* and *The Goat Or, Who Is Sylvia?*', *Journal of American Drama and Theatre*, 18 (2006), 5 – 23 (p. 17).

intermarry', before introducing Stan to his wife Janice, a llama.<sup>301</sup> The PETA member then states that 'the outside world looks down on a man marrying a llama, but our love knows no boundaries'.<sup>302</sup> This episode was a mockery of the notion that the people of PETA 'really love animals', by extending this 'love' to marriage and interbreeding. The reference to love knowing no boundaries satirised a belief held by many in animal rights circles, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, that an unbridgeable divide between the 'human' and 'animal' did not exist that rendered animals so different and inferior that humans could use and abuse them as they saw fit. The writers of *South Park* chose to ridicule this position, by claiming that the conclusion of deconstructing the borders of 'humanity' and 'animality' would ultimately be interspecies marriage and breeding.

In a decade when the notion of marrying animals was invoked in political and cultural conversations, commonly to ridicule animal rights politics or to fashion a conservative 'what next?' hypothesis concerning same-sex marriage, it is puzzling that Walker hosted an event with her animals, which she defined as a marriage ceremony, and thereby seemed to confirm the most far-fetched stereotypes of animal advocates. In view of these debates, Walker may have decided to embrace this stereotype, and offer a parody of the parody, by holding an elaborate confirmation of the familial bond between herself, her dog and her cat. This ceremony offered the opportunity for Walker to declare that she was not phased by anti-animal rights, anti-LGBTQ rhetoric, by parodying the 'worst nightmare' of their arguments, whilst simultaneously communicating to her closest friends her wishes for the pragmatics of care for her companion animals, were she to no longer be around. Anthropomorphising Marley and Surprise, through assuming their consent to the sacred union and choosing to present their behaviours as indicators of love,

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<sup>301</sup> 'PETA really loves animals', *YouTube*, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwm5UcGJ5wY>> [accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2017].

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid*, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwm5UcGJ5wY>> [accessed on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2017].



was therefore part of a wider trend amongst pet-keepers, both black and white Americans, of presenting animals as part of families and part of support networks whom were capable of emotional responses. However, Walker's act of taking anthropomorphism to its limits, through an imitation of marriage, also has to be situated alongside popular parodies of animal advocacy that arose in this era.

### **Anthropomorphism and Challenging The Human/Animal Divide**

To return to Moore's argument that anthropomorphism could undercut anthropocentrism, of viewing humankind as the most important element of existence, there are flashes within Hurston and Walker's writings that suggest that humanising animals through language served to challenge the human/animal divide and hierarchy. Furthermore, the strategy of humanising animals, specifically within black American literature and culture, may have been shaped by the history of white supremacy and resistance to this system, which sought to deny black American women and men their humanity. Debates within animal studies circles about appropriate terminology, such as the use of 'human animal', 'non-human animal' and 'more-than-human animal' point towards efforts to place the human back into its animal body, rather than continuing the fallacy that human beings are entirely separate from the rest of the animal kingdom. I argue here that black Americans, having been subjected to dehumanising systems of oppression that aimed to construct black women and men as animals or closer to animals than white Americans, would be less inclined to use a 'we are all animals' strategy to advance the cause for animals. As the category 'animal' has historically been racialised, and animality was a weapon with which black Americans were subjugated, it is therefore a loaded term that black women and men in the U.S. may have been reluctant to embrace to advance animal welfare and rights.

In the context of the historically intertwined construction of race and species, it is reasonable that black American thinkers would draw upon anthropomorphism,

the method of representing animals as human or human-like, to challenge animal oppression. Extending the definition of humanity to include animals, rather than identifying as an animal, a term that could trigger memories and associations of racial terror, could have been a less painful strategy for opposing speciesism for black Americans.

Hurston's correspondence in the 1950s contained multiple instances where she anthropomorphised particular animals, most often her pets, in an attempt to show that a vast chasm does not exist between human and animal natures. Hurston acknowledged that familiarity with certain animals on a regular basis increased the likelihood of anthropomorphism. Whereas previously Hurston referred to her efforts to chase cats off 'her' land, to protect birds, in May 1952 she disclosed to Burroughs Mitchell that 'for the first time in my life I have a cat'.<sup>303</sup> Hurston followed up this statement with an admission that 'because I love her perhaps, I see in her a very intelligent animal'.<sup>304</sup> Here, Hurston suggested that her emotional attachment to the cat filtered her perceptions of the mental capacities of the animal. The closeness and familiarity that Hurston experiences with the adopted cat leads her to view the animal as intelligent in a way that she perhaps would not with animals raised for food. Spending time with and observing the cat leads to feelings of love for the animal and recognition that intelligence specific to this creature is identifiable. In an era when post-humanist thought has proliferated, and intelligence is recognised as a trait not solely belonging to humans, describing a cat as intelligent would not necessarily be considered an act of anthropomorphism. However, when Hurston recorded her opinions in the 1950s, anthropocentric thought had greater influence and humans were considered to be at the peak of the species hierarchy and uniquely possessed intellect. Set against this backdrop, Hurston's descriptor of the

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<sup>303</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, 'Letter to Burroughs Mitchell, dated 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1952', in Carla Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*, ed. by Carla Kaplan (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), pp. 684 - 685 (p. 685).

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid*, p. 685.

cat can be described as an act of humanising an animal. From this correspondence extract it is possible to deduce that Hurston expressed beliefs to her closest circle of confidantes that there were overlaps between humans and animals, tentatively arguing that possessing intelligence was not monopolised by humans only.

In the same letter, Hurston more explicitly anthropomorphised the behaviour of her pets as a way of emphasising the similarities between humans and animals, asserting that 'it is now my conviction that domestic animals would be much more imitative if encouraged by us, and understand what we are doing. Animals are much more like us (or we like them) than we grant'.<sup>305</sup> Here, she articulated that although broad swathes of U.S. society promulgated the idea that an unbridgeable divide existed between humans and animals, as a basis for the continued exploitation of animals and animalised humans, the realities of animal behaviour suggested that they were markedly similar to humans. Though Hurston used similarity to humans as a way of understanding, expressing admiration for and implying that the animals that she lived alongside deserved care and respect, her phrasing within the brackets suggest an attempt to destabilise the notion that humans are at the centre of the universe. That humans could be like animals, not vice versa, was acknowledged by Hurston and works to undercut the human exceptionalism implicated in societies across the globe in the mid-twentieth century. By establishing that animals and humans shared a common ground, Hurston took the first step towards establishing an argument for the just treatment of animals, even if these animals were only those within her immediate locale.

One area in which Hurston observed similarity between humans and animals was in their desire for drama, recording that:

a small female dog is in heat in my neighbourhood. Three or four mornings lately, she and her band of hopefuls have arrived in front of my house. Thisi [sic] morning, the poor little dog was discouraging her suitors by tucking her tail between her legs. Spot, desiring the drama to proceed, went back of her and caught hold of her tail and raised it up. Never, [in left margin: "in animals,"]

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<sup>305</sup> Kaplan, p. 685.

have I seen a thing like that before. I have seen humans egging on excitement in the same way.<sup>306</sup>

This passage is significant for a spectrum of reasons. Firstly, it is a standard example of anthropomorphism; wherein Hurston read the intention of behaviours displayed by Spot-the-dog and likened them to human motivations. Spot's interaction with the small female dog, of catching and lifting her tail, is interpreted not simply as a greeting or play, but as 'egging on' excitement in the dog community. Hurston marvelled at this scene and asserted that she had seen humans behave in the same manner, thereby arguing that humans and animals alike possess the same feelings of boredom and the mental capacity to act on that boredom to instigate drama. Again, the emphasis in this extract is on sameness between humans and animals, and can therefore be viewed as another example of Hurston consciously trying to deconstruct the human-animal binary, where animals were seen as entirely separate and inferior to human beings.

Secondly, this passage speaks volumes about Hurston's training as an anthropologist and her inspiration as a writer, at a time when her works of fiction received less interest from publishing houses. Virginia Lynn Moylan noted that in the early 1950s, Hurston's manuscript for a novel, *The Lives of Barney Turk*, was rejected by Burroughs Mitchell, as it lacked both 'the power to hold the reader's attention' and the 'stylistic breadth' of her earlier novels, despite it containing 'wonderful flashes of writing'.<sup>307</sup> Within the same letter that Hurston recorded her anthropomorphic anecdotes relating to her pets, she also claimed to have begun work on the second volume of her autobiography, which Mitchell had steered her towards. However, Kaplan notes that there is no evidence to support that she had completed this work, or even begun it, and the possibility lingers that Hurston was

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid, p. 685.

<sup>307</sup> Moylan, p. 75.

attempting to appease her editor here, to remain in his favour for future projects.<sup>308</sup>

Thus, at this juncture, Hurston was encouraged to reflect on and record the 'facts' of her life, rather than pursue works of fiction. Viewed in this context, the anthropomorphic descriptions of her pets appear as outlets for Hurston's creativity, which was being stifled. Imagining the inner life of Spot-the-dog provided Hurston with a form of entertainment and drama, which she then projected onto her pet, by claiming that the animal enjoyed stirring up amusement. Throughout the 1930s Hurston used her training as an anthropologist, of observing and recording the culture and folklore of rural black Americans, to form the bedrock of her plays and novels. Whereas in the 1950s, her financial and literary support from white patrons and publishers had dwindled, rendering travel across the U.S. South and Central America unfeasible for garnering inspiration. As such, Hurston turned inwards, to the domestic sphere, for literary material, watching the behaviours and conjuring stories that explained the actions and motivations of pets that were both a comfort in reality and creative constructs through which she could satisfy her cravings to dramatise. Examining the animal-based anecdotes in Hurston's private correspondence thereby helps to document both her attempts to communicate that the possession of certain abilities were not solely limited to human beings, but could be identified in other animals, and also that her pets were constructs on which she could inscribe her creative imaginings.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion, Hurston, Tarry and Walker recurrently anthropomorphised animals, primarily those kept as pets, in their public and private writings and in other areas of their lives. As Moore argued, representing animals as human is not necessarily always part of an agenda to maintain speciesism and keep humans at the centre of all things, but can form part of an effort to show fluidity and similarities across

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<sup>308</sup> Kaplan, p. 684.

constructed species boundaries, and concurrently challenge the existence of such boundaries.

Hurston's anthropomorphic writings, both the collected folktales that include characters that morph humans and animals and the private correspondence from her later life, document that she was a thinker who regularly challenged the criteria that separated humans from animals, sought emotional comfort and creative inspiration from the animals that lived alongside her, and thereby encouraged her readers, friends and literary gatekeepers to interrogate their assumptions of animal inferiority.

Additionally, exploring Tarry and Et's *My Dog Rinty* demonstrated that even in a text that aimed to present black domestic life through a realist lens, it was difficult for writers to escape humanising the animal characters. Rinty's transformation from 'bad' to 'good' dog illustrates that it was commonplace for black and white communities at the mid-twentieth century to view animal behaviours through a human moral code and also judge their pet's behaviours depending on whether they were helpful or damaging to the routines of their human owners. This overlooked text highlights how black women writers were shaping arguments which aimed to compel city planners and society in general to be more accommodating of more-than-human inhabitants, in an era when black Americans felt the sting of segregation and exclusion from public spaces.

The source material drawn upon from Walker's photographic archive reveal that seeing pets as human was not just part of her literary work, but moulded her understanding of her relationship with the cat and dog that she shared her home with. The sacred union ceremony that Walker hosted to bless the relationship that she had forged with her pets was, to a degree, a pragmatic affair, one in which she sought to gain assurances from her human friends that the animals that she loved would be cared for in the event of her illness or death. These sources can be read as an expression of Walker's love for her pets and an embrace of the existence of

relationships spanning species boundaries. However, the pageantry of the ceremony also conveys an attempt at parody by Walker, a queer-identified woman, at a time when right-wing discourse compared same-sex marriage to human-animal unions.

This chapter has demonstrated the multiple ways that black American intellectuals have used anthropomorphism to understand and represent animals, from relying on them for emotional support and perceiving them as family members, to showing the fluidity between human and animal traits, which goes beyond reading anthropomorphism *only* as a mask for human struggles in black-authored writings.

## **Chapter Three: Animals, Labour and the Land: Unequally Yoked Together?**

### **Introduction**

Since the mid-nineteenth century, black American writers have considered the relationship between the land and the exploitation of labour of racialised humans and non-human animals. In slave narratives, speeches, novels and interviews, black American intellectuals have acknowledged how racism and speciesism have marked land use in the U.S. and how human and non-human labour has been exploited to alter the land for a narrow white human gain.

Ideas about the land and labour in the U.S. were and remain inextricably linked to white supremacy. The foundations of the U.S. were built upon the colonisation of the land of hundreds of indigenous American nations. Ideas about the land, including who has the right to live on it, who owns it and what ends it should be used for have been linked with exploitation from the birth of the U.S. Speciesism has also characterised the alteration of the North American landscape for the purposes of settlement, agriculture, industry and leisure, where the needs and wants of human communities have frequently trumped the harms inflicted upon animal inhabitants of the land.

The relationship between labour, race and species in the U.S. was forged through the institution of slavery, across two centuries, where the bodies of black Americans were bought and sold as chattel and exploited to undertake a spectrum of work tasks, primarily in agriculture, which markedly altered the land, especially in the U.S. South. The obstacles to land ownership in the post-emancipation era meant that black Americans were locked into an oppressive relationship, where they laboured tirelessly to work the land, only to increase the wealth of white landowners, whilst they eked out a difficult existence. As Deborah Gray White argued:

sharecropping carried an advantage and a disadvantage: it allowed black people to earn a living doing what they did best; conversely, it kept them in a never-ending cycle of debt to landowners and merchants who had advanced



food, supplies, and equipment for a share of the family's meagre crop. Since interest rates were usuriously high, and since neither landowners nor merchants had any interest in making black tenants independent, year after year black people worked for landowners without making a profit from their share of the crop.<sup>309</sup>

Gray White's summary of sharecropping highlights how this practice enabled black Americans to continue working in a sector that the majority of formerly-enslaved men and women had experience of, but that this structuring of agriculture was always designed to maintain white supremacy and black dependency. In the post-emancipation era, the white domination of land facilitated the continued exploitation of black labour.

In contexts where labour practices and land policies were shaped by racism, which affected the contours of black American lives, it is significant that black American intellectuals expressed solidarity with the plight of animals. Black American writers used animal metaphors to critique the ways in which black bodies were worked under white supremacy, but moments of empathy can also be identified that challenged the ways that animal labour was used for the benefit of humans and the assumption that land in the U.S. should always be prioritised for human needs.

I explore how black American thinkers, themselves subject to labour exploitation, perceived the work of animals, the extent to which they viewed animals as fellow-sufferers or regarded the extraction of labour from animals as a symbol of their own degradation from which they needed to escape. Going beyond the acknowledgement that particular working animals were linked to various raced and classed human groups, this chapter examines how black Americans interpreted exploitative labour as a site for trans-species solidarity and how their capacity to advocate for draft animals was complicated by a patriarchal white supremacy.

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<sup>309</sup> Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 182.

Employing a range of black authored sources, from Frederick Douglass' slave narratives and Reconstruction-era speeches, Zora Neale Hurston's plays, collected folktales and novels, to Alice Walker's essays and interviews, this chapter examines the multiple understandings of animals, labour, and the land across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It demonstrates that animals, at times, vexed black American writers, when they could not or would not follow human commands. Whilst, at other times, empathy towards animals locked into an exploitative labour system can be identified. I discuss how black American writers like Walker reconfigured their ideas about race, species, labour and the land, as agriculture became increasingly industrialised in the mid-twentieth century, and was less reliant on the energy of human and non-human animals to work the land. Ideas of coexisting on the land with other animals, regardless of their utility to human beings, and recognising that migrant labour was still being exploited daily in post-Civil Rights America, and that this mattered to all social justice groups, became central prongs of Walker's animal advocacy in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Placing black-authored sources at the front and centre of an analysis of the relationships between animals, labour and the land enables an understanding of the ways that racism created points of overlap in the treatment of racialised humans and animals through exploitative labour and land-use, which created opportunities for cross-species solidarity, but also the ways in which white supremacy made working relationships between black Americans and animals a site of danger for both parties. Exploring the texts of celebrated black writers for their ideas on labour and the land as loci of oppression and putting them in conversation with current literature on animals, labour and the land, positions figures such as Douglass, Hurston and Walker as thinkers who recognised that species, as well as race, gender and class, shaped vulnerability to oppression. The decision not to place black-authored sources on animals, labour and the land alongside histories of white-led animal advocacy activism was consciously taken. The long tradition of referring to animals

in black literature and culture, both as symbols to talk through forms of human oppression and as recognition of animals' material oppression, is important in and of itself, regardless of the similarities and differences to white discourse on animals and labour. Contextualising black sources within white histories of draft animals could suggest that black American theorising on animals was merely a derivation of previously formulated white ideas. This chapter proposes that texts that have been incorporated into the black American literary canon, and lesser-known materials, which are celebrated for their challenges to slavery, racialised poverty, and racialised gender discrimination; also contain important messages about seeing beyond 'the human' in conceptualisations of oppression.

An undated, unsigned photograph from the Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection is a thought-provoking place to begin a discussion of how labour exploitation affected black Americans' views of working animals. It is difficult to surmise the race of the photographer or offer a precise time period in which the photograph was taken; indeed the scene of black agricultural life could have been captured in a rural logging area of the U.S. anytime from the mid-nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century. In the past decade, historians have undertaken much-needed research on race and the invention of photographic technologies in the nineteenth century. As Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith argued, early photography 'served not only as a means of self-representation but also as a political tool with which to claim a place in public and private spheres circumscribed by race and racialized sight lines'.<sup>310</sup> The embrace of photography by black American intellectuals, most prominently by Frederick Douglass, was stirred by a belief in the new technology's capacity to counter a 'legacy of racist misrepresentation', in which black Americans were frequently portrayed as physiologically closer to animals, and also a strong faith in

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<sup>310</sup> Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 5.

the democratising nature of photography.<sup>311</sup> In much the same way that Douglass perceived the power of reading and writing as the 'pathway from slavery to freedom', through the written word's gift to black Americans to record their own experiences and tell their own stories that could be preserved for posterity, he also valued photography as a tool to objectively document black American life.<sup>312</sup> As Wallace and Smith argued, for Douglass, the importance of photography was as much about carrying the past, as it was about inspiring a different future.<sup>313</sup>



**Figure seven:** 'Unequally yoked together: African American men with an ox and mule cart and slabs of wood'.

The image in figure seven features two black American men sat on a cart, attached to a mule and oxen that power the vehicle. Another black American man stands in the background, in front of piles of lumber.<sup>314</sup> Written on the back of this

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<sup>311</sup> Wallace and Smith, p. 6.

<sup>312</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave, Written By Himself* (Burk Classics, 2013 [originally published Boston: Antislavery Office, 1845]), p. 33.

<sup>313</sup> Wallace and Smith, p. 8.

<sup>314</sup> 'Unequally Yoked Together: African American Men with an Ox and Mule Cart and Slabs of Wood', Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection, Box 2. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.

photograph were the words 'Unequally Yoked Together'.<sup>315</sup> This phrase came from a biblical passage in Corinthians to advise those of the Christian faith not to attach themselves to non-believers, or 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers'.<sup>316</sup> This caption could relate to the mule and oxen in the photograph, as another biblical passage directed that 'you shall not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together'.<sup>317</sup> Read in such a way, this would suggest that yoking the mule and oxen together, different species of animal, was destined for failure. Knowing that fears of miscegenation were heightened in the post-bellum period, this inscription could have been a warning against integrating difference, whether the difference was species or race. Interpreted through the lens of these biblical passages, the inscription on the photograph conveyed that placing two 'unequal' animals side by side would cause problems. Through this reading, the warning against using mules and oxen alongside each other in agriculture had an allegorical meaning about racial politics in the U.S., one that upheld segregation and advocated keeping black and white Americans separate from each other in most areas of life.

However, 'unequally yoked together' could also have been a comment on the exploitative labour that characterised the lives of black Americans in the lumber industry, and more broadly in U.S. agriculture across the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, and the hard labour that defined the lives of draft animals. Read in this way, both the black men sitting on the cart, and the animals attached to the cart and the men via the reins, were unequal in terms of power, the men because of their blackness in a white supremacist society, and the mule and oxen because of their species, in a society that privileged human gain over harm done to all other animals. Read in this alternative manner, the inscription on the photograph

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> '2 Corinthians 6:14 – 17', *Bible Gateway*, (2018), <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+6%3A14-17&version=KJV>> [accessed 13 February 2018].

<sup>317</sup> 'Deuteronomy 22:10', *Bible Gateway*, (2018), <<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+22%3A10&version=KJV>> [accessed 13 February 2018].

suggested that being unequally yoked together through a shared site of exploitation, coerced labour, created a line of connection and feelings of solidarity with animals. This inscription could refer to the idea that black Americans and draft animals were connected through the experience of having their bodies used for the gain of those with more power.

Using the photograph as documentary evidence of labour practices in U.S. agriculture reveals at the very least that black Americans worked in close proximity with draft animals to complete tasks for economic development. Considering the race of the individual who captured the image and wrote the inscription impacts upon how the photograph is read. Indeed, if the photograph was taken by a white photographer in a white supremacist society, implying the closeness of black Americans to working animals echoes earlier scientific racism which drew direct comparisons between black bodies and animal bodies. Whereas if the photographer was a black or white antiracist, the image conveys an attempt to record the hardships of work in agriculture, where black Americans and animals worked and altered the land, for the 'progress' of another more powerful group. The vagueries in which this photograph was produced mean that the meaning of the inscription cannot be deciphered definitively, and yet it serves as a useful springboard for examining whether close working relationships between black Americans and animals in agriculture could stimulate empathy and compassion, as well as use and abuse of animals for human profit.

### **'I Am To Be Broken To The Yoke Of A Bitter And Lifelong Bondage': Working With Animals In Slavery**

Cristin Ellis argued that within Douglass' second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, he presented an argument for the abolition of slavery on the basis of

the environmental damage the institution inflicted on lands in the U.S. South.<sup>318</sup> Ellis postulated that readers who were not swayed by arguments relating to the humanity of enslaved black Americans or the sinfulness of slavery, might condemn the institution on the grounds that it was ecologically disastrous and thereby economically harmful.<sup>319</sup> Her scholarship is pertinent to this study because it is an alternative reading of Douglass' writings that suggest he understood that slavery was not only devastating to the unfree black American labour force, but that it would have a profound ecological impact for future generations in the South.

This chapter explores how Douglass' ideas about working the land with animals shifted across his lifetime. In *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) Douglass repeatedly described his situation of enslavement as similar to the plight of animals on the plantation. When Douglass recalled how he was sent to live under the rule of Edward Covey, for what was considered insubordinate behaviour with his previous master, he declared that 'like a fish in a net, allowed to play for a time, I was now drawn rapidly to the shore, secured at all points'.<sup>320</sup> Through this metaphor, Douglass communicated to his audience the sense of suffocation and entrapment that he felt when traveling to Covey's residence, a man with a reputation for punitive discipline and violence. For this metaphor to be effective, Douglass and his readership at the very least acknowledged that, through the practice of fishing, fish were ensnared and deprived of their freedom. This is not to say that Douglass condemned fishing, which undoubtedly provided black women and men in coastal regions with a supply of food to aid survival on meagre rations during slavery. Nonetheless, Douglass employed common understandings of the human use of fish to convey how desperate his situation was when sent to live under a new master.

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<sup>318</sup> Cristin Ellis, 'Amoral Abolitionism: Frederick Douglass and the Environmental Case Against Slavery', *American Literature*, 86 (2014), 275 – 303, p. 276.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

<sup>320</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014 [originally published by Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855]), p. 166.

Continuing to develop the idea that animals too were oppressed in the U.S. South, Douglass added that 'I am footing my way to the home of a new master, where, I am given to understand, that, like a wild young working animal, I am to be broken to the yoke of a bitter and lifelong bondage'.<sup>321</sup> Through this statement, Douglass acknowledged that draft animals were abused in order to quell any spirit of resistance within them, which would make it more difficult for humans to extract labour from them. His use of the phrase 'bitter and lifelong bondage' illustrated that the lives of draft animals, in the South, were marked by undertaking tasks that would benefit a more powerful other, regardless of the harm it inflicted on their bodies. By aligning his own future in slavery with that of working animals, Douglass suggested that both practices were morally wrong. His dread at the possibility of enduring a life of hard labour, like an animal, encouraged his audience to condemn the treatment of millions of black women and men in slavery, but also to question whether a 'bitter and lifelong bondage' was ethical treatment for any living being. Within this segment, Douglass provided a radical critique of white supremacist agriculture, which was reliant on abusive practices to sustain both human and non-human coerced labour.

Shortly after arriving at Covey's residence, Douglass was tasked with gathering wood, with the aid of 'a pair of unbroken oxen'.<sup>322</sup> Anne Norton Greene, a Professor of envirotechnical and animal histories, argued that in the nineteenth century oxen were perceived as 'docile' animals that were 'easy to train to voice commands'.<sup>323</sup> However, in the incident that Douglass recalled, the oxen were more of a hindrance than help. To explain his difficulties with the oxen, Douglass asserted that 'working animals in the South are seldom so well trained as in the North'.<sup>324</sup> Here, Douglass articulated a long-held perception that animals in the South had

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid, p. 166.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

<sup>323</sup> Anne Norton Greene, *Horses At Work: Harnessing Power in Industrial America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>324</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 168.



become wild over the centuries since colonisation. Virginia DeJohn Anderson argued that since the development of tracts of land for cash-crop agriculture in the South, managing livestock was considered to be of lesser importance. DeJohn Anderson, a historian of agriculture and animal ecology in colonial America, noted that planters in Virginia were concerned with 'raising...animals that required the least amount of attention', as they were 'unwilling to divert valuable labor from tobacco', which was a more profitable market.<sup>325</sup> Thus, Douglass' experience working with the oxen was part of a longer history of animal husbandry in the South, which favoured a hands-off approach to managing draft animals. However, Douglass was also keen to emphasise that until this point in his enslavement, he had developed little experience of agriculture. He recounted that the brief introduction offered by Covey and the jargon involved in managing the oxen left him feeling underprepared for the task, stating that:

my life, hitherto, had led me away from horned cattle, and I had no knowledge of the art of managing them. What was meant by the "in ox" as against the "off ox", when both were equally fastened to one cart, and under one yoke, I could not very easily divine; and the difference, implied by the names, and the peculiar duties of each, were alike *Greek* to me.<sup>326</sup>

Through this passage and Douglass' later admission that 'I was as awkward, as a driver, as it is possible to conceive', he suggested to his audience that Covey had deliberately allotted him a task at which he was destined to fail, so as to subsequently administer punishment to him.<sup>327</sup> Douglass was eager to craft an image of himself as entirely unsuited to agricultural labour, which can be interpreted as an act of resistance, as he challenged the sectors of work accepted as 'natural' to black Americans. Indeed, as the profitability of the agricultural economy in the South was dependent on the uncompensated labour of enslaved women and men, it was in the interests of the white power structure to present black Americans as

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<sup>325</sup> Virginia DeJohn Anderson, *Creatures of Empire: How Domestic Animals Transformed Early America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 112.

<sup>326</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 168.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

possessing an inherent aptitude for working the fields and working alongside animals. George Ellenberg, a scholar with research expertise in agricultural histories of the South, quoted Joseph Jones, an attendee at the Planters Convention of Georgia, who claimed that the physiology of black bodies was particularly suited to agricultural labour, asserting that 'no race but the African can even stand the burning heat and fatal miasms [sic] of the rice fields, and of the cotton fields'.<sup>328</sup> Douglass' emphasis on his difficulty managing animals in agriculture challenged the perception amongst white Southerners that black Americans were a homogenous group, only endowed with the capabilities for manual labour.

As Douglass approached the woodland with the cart, the oxen became startled and took off at speed, becoming entangled amongst the foliage and toppling the cart. Eager to continue on his journey to collect firewood, Douglass lifted the cart back onto its wheels and cut down the saplings to free the oxen, whom he feared might 'take it into their senseless heads to cut up a caper' once again.<sup>329</sup> In this moment, Douglass characterised working animals as lacking the mental capacity to complete the task of pulling the cart smoothly, which was suggestive that he did not empathise with the plight of animals in plantation societies, likely because his body was on the line if he did not complete Covey's order efficiently. The oxen's resistance to Douglass' control under the reins placed Douglass in jeopardy, fearing the violent reprisals of white supremacy. Thus, in this scene, Douglass' frustration with the oxen was compelled by white supremacy, as he was painfully aware that if the animals did not bend to his will, then Covey would make him pay. This example demonstrates how the conditions of slavery hampered trans-species solidarity when humans and animals worked alongside each other on plantations. Once the oxen had steadied, Douglass recalled that he:

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<sup>328</sup> George Ellenberg, 'African Americans, Mules, and the Southern Mindscape, 1850 - 1950', *Agricultural History*, 72 (1998), 381 - 398 (p. 387).

<sup>329</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 170.

filled the cart with a heavy load, as a security against another running away. But, the neck of an ox is equal in strength to iron. It defies all ordinary burdens, when excited. Tame and docile to a proverb, when *well* trained, the ox is the most sullen and intractable of animals when but half broken to the yoke.

I now saw, in my situation, several points of similarity with that of the oxen. They were property, so was I; they were to be broken, so was I. Covey was to break me, I was to break them; break and be broken – such is life.<sup>330</sup>

Within this passage, Douglass explicitly aligned his own struggle against slavery with the plight of draft animals, forced to follow the orders and carry the burden of humans. His characterisation of the oxen as strong as iron seemingly suggests admiration for the animal. Though the proverb crafted a representation of oxen as pacified and submissive, Douglass presented the other side of this animal as ‘sullen’ and ‘intractable’. At this point in the narrative, Douglass did not castigate the oxen for this stubbornness, but identifies this characteristic as part of the animal’s spirit of resistance. Though the animal has been trained to bend to the demands of humans, it still possessed the capacity to rebel, which he takes inspiration from, for his own struggle against slavery. Ellenberg’s research, though specific to mules, is pertinent here, as he pondered ‘how closely slaves and sharecroppers identified with the plight of an animal that was independent enough not to want always to do the boss’s bidding’.<sup>331</sup> Subsequently, the depiction of draft animals as ‘intractable’ could be layered with feelings of both frustration and admiration simultaneously, with a desire for the animal to assist in the task of working the land, combined with flashes of respect for an animal that was not always willing to put its body on the line for the gain of others.

Douglass asserted that both chattel status and the experience of being oppressed formed a point of similarity in the lives of draft animals and the lives of enslaved women and men. He argued that his human identity, though questioned through white supremacist discourse, gave him the power to break animals, an

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, p. 170.

<sup>331</sup> Ellenberg, p. 393 – 394.

oppressed group in a speciesist society. Whilst he was broken through the institution of slavery because of his perceived 'inferior' race, he was made to continue the cycle of oppression by dominating animals on the plantation. Ellenberg recorded that in the ante-bellum and post-bellum period, 'slaves were often identified as brutes in the manner they attended animals'.<sup>332</sup> Abuse could certainly form part of the landscape of black American relations with animals on plantations, as it did for human groups of all races across the globe, and yet it is vital to acknowledge that Ellenberg's assertion that enslaved men and women were *particularly* abusive, was part of a racist white worldview. Indeed, the accusation of abuse towards an animal was often cited as justification to mete out violent punishments to enslaved black Americans. Sojourner Truth's narrative contains a disclosure that the most severe whipping her master ever gave her was the result of her being 'cruel to a cat'.<sup>333</sup> Moreover, Douglass noted that an enslaved man on Lloyd's plantation, Old Barney, who worked as an ostler and farrier and was devoted and knowledgeable in the care of horses, still experienced frequent violent abuse. Douglass recalled that 'in nothing was Col. Lloyd more exacting, than in respect to the management of his pleasure horses. Any supposed inattention to those animals was sure to be visited with degrading punishment'.<sup>334</sup> Therefore, Douglass' assertion that enslaved black Americans could enact domination on animals, on account of their human privilege, was only part of the matrix of race, species and power on the antebellum plantation, as it is evident that slaveholders embellished the animal cruelty enacted by the enslaved, in order to validate their own violence towards this oppressed human group.

Douglass' concluding line to this segment, 'break and be broken – such is life', implied anxieties surrounding the continuation of oppression along several axes

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<sup>332</sup> Ibid, p. 387.

<sup>333</sup> Sojourner Truth, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997) p. 14.

<sup>334</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 91.

of power. However, Douglass does not succeed in breaking the oxen. As he approached Covey's residence, and loosened his grip on the rope connecting him to the oxen, he recounted that 'again, off went my oxen – making nothing of their load – full tilt; and in doing so they caught the huge gate between the wheel and the cart body, literally crushing it to splinters'.<sup>335</sup> Whilst this action by the oxen placed Douglass in a vulnerable position, as the damage to Covey's property would be blamed on Douglass for his failure to control the animals, it also showed Douglass that these animals had not been completely broken to the will of their powerful oppressor. Indeed, they seized every opportunity to take flight. Through Douglass' reminiscence of working with animals, he showcased a speciesist frustration when the oxen failed to meet the idealised behaviour of the draft animal, but he also demonstrated an awareness that animals were caught up in a system of oppression, and perceived the oxen's continuing spirit of resistance as commendable. Though the animal's resistance put him in danger of Covey's white supremacist wrath, it also kindled in him a longing not to submit to Covey or any other master.

### **'Company As Well As Helpers In His Toil': Working With Animals In The Era Of Reconstruction**

Decades after Douglass' self-emancipation, in the era of Reconstruction, he advocated for the kind treatment of animals through a plan to carve out the most effective and profitable black agriculture. In September 1873, Douglass was invited to speak at the annual fair of the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association, where his first piece of advice for the newly-emancipated black farmers centred on the 'treatment of animals', alongside instruction to properly maintain agricultural tools and to embrace learning of the theory and techniques of farming.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid, p. 171.

<sup>336</sup> Frederick Douglass, 'Address Delivered by Hon. Frederick Douglass, at the Third Annual Fair of the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association', *New National Era*

Douglass opened the speech with an admission of his hesitation to give the address, owing to his limited knowledge and experience of agriculture and mechanics, affirming that 'I could far more easily tell you what I don't know about farming than what I do know'.<sup>337</sup> The Association's insistence on Douglass' lecture, despite his lack of expertise in the subject matter, demonstrates that black farmers in the U.S. South in the era of Reconstruction were eager to hear from a figure that had played a leading role in the abolitionist movement and how racial justice could be fostered within agriculture. The research of Steven Hahn recognised that in the final decades of the nineteenth century, an identifiable 'organizational impulse' existed amongst black American agricultural labourers, prepared to agitate for improved wages, rents, and conditions of work in the U.S. South, in the face of white violence.<sup>338</sup> As such, it is likely that the audience were not interested in hearing the technicalities of farming from Douglass, but his presence at their annual fair offered a symbolic assertion of hope that black agriculture in the post-emancipation era would be different, expertise would replace exploitation and prosperity would replace persecution at the hands of whites.

Before Douglass offered his first piece of practical advice on working with animals in agriculture, he declared that the development of agriculture originated with blackness. He proclaimed that:

It is pleasant to know that in color, form, and features, we are related to the first successful tillers of the soil; to the people who taught the world agriculture; that the civilization which made Greece, Rome, and Western Europe illustrious, and even now makes our own land glorious, sprung forth from the bosom of Africa. For, while this vast continent was yet undiscovered by civilized men; while the Briton and the Gallic races wandered like beasts of prey in the forests, the people of Egypt and Ethiopia rejoiced in well cultivated fields and in abundance of corn.<sup>339</sup>

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and Citizen Print (1873) Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, Manuscript/Mixed Material [accessed on February 20<sup>th</sup> 2018], p. 13.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>338</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 417.

<sup>339</sup> Douglass, 'Address Delivered by Hon. Frederick Douglass, at the Third Annual Fair of the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association', p. 8.

Less than a decade after slavery was abolished, where blackness was so denigrated that black women and men were characterised as less-than-human and as objects of property to be used and abused, or as Douglass stated ‘a people recognised as standing outside the circle, and ranked by the laws of the land with horses, sheep, and swine’, it was significant that he challenged Eurocentric ideas of ‘civilisation’ and traced the development of agriculture to black Africa, not Europe.<sup>340</sup> Whilst black Africans ‘rejoiced’ in the plenty that agriculture produced, white Europeans were nomadic and vulnerable like prey animals, Douglass argued. As many of the agriculturalists at the Annual Fair in Nashville would have gained their experience of farming during slavery, where they were to obey the demands of white masters and overseers, rather than work the land on their own terms, it was meaningful that Douglass instilled a message of pride in the long-history of black agriculture, where black women and men were innovators in farming, rather than bodies from which labour was extracted.

Making agriculture work for newly-emancipated black men and women was the focus of Douglass’ speech, ‘how it can be made to serve us, as a particular class’ was the ‘commanding question of the hour’.<sup>341</sup> As such, Douglass’ guidance on working alongside animals in agriculture should be viewed at least partly through this lens, where animals were useful to, and served a purpose for, humans, whether those humans were powerful or oppressed. Within this speech, Douglass argued that slavery had been an evil for the human chattel who endured it, but also for animal inhabitants of the plantations, and the land itself. He proclaimed that ‘the very soil of your State was cursed with a burning sense of injustice’ during slavery and poor agricultural practices were followed because ‘the hand that planted cared nothing for the harvest’.<sup>342</sup> Douglass perceived that slavery fostered an environment where little care was shown to the land and to animals that worked the land,

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<sup>340</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

because enslaved workers had no interest in it. He asserted that because enslaved labour was uncompensated, undertaking agriculture with efficiency and care only lined the pockets of oppressors, and thus he saw the limited effort in agriculture as a mode of resistance for enslaved black Americans. However, this line of thinking erases the motivating forces of terror and violence during slavery that compelled the backbreaking labour of the enslaved, which they undertook to minimise harm from the white power structure.

The first area in which Douglass suggested that the principles of freedom could be applied, to improve black American agriculture, was in the treatment of animals. He claimed that animals suffered under slavery too, stating that 'not only the slave, but the horse, the ox and the mule shared the general feeling of indifference to rights naturally engendered by a state of slavery'.<sup>343</sup> In this excerpt, Douglass laid out an understanding of oppression that transcended species, where he believed that animals and racialised humans shared a desperate situation, because of the decisions of the powerful to deny certain freedoms to the less powerful. It is notable that the animals that Douglass claimed shared in the 'indifference to rights' were all beings used in agriculture for draft, draft being 'the amount of power necessary to put an object into motion, and that concurrently he viewed labour as a key site of subjugation for humans and nonhumans'.<sup>344</sup>

Acknowledging that violence permeated the lives of enslaved women and men *and* draft animals, Douglass asserted that 'the master blamed the overseer; the overseer the slave, and the slave the horses, oxen and mules, and violence fell upon the animals as a consequence'.<sup>345</sup> Within this statement, Douglass conveyed an analysis of the multiple axes of power within slaveholding societies, where particular groups oppressed others with less power than themselves. Through this

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<sup>343</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>344</sup> Norton Greene, p. 6.

<sup>345</sup> Douglass, 'Address Delivered by Hon. Frederick Douglass, at the Third Annual Fair of the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association', p. 13.



analysis, Douglass recognised that power was divided along the lines of race, class and species at this juncture in U.S. history. Douglass' pyramid of power placed wealthy white male planters at the top, who could order less economically privileged overseers to undertake the labour (of controlling and disciplining the enslaved) on their behalf. Further down on Douglass' power hierarchy were enslaved men and women, forced to undertake labour in agriculture and the domestic sphere, as a result of the system of white supremacy. Douglass finished his depiction of power relations in the slaveholding South, with the addition that the enslaved populace 'blamed' or oppressed draft animals on the plantations, and thereby inflicted violence upon them. In this conception of power relations in the South, animals, on account of their species status, were at the bottom of the pile. This statement illustrates that, in the Reconstruction era, Douglass perceived that the belief in an all-encompassing human supremacy over all other animals was part of the old system of slavery that needed to be eradicated.

To agitate for the better treatment of animals in agriculture, Douglass forged a direct link between successful farming and kindness to animals, stressing that:

there is no successful farming without well-trained and well-treated horses and oxen, and one of the greatest pleasures in agricultural life may be found in the pleasant relations capable of subsisting between the farmer and his four-legged companions; for they are company as well as helpers in his toil.<sup>346</sup>

Though he felt that animals ought to be afforded a certain standard of care, Douglass also supported the training of animals to assist and benefit human communities, specifically black Americans in the rural South. His reference to draft animals fulfilling the dual function of being 'company and helpers in his toil' for black farmers, demonstrates that he saw the potential for human-animal companionship, whilst maintaining a focus on what animals could do for humans seeking out better livelihoods in difficult conditions. Douglass purported that working closely with

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid, p. 13 – 14.

animals, and showing a degree of compassion towards draft animals, was imperative to the future of a prosperous black agriculture.

Further, Douglass urged that if black American farmers did not foster respectful working relationships with draft animals, it would harm their productivity, claiming that he had seen numerous examples where men had spent 'valuable hours' chasing horses and mules in the open field, who were reluctant to follow the demands of human workers because of fear, which was a result of abuse.<sup>347</sup>

Douglass counselled that:

it should be the study of every farmer to make his horse his companion and friend, and to do this, there is but one rule, and that is, uniform sympathy and kindness. All loud and boisterous commands, all brutal flogging should be banished from the field, and only words of cheer and encouragement should be tolerated.<sup>348</sup>

This approach to working with animals, centred on positive reinforcement, was crafted to appeal to a formerly enslaved audience. Through this speech, Douglass aimed to garner empathy for working animals on the basis of formerly enslaved men and women's prior experience of exploitative and violent labour extraction. By invoking the spectre of a 'brutal flogging', Douglass not only referred to the use of whips to control working animals, but raised a defining symbol of the terror of slavery for black Americans. Deploying this symbolic instrument and method of violence, Douglass drew upon the memories of fear, pain, and harm produced through flogging, and encouraged his audience to assume that the use of the whip created similar reactions of fear and pain in working, sentient animals, and, by extension, urged the agriculturalists to condemn the use of force against animals. Here, Douglass attempted to foster cross-species empathy through a shared site of oppression: violent labour exploitation, and crafted an argument for animal advocacy rooted in the history of black oppression. He used the experience of racial

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<sup>347</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

oppression as a platform for empathy and compassion towards working animals who also lived through systematic abuse.

Douglass steered his advice on working with animals back to how kind treatment could benefit the black American farming community. He purported that:

A horse is in many respects like a man. He has the five senses, and has memory, affection, and reason to a limited degree. When young, untrained and untamed, he has unbounded faith in his strength and fleetness. He runs, jumps and plays in the pride of his perfections. But convince him that he is a creature of law as well as freedom by a judicious and kindly application of your superior power, and he will conform his conduct to that law, far better than your most law-abiding citizen.<sup>349</sup>

The opening of this extract reflects an attempt by Douglass to deconstruct human exceptionalism, as he lists the ways in which animals like horses were similar to men. A lack of memory, emotion, mental capacity, and the inability to feel pain were all cited as mitigating factors that enabled humans to continue using animals in whatever way they saw fit. Douglass' likening of working animals to men formed part of his argument for the kind treatment of animals in agricultural environments. If animals such as horses possessed sensory perception and memory, it follows that he believed that they should not be mistreated in ways that would cause pain.

Also of significance in this passage is the way in which Douglass gendered ideas about animals, labour and citizenship. His use of the pronoun 'he' to refer to working horses and direct comparison of the horse to 'man' suggest that he perceived labour, specifically agricultural labour, as a masculinised sphere. Sojourner Truth's renowned speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1851, forcefully challenged racialised constructions of womanhood and also obliterated the notion that women were not workers. She commanded her audience to:

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

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

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?<sup>350</sup>

Truth's references to ploughing, planting and gathering communicated that enslaved black women were not exempt from backbreaking labour in the field on account of their womanhood; indeed, she declared that she often outstripped men at a range of agricultural tasks. Her revelation of the trauma of familial separation, when the majority of her children were sold off to other slaveholders, demonstrated that not only did black women labour in the field, they also carried the burden of reproductive labour on which the continuation of slavery was dependent, and the emotional labour that maintained bonds within enslaved black communities, that enabled black men and children to survive in the face of the white violence that permeated their lives.

Douglass' characterisation of agricultural labour as masculine thereby did not fit with the historical experience of black women. It is important to note that Douglass was not opposed to the idea of women working. Philip S. Foner noted that Douglass perceived women's economic dependence on men to be a central part of their experience of subjugation. Foner claimed that when Douglass 'drew up a plan for an American industrial school for blacks to be established in Pennsylvania, he included a provision for an industrial school, which included females. He emphasised that "a prominent principle of conduct will be to aid in providing for the female sex, methods and means of enjoying an independent and honourable livelihood"<sup>351</sup>. Thus, it is clear that Douglass valued independent labour as part of the emancipation of black and white women from patriarchy. However, it is questionable whether Douglass considered toil in agriculture to be an honourable

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<sup>350</sup> Sojourner Truth, 'On Women's Rights', *Sojourner Truth Memorial Committee* <<http://sojournertruthmemorial.org/sojourner-truth/her-words/>> [accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2018].

<sup>351</sup> Philip S. Foner, *Frederick Douglass on Women's Rights* (New York: De Capo Press, 1992), p. 18.

livelihood for black women in the freedom promised during Reconstruction.

Ultimately, his conflation of mankind with animalkind in this extract, demonstrates an understanding of agricultural labour that was linked to masculinity, but also of species working together to improve outcomes for all, both human and nonhuman.

When Douglass advised that black farmers apply their 'superior power' in a kindly manner, to convince working animals through reason that they were creatures 'of law', he highlighted that compassion for draft animals was in their best interest.<sup>352</sup> Douglass was not questioning whether animals should be used for human gain, but articulated that using violence against them in the process of compelling them to work did not make economic sense. In his slave narratives, Douglass showed empathy with draft animals as fellow sufferers of an exploitative labour, but in the changing circumstances of Reconstruction, which offered the promise of a black-controlled agriculture which could lift formerly-enslaved communities out of poverty, Douglass felt it necessary to advise his audience that the best way to control animals, to use their labour to make life easier, was with a carrot and not a stick. Undoubtedly, this was a radical position that considered the interests of human and non-human animals simultaneously, seeking to improve the material conditions of working animals in the field, whilst attempting to build up independent and profitable livelihoods for freedmen and women working the land.

### **'A Little War Of Defense For Helpless Things': Solidarity With Draft Animals As Fellow Subjects Of Labour Exploitation In Hurston's Writings**

In Hurston's writings, she repeatedly drew upon the symbol of the mule to highlight the existence of oppression in black communities. Two of Hurston's plays, *De Turkey and De Law: A Comedy in Three Acts* (1930) and *Mule Bone: A Comedy of Negro Life in Three Acts* (1931) centred around a court case where two black men,

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<sup>352</sup> Douglass, 'Address Delivered by Hon. Frederick Douglass, at the Third Annual Fair of the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association', p. 14.

Jim Weston and Dave Carter fought for the affections of a black woman, named Daisy. Within these earlier plays, it is clear to see the origins and development of Hurston's ideas about working animals and how they formed part of the economic and cultural landscape of black communities in the early twentieth century. In Ellenberg's study of mules in the Southern mindscape, he articulated that the 'mule became a fundamental part of Southernness', for both black and white Americans, but that racial politics shaped the perception of the mule.<sup>353</sup> Ellenberg noted that white supremacist thought forged an association between black Americans and mules, as both 'were viewed as beasts of burden admirably suited for laboring in the Deep South'.<sup>354</sup> Conversely, black Americans did not 'assume that they shared innate qualities with the animals', but demonstrated a spectrum of feelings towards the mule, varying from irritation and amusement at their 'recalcitrant' nature, to admiration of and empathy with a creature valued solely for its labour.

In Hurston's *De Turkey and De Law*, a group of black men used the symbol of the mule as part of the practice of signifyin', a form of wordplay where metaphor and hyperbole were used to insult one another affectionately. The men compete to compare a character named Walter with a mule. Walter chafed at the idea of being compared to the mule, declaring 'Aw naw, don't throw me in wid dat mule. He could eat up camp-meetin... and drink Jurdan dry'.<sup>355</sup> Here, Hurston drew upon several motifs from black American spirituality, the camp meeting and the river Jordan, to engage in comedic hyperbole about the mule's hearty appetite and great thirst. Lige's reference to the 'useter-be mule' communicates to the audience that this working animal has taken on cultural significance even after death.

Though it is clear in the play that the tales relating to the mule's behaviour and character were exaggerated for the purposes of comedy, they can reveal broad

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<sup>353</sup> Ellenberg, p. 385.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid, p. 387.

<sup>355</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, 'De Turkey and De Law: A Comedy in Three Acts', (October 1930) Zora Neale Hurston Plays at The Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, p. 9 - 10.

attitudes relating to animals and labour in the U.S. South in the first decades of the twentieth century. For instance, Lige claimed that:

'he [the mule] laid down before he'd plow a lick...But who ever seen him work? All you ever did see was him and Brazzle fightin up and down de furrows (all laugh). He was so mean he would even try to kick you if you went in his stall to carry him some corn.'<sup>356</sup>

The references to lying down, fighting, and kicking create an image of the mule as a malicious and workshy animal. Such imagery reflected widely understood symbolism of the 'stubborn mule'. Indeed, Norton Greene recorded how, since the nineteenth century, mules were viewed as 'stubborn, unpredictable, cowardly, immoral, untrustworthy, and inclined to panic'.<sup>357</sup> Through this signifyin', Hurston demonstrated that in black American farming communities, as in other cultures reliant on agriculture, an animal's worth and value was judged based on its usefulness to human beings. If an animal did not consistently obey human commands to assist in ploughing a field or carrying a load, it was perceived as deliberately obstinate. Walter continued to characterise mules as disagreeable when he declared that 'nothin but pure concentrated meanness stuffed into uh mule hide. Thass de reason he wouldn't git fat – just too mean'.<sup>358</sup> This statement conveyed Walter's insistence that the mule was purposefully intractable, that this animal refused to eat as an act of resistance, so that it would not build up the strength to assist with agricultural labour. Through the character of Walter, Hurston encapsulated the reliance of black farming communities on animals to assist with backbreaking work. Although Walter chose to assume that the animal would not eat out of sheer spite, it is possible that the mule's lack of appetite was related to illness that rendered her/him unable to undertake hard labour. As Norton-Greene explained, mules were chosen specifically in poorer rural areas of the U.S. South,

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>357</sup> Norton Greene, p. 31.

<sup>358</sup> Hurston, 'De Turkey and De Law: A Comedy in Three Acts', p. 10.

that had less infrastructure and difficult terrain because they were known to be hardy creatures, she noted that:

mules are smaller and less powerful than horses, but hardy and strong. They have stocky legs, small, hard hooves, thick skin, and sturdy digestive systems. They tolerate heat, lack of water, and irregular forage better than horses. Mules mature more rapidly and can begin work at age two, in contrast to age four for horses, and they live longer. Though a mule usually cost more than a horse, it was a living machine that delivered for longer and at less expense with fewer break downs.<sup>359</sup>

In the early twentieth century, black Americans who were reliant on agriculture to make a living faced numerous obstacles that were rooted in white supremacy. In the post-Reconstruction era, few black farmers owned the land that they worked, and the systems of sharecropping and tenant farming were designed to keep black American families perpetually in debt to white landowners. White landowners profited most in good years, whilst black tenant farmers and sharecroppers carried the risk posed to farming by adverse climatic conditions, pests, and low market value for crops.<sup>360</sup> For the majority of black American farmers, their livelihoods were often vulnerable and without a safety net. Consequently, Hurston's exploration of frustration with working animals, when they did not meet the ideal of 'the machine' that would prove to be a sound investment and bring prosperity to the community, is understandable. Though Hurston's work was contemporarily dismissed as apolitical, her representation of telling tales about draft animals illustrated that black farming communities living in, or on the brink of, poverty had more to lose from their relationships with working animals. Walter's frustration with the 'mean-spirited' mule's inability to put on weight and work arose from a gap in expectation and reality, where the animal was supposed to withstand hardship, labour consistently, improve crop yields and subsequently bring prosperity. Hurston's emphasis on the mule's tendency to eat but not grow strong demonstrates that working animals relied on human labour for survival, and that resources for food and shelter were

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<sup>359</sup> Norton Greene, p. 29.

<sup>360</sup> Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (London: The Women's Press, 1982), p. 88.



necessary. In sharecropping contexts, where black labour had to be focused upon producing cash crops, whilst resources for the black populace were scarce, it is not surprising that providing sustenance to animals that were not able to undertake labour in return generated ill will. In *De Turkey and De Law* Hurston showcased communities that were shaped by racialized poverty, an environment in which it was far more difficult to nurture working animals and look out for their welfare.

The theme of labour exploitation also emerges from Hurston's collection of folktales and hoodoo practices, *Mules and Men* (1935). The tales 'Why the Sister in Black Works Hardest' and 'Why They Always Use Rawhide On a Mule', when read together, present an understanding of work that transcends human labour, and examines the role of animals in the economy of the U.S. South. Collecting and writing up these tales was a success in and of itself, preserving the oral culture of black communities in the South that Hurston embedded herself in. Hurston's folklore-collecting trips and the act of writing *Mules and Men* enabled her to develop a black feminist, anti-speciesist analysis of labour that she would ultimately articulate in her most celebrated novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). In *Mules and Men*, Jim Allen recounts 'Why the Sister in Black Works Hardest', a tale set in slavery, which presents the racialised and gendered nature of labour in the U.S. Allen asked:

Know how it happened? After God got thru makin' de world and de varmints and de folks, he made up a great big bundle and let it down in de middle of de road. It laid dere for thousands of years, then Ole Missus said to Ole Massa: "Go pick up dat box, Ah want to see whut's in it". Ole Massa look at de box and it look so heavy dat he says to de nigger, "Go fetch me dat big ole box out dere in de road." De nigger been stumblin' over de box a long time so he tell his wife:

"Oman, go git dat box". So de nigger 'oman she runned to git de box. She says:

"Ah always lak to open up a big box 'cause there's nearly always something good in great big boxes." So she run and grabbed a-hold of de box and opened it up and it was full of hard work.

Dat's de reason de sister in black works harder than anybody else in de world. De white man tells de nigger to work and he takes and tells his wife.<sup>361</sup>

Though Allen proclaimed that God created work, the division of such work was to be decided by humans, specifically white humans. He perceived that constructions of gender and race rendered white women exempt from 'hard work'. The 'cult of true womanhood' constructed white, middle-class women as delicate and suited to the domestic sphere, rather than work in agriculture or industry.<sup>362</sup> As Kate Dossett, a historian of race and gender in the nineteenth and twentieth century U.S., argued, 'white femininity was defined in opposition to work'.<sup>363</sup> The white Mistress' demand that her husband should pick up the bundle of hard work reveals a perception in black communities that, especially in the arena of labour, white women were endowed with power, because they could will others to labour on their behalf. The weight of the load leads the Master to reject this work and demand that the black man pick up the burden of labour, thereby signifying the power of white supremacy to shape labour in the South.

Subsequently, following a period in which the black man in the tale avoids the box that signifies hard work, the black woman is encouraged to shoulder the load. The manner in which deception is deployed here, as the black woman enthusiastically rushes to open the box that she assumes is a gift, illustrates how this tale fits into a broader pattern of black oral culture, which celebrated trickery as a weapon of resistance, but also a more pernicious idea that black women were somehow less intelligent, more gullible and thereby more easily duped. The message encapsulated in the title of the tale, that black women worked harder than black men, white women and white men, was an acknowledgement that the

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<sup>361</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules and Men* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1975 [originally published by J.B. Lippincott, Inc, 1935]), p. 74.

<sup>362</sup> Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc, 1997), p. 68 – 69.

<sup>363</sup> Kate Dossett, 'Black Women, Work, and Freedom' in *Reconstruction: People and Perspectives*, ed. by James M. Campbell and others (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2008), pp. 135 – 159 (p. 137).

intersecting forces of racism and sexism shaped the labour expected of black women. However, the tale communicates an inaccurate understanding of how black American labour was controlled, specifically in the context of slavery. Indeed, black women had the burden of labour foisted upon them by black men in the tale, which infers that black men's sexism led to black women's labour exploitation and perpetuates the racist stereotype of the idle black male.<sup>364</sup> The institution of slavery, a system maintained by both white men and women, placed the bundle of hard labour in the hands of black women and black men. Undoubtedly, patriarchal gender roles also shaped the load of labour carried out by black women, but this was not a form of oppression sustained only by black men, but was built into the fabric of society in the U.S. South. As Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson affirmed, 'American mainstream gender roles had a lot of power in the plantation South. When it was convenient for the slaveholder to shatter the stereotypes – putting women into the fields, for example – he did. But most of the time a woman was expected to fulfil a woman's role, and that included doing "women's work", such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, and caring for dependents.'<sup>365</sup> The folktale communicated that black women were oppressed along multiple axes, but suggested that the sexist double burden of being forced to undertake manual labour in agriculture, along with work in the domestic sphere, was passed to them solely by black men, rather than being an outgrowth of a white supremacist, patriarchal society, where race shaped black women's gendered experiences.

Later in *Mules and Men*, Hurston recorded the performance of a tale, which recognised that animals were caught up in agricultural labour exploitation as well as humans. Joe Wiley asserted that:

Whenever they make a whip they gointer have raw-hide on it, if it ain't nothin' but de tip.

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<sup>364</sup> Martin Gilens, *Why Americans Hate Welfare: Race, Media and the Politics of Antipoverty Policy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 155.

<sup>365</sup> Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1998), p. 78.

A man had a mule you know and he had an ox too. So he used to work 'em together.  
 Both of 'em used to get real tired befo' knockin' off time but dat ole ox had mo' sense than de mule, so he played off sick.  
 Every day de mule would go out and work by hisself and de ox stayed in de stable. Every night when de mule come in, he'd ast, "Whut did Massa say 'bout me today?"  
 De mule would say, "Oh nothin'," or maybe he'd say, "Ah heard him say how sorry he was you was sick and couldn't work".  
 De ox would laugh and go on to sleep.  
 One day de mule got tired, so he said, "Massa dat ox ain't sick. T'ain't a thing de matter wid him. He's jus' playin' off sick. Ah'm tired of doin' all dis work by myself".  
 So dat night when he got in de stable, de ox ast him. "What did Ole Massa say 'bout me today?"  
 Mule told him, "Ah didn't hear him say a thing, but Ah saw him talkin' to de butcher man".  
 So de ox jumped up and said, "Ah'm well. Tell Ole Massa Ah'll be to work tomorrow".  
 But de next mornin' bright and soon de butcher come led him off.  
 So he said to de mule, "If you hadn't of told Massa on me, Ah wouldn't be goin' where Ah am. They're gointer kill me, but Ah'll always be war on yo' back".<sup>366</sup>

It has long been argued in studies of black American culture that folktales, specifically animal-centred stories, were multi-layered: that is, they contained a surface narrative, and a subversive or cautionary message or moral.<sup>367</sup> In 'Why They Always Use Rawhide On A Mule', references to Ole Massa are suggestive that this tale contained messages about labour practices within the context of slavery or post-bellum sharecropping communities. James C. Scott, a political scientist with expertise in the resistance strategies of subordinated groups, argued that during slavery 'foot-dragging' and feigning illness formed part of the 'infrapolitics of the powerless', an act of resistance designed and disguised to 'thwart material appropriation of their labour'.<sup>368</sup> It is likely that this folktale aimed to explore acts of enslaved labour resistance through the veiled medium of an animal tale. Within the narrative, the character that the audience should sympathise with is deliberately

<sup>366</sup> Hurston, *Mules and Men*, p. 117 – 118.

<sup>367</sup> Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 103 – 104.

<sup>368</sup> James C. Scott, *Hidden Transcripts: Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. xiii.

blurred. The ox was described as having more sense than the mule, so he deployed trickery to play sick. As a result of the ox's deception, the mule carried the extra burden of labour. On the one hand, the ox was celebrated for being conscious that his labour was being exploited and actively refusing to work. However, he is also castigated for saddling the mule with additional work. At the conclusion of the tale, neither animal emerged triumphant: the ox is sent to the butchers for his insubordination, to be converted into meat and leather; whilst the mule is destined to a life of hard labour and violent whippings, to ensure subservience. The ox claims that he will have the last laugh, as parts of his slaughtered body will be used to inflict pain on the mule for the rest of his working life. Viewed allegorically, this tale seems to warn an enslaved audience of the dangers of individual acts of resistance such as feigning illness, as it increased the workload of the rest of the enslaved community. Likewise, the tale offered a bleak warning against the practice of 'snitching' or informing on fellow subjects of oppression, and working with the enemy, which in this tale is Ole Massa and the white power structure that he represented. The tale seemingly warns the audience of the bleak outcomes when solidarity is not fostered amongst the oppressed.

Undoubtedly, 'Why They Always Use Rawhide On A Mule' contained a message on the politics of solidarity and black labour under white supremacy, but for the animal tale to function as a mask for this subversive message, an acknowledgement of animal suffering through labour was required. The assertion that the ox and mule got 'real tired befo' knockin' off time', description of the use of the whip as 'war on yo' back' and the slaughter of the ox for his refusal to labour, illustrated an awareness of the ways in which animals were used and abused in agricultural societies. The long hours, the use of instruments to compel animals to work harder and faster, and the conversion of their bodies into food and instruments of violence demonstrates that the lives of animals were not respected, and that in agricultural economies animals were valued primarily as producers of labour and

products to be sold and consumed. For many working animals in the nineteenth century U.S., the ‘damned if you do, damned if you don’t’ idiom was applicable, as if an ox or mule could not labour, then they were destined for slaughter, and if they laboured reliably for their human owners then they could expect little reward and were doomed to a life of hard work until their body was worn out. Hurston’s inclusion of this folktale in *Mules and Men* showcased how a central part of black oral culture imagined animals with voices of their own, able to express dissatisfaction with their lives controlled by and for the benefit of humans. Furthermore, this tale demonstrates that black communities, reliant on animals to lift them out of poverty, were also reflecting on the ways in which animals were locked into systems of exploitation.

The mule emerges as one of the most powerful metaphors within Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), which sets the scene for the life that Nanny desperately wants her granddaughter, Janie, to escape. In the second chapter of *Their Eyes*, Janie learns the painful history of her genealogy. Nanny recounts how she was born into slavery, where her labour was extracted by powerful whites as though she were a draft animal, avowing that ‘ah didn’t want to be used for a work-ox and a brood-sow and ah didn’t want mah daughter used dat way neither’.<sup>369</sup> Nanny’s animal metaphors describe the ways that during slavery black women’s bodies were used both for agricultural labour and reproductive labour. As bell hooks encapsulated, throughout the era of slavery ‘the black female was exploited as a labourer in the fields, a worker in the domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault’.<sup>370</sup> Nanny wished that future generations of black women, her daughter and granddaughter included, would not endure the backbreaking work and coerced sexual relationships that women in slavery

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<sup>369</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, ‘Their Eyes Were Watching God Holograph Manuscript’, Zora Neale Hurston Collection, JWW MSS 9, Box 2, Folder 27, p. 11. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven.

<sup>370</sup> bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1982), p. 22.

experienced. Hurston chose these animal metaphors both because they tapped into the longstanding pattern of drawing on animal characters in the black American oral tradition, and because of the repeated references to animals within slave narratives to emphasise the dehumanising nature of slavery. For Nanny's animal metaphors to communicate the racist, sexist coercion and exploitation of black women's bodies, they relied upon an understanding that the 'work-ox' and 'brood-sow' were indeed controlled and entrapped for the benefit of a more powerful group. At this point in *Their Eyes*, Hurston used metaphors to link the human struggle of black women against a patriarchal white supremacy, with the plight of animals caught up in a speciesist system.

A personal history of sexual violence informed Nanny's attitude towards black women's sexuality and her perception of marriage as a saviour for black women. Nanny's recollection that her mistress inflicted a violent attack on her after asking 'whut's yo' baby doin' wid gray eyes and yaller hair' and her account of a man referred to only as 'a rider' who 'run into mah cabin and made me let down mah hair for de last time' implied to the audience that a white man raped her during the Civil War.<sup>371</sup> Within the text, his identity is concealed, indeed it could have been a Confederate soldier, however, Nanny's mistress' violent reaction at seeing Nanny's mixed race child communicates the prevalence of rape and sexual exploitation by white men from slave-owning families. Hurston demonstrated that the preservation of a system of white supremacy, following the abolition of slavery, rendered black women in the U.S. vulnerable to sexual violence.

In the text, Nanny secured schooling for her daughter Leafy, and wished to 'make a school teacher outa her'.<sup>372</sup> Carol Batker's seminal research on the radical sexual politics of *Their Eyes* is pertinent here. Batker argued that throughout the novel, Hurston refused to position Janie within the accepted binary of black

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<sup>371</sup> Hurston, 'Their Eyes Were Watching God Holograph Manuscript', p. 11 -12.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

women's sexuality, where black women were presented in white racist discourse as the oversexed, promiscuous 'Jezebel' stereotype, to justify the mass-scale sexual exploitation of black women by white men, or the antithesis, the respectable, but sexless, 'mammy' figure, who was 'wholesome' enough to raise white children.<sup>373</sup> As Batker asserts, Hurston used the character of Nanny as a 'representative of middle-class norms of respectability'.<sup>374</sup> Nanny's desire for her daughter to be a schoolteacher, to educate black American children, without having to reproduce her own, demonstrates how she wanted to shield Leafy entirely from sexual encounters. However, Nanny's dream does not come to fruition, as at the age of seventeen Leafy goes missing and Nanny painfully remembers that 'de next mornin' she come crawlin' in on her hands and knees. A sight to see. Dat school teacher had done hid her in de woods all night long, and he had raped mah baby and run on off just before day'.<sup>375</sup> Nanny's own experience of sexual violence and bearing witness to the rape of her daughter leads her to equate *all* sexual encounters, specifically those outside of marriage, as exploitative and associates them with danger and degradation. Resultantly, when Nanny spies her sixteen-year old granddaughter, Janie, being 'lacerated' with a kiss by a local black boy, Johnny Taylor, she fears that history will repeat itself and Janie will experience the same trauma of sexual violence that her mother and grandmother went through. Thus, Nanny's suggestion that Janie hastily marry Logan Killicks, a 'good man' who lives locally, who Janie describes as 'some ole skull-head in de grave yard', was motivated by her desire to protect her granddaughter's respectability in a society that punished the victims and survivors of sexual violence more than the perpetrators.<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>373</sup> Carol Batker, "'Love Me Like I Like To Be": The Sexual Politics of Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Classic Blues*, and the Black Women's Club Movement', *African American Review*, 32 (1998), 199 – 213 (p. 200).

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid*, p. 203.

<sup>375</sup> Hurston, 'Their Eyes Were Watching God Holograph', p. 13.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid*, p. 9.



To explain her intention for Janie to marry Killicks, Nanny used the symbolism of the mule to communicate black women's struggle to her granddaughter, arguing that:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as ah been able tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothin' but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. Ah been prayin' fuh it to be different wid you.<sup>377</sup>

Nanny's tract on black women's position in U.S. society in the published novel differs from the original manuscript, through the addition of the phrase 'Lawd, Lawd, Lawd!' at the end of the declaration.<sup>378</sup> This dramatised Nanny's acts of prayer, that her granddaughter would not live a life akin to the mule, a symbol of exploitation in the agricultural South. In the original manuscript, Nanny's speech to Janie appeared as a stand-alone paragraph, rather than being integrated into the rest of the narrative, which suggests that Hurston had known the significance of this extract to the novel for some time, and that it required little editing to sharpen the power of the message. Analysing the original manuscript allows the reader some insight into the priorities in the thinking and writing process of Hurston, when she penned her first draft of the novel. The format and layout of the original manuscript illustrates that the 'mule of the world' passage was stand-alone, and perhaps was a thought that Hurston needed to put to paper quickly without initially linking it to the rest of the narrative. This interpretation of Hurston's process, and the implied centrality of this metaphor, could not be gleaned from solely analysing the published novel. Indeed, the image of the white man throwing down the load and forcing black men to pick it up, who then pass the burden along to black women, was lifted from Hurston's earlier collected folktale, 'Why the Sister in Black Works Hardest'. Nanny's assertion

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>378</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (London: Virago Press, 1986), p. 19.

that black women were the 'mules of the world' conveyed Hurston's understanding that black women lived through and resisted the multiple oppressions of racism, sexism and classism, and, as such, they were forced to carry a heavy load, like the mule working as a draft animal in the U.S. South. For Janie to comprehend Nanny's 'mule of the world' metaphor, Nanny judges that a teenage girl, on the cusp of womanhood, would possess an awareness of the ways that draft animals were used and abused in rural, largely unindustrialised societies. Nanny does not condemn the overworking of draft animals within her speech, but she uses the suffering of working animals like mules as leverage to convince her granddaughter that she deserves more in life than to be treated like an animal.

Hurston's declaration that black women were 'de mule uh de world' in the early twentieth century U.S., demonstrated an understanding of labour that diverged from Douglass' masculinised conception of work in the 1870s. Though Douglass may have envisioned an independent black agriculture during Reconstruction, where black women were exempt from physically demanding tasks, Hurston's metaphor communicated that freedom from slavery did not translate to freedom from the heavy burden of several forms of labour for black women. Her alignment of black women's situation with that of a draft animal, forced to carry heavy loads for human communities, challenged the myth that following emancipation from slavery, black women were able to withdraw from agricultural labour, aspiring to the respectability that white, middle-class domesticity afforded. The 1890 census uncovered that '38.7% of working black women were employed in agriculture', with the second largest group, 30.8% of working black women working in domestic service.<sup>379</sup> Though formerly enslaved black women were not able to put down the tools of agriculture entirely, they were able to exercise more control over the conditions in which they would labour, such as not working under close white supervision. Dossett astutely argued that 'for black women, withdrawal from white

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<sup>379</sup> Dossett, p. 138.

supervised agricultural work was more about survival and family needs than any notion of aping white womanhood'.<sup>380</sup> Moreover, as Jacqueline Jones noted, in cotton-growing regions in the post-bellum era, cotton picking was a task that 'weighed heavily on the shoulders of rural black women', showing that certain agricultural activities were shaped by racialised gender long after emancipation.<sup>381</sup> Planting and packing seeds and harvesting yields, essential to the local cash-crop economy, remained black women's work in the post-bellum era. Furthermore, black women also completed the daily work required to maintain a family, having to 'carve out time to grind corn for meal, bathe the children, weed the garden, gather eggs, and do the laundry. Periodically, [black women] devoted an entire day to making soap out of ashes, and lard or helping with the hog butchering'.<sup>382</sup> Hurston's characterisation of black women's experience in the U.S. South, as similar to the plight of a working animal, illustrated that their maligned race *and* gender identity rendered them uniquely vulnerable to labour exploitation. Norton Greene declared that 'the belief that mules were more resistant to abuse probably made them more abused', and this pattern of thinking was applicable to black women's labour also. Constructing black women as a homogenous type, innately capable of completing agricultural and domestic labour, in opposition to white women, meant that work remained a key site of black women's oppression into the twentieth century.<sup>383</sup>

Though Nanny wished that marriage to Logan Killicks would rescue Janie from the fate of the 'work ox' and the 'brood sow', her granddaughter's worth to her new husband was on a par with that of a working animal. Hurston's references to Killicks' 'often-mentioned sixty acres' demonstrate that land ownership amongst black Americans in the U.S. South was a rarity and an achievement that brought

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<sup>380</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>381</sup> Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, From Slavery to Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), p. 87.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid, p. 30.

considerable status.<sup>384</sup> As Ellenberg stated, the failure of Reconstruction in 1877 created 'dashed hopes in the aftermath of emancipation and unfulfilled promises of freedmen receiving "forty acres and a mule"', a promise that implied that property ownership of land and animals were key to the uplift of formerly enslaved communities.<sup>385</sup> Six months into their marriage, when it had become clear to Janie that their legal union would not blossom into love, Killicks began to view Janie solely through her labour. Once again, the mule was used within this segment of the novel to indicate the future of hard labour that awaited Janie in this marriage. Killicks' characterisation of Janie as 'spoilt rotten' when she refused to chop and carry wood for him, and the vision of the mule 'all saddled at the gate' act as alarm bells to Janie that her husband now primarily perceives her as a source of valuable labour, rather than a loving partner.<sup>386</sup> Janie discovered that Killicks was heading out on business to purchase a second mule, as he aimed 'tuh run two plows, and dis man Ah'm talkin' 'bout is got a mule all gentled up so even uh woman kin handle 'im'.<sup>387</sup> The promise of prosperity here is not enough to convince Janie of the merits of working the land. Indeed, the prospect of the monotony and hard toil involved in running a plough and commanding draft animals rendered her speechless, and in the next scene she becomes infatuated with the life that Joe Starks, a stylish, charming and ambitious man, could offer her. Janie identifies her future self in the image of the saddled up mule, destined to pull heavy loads for the benefit of a more powerful other, and so she makes a conscious choice to leave this marriage to escape the drudgery of agricultural labour, where she was valued as nothing more than a source of energy to help line the pockets of her husband. Starks made a declaration that Janie found immediately appealing, as it promised to free her from a life of unremitting toil, when he asserted that she:

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<sup>384</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, p. 28.

<sup>385</sup> Ellenberg, p. 392.

<sup>386</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, p. 35.

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

ain't got no mo' business wid uh plow than uh hog is got wid uh holiday! You ain't got no business cuttin' up no seed p'taters neither. A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you.<sup>388</sup>

Starks' declaration conveyed that his vision for Janie's life was entwined with a patriarchal worldview and the continuation of social inequality. His judgement that Janie was physically attractive and should therefore be excused from hard labour revealed that sexism shaped the work of black women, alongside racism. The image of Janie sat on the porch fanning herself, whilst others undertook the planting on her behalf, was reminiscent of the white mistress on the plantation, spared from work in the fields on account of her racialised gender. Although this promised life of leisure was initially alluring to Janie, as she was eager to escape a future where she would be treated like a draft animal, it is an early textual clue that Starks merely wanted a bigger slice of the pie in an oppressive society, rather than to throw the pie out and create a more just society along the lines of race, class and gender. Starks' comment that the idea of a 'hog... wid uh holiday' was preposterous conveyed an attitude towards animals and labour in the early twentieth century U.S. South, where the notion of allowing animals time off from labouring (or fattening in the case of food animals) bordered on the absurd. Indeed, draft animals were defined solely through their capacity to work, and so the idea of providing leisure time, or even recovery time, for these animals was laughable in an agricultural economy dependent upon animal bodies as sources of energy.

Following a tumultuous scene where Killicks accused Janie of failing to pull her weight on the farm, and claimed that he is 'too honest and hard-workin' for anybody in yo' family', and concurrently blames Nanny and Leafy for their own sexual assault, she decides to leave her first marriage and run away with Joe Starks to begin a different life.<sup>389</sup> Roger Rosenblatt noted that Janie's dream of a more

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid, p. 43.

fulfilling life with Starks was fleeting, as 'just as Logan had done, he begins to treat Janie like property'.<sup>390</sup> Whereas with Killicks, Janie was perceived as a working animal, valued solely for her labour, in the initial stage of her marriage to Starks it is the absence of labour that defines their relationship. He views Janie as a fine piece of art that should be looked at and admired, but never interacted with. When Janie and Joe arrive at their new residence, a black town named Eatonville, close to Maitland, Florida, Starks was struck by the lack of community organisation and takes it upon himself to lead the town as Mayor. Starks' linguistic tic, 'I god', communicates to the audience that he is a figure who seeks to be worshipped, and that his aspiration for reverence from the townspeople extends to his new wife, who he expects to be submissive and silent.<sup>391</sup> On the opening night of Starks' store, Hurston used animalising language to depict his sexist worldview, in which he sees Janie as a possession to provoke envy and increase his own social status. It is revealed that he 'told her to dress up and stand in the store all that evening. Everybody was coming sort of fixed up, and he didn't mean for nobody else's wife to rank with her. She must look on herself as the bell-cow, the other women were the gang'.<sup>392</sup> This passage demonstrates how animalising language formed part of patriarchal oppression, as Janie is encouraged to see herself as the 'bell-cow', the lead cow of a herd and is advised through this metaphor to stand apart from the women in the community, rather than form bonds with and express solidarity with the other women residents. Starks' command that Janie 'dress up' and concern that another woman might 'rank with her' in attractiveness show that he views Janie as a commodity that could increase his power, rather than as a whole person. Here, Hurston's deployment of animal metaphors worked to show the antithesis of black

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<sup>390</sup> Roger Rosenblatt, 'Their Eyes Were Watching God', in *Zora Neale Hurston: Modern Critical Views*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), pp. 29 - 33 (p. 31).

<sup>391</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, p. 46.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

women's labour exploitation, through their commodification as trophy wives, another form of subjugation that limited their lives.

Starks' desire to embody white, middle-class gender roles in this new community is revealed when the residents of Eatonville request a speech from Janie, the newly-appointed mayor's wife, to which he immediately responds with 'Thank yuh fuh yo' compliments but mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' lak dat. She's uh woman and her place is in de home'.<sup>393</sup> This is the first explicit instance in the novel when Starks silences Janie. He would not know whether she is skilled at speech-making, because the opportunity is snatched away from her as he deems that public oration is not suitable work for a woman, who should be confined to the domestic realm. Within the novel, Starks' store is a site where public and private spheres meet. It is clear that Starks views the inside of the store as an extension of the domestic sphere, as he notes that if she has at least a 'thimble full uh sense' then she will be able to help to sell the goods.<sup>394</sup> However, if Janie goes beyond the work tasks deemed acceptable by Starks, and enters the porch of the store on which local townsfolk regularly tell tales, then she crosses the boundary between private and public and is chastised by her husband.

At this point in the narrative, the yellow mule, which had formed part of the drama in *De Turkey and De Law* and *Mule Bone*, emerges as a central part of the cultural landscape of the community in Eatonville. As in the earlier plays, the mule was used to talk through the issue of poverty in rural black communities dependent on agriculture. In *Their Eyes* the mule is the property of Matt Bonner, who is teased for the skinny frame of his working animal. The local men joke that they spotted the renowned mule being used 'fuh uh washboard' and that their wives had been

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

'hangin' things out on his hock-bones to dry'.<sup>395</sup> Though Sam and Lige tell these tales in jest, there is an element of humiliation for Bonner that is rooted in masculinised ideas of labour and providing for a household. Despite Bonner's protestations that he feeds the mule well, Sam retorts that Bonner has substituted a feed cup for a 'tea cup' to nourish the animal, with the implication that Bonner is either stingy or impoverished and thereby failing in his role as a provider. Constructions of the mule as mean and spiteful that were present in Hurston's earlier plays are redeployed in *Their Eyes*. Bonner argues that the mule stays deliberately 'poor and rawbony' because he is 'skeered he'll hafta work some'.<sup>396</sup> After recalling an incident where the mule chased and almost trampled some children, Sam asserts that 'maybe de mule takes out after everybody 'cause he thinks everybody he hear comin' is Matt Bonner comin' tuh work 'im on uh empty stomach'.<sup>397</sup> Such excerpts highlight the difficult lives of draft animals, forced to submit to the working demands of human owners, whilst receiving minimal care. Yet, the community's mockery of Bonner infer that he is the exception and not the rule, that he is judged negatively, if humorously, for the practice of underfeeding and overworking his draft animals. These passages imply that the limited resources available to maintain working animals in black communities living on the brink of poverty were the result of individual failings by miserly or incompetent men like Bonner, rather than the structure of white supremacist agriculture.

Most significantly within *Their Eyes*, the tale-telling surrounding the mule was a site in which Starks asserted his patriarchal control over Janie, by silencing her and refusing to let her partake in the oral tradition of the Eatonville community. Janie revealed that 'sometimes she thought up good stories on the mule, but Joe had forbidden her to indulge'.<sup>398</sup> As Shirley Anne Williams argued, Starks 'isolates her

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid, p.69.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid, p. 70.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid, p. 71.



from direct participation in any life except his own' and a central part of his 'stranglehold on her life is symbolized in his prohibition against her participation in the tale-tellings'.<sup>399</sup> Every time Janie is on the cusp of joining in with the tale-telling, she noted that Starks would 'hustle her off inside the store to sell something'.<sup>400</sup> Starks' opposition to Janie's signifying' was rooted in sexism and class prejudice. Indeed, he declared that 'he didn't want her talking after such trashy people' and that as she was a mayor's wife, he could not understand why she would 'want tuh be treasurin' all dat gum-grease from folks dat don't even own de house dey sleep in. 'Tain't no earthly use. They's jus' some puny humans playin' round de toes uh Time'.<sup>401</sup> Starks' characterisation of the local residents and patrons of his store as 'trashy people' and derogation of people that do not own their own houses illustrates his misunderstanding of how the structural force of racism in the U.S. prevented black Americans from property ownership, and his maintenance of class inequality in Eatonville, where he believed that there was only room for one successful black man: himself. Further, his description of local folklore as 'gum-grease' and 'playin' round de toes uh time' illustrate his attitude that acts of preserving black American culture, specifically black Floridian culture, were merely a waste of valuable time that could be spent labouring and earning money. Janie discovered that labouring for Starks in the store was as loathsome as working for Killicks in the field. She asserted that she 'had come to hate the inside of that store' and that it 'kept her with a sick headache'.<sup>402</sup> By this stage in Janie's life she did not find the physical labour of stacking shelves or moving barrels to be irksome, but found the mathematical calculations involved in weighing and calculating the price of meat and dairy produce to be troubling and tedious, affirming that 'she went through many silent

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<sup>399</sup> Shirley Anne Williams, 'Janie's Burden', in *Zora Neale Hurston: Modern Critical Views*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1986), pp. 97 – 102 (p. 101).

<sup>400</sup> Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, p. 72.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71 - 72.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

rebellions over things like that. Such a waste of life and time'.<sup>403</sup> Within her second marriage, Starks controlled Janie's labour and expected her to be grateful for the role of Mayor's wife and store attendant, even regulating what she wore in public, so that other men could not gaze upon what he saw as his property.

In the next scene, Janie resisted being silenced any longer by her husband and spoke out in defence of Bonner's mule, an animal that she perceived as a victim of labour exploitation and violent abuse. It is apparent from this scene, which directly follows Janie's admission of her own exploitation as a source of labour and an object of property that she identifies with the mule as a fellow sufferer. Bonner reveals that he is hunting the mule, who has wandered off. When two local men, Lum and Lige, hear the mule coming past the store, they take it upon themselves to capture the mule and return it to Bonner. It is noted that:

Lum went out and tackled him. The brute jerked up his head, laid back his ears and rushed to the attack. Lum had to run for safety. Five or six more men left the porch and surrounded the fractious beast, goosing him in the sides and making him show his temper. But he had more spirit left than body. He was soon panting and heaving from the effort of spinning his old carcass about. Everybody was having fun at the mule-baiting. All but Janie.<sup>404</sup>

The final sentence demonstrated that physically provoking the mule was not entertaining to Janie. Similar to Douglass' encounter with the oxen, Janie admired the spirit of resistance that the mule showed, rushing to the attack against his human captors, rather than submitting to their commands. This passage shows that the mule may appear to be irritable, but the animal's behaviour was an understandable result of human mistreatment, as he was tackled, poked in the sides and forced to heave his exhausted body around as the residents enjoy teasing him.

Advocating on behalf of the mule was the act that enabled Janie to find her voice and speak out against her own experience of sexism. After she watched the

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid, p. 73.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

mule being incited by the local men, it is noted that Janie 'began muttering to herself' that:

they oughta be shamed uh theyselves! Teasin' dat poor brute beast lak they is! Done been worked tuh death; done had his disposition ruint wid mistreatment, and now they got tuh finish devilin' 'im tuh death. Wisht Ah had mah way wid 'em all.<sup>405</sup>

This declaration is multi-layered. Observing the mule's use and abuse enables Janie to understand her own oppression more astutely. She simultaneously opposed the spectacle before her, demonstrating trans-species solidarity with a draft animal that had been overworked and undervalued and also used the mule as a vehicle to speak out about her own labour exploitation and devaluation by her husband, and more broadly as a black woman in a patriarchal, white supremacist society. Janie's assertion that the townsfolk ought to be ashamed of the manner in which they treat the mule demonstrates that black American writers in the early twentieth century challenged power relationships between humans and animals in black communities, where animals were viewed as exploitable for human needs in agriculture, and human-animal working relations had fallen below the kind treatment that Douglass had set out for a prosperous and independent black agriculture. Although Janie mumbled her defence of the mule, it is the beginning of her resistance to Starks' silencing tactics and breaking out of his mould of what a Mayor's wife should be. Her contention that she 'wisht [she] had [her] way wid 'em all' implied that if she were running the town, then residents would be held accountable for their poor treatment of animals.

Following this incident with the mule, Starks directed Janie to bring him another pair of shoes from their house, demanding that she 'go fetch me dem old black gaiters', so that he can be more comfortable.<sup>406</sup> Hurston charts Janie's internal monologue, observing that 'she got up without a word and went off for the shoes. A

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid, p. 75.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid, p, 76.

little war of defense for helpless things was going on inside her. People ought to have some regard for helpless things. She wanted to fight about it'.<sup>407</sup> This statement contains interplay between passivity and activity. The phrase 'helpless things' is repeated within two adjacent sentences. Here, it is clear that Janie characterises non-human animals in agriculture as helpless, unable to escape a life of oppression that they have no say in designing. As humans and animals cannot communicate through a shared language, it is often assumed that animals are voiceless and unable to resist or assert any agency over their lives, and yet the mule's infamous 'workshy', 'stubborn' and 'bad-tempered' personality is suggestive that the animal resisted labour exploitation and violent mistreatment. Though speciesism shaped the life of Bonner's mule, and the lives of millions of draft animals in the agricultural U.S. South in this era, Hurston showed through this animal character that outside of human language animals were capable of demonstrating discontent with their lot in life. Moreover, Janie's use of the phrase 'war of defense' and assertion that 'she wanted to fight about' the mule's mistreatment illustrate that even though her experience of her second marriage is one of sexist domination and entrapment, she is not a 'helpless thing' and has the capacity to resist. It is through Janie's repulsion at witnessing the labour exploitation and violent treatment of an animal that she chooses to take a stand against oppression, and once she has learnt to assert her own voice, she uses this as a weapon to deconstruct her own situation of exploitation. Through the relationship between Janie and the mule, Hurston communicated an understanding that struggles against oppression transcended 'the human', and that struggling against labour exploitation was a site where trans-species solidarity could be nurtured.

Janie's understanding that labour oppression was not limited to the human inhabitants of Eatonville, and her decision to speak up on behalf of the mule led to the release of the animal from exploitation in the final days of his life. Having

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

overheard Janie's speech about the mule, Starks purchased the animal for five dollars from Bonner. Initially, Bonner claimed that the sale of this animal will strip him of his livelihood, proclaiming that 'If you wants tuh rob uh poor man lak me uh everything he got tuh make uh livin' wid, Ah'll take de five dollars. Dat mule been wid me twenty-three years. It's mighty hard'.<sup>408</sup> At this point in the narrative, Bonner's heartfelt plea reflects Douglass' exploration of working with animals in agriculture, where he noted the potential of working alongside animals to create cross-species solidarity and companionship, and also the reliance of black families and communities in the U.S. South on animals to subsist. However, once the money changed hands, Bonner was jubilant that Starks bought an animal considered spent in terms of its capacity to work the land, boasting that he has 'beatyuh tradin' dat time, Starks! Dat mule is liable tuh be dead befo' de week is out. You won't git no work outa him'.<sup>409</sup> Bonner's conviction that he has succeeded in tricking Starks shows that his struggle to part with a mule that had laboured for him for twenty-three years was merely performance, and that he was keen to eke a final few dollars out of an animal that he only ever saw as a piece of property and a source of energy. Starks' retort is unexpected, both from Bonner and the rest of the community, when he revealed that he 'didn't buy 'im fuh no work. I god, Ah bought dat varmint tuh let 'im rest. You didn't have gumption enough tuh do it'.<sup>410</sup> Here, Starks acts as the saviour of the much-exploited animal, allowing him the freedom to wander as he pleases in his final days. His accusation that Bonner did not have the 'gumption' to release the animal from labour demonstrated that as well as trying to act on his wife's wishes for the mule's welfare, he also sought to enhance his reputation as a man of initiative and resources. As Starks represents a figure who seeks to develop black capitalism, and move away from the agricultural sector, his purchase of the mule to allow it to rest improves the outcome for this individual animal, but it is also

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<sup>408</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid, p. 77.

a means of proving to the community that he has the money to throw away on an animal's leisure, rather than relying on him for survival. Ultimately, it shows that race and economic status moulded the ability of black communities to be animal advocates in the early twentieth century.

### **Animals, Labour And The Land In The Era Of Industrialised Agriculture**

Across the mid-twentieth century, the relationship between labour, the land, race and species shifted dramatically as black Americans left the agricultural South in large numbers for the promise of a better life in urban industrial centres, migrant populations became the dominant agricultural labour force, and draft animals were increasingly replaced by machines to work the land.

In Farah Jasmine Griffin's research on black American migration narratives in literature, she produced a chapter on reasons for leaving the South titled "Boll Weevil in the Cotton/Devil in the White Man".<sup>411</sup> This encapsulated the primary push factors that led to millions of black women and men leaving the land in the South for the Northeast, Midwest and West. The boll weevil, a beetle that feeds on cotton buds, symbolised the perilousness of working in agriculture as a black American in the South. This insect was widely recognised as a 'pest' amongst cotton cultivators, due to the damage it could inflict upon the crop. James C. Giesen, an agricultural and environmental historian of the U.S., explained that 'individual weevils feed on the plant's fibres, lay eggs in its squares, grow in its enclosed buds, and hibernate on the edges of its fields'.<sup>412</sup> Giesen argued that the insect's dependence on the cotton plant was the 'principle reason for the weevil's destructiveness'.<sup>413</sup> As stated previously, black American tenant farmers and sharecroppers were reliant on strong crop yields to pay back debts that they had accrued to white landowners, and so the

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<sup>411</sup> Farah Jasmine Griffin, *Who Set You Flowin? The African-American Migration Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 1.

<sup>412</sup> James C. Giesen, *Boll Weevil Blues: Cotton, Myth and Power in the American South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 5- 6.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

devastation of the cotton crop by insects like the boll weevil could push families and communities deeper into poverty. The capacity of so-called 'pest' animals like the boll weevil to hamper the ability of black farmers to survive on the land in the early-mid twentieth century contributed towards the Great Migration, where millions hoped to find security in industry and other growing areas of the economy. Furthermore, this example highlights that throughout U.S. history, human-animal conflict was racialised: for black Americans encountering the boll weevil, the stakes were higher, as they had little safety net to cushion their fall if crops failed. The second part of Griffin's title, referring to the 'Devil in the White Man' depicts that the overwhelming push factor for black Americans, leaving Southern states, was a desire to escape areas where the legacy of slavery and the preservation of white supremacy was most deeply entrenched. Steven Hahn, a Professor of black politics in slavery and emancipation, noted that black American lives were always 'vulnerable to violence and repression' in the post-Reconstruction South, and that it was 'only necessary to establish relative independence, to stand up to a landlord, to show the signs of literacy, to speak one's mind, or to ignore the local racial etiquette: in short, to behave in any way that could be regarded as nonsubmissive by a white person' to be at risk of violent repercussions.<sup>414</sup> This important point demonstrates that even if the climatic conditions were perfect, and one's fields were free of 'pests', successful black agriculture in the South was always dangerous, because of the threat it posed to white power. If a black family did *too* well at working the land, they were at risk of lynching and the local white perpetrators of vigilante justice. Thus, the combination of pests and poverty, and the foundation of white supremacy on which rural Southern communities were built, illuminates why black Americans left the fields for new, concrete pastures in urban centres in the early and mid-twentieth century.

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<sup>414</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 425.

In the age of flourishing Black Feminist scholarship and activism, and the rise of movements centred around environmental protection and animal rights, the writings of Alice Walker provide significant interventions into conceptualising the relationship between animals and the land, in a context where they were no longer required by communities to labour on the land in large numbers. Ellenberg claimed that mules 'disappeared statistically from the land in 1960 with the bureaucratic decision to no longer count them', illustrating that these working animals were no longer deemed to be of economic or social importance. Paul Conkin, a Professor of agricultural history, argued that it was not until the decades between 1950 and 1970 that technological innovation in agriculture led to the mass displacement of both human and animal labour from the fields of the U.S.<sup>415</sup> As such, black American intellectuals such as Walker had to reconfigure their ideas about animals, labour and the land in an era when the human population increasingly resided and worked in urban rather than rural areas, and animals such as oxen, mules and horses were largely redundant as prime movers in agriculture and transportation, due to the introduction of machinery such as combine harvesters and mechanical cotton pickers, and the increase in automobile ownership.

In an essay delivered as an address in honour of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, titled 'Everything Is A Human Being', in 1983, Walker advanced the argument of sharing the land and co-existing alongside animals, regardless of their value as sources of labour. That this essay was presented as part of a posthumous celebration of King's life and dedication to creating a more just U.S. for oppressed groups is important, as it suggests that Walker sought to incorporate the conservation of animal habitats into the black resistance struggle. Within the essay, Walker linked conservation to anti-racism by arguing that privileging the needs of human beings to settle on and 'develop' land already inhabited by animals echoed

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<sup>415</sup> Paul Conkin, *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture Since 1929* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), p. 101.



the modes of thinking that characterised the colonisation of North America and the massacring and displacement of indigenous American nations. Walker recalled two incidents that epitomised the lack of respect for animals and the environments that they inhabited. In the opening segments of the essay, Walker deployed personification to convey the harms that the logging industry wreaked upon the environment in Northern California. She declared that she entered into an 'intense dialogue' with the trees in a park outside of the city, and lamented that 'there is no longer countryside that is not owned by someone'.<sup>416</sup> This piece is thereby framed through an opposition to the American ideal of property ownership, that a single proprietor should hold land and natural resources.

'Everything Is A Human Being' draws upon an imagined conversation between Walker and the surrounding trees, which appear to have been poisoned by chemical waste, as the ground was 'gray and dead-looking', the branches were bent and the bark covered in a light green fungus.<sup>417</sup> Walker characterised the trees as diseased and deformed, and states that 'these were sick people, or trees; irritable, angry, and growing old in pain'.<sup>418</sup> The use of personification here encouraged Walker's audience to empathise with the trees as living entities, and to suggest that human communities have a moral obligation not to cause them harm. Her observation of the 'pain' of the trees leads Walker to recall the presence of logging trucks in the hills of Northern California, which she describes as a funeral procession. She claimed that every day she saw the loggers' trucks 'like enormous hearses, carrying the battered bodies of the old sisters and brothers, as I thought of them, down to the lumberyards in the valley'.<sup>419</sup> Walker noted that as she looked upon this scene she felt 'mournful but impotent'.<sup>420</sup>

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<sup>416</sup> Alice Walker, 'Everything Is a Human Being', in *Living By The Word: Selected Writings 1973 – 1987* (London: Phoenix, 1988), p. 139 – 152 (p. 140).

<sup>417</sup> Ibid, p. 140- 141.

<sup>418</sup> Ibid, p. 140.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid, p. 141.

The essay features dialogue between Walker and the ailing trees, where they refuse to absolve her of culpability for their destruction, despite her modest use of wood. The trees refuse to listen to Walker and affirm that ‘you butcher us, you burn us, you grow us only to destroy us. Even when we grow ourselves, you kill us, or cut off our limbs. That we are alive and have feelings means nothing to you’.<sup>421</sup> Walker’s depiction of the trees as sentient beings, capable of feeling pain, rendered the actions of cutting, burning, butchering and killing more hideous. Here, the extraction of trees for logging was presented as not just harmful to the human and animal communities reliant upon the ecosystem of which the trees were a part, but to the trees themselves, who could feel pain as humans and animals do. By personifying the trees, she dramatised the act of environmental destruction, and sought to garner empathy from her audience that an act of violence against human communities could provoke. Walker concluded that ‘we are judged by our worst collective behaviour, since it is so vast; not by our singular best. The Earth holds us responsible for our crimes against it, not as individuals, but as a species – this was the message of the trees’.<sup>422</sup> This was an important acknowledgement, as she informed her audience that environmental activists needed to take on large corporations and tackle the systemic willingness to destroy bio diverse tracts of land for human profit, as well as focusing on individual consumption of resources like wood.

In addition, Walker openly reflected on how she enacted speciesism through her belief in the right of humans to dominate the land and the fatal impact this had on the surrounding animal inhabitants. She had recently moved deeper into a rural part of Northern California and was planting a garden for her new cabin. Walker recounted that:

as I was patting the soil around the root of a new tomato plant, I awakened a small garden snake who lived in the tomato bed. Though panicked and not

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid, p. 142.

knowing at the time what kind of snake it was, I tried calmly to direct it out of the garden, now that I, a human being, had arrived to take possession of it. It went. The next day, however, because the tomato bed was its home, the snake came back. Once more I directed it away. The third time it came back, I called a friend – who thought I was badly frightened from my nervous behaviour – and he killed it. It looked very small and harmless, hanging from the end of his hoe.<sup>423</sup>

Through this anecdote, Walker unpacked the absurdity of expecting animals to respect property boundaries, a human construct, when they were not even conscious of them. Her efforts to direct the reptile off the land, and well of panic at encountering such an animal, demonstrate both the vulnerability of humans who work the land to conflict with animals, and also the learned belief that animals such as snakes, who were never valuable to humans for developing the land for their own needs, were constructed as pests to be feared and eradicated. Walker asserted that her identity as a human being, and associated beliefs in human exceptionalism, convinced her that she was justified in putting her own needs, of taking control of the property and converting the land into a garden, before the need of the snake for a habitat. As the snake had likely inhabited this area of land long before Walker had moved onto it, it repeatedly returns to 'her' garden, and shortly afterwards the snake's removal is made permanent. She uses this essay as an opportunity to explore the feelings of guilt experienced as a result of her role in this animal's death. Walker's acknowledgement that the snake appears to be 'small' and 'harmless' once it is hanging lifelessly from the hoe demonstrate that human constructions of the snake work to create and exaggerate fear of particular animals, and encourage destruction. Indeed, she claims that 'everything I was ever taught about snakes – that they are dangerous, frightful, repulsive, sinister – went into the murder of this snake person, who was only, after all, trying to remain in his or her home, perhaps the only home he or she had ever known'.<sup>424</sup> Though Walker recognised that she had played a part in what she characterised as the 'murder' of the snake, which

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<sup>423</sup> Ibid, p. 142 - 143.

<sup>424</sup> Ibid, p. 143.

would suggest some pre-planning on her part and that her friend had not killed the animal impulsively, she also made the important intervention that widely understood constructions of certain animals as threatening pests had contributed to her behaviour, and that speciesist ideas about snakes and other animals needed to be unlearned.

Within this passage, Walker repeated the claim that this area of land was the snake's home, and that it was only after the death of the animal that she realized that the snake had a claim to inhabit the land, just as she did. It is important to note that, at this stage in her life, in the late 1970s, Walker was cultivating a growing reputation as a writer of great talent, with more than one published novel, poetry and short story collections in her repertoire. Her position, as a celebrated literary talent, enabled her to escape the poverty of Eatonton, Georgia that had characterised her childhood, and move to Boonville, California, a region distinguished for countercultural ideals and scenic views that reminded her of home, but did not encapsulate the painful history of segregation that Walker wanted to distance herself from. Evelyn C. White, Walker's biographer, noted that the ranks of black Americans were 'thin in this stretch of Northern California', though the area was not 'completely bereft of black families', and that Walker's observation of a small, black boy in Boonville who 'looked really happy' convinced her that she could make a home in this area.<sup>425</sup> Walker's settlement on the land as a black woman in this region of Northern California made her both exceptional, as property ownership was still out-of-reach to countless black American families in the late 1970s, and also vulnerable to the everyday violence of racism as a minority in a white-dominated community. That Walker had achieved a cornerstone of the American success story, owning your own land, cut off to so many black Americans due to poverty and racist lending policies, made her decision to question the very idea of human beings owning the land, to the detriment of racialised human groups and animal

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<sup>425</sup> Evelyn C. White, p. 311.

inhabitants, even more radical.<sup>426</sup> If you had fought for a hard-won prize, it would be understandable to want to protect the institution of property ownership with all you had, and yet Walker questioned the very idea of the prize.

Walker took inspiration from indigenous American thinkers, such as Black Elk, when exploring the issue of co-existing on the land with other animals. It is clear that when Walker spoke of taking control of the land that the snake inhabited, she viewed herself in this moment as a coloniser. A statement on the continued attempts to colonise and eliminate indigenous American nations by the U.S. federal government follows the passage on the killing of the snake. Walker argued that 'like the little snake in my garden, many of the Indians returned again and again to their ancient homes and hunting grounds, only to be driven off with greater and greater brutality until they were broken or killed'.<sup>427</sup> This comparison is markedly different in scale and experience. Indeed, the killing of the snake was an individual act fuelled by institutionalised speciesism that constructed animals as exploitable and expendable for the benefit of humans, whereas the colonisation of indigenous American nations involved the systematic massacre, forced removal and subjugation of peoples across centuries. Walker advanced an argument that the colonisation of indigenous American nations and the destruction of animals for human settlement were compelled by the same belief that land could be owned and that violence and destruction followed in defence of that ownership. She contested the idea that celebrated figures like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson should be considered the 'fathers of this country', when they had ordered the killing of indigenous Americans and enslaved black Americans.<sup>428</sup> Alternatively, Walker argued that a father figure like Black Elk should be honoured, for his ideas of love, respect, and coexistence, citing his words that 'it is the story of all life that is holy

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<sup>426</sup> Dalton Conley, *Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth and Social Policy in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), p. 31.

<sup>427</sup> Walker, 'Everything Is a Human Being', p. 144.

<sup>428</sup> *Ibid*, p. 144.

and is good to tell, and of us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one Spirit.<sup>429</sup> Within this passage, Black Elk emphasised the connectedness of humans and other mammals, birds and plant life. Shared life amongst different organisms that make up an ecosystem was accentuated, rather than the idea of hierarchy, which suggested that one part of the ecosystem was justified in dominating and destroying the others for their own gain.

Walker concluded 'Everything Is A Human Being' with a demonstration of her personal growth, where she attempted to put her thinking into practice and, in some small way, atone for the death of the snake that she cast out from the land. She observed that:

As I finish writing this, I notice a large spider sleeping underneath my desk. It does not look like me. It is a different size. But that it loves life as I do, I have no doubt. It is something to think about as I study its many strange but oddly beautiful dozen or so legs, its glowing coral-and-amber coloring, its thick web, whose intricate patterns I would never be able to duplicate. Imagine building your house from your own spit!

In its modesty, its fine artistry and self-respecting competency, is it not like some gay, independent person many of us have known?<sup>430</sup>

Within this extract, Walker acknowledged that this living being was 'different' and even strange, but does not allow herself to succumb to fear, instead focusing on the beauty of the spider and the uniqueness of its body and web. Difference and commonality are not placed in tension here, as Walker makes it clear that this creature is so different from human beings, and yet she believed that it loved life, or sought self-preservation, just as humans do. As such, killing this being, regardless of its physiological differences from humans, would be a harm. As she had described the garden as the snake's home, Walker portrayed the intricate web underneath the desk as the spider's 'house', so as to convey to her audience that this creature had put down roots in this location. Tackling her own internalised

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid, p. 145.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid, p. 151.

speciesism, in this scene Walker does not remove the spider or order its destruction and sees that the creature has as much of a claim to be there as she does. Though she lives on the land at this particular locale in Northern California, she recognised that other animals can live alongside her, as long as she learns to respect their space. This demonstrates that black American intellectuals such as Walker advocated for coexistence with animals on the land, in an era where animals previously used for draft, were becoming less relevant to human needs in an industrialised economy. That Walker reflected on sharing the land with snakes and spiders, two creatures commonly perceived as pests in North America, demonstrates that she promoted moving beyond the propensity to view animals as valuable only for their utility to humans, to an awareness that other animals stake a claim to the earth as much as humans do. At this moment in her activism, Walker's ethos was to learn to live alongside other animals compassionately and without fear, rather than to labour alongside specific animals to 'develop' the land for a narrow, unsustainable human gain.

### **Being 'Just As Concerned' About Racialised Labour Exploitation: Educating The Animal Rights Movement On Racial Privilege**

In the late 1980s, Walker made a further interjection into the discussion concerning labour and the land in the U.S., in an interview with Ellen Bring, an adjunct law professor and animal rights activist from Oakland, California, which was published in two publications, *The Animals' Agenda* and *Woman of Power*, where she urged those in the animal rights community to challenge the labour exploitation of migrant workers in California. Expanding upon her involvement in animal advocacy, she informed Bring that:

I'm also just as concerned about the migrant workers who harvest the strawberries I eat. I read an article in the San Francisco Chronicle recently about two of them who are suing the growers they worked for because they were paid \$20 a week for a six-day, twelve-hour-a-day week. They were

housed in a shack with no toilet or bathing facilities, with eighty-nine other people. This is slavery.<sup>431</sup>

It is important that in a white-controlled animal rights publication, Walker espoused and encouraged her readership to take an intersectional approach, one that considered that both animals and human groups could be oppressed. By raising the plight of migrant workers in California, Walker suggested that taking a single-issue approach, of challenging only speciesism, was not an affective way to work towards creating a just society in the late twentieth century U.S. Although those undertaking work to deconstruct speciesism wanted to move away from the idea of the human as the centre of all things, and to highlight the spectrum of ways that animals, historically and contemporarily, were used and abused for the gain of humans, Walker stressed that there was a danger of one's animal activism eclipsing the reality that all humans are not equally allotted power in U.S. society and can be oppressed along several axes of their identity. By focusing on migrant fruit pickers, Walker acknowledged that vegetarian and vegan diets, though free from harm to animals, could be bound up with the exploited labour of racialised human groups. Being 'just as concerned' with the racism that underpinned the agricultural economy in the U.S. as one was about the institutionalised speciesism that the rise of agribusiness was dependent upon, demonstrates that Walker wanted to see an animal advocacy movement intent on fighting more than one oppression simultaneously.

Walker's discussion of the long hours, derisory pay, overcrowding and lack of proper hygiene and sanitation facilities available to workers led her to conclude that the conditions of agricultural work in the 1980s were not all that dissimilar from the conditions of slavery through the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Indeed,

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<sup>431</sup> Ellen Bring, 'Interview with The Animals' Agenda', (1988) Alice Walker Papers, MSS1061, Box 87, Folder 28, P. 8. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.



she claimed that the work that migrant workers undertook were akin to modern-day slavery. Through this statement, Walker urged a readership of animal rights activists that advocating *only* on behalf of animals was not enough, and that the exploitation of minority groups who laboured on the land, to produce crops that they themselves could not afford, must be challenged also. The research of Sandy Brown and Christy Getz documented how primarily Mexican migrant workers in California remained food insecure into the twenty-first century, noting the contradiction across contemporary U.S. agriculture, wherein ‘those who produce our nation’s food are among the most likely to be hungry or food insecure’.<sup>432</sup> They recorded that alongside experiencing food insecurity, the migrant agricultural workforce also experienced ‘poor physical and mental health and lack of access to health care and affordable housing, ... unsafe and debilitating working conditions, pesticide exposure and low annual earnings, long hours and unstable employment’.<sup>433</sup> It is clear that, similar to black American sharecroppers in the early twentieth century, migrant workers in the 1980s who laboured on the land shouldered multiple risks, to their health and finances, whilst reaping little reward.

Through her remarks in the interview with *The Animals’ Agenda*, Walker reminded her readership that labour exploitation still existed within agriculture and that even if animals were not subject to this exploitation, it still mattered to the cause. This was an instance in which Walker tried to educate animal rights activists to make anti-racism an integral part of the movement, as well as anti-speciesism. Walker’s efforts here prefigured contemporary Black Feminist vegan scholars like Amie Breeze Harper, who stressed that ‘one’s sense of “ethical consumption” is

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<sup>432</sup> Sandy Brown and Christy Getz, ‘Farmworker Food Insecurity and the Production of Hunger in California’, in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, ed. by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), pp. 121 - 146 (p. 121).

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123.

contingent upon geopolitical, social and physical position'.<sup>434</sup> Harper drew upon the example of sugar, asserting that 'an indentured black Haitian sugar cane worker in the Dominican Republic will have a different relationship and perception of sugar, than a 'free' white US American vegan that is consuming a vegan product with sugar harvested by the enslaved Dominican'.<sup>435</sup> Harper forced those in the vegan movement to acknowledge the ways that their own diet could be complicit in sustaining oppression, stating that 'although many vegans in the USA believe they are practicing 'cruelty free' consumption by saving the life of a non-human animal by eating vegan chocolate products, those who purchase non-fair trade cocoa products may be causing cruelty to thousands of humans beings'.<sup>436</sup> Walker can be viewed as initiating the conversation about racial privilege within the white-dominated animal rights movement, which scholars like Harper were able to build upon. Walker's short statement about the fruit pickers in *The Animals' Agenda* could easily be glossed over, but it was a moment where a celebrated black woman intellectual encouraged all animal advocates to examine whether the diets that they had considered 'cruelty-free' and ethically sound were rooted in white supremacist labour exploitation, that US agricultural systems wanted to render invisible.

## Conclusions

In conclusion, this chapter has examined how black American writers, from slavery through to the post-Civil Rights era have articulated multiple understandings of the relationships between race, species and labouring on the land. It has shown that black Americans worked alongside animals on plantations during the antebellum period, and became reliant upon animals for their livelihoods as sharecroppers and

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<sup>434</sup> Amie Breeze Harper, 'Race as a "Feeble Matter" in Veganism: Interrogating Whiteness, Geopolitical Privilege, and Consumption Philosophy of "Cruelty Free" Products', *Journal for Critical Animal Studies*, 8 (2010), 5 - 27 (p. 13).

<sup>435</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

tenant farmers, following the failure of Reconstruction and birth of the Jim Crow South.

The writings of Douglass and Hurston do not convey straightforward sympathy for draft animals, but reveal that black American communities experienced a complex web of emotions when labouring with animals such as oxen and mules, from frustration and resentment, to amusement, admiration, empathy and solidarity. It has been argued that racialised poverty and white supremacist violence in the post-Emancipation era raised the stakes of working with animals for black Americans. If draft animals could not or would not labour reliably and productively in black American communities, yields and profits were hampered in economic circumstances that were already difficult. If working animals did not meet their idealised purpose as working machines, then it could breed discontent for black Americans navigating poverty, and lead to neglect and abuse. Nonetheless, figures such as Douglass sought to improve outcomes for working animals and black agriculturalists in the Reconstruction Era, by urging the kind treatment of animals as a vital step in his plan for an independent, prosperous black farming sector. Douglass' encouragement to black farmers to make draft animals a 'four-legged companion' and to banish 'boisterous commands' and 'brutal floggings' from the field, illustrate that black American thinkers such as Douglass perceived animal advocacy as promising a dual function, of bettering the material conditions in which draft animals worked and also improving the efficiency and profitability of black-directed agriculture, and thereby helping to lift black communities out of poverty.<sup>437</sup>

Hurston's explorations of labouring on the land in her collected folktales, plays and most celebrated novel, *Their Eyes*, shone a spotlight on the centrality of labour exploitation in black women's lives in the early twentieth century, using the symbol of the mule, an abused and overworked draft animal, to convey how racism,

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<sup>437</sup> Douglass, 'Address Delivered by Hon. Frederick Douglass, at the Third Annual Fair of the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association', p. 14.

sexism and classism intersected to force black women to shoulder the load of hard work across the private and public spheres. Through the character of the yellow mule, Hurston crafted a literary moment of trans-species solidarity, where Janie recognised that draft animals could be oppressed through labour and stood up in defence of the creature. By observing the animal's circumstances of labour exploitation and violent mistreatment in the community, Janie comes to understand her own situation of oppression, viewed as a source of labour and an object to be owned within her marriages and is stirred to speak out against her subjugators. Advocating for the mule to live a life free from harm enables Janie to find her voice, and challenge the silencing tactics of a white supremacist, patriarchal society, a scene through which Hurston suggests that deconstructing oppression across the constructed borders of species can strengthen social justice for all.

Additionally, by drawing upon Walker's essays and interviews, this chapter has discussed shifting ideas about living on the land with animals, in contexts where agriculture had become largely industrialised in the U.S., where human labour was required on a much smaller scale and draft animals became largely redundant economically. In an age where animals were not useful to humans to 'develop' the land for agriculture, Walker argued that the human populace needed to unlearn ways of thinking that perceived animals as unwelcome intruders on human-owned land. She challenged the 'coloniser' mentality that encouraged humans to destroy animal habitats and animal inhabitants, which mirrored the white settler mind-set when colonising indigenous American nations. Furthermore, Walker undertook considerable labour to educate anti-racist audiences on integrating environmental protection and animal advocacy into their social justice struggle. Moreover, she instructed the readership of a white-led animal rights publication not to be complacent in their belief that a diet free of animal bodies was free of oppression. Her statement on the exploitative labour conditions of migrant fruit pickers conveyed her position that animal advocates should not ignore the continuation of various

forms of human oppression across U.S. society, and that holding concerns for and challenging the exploitation of animals *and* humans simultaneously would create a more just world for all.

## Chapter Four: 'Eating Misery'? Explorations Of Black American Ideas On Consuming Animals As Food

### Introduction

This chapter explores the multitude of ways, along which black American writers have presented the relationships between animals and food, from the mid-nineteenth through the early twenty-first century. I am interested in discussing the ways that animals were viewed by black Americans as competitors for food and as consumable sources of food. Furthermore, I will examine how the construction of hunger by the white power structure in the U.S. limited access to only the least desirable parts of an animal's body for black American populations, which subsequently contributed to an environment where animals were also perceived as weapons used to uphold white supremacy.<sup>438</sup>

In addition, I argue that Frederick Douglass, Dick Gregory and Alice Walker critiqued the consumption of animal bodies as meat and dairy, demonstrating that since the era of slavery black American intellectuals questioned a speciesist worldview that perceived animal bodies only as sources of sensory pleasure and fuel to power human bodies. I foreground black American discussions of the connections between consuming animal bodies and human health, along with debates on the morality of eating animals and the rejection of animal-based diets as part of a larger strategy of non-violence. I will document how black American writers advocated for animals to be included in the creation of a more just society, and how human attitudes towards animals and food systems would need to be transformed to achieve this. Bringing black-authored texts on consuming animals as food to the

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<sup>438</sup> I use the phrase 'construction of hunger' here not to imply that this was an abstract or theoretical concept, as black Americans felt the very real consequences of a lack of food across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Hunger was *constructed* by white populations in the U.S., in the antebellum and post-bellum periods, because they had the power to control how much and which types of food black women and men had access to. Hunger was constructed here because unequal power relations, rather than agricultural deficits, led to inadequate food provision for black American communities.

front and centre of this study not only disproves the assumption that animal advocacy was historically, and remains, a 'white thing', it shows that Douglass, Gregory and Walker saw food as a site where they could practice liberation for all, across species boundaries, improving the lives of black Americans through diet, whilst rejecting the commodification of animal bodies.<sup>439</sup>

Throughout this chapter I draw upon source material ranging from excerpts from slave narratives, to nutritional advice books and letters written specifically as part of animal rights campaigns. The intended audience and primary purpose for which these texts were written vary greatly. I do not seek to suggest that a text such as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published principally to document gender violence experienced by women in slavery, was first and foremost a treatise on the subjugation of animals through the practice of meat-eating. However, slave narratives contain fragments of evidence that can build up a rich picture of the place of animals in plantation societies, and how the entrenchment of racial violence at times generated friction between black Americans and animals, whilst at other times black American resistance created the basis for empathy and solidarity with creatures raised to be eaten.

Moreover, the source material authored by Gregory and Walker, including memoirs, journal entries, essays and dietary guidance books, which contain unambiguous animal advocacy messages are not solely about protecting animals from human consumption, but reveal the multiple ways that the constructions and lived experiences of race and gender inform attitudes towards, and interactions with, animals. Through the centring of a heterogeneous collection of black-authored sources, this chapter showcases that the white supremacy that has pervaded the U.S. in many guises created circumstances in which animal bodies as food were weaponised to malnourish black American populations and were simultaneously fetishised as objects of consumable luxury and status. It recovers how black

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<sup>439</sup> Harper, 'Social Justice Beliefs and Addiction to Uncompassionate Consumption', p. 35.

American resistance to the violence of race relations in the U.S. also created opportunities to unlearn speciesist ideas about animals, which formed the bedrock of oppression for both racialised humans and animals alike.

Whilst earlier chapters have explored the thinking of canonised black American writers like Douglass, Jacobs, Hurston and Walker, in this chapter I introduce and analyse the ideas of the late Dick Gregory, a black American comedian, civil rights supporter and activist, and advocate of plant-based living. I am interested in Gregory's writings for the ways in which he positions his rejection of consuming animals as an outgrowth of his civil rights activism and participation in non-violent resistance, and his documentation of how race and class in the U.S. shaped his consumption habits. In addition, exploring Gregory's written ideas on the politics of eating animal bodies and placing them in conversation with, and contrast to, more celebrated black American writers contributes to the debate over the efficacy of black American literary canons and their role in both celebrating black knowledge and culture but also of limiting what has been seen as suitable material for black writers to approach, and who is classed as a serious writer and thinker.

Gregory's memoirs and nutritional guidance book were written in a humorous style, reflecting his background as a comedian, which render the texts more accessible to a wider audience. That Gregory's arguments about animals often take comedic and unexpected turns does not mean that they should be dismissed as eccentric ramblings, but should be read as an attempt by Gregory to use his art form to capture the attention of his audience on the issue of animal exploitation for food. A debate initiated by black writers in the 1990s is relevant here, which considered how the concept of a 'genius' or an 'intellectual' related to black women and men. bell hooks and Cornel West, affirmed that in the U.S. these concepts were heavily raced and gendered, with hooks noting that when she asked her students to name a black intellectual, 'they most often conjure up male



images'.<sup>440</sup> Moreover, hooks and West outlined that the institutional apparatus usually required to become an 'intellectual' or 'genius' were often out of reach for working class black Americans. West rightly acknowledged that to be considered an intellectual one had to 'dedicate one's life to the activities of reading, writing, and conversing' and that the primary routes to pursuing a 'life of the mind' were the academy, 'or the literate subcultures of art, culture and politics'.<sup>441</sup> West argued that the entrenchment of racism within the academy, which created circumstances where black students were taken less seriously as scholars and intellectuals, combined with the broader current of anti-intellectualism in U.S. society, meant that the pathway for becoming a black intellectual was 'highly problematic'.<sup>442</sup> Along with associations that a 'genius' or intellectual betrayed a certain arrogance of upheld elitism, West argued that a specific distrust of intellectuals existed in black communities, because of the perception that black scholars were attempting to escape their blackness through an education at white-led academic institutions, and also the belief that black intellectual activity was 'impotent' and could not create change for the masses of black Americans. However, hooks articulated that a 'genius' could also signify a person who strongly influences, for good or ill, the character, conduct or destiny of a person, place or thing".<sup>443</sup> It is in this sense of the word 'genius', as a forceful influencer, that Gregory connects to the other celebrated black American writers. Though his texts may never be part of the canon of great works of black American literature, and his writing style diverges from the formality expected of theory, his ideas on the intersections of food, species, race and class were attention grabbing, influential and worthy of further interrogation.

Similarly, scholars have pondered over whether Gregory fitted into the role of activist in the 1960s, primarily because his work as a comedian acted as a master

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<sup>440</sup> bell hooks and Cornel West, *Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life* (Boston: South End Press, 1991), p. 150.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

<sup>443</sup> Ibid, p. 129.

status, one that led others to question his commitment to civil rights activism. Professor Emilie Raymond, a scholar exploring the intersections between Hollywood and politics, argued that whilst Gregory's 'spontaneity and self-described "loud mouth" sometimes led them in unexpected directions', he 'proved an able fundraiser, spokesperson and tactician' for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).<sup>444</sup> Gregory's comedy career began in the late 1950s, starting off in entertainment venues with mostly black audiences like Esquire, in the South Side of Chicago, and later moving on to work at white night clubs 'where the bread is', in order to support his growing family.<sup>445</sup> As he began working in clubs with primarily white patrons, Gregory walked along a tightrope of violent and tense race relations, wherein there were some hecklers who hated him for his blackness and would threaten him with racial slurs, whilst other audience members pitied him and felt discomfort at his situation, which Gregory argued would hurt his chances at gaining repeat custom and making it as a comedian. Recalling one performance at the Playboy Club in Chicago in January 1961, Gregory tackled the issue of segregation directly, using a joke about meat-eating as a means to approach the subject. He told the audience that:

Last time I was down South I walked into this restaurant, and this white waitress came up to me and said: "We don't serve colored people here".

I said: "That's alright, I don't eat colored people. Bring me a whole fried chicken".

About that time these three cousins came in, you know the ones I mean, Klu, Kluck, and Klan, and they say: "Boy, we're givin' you fair warnin'. Anything you do to that chicken, we're gonna do to you." About then the waitress brought me my chicken. "Remember boy, anything you do to that chicken, we're gonna do to you". So, I put down my knife and fork, and I picked up that chicken and I kissed it.<sup>446</sup>

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<sup>444</sup> Emilie Raymond, *Stars for Freedom: Hollywood, Black Celebrities and the Civil Rights Movement* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), p. 144.

<sup>445</sup> Dick Gregory, *Nigger: An Autobiography By Dick Gregory* (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), p. 131.

<sup>446</sup> *Ibid* p. 144.

Gregory claimed that 'the audience fought me with dirty, little, insulting statements, but I was faster and I was funny, and when that room broke it was like the storm was over. They stopped heckling and they listened'.<sup>447</sup> In the context of the growing movement for black freedom, Gregory viewed his comedy performances as a fight with the audience, one in which through the use of quick wit and humour, he could gain the upper hand and secure a platform to talk about racial violence. By telling the waitress that he 'don't eat colored folks', Gregory mocked the language of segregation, in an attempt to highlight the absurdity of a system that allowed black Americans to prepare food for whites, but could not allow a black patron to sit alongside or be served by whites in eating establishments. When Gregory requested that the waitress bring him a fried chicken as an alternative, he played into white racist culinary stereotypes that had linked black Americans to chickens since the nineteenth century and concurrently linked black women and men to criminality and sexual deviancy. Ultimately, the joke was reliant on the expectation from the three KKK brothers, and the audience, that Gregory will cut up and eat the chicken flesh. Knowing that the white men have threatened to inflict the same damage on Gregory that he inflicts upon the body of the chicken, he is placed in considerable jeopardy. The comedic twist occurred when Gregory announced that he dropped his cutlery, and grasped the chicken to kiss it. Through this anecdote, he thereby created the image of the KKK squirming, as they are compelled to kiss a black man if they are to stick to their word. This performance drew upon the discourse of the civil rights movement, by meeting the hate of white supremacists with an act of love and non-violence. Although some might argue that Gregory made light of a violent system that limited the freedom of millions of black Americans in the South, I would suggest that in this instance he encouraged his white audience to think more critically about the system of segregation. He communicated his stance on non-violent action in an entertainment format where he was still vulnerable to

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid, p. 144.

white hate, but less so than in an overtly political arena. Indeed, Jennifer Bloomquist, an Africana Studies scholar, affirmed that since slavery, and with the proliferation of minstrel shows in the 1820s, black Americans and the distortion of black American lives, have been viewed as sources of entertainment for white audiences.<sup>448</sup> As such, Gregory's career in entertainment in the early 1960s was part of a longer history of racism in the U.S. that depicted black Americans as unintelligent buffoons and laughable figures. Nonetheless, Gregory used this accepted platform to challenge institutionalised racism and racial stereotypes, and laugh at the perpetrators, rather than the survivors of oppression. Subsequently, Gregory's work in comedy can be seen as part of his developing anti-racist consciousness, which intermingled with his activist role rather than being entirely separate from it. Considering Gregory's later rejection of animal flesh, his joke about kissing a chicken in front of the KKK should be read as part of his animal advocacy development, wherein practicing non-violence to all beings was a favoured tactic and principle.

### **Weaponised Meat: Using Animal Bodies To Subjugate Black Americans**

Passages within North American slave narratives convey a set of ideas held by enslaved women and men about the place of animals in food production and consumption on plantations. These varied from perceiving certain animals as receiving a preferential quantity and quality of foodstuffs to the enslaved, to recognizing that animals were caught in a system of oppression that profited from converting their bodies into food. Formerly enslaved writers such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Solomon Northup communicated a keen awareness of the ways that animal flesh, and food more generally, was used as a weapon by the white power structure to enforce hunger, dehumanise black Americans and

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<sup>448</sup> Jennifer Bloomquist, 'The Minstrel Legacy: African American English and the Historical Construction of "Black" Identities in Entertainment', *Journal of African American Studies*, 19 (2015) 410 – 425 (p. 411).

construct a racial hierarchy through consumption practices. As Kyla Wazana Tompkins, a Professor of English, Gender and Women's Studies, affirms, 'eating culture... played a significant part in the privilege of whiteness during the nineteenth century'.<sup>449</sup> Furthermore, using food and controlling access to meat remained an instrument for oppressing black Americans long after the institution of slavery was abolished.

Douglass, Northup and Jacobs described how limiting access to meat kept enslaved women and men physically weakened, whilst also reinforcing the racial hierarchy that slavery was dependant on, by providing black Americans with only the cuts of meat from an animal's body that were considered to be the lowest quality. As Nick Fiddes argued, 'those who have enjoyed less control over their own lives... have been denied access to the same quantities of meat as their more powerful peers'.<sup>450</sup> Thus, before meat production became industrialised, to consume the flesh of an animal, or, some parts of an animal, was a signifier of wealth and status. Fiddes purported that 'meat... has long been most highly valued by the wealthy and powerful elites in society, for whom it has served as a means of demonstrating authority'.<sup>451</sup> Laretta Henderson described how the symbolic power of meat intersected with the slave experience, stating that 'pieces of the pig that the white plantation owners did not want – along with cornmeal, were the core of the bondsmen's diet'.<sup>452</sup> White Americans controlled access to meat for black women and men during slavery, determining that the 'leftovers' of the animal's body were suitable for the slave diet.

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<sup>449</sup> Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 2.

<sup>450</sup> Nick Fiddes, 'Social Aspects of Meat Eating', *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*, 53 (1994), 271 – 280 (p. 277).

<sup>451</sup> Fiddes, p. 277.

<sup>452</sup> Laretta Henderson, "'Ebony Jr!' and 'Soul Food': The Construction of Middle-Class African American Identity Through The Use Of Traditional Southern Foodways", *MELUS*, 32 (2007), 81 – 97 (p. 83).

Within *Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl*, Jacobs explained that if the enslaved claimed more than the amount of meat allotted to them by white slaveholders, then they could be punished with death. Jacobs cited the example of Mr. Litch, who owned a large plantation holding approximately six hundred enslaved men and women. She recalled that 'if a slave stole from him even a pound of meat or a peck of corn, if detection followed, he was put in chains and imprisoned, and so kept till his form was attenuated by hunger and suffering'.<sup>453</sup> In another instance, where two slaves 'secured bits of meat and bottles of wine' without the permission of their master, Jacobs described how 'they were summoned by their master. No words were used, but a club felled them to the ground. A rough box was their coffin, and their interment was a dog's burial'.<sup>454</sup> These violent recollections demonstrated that meat was embedded with meaning beyond mere sustenance and energy. Indeed, consuming choice cuts of meat worked to symbolise wealth and power. In the case of Litch's plantation, the rationing of meat for the enslaved was not motivated by a desire to conserve food supplies that were running low, as it is revealed that he was a wealthy man with an ample harvest. Taking and consuming unauthorised cuts of meat was perceived as such a subversive act by the enslaved, because it challenged the power and status of whites. Animal bodies, and who had the right to consume them, therefore become a site over which racial hierarchies were contested.

In Northup's narrative, *Twelve Years a Slave*, he recounted the weekly rations allotted to the enslaved, which were comprised of 'three and a half pounds of bacon, and corn enough to make a peck of meal'.<sup>455</sup> Northup then contrasted the type and preparation of foodstuffs provided to slaves with that provided to farm animals, stating that:

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<sup>453</sup> Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc, 2001 [originally published Boston: 1861]), p. 41.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid*, p. 41.

<sup>455</sup> Solomon Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave: A True Story* (London: Collins Classics, 2014 [originally published New York: 1853]), p. 117.

Master Epps' hogs were fed on shelled corn – it was thrown out to his “niggers” in the ear. The former, he thought, would fatten faster by shelling, and soaking it in the water –the latter, perhaps, if treated in the same manner, might grow too fat to labor.<sup>456</sup>

Here, Northup's description of how corn was thrown out to enslaved men and women, and his reference to the way that corn was shelled and soaked for the hogs illustrates a perception that domesticated animals were treated with more consideration than the enslaved. However, Northup also acknowledged that Epps was a 'shrewd calculator, and knew how to manage his own animals'.<sup>457</sup> Northup thereby recognised that a drive towards efficiency shaped the food sources allotted to enslaved women and men, and domesticated animals. Whilst the proscribed role of the hogs on the plantation was to increase their weight and be converted into food products as soon as possible, black men and women were condemned to a life of involuntary, perpetual labour for white plantation owners. The reference to 'becoming too fat to labor' reveals one of the foundational myths of the slave system, which claimed that black Americans were idle and would only be productive in U.S. society if they were compelled to labour.<sup>458</sup> Although on the surface it appeared that farm animals received higher quality foodstuffs than enslaved inhabitants of the plantation, Northup understood that it was connected to the hog's constructed role to end up on a platter. Northup's envy of the hog's more refined diet faded once he acknowledged that it was only a result of the hog's fate to become food itself. Rather than viewing the farm animals as competitors for resources on the plantation, Northup showed an awareness that the lives of both enslaved women and men, and domesticated animals, were tightly controlled by the white power structure who sought to gain from their bodies, either through their capacity to labour, or through consumption of their flesh to provide the energy for labour.

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>457</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>458</sup> Sarah F. Rose, *No Right to Be Idle: The Invention of Disability, 1840s – 1930s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017), p. 7.

In *My Bondage and My Freedom* Frederick Douglass recounted the hunger that shaped his childhood in slavery, the minimal access to meat afforded to the enslaved, and incidents in which he was forced to have physical struggles with cats and dogs to gain leftover scraps of food. On Col. Lloyd's plantation Douglass recalled that during the summer months, in which the slave-owning family would host guests, 'the air was freighted with the rich fumes of baking, boiling, roasting and broiling'.<sup>459</sup> Douglass noted that although 'the odors I shared with the winds... the meats were under a more stringent monopoly'.<sup>460</sup> The smell of meat cooking on the plantation could not be kept under lock and key, however the opportunity to consume animal flesh reflected the racial hierarchies of slavery. Similar to the allowance provided to the enslaved in Northup's narrative, Douglass recorded that black men and women 'received, as their monthly allowance of food, eight pounds of pickled pork, or their equivalent in fish. The pork was often tainted, and the fish was of the poorest quality... with the pork or fish, they had one bushel of Indian meal – unbolted – of which quite fifteen per cent was fit only to feed pigs'.<sup>461</sup> Little variation, low quality and low quantity were markers of the rations supplied to the enslaved on Lloyd's plantation. That the only animal flesh allotted to black Americans in slavery was often decaying demonstrates the disregard for the health of those living in bondage, but also that meat in this context signified power, and thereby access to it had to be tightly managed. Restricting enslaved black Americans to only the lowest quality cuts of meat was therefore one mode of keeping them physically and symbolically subjugated.

Douglass also cited several examples from his childhood when food, or the lack of food, was used as a weapon and a mechanism of reasserting the racial hierarchy, which was intertwined with animalising discourses about black Americans. Douglass recalled that:

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<sup>459</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 90.

<sup>460</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid, p. 82.



I have often been so pinched with hunger; that I have fought with the dog – “Old Nep” - for the smallest crumbs that fell from the kitchen table, and have been glad when I won a single crumb in the combat. Many times have I followed, with eager step, the waiting-girl when she went out to shake the table-cloth, to get the crumbs and small bones flung out for the cats.<sup>462</sup>

Douglass recorded that certain animals, such as cats and dogs, which were brought into middle-class family homes as domestic pets across the nineteenth century, were considered for leftover food before undernourished men, women, and children.<sup>463</sup> Through this passage Douglass attempted to communicate the argument that within the ‘peculiar institution’ black Americans were treated more unjustly than animals. Struggling with the cat and dog to consume crumbs and small bones highlighted both Douglass’ desperate plight to fend off hunger, and also the indignities that were part of the system of slavery. In a society in which non-human animals were seen as lowly, dispensable and inferior to humans, creating circumstances where an enslaved child was compelled to compete with animals for food was an attempt to send out a message that enslaved black Americans were degraded and reduced to the level of animals. This scene, framed as a battle for sustenance between a pampered pet and an enslaved child, played up to dominant discourses that animalised black Americans, illustrating how racism and speciesism fed off one another.

Encounters with animals on the plantation at times worked to dehumanise black Americans, particularly surrounding access to food. Harriet Jacobs disclosed a scene in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* where an enslaved woman working as a cook on the plantation was forced by her master to consume a meal originally prepared for his dog. Jacobs recorded that:

The cook never sent a dinner to his table without fear and trembling; for if there happened to be a dish not to his liking, he would either order her to be whipped, or compel her to eat every mouthful of it in his presence. The poor,

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<sup>462</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

<sup>463</sup> Katherine C. Grier, ‘Childhood Socialization and Companion Animals: United States, 1820 – 1870’, *Society and Animals*, 71 (1999), 95 – 120 (p. 95).

hungry creature might not have objected to eating it; but she did object to having her master cram it down her throat till she choked.

They had a pet dog, that was a nuisance in the house. The cook was ordered to make some Indian mush for him. He refused to eat, and when his head was held over it, the froth flowed from his mouth into the basin. He died a few minutes after. When Dr. Flint came in, he said the mush had not been well cooked, and that was the reason the animal would not eat it. He sent for the cook, and compelled her to eat it. He said that the woman's stomach was stronger than the dog's; but her sufferings afterwards proved that he was mistaken.<sup>464</sup>

Significantly, racism and speciesism intersected in this incident, as force characterised both the enslaved cook's and the dog's experience of food consumption. The first paragraph revealed how, in spite of some historiographical claims that enslaved women working in the domestic sphere of plantations were protected from the worst abuses of slavery, the cook was significantly at risk of violence because of her close proximity to the slaveholding family.<sup>465</sup> From the perspective of slave-owners, the role of preparing food could be potentially insurrectionary, as those charged with cooking meals had the opportunity to lace food with poison. Flint used violence as a means of subjugating the cook, to cope with his anxieties around the potential for food to be used as a tool of resistance. Tompkins' argument that 'it is exactly as a site of racial anxiety that eating is most productively read' is of note here, as when whites consumed food prepared by enslaved black women, their power was at risk of coming undone, even if only momentarily.<sup>466</sup> However, the cook on Flint's plantation faced a reality of food-related violence, rather than simply a risk, as food was weaponised doubly: through denying food to create hunger; and by using food as an instrument for choking. Within these extracts, Jacobs encapsulated how food was a recurrent site of violence for enslaved black Americans.

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<sup>464</sup> Jacobs, p. 14 – 15.

<sup>465</sup> Clark Hine and Thompson, p. 70.

<sup>466</sup> Tompkins, p. 2.

The passage describing how the enslaved cook was ordered to prepare a meal for Flint's dog highlights the attitudes that some enslaved women and men held about animals, and also about the animalising discourse that formed part of white supremacist knowledge in the mid-late nineteenth century. Jacobs set up her recollection of the dog's death by noting that maintaining the animal inside the house was a 'nuisance'. In a context where black men and women were given minimal resources to survive on the plantation, whilst animals kept as pets resided in the comfort and luxury of the master's 'big house', Jacobs' perception of the dog as a pest and her irritation at having to expend labour on accommodating the animal is not unexpected. Whether the cook poisoned the dog's food as an act of resistance against Flint was left ambiguous. That the cook used Flint's pet as a proxy site of violence is possible, knowing that this dog was already perceived as bothersome to the enslaved. However, considering that the slave master controlled the food supply provided to the cook, it is more likely that Flint was responsible for allotting tainted corn for cooking with, contributing to the dog's death. What is made clear in the passage is that by refusing to eat the food, the dog demonstrated a degree of agency and sensed that the corn was tainted. That Flint then forced the cook to consume a meal that had been fatal for the dog demonstrated both his anger at the loss of a favoured pet, and the depths to which whites stooped to dehumanise the enslaved. By claiming that the cook's stomach was 'stronger than the dog's', Flint drew on dominant racist discourse that presented black women's bodies as closer to animals than white bodies.<sup>467</sup> Moreover, when Jacobs recorded that the enslaved woman's digestive system suffered greatly after consuming the spoiled food, she challenged both the dehumanising behaviour of Flint, and the animalising knowledge that slavery was built upon. Jacobs' account highlighted how the uneven allocation of food resources in favour of domesticated pets and the

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<sup>467</sup> Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African American Ideas About White People, 1830 – 1925* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3 – 4.

requirement of enslaved women to serve particular animals worked to reduce empathies across species boundaries. It also showed that food preparation and consumption was a prime location for the use of racist and speciesist force that sought to control and punish entrapped human and non-human bodies.

Using food as a technology of oppression extended beyond the abolition of slavery. The comedian, civil rights activist, and cookbook author Dick Gregory recalled that during his childhood, growing up on welfare in 1930s St. Louis, going hungry was part of life. Gregory opened his first autobiography by recalling the memory of one extraordinary Christmas when his family had more than enough food to eat, and a surplus of meats on the dinner table. Gregory's joy at not having to go hungry was not a result of the family's economic security, but was dependant on the contributions of neighbours, the charity of whites, and the extension of credit from local shopkeepers. Gregory recounted his mother's orders to:

“Go get the vanilla, Richard” said Momma, “Presley, peel some sweet potatoes. Go get the bread out the oven, Dolores. You get away from that duckling, Garland. Ronald, oh, Ronald, you be good now, stand over there with Pauline. Oh, Richard, my little man, did you see the ham Miz White from the Eat Shop sent by, and the bag of nuts from Mister Myers and the turkey from Miz King”.<sup>468</sup>

Though the donations of food included nuts, bread and sweet potatoes, Gregory focused on the foods that were produced from animal flesh, proudly claiming “hey, Momma, I know some rich people don't got this much, a ham, and a turkey”.<sup>469</sup> Gregory's pride and awe at having more than one type of meat to choose from at Christmas, was linked to the association between animal flesh consumption and wealth and social status. His assertion that on this particular occasion they had more than the rich folks, enabled Gregory to feel powerful and important, if only temporarily. The consumption of various meats: the duckling, the ham, and the turkey, was about more than having a full stomach, though in an environment where

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<sup>468</sup> Dick Gregory, *Nigger: An Autobiography by Dick Gregory* (New York: Pocket Books, 1964), p. 4.

<sup>469</sup> *Ibid*, p 4.

hunger was the norm this alone should not be underestimated. As a child, consuming animals that were usually accessed through wealth enabled Gregory to momentarily feel as though he had scaled the ladder of social status and push aside feelings of shame associated with living through economic deprivation.

The impermanency of feeling both physically satiated and empowered by consuming the gifted meats was revealed when Gregory exclaimed 'Did we eat that night! It seemed like all the days we went without food, no bread for the baloney, and no baloney for the bread... were wiped away'.<sup>470</sup> Though Gregory claimed that the one night when the dinner table was a vision of plenty erased the memories of feeling hungry, the passage conveys quite the opposite. Regardless of the charitable contributions provided to the Gregory family on Christmas Eve, for the other three hundred and sixty four days of the year their food security was precarious. Gregory's family were expected to be grateful for the supposedly generous charity of white families and middle-class black families, rather than agitate for a just society where low-income black Americans experiencing racialised poverty did not have to go without food on a daily basis.

The animals thrown out as bones to Douglass on Lloyd's plantation and those served up as part of Gregory's Christmas feast were done a harm, by having their lives ended to fuel the bodies and satisfy the taste buds of humans. Nonetheless, in the context of slavery, segregation and racialised poverty, where only the parts of animal bodies considered 'waste' products were made available to black Americans, whilst the 'prime' cuts of meat were monopolised by powerful and wealthy whites, being able to make the choice about, access, and consume different animals, and different cuts of animal flesh, became associated with both aspiration and, to a degree, resistance. White supremacy kept black Americans hungry as a tool of oppression. The denial of a source of protein to enslaved and poor black Americans living in the Jim Crow era, and the symbolic power meat consumption

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<sup>470</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

conferred on the eater, created a situation where black Americans craved the thing denied to them, either as a way of proving that they had the wealth/status to access meats, or that they were resisting white control of their diets and their ability to consume animal flesh. In a context in which meat had been weaponised in service of white power, it is not surprising that black Americans took up this weapon in their own resistance battle. Indeed, when responding to a 1969 *TIME* article that dismissed 'soul food' as a 'fad', the black American culinary anthropologist and food writer, Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor, asserted that 'I will stick to the fad that brought my ancestors through four hundred years of oppression'.<sup>471</sup> In defending soul food items, such as chitterlings, made from the small intestines of pigs, Smart-Grosvenor illustrated that enslavement forged a connection between the consumption of throwaway animal flesh, survival, and resistance.

The long history of withholding meat from black Americans illustrates that animal advocacy, and motivations to boycott meat, whether for ethical, environmental or health reasons, were racialised. As Jacqueline Dalziel and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel purported, animal advocacy 'inevitably occurs' within 'racialized terrain'.<sup>472</sup> Across the late nineteenth century, the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, the majority of black Americans, like the majority of white Americans, consumed animal flesh as food, because it was accepted as natural, normal and beneficial.<sup>473</sup> Many black Americans practiced resistance through the celebration of animal-based soul food dishes, which used food as a means of

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<sup>471</sup> Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor cited in Psyche Williams Forson, 'Foreword', in *Vibration Cooking Or, The Travels Of A Geechee Girl* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), pp. xiii - xxxii (p. xxii).

<sup>472</sup> Jacqueline Dalziel and Dinesh Joseph Wadiwel, 'Live Exports, Animal Advocacy, Race and 'Animal Nationalism'', in *Meat Culture*, ed. by Annie Potts (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 73 – 89 (p. 74).

<sup>473</sup> Amie Breeze Harper, 'Social Justice Beliefs and Addiction to Uncompassionate Consumption', in *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health and Society*, ed. by A. Breeze Harper, (New York: Lantern Books, 2010), pp. 20 - 41 (p. 34).

reclaiming a history of black strength and survival through the violence of white supremacy.<sup>474</sup>

In addition to this aspect of food resistance, some black Americans showed moments of unease at the consumption of animal flesh, as seen in slave narratives of the mid-nineteenth century. Black American voices challenging the use of animal bodies as food grew louder and more explicit after the mid-twentieth century, as social movements in the U.S. opposed the structural inequality faced by communities of color, women and LGBTQ+ communities, along with challenging the degradation of the planet. Since the mid-nineteenth century, black American writers and activists have questioned, if not explicitly criticised, the raising of animals for meat consumption. The arguments such writers conveyed for consuming meat ranged from: concern for health stemming from the overconsumption of meat; questioning the right to use beings deemed inferior for human gain; and perceiving animal liberation as part of a wider goal for social justice for all.

### **‘Poison, Not Sustenance’: Ideas On Consuming Animal Flesh And Human Health**

In *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass’ sense of smell stirred in him the desire for meats that were off limits, retained only for the Lloyd family and their guests. However, after describing the vast array of animal bodies festooning the Lloyd’s dinner table, Douglass’ desire for meat seemingly turned into derision for meat consumers. To Douglass, excessive consumption was dangerous. He purported that:

food, to the indolent loungeur, is poison, not sustenance. Lurking beneath all their dishes, are invisible spirits of evil, ready to feed the self-deluded gormandizers with aches, pains, fierce temper, uncontrolled passions,

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<sup>474</sup> Doris Witt, ‘Soul Food: Where the Chitterling Hits the (Primal) Pan’, in *Eating Culture*, ed. by Ron Scapp and Brian Seitz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 258 – 282 (p. 260).

dyspepsia, rheumatism, lumbago and gout; and of these the Lloyd's got their full share.<sup>475</sup>

Though Douglass did not specifically refer to meats within the passage, this discussion was positioned shortly after his remark that the Lloyd's had a 'stringent monopoly' on the consumption of animal bodies.<sup>476</sup> Douglass clearly viewed overconsumption in general to be damaging to health. Nonetheless, the ailments listed point towards excessive meat in the diet as being particularly problematic. The rheumatologists George Nuki and Peter A. Simpkin noted that 'throughout history gout has been associated with rich foods and excessive alcohol consumption', and that purines, found in meat, seafood, and beer predisposed individuals to gout.<sup>477</sup> Thus, it is reasonable to infer that Douglass viewed meat as particularly toxic to human health.

It is also significant that Douglass characterised the toxicity of food according to the activity levels of the consumer. By referring to 'indolent loungers' Douglass underlined the skewed logic of the diet provided to slave-owners and the enslaved. He was aware that eating was partly about the intake of energy to fuel the body. As such, there was an injustice located in the allocation of food on the plantation, as enslaved men and women worked long hours, undertaking hard labour in both the fields and within the domestic sphere, and yet received a fraction of the food consumed by the slaveholding classes, who largely did not perform physical labour. Douglass' discussion of the poisonous relationship between excess consumption, various illnesses and negative behavioural patterns, was a mode of communicating the unfairness at the root of the institution of slavery.

Furthermore, his use of the phrase 'self-deluded gourmandizer' suggests that Douglass believed that powerful whites were in denial that consuming large

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<sup>475</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 90.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90.

<sup>477</sup> George Nuki and Peter A. Simpkin, 'A Concise History of Gout and Hyperuricemia and their Treatment', *Arthritis Research & Therapy*, 8 (2006), 1 – 5 (p. 2).



quantities of meat, and other rich foods, could negatively impact upon their health, through ailments such as pain and inflammation in the back and joints, and gastroesophageal problems.<sup>478</sup> By referring to lumbago, rheumatism, and gout, Douglass evoked the image of the body buckling under excess weight. Douglass also utilised the motif of buckling under weight at the opening of the chapter that described the diet of slave owners, when he claimed that ‘the table groans under the heavy and blood-bought luxuries gathered with painstaking care, at home and abroad’.<sup>479</sup> The use of personification here, to show the dinner table moaning in agony whilst holding the glut of the latest feast served to the Lloyd’s, and references to ‘blood’ and ‘painstaking care’, conveyed Douglass’ argument that wealthy whites were only able to consume excessively because of the violence done to enslaved and colonised peoples in the U.S. and globally. Thus, Douglass seemingly made a two-pronged argument, that the overconsumption of meat, and other foodstuffs, was damaging to the health of the enslaved, who were denied their fair share of foodstuffs whilst undertaking uncompensated labour to generate white wealth to afford gastronomic luxuries, and also that excess would bring about the demise of whites when they succumbed to diet-related ailments. Though Douglass did not overtly articulate a position stating that animal flesh should not be consumed on health grounds, he did contribute to a conversation that questioned whether eating a heavily meat-based diet could produce negative health outcomes.

Over a century later, Dick Gregory put forward a similar argument in *Dick Gregory’s Natural Diet for Folks Who Eat: Cookin’ With Mother Nature* (hereafter referred to as *Cookin’ With Mother Nature*), claiming that excessive consumption was harmful to human health. Making connections between diet and health, Gregory stated that ‘eat bad enough, long enough, and Mother Nature will send you little notes of reprimand – tooth decay, high blood pressure, heart trouble, kidney

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<sup>478</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 90.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid*, p. 87.

trouble'.<sup>480</sup> Like Douglass' argument, Gregory purported that it was overconsumption in general that produced ill health. For example, references to tooth decay and kidney problems illustrated his perception that consuming an excess of sugar and alcohol were part of 'eat[ing] bad'. Gregory's allusions to high blood pressure and heart trouble are suggestive of his criticisms of the overconsumption of meat, and his belief that a diet lacking in fruit and vegetables could produce strain on the body. Like Douglass' 'invisible spirits of evil', Gregory argued that there was a spiritual element to ailments of the body.<sup>481</sup> The notes of reprimand sent by Mother Nature and the use of the phrase 'eat bad' infer that Gregory believed that there was a morality to eating, and that if one did not follow this code then punishment in the form of illness would follow. Use of such language implied that, in the post-Civil Rights era when Gregory published the text, all Americans had a choice in the food that they accessed and consumed. However, income, time, geographical location, and cultural heritage all shaped the types of food that black Americans were able to access in this era. Though Gregory critiqued the practice of food shaming within alternative diet cultures in the U.S., his use of moralising language that implied that food could be easily categorised as 'good' or 'bad' fell within the remit of the practice he sought to challenge. His conviction that fruit-based diets were morally aspirational and beneficial to human health led him to, at times, partake in shaming those black Americans who did not follow such dietary practices. This reflects Dalziel and Wadiwel's argument that campaigning for animal advocacy, and urging changes to diet linked to animal advocacy, had the potential to 'simultaneously enact forms of violence and marginalization, particularly against racialized humans'.<sup>482</sup>

Though Gregory claimed that there were 'good' and 'bad' ways to eat, he argued that the adoption of a diet centred around fruits and the rejection of animal

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<sup>480</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 6.

<sup>481</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 90.

<sup>482</sup> Dalziel and Wadiwel, p. 74.

flesh and animal by-products, involved shaming prior eating habits. Noting the time when he became familiar with black American nutritionist, Dr. Alvenia M. Fulton, who later went on to act as an editor for *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, Gregory described the emotions that being given dietary advice brought to the surface, and how it prompted him to defend his mother's efforts to provide sustenance. He asserted that:

I just couldn't believe my momma would have fed me meat if it was wrong, or given me cow's milk if it was wrong. And here was a stranger, a woman I had just met, telling me that my own momma had fed me wrong! My momma never had the benefit of learning the Truth about proper diet, and as a result she suffered many of the physical results of improper eating habits. We were very poor and my momma's main concern was that we kids got "somethin' to eat".<sup>483</sup>

Here, Gregory's repetition of the term 'wrong' and the dichotomy between 'proper' and 'improper' eating habits, demonstrates Psyche Williams-Forsson's argument that food has historically acted as, and still remains, a moral litmus test.<sup>484</sup> Gregory accepted that there was one 'Truth' about the correct way to eat that was universally applicable. Clovis A. Semmes, a Professor of Black Studies, characterised Gregory as an 'entrepreneur of health' and noted that across the 1960s and 1970s 'activists viewed diet as the key to health, and living right – especially as God wanted you to – meant eating right'.<sup>485</sup> In the context of white supremacy, rooted in the control and destruction of black bodies, it is understandable that activists like Gregory wanted community health, rooted in a nutritious diet, to be a central part of black resistance. However, creating binaries between good and bad food ran the risk of further marginalising groups who did not have the resources to follow his dietary guidance.

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<sup>483</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 5.

<sup>484</sup> Psyche Williams Forson, 'Eating While Black: A Case Study on Food Shaming and Policing', *Clarke Forum for Contemporary Issues*, <<https://stream.dickinson.edu/app/portal/video.aspx?PortalID=77f5bc46-43b5-4810-a77b-904f339e7bde&DestinationID=438e8fa2-dddf-4a10-b267-c4eed8d739b&IsLivePreview=False&ContentID=SVVMMR53LUS5ZloB47luqq>> [accessed on 4 July 2017].

<sup>485</sup> Clovis E. Semmes, 'Entrepreneur of Health: Dick Gregory, Black Consciousness, and the Human Potential Movement', *Journal of African American Studies*, 16 (2012), 537 – 549 (p. 538).

Simultaneously, Gregory articulated that guidance on alternative diets often stigmatised families on low incomes. By asserting that putting *any* food on the table was a struggle for families living through racialised poverty, Gregory made the significant point that for those groups who were oppressed through systematic hunger, the nutritional value or the ethical production of foodstuffs was not a priority. His statement reveals a sense of shock that a stranger had the audacity to propose that his mother had failed her children by choosing the wrong foods to satiate them. This underlines the wider association of food with family and identity, and also that the preaching tone of some alternative food movements overlooked how access to food has been shaped by race and class in the U.S. Though Alvenia M. Fulton was a black American nutritionist, Gregory's initial reaction to her dietary guidance echoes Amie Breeze Harper's argument that white discourse around food, health and eating animals was 'usually lost in an oppressive tone that reminded me of another form of trying to colonize people of color to live in the way white class-privileged people deemed as civilized and healthy'.<sup>486</sup> Without accepting that the structures of slavery, segregation, and poverty have weaponised food for black Americans, and that white race and class privilege enabled the construction of knowledge on healthy and ethical food choices, advocating for a reduction in meat and dairy products in a diet can be perceived as another mode of oppression, rather than as part of a broader-based platform for liberation for all, human and non-human. Julie Guthman's argument is useful here, if fresh, local, and organic food is substituted for vegetarian and vegan foods: 'in assuming the universal goodness of fresh, local, and organic food, those who value this food ask those who appear to reject this food to either be subject to conversion efforts or simply be deemed as other'.<sup>487</sup> Gregory underlined that in his transition to a vegetarian diet, and later an

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<sup>486</sup> Harper, 'Social Justice Beliefs and Addiction to Uncompassionate Consumption', p. 35.

<sup>487</sup> Julie Guthman, "'If Only They Knew': The Unbearable Whiteness of Alternative Food', in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*, ed. by Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011), pp. 263 - 283 (p. 271).

entirely fruit-based diet, he initially resisted conversion efforts, which he viewed as part of a system of white supremacy that sought to dictate how black Americans should live their lives, including what they should or should not eat.

Although Douglass and Gregory conveyed similar beliefs in the human health implications of consuming an 'excess' of meat, the disparate contexts in which they produced their ideas gave their arguments different meanings. Douglass' claim that excessive food, and the glut of animal bodies that epitomised the overabundance of white slaveholding dinner tables, was 'poison' rather than 'sustenance' should be viewed in the context of his work to abolish slavery, and to communicate his own arguments to bring down the institution, rather than act as a prop for white abolitionists. The publication of *My Bondage and My Freedom* in 1855, primarily to attest to Northern white audiences that slavery was a moral abomination, clarifies why Douglass chose to deploy an argument centred on excess and health. By listing the health ailments experienced by the Lloyd family, Douglass argued that consuming an excess of animal flesh, which the skewed power relations of slavery enabled, was dangerous to white bodies as well as black bodies. He thereby used food and consumption as a site to fashion an argument that the white supremacy that underlay slavery was damaging to all. Douglass used his ideas about animals and food, and the concentration of power in white hands to over consume, to infer that racial inequality led white Americans to lose all restraint in their consumption habits, and that this had damaging health implications for the white populace. Ultimately, Douglass drew upon his observation of the frequent consumption of meat by the slaveholding classes to compel Northern white audiences to support abolition on the grounds of self-interest, whereby the unfettered power to consume was dangerous for whites in the long-term. His discussion of eating animals was part of his multi-pronged approach to convincing a white audience that slavery was harmful to both the enslaved and the enslavers,

and that the power imbalance embedded within this institution needed to be addressed immediately.

Gregory's arguments against eating meat and animal-derived products, for reasons of protecting human health, were crafted in the midst of the Civil Rights, Black Power and anti-war activism of the 1960s, and, as such, *Cookin' With Mother Nature* explores issues of racism, poverty and colonialism. The text was written and published primarily to engage people to consume a diet rooted in fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, and to assist those who, as Gregory argued, wanted to practice the 'self-control' to live off the bounty of 'Mother Nature'.<sup>488</sup> However, he contended that his dietary guidance would be most useful to those living on the brink of, or in, poverty, due to the U.S. healthcare system. He articulated that if any group were to eat the 'wrong' kind of foods, it should be the wealthy, 'because they can afford the medical expenses which are sure to follow bad eating'.<sup>489</sup> Thus, he encouraged 'poor folks' to follow a natural diet, which included the rejection of 'meat, milk and eggs', for reasons of economic necessity, as he believed that his dietary guidance could protect human health, which resulted in 'no doctor bills'.<sup>490</sup> Gregory's thinking around health and the rejection of animal flesh were intertwined with wider ideas about gender, the environment and self-mastery, and were rooted in the political circumstances of the mid-twentieth century U.S., where access to health care was predicated on the possession of private health insurance. Gregory argued that eating habits in the U.S. were sharply divided along the lines of class, claiming that:

The rich eat well (as society defines this) and the poor eat poorly. Rich carnivores can afford the choicest, freshest meats. They can afford the luxury of garden-fresh vegetables and orchard-fresh fruits. Many rich folks have their own gardens and orchards. It is also interesting to note that the homes of the wealthiest families have a tendency to be located in truck farming areas, giving the rich immediate access to freshly grown and freshly cultivated crops.

Poor folks, on the other hand, take their food stamps or their meagre earnings to the supermarket. They buy canned foods, frozen foods, TV dinners, white

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<sup>488</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 6.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

bread, pastries and all other kinds of commercially processed junk. The meats, vegetables and fruits in the supermarkets in poor communities are always of the lowest quality and are sold at the highest prices! The result is that poor folks pay more to eat their way into even greater expenses.

Within this passage, Gregory highlighted that food consumption was shaped by class position, which determined disposable income and neighbourhood facilities. His conception of *good* food was centred on freshness and he noted that this was tied to wealth and land ownership. He claimed that living within truck farming areas, known also as market gardens where fruit, vegetables and flowers were grown on a relatively small scale, to be sold directly to consumers and businesses, was largely restricted to those who were affluent and that such people benefitted from a shorter lapse of time between when the crop was grown or the animal slaughtered and when the food item was consumed. Conversely, Gregory noted that people living in poverty, both those entitled to federal assistance and those experiencing in-work poverty, were more likely to consume highly processed, lower quality foods from supermarkets at marked up prices.

Gregory foreshadowed more recent scholarship on food deserts, which the American Nutrition Association defines as ‘parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and healthy food providers’.<sup>491</sup> Jarrett Thibodeaux’s research evidenced that in the twenty-first century U.S., access to food remains shaped by class and race, as ‘supermarkets are less common in areas with higher rates of poverty and a higher proportion of African Americans’.<sup>492</sup> Gregory’s arguments challenging the consumption of animal bodies as meat, in *Cookin’ With Mother Nature*, were thereby part of a wider conversation about racial injustice within food systems.

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<sup>491</sup> ‘USDA Defines Food Deserts’, *American Nutrition Association*, (2010) <<http://americannutritionassociation.org/newsletter/usda-defines-food-deserts>> [accessed 5th June 2018].

<sup>492</sup> Jarrett Thibodeaux, ‘City Racial Composition as a Predictor of African American Food Deserts’, *Urban Studies*, 53 (2016), 2238 – 2252 (p. 2239).

Though Gregory asserted that impoverished communities ‘did not realize it is cheaper to feed those families correctly than it is to purchase the junk diet’, he also stressed that ‘mothers and fathers in poor communities work so hard to earn money to feed their families’ and that they ‘have such a difficult time making ends meet’.<sup>493</sup> His suggestion that low income communities ‘did not realize’ the economic gains to be garnered from a meat-free diet imply that it was a lack of knowledge and a lack of self-will that led to the overconsumption of ‘junk’ foods, rather than a lack of access to fresh foods, as he had more radically outlined in the previous paragraph. Although fruit and vegetables may have been less expensive per individual item than meat, milk and eggs, if poor families did not live near to a grocery store or supermarket that stocked fresh produce, then they were cut off from accessing such food items without incurring unaffordable transport costs and loss to time. Thus, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, whilst Gregory wanted to make the consumption of a fruit-based diet sound easy for low-income black Americans, in an attempt to improve health outcomes, the reality of continued de facto residential segregation and cycles of poverty meant that there were significant barriers to following a vegetarian or vegan diet in such communities.

To conclude, Douglass and Gregory formulated arguments that claimed that overconsumption in general was damaging to human health, whilst implying that eating an excess of meat, along with sugar and alcohol, would result in an abundance of bodily ailments. Douglass’ critique of the plenty of the slaveholder diet conveyed that overeating would be punished through ill health and urged his readers to acknowledge that the plenty of white planters was dependent on the blood, sweat and tears of enslaved labourers and colonised peoples globally, whose health had already been compromised through slavery and deprivation. Gregory probed the stigmatising language of nutritional guidance, however he also reinforced the idea that there was a ‘truth’ to eating ‘good’ or eating properly. Both

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<sup>493</sup> Gregory, *Cookin’ With Mother Nature*, p. 29.



writers questioned the benefits of consuming animal flesh, especially in excess, constructing their own knowledge about which foods were nurturing or damaging to human health.

### **The Ethics of Consuming Animal Bodies**

Alongside Gregory's conviction that consuming animal flesh was dangerous to human health, and thereby detrimental to the struggle for black freedom in the U.S., he articulated that using animals as food was morally questionable. Gregory revealed that on one Thanksgiving he began to question the ethics of meat consumption, stating that he 'started thinking about whether or not it was right to eat meat'.<sup>494</sup> Gregory centred his ethical opposition to eating animals on the notion that human beings should not be entitled to use other beings for their own purposes because they view them as less intelligent, and therefore as inferior. He disclosed that:

By the time I was standing at the head of the table with my carving knife, I suddenly had the strangest thoughts. I got to thinking that there might be some beings on another planet somewhere who are as intelligent compared with us as we are compared with turkeys. Now that's a disturbing thought! I could just see myself in some strange planetary oven, being basted and roasted...I even thought about myself lying on a platter all filled with stuffing.

Then I had visions of these beings from another planet going to the butcher shop with their meat list. I wonder what they'd call their butcher shops? They'd probably call them "folk shops". I could hear them placing an order "Give me a half dozen Oriental knees, two Caucasian feet and twelve fresh black lips". And the folk-shopkeeper comes back smiling and says, "These black lips are so fresh they're still talkin'". After that little fantasy, I couldn't eat my Thanksgiving dinner. But it started me thinking.<sup>495</sup>

Gregory accepted that turkeys were less intelligent than human beings, rather than possessing different forms of intelligence. However, he challenged whether this was a justifiable basis on which to use a being for human gains. He conveyed this argument by interrogating whether human beings were separate from, and superior

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<sup>494</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 2.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

to, all other beings in the universe. By invoking an imagined species that possessed superior mental faculties to humans, who saw fit to consume humans as food, Gregory encouraged his readership to envisage a scenario where humans were subjected to the same violent procedures that convert animals into food.

Gregory asked his audience to visualise humans in the place of animals in food production and consumption systems. By flipping reality, and conjuring a scene where humans become the consumed, rather than the consumers, Gregory unsettled the act of turkey-eating, which was part of the ritual of Thanksgiving. For Gregory, imagining his own body being cooked in an oven, stuffed with herbs, and served on a platter was disturbing enough to put him off consuming animal flesh at the dinner table. In a comedic style, Gregory advanced a serious philosophical argument, that animals possessed intrinsic value, regardless of human perceptions of their intelligence or their usefulness to humans for generating a source of protein and taste-based pleasure.

In the imagined 'folk shop' scene, Gregory reduced racial groups to white constructed stereotypes. By referring to 'Oriental knees' as a cut of meat that would be sold in human butcher shops in this alternate universe, Gregory drew on the negative representation of Asian Americans as subservient, and thus bent on one's knees in a servile position.<sup>496</sup> He also reduced black Americans to their lips; a body part exaggerated through minstrelsy and a reference to the stereotyping of black Americans as loud, which sought to silence black women and men.<sup>497</sup> It is noteworthy that the cuts of meat served up in the greatest number in this scene were taken from black American bodies. Gregory asserted that were humans ever to be on the menu, in a society built upon racial violence, black bodies were likely to be offered up first. As *Cookin' With Mother Nature* was primarily aimed at a black

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<sup>496</sup> Chyng Sun and others, 'Shifting Receptions: Asian American Stereotypes and the Exploration of Comprehensive Media Literacy', *The Communications Review*, 18 (2015), 294 – 314 (p. 297).

<sup>497</sup> Malte Hinrichsen, *Racist Trademarks: Slavery, Orient, Colonialism and Commodity Culture* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2012), p. 30.

American audience, Gregory explored what a society would look like if a willingness to eat a particular type of flesh was predicated upon race rather than species. Recent scholarship by Vincent Woodard emphasised the historiographical reluctance to acknowledge that ‘practices of human consumption’ and ‘the cannibalizing of black Americans’ was part of life on some Southern plantations in the U.S.<sup>498</sup> Thus, although Gregory presented a dystopian vision of racialised human butcher shops to push his audience to question their consumption of animals as meat, he actually drew upon a long, violent history where the consumption of black bodies as food was not simply an imagined nightmarish vision, but an alarming reality of a system of oppression.

Gregory also utilised the strategy of role reversal to further an animal liberation agenda, when discussing perceptions of a Christian God, and how this shaped attitudes towards consuming animals. He used humour as the medium to convey that the belief in a human, elderly, white, male deity invigorated the acceptance of human exceptionalism and justified the use of animals for human ends. Gregory recalled that:

Every time I pass Colonel Sanders’ Kentucky Fried Chicken stand, I have the same thought. Wouldn’t it be wild if Colonel Sanders got to heaven one day and found out God was a chicken? If that ever happens, I sure hope I’m standing there right behind the Colonel. I’d whisper in his ear, “Go on and tell Chicken Big he’s “finger-lickin’ good”.

In this scene, Gregory imagined the founder and brand ambassador, Harland David Sanders, of the fast-food chain Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC), regretting his role in running a business built upon the mass-scale rearing and slaughter of chickens, destined to end up in buckets in his food stands and restaurants. Once Sanders comes face to face with God, who will determine whether Sanders gains entrance to heaven, it is revealed that God takes the form of a chicken, rather than a human form. Gregory took aim at the KFC slogan, the claim that their chicken was ‘finger-

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<sup>498</sup> Vincent Woodard, *The Delectable Negro: Human Consumption and Homoeroticism Within US Slave Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2014), p. 5 and p. 7.

lickin' good', which was popularised in the 1950s, by arguing that Sanders would not want to reduce the value of a live animal to its deliciousness on the human palate, if an all-knowing deity were to take this same animal form.<sup>499</sup> Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey, a theologian and prominent figure in the Christian vegetarian movement in the United Kingdom, asserted that in traditional interpretations of Christian doctrine it is 'assumed that God is not very much interested in anything else but the human species within the world he has made'.<sup>500</sup> Through his 'God-is-a-chicken' skit, Gregory questioned the material ramifications of human-centric Christianity for animals in U.S. food systems.

Furthermore, within this passage Gregory employed the format of black American folktales, where power structures were flipped and the less powerful figures emerged triumphant. Though the chicken in this tale was initially constructed as weak and disadvantaged, inferior and consumable, in the afterlife the chicken emerges triumphant, all-powerful, and able to inflict retribution onto man for crimes against chickens. Following the format of the trickster tale, the broiler chicken gets the last laugh, and Colonel Sanders stands waiting for judgement. Gregory therefore drew upon the black American oral tradition to resist speciesism in this instance. Through this subversive scene Gregory shifted the representations of humans and animals, and asked what role religion had in assigning a lowly status to animals and the simultaneous readiness of humans to consume animal bodies.

### **Challenging Violence Across Species Boundaries**

Aside from linking animal consumption to dangers to human health, and challenging the basis of inferiority in which meat production is rooted, black American activists and writers also opposed the violence implicated in rearing animals for slaughter, and in the act of killing itself, which they saw as an extension of their commitment to

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<sup>499</sup> John Morrish, 'Slogan Doctor: KFC: 'Finger Lickin' Good', *Management Today*, (2009), pp. 1 - 14 (p. 1).

<sup>500</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 22.

non-violence, a key principle and tactic of the twentieth century Civil Rights Movement. For some black American women and men, their involvement in anti-racist and feminist work led them to interrogate their relationship with non-human animals, due to the belief that speciesism was rooted in overlapping mechanisms of control and violence to those that maintained white supremacy.

Douglass, who experienced first-hand the violence of slavery and dedicated his life after self-emancipation to abolishing the institution and creating a more just future for freed people of color, disclosed moments of unease at the plight of food animals living on U.S. plantations. Douglass did not abstain from eating meat, as enslaved men and women required every source of protein allotted to them to fuel their uncompensated labour. However, he showed flashes of empathy, and identification with, animals who were passing through food production systems on the plantation. Illuminating the excessive consumption of the Lloyd family, Douglass reeled off the long list of animal and bird species that festooned the slave-owning dinner table. He claimed that in the 'great house' 'appetite, not food, is the great desideratum', noting that for the Lloyds, eating was not about consuming foods necessary to sustain life, but about satisfying wants and desires.<sup>501</sup> Douglass recorded that:

Fish, flesh and fowl are here in profusion. Chickens, of all breeds; ducks, of all kinds, wild and tame, the common, and the huge Muscovite; Guinea fowls, turkeys, geese, and pea fowls, are in their several pens, fat and fattening for the destined vortex. The graceful swan, the mongrels, the black-necked wild goose; partridges, quails, pheasants and pigeons; choice water fowl, with all their strange varieties, are caught in this huge family net. Beef, veal, mutton and venison, of the most select kinds and quality, roll bounteously to this grand consumer. The teeming riches of the Chesapeake Bay, its rock, perch, drums, crocus, trout, oysters, crabs, and terrapin, are drawn hither to adorn the glittering table of the great house. The dairy, too, probably the finest on the Eastern Shore of Maryland – supplied by cattle of the best English stock, imported for the purpose, pours its rich donations of fragrant cheese, golden butter, and delicious cream, to heighten the attraction of the gorgeous, unending round of feasting.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 88.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid*, p. 88.

The most striking part of this extract is the sheer volume of fish, mammals, and birds that make their way onto the Lloyd's dining table, as Douglass sought to convey the extravagance of the slave-owning classes, and how this luxury was dependant on the back-breaking labour of the enslaved. However, several phrases indicate that Douglass perceived that control and confinement characterised the experience of food animals on this plantation, and that the destinies of these living creatures were in the hands of wealthy, white humans. When Douglass referred to the numerous breeds of bird, he argued that they were 'fattening for the destined vortex' in their respective pens. Douglass highlighted the role of these creatures to increase their body mass until they were seen as suitable for consumption, in a confined space. In addition, his use of the term vortex to describe the mouth, conjured images of a loss of control and a powerful, swirling force that pulls life under. As he continued to list the birds raised to satisfy the Lloyd family appetite, Douglass described these creatures as 'caught in this huge family net', supporting the view that he perceived that entrapment was a part of the experience of food animals on the plantation and that the agency of animals was limited.

Furthermore, when Douglass described the contents of the dairy on the Lloyd's plantation, he noted that the cattle was 'of the best English stock, imported for the purpose' of providing 'rich donations of fragrant cheese, golden butter, and delicious cream'.<sup>503</sup> In the context of slavery, when black bodies were held as property, to be inspected for qualities set by the white power structure, using terms such as 'stock' and 'imported' was not neutral, indeed it was the language of the enslavers. Through his use of imagery such as nets and vortexes, and drawing on terminology that referenced the mechanisms of Atlantic slavery, Douglass implied a link between the modes of control used to oppress animals in food production and those that white Americans used to exploit and terrorise enslaved black Americans. Thus, although Douglass did not overtly condemn the violence implicit in turning

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

animals into foodstuffs, he communicated a sense of unease with the raising of a plethora of mammals, fish, and birds for the slave-owning classes, and suggested a likeness in the entrapment that black Americans and food animals faced respectively. Douglass' discomfort with the conditions that some animals were held in, on the plantation, was therefore shaped by his own experience of violent enslavement, as he showed empathy towards beings whose sole constructed purpose was to satiate the white power structure.

In the 1960s and 70s, as social movements and the use of direct action tactics proliferated across the U.S., black American intellectuals and activists expressed opposition to the eating of animals, which was rooted in a commitment to non-violence and liberation for all, including humans *and* animals.

Although white-led organisations such as PETA have in recent decades drawn upon the language of Civil Rights to communicate arguments for animal advocacy, the limited scholarly literature that exists on the Civil Rights Movement, non-violence and attitudes towards non-human animals illuminates that practicing non-violence in the struggle for black freedom did not neatly translate into opposition to the consumption of animals for food. On PETA's website, sound bites from the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. have been repurposed for an animal advocacy agenda, where quotes such as 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere' and 'in the end we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends' were overlaid onto images of animal suffering in factory farms, slaughterhouses and entertainment parks where animals are held in captivity.<sup>504</sup> The use of King's words for numerous social justice causes, in this case to challenge institutionalised violence towards animals, erases the historical specificity of his arguments in his open letter from Birmingham Jail in 1963 and The Trumpet of Conscience lecture series in 1967. By using King's words in this way, PETA implied

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<sup>504</sup> 'Martin Luther King Jr. and Animal Rights', *PETA*, <<https://www.peta.org/features/martin-luther-king-jr-animal-rights/>> [accessed 11<sup>th</sup> June 2018].

that his ideas on loudly voicing opposition to oppression were formulated for the issue of animal rights, which consequently diverts attention from King's commitment to dismantling white supremacy, economic inequality and challenging the war in Vietnam. Recovering overlooked ideas that black American intellectuals and activists expressed around the connections of non-violence, black freedom and the use of animals as food is different from repurposing words that were specifically written to dismantle the system of racism in the U.S. for an animal advocacy agenda. The anti-speciesist ideas of figures like Gregory and Walker matter, but recovering black American ideas on animals and food systems in the U.S. should not digress into claiming anti-racist discourse for an anti-speciesist agenda.

Though an organisation such as PETA may want to claim an icon like King as an animal advocate, the key to recovering a black American tradition of animal advocacy is the acknowledgement that the relationship between advancing racial justice and speaking out against the exploitation of animals as food is complicated, and that at times, consuming animals aided the survival of black communities, which was a form of resistance in a white supremacist society. In Robin D.G. Kelley's celebrated text, *Race Rebels*, in which he interrogates histories of working class black Americans, he notes that the text is not concerned with presenting readers with 'romantic stories of triumph', but that the chapters 'try to make sense of people where they are rather than where we would like them to be'.<sup>505</sup> This approach is helpful to an understanding of the broader landscape of Civil Rights and food consumption, and to the complexities and contradictions expressed in the ideas of Gregory and Walker. It compels readers to understand the importance of Civil Rights discourse on animals and food, whether that discourse was pro-animal or fed into the maintenance of speciesism, for the context in which they were produced,

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<sup>505</sup> Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), p. 13.



rather than twisting words to fit a neat, animal advocacy narrative that downplays the everyday constraints and violence that white supremacy imposed on black lives.

The research of Monica M. White, a scholar of environmental justice and grassroots food organisations, illustrated that in the late 1960s animal bodies played a role in the resistance strategies of Civil Rights organisers, enabling hungry populations to carve out independent food systems. Although the advertising materials of organisations such as PETA encourage the belief that strong overlaps existed between the movements for Civil Rights and those for animal rights, White's study demonstrates that the forces of white supremacy complicated the capacity and desire to advocate on behalf of animals whilst simultaneously fighting for your own life. Her research focuses on the work of Fannie Lou Hamer and other activists based in Ruleville, Mississippi to found and run the Freedom Farms Cooperative (FFC) in 1967. White detailed how the raising of animals as livestock as part of the FFC formed a central part of generating sufficient food resources for the local community, and, in turn, enabled black men and women to register to vote, without fearing that they would starve at the hands of local white landowners. She argued that 'white elites used hunger as a weapon, starving anyone who sought the right to participate in the political process into compliance'.<sup>506</sup> As such, the combination of growing subsistence crops to live off, cash crops to sell to cover the mortgage on the land, and the raising and breeding of pigs for food, was a significant resistance effort on the part of Sunflower County activists, where survival was an achievement against white efforts to starve black communities into submission. White's study revealed that the pigs that formed part of the FFC were not destined for immediate slaughter but were donated by the National Council of Negro Women, in October 1969, to help build up an independent, black-led agriculture in Sunflower County. 'Forty-five white Yorkshire pregnant gilts (females) and five male brown Jersey

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<sup>506</sup> Monica M. White, "A Pig and a Garden": Fannie Lou Hamer and the Freedom Farms Cooperative', *Food and Foodways*, 25 (2017), 20 – 39 (p. 21).

boars (males)' were given to the FFC to build up what was to be named 'The Bank of Pigs' or, more informally, the Oink-Oink Project.<sup>507</sup> The logistics of this project involved local families keeping the sows (grown females) and taking them to a breeding facility that housed the boars. White argued that the Bank of Pigs was a major achievement of the FFC, providing subsistence and supplemental income, recording that:

Upon delivery of a litter, which typically included nine to twenty piglets, families deposited two piglets to the Pig Bank. By 1969, the Pig Bank provided over one hundred families with pigs that produced over one hundred and fifty pounds of meat each. In its third year, the number grew to three hundred. By 1973, more than eight hundred and sixty five families were beneficiaries of the Pig Bank, which had produced thousands of pounds of meat and thousands of dollars in supplemental income for member families. With the pigs they produced bacon, sausage, hog head cheese, pigs feet, chitterlings, and other southern delicacies.<sup>508</sup>

White's research is pertinent to this chapter because it demonstrates that there was not an easy transition from Civil Rights to advocating for the protection of animals categorised as food. The FFC's Pig Bank project was a pragmatic response to the white supremacist starvation tactics inflicted on black Ruleville residents who attempted to assert their political power. White notes that the arrival of the pigs was met with great celebrations of eating, singing and dancing because they offered a way out of poverty and dependency on local white elites, and a future remedy to hunger. In the context of a white-constructed hunger in Sunflower County, it is reasonable that the individual animals were understood as a food source to alleviate malnutrition and an income to counter the deprivation that was a by-product of taking part in the Civil Rights Movement in Mississippi. White's description of the Southern delicacies that could be produced through use of the pig's body illustrate that the FFC's Pig Bank project gave local women a sense of pride through creatively cooking and satiating the community. Whilst this project viewed animals as consumable, it was as a means to preserve a black American community in the

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<sup>507</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

<sup>508</sup> Ibid, p. 28.

face of white violence, highlighting that in the Civil Rights era the system of racism lessened opportunity to challenge exploitation across species boundaries.

Earlier discussion explored how espousal of non-violent tactics in the Civil Rights Movement did not lead to widespread challenges to the exploitation of animals for food. However, a minority of black American activists and writers forged a direct connection between their disavowal of violence fostered through the black freedom struggle and their unwillingness to consume food produced through inflicting violence on animals. Much of Gregory's *Cookin' With Mother Nature* was dedicated to exploring the health implications of consuming a plant-based diet, however he was keen to emphasise that his own transition to vegetarianism, and later fruitarianism, ('the eating of fruit alone') emerged from his activism in the Civil Rights Movement, during the 1960s.<sup>509</sup> In Gregory's memoir, *Callus On My Soul*, he recalled that once his comedy career begun to take off, civil rights leaders called on him to take part in various campaigns. After an initial meeting with Medgar Evers in Mississippi and contact with SNCC, Gregory was involved in organising a food drive for the black populace of Leflore County, Mississippi, left struggling with state-enforced hunger, as a result of their efforts to register black voters.<sup>510</sup> Gregory noted that James Eastland and John Stennis, senators for Mississippi and landowners that relied on the labour of black sharecroppers, knew that 'if these people had food stamps and other aid from the government, they wouldn't need old master anymore'.<sup>511</sup> This case was yet another example of the white power structure using food as a weapon in the fight to maintain control over and exploit poor black Americans. Gregory asserted that 'I knew they just wanted the people to beg, like Momma used to, but I wasn't going to let that happen'.<sup>512</sup> Linking the plight of black Mississippians to his own experience of childhood hunger, Gregory made it clear

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<sup>509</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 9.

<sup>510</sup> Dick Gregory, *Callus On My Soul: A Memoir* (New York: Kensington Publishing Corp., 2000), p. 62.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid*, p. 62.

that withholding food, and attempting to strip black Americans of their dignity in the process, was a central part of racist domination. To help to alleviate the food poverty, Gregory 'went through the streets of Chicago with a disk jockey named Daddy-O-Dailey, and we collected fourteen thousand pounds of food. People gave all kinds of food, but mostly canned vegetables and fruit'.<sup>513</sup> He argued that it was necessary for Northern black Americans to show solidarity with black communities fighting some of the most deep rooted and unconcealed forms of white supremacy in the South. His participation in food drives demonstrates that, from the offset, Gregory's anti-racism activism was interwoven with the politics of consumption.

In *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, Gregory revealed that his anti-racism work also pushed him to alter his treatment of animals. He declared that 'under the leadership of Dr. King, I became totally committed to nonviolence, and I was convinced that nonviolence meant opposition to killing in any form'.<sup>514</sup> Gregory therefore set out a position advocating for the inclusion of animals in strategies for non-violence. He expanded his reasoning, stating that:

I felt the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" applied to human beings not only in their dealings with each other - war, lynching, assassination, murder and the like - but in their practice of killing animals for food and sport.<sup>515</sup>

Gregory thereby saw his treatment of animals as part of his commitment to non-violence, which was based in biblical teaching. Though scriptural teachings about human interactions with animals are ambiguous in Christianity, Gregory interpreted the commandment not to kill as too limited if only applied to human beings, and brought it to the attention of his readership that food production systems and certain forms of sport and entertainment were dependent upon taking animal lives. He challenged the idea within Christianity that, to borrow a phrase from Annika Spalde

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<sup>513</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>514</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 15.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

and Pelle Strindlund, 'humankind is supposedly the pinnacle of creation'.<sup>516</sup> Gregory interpreted the Ten Commandments as applying to animalkind as much as humankind. His grappling with the relationship between Christianity and animal advocacy was a forerunner to debates taking place in animal theology in recent decades. In 2012, Spalde and Strindlund argued that human beings had a God-given duty to 'expand a dominion of love to all creatures' rather than to exercise a 'dominion of violence', which involved raising animals for food intensively, experimenting on their bodies in the name of science and industry, and destroying their habitats.<sup>517</sup> It is significant therefore that Gregory departed from widely held beliefs in the early 1970s that claimed that humans were given dominion over animals to use as food, instead articulating a non-violent worldview that encompassed animals as well as humans. Moreover, Gregory was keen to point out that his thinking around animals, of opposing their killing for food, developed 'under the leadership of Doctor King'. Unlike PETA's recent campaigns, which implied that King's anti-racist words were speaking directly to the animal advocacy cause, Gregory articulated that King's tactics for advancing black freedom in the U.S., of resisting evil without using violence, pushed him to examine areas in his own life where he committed acts of or supported systems of violence. As such, Gregory used King's teachings as a springboard from which to oppose the violence embedded within industrialised farming, which had undergone a dramatic rise since the mid-twentieth century.

Gregory explained his beliefs in non-violence towards animals by claiming that: 'animals and humans suffer and die alike. Violence causes the same pain, the same spilling of blood, the same stench of death, the same arrogant, cruel and

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<sup>516</sup> Annika Spalde and Pelle Strindlund, 'Doesn't Jesus Treat Animals as Property?', in *A Faith Embracing All Creatures: Addressing Commonly Asked Questions About Christian Care for Animals* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), pp. 101 – 113 (p. 112).

<sup>517</sup> *Ibid*, p. 113.

brutal taking of life'.<sup>518</sup> Here, he advanced an argument that echoed the words of the eighteenth century philosopher Jeremy Bentham, when he asked: 'the question is not, can they reason? Nor, can they talk? But, can they suffer?'<sup>519</sup> Gregory rejected the notion that animals should be used freely by human beings because of some criteria that they failed to meet, such as the ability to reason or use language, instead centring an animal's capacity to suffer as the guiding principle that should structure human attitudes towards, and interactions with, animals. He emphasised the vulnerability of humans and animals and similarity in the finite nature of their lives, by claiming that humans and animals die alike. Moreover, in an era when industrialised farming was becoming evermore prevalent, and the raising of animals in feedlots and the killing of animals in slaughterhouses was veiled and distanced from the majority of human populations, it is significant that Gregory argued that animals, like humans, could experience violence. Gregory's references to 'pain', 'spilling of blood', and 'stench of death' demonstrate an unwillingness on his part to sanitise the processes involved in converting a live animal into packaged meat.<sup>520</sup> Furthermore, his characterisation of killing animals as arrogant illustrated his efforts to decentre the myth of human supremacy that Western society employed to justify their use and abuse of animals. His use of 'brutal' and 'cruel' suggested that Gregory sought to challenge the language of progress, modernity, and civilisation that discourse surrounding industrialised farming was couched in. Timothy Pachirat, a political scientist with expertise in industrialised slaughter, proclaimed that 'our understanding of "progress" and "civilization" are inseparable from, and perhaps even synonymous with, the concealment (but not elimination of what is increasingly rendered physically and morally repugnant)'.<sup>521</sup> Gregory's descriptive language

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<sup>518</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 16.

<sup>519</sup> Jeremy Bentham, cited in Ian A. Robertson, *Animals, Welfare, and the Law: Fundamental Principles for Critical Assessment* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 57.

<sup>520</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 16.

<sup>521</sup> Timothy Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), p. 14.

thereby pushed his readership to confront parts of the food system that they would prefer to conceal or forget. Ultimately, his conviction that the killing of animals was rooted in violence urged his readership to acknowledge the ways in which their diet was complicit in the oppression of living beings, even if diet was a site of racist violence also.

Gregory's transition to vegetarianism occurred following a nightclub engagement in San Francisco, where he 'made the decision never to eat meat again'.<sup>522</sup> He explicitly stated that 'it was a moral decision. It had nothing to do with an understanding of proper diet', showing that he was keen to stress that the impetus behind this change was based on ethical concern for animals.<sup>523</sup> However, Gregory followed up this statement, on the morality of rejecting meat, with a passage that reinforced the idea of human exceptionalism. He argued that:

I had become firmly convinced that the killing of animals for food was both immoral and unnatural. Human beings are the most beautifully constructed machines in the universe. They are endowed by Nature with a wisdom and an intelligence surpassed by no other creature. As a human being and the beneficiary of Mother Nature's endowment of mind and body, I refused to accept that I had to stoop to the lowliness of *killing* something to get my dinner.<sup>524</sup>

Gregory's belief that killing is unnecessary and beneath him is at the heart of this extract. He suggested that violence and killing were evidence of a less evolved, inferior society. In addition, Gregory asserted that human beings represented the epitome of intelligence and wisdom, amongst other animal beings, and inferred that they should therefore be able to find means of subsisting that did not rely on killing. Here, Gregory argued for moral vegetarianism by upholding human superiority, rather than destabilising it. Though some would argue that it seems perplexing to challenge human consumption of animals on the basis of the inferiority of animals, this line of thinking may have been shaped by Gregory's experience as a black man

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<sup>522</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 16.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

in a white supremacist society. Whilst his own experience of violent oppression contributed towards his abhorrence of violence towards animals, it also shaped his defence of human exceptionalism. Steve Estes, a Professor of gender and the Civil Rights Movement, noted that from the abolitionist discourse of the nineteenth century through to the rhetoric of the mid-twentieth century black freedom struggle, an emphasis on claiming manhood recurred. Estes affirmed that black men in the Civil Rights Movement were ‘no longer willing to wait for an answer to the question “Am I not a man and a brother?” they demanded freedom with the slogan, “I AM a Man!”<sup>525</sup> As Gregory’s political consciousness was forged in this movement, in which manhood was claimed and not deconstructed, it is unsurprising that he continued to maintain some boundaries and hierarchies between ‘man’ and ‘animal’ in his discussion of moral vegetarianism. Having spent the previous decade advocating for his rights as a black man, Gregory was not in a position to blur the boundaries between human and animal, even though he was able challenge the violence implicit in killing animals for food.

Alice Walker characterised her disavowal of meat eating in a similar manner to Gregory, by acknowledging that it emerged out of her commitments to other social justice struggles, such as the Civil Rights Movement and Womanist activism. In her most celebrated essay on animals, *Am I Blue?*, first published in *Ms.* in 1986, Walker dedicated the final paragraphs to discussing the distancing techniques implemented in U.S. society, to conceal the violence implicated in the work of killing animals for food, and the sense of hypocrisy she felt for not considering animals in a holistic liberation struggle. Walker declared that:

‘the animals are forced to become for us merely “images” of what they once so beautifully expressed. And we are used to drinking milk from containers showing “contented” cows, whose real lives we want to hear nothing about, eating eggs and drumsticks from “happy” hens, and munching hamburgers advertised by bulls of integrity who seem to command their fate.

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<sup>525</sup> Steve Estes, *I Am A Man!: Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), p. 1.



As we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks. I am eating misery, I thought, as I took the first bite. And spit it out'.<sup>526</sup>

Here, Walked expressed a degree of nostalgia for pre-industrialised livestock farming, where she imagined that chickens, pigs and cows were free to live out their lives in relative comfort, up until the moment of slaughter. Killing animals for food for human consumption was always rooted in violence and a logic of domination. However, as industrial farming became evermore prevalent in the U.S., following the Second World War, and the processes involved in killing animals became removed from public view, it became easier to view pre-industrial livestock farming with rose-tinted glasses. Michael Pollan, a scholar of food systems, noted that following the end of the Second World War and the subsequent rise in demand for meat in Europe, the lives of animals designated as food changed dramatically. Pollan proclaimed that:

at the same time much of America's human population found itself leaving the city for the suburbs, our food animals found themselves traveling in the opposite direction, leaving widely dispersed farms in places like Iowa to live in densely populated new animal cities. These places were so different from farms and ranches that a new term was needed to denote them: CAFO – Confined Animal Feeding Operation.<sup>527</sup>

Pollan demonstrates that by the second half of the twentieth century, the idealised family farm existed in very small numbers. Timothy Pachirat cited Norbert Elias, a Sociologist of the theory of civilising processes, when describing the concealment of violence in food production, stating that 'what once occurred in the open without provoking reactions of either moral or physical disgust has been increasingly segregated, confined, and hidden from sight'.<sup>528</sup> Following the Second World War, not only was the conversion of animals into food industrialised and controlled by large corporate firms, it was also concealed largely from public view.

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<sup>526</sup> Alice Walker, 'Am I Blue?', in *Living By The Word: Selected Writings, 1973 - 1987*, ed. by Alice Walker (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 3 - 8 (p. 8).

<sup>527</sup> Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), p. 66 – 67.

<sup>528</sup> Timothy Pachirat, citing Norbert Elias, p. 10.

In response to this pattern within food production systems, Walker argued that “contented” cows’, “happy” hens’ and ‘bulls of integrity’ were images invented by advertising companies to mask the round-the-clock violence inflicted upon animals in factory farming.<sup>529</sup> She acknowledged that the majority of the American public ‘want to hear nothing about’ the ‘real lives’ of animals caught up in the system of factory farming, because they gain energy and pleasure from consuming their flesh and bodily by-products. By arguing that the happy and contented animal was a myth, and a gross misrepresentation in the era of industrialised farming, Walker employed the ‘politics of sight’, which as Pachirat designates, made ‘visible a massive, routinized work of killing that many would prefer to keep hidden’.<sup>530</sup>

Walker’s growing awareness that animals going through the system of industrialised farming did not command their own fate, led her to question the morality of consuming animal flesh. In the essay, Walker articulated that liberation discourse that erased the status of billions of unfree animals caught up in factory farms was hollow, and did not encompass ‘freedom... for all’.<sup>531</sup> Walker’s feelings of hypocrisy when using slogans that claimed to agitate for justice for all, whilst contributing to the violent treatment of food animals, compelled her to take steps towards eliminating meat from her diet. She recalled that when she took the first bite into the steak, a cut of meat associated with power, privilege and virility, her mouth was not filled with the pleasant taste of a delicacy, as she struggled to banish the thought that she was consuming the misery that the cow endured to be converted into steak.<sup>532</sup> This knowledge triggered a reaction of disgust in Walker and she spat out the steak, symbolising the beginning of her transition to vegetarianism. This transition was therefore rooted in Walker’s personal feelings of incompatibility in

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<sup>529</sup> Walker, ‘Am I Blue?’, p. 8.

<sup>530</sup> Pachirat, p. 10.

<sup>531</sup> Walker, ‘Am I Blue?’, p. 8.

<sup>532</sup> Matthew B. Ruby and Steven J. Heine, ‘Meat, Morals, and Masculinity’, *Appetite*, 56 (2011), 447 – 450 (p. 448).

struggling against the domination of some bodies, whilst feasting on the domination of other bodies.

Across Walker's body of public and private writings, she made it clear that she did not always follow a rigidly pure vegetarian diet, and that there were moments where she consumed animal flesh and dairy products in small amounts. For example, in a journal entry written in June 1987, later published as part of Walker's *Living By The Word* collection, she recorded her attendance at a protest at the Concord Naval Weapons Station, to object to the use of her tax dollars 'for weapons and the policy that maims, kills, frightens, and horribly abuses babies, children, women, men, and the old' in Nicaragua and El Salvador.<sup>533</sup> Though Walker's aim at this demonstration was to challenge U.S. foreign policy in Central America, and be arrested as part of a fill-the-jails tactic, she recalled how her thoughts turned to food once she remembered that she'd left ...[her] well-provisioned backpack in the car'.<sup>534</sup> Walker's concerns about food during this moment of protest were related to her newly adopted vegetarian diet. Walker disclosed that:

As a vegetarian, which I've now been for a good three months, I get hungry frequently. I think about oranges, almonds, apples – and, yes, a well-cooked piece of chicken. As soon as I'm seated fairly comfortably in the holding area – a large gray "cattle car" from the Port Chicago explosion days – Sallie, the woman in her fifties, breaks out her stash of oranges, Swiss cheese, and Triscuits, and offers me some. I think about how hard it would be for me to engage in any kind of action now for justice and peace with the remains of murdered flesh in my body. I'm tempted to wonder about the cows who "gave" the "Swiss" cheese, but don't. I eat it with gratitude.<sup>535</sup>

Here, Walker was open about her struggles with adapting to a vegetarian diet, noting that a need to eat more regular meals characterised the transitional period. Moreover, whilst she noted that she desired a variety of fruits and nuts, in moments of hunger she also craved animal flesh, particularly pieces of chicken. Walker wrote

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<sup>533</sup> Alice Walker, 'Journal', in *Living By The Word: Selected Writings, 1973 - 1987*, ed. by Alice Walker (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 174 – 186 (p. 182).

<sup>534</sup> Ibid, p. 182.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid, p. 182 – 183.

elsewhere about how this type of meat was the most difficult to give up, due to its associations with her family and childhood, growing up in rural Georgia.<sup>536</sup> In this passage, she acknowledged that she was simultaneously pulled in opposite directions, by the traditions and pleasure bound up with consuming animal flesh and her conscience telling her not to partake in a system that oppresses animals. Walker's burgeoning profile as an advocate for animals in the 1980s developed alongside her honesty about the contradictions and limitations of her own consumption practices.

Though Walker noted that she was 'seated fairly comfortably' following her arrest, her use of the phrase "cattle car" to describe the area where the protestors were being held, conjured an ominous atmosphere and associations with historical atrocities. By referring to the cattle car, Walker foregrounded a mode of transport linked to animal sale and slaughter, and also most glaringly to the Holocaust, and the transportation of Jews, and other groups targeted because of their religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and political beliefs, to concentration and extermination camps. Walker implied that this holding area for the protestors was designed to intimidate, due to its association with a history of violence and domination. Through the symbol of the cattle car, Walker nodded towards an argument that other writers in animal rights circles expanded decades later, that the mechanisms employed to control, harm, and execute humans are also used in the mass-scale killing of animals designated as food. In 2002, Charles Patterson explored the intersections between the instruments of violence used in the Holocaust and those used in the industrialised exploitation of animals.<sup>537</sup> At an event protesting the violence of U.S. bombing in Central America, Walker developed a position that maintained that

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<sup>536</sup> Alice Walker, 'Why Did the Balinese Chicken Cross the Road?', in *Living By The Word: Selected Writings, 1973 - 1987*, ed. by Alice Walker (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 170 - 173 (p. 172).

<sup>537</sup> Charles Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002), p. 53.

turning a blind eye to the suffering of animals was not a holistic vision for a just society.

Making a direct link between her involvement in feminist, anti-racist, anti-war activism and her evolving animal advocacy, Walker declared that it would be 'hard' for her to take part in demonstrations for justice and peace whilst consuming animal flesh. Walker divulged that she felt as though partaking in what she described as the 'murderous' practice of eating meat was in conflict with her wider beliefs in creating a world free from violence. Her discussion of the unsettling nature of killing an animal to fuel her own body to take part in social justice protests, demonstrate how Walker sought to make connections between the oppression of animals and the oppression of humans. That Walker highlighted that her consciousness around animal suffering emerged during moments when she was challenging raced, classed, and gendered forms of subjugation, shows how she aimed to widen out her intersectional politics to include animals. Furthermore, it illustrates that a commitment to non-violence was the foundation from which her involvement in animal advocacy arose.

In the journal entry, Walker questioned the distancing techniques that humans employed to justify the consumption of dairy products, even as she continued to rely on them in her own diet. Just as she challenged the image of the 'contented cow' providing milk and other dairy products from an idyllic farm, Walker's emphasis on the word "gave", placing the term in quotation marks, demonstrated that the dairy industry was not centred around the agency of non-human animals, but involved force and bodily by-products being *taken* rather than *given*. Despite her thoughts about the violence bound up in the production of the Swiss cheese that Walker was offered, she noted that she accepted and ate it 'with gratitude'.<sup>538</sup> This reflected Walker's struggles to implement her animal advocacy ideals into her dietary practices. Moreover, the context in which Walker consumed

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<sup>538</sup> Walker, 'Journal', p. 183.

the animal products was significant. That Walker accepted the cheese following her arrest for her political activism, during a moment where her mobility and access to food was limited, communicates a wider point about the privilege of being able to follow a vegetarian and vegan diet. Indeed, for oppressed and incarcerated populations in the mid-late twentieth century, choosing to reject animal-derived foods was more complicated.

Though Walker's pronouncements surrounding her vegetarianism were explicit in this extract, describing meat production as 'murderous', in the following paragraph she forged an argument that people often follow a particular path because they feel that they have little other choice, rather than because they are inherently 'bad' or 'immoral' people. She noted that:

Apparently it is lunchtime for everyone. I look out the window of our cattle car and I see that the guards, the nurse, the people who checked us in (even the black woman in a light-blue uniform, who asked for my autograph and said, "Oh, I'm so glad you're here!"), all are eating. Since this is California, they are eating thick whole-grain sandwiches fluffy with fillings, trailing juicy tomato slices, lettuce leaves, and sprouts. As we all munch, they outside and "free", me inside and "captive", I can't help a feeling of tenderness for them: the need to eat connects us. Perhaps that is why they have taken these jobs.<sup>539</sup>

Walker's use of the descriptors 'thick', 'fluffy', and 'juicy' invoke a vision of plenty and the references to wholegrain and salad ingredients were suggestive of the affluence and health consciousness of Northern California, and its association with alternative food movements.<sup>540</sup> Walker argued that the workers outside, including the guards and the police officers that have arrested the protestors, were not actually free, but that financial necessity may have compelled them to take jobs that did not align with their political or ethical standpoints. Walker's assertion that 'the need to eat connects us', demonstrated that for individuals who did not possess race and class privilege, pragmatism often came before principles.<sup>541</sup> In the

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<sup>539</sup> Walker, 'Journal', p. 183.

<sup>540</sup> Marion Nestle, 'Foreword' in *California Cuisine and Just Food*, ed. by Sally K. Fairfax and others (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), pp. xi – xiv (p. xi – xii).

<sup>541</sup> Walker, 'Journal', p. 183.

aforementioned extract, Walker mused about men and women from racial minorities working in institutions that have played a role in oppressing minority groups, yet her analysis about the pragmatics of needing money for food are applicable to her earlier exploration of following a vegetarian diet. Economically oppressed groups, such as poor black Americans, have not always had the privilege of sticking to their principles in the job market, accepting jobs in order to survive. Likewise, poor and incarcerated black Americans have not had the resources or opportunities to be able to rigidly follow vegetarian and vegan diets and eschew meat and dairy at all times. Walker's simultaneous challenge to the distancing politics that humans construct around meat production and consumption *and* acknowledgement that race and class positions can create privileges or barriers to animal advocacy, were necessary interventions in the debate concerning animals and food production.

Walker continually returned to the violence implicated in converting animals into food, within her writings. In a piece penned in 1997, Walker explored the contradictions inherent in holidays celebrated in the U.S., such as Thanksgiving and Christmas. Though Walker noted that these holidays were popularly associated with peace, and with families coming together and giving blessings, she also acknowledged that for many they represented destruction, and that the symbols of these holidays were heavily racialised. Having come of age in the Jim Crow South, Walker declared that 'Christmas was the only time it was possible to collectively celebrate the only generous and cheerful white man anyone in the community was ever likely to know: Santa Claus'.<sup>542</sup> Commenting on how white supremacy was built into the festivities of Christmas, Walker pondered 'what would have been the imprint on white children's minds... if once a year they were encouraged to welcome a stealthily moving large black man into their sleeping houses in the middle of the

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<sup>542</sup> Alice Walker, 'My Face to the Light: Thoughts About Christmas', in *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism*, ed. by Alice Walker (London: Phoenix, 2005), pp. 98 - 101 (p. 98).

night’?<sup>543</sup> Walker’s commentary on the racialised nature of Christmas celebrations conveyed how U.S. holidays perpetuated racist imagery around the ‘ideal person who was compelled to be white’.<sup>544</sup> By asking her audience to imagine the implications if Santa Claus was depicted with black skin, she highlighted the racist stereotypes attached to black men in the U.S. and the concurrent links between whiteness, safety, and a morally upstanding nature. Walker thereby emphasised that far from being a holiday of joy and merriment, Christmas was a site of violence for black Americans through its erasure of the danger of whiteness.

Walker’s critique of the holiday season in the U.S. was not limited to its perpetuation of racial injustice, but to the violence implicated in the consumption of animal bodies at this time of year. She affirmed that:

Thanksgiving is a day that represents the ritual killing, and eating, of millions of birds. I was sickened by the thought of all those stumps, all those bleeding necks, and by the message given to children that it is okay to sacrifice living beings in order to express appreciation for being alive yourself, or in order to celebrate the birth of a sacred person, Jesus Christ, who was himself against killing.<sup>545</sup>

The reaction of disgust that once again compels Walker’s rejection of partaking in meat consumption is striking in this extract. Walker employed the politics of sight by referring to the stumps and bleeding necks of the turkeys and how this sickened her. By foregrounding the dismemberment of the turkey and the blood that resulted from the act of killing, Walker communicated to her readership that the turkey was a live animal, rather than just a consumable piece of meat. As Pachirat notes, ‘in many of our meat dishes the animal form is so concealed and changed by the cut of its preparation and carving that, while eating, one is scarcely reminded of its origin’.<sup>546</sup> Walker’s refusal to sanitise the meat served as a ritual delicacy is evidence of her

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

<sup>545</sup> Ibid, p. 98.

<sup>546</sup> Pachirat, p. 10.



efforts to break down the mechanisms of concealment bound up with industrialised food production.

Walker's hostility to the traditional modes of celebrating Thanksgiving and Christmas was related to the paradox between the non-violent teachings of Jesus Christ, and the violence involved in slaughtering animals for a Christmas feast. As Spalde and Strindlund note, theological explorations of Christ's teachings about and interactions with animals are divided, on the one hand 'Jesus...is described as showing apparent indifference to the fate of non-humans'.<sup>547</sup> However, Walker sided with the interpretation of Jesus' teachings that emphasise peaceful practices and serving those considered to be lowly. By stating that she was disturbed by the message sent out to children that 'it is okay to sacrifice living beings in order to express appreciation for being alive yourself' Walker stressed the speciesism at the heart of consuming animals, and condemned the viewpoint that human pleasure and the right to celebrate outrank an animal's right to a life free from harm.<sup>548</sup> Here, Walker's observations on the holiday season in the U.S. illuminate that she frequently entwined a race and species analysis into her activist writings. From her standpoint, Thanksgiving and Christmas were sites of racist and speciesist violence, and were therefore difficult to celebrate.

Walker's opposition to factory farming was also forcefully communicated as part of a PETA campaign, in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As Maneesha Deckha, a Professor specialising in animals, culture and law, asserted, PETA is 'arguably the most recognizable (and successful) public face of animal advocacy' in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century U.S., for its 'efforts to work with... fast food giants to improve the conditions in factory farms'.<sup>549</sup> Ingrid Newkirk and Alex Pacheco founded the organisation in 1980 in Norfolk, Virginia.

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<sup>547</sup> Spalde and Strindlund, p. 101.

<sup>548</sup> Walker, 'My Face to the Light: Thoughts About Christmas', p. 98.

<sup>549</sup> Maneesha Deckha, 'Disturbing Images: PETA and the Feminist Ethics of Animal Advocacy', *Ethics and the Environment*, 13 (2008), 35 – 76 (p. 36).

Michael Specter encapsulated that 'PETA's publicity formula – eighty per cent outrage, ten per cent each of celebrity and truth – insures that everything it does offends someone'.<sup>550</sup> Indeed, the organisation's founders argued that if PETA did not employ outrageous or offensive tactics then it would be 'worthless' as an advocacy group, because it is reliant on drawing attention to 'an issue largely ignored by society', primarily that 'animals are not ours to eat, wear, experiment on, or use for entertainment'.<sup>551</sup>

However, as scholars have noted, the outrage generated by PETA's campaign style centres not on the revelation of violence against animals bound up in U.S. food systems and scientific and medical institutions, but on the blatant sexism and racism that the organisation relies upon to further its animal advocacy objectives, wherein racialised women and men and white women are seen as collateral damage in the fight to protect animals. As Deckha argued, PETA's campaigns 'exploit gendered and racialized logics and images which are harmful to women and racialized peoples'.<sup>552</sup> Most notably, PETA's 'I'd Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur' campaigns, beginning in 1990, and the 'Holocaust on Your Plate' and 'End Slavery' campaigns in the early twenty-first century were emblematic of PETA's decision not to take an intersectional approach to animal advocacy and play to patriarchal and white supremacist ideas about women and racial minorities. The 'I'd Rather Go Naked Than Wear Fur' campaign was a print-ad campaign featuring primarily white, young, thin, able-bodied women who were famous or emerging as celebrities. One advertisement was a close-up shot of a white woman's pelvis, showing fake pubic hair sprouting from the sides of her underwear. The image was

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<sup>550</sup> Michael Specter, 'The Extremist: The Woman Behind the Most Successful Radical Group in America', *The New Yorker*, (May 7<sup>th</sup> 2003) <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2003/04/14/the-extremist>> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> Jun 2018].

<sup>551</sup> Wendy Atkins-Sayre, 'Articulating Identity: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Animal/Human Divide', *Western Journal of Communication*, 74 (2010), 309 - 328 (p. 310).

<sup>552</sup> Deckha, p. 40.

accompanied by text that read 'Fur trim. Unattractive'.<sup>553</sup> The advertisement reads as an attempt to encourage women not to wear clothing items made from animal pelts. Significantly, the reasoning behind PETA's suggestion that women should reject fur as a fashion choice is not that it is dependent upon the speciesist use of animal bodies for human gain, but that it is unattractive, presumably to men. However, the animal advocacy message was delivered within the surface-level commentary in the advertisement on women's bodies, beauty standards and the male gaze. The text implies that women's body hair is unattractive and that to be desirable women should be constantly vigilant about disciplining and depilating their bodies. In addition, the 'Holocaust on Your Plate' and 'End Slavery' campaigns, which juxtaposed graphic images from concentration camps and from the era of slavery and segregation in the U.S., with images from industrial farming provoked outrage from anti-racist groups, who charged that PETA had used the suffering of Jewish and black American communities to further their own agenda, 'by equating them to animals, reducing the horror of those oppressions, and violating their human dignity'.<sup>554</sup>

The participation of Walker, and several other famous black American writers, comedians and politicians, in PETA's Kentucky Fried Cruelty campaign should therefore be viewed against the history of an organisation with troubling race and gender politics. Nonetheless, Walker's ideas should also be viewed for their own merit. Indeed, her ideas about animals and food in the era of industrial farming were informed by her experiences as a black woman born into poverty in the U.S., the food culture of the South, changing economic circumstances that came with her successful writing career and her lifelong commitment to activism, as much as they were with temporary alliances with white-led animal advocacy organisations such as PETA.

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>554</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

PETA's Kentucky Fried Cruelty campaign began in 2001, when the animal rights group instigated discussions with the fast-food giant KFC, in an effort to improve conditions for chickens going through factory farms that supplied their food outlets. Over a period of two years, KFC did not take steps to 'eliminate any of the worst abuses suffered by the more than 850 million chickens killed for its buckets each year'.<sup>555</sup> Resultantly, in 2003 PETA called for an international boycott of KFC. PETA's campaign involved thousands of direct action protests at local KFC branches, including pieces of street theatre, for instance, where demonstrators crawled into cages and effigies of Colonel Sanders were 'burnt' or 'slaughtered'.<sup>556</sup>

An additional component of PETA's campaign was comprised of celebrity endorsements of the boycott, which involved making statements, recording videos and taking part in letter-writing campaigns opposing KFC's practices. Several black American celebrities were associated with this campaign, including comedians Dick Gregory and Richard Pryor, religious and political figures such as the Rev. Al Sharpton and Kweisi Mfume, and writers and academics, Dr. Cornel West and Alice Walker. West positioned his unease with KFC's practices as part of a wider strategy to tackle injustice. He declared that:

As a person who is concerned about all injustices, I am asking you to direct KFC's suppliers to stop breeding and drugging animals so that they collapse under their own weight or die from heart failure and to phase in humane gas killing, a method of slaughter that protects birds from broken bones and wings, electric shocks, and even drowning in scalding-hot tanks of water.<sup>557</sup>

Known most prominently as a Professor of race, gender, and class in the U.S., West directly linked his distress at the violent procedures involved in converting birds into food in industrial farming with his commitment to challenging 'all injustices', whether those injustices were experienced by human groups or animals. West noted that in

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<sup>555</sup> No author cited, 'Kentucky Fried Cruelty', <<http://www.kentuckyfriedcruelty.com/h-campaign.asp>> [accessed 23rd August 2017].

<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Cornel West, 'Letter to David Novak', *Kentucky Fried Cruelty* <<http://www.kentuckyfriedcruelty.com/pdfs/11-5-03westletter.pdf>> [accessed on 23rd August 2017].

Western societies an arbitrary line is drawn between animals designated as pets and those designated as food, despite similar cognitive abilities and a shared capacity to suffer. He argued that:

Although most people don't know chickens as well as they know cats and dogs, chickens are interesting individuals with personalities and interests every bit as developed as the dogs and cats with whom many of us share our lives. And of course, they feel pain just like we do.<sup>558</sup>

Though the argument that animals have the capacity to feel pain, as humans do, was not a new theory in 2003, West's reiteration of this argument had the potential to draw in activists involved in intersectional social justice work. If animals had the capacity to feel pain, then they could be subject to violence, and thus for individuals and groups dedicated to challenging violence towards human groups, it was a sound next step to extend their field of concern to animals experiencing violence also.

Walker's letter to David Novak, former chairman of Yum! Brands, Inc., which oversaw operations at KFC, was centred on a race and gender analysis of factory farming. She employed motherhood as a trope through which to structure her challenge to KFC's mass-scale killing of chickens. The letter is headed with the date May 9<sup>th</sup> 2004, which Walker elucidated was Mother's Day in the U.S. This set the tone for the letter, as Walker presented the argument that animals too can have close familial bonds, and that one of the primary injustices of factory farming involves the severing of such bonds. Her decision to highlight that she penned the letter on Mother's Day illustrates that Walker sought to extend the politics of mothering across the species boundary, to concern for non-human mothers and children caught up in U.S. food systems. By harnessing the traditional associations tied to Mother's Day and symbols of motherhood – such as the qualities of nurturing

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

and caring, along with black American conceptions of motherhood as community-based rather than individualistic – Walker employed maternalist politics to encourage the audience of her open letter to advocate against the foundations of violence within factory farming and to perceive non-human animals as part of society’s children, worthy of care and protection. Though the letter is addressed to David Novak, he is clearly not Walker’s sole intended audience, as she would have been aware that PETA aimed to use the piece in their promotional materials for the boycott. Thus, we can assume that the arguments contained within the letter were not necessarily meant to sway Novak towards rejecting meat, as he sought to make substantial financial gain from the continuation of negligent welfare regulations, but could impact on PETA’s wider audience.

It is important to note here that PETA’s Kentucky Fried Cruelty campaign was not targeted specifically at black Americans, but took a ‘color blind’ approach to generating opposition to KFC’s institutionalised animal abuse. By engaging spokespeople from diverse racial backgrounds, PETA aimed to present an image of the organisation as supported by a cross-section of U.S. society and the issue of animal advocacy as one entirely separate from forms of human oppression, such as entrenched racial injustice in the U.S. Significantly, the ‘Celebrity Support’ tab of the Kentucky Fried Cruelty webpage listed the numerous spokespeople for the campaign, but the header used an image from an earlier PETA advertisement featuring Pamela Anderson, the actress, model and activist. The advertisement from which the image was taken shows Anderson dressed in a bikini made from lettuce leaves, accompanied by the text ‘Turn Over A New Leaf. Try Vegetarian’.<sup>559</sup> It was used as a billboard poster in Belfast to coincide with National Vegetarian Week, in May 2003. Re-using this image of Anderson for the Kentucky Fried Cruelty website, alongside the description of her as a ‘former Baywatch babe’, illustrates how into the

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<sup>559</sup> ‘Lettuce Bikini-Clad Pamela Anderson Invites Belfastians To Go Vegetarian’, *PETA*, <<https://www.peta.org.uk/media/news-releases/lettuce-bikini-clad-pamela-anderson-invites-belfastians-to-go-vegetarian/>> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> June 2018].

early twenty-first century PETA remained committed to tactics which reduced women to their bodies, rather than presenting figures such as Anderson as women who were undertaking important work to challenge violence against animals in international food systems. As Deckha elucidated, in the 1990s and early 2000s, Anderson represented the 'epitome of dominant white femininity as sexualized and on-display for a male heteronormative gaze', and so PETA's choice to present Anderson through imagery that erased the multiple roles that women played within animal advocacy, sent out the message that women were only valued in the movement as objects to draw the attention of heterosexual males.<sup>560</sup> Further, that PETA viewed Anderson, a white, thin, able-bodied woman, as the essence of desirability, reinforced the perception of animal advocacy as a subculture where 'black women are rare. It means going to protests and holding signs decrying abuse of animals and wondering why no other Black people are there'.<sup>561</sup> Thus, whilst the Kentucky Fried Cruelty campaign sought to gain statements against factory farming from figureheads from a range of racial groups, the advertising on the website reinforced the message that this was an online space that privileged whiteness, heteronormativity and upheld patriarchal ideas about women.

In the Kentucky Fried Cruelty campaign PETA did not explore the problematic racial politics of the fast food giant, which used advertising to appeal to a teenage consumer market and reasserted a racist stereotype that linked black Americans to chickens. Pippa Holloway, a Professor of nineteenth and twentieth century U.S. political history, declared that the representation of black Americans as 'chicken stealers' originated in the era of slavery, and that in the Reconstruction era the accusation of larceny against black Americans, often through false claims that black men had stolen chickens or other animals held as livestock, was used to

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<sup>560</sup> Deckha, p. 42.

<sup>561</sup> Delicia Dunham, 'On Being Black and Vegan', in *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans on Food, Identity, Health and Society*, ed. by A. Breeze Harper (New York: Lantern Books, 2010), pp. 42 – 46 (p. 42).

prevent black men from casting their ballot.<sup>562</sup> The association between black Americans and chickens was therefore rooted in the white supremacist effort to destabilise the newly gained political power of black men in the Reconstruction era, and was not simply a homogenising stereotype about black American food habits.

Professor Psyche Williams-Forson, a scholar of black American foodways, cited an example from a 1999 video advertisement in which KFC relied upon the tropes of minstrelsy in its rebranding of the fast food figurehead Colonel Sanders. Williams-Forson affirmed that whilst Sanders' appearance was largely the same in the advertisement, 'KFC created a new animated version whose voice would resonate in quasi-hip-hop tones'.<sup>563</sup> Though Colonel Sanders was voiced by a white actor, Randy Quaid, Williams-Forson noted that on first hearing the advertisement, she registered 'what sounded like the voice of a black man against a backdrop of hip-hop music'.<sup>564</sup> Moreover, the KFC advertisement featured the 'Colonel "hop around"' in mock imitation of a dance that happened to be in vogue throughout black communities at one time' and suggested 'age-old stereotypes that linked African American men to playing basketball and eating chicken'.<sup>565</sup> Williams-Forson stressed that the advertisement was overflowing with tropes that had been historically used to oppress black Americans, to link black women and men to criminality and dishonesty, and to represent black Americans as innately endowed with physical prowess at the expense of intellectual capacity. Ultimately, the advertisement used aspects of black culture to make the KFC brand appear 'cool', whilst simultaneously exploiting stereotypes that entrenched racist views about black Americans. This discussion of KFC's advertising strategy in the late 1990s demonstrates that the fast food giant was rooted in racism as well as speciesism,

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<sup>562</sup> Pippa Holloway, "A Chicken Stealer Shall Lose His Vote": Disfranchisement for Larceny in the South, 1874 - 1890', *The Journal of Southern History*, 75 (2009), 931 – 962 (p. 937 - 938).

<sup>563</sup> Psyche Williams Forson, *Building Houses Out of Chicken Legs: Black Women, Food and Power* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>564</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.



employing cultural appropriation and damaging racial stereotypes to further the sale of animal bodies for consumption. However, PETA left unsaid the history of racist advertising that KFC profited from, choosing in this instance to keep discussions of human and animal oppressions entirely separate.

Returning to the ideas within Walker's campaign letter, she underlined the violence embedded in the lived conditions of animals passing through factory farms and slaughterhouses. Within the opening segment of the letter Walker suggested that the reader imagine that 'in a future life you come back as a chicken. You are small and fuzzy and scared. You are soft. Beautiful. Yellow, with bright orange legs. Tiny feet. Innocent, deeply curious eyes'.<sup>566</sup> Walker appealed to the public to put themselves into the position of a chicken going through the system of factory farming. Walker's use of emotive language, using terms such as 'small', 'scared', 'soft', 'tiny' and 'innocent', stressed the vulnerability of animals in industrial agriculture. She juxtaposed the 'beauty' of newborn creatures with the unpleasantness of the space of the factory farm, declaring that this environment 'does not live up to you', directing her words to the chicks passing through the system.<sup>567</sup> Walker's description of the space echoed the information that animal rights groups like PETA wanted to emphasise about industrial farming, stating that 'it is dark and hot; there is no fresh air. It stinks'.<sup>568</sup> She then referenced the process of de-beaking that occurs for battery hens, asserting that 'as soon as you are born, part of your mouth, your tender beak, is burned off. This indescribable pain is your introduction to life'.<sup>569</sup> Within these passages Walker tried to affect change in public attitudes towards factory farming by focusing on the contrast between the cute and fluffy chick and the stifling, poorly ventilated space into which the animal is born. By

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<sup>566</sup> Alice Walker, "General correspondence – Letter dated May 9<sup>th</sup> 2004", (2004), Alice Walker Papers, MSS1061, Box 30, Folder 4, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.

<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.

centring the animal's 'cuteness', Walker aimed to produce a more empathetic response from her audience, and thereby compel opposition to violent practices such as de-beaking, which involved removing the chick's beak with a hot, metal blade, to reduce injurious pecking in cages, to protect the property interests of those with stakes in the factory farm.<sup>570</sup>

Following the initial two paragraphs, Walker's analysis of factory farming and the conversion of live animals into food for human consumption, contained a stronger focus on raced and gendered experiences in the U.S. Not for the first time in her writings, Walker compared animal suffering to the institution of racialised slavery in North America. She stated that:

you are in a cage with so many others! You feel your body, stuffed with food and hormones, pressing against the bodies around you. It reminds you perhaps of the lifetime ago when you were a human slave in a ship enduring the Middle Passage.<sup>571</sup>

Here, Walker drew upon the chronic conditions of overcrowding experienced by black Africans forced to endure the horrors of the Middle Passage, during trans-Atlantic slavery, to garner opposition to industrial meat production. Her use of the phrase 'human slave' implied that, from her standpoint, animals too could experience a form of bondage. This strategy that invoked the history of slavery was provocative, as it employed on-going racial trauma to raise the profile of a separate advocacy issue. Further, directly comparing the experience of animals in factory farms to the experience of enslaved women and men was dangerously close to the animalising discourse that ran through white supremacist justifications for slavery and post-bellum oppression of black Americans. Seemingly, Walker sought to engage her audience with animal rights issues by arguing that the entrapment and disregard for the wellbeing of certain bodies, in pursuit of power and profit, was

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<sup>570</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (London: Pimlico, 1995 [originally published 1975]), p. 101 – 102.

<sup>571</sup> Walker, "General correspondence – Letter dated May 9<sup>th</sup> 2004".

morally wrong, whether those bodies were human or non-human. By bringing slavery into the animal rights debate, Walker emphasised that practices sanctioned by law can later come to be categorised as a moral abomination, and that her readers should therefore question their willingness to partake in consuming animal flesh. Nonetheless, using the history of slavery to engender empathy for animals risked further subjugating black Americans. Through this extract, Walker claimed that her identity as a black woman in the U.S., reconciling herself with the history of slavery that her ancestors had endured, led her to challenge, and encourage others to challenge, the exploitation of animals for human gain within industrial farms.

In the following paragraph, though Walker did not directly refer to slavery, the spectre of the 'peculiar institution' haunted her analysis of conditions within factory farms. She asserted that:

You feel heavy and hot, suffocating, because you are constantly drugged; your body forced to grow so large and fast your bones cannot support it: they begin to break. After an infinity of unbearable pain you are lifted out of the cage into which you were born, and from which your mother was taken immediately after your birth, and dumped, with thousands of others, into a vat of boiling water. Most of the others are dead, but for some reason, you are not. You drown, choking, in the smelly, scalding water.<sup>572</sup>

In Peter Singer's renowned text, *Animal Liberation*, he noted that chickens within industrialised farming experienced a truncated existence, recording that 'broiler chickens are killed when they are seven weeks old (the natural lifespan of a chicken is about seven years)'.<sup>573</sup> Singer outlined that 'every aspect of the birds' environment is controlled to make them grow faster on less feed'.<sup>574</sup> Broiler chickens are selected from specific breeds that have the genetic capacity to grow at a fast rate, and a combination of automated feeding and controlled lighting encourages the birds to eat more. Despite the aim of factory farms to convert the live animal into

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid.

<sup>573</sup> Singer, p. 99.

<sup>574</sup> Ibid, p. 99.

packaged meat in as little time as possible, Walker characterised the chicken's experience as an 'infinity of unbearable pain'.

The information that Walker conveyed as part of PETA's Kentucky Fried Cruelty campaign was not new by the twenty-first century, as practices within factory farms had been condemned by animal rights activists since the mid-1970s. However, the way that she framed this information was significant. The passage illustrated the pain and trauma that billions of individual chickens go through to generate food for humans. Walker was keen to stress that the pain inflicted upon animals through industrialised farming was not restricted to physical pain, but emotional pain also. As stated beforehand, Walker clearly pointed out that the date on which she penned the campaign letter was Mother's Day, and she underlined that chickens, and by extension other animals passing through factory farms, were routinely separated from their mothers soon after birth. Walker's pronouncement that 'your mother was taken immediately after your birth' was intended to create an affective response. On a holiday where the U.S. populace was encouraged to celebrate associations of love and nurturing attached to motherhood and maternal bonds, Walker urged her readers to widen their definition of motherhood to encompass familial bonds between animals, and to respect these bonds by questioning the ease with which they consume meat.

Furthermore, considering that Walker provided the preface to Marjorie Spiegel's 1988 text *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery*, it is not unreasonable to argue that her reference to the severing of maternal bonds, in the letter to KFC's executives, was an attempt to present the overlaps in the mechanisms of oppression used against enslaved women and men objectified as property in centuries past, and the contemporary suffering of animals in industrialised farming. Over a decade after Spiegel published her text drawing comparisons between the institution of slavery and factory farming, Walker believed that drawing on the history of slavery, and in particular, the forced separation and

removal of enslaved children from their mothers, was an effective way to mobilise public opinion against industrial farming. Within this passage, Walker challenged the consumption of animal flesh by linking it to gendered and raced experiences of trauma, in order to fashion a social justice movement that considered human and non-human animal social justice issues alongside each other. Though Walker used her opposition to manifestations of violence against racialised humans as a basis from which to challenge institutionalised violence against animals, her attempt to combine anti-racist politics with animal advocacy through use of a slavery analogy risked further oppressing black Americans, by comparing the suffering of animals to that of a group already animalised through white racist discourse. Carol J. Adams' warning that those striving to create an intersectional animal advocacy movement should not 'attempt to make connections by ripping experience from its history' is pertinent here, as Walker used the history of slavery out of context.<sup>575</sup> Adams' assertion that 'we must locate our ethics for animals so that it does not hurt people who are oppressed' is of paramount importance when creating a space for animal advocacy within wider social justice movements.<sup>576</sup>

## Conclusions

In this chapter I argued that recovering black American ideas on consuming animal bodies as food has to take into account how slavery, segregation and racialised poverty have used food as a weapon of violence against black women and men. The slave narratives of Douglass, Northup and Jacobs attest to the use of enforced hunger as a common method of controlling and punishing enslaved populations. In these texts, different categories of animals are the consumed and the consumer. The bodies of animals converted into meat were desired, restricted commodities, whilst other animals such as cats and dogs were perceived as competitors for food

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<sup>575</sup> Carol J. Adams, *Neither Man Nor Beast: Feminism and the Defense of Animals* (New York: Continuum, 1995), p. 83.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.

resources, amongst enslaved women and men. Recollections of inferior food rations to those allotted to farmed animals, breathing in the aromas of meats out of reach, grappling with dogs for scraps thrown from the slave master's table and being forced to swallow food intended for a dog, were just some moments that bolster the argument that white supremacy created circumstances in which the treatment of racialised humans was perceived as similar to, or worse than, that of animals on plantations. Although animal flesh is only one amongst many sources of protein, the restrictions placed upon meat for enslaved communities meant that black women and men were denied a food source that would enable the repair of their bodies in conditions that demanded unrelenting, high energy labour. Ultimately, the monopolisation of all but the least desirable parts of an animal's body for consumption by whites helped to construct and maintain unequal power relations between white and black Americans in the era of slavery, where certain cuts of animal flesh signified status and luxury, whilst others conveyed degradation. The restrictions placed on consuming meat and the state of hunger crafted as part of white mechanisms of control, created circumstances wherein black women and men viewed animals as the enemy, creatures gaining more than their fair share of food resources and also as aspirational consumable objects. The sources within this chapter convey that white supremacy forged connections between black Americans, animals, and food, using the institutionalised killing of animals and objectification of their bodies as weapons against oppressed human groups.

Although white supremacy fostered fraught and hostile relations between black Americans and animals raised for food in slavery and across the Jim Crow era, writers such as Douglass, Gregory and Walker expressed ideas and shaped arguments that recognised that animals raised for food were victims of an oppressive system, rather than active agents of white supremacy. When animal bodies were weaponised against black Americans, they were first and foremost weaponised against themselves, as the animal life was taken in order for her/him to

become an object. Douglass' protracted listing of birds caught in the 'huge family net' and animals 'fattening' for the 'destined vortex' demonstrated that in the midst of enslavement, black writers observed that animals too were entrapped in a society built upon unequal power relations, where the race and species privilege of white humans enabled them to consume beings at their will.<sup>577</sup>

Additionally, Gregory's declaration that he examined his willingness to consume animal bodies through his commitment to non-violence learned in the Civil Rights Movement, along with Walker's understanding of the disjuncture in sitting down to steaks as she spoke of 'freedom and justice for all', demonstrates that in the mid-late twentieth century influential black writers integrated animal advocacy into their multifaceted social justice activism. Gregory and Walker both communicated that the experiences of animals in industrialised farming was an institutionalised form of violence, which they encouraged their audience to stand against.<sup>578</sup>

However, Gregory and Walker also instigated open conversations around their initial resistance to transitioning to animal-free diets and their continued struggles to entirely eliminate animal flesh and by-products from their consumption habits. They brought to the foreground how the food cultures of black Americans complicated the rejection of consuming animals as food, and how the perception of vegetarianism and veganism as yet another mode of controlling black lives were real obstacles to widespread challenges to eating animals in black communities. Douglass, Gregory and Walker instigated debate that explored how the changing forms of white supremacy shaped the consumption habits of black Americans, whilst revealing how their experience of human forms of violence propelled them to extend their non-violent principles to non-human animals.

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<sup>577</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 88.

<sup>578</sup> Walker, 'Am I Blue?', p. 7.

## Conclusion

This thesis has shown that recovering a black American tradition of animal advocacy involves centring complex understandings of animals across changing personal and political landscapes, through a diverse source base. It has traced how black American thinkers expressed and documented ideas about various animals through the written word, across a long arc of time, spanning the mid-nineteenth century through to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Black American ideas relating to animals and their oppression have been foregrounded within this study. Unlike some previous animal advocacy literature, such as Spiegel's *The Dreaded Comparison*, black Americans are not used as props to make an animal advocacy argument.<sup>579</sup> Such literature compared the various forms of racial violence experienced by black women and men in the U.S. to the suffering experienced by animals in industrial farming, scientific experimentation and for leisure and entertainment. Resultantly, the systems of white supremacist violence used to oppress black Americans are held up in this line of argument not for condemnation in and of themselves, but to suggest that racism was a moral evil of the past, roundly condemned through moral suasion, and that through exposure of the suffering of animals, species-based abuse should also be condemned. The trauma of black Americans was therefore drawn upon as a tool to garner opposition to speciesist oppression. In arguments such as Spiegel's, slavery was used as an analogy for understanding the confinement of animals in the present day, and extrapolates that if we condemn one form of 'slavery' – the human kind, then we should challenge the 'enslavement' of animals also. This method of comparing human suffering to animal suffering exploits histories of black trauma to make an animal rights argument and is insensitive to discourses of racialised animalisation, wherein black men and women were represented as animals or less-than-human, to

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<sup>579</sup> Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (London: Heretic Books, 1988).



justify their oppression and exploitation at the hands of whites. This thesis has asked how black Americans have historically understood animals and their place in U.S. society, in relation to their own experience of subjugation and resistance. As such, black women and men have been transformed from objects of spectacle within an animal advocacy argument, to agents thinking through and formulating arguments about living alongside animals.

This research demonstrated that since the mid-nineteenth century, black American understandings of animals, as well as white American representations of animals, have been shaped by race and gender oppression. Slave narratives have proven to be rich documentary sources that elucidate how black women and men worked representations of animals into their writings to craft an abolitionist argument. Subverting a white supremacist discourse that associated blackness with animality, writers such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Sojourner Truth and Solomon Northup used terms such as 'beast' and 'brute' repeatedly, along with more specific animal symbols, such as snakes and tigers, to characterise the deceptive and violent behaviour of powerful whites in the slaveholding South. Moreover, in Jacobs' and Truth's narratives, animal symbolism was employed to give formerly enslaved women a coded language to talk through and communicate widespread occurrences of sexual harassment and assault against black women, in a society wherein it was deemed improper for women to discuss sexual experiences, whether forced or consensual. In chapter one I argued that slave narratives, to an extent, cemented and shaped antiradical ideas about specific animals, such as snakes and tigers, and animals as a homogenous group, through the terms beast and brute, by associating animality with fear, deception, danger and wildness. Such associations could affect human perceptions and reactions to animals and support their willingness to exploit and exterminate them. In this example, which linked the dangerous animal with whiteness and the institution of slavery, speciesism furthered an anti-racist argument, by flipping the animalisation

of blackness. However, this line of argument left in tact the construct of the 'dangerous animal', in need of control, that formed a central plank of the white supremacist justification for oppressing black men and women in the U.S. I made the case that black abolitionist writers used animal symbolism to generate empathy amongst Northern white audiences, for the millions of enslaved men and women held in the South. Douglass' depiction of Covey as 'snake-like' and 'unmanly', along with Northup's references to 'coiling', 'crushing', 'stinging' and 'venom' to describe his altercation with Tibeats, supports the argument that black abolitionist writers provided their audience with an analogy, to understand the fear experienced by black Americans under the system of slavery.<sup>580</sup>

The ideas explored within chapter one, which shaped negative perceptions of animals as fearsome beings, as part of an abolitionist strategy, form part of a broader approach within the thesis to include a spectrum of ideas that black Americans communicated about animals, ranging from the antiradical to the radical. This chapter highlights one of the complications of a project intent on recovering a black American tradition of animal advocacy, that as a researcher you encounter ideas that do not support empathy and respect towards animals, or ideas that actively further their oppression. Yet, rather than push these ideas aside, this project has sought to do justice to the richness and multi-faceted nature of relating to animals, specifically in changing contexts of racial oppression. As has been documented across the thesis, black American writers communicated ideas about animals that ranged from viewing them as useful symbols and reference points for human degradation in abolitionist and anti-racist struggles, to also crafting arguments that perceived animals as fellow exploited beings, and victims of oppressive systems. These ideas were not mutually exclusive but are testament to the complexities and obstacles of advocating for animals as a black American living

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<sup>580</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 173 and Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, p. 91.

through restrictive, violent and changing circumstances of white supremacy and living within wider U.S. society, where beliefs and practices that maintain human exceptionalism remain dominant.

Chapter two explored the long tradition of representing animals as human or human-like within black American oral culture and, subsequently, through the written word. I argued that for black Americans, using anthropomorphism to describe animals and human-animal relationships was not necessarily at odds with animal advocacy. Drawing on Bryan L. Moore's argument that anthropomorphism can undercut a worldview based upon human separateness and superiority from other animals, I analysed how black American writers regularly created slippage between human and animal.<sup>581</sup>

The pattern of characterising animals as human originated in the oral tradition of folktales, wherein the animal trickster played a central role, acting as a veil or mask for subversive human resistance narratives. Within animal-centred folktales, animal characters were voiced, clothed, played musical instruments and were capable of acts of resistance and plots of revenge, against powerful oppressors. Thus, through the oral tradition in black communities, animal constructs were intricately interwoven with narratives of anti-racist resistance. Alice Walker's admission in a 1988 radio interview with Shelton Walden, a black American radio host and animal advocate, that she understood a tradition of caring for and respecting animals as emerging out of the culture of animal trickster tales is significant.<sup>582</sup> That Walker, the most celebrated black American animal advocate, who encouraged her readership to include animals in their vision and practice of non-violence, located a long black-centred history of pro-animal thought, highlights that a black tradition of animal advocacy was not merely an outgrowth of white-led

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<sup>581</sup> Bryan L. Moore, *Ecology and Literature: Ecocentric Personification from Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 13.

<sup>582</sup> 'Alice Walker Interview, WBAI, New York', (December 26, 1988), Alice Walker Papers, MSS1061, Box AV1. Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Atlanta.

thinking and activism on animals, but grew out of black cultural forms and the experience of oppression and anti-racist resistance.

Writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Ellen Tarry and Walker each used anthropomorphic language when documenting their interactions with pets and animals residing in the landscape of the home. This study has shown that in the twentieth century, black American writers, as in the oral tradition, used humanised animals to mask human struggles, but that they deployed anthropomorphic language for other reasons. When black Americans write about animals in an anthropomorphic manner it should not be interpreted that they are *always* and *only* using them as stand-ins for human political narratives. Reading animals in black American writings only as masks obscures a multi-pronged vision of liberation advocated for by women like Hurston and Walker, wherein they challenged oppression based on race, gender and species simultaneously.

Hurston and Walker frequently described animals as human-like, both as part of a strategy to characterise these beings as 'part-of-the-family' and create a 'more-than-human-home', and to create slippage across human-animal boundaries, claiming traits perceived to be human as belonging to animals also. The source material that I drew upon in chapter two focused primarily on personal correspondence from Hurston's archive, published decades after her death, along with essays, event invitations and photographic material from Walker's archive. This source base highlighted that anthropomorphic language was not merely a literary device, wherein animals acted as symbols to veil human stories, but that anthropomorphism was a lens through which black women writers understood animals as part of a mutually beneficial network of caring. Hurston and Walker represented the owner-pet relationship as one that involved work in maintaining the animal, but that this labour was worthwhile as these companion animals provided comfort, emotional support and were integral to their construction of a sense of home. Hurston's relocation to Eau Gallie, Florida in the early 1950s required her to

recreate a feeling of home anew, vulnerable to the ever-present danger of white racist violence. She divulged that she was ‘waiting on public reaction’, once she had taken up residence in a rented property in a predominantly white neighbourhood, and that neighbours had assumed that she was the exception to the rule, as she was a black woman who liked things orderly and clean.<sup>583</sup> For a woman raised in the black-governed community of Eatonville, who had once proclaimed her astonishment that she could be racially discriminated against, asking ‘how could any deny themselves the pleasure of my company? It’s beyond me’, meeting with homogenising remarks and negative racial stereotypes about black Americans must have stung.<sup>584</sup> In an environment of racial hostility, Hurston turned to the non-human inhabitants of Eau Gallie to feel at home. The array of birds that flocked to her garden, created a growing sense of contentment for Hurston in Eau Gallie. Her anthropomorphic descriptions of the birds, whom she characterised as ‘feathered friends’, who woke her up ‘clamouring for their breakfast’ and ‘complain’ when the food runs out, made Hurston feel wanted and provided a sense of belonging, in a community that was a microcosm of U.S. society, entrenched in preserving white power.<sup>585</sup> In this example, anthropomorphism was utilised to communicate that Hurston nurtured these birds to create a more-than-human family, to create a safe haven in a site of racial vulnerability. In this moment, Hurston valued animals for their role in soothing her through the tumultuous final decade of her life.

For Ellen Tarry, including animal characters in her children’s literature and using anthropomorphic language was a device to communicate a message about respectability and instil the importance of ‘good’ behaviour for black American children in the 1940s. In an oft-overlooked text, *My Dog Rinty*, Tarry and her white

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<sup>583</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, ‘Letter from Zora Neale Hurston to Jean Parker Waterbury, dated 9<sup>th</sup> July 1951’, Zora Neale Hurston Papers, MS Group 6, Box 2, Folder 35, University of Florida George Smathers Library, Gainesville.

<sup>584</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, ‘How It Feels To Be Colored Me’, in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), pp. 1030 – 1033 (p. 1032).

<sup>585</sup> Hurston, ‘Letter from Zora Neale Hurston to Jean Parker Waterbury, dated 9<sup>th</sup> July 1951’.

co-author, Marie Hall Ets, used the eponymous dog, Rinty, to convey several messages to their intended young audience. To an extent, this text sought to encourage orderly behaviour in black children, impressing upon them the value of obedience and tidiness. This was emphasised at the conclusion of the text, when the young black child, David, and his family (including Rinty) move into a newly constructed apartment complex in Harlem, which welcomes 'well-behaved children' and 'well-behaved dogs'.<sup>586</sup> Likening children to dogs in a text that claimed to be one of the first to represent young black lives through a realist lens, may seem at odds with the writers' mission, and a perpetuation of racialised animalisation. I argue that in a society that was deeply segregated and where white supremacist violence was unexceptional, teaching children about obedience through an animal character that acted as an example was part of a safety mechanism and an attempt in black communities to reduce the vulnerability of black children to racial violence. Instilling the values of orderliness and obedience in black children was therefore part of the politics of uplift and of countering racist stereotypes, but it was also a pragmatic response to the threat of racial violence against young bodies, wherein parents and elders in black communities did not want to give whites the smokescreen of discipline to justify acts of violence against black children.

Tarry was dismissed as an unserious writer because of her animal protagonists and young audience. However, her text provided a window into a black American perspective on pet-keeping in the mid-twentieth century. The scratched carpets, chewed-up clothes and commotion at a Sunday church service demonstrated that pet-keeping was not a signifier of a harmonious, middle-class domestic life, but that the realities of living alongside animals, even those classed as domesticated, could be marked by friction and frustration. The anthropomorphism employed by Tarry and Ets, detailed Rinty's experience of 'shame' when he exhibits 'bad' behaviour and fails to live up to ideas of the ideal pet expected by the family.

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<sup>586</sup> Tarry and Ets, *My Dog Rinty*, p. 48

Moreover, Rinty's deep sadness is noted when, out of exasperation, David's family attempt to re-home him. Reading into and representing animal behaviours as indicative of particular emotions, such as shame and sadness is a complex issue that raises more questions than answers from a critical animal studies perspective. On the one hand, we are limited, through the lack of a shared verbal language, about what we can know about animals' inner lives. This raises questions as to whether we should refrain from describing their patterns of behaviour as evidence of particular emotions experienced by humans. For example, Rinty's behaviour shamed David's family in the church and the separation of the young child from his beloved pet triggered sadness, with these feelings being transferred onto the animal also. On the other hand, it can be argued that it is anthropocentric to assume that the capacity to feel certain emotions is confined to humans. Therefore, what has been read as anthropomorphic language could unsettle the categories of human and animal, by claiming particular traits and characteristics as belonging to human *and* non-human animals. *My Dog Rinty* enriched an understanding of the complexity of uses of anthropomorphism in black American writings. It was a helpful device for communicating perceived reciprocal emotions between owners and pets, for underlining the ups and downs of living alongside animals in domestic settings, and for stirring debate on where we draw the line between difference and sameness amongst humans and animals, and whether we need to draw a line at all.

In chapter three, I explored the relationships between animals, labour and the land in black American writings, spanning the era of enslavement through to the era of industrialised agriculture in the mid-twentieth century. Drawing upon source material from Frederick Douglass and Zora Neale Hurston, I contended that black American intellectuals documented multiple understandings of how race and species interacted when working the land. The weight of racial oppression upon black women and men, during slavery and in post-emancipation sharecropping and tenant farming societies, shaped interactions with and attitudes towards draft

animals that worked the land alongside human labourers. In Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom* and Hurston's *Their Eyes*, each writer communicated how working the land with animals was a site of vulnerability for black Americans, putting them at risk of reduced yields, cycles of debt and poverty to white landowners, and ensuing physical violence at the hands of whites, if draft animals resisted. In *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Douglass' characterisation of a team of oxen as 'sullen and intractable' with 'senseless heads' highlighted his frustration when they did not follow his orders, which had been passed down by his violent and unpredictable master, Covey.<sup>587</sup> In this moment, Douglass upheld speciesist understandings of animals, viewing them as energy sources and working machines designed to follow human commands. The wider political context of racial slavery facilitated this perception of animals by Douglass. Knowing that Douglass had limited experience working with animals, Covey allotted him a task that he was likely to fail at and would therefore provide 'justification' for a violent beating. When the oxen resisted his orders, Douglass envisioned the ensuing punishment that would be meted out to him from Covey, resulting in resentment towards the animals. During slavery, working with animals had higher stakes for black women and men, as the resistance of animals to the yoke could reflect badly upon the enslaved, who were blamed and violently punished for not managing the draft animals effectively and for decreases in crop yields.

This sentiment, of frustration with animals that, through old age, illness or resistance, could not or would not perform to the ideal of the productive, load-bearing machine, was echoed in Hurston's *Their Eyes*, through the characters of Matt Bonner and the yellow mule. As explored in chapter three, the mule is both a character and a symbol in Hurston's work, developed in several texts before it appeared in *Their Eyes*. Scholars and other Hurston enthusiasts would cite Nanny's declaration in *Their Eyes* that 'de nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah

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<sup>587</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 170.



can see' as the most significant role played by the mule in her writings.<sup>588</sup> Through this statement, Hurston crafted a black feminist argument reliant on animal symbolism, wherein it was necessary for her audience to recognise that mules were exploited, overburdened working animals. Through the character of Nanny, and her experiences in slavery of hard toil in agricultural and domestic settings, Hurston demonstrated the multiple jeopardy of black women, in the antebellum and post-bellum South. Indeed, the 'black woman as mule' metaphor conveyed the heavy loads that black women carried throughout their lives and their mistreatment on multiple axes, as they experienced racism, sexism and classism that intersected on a daily basis. Their race shaped their experiences of womanhood and their gender was affected by their racialised identity. Rather than equating blackness with animality through physiology, in the way that white supremacist discourse had done recurrently, Hurston drew upon histories of animal exploitation as an analogy to communicate black women's overburdened, exploited position in a racist, patriarchal society.

Even in circumstances where the stakes were incredibly high, due to the violence of white supremacy and racialised poverty, black American writers documented empathy towards and solidarity with draft animals as subjects of labour exploitation. Douglass perceived 'several points of similarity' between his situation and that of the oxen, wherein 'they were property, so was I; they were to be broken, so was I. Covey was to break me, I was to break them; break and be broken – such is life'.<sup>589</sup> The passage in which Douglass empathised with the plight of the broken and abused oxen was therefore part of his wider intellectual mission to document his *ideas*, as well as his *experiences*, through the written word. Read in one way, Douglass was underlining the degradation of the system of slavery, as the property

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<sup>588</sup> Zora Neale Hurston, 'Their Eyes Were Watching God Holograph', Zora Neale Hurston Collection, JWW MSS 9, Box 2, Folder 27, p. 13. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven.

<sup>589</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 170.

status and the 'breaking in' of enslaved men and women, and animals, through violent punishment to achieve control and submissiveness, placed human beings on the same level as animals. Through such a reading, Douglass sought to compel challenges to the institution of slavery, by underlining how, through forced and uncompensated labour extraction, black men and women were treated like animals. However, the passage also contains a degree of identification with the oxen as oppressed beings, and a theory that he, as an enslaved man, continued a cycle of violence over beings that he could control, along the axis of species, as Covey did to him along the axis of race. Douglass thereby forwarded an argument that violence begets more violence, and that oppressions sustain each other. Furthermore, Douglass recognised his own capacity to be both oppressed and oppressor, and beyond using the oxen as a literary device to gain support for abolition, he acknowledged that their material conditions on plantations in the South were exploitative, centred on overuse as labourers and violent discipline.

Douglass' reflections on the violence of slavery creating victims beyond enslaved men and women were echoed in a Reconstruction-era speech, which he gave to recently emancipated black agriculturalists in Tennessee. As well as imbuing former slaves with a sense of pride and dignity in independent black agriculture, by proclaiming that agricultural cultivation originated with black Africans, Douglass made the kind treatment of animals the first plank in his foundation for successful, self-sufficient black farming. He argued that 'not only the slave, but the horse, the ox and the mule shared the general feeling of indifference to rights naturally engendered by a state of slavery'.<sup>590</sup> This declaration by Douglass, along with Hurston's fictional defence of draft animals, documents a long tradition in which black American intellectuals expressed solidarity with animals as oppressed beings.

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<sup>590</sup> Douglass, 'Address Delivered by Hon. Frederick Douglass, at the Third Annual Fair of the Tennessee Colored Agricultural and Mechanical Association', p. 13.

Chapter four showcased the multiple understandings of consuming animals for food expressed by black American writers, demonstrating how through slavery and racialised poverty meat became monopolised and weaponised by powerful and wealthy whites. Within Douglass', Northup's and Jacobs' slave narratives, animals, such as dogs, pigs and horses, were recurrently presented as competitors for food on the plantation, with each writer describing how animals received a greater quantity and quality of food. Through this line of argument, black abolitionist writers sought to communicate the debasement of slavery, wherein animals were perceived as being treated more favourably than enslaved women and men. However, within these segments, there were flashes of recognition that the diet provided to animals such as pigs, was the result of an intention to fatten for slaughter. Northup's juxtaposition of the meagre rations provided to enslaved women and men, with the more ample portions provided to domesticated farm animals, demonstrated the differences in oppression along race and species axes, with enslaved black Americans experiencing hunger because of fears that they would 'grow too fat to labor', whilst speciesism in this context led to overfeeding, as the animal was destined for the dinner table of wealthy whites.<sup>591</sup>

Moreover, within *My Bondage and My Freedom* Douglass drew out the racial complexities of relating to animals on plantations during slavery. Though he had documented the indignity of fighting for scraps of food with the Lloyd family dog, Old Nep, under the dinner table, he also acknowledged the harms done to an overabundance of animals that provided a feast atop the table. Douglass' listing of birds and mammals that had been 'fattened for the destined vortex' or 'caught in this huge family net', can be read as empathy with food animals for their entrapment on the plantation and consumption via the salivating mouths of white planters.<sup>592</sup> In addition, Douglass' personification of the slaveholding dinner table as 'groaning'

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<sup>591</sup> Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, p. 117.

<sup>592</sup> Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 88.

under the weight of 'blood-bought luxuries' and 'unending feasting', demonstrated how the hunger of the enslaved was constructed.<sup>593</sup> Indeed, malnutrition amongst the enslaved populace was not a result of food, including meat and dairy products, being in short supply, but because it was monopolised and unevenly distributed by whites. The array of animal bodies that lined the slaveholder's dinner table were 'blood-bought' both because speciesism ordained that animal bodies could be killed and drained to create food and because the violence and exploitation of slavery enabled the excess wealth that made it possible for white Americans to over consume.

Over a century later, the writings of Dick Gregory and Alice Walker unpacked the relationship of eating animals to anti-racist struggles. They simultaneously accepted the difficulties of eliminating meat and other animal by-products from one's diet, when, as a result of white supremacy and enforced hunger, such food had been constructed as forbidden, out-of-reach and laden with power. Gregory's reminiscence of growing up poor in St. Louis, where memories of welfare assistance and the 'philanthropy' of local white Americans helped to stave off hunger, deepened an understanding of how transitions to plant-based diets for black Americans who had experienced racialised poverty were complicated. Indeed, Gregory's hostile initial reaction to Dr. Alvenia Fulton's advice, that he should refrain from eating animals as food and adopt a vegetarian, and later, entirely raw, fruit-based, diet, revealed how consumption had strong ties to the politics of race and class. His astonishment that somebody had the gall to tell him that his mother had 'fed me wrong', when it was a near-impossibility to provide 'somethin' to eat' for her children on such a small income, underscores how black American writers who were willing to advocate for animals also stressed the importance of how race and class privilege smoothed the journey of dietary transitions.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>593</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

<sup>594</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 5.

Nonetheless, Gregory's commitment to non-violence, under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., pushed him to examine his reliance on animals for food and the processes that converted animals into food, claiming that non-violence meant 'opposition to killing in any form', including animals.<sup>595</sup> Through this statement, Gregory expressed how black American ideas on animal advocacy were derived from their own histories and protest traditions, as opposed to being an offshoot of white-led activism. His declaration that 'animals and humans suffer and die alike' was a radical position that influenced his readership to consider the suffering of animals in industrialised food systems in the U.S. and to incorporate animal advocacy into the continuing anti-racism, anti-war struggle in the 1970s.<sup>596</sup>

Gregory's calls to make vegetarian and vegan lifestyles a platform of the black freedom struggle foreshadowed Alice Walker's declaration that 'as we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks', honing in on the dearth of compassion for animals in this vision of liberation.<sup>597</sup> Walker's essays, journal entries, interviews and campaign letters attest to her decades-long commitment to improving conditions for animals in factory farms and slaughterhouses, and her advocacy for the reduction and elimination of animal bodies from human diets. Walker's references to the 'ritual killing' of turkeys and their 'bleeding necks' that symbolised Thanksgiving, her penning of a letter for a PETA campaign on Mother's Day that focused on the familial separation of farmed animals, and her assertion that it would be 'hard' to consume animal flesh whilst attending demonstrations for peace and justice, illuminate that her animal advocacy, specifically around animals categorised as food in the U.S., extended well beyond her most-celebrated essay, *Am I Blue?*<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>595</sup> Gregory, *Cookin' With Mother Nature*, p. 15.

<sup>596</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.

<sup>597</sup> Walker, 'Am I Blue?', p. 7.

<sup>598</sup> Walker, 'Journal', p. 182 – 183 and Walker, 'My Face to the Light: Thoughts About Christmas', p. 98.

Collectively, the chapters that form this thesis challenge the erasure and sidelining of black American voices and ideas on animals and their oppression, which characterised earlier white-authored and white-centered histories of animal advocacy. They chart the development, communication and documentation of black-centered ideas about animals that furthered the causes of abolitionism, civil rights and black feminism. Recovering ideas and demonstrating that since the mid-nineteenth century, black American thinkers have recorded significant, complex theories about animals, their oppression and the relationship between human and non-human social justice struggles, has been a central plank of the original contribution to knowledge within this thesis.

Moreover, by engaging with the research of Gene Andrew Jarrett, this thesis adds to the debate on traditions and canon-building within black literature, and the limitations placed upon black women and men to always and only make race the focus of their intellectual and creative work. Jarrett's investment in presenting 'anomalous texts' to show that the scope of content and characters in black American literature moved beyond discussions of blackness and living through and resisting white supremacy, enabled a richer understanding of the obstacles to advocating for animals as a black American across the decades.<sup>599</sup> This thesis charts how, particularly from the mid-nineteenth through to the mid-twentieth century, extraordinary writers such as Frederick Douglass, Zora Neale Hurston and Ellen Tarry formed their multi-faceted understandings of animals in circumstances where they were expected to direct all of their energies towards bringing down slavery, segregation and racial discrimination, and yet they still documented ideas on animal exploitation. Building upon Jarrett's framing, black American ideas on animals can be seen as *anomalous*, not in that they were a rarity, but because they unsettled expectations of what a black American should write about. As such, this

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<sup>599</sup> Jarrett, p. 3.

thesis represents a vital contribution to recent research that seeks to highlight the breadth and richness of black American ideas.

Ultimately, the findings of this thesis call for a more generous interpretation of black American animal advocacy, in which a spectrum of understandings of animals were recorded, ranging from perceptions of animals as competitors for resources and as working machines, through to fellow subjects of oppression, capable of intelligent thought with the capacity to suffer. These multiple, varied and complex understandings of animals - some that encouraged fear and hostility, others that pushed for coexistence between humans and animals, challenging their institutionalised use and abuse - were each shaped by the race, gender and class politics of the era in which they were produced. Through documenting these ideas, this thesis makes a valuable contribution to literature on the messy intersections of race and species across a broad sweep of nineteenth through twenty-first century U.S. history.

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