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The Queer Visuality of Slavery and its Afterlives

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Abstract: This manuscript examines the racial-sexual anxieties of slavery and its afterlives as they are articulated in contemporary Black queer visual culture. An engagement with cultural history, visual studies, and Black porn studies, the manuscript traces the (dis)appearance of Black queer sexuality within the colonial archive. Placing this scholarship in conversation with DePaul Vera's *My Soul to Keep*, it posits that white supremacy is intimately connected to expressions of sexual anti-Blackness in mainstream queer culture. The manuscript offers Black queer pleasure as a corrective to normative conceptualizations of Black sexuality, embracing the liberatory potential of our practices in intimacy and relationality.

Keywords: Black queer, visual culture, temporality, archives, pleasure, care

From No Coloreds to No Blacks: The Archival Resonance of Sexual Anti-Blackness

For some Black queers,¹ signing up for a gay dating app is like entering a cafe that separates white and colored patrons in the Jim Crow south (see Figure 1). One will likely be met with silent loathing from those on the other side of the di-

vide, and may even have the misfortune of receiving vitriolic comments and poor service from the white patrons and owners, respectively. While the digital space does not lend itself to the same physical dangers of a racist establishment, it does allow for various forms of epistemic and symbolic violence to persist. Like the Black patron of the cafe might ask why their presence makes white folks so uncomfortable, so too do some Black queers wonder why they are reduced to the value of their body parts: the bridge of their nose, the (assumed) size of their dick² and ass, the color of their eyes, the tone of their skin, the composition of their physique. In different registers and at varying levels of transparency, the “separate but equal” mindset is present in both of these scenarios, governed by the racial-sexual anxieties of white folks maintained across space-time.

If one understands segregation as a socio-juridical mandate meant to protect white Americans from the sexual depravity of Black folks, the phrases *No Coloreds* (past) and *No Blacks* (present) become a resonant archive of sexualized white supremacy. Despite catering to radically different audiences, *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith, 1915) and *On Lynchings* (Wells, 2014) are exemplars of how racial-sexual violence structured institutionalized segregation. A critically acclaimed Hollywood film about North-South relations during the American Civil War and Reconstruction era, *Birth of a Nation* imagines the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan as a direct response to Black men’s predatory behavior towards white women. While much of this film is based in lies about Black sexuality, the myth of the Black male rapist had (and still has) material consequences for the Black community. Ida B. Wells-Barnett’s pamphlets on late nineteenth-century southern lynchings explicitly cites white women’s lies about Black men’s sexual advances as one of the leading causes of lynching. Whether white women sought out this sex with



Figure 1: Segregated cafe in Durham, NC (Library of Congress 1940).

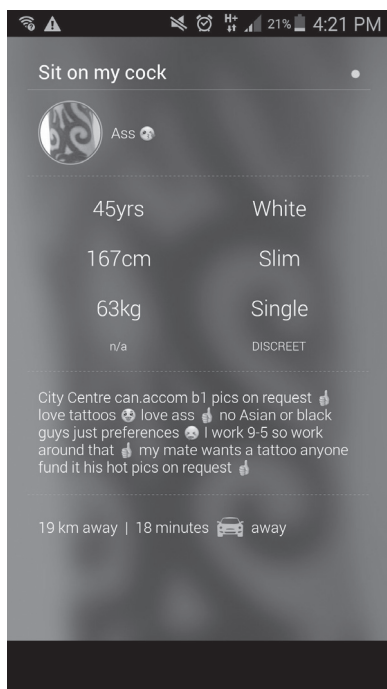


Figure 2: Profile of white man saying “no Asian or black guys” with a tongue emoji to express his disinterest (Twitter 2016).



Figure 3: Profile of white Grindr user cyber-bullying a Black man with racial slurs and death threats (Twitter 2017).

Black men, or the liaisons never happened at all, the idea of interracial sex planted by these lies became a justification for white violence, structuring homosocial spaces like the KKK. Segregation was simply a hegemonic shift in the status quo post-Civil War, a neoliberal aperture that consequentially veiled the racial-sexual anxieties of white Americans under new guises. *No Coloreds* is a reminder that white society accepts Black folks under the condition that they know their place and stay in it.

No Blacks continues that legacy by using “politically correct” language to (re)articulate these anxieties, which are often touted as sexual and relational preferences. As shown by the screenshots (see Figures 2 and 3), compiled by the Twitter account @GrindrRacism, gay dating apps are rife with *sexual anti-Blackness*. A white supremacist mindset that positions a Black person’s desirability as the composite value of their body parts, sexual anti-Blackness captures the nuance of dating apps and other digital technologies that si-

We stand in solidarity with the #BlackLivesMatter movement and the hundreds of thousands of queer people of color who log in to our app every day.

We will not be silent, and we will not be inactive. Today we are making donations to the Marsha P. Johnson Institute and Black Lives Matter, and urge you to do the same if you can. We will continue to fight racism on Grindr, both through dialogue with our community and a zero-tolerance policy for racism and hate speech on our platform. As part of this commitment, and based on your feedback, we have decided to remove the ethnicity filter from our next release.

Figure 4: Grindr announces removal of ethnicity filter the day before Blackout Tuesday (Instagram 2020).

multaneously render Black queers hypervisible and invisible.³ Sexual anti-Blackness is used here in lieu of the more widely recognized term, *sexual racism* (Lay, 1993; Stember, 1981), to both center Black queers and extend this critique to non-Black people of color (henceforth POC) queers. While also subjected to racism on the apps, this distinction is important because some non-Black POC also include various iterations of *No Blacks* on their own profiles. This incorporation into whiteness by distancing oneself from Blackness is resonant with the differential social positioning of East Asian and white Latinx/Latin American folks throughout U.S. history.

In June of 2020, as a result of the Black uprisings in the U.S. and ongoing fight for Black liberation worldwide, Grindr⁴ announced that they would eliminate their ethnicity filter, which allowed users to search for profiles by the self-identified ethnicity of other users (see Figure 4). In the wake of this removal, however, racism is still alive and well on the app. While this act was in line with what some studies of race and gay dating apps have called for (Huston et al., 2018; Lefkowitz, 2018), it does very little for Black queers other than make it harder to search for one another. In a good faith effort to create an inclusive environment for all users, Grindr ironically added anoth-

er layer of obfuscation to the veil of sexual anti-Blackness. If slavery was an attempt to control the Black body for (re)productive means, and segregation and lynching were modes of preventing racial-sexual anxieties from manifesting, then deleting the ethnicity filter on gay dating apps is a post-racial move that makes all users responsible for addressing *sexual racism*. It is no longer a Black queer person's prerogative to convert their screen into a sea of Black queers. Instead, they are obliged to appear in front of a multicolored grid of people who do not want them, or want them in ways that make them uncomfortable, in hopes that their presence might ameliorate the internalized biases of non-Black users.

Drawing from cultural history, visual studies, and Black porn studies, the author details the queer visibility of slavery and its afterlives as it relates to sexual anti-Blackness. Using Hartman's conceptualization of the sexual/libidinal economy of slavery as a point of departure, they provide a detailed survey of historical Black queer sexuality in Black Studies scholarship. They then use this engagement to analyze the collages of DePaul Vera, a Miami-based artist who uses print and digital media to create harrowing portraits of contemporary Black queer life. To close, the author reflects on what sexual liberation and aftercare might look like for Black queer intellectuals, whose work regularly calls them to relive their traumas in order to fashion more livable lives for themselves, as well as for future generations of Black folks at the gender and sexual margins of this world.

The Libidinal Economy of Slavery

The libidinal investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents, statements and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past.

—Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts"

Slavery was founded upon forms of racial-gendered-sexual violence that have haunted Black people into the present. From the torturous experiments conducted on enslaved Black women in order to develop the field of modern gynecology (Sharpe, 2016, p. 50; Snorton, 2017, p. 17–53), to myths about Black male hypersexuality and virility, chattel slavery was founded in various anxieties and arousals regarding the Black body that inform sexu-

al anti-Blackness today. As people whose identities are intimately associated with non-normative practices in gender and sexuality, Black queers are even more implicated in these conceptualizations of sexuality by daring to embrace the very promiscuity that was created to justify Black subjection. This audacity to love and fuck differently, however, must be contextualized by the history of queer sexual violence that structured slavery.

In *Scenes of Subjection* (1999), Saidiya Hartman identifies the interplay of terror and pleasure as imperative to the structure of U.S. chattel slavery. Her brief attention to the gendered dimensions of slave torture opens a conversation on the centrality of queer sexual violence to white masculinity and domination. While she focuses on cisgender women in her analysis, Hartman is sure to mention that sexual violence was perpetrated against *all* enslaved persons:

Here it is not my intention to reproduce a heteronormative view of sexual violence as only and always directed at women or to discount the “great pleasure in whipping a slave” experienced by owners and overseers or eliminate acts of castration and genital mutilation from the scope of sexual violence but rather to consider the terms in which gender—in particular, the category “woman”—becomes meaningful in a legal context in which subjectivity is tantamount to injury. (p. 97)

By gesturing to the pleasure that slaveowners experienced from abusing slaves, as well as the explicitly sexualized violence of castration and genital mutilation, Hartman acknowledges that the institution of slavery trafficked in queerness. From the auction block to the whipping post, an enslaved person was only as valuable as the summation of their parts, and the pleasure their masters could derive from their flesh. While not articulated as queer sexual violence in the archive, the gendered-sexual dimensions of colonial punishment can be garnered through a close-reading practice that gives equal weight to documented and embodied knowledges.

It is to this end that Hartman revisits the scene of two enslaved Black girls aboard the *Recovery* in “Venus in Two Acts” (2008). Vexed by her failure to discuss another girl who is mentioned in passing during the captain’s trial for murdering Venus (Hartman, 2006), Hartman provides us with the imperfect writing practice of *critical fabulation* (2008, p. 11), making a way for the girl to appear despite the obscurity of her archival traces. By overlapping what little is known of the girl with what *can* be known about Black girls like her in the past, present, and future, Hartman demonstrates how a

healthy distrust of the archive can generate new engagements with the past. Though she admits that this method is not capable of “resuscitating the girl” (p. 12), it does provide us with a pathway for discussing lives and experiences that were left out of the colonial register, including those of Black queers.

Reading against the grain of the Portuguese Inquisition archive, a series of investigations conducted by the Holy Office in Portugal, Lamonte Aidoo’s *Slavery Unseen: Sex, Power, and Violence in Brazilian Slavery* (2018) uses cases of same-sex sexual acts, “the rape of male slaves by white masters, sex between clergymen and young boys, and numerous instances of incest” (p. 31), to argue that same-sex sexual violence was fundamental to Brazilian slavery. While he cautions that sexual violence should not be conflated with romance or used to define the sexualities of those enslaved Black men and boys who were raped, he does use these cases to demonstrate how white male supremacy was constituted through these sex acts. The prominence of same-sex sexual violence in Brazil may not give us precise language for contemporary Black queerness, but it does reveal that white masculinity and queerness have found articulation in and through the non-consensual consumption of the Black male interior.

The hunger for Black flesh during slavery did not stop at the pleasures derived from torture and sexual violence for white slaveowners. In *The Delectable Negro* (2014), Vincent Woodard assembles a harrowing archive of cannibalism (as the literal and figurative consumption of the Black body) during U.S. chattel slavery. While Woodard also touches upon issues of same-sex rape, and similarly cautions against any reading of sexual violence as responsible for producing Black queer sexualities and genders (p. 22), much of his analysis focuses on the white male fantasy of cannibalizing Black flesh. By consuming Black men’s flesh, “a permanent taking in of that which horrifies, that which embodies the threat of self- and communal annihilation” (p. 93), white men transitioned from humiliating to fully incorporating that which they most feared. In identifying the Black male interior as a political and poetic site for understanding the resonance of historical same-sex abuse with Black queer dispossession in the present, Woodard offers the mouth and anus as spaces “within the collective black memory of slavery” (p. 212). Slavery alone did not produce Black genders and sexualities, but it made their presence salient via the racial-sexual anxieties and abuses carried out by white male slaveowners and their associates.

To differently locate the racial-sexual terror of slavery and its bearing on

Black queer sexuality in the present, Christina Sharpe's *Monstrous Intimacies* (2009) positions Isaac Julien's *The Attendant* as a sadomasochist (re)animation of chattel slavery. Filmed at the Wilberforce House in England, *The Attendant* is an experimental film that follows a Black museum attendant into the psychosexual drama of *Slaves on the West Coast of Africa*, a famous anti-slavery painting by François-Auguste Biard (Sharpe, 2009, p. 113). Cycling between the roles of dominant and submissive, voyeur and actor, the museum attendant's Black queerness is constituted in (non-)relation to the painting. His desires simultaneously produce and are produced by the scene, transforming the space around him into an interracial s/m⁵ play party.

Sharpe's analysis of *The Attendant* refracts the same-sex violences of chattel slavery, offering instead a space of Black queer sexual possibility: "Julien's *The Attendant* offers a vital space of regeneration and resistance to total incorporation, a map to creating and theorizing within and against sociopolitical and disciplinary regimes, a possible space for retheorizing consent, desire, and transmission" (2009, p. 152). Rather than allowing chattel slavery to hinder Black queer sexual practice and community, *The Attendant* dares to envision Black queers as consensual producers of their own sexualities. Further displacing the myth that Black queer sexuality is the product of colonial same-sex sexual violence, Sharpe positions s/m as a fraught practice in erotics and haunting that historicizes Black queerness by reclaiming the scene of subjection.

It would be remiss to analyze the resonant visuality of slavery and Black queer s/m performances without mentioning race-play pornography. In *The Color of Kink* (2016), Ariane Cruz details Black women's engagement in various forms of BDSM, including race-play and humiliation. In her analysis of Pudding Foot Productions, an amateur porn blog that specializes in "black-white lesbian race play and (inter)racial domination" (Cruz, 2016, p. 103) Cruz offers another valence of Black queer BDSM that is not a value judgement of race play, but rather "elucidate[s] the multiple ways it may be experienced and how it illuminates the experience of black female sexuality" (p. 110). Her analysis of *Get Out of My Town* represents a generous reading of race play's relationship to Black queer sexuality, collapsing the boundaries between viewers, actresses, and director:

What strikes me about this scene of interracial lesbian race play mediated by the black male gaze is not that queerness occupies the nadir in a hierarchy of straight male desire . . . Rather, this scene speaks to the ways that

race play and its pleasures are rendered ambivalently queer. The different levels of performance—verbal and visual—further convolute lesbian desire. Mabel’s oral allegiance to black manhood contradicts both her other comments that convey lesbian desire (e.g., the pleasure Betty Sue imagines Mabel experiences from being in proximity to her “white crotch” and the pleasure Mabel asserts Betty Sue would derive from the taste of her “melted” blackness) and the actions of the performers, which are ambiguous. For example, Mabel’s moans indicate both pain and pleasure, while her laughter alternatively signals amusement and discomfort. *The body is an unreliable index of desire here*. However, while interracial lesbian desire is opaque, the queerness of the scene—its jumbling of binaries and dramatizing of the mercuriality of sexuality—is transparent. (Cruz, 2014, p. 116; emphasis present author)

By accounting for the Black male gaze of the director and the nebulous desires of the actresses and their characters, Cruz details the queerness of the scene beyond simple categorizations of queer sexualities. Her reading of *Get Out of My Town* gestures toward the queer visibility of slavery and its afterlives, a corporeal unreliability that is demystified only when one attends to the sexual and erotic lives of self-identified Black queers. While race-play pornography⁶ may fail to center Black queer desire, it forces a confrontation with the queer libidinal economy of slavery that produces pleasure for viewers of various races, genders, and sexualities, albeit in different registers.

What becomes possible, then, when Black queers insert themselves and their racial-sexual antagonists into the scenes of chattel slavery and its afterlives? Reflecting on a series of collages produced by DePaul Vera, the author conceptualizes a Black queer temporality in which redress for sexual anti-Blackness is made possible by (re)articulating it as white supremacy. Collage, as an art form that is comprised of overlapping and superimposed materials, is unique in its potential to bring the resonance of past, present, and future into focus. Through the scenes below, Vera offers a remediation of past harms in his own life as a Black queer, reclaiming his sexuality in the process.

Black Queer Temporality in DePaul Vera’s Collages

Born in Nashville and currently based in Miami Beach, Vera is a “designer, illustrator, and color enthusiast” who uses art as a mode of expressing his identities and personality (Vera, 2020a).⁷ For his MFA thesis installation,

My Soul to Keep (2018), Vera created a multiroom menagerie of photos, magazine clippings, posters, flags, collages, and other materials that represent him. While many of the materials are of naked and semi-nude men, the most prominent and harrowing pieces are those that bring the Jim Crow and Civil Rights eras into direct conversation with white queer culture. The repetition of white gay imagery (from Tumblr, Instagram, Adobe Stock Images, etc.) alongside Ku Klux Klan photos and paraphernalia throughout the exhibition is an indictment of white queers who believe that their queerness absolves their whiteness. The three pieces from the exhibition analyzed here, *I know what they want, what the Klan really really wants* (2017), *West Hollywood*, (2018), and *Just Watching* (2018) all reflect on the queer dimensions of white supremacy. Vera leverages his contemporary experiences as a Black queer man to illustrate the visual resonance of present-day sexual anti-Blackness and extreme acts of twentieth-century anti-Black violence.

I know what they want, what the Klan really really wants

I know what they want, what the Klan really really wants (Figure 5) is a satirical commentary on racial purity and white homosocial violence. The collage features a black and white photograph of hooded Klansmen entering a white door and being watched by two other white men in formal wear. This photo is superimposed onto a color photograph of a white twunk,⁸ laying on his stomach atop white striped bedding while arching his back in a suggestive manner. His anus is covered by the door, implying that the Klansmen are *entering* him as one might enter their partner during anal sex.

On his Patreon, a website where creatives can share and curate exclusive content for their patrons, Vera states that he “imagined Klansmen as disembodied dicks waiting in line to gangbang yet another idealized White body” when creating this collage (Vera, 2020b). By tracing the archival resonance of racial purity, linked to both the biological and social reproduction of whiteness, Vera demonstrates that the white supremacist project of the Ku Klux Klan is eerily reminiscent of contemporary practices in white queer relationality. The satire is rooted less in the unfathomability of the connection than the irony of the claim; despite the documented homophobic leanings of white supremacists, the comments and behaviors of white gay men reproduce this ideology of racial purity.

No Blacks, and other phrases rooted in sexual racism, serve as a roundabout way for white gays to say that they only date and fuck other white men. While the intention may be articulated under the guise of sexual pref-

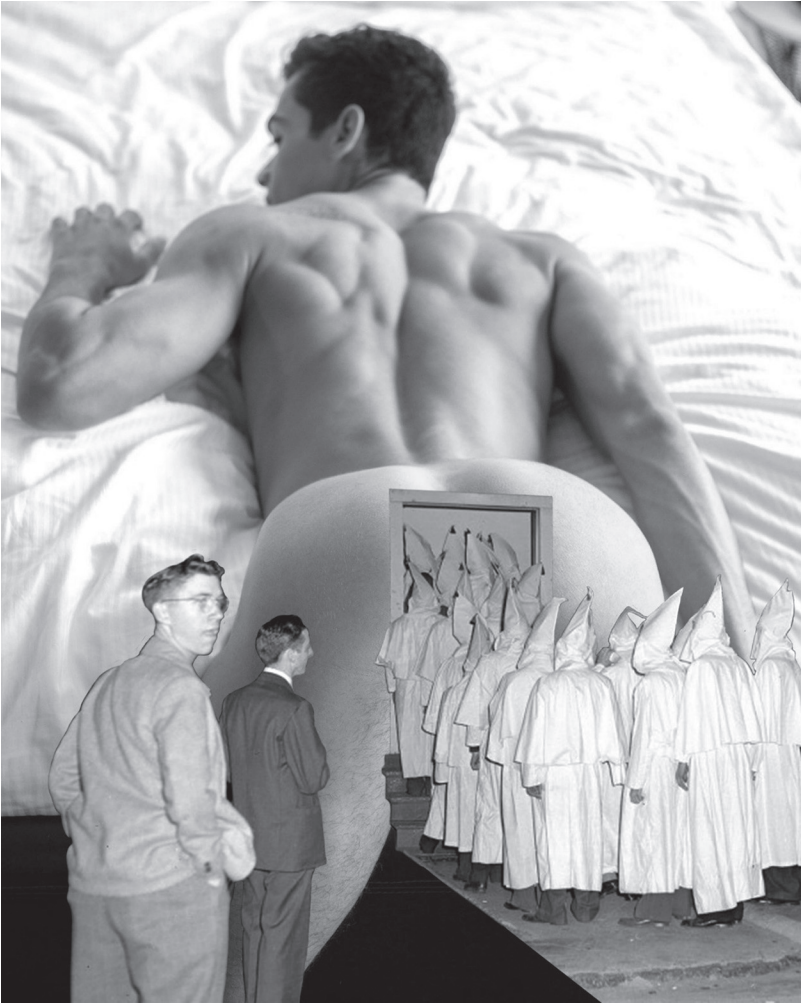


Figure 5: *I know what they want, what the Klan really really wants* (Vera 2017).

erences, the impact is the perpetuation of white supremacist logics that say Black folks are, at most, only worthy of hardcore and nonconsensual sexual practices. These men may choose to transgress their self-imposed color line when they want a taste of Black flesh, but they rebuke the advances of Black queers who pursue them. *I know what they want* is Vera's way of processing overlapping temporalities of racial trauma and sexual abjection, while also validating his own desires by satirizing sexual anti-Blackness.

West Hollywood

West Hollywood (Figure 6) is a more explicit commentary about Vera's experiences in (white) queer space. During a trip to West Hollywood, a well-known gayborhood of Los Angeles and hub for gay adult entertainers, Vera encountered sexual anti-Blackness while "trying to pursue guys who side-eyed [him] while others watched in amusement" (Vera, 2020b). The resulting collage is a black and white photo of a group of white men surrounding a Black man at what appears to be a lunch counter sit-in, with a cropped image of a white twink in his underwear watching from just outside the scene. The submissive, protective posture of the Black man amid the active, upright gaze of the white men both past and present conjures the sexually charged humiliation of both Vera's experience and same-sex sexual violence during chattel slavery. Vera's reflections on this experience gesture towards this resonant feeling of humiliation across space-time: "Their hostility to my fragile gestures annihilated any lustful thoughts, and suddenly my sex drive was gone. This disenchantment and my frustration of being othered in an already othered community was the spark that initiated the combination of these two images" (Vera 2020b).

While Vera does not specify the race of those who rejected him during this trip, sexual anti-Blackness allows us to understand that white queer supremacy (as enacted by white gay men and reinforced by mainstream queer culture) can be perpetuated by anyone. The visibility of anti-Black violence evoked here is both specific and metonymical in its applications; whether those who rejected and mocked Vera were all white or a combination of races, the fact of white queer supremacy and sexual anti-Blackness still haunt the scene. Vera uses this collage to show that the nature of the rejections, an apparent violation of his place and value in the hierarchy of racial-sexual relations, are representative of Black queer dispossession, an otherness within otherness.

In the reflection for this collage, Vera also holds viewers accountable to the joy he experienced in West Hollywood: "There were a lot of firsts for me during this trip, sleeping in a penthouse, emerging myself in LA's art culture, being surrounded by other Black Queers and ultimately enjoying the life I've waited too long to enjoy" (Vera, 2020b). A subtle denial of the viewer's right to his pain, Vera points to the generative moments of care and community that he experienced among other Black queers in Los Angeles. This, along with his solo erotic work on OnlyFans, are forms of *archival aftercare*⁹



Figure 6: *West Hollywood* (Vera 2018)

that Vera and other Black queers practice to recoup from this racial-sexual fatigue.

Just Watching

The series of collages in *Just Watching* (Figures 7a–c) are exemplars of Vera's more graphic work, depicting lynching, police brutality, and the domestic



Figure 7a: *Just Watching 1* (Vera 2018)

terrorism of the KKK. The series opens with a collage of two images, “a stereotyped representation of current gay culture and an awful murder from the early 1900s” (Vera, 2020b; see Figure 7a). The second photo Vera describes is of the lynching of William Brown during the Omaha race riots of 1919. As with Chicago, Charleston, and other race riots of the period, the visibility of Black death and dying alongside white pleasure saturates the archive. Vera uses a stock image of a white gay couple’s intimacy to foreground the complacent/complicit act of watching Black pain, “look at the way the couple embraces one another in the presence of horrific incidents, just the same as some White people today tend to care less about issues that don’t affect them personally” (Vera, 2020b). Voyeurism, as both a fetish for watching others engaged in sexual activity and the enjoyment of seeing others in pain, animates this cross-temporal scene of anti-Black violence.

The other two collages in this series, the ones that did not make the final cut into his exhibition, are of the same stock photo in visually similar scenes. The second collage superimposes the couple into a scene of police brutality; the white policeman extends his hand, not to help the Black men in critical condition, but instead as a cautious gesture to tell them to calm down and stay put (see Figure 7b). This scene is a harrowing reminder that even in

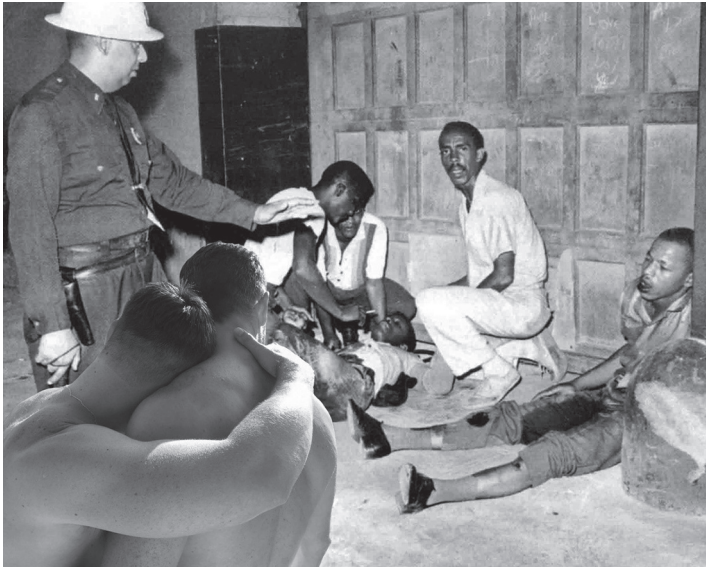


Figure 7b: *Just Watching 2* (Vera 2018)



Figure 7c: *Just Watching 3* (Vera 2018)

injury, Black folks are considered an imminent threat to be watched and policed at all times. The last collage places the white gay couple in a field with six hooded Klansmen in view, burning a disproportional cross and several smaller stakes that spell out “KKK” (see Figure 7c). This scene brings us back to *I know what they want* in that it highlights the homosocial intimacy of racial purity. It is through the “libidinal investment in [queer] violence” (Hartman, 2008, 5), the social performance of white domestic terrorism, that these images make sense together, once again rendering transparent the white supremacist legacies that mark sexual anti-Blackness in the present.

Vera created *Just Watching*, *West Hollywood*, and *I know what they want* in order to process his own life as a Black queer man living at the racial-sexual margins of multiple communities. It is no surprise that his collages are some of his most famous works; while they directly address the perverse joy that white folks garner from Black pain, the art world still uplifts expressions of Black (queer) dispossession more than they do Black (queer) joy. Artists like Vera, who have reclaimed their joy and desire in the midst of these consumptive practices, highlight the interventions that visual art offers other fields in writing Black queer life.

Pleasure as Archival Aftercare

Due to the fatigue of producing work rooted in racial-sexual trauma, Vera has moved into a new stage of his artistic practice. On Instagram¹⁰ and Patreon, Vera works with a mixture of erotic illustrations and portraiture. He will occasionally call upon his followers to inspire his work, a practice that has yielded some of his most popular merchandise: dickmarks (bookmarks that are illustrations of dick pics submitted by his followers). This engagement with his fanbase is just one of the ways that Vera practices care for himself and those that believe in his work. By providing spaces for queers who have experienced similar feelings of shame around their bodies and desires, Vera has found a generative way to move beyond his traumas.

It is also worth mentioning that while Vera cares deeply about Black folks, much of his recent art is of interracial couples and groups, as well as individuals of all races. Though this may seem antithetical to his experiences, and to the project of Black love writ large, one could read this as a bold choice to not let sexual anti-Blackness inhibit his desires. His recasting of porn scenes in his illustrations, inserting himself and sometimes changing the race(s) of the other participant(s), is an example of how Vera plays with

race in ways that make his desires legible beyond what mainstream queer culture allows. This practice is also apparent in his fanfic drawings of animated (adult) characters, a playful meditation on other aspects of his identity as they relate to his Blackness and queerness.

A more visceral example of releasing himself from racial-sexual trauma is Vera's OnlyFans (henceforth OF) account. Comprised of nude photos, solo masturbation videos, and provocative phrases on colorful backgrounds, Vera's OF page is a more intimate engagement with the sexual and sensual in which his body is on the line. The solo nature of his page creates an intimate space where Vera's fans are invited to consume his likeness on his own terms. Websites like OF and JustForFans promote a type of engagement that open access websites like Pornhub and XVideos do not; while imperfect, the ability to curate and caption content on one's own terms makes OF a space where users must literally "buy in" to the content that creators produce, a form of consent that is absent from most amateur porn services. In this way, Vera is once again able to hold us accountable to his desires, whether that is a stylized video of him ejaculating onto the window of his veranda, or a photo of him cuddling his Curious George plushie.

These departures from his collages are a form of archival aftercare, the types of care that Black folks choose to practice following an engagement with the violences of the archive. Black (queer) scholarship and artistic practices that choose pleasure over violence are often scoffed at, by Black and non-Black folks alike, for their lack of political relevance. It would be irresponsible, however, not to attend to Vera's erotic work and life when he has made clear that the collages are not the only terms by which he wants his art to be known and remembered. His insistence in being seen as a goofy, joyful, and sexy Black queer animates his artistic practice, and it is to this end that the pleasurable dimensions of his work must be recognized. Pleasure as archival aftercare is also a generative disruption of the heavy reflections on white queer supremacy and sexual anti-Blackness that structure this manuscript, suggesting that a remedy to impositions on Black queer modalities of loving and fucking might just be to love and fuck one another even harder, on one's own terms, and with consent.

Vera and other Black queers who center pleasure in their lives and work encourage more intentional practices of writing Black queerness. Since colonialism, Black sexual life has become woefully associated with abuse. The artwork and scholarship engaged here not only elucidate the bearing that these abuses have on Black queer sexuality, but also demonstrate how some

contemporary Black queers refract colonial violence to live pleasurable lives (Wholley and Miller, 2016). Arousal and ecstasy (Nash, 2014) are not the only ways towards pleasurable living, but they are radical in their potential to disrupt normative, respectable ideas around Black gender and sexuality that are often employed to harm Black cisgender women, Black queers, and Black trans folk. What one stands to learn from Black sex/body workers, kink practitioners, polyamorists, and others who practice sex differently is that ways of living, loving, and fucking beyond the white colonial imagination exist. Whether one chooses to engage in these practices is up to them, but Black folks committed to social justice would do well to support those at the gender-sexual margins of their communities in envisioning and maintaining these pleasurable worlds. A radical investment in Black pleasure is a loving investment in ourselves, a choice to live beyond the lies the archive tells us about Black sexual practice in order to promote healthier, more sustainable relationships among Black folks.

Joshua K. Reason is a doctoral student in Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Their research areas include performance studies, geography, and digital humanities, detailing the material and affective resonances of Black queer and trans life. Currently, their dissertation project explores geographies of Black LGBTQI+ memory in the Americas.

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Notes

1. I use *Black queers* throughout the essay to refer to non-normative Black sexualities practiced by people of various gender identities. While the majority of my sources refer specifically to cisgender Black men, these issues of desirability appear across Black queer genders and sexualities. Future research will illustrate, in more detail, the specificity of (un)desirability in the lives of Black trans and non-binary folks, as well as cisgender Black queer women.

2. My use of the term *dick* here not only mimics the suggestive prose used on gay

dating apps, but also gestures towards the trans erasure that phallogentric language engenders. Not everyone who uses gay dating apps is a man or has a penis. The archetype of the Black male dominant/top and its association with cisgender men further perpetuates the white, cisheteropatriarchal violence of how (and on what terms) same-sex intimacy is practiced.

3. For more on the hypervisibility and invisibility of the Black body in digital space, please see “Searching for Black Girls” in Noble, 2018.

4. While Grindr is one of the most well-known and widely used gay dating apps, it is not exceptional in the prevalence of sexual anti-Blackness among its users. Though catering to different subcategories of the gay community, apps like Scruff, Growlr, and Jack’d are also saturated with racism. Of these apps, only Grindr and Scruff have eliminated the ethnicity filter.

5. *Sadomasochism* (s/m) refers to an array of practices in physical or mental pain that produce sexual pleasure for both the giver and receiver of such actions. To see the specific types of s/m engaged in Julien’s film, watch *The Attendant* (1993).

6. As a continuation of Cruz’s research, I am curious as to how amateur porn produced by and for Black queers (both solo and with multiple actors) may lead to more transparent readings of Black queer desire. I believe that an analysis of Twitter porn, OnlyFans (OF), JustForFans, and Tumblr archives would make those readings possible.

7. I am writing this as a client and patron of both Vera’s Patreon and OF accounts. His sex/body work is intimately connected to his artistry, and my writing of his art is not separate from my consumption of his nudes and solo masturbation videos posted on OF.

8. *Twunk* is a gay slang term used to refer to slender, young, muscular gay man. The word is a combination of *twink* and *hunk*.

9. *Archival aftercare* is a term coined by my colleague, Bonnie Maldonado, which gestures to a wide array of care practices that one might engage in post-archival research. This conceptualization of aftercare comes from her previous work as a facilitator, and is in conversation with BDSM education’s discussion of care after performing a scene.

10. Due to the recent change of Instagram’s community guidelines, erotic and sexual content producers have largely been expelled from the platform. For the most up-to-date information on Vera’s work, including prints for sale, please visit <http://www.depaulvera.com/>.

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