Colgate University

Mama, I'm Tired:

A Black Religious Ethic of Rest

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Religion Honors Thesis

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Prologue

I ask that you handle my letter to you carefully.

Through thought, I have wept, sweat, and bled a sea of dark.

Production for you, for me, for us.

Hoping its poison blackens your heart until it is nothing at all.

A wonderful nothing in which there is a blessed infinity and beyond for possibility.

Leaving me forever tied to your conscience.

My thought a gift to you. My body a gift to the soil.

Once children to the sea, we made dirt our resting space.

Production for you, for me, for us.

If you knew who I am, would you listen? If you knew who I was, would it change your mind?

These are only the thoughts of a black boy:

seeking refuge. seeking reparations. seeking redemption. seeking rest;

Handle me with care.

Production for you, for me, for us;

Another night. I pace back and forth in my empty apartment. Thoughts plastered across my white walls, bleeding the struggles of my everyday occurrences. I close my eyes. Filled with rage, searching for refuge, and in need of rest, in my darkness, I found Black.

My smile washed away. My masks, just beyond my reach.

Mama, I'm tired.

September 9th, 2001. The day god decided to wrap itself in my flesh and give life a whirl.

September 9th, 2019. The day god decided to unwrap itself in search of more, for excess.

This story starts where I thought mine ended. In hopes of finding my more in the beyond, I failed at rupturing my existence. Foggy eyed with a pain deep in my stomach, the first person I could make out in my hospital room after my failed suicide attempt was my little sister. She was holding my hand as firm as she could, scared that if she loosened her grip her big brother might slip away into the after. She bounced around as I was coming to and ran out the room, only returning when she had my mother in her life affirming embrace. Confused in the chaos, family filed in to witness my beautiful mistake. Watching my mother's lips, I could not make out what she was saying, but I felt the need to reveal my reasons. To justify my distance. To ease my mama's stress. Please stop crying.

"Mama, I'm tired."

I have been struggling with myself for as long as I remember, and it is the central motivation behind my art. Growing up in the city and witnessing the struggles of my people, I sought ascension through the manners in which society projected: "Use your size. Play sports. Leave this all behind… But most importantly, don't you ever turn back." Under the illusion of this false reality, I worked away from my community in search of rest. Ironic, ain't it? Trading my pain for more.

Introduction

As I approach the conclusion of my years in undergraduate education, I recollect over the life I have lived while utilizing religion as my lens. Drawing upon the context of my upbringing in a Black household characterized by the absence of a father, oftentimes distanced due to work commitments and his perpetual sense to provide, and a mother struggling to manage the demands of raising children while ensuring they wouldn't see her cry, I root the foundations of my inspiration to engage in this work. As I reflect on my own journey, now as a man, I use these pages to confront moments of profound exhaustion that placed me at the doorstep of death repeatedly. After all their work, why am I here again? This introspective exploration compels me to revisit the trauma of my past not merely for personal catharsis, but to offer a sanctuary of understanding and solidarity for others facing similar circumstances until we meet again in the beyond;

In the intricate tapestry of human existence, religion emerges as a pivotal thread, weaving narratives of identity, purpose, and transcendence of the realities presented before us. Within the paradigm of Black experiences, particularly following the harrowing forced migrations to the New World, religion transcends the mere belief systems presented by our captors; it serves as a profound vessel for resilience, resistance, and the construction of holistic meaning. Amidst the dissection and examination enforced by oppressive structures, Black religion emerges as an indomitable force, perpetually rebelling against reductionism, and instead, propelling us towards more expansive realms of significance and being.

Historically, humanity has used religion as a tool to make sense of the unknown. To find answers. Working with and through Anthony Pinn, I use this space as evidence that black religion, specifically, has been a means/tool in which we use to resist, rebel, and always reach for expansive meaning, especially in the confines of the New World. Through this exploration, my argument posits that the black poetic emphasis on rest in contemporary times has functioned as a crucial tool in the ongoing pursuit of complex subjectivity in black religion. I argue these notions can and should be extended to Black athletes in their push for more.

Anthony Pinn's definition of the religious experience within Black America serves as the catalyst to my reflection. He contends that the Black religious experience in America extends beyond traditional institutions and doctrines that are consumed in our current forms of academia.

Within this framework, he defines religion as “the recognition of and response to the elemental feeling for complex subjectivity and the accompanying transformation of consciousness that allows for the historically manifest battle against the terror of fixed identity” (Pinn 2003, 175). According to Pinn, within the context of the Black community’s effort to navigate the ways in which the black subject has been objectified throughout history, black religion is defined by their constant push to transcend the shackles of imposed identities and carve out spaces for expansive self-interpretation. Pinn also articulates complex subjectivity as “a desire or feeling for more life meaning” (Pinn 2003, 173). So, though there is an emphasis on being objectified as fixed objects, Pinn also captures the manners in which we push past this— toward a more complex and expansive mode of being. Beginning in the Middle Passage and solidifying its position in greater society through historical atrocities like the auction block and lynching, Pinn stakes claim that these dynamics became fundamental for the black community and has been a foundational sentiment of our religious experience..

Specifically engaging with Anthony Pinn’s concept of complex subjectivity, one better grasps the diversity of religious experiences within Black communities but a common element of many. Pinn argues that understanding Black religion requires considering a multitude of forms in order to develop and understand a sense of our being that isn’t oversaturated by the emphasis that we place upon the Black church. Pinn challenges essentialist perspectives that seek to simplify or homogenize Black religious experiences. Instead, he advocates for an approach that recognizes the rich diversity within Black communities, emphasizing the need to avoid reducing Black religious identity to a single, fixed narrative. In acknowledgement of the monolithic narratives insinuated, he provides context to a multitude of black religious forms like the Black Church and Nation of Islam that have been studied, but he pushes us further to consider the ways in which art and literature has served as focal points for black religious expression due to the ways that it functions as a medium for black people to resist objectification and express more expansive ways of being in the world. This transition in religious studies inspires the ways in which I aim to consider how black poetry reflects the black religious push for complex subjectivity through its attention to rest.

Complex subjectivity emphasizes the interconnectedness of these dimensions in understanding the nuances of Black religious identity. Pinn describes complex subjectivity as “desire for meaningful existence, for a stronger sense of being” (Pinn 2003, 165). Central to this

concept is the notion of agency. He contends that individuals actively shape their religious identities and expressions. This impulse can be identified in believers' conversion experiences. Pinn states that they "represents confrontation with historical objectification and the forging of a new sense of self through a feeling of personhood running contrary to old ways of being" (Pinn 2003, 163). In defining our being through this lens, he emphasizes our internal sense of self in relation to the social context in which it arises, so in recognition of this, complex subjectivity allows for an exploration of how people navigate and negotiate their religious beliefs within the broader socio-cultural context.

In essence, complex subjectivity is a push for a greater sense of meaning and expansive ways of being despite the imposing forms of objections that render us less than complex subjects. Working with Anthony Pinn's ideas around complex subjectivity, I embark on a narrative journey, contending that within our impulsive yearning for "more— more possibilities, more complexity, more vitality," an insatiable appetite toward liberation emerges (Pinn 179, 2003). Through Pinn's logic, this appetite pushes us to search for alternative methods in which we can study black religion in consideration of our outside circumstances. Each person's subjectivity or inner world is influenced by a multitude of complex and intersecting elements, and Pinn defines this impulse as a struggle against objectification. In essence, a synopsis of complex subjectivity would involve summarizing the notion that a community's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are shaped by a combination of internal and external factors, but ultimately serve as a "push and desire for fullness" for Black beings (Pinn 173, 2003).

In his scholarship, Anthony Pinn introduces The Hermeneutics of the Ontological Dimension as a specific academic methodology to analyze the Black religious pursuit of complex subjectivity. This approach goes beyond traditional frameworks associated with institutions like the Black Church or the Nation of Islam. Pinn supports these sentiments with Charles Long's ideas around the Hermeneutics of the Ontological Dimension, stating, "That the sacred- the referent for religion- is manifest in the context of history and gives depth to all modalities of human consciousness and experience" (Pinn 2003, 186).The sacred manifests itself in different forms of human consciousness, so we must expand the sources in which we examine communities' sensibilities towards religiosity. Pinn argues that conventional academic approaches often overlook or underestimate the profound nature of Black religious subjectivity, which extends beyond doctrinal boundaries and institutional structures, so Pinn posits that the

sacred, rooted in historical context, permeates various facets of human consciousness and experience. Pinn's method emphasizes examining how the quest for complex subjectivity within Black religious contexts is expressed and understood through creative "cultural production and the natural environment encountered during the course of human life" (Pinn 2003, 186). This broadens the scope of where we seek sacred meaning. Such creative productions serve as manifestations of humanity's quest for meaning and expansive existence, concepts that he finds fundamental to black religion. By focusing on creative cultural production within Black religious communities, Pinn's approach highlights how individuals and communities articulate and enact complex subjectivity. This includes exploring how art, music, literature, rituals, and other cultural expressions embody and convey unique understandings of identity, consciousness, and transformation within Black religious contexts.

It is through the Hermeneutics of the Ontological Dimension that I turn to a study of slave narratives and black poetry and its efforts to examine, express, and expand our current modes of meaning. I contend that these sources reflect black efforts to "wrestle with history in order to place black bodies in healthier spaces, with a greater range of possibilities" (Pinn 179, 2003). Through this specific mining, I uncover valuable perspectives, narratives, and philosophies embedded within Black cultural expressions. This process unveils the profound wisdom, resilience, and creativity inherent in these traditions, providing a nuanced lens to interpret the lived experiences of Black athletes on college campuses— a foundational identity of my own. In essence, my approach synthesizes historical and contemporary Black experiences, integrating the poetic and the academic to offer profound interpretations of the unique journeys and perspectives of Black athletes. By intertwining past wisdom with present realities, I aim to highlight the enduring relevance and significance of Black intellectual and spiritual traditions in shaping our understanding of sports, education, and identity in today's world.

Following my inquiry, I delve into the realm of black poetry, particularly focusing on works by prominent poets throughout different historical black artistic movements in the US. By immersing myself in cultural productions, particularly poetic expressions, I aim to deepen my understanding of how rest shapes the lived experiences of artistic communities and informs their everyday existence. Using this as a backbone to my research and opening my argument to non-traditional methods of gathering research, I supplement my research in a manner that captures a more holistic approach in considering black bodies as beings and their expressions as religious

work. Pinn continues in stating, “These objects and the ability of language to somewhat grasp these realities allow the elemental meaning of religion to be discussed as a type of clarification, an ordering of social structures and realities or means of monitoring human experience” (Pinn 2003, 186). In this, Pinn asserts that an exploration of cultural production like slave narratives and black poetry produces an articulation of a fundamentally Black religious experience. It examines the ways in which individuals in our community perceive themselves and their circumstances, informing all other logic.

Roadmap For The Thesis

I foreground the concept of complex subjectivity as a cornerstone of black religiosity, beginning with an examination of slave narratives for insights into the nuanced experiences of enslaved individuals. Through a historical analysis of slave narratives, my aim is to establish a transhistorical link elucidating how whiteness has historically exploited the black body and persists in its efforts of objectification even today. I critically examine the pervasive theme of brutal labor and violence as catalysts for exploitation in slave narratives, observing its dual role as a space for both trial and triumph. With emphasis on a critical examination on the reasons in which we run and the weathering it has had on the body, I explore narratives presented by Black folk in captivity during the Civil War. I heavily focus on narratives by Frederick Douglas and Harriet Jacobs, but I also integrate narratives from WPA. Understanding and engaging with the loaded biases of ethnographers at the time, I carefully work with these narratives in order to capture Black voices and their explanations of their conditions.

With this examination, one realizes the echoes of oppression reverberate through time, discerning the eerie resemblance between the objectification of Black athletes within the modern spectacle of sports arenas and the plight of Black slaves in epochs past. Like ghosts haunting the collective consciousness, these parallels materialize as reminders of a transhistorical continuum of exploitation and dehumanization. Just as the bodies of Black slaves were commodified, their humanity reduced to mere chattel, so too are the bodies of Black athletes commodified within the confines of the sporting arena, their identities often eclipsed by the appetites of a profit-driven industry (whiteness). Through this juxtaposition, the haunting echoes of history resonate with a disconcerting clarity, underscoring the enduring legacy of systemic oppression and the persistence of objectification in diverse manifestations across temporal epochs.

Moreover, I dive into the emerging trend within current black artistic communities that advocates for rest as an alternative healing process. In this exploration, I engage with Tricia Hersey's insights on the sacred nature of rest in order to ground my research in contemporary frameworks around the embodiment of rest, seeking to contextualize its role as a healing mechanism in the face of capitalist structures. In recognition of Hersey's ideas of liberation as a "continually evolving and never-ending process (Hersey 2022)," I follow her logic on how intentional acts of rest, such as dreaming and reinterpreting the world around us function as crucial elements in the black religious struggle for liberation, and I investigate how they may function in respect to Pinn's ideas around complex subjectivity. First in examining Hersey's sentiments around rest as "imagination work" (Hersey 2022, 3), I emphasize the irony of using the term *work* to heal the trauma of *grind* culture, but I believe this usage further emphasizes her sentiments around liberation. In engaging in imagination work, we must continue to actively make an effort to push toward our liberation. Through an analysis of black poetry, I further support these sentiments due to the ways in which black poets have utilized sentiments around dreaming and reinterpretation as foundational principles in their push for more expansive meaning and being, exemplifying the black religious ethic of rest.

I then articulate the manners in which mythics serve as indicators of black religiosity and its function with black poetry. As articulated by Pinn, the deities within Black religious frameworks function as "mythics," illuminating pathways towards alternative subjectivities beyond the confines of the slave/master dichotomy (Pinn 2003, 179). Mythics serve as figures who represent the collective's consciousness of subjectivity and agency.In providing further context to support his ideas, Pinn equates the function of gods here with Charles Long's ideas of "the original authenticity." Considering the history of objectification, Long states that black communities are in search of "the negation of the image of the oppressor and the discovery of the first creation." Mythics serve as a revelation of the internal desires of a particular community. Pinn uses this insight to offer a theoretical anchor for an exploration of how Black communities use these symbols for direction as they grapple with and seek liberation from historical traumas in their quest for self-determination and being.

Expanding from Hersey's foundational insights on rest, I embark on a literary analysis that delves into how Black poets have grappled with the pursuit of complex subjectivity through their writing. Drawing upon the scholarship of Stacey Floyd-Thomas, a distinguished Black religious scholar and womanist known for her concept of "Mining the Motherlode," I apply her insights to illuminate how poets similarly engage in their creative endeavors. By integrating Floyd-Thomas's ideas on the sacred dimensions of writing, I explore the role of poets as cultural architects who not only shape societal values through their poetry but also embody a struggle for expansive modes of existence through their artistic expressions.

Within the expansive network of black poets throughout US history, I work with Maya Angelou, Ishmael Reed, Langston Hughes, Audre Lorde, Claude McKay, and Danez Smith as an intimate focus group, their verses akin to profound testaments to the refuge one finds within the fabric of rest. Through the artful tapestry of language and imagery, these poets embark on an exploration of the delicate intricacies found in moments of repose. Their verses resonate on a visceral level, orchestrating a symphony of emotions that reverberate the profound black religious quest for "more" borne from the sanctuary of rest.

Exploring social norms and cultural expectations, poets navigate the currents of a collective consciousness that often undervalues the sanctity of reprieve, challenging us to reconsider the conventional metrics of success and well-being. Prevalent in eras like the Harlem Renaissance Period and the Black Arts Movement, poets have captured the essences of their external predicaments and the internal revelations that accompany these circumstances. Through these readings, one realizes the poets' communion with the natural world echoes a wisdom woven into the cycles of growth, decay, and renewal, which I believe will serve well in understanding the symbiotic relationship between rest and liberation.

As unconventional thinkers, black poets challenge established norms, positing alternative perspectives that question the relentless pursuit of productivity over the intrinsic value of rest. Infusing their works with personal narratives, I better navigate the transformative power of rest. Through this poetic focus, diverse voices converge, offering profound insights and narratives that enrich my exploration of rest as a compelling force towards complex subjectivity.

More specifically, I identify three foundational tenets of a Black religious ethic of rest embedded within these Black poetic expressions, illustrating how Black poetry:

1) Offers models of rest that push for expansive meaning specifically through the use of imaginative space and mythics

2) Functions as an intimate space for complex subjectivity in the act of writing

3) Reinforces communal connection by forging a collective embodiment of complex subjectivity further emphasizing the sacrality of Black poetry

In studying black poetry and its sentiments around rest, we can significantly expand religious dialogues, especially when considering poetry as sacred text. This approach is novel and holds particular significance for understanding religion within the complexities of the black community. Just as religious texts are interpreted and revered, so too can poetry be approached with reverence and scholarly inquiry. Black poetry, in particular, often contains elements of ritual, mythology, and spiritual revelation. By treating poetry as sacred text, scholars can engage in deep theological reflection and dialogue, expanding the scope of religious studies to include diverse cultural expressions.

Pushing me to think, just as poets have inspired me by challenging conventional norms through their craft, athletes can redefine success beyond mere victories and accolades. The integration of rest as a cornerstone of their training philosophy allows athletes to measure success not only by championships but also by the quality of their physical and mental well-being. This reprieve from the relentless pursuit of performance metrics ensures athletes can prioritize the qualitative essence of their being instead of defining themselves through numbers attached to loaded assumptions. Athletes, too, possess the influence to reshape culture, and I propose that, by embracing rest as a healing force, they live more holistic lives, better enabling the black mind, body, and spirit to persist in reaching for expansiveness.

Thus, my project expands the focus on literature within the study of black religion by foregrounding the distinct contributions of poetry in shaping and expressing black religious identities, beliefs, and practices. Moreover, by centering poetry in my analysis, I seek to challenge conventional boundaries of where black religion is typically situated. While traditional studies often privilege institutional spaces like churches or religious texts, my examination of

poetry encourages a broader understanding of religious expression that extends into artistic and cultural domains. In doing so, I hope to illuminate the diverse ways in which black individuals engage with and negotiate their identities beyond conventional religious institutions. Ultimately, my project seeks to enrich and diversify the scholarly conversation surrounding black religion by demonstrating the profound insights that poetry offers into the complexities of black religious experience. By recognizing the significance of poetry as a site of religious expression, we can develop a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of the multifaceted nature of black religiosity.

In regards to the implications of my study for religion, my attention towards poetry within the context of black religion represents a significant departure from traditional approaches within the field. While scholars have indeed explored the intersections of literature and black religion, the specific focus on poetry as a lens for understanding black religious experience is relatively novel. By delving into the nuanced themes, symbols, and narratives within black poetry, I aim to broaden our understanding of where black religion manifests and how it operates. Poetry offers a unique platform for exploring the complexities of black religious experience in ways that prose or other forms of literature may not fully capture. Through the creative use of language, imagery, and rhythm, poets articulate profound insights into the spiritual, cultural, and existential dimensions of black life.

The Historical Reference Site of Objecthood

The epoch of chattel slavery in the United States delineated a stern dynamic wherein Black bodies were ensnared within the machinery of labor, relegated to the role of mere instruments of servitude and economic utility in the eyes of their white oppressors. In this framework, the intrinsic humanity of Black individuals was mercilessly debased, their very essence diminished to mere measurements of productivity and profitability. Rendered as property rather than human beings, the enslaved found themselves subjected to a cruel ontology of objectification, stripped of agency and dignity, and consigned to the dehumanizing fate of being bought, sold, and bartered at the whims of their masters. Through the testimonies chronicled in slave narratives such as Frederick Douglass's "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave" and Harriet Jacobs's "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl," the soul-wrenching odyssey of objectification unfolds, revealing the raw brutality of a system that reduced individuals to mere chattels, devoid of intrinsic worth or autonomy. In this section, my aim is to articulate the profound implications of objectification within the narratives of Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, utilizing the Hermeneutics of the Ontological Dimension as a lens for their narratives. By closely examining how slaves articulated forms of objectification they encountered and some correlating methods in which they pushed for complex subjectivity past this, I seek to make a compelling case for the transhistorical connection of black bodies, heavily tending to the traumas imposed on them in this section but also providing a bit of context of their push past this in the next section. Through this analysis, I aim to illustrate how their testimonies serve as potent reflections of the systemic dehumanization endured by enslaved individuals through means of invisibility and vulnerability, shedding light on the enduring legacy of objectification across historical contexts.

In placing this objectification in a specific point of history, Pinn refers to "Rituals of reference" in which he describes to be "repeated , systematic activity conducted in carefully selected locations that is intended to reinforce the enslaved's status as an object" (Pinn 2003, 49). In consideration of our quest for complex subjectivity, the emphasis on the particular ways in which Black folks were objectified is crucial for Anthony Pinn's theorization of Black religion because it highlights the historical and systemic challenges faced by Black individuals in shaping their identities and asserting their humanity within a context of dehumanization. By examining the specific forms of objectification experienced by Black people—specifically through these

rituals of reference— we better conceptualize the ways in which Black identity has been formed under anti-Black realities. In these haunting spectacles, the auction block, alongside lynching, stands as a foundational example for Pinn. It serves as a testament to the systematic erasure of Black individuals' humanity, a stage upon which their identities were effaced, and their worth being calculated in service of the appetites of their masters. White audiences found a sense of being in creating an "other," and through projection and impositions, they were able to create a ritual that severed themselves. Leaning into the performative and repetitive nature of such rituals, white bodies could now reinforce their subjectivity into a cultural norm. Through the ritual of auctions, the spectacle of invisibility unfolded, perpetuating a narrative of dehumanization that rendered the enslaved as little more than objects ripe for exchange.

Within the confines of this desolate arena, the humanity of Black souls was systematically obscured, relegated to the shadows as their bodies were paraded, prodded, and appraised like cattle in a market. Frederick Douglass's perceptions of the block, delineated in his autobiography "Narrative of The Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave" which was published in 1845 shortly after his escape from slavery in the midst of abolitionist movements, parallels Pinn's assessments, stating,

> We were all ranked together at the valuations. Men and women, old and young, married and single, were ranked with horses, sheep, and swine. There were horses and men, cattle and women, pigs and children, all holding the same rank in scale of being and all were subjected to the same narrow examination. (Douglass 2001, 38)

Here, valued for profit, the essence of personhood was ruthlessly sacrificed, as the relentless cycle of auctions served to reinforce a paradigm wherein the humanity of the enslaved was rendered invisible, their identities subsumed beneath the weight of their servile existence. In placing the enslaved alongside domesticated animals, the sacrament of subjugation wherein the inherent humanity of Black individuals was overlooked and they were showcased around similar to farm animals, further exemplifying the perception of inferiority and objectification for white audiences. Pinn pushes us further to consider the importance and implications of this in stating,

> But for Africans and their descendants, these rituals entail a collapse into meaninglessness, into nothingness, in that these rituals force, in numerous ways, blacks into the position of nonbeing as historical objects or objects of history. In

> contrast to this, for whites 'being' includes the potential for transhistorical existence, and this potential is reinforced by the restrictions placed on blacks. (Pinn 2003, 79)

Through this ritualized dehumanization, the machinery of oppression was perpetuated, entangling the enslaved within a space of degradation from which escape seemed an impossible dream. This invisibility served as the foundation of later justifications for the treatment harped on black bodies, leaving enslaved people vulnerable to inhumane treatment.

Delineated in her autobiography "Incidents In The Life of A Slave Girl" which was published 1861 under the pseudonym Linda Brent in order to protect herself and family from the violence presumed to follow her truth, Harriet Jacobs speaks of the turmoil she felt during her isolation. After six years in a makeshift space carved out of her grandmother's home in North Carolina, severed from familial connections, and forced to hide from the sexually aggressive attempts made by her master and the envious threats by his wife, she states, "the thought that I could not go to her made me utterly miserable" (Jacobs 1987, 145). Harriet Jacobs's grandmother's last surviving child had succumbed to paralysis, and Jacobs expresses how her forced isolation brought about many traumatic repercussions. In not being able to physically see her last known living aunt, Jacobs expresses discontent in her situation. I pay particularly close attention to the essence of invisibility imposed upon her. At this time she has spent six years in hiding, eventually settling into a small makeshift compartment attached to her grandmother's home. She finds it safer to stay out of the view of her children and family but has struggles with the circumstances that renders her invisible. She states,

> During the long nights, I was restless for want of air and I had no room to toss and turn… The laws allowed him to be out in the free air, while I, guiltless of crime, was pent up here, as the only means of avoiding the cruelties the law allowed him to inflict upon me! I don't know what kept life within me. Again and again, I thought I should die before long… (Jacobs 1987, 121)

The speaker's invisibility becomes both a means of survival and a dehumanizing agent, representing a paradoxical state of existence. Invisibility serves as a strategy for self-preservation, allowing her to evade further harm and exploitation by remaining concealed from dominating power structures through communal support. However, this invisibility also renders

her devoid of agency and recognition as a fully autonomous human being. If she is seen at all, it is solely through the lens of her masters' dominance, reducing her to an object subjected to his whims and cruelties. The profound sense of vulnerability conveyed in the passage reflects the pervasive dehumanization experienced by enslaved individuals, who are denied basic rights and subjected to constant surveillance and control. The speaker's despair at the prospect of imminent death underscores the physical and psychological toll of living under such oppressive conditions, where survival hinges on navigating an existence defined by invisibility and subjugation.

Jacobs continues by voicing her troubles with consoling her grandmother during this time, stating, “I said all I could to comfort her; but it was a sad reflection, that instead of being able to help her, I was a constant source of anxiety and trouble” (Jacobs 1987, 147). In this, her troubles become the community’s struggles. To maintain her invisibility and safety, she depends on the support of those around her. They work tirelessly to shield her from individuals who could escalate her perilous situation, ensuring she remains hidden by finding or constructing safe spaces for her to stay. Despite their own limited resources, they visit her regularly, sharing their food and updates on external conditions. However, this collective effort to protect her exacerbates her stress and reinforces her sense of helplessness, deepening her experience of objectification. She expresses that she is a “constant source of anxiety and trouble” (Jacobs 1987, 147). This dynamic underscores the interconnectedness between her invisibility and vulnerability within the community, revealing the complex and challenging realities faced by enslaved individuals. Pressuring her return, her master had threatened family and constantly surveilled them in order to find leads to Jacobs, and purely based on her master’s assumptions, her son, brother, and uncle were questioned and at times imprisoned.

Douglass recounts how slaves were treated as mere instruments, devoid of agency or autonomy. Being stripped and lashed, subjected to physical and sexual violence, and forced to labor under brutal conditions, slaves were further pushed into a place of submission. Douglass captures this in his narratives, stating, “We were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or too cold; it could never rain, blow, hail, or snow too hard for us to work in the field. Work, work, work was scarcely more the order of the day than the night.” (Douglass 2001, 49). The relentless pressure to toil under the yoke of bondage inflicted upon the enslaved a profound and enduring fatigue, both physical and spiritual, as they labored beneath the oppressive weight of exploitation. Constantly, they found themselves subjugated to a ceaseless cycle of labor, their

bodies pushed beyond the brink of endurance, their spirits battered by the unrelenting demands of their masters.

This system felt totalizing in the sense that there was a feeling of surveillance accompanying enslaved individuals even in the absence of white bodies. Douglass captures this, stating, “There was no deceiving him. His work went on in his absence almost as well as in his presence; and he had the faculty of making us feel that he was ever present with us” (Douglass 2001, 47). Referring to a previous master known to “break” slaves, Douglas expands on the multitude of methods his master would enact in order to watch and check-in on slaves. Douglas states,

> When we were at work in the cornfield, he would sometimes crawl on his hands and knees to avoid detection, and all at once he would rise nearly in our midst and scream out… He appeared to us as being ever at hand. He was under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush, and at every window, on the plantation. (Douglass 2001, 47)

The panoptic architecture of the plantation epitomized the ethos of surveillance, whereby overseers and masters had found many ways to hold a watchful eye on enslaved people, so in turn, the enslaved constantly worked in case someone was watching in order to dodge further punishment. Through the fear of a watchful eye of their captors, every movement, every utterance of the enslaved was scrutinized, fostering a culture of perpetual vigilance and self-censorship. This internalization of surveillance reinforced the visibility dynamics set by masters, compelling Black individuals to police their own behavior to evade punishment and ensure survival. Working constantly despite the exhaustive and extractive predicaments, slaves were rendered weak and sick.

This unyielding grind of toil, devoid of respite or reprieve, exacted a toll that extended far beyond the realm of mere physical exhaustion. Each day became a battleground, fought not only against the physical strain of their labors but also against the psychological toll exacted by the persistent pressure to work. It eroded the very fabric of their being, corroding their sense of self and fostering a pervasive sense of disconnection from their own humanity. Forced to dissociate from the crushing reality of their circumstances, many found themselves adrift in a sea of numbness, their minds seeking refuge in the recesses of detachment as a means of coping with

the overwhelming burden of their existence. Douglass goes on to state, “I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity crushed, my intellectual languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery enclosed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute” (Douglass 2001, 49). In referring to black men as “brutes,” slave owners deliberately stripped black men of their humanity. By characterizing them as primal, violent, and subhuman, slave owners and proponents of white supremacy justified their exploitation and mistreatment. Pinn supports these notions in stating, “Whether considered a beastly threat or a relatively harmless buffon, the dominant perspective meant a fixed identity and a continued primary concern among whites with the economic gain achievable through the use of black bodies” (Pinn 2003,19). He suggests that creating a specific image is essential for exploitative communities to rally around and to justify victimizing an “othered” presence in pursuit of their goals. In the context of depicting slaves as inherently aggressive and dangerous animals or objects, slave owners emphasized physical characteristics to rationalize brutal actions like punishment, torture, and murder as necessary means of control and discipline over enslaved individuals. This portrayal served to dehumanize and justify the exploitation of a marginalized group within society, enabling systemic violence and oppression under the guise of maintaining order and safety for the dominant community. In the face of such relentless exploitation and objectification, the enslaved were compelled to forge a precarious equilibrium between endurance and disassociation, their spirits hollowed out by the ceaseless grind of labor. Each day became a battleground, fought not only against the physical strain of their labors but also against the psychological toll exacted by the persistent pressure to work.

Through these dehumanizing ordeals, a culture of exploitation was given space. The exploitation of slave labor was central to the economic system of slavery, with enslaved individuals forced to toil under harsh conditions for the benefit of their owners. Enslaved individuals were denied wages, subjected to arbitrary punishments, and often worked from dawn until dusk without respite. Their labor was extracted for the profit and enrichment of their owners, who viewed enslaved people as disposable resources to be used and discarded at will. In “Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,” Harriet Jacobs demonstrates these sentiments stating, “I knew an old woman who for seventy years faithfully served her master. She had become almost helpless, from hard labor and disease. Her owners moved to Alabama, and the old black woman was left to be sold to any body who would give twenty dollars for her.” The unwavering dedication and loyalty of this woman was left to a transaction that amounted to being left behind

and *given* away. The lax nature of the verb and amount that was placed upon her further emphasizes the lack of care given to the individual, further emphasizing her as mere property without value. Her reaction is absent from the narrative, which reinforces my belief that her feelings were deemed irrelevant by those who claimed her—those who are allowed to capture history. This underscores her descent into an object of history.

The asymmetrical power dynamics inherent in the institution of slavery imbued slave masters with a chilling sense of impunity, affording them unparalleled latitude to wield control over the lives and destinies of those held in bondage, so even when given a sense of agency, enslaved people were limited in their scope of self determination and self expression which are central components of complex subjectivity. Within this tyrannical hierarchy, the masters wielded absolute authority, their decisions holding sway over every aspect of the enslaved individuals' existence. Douglass provides perspective to his relationship with a previous master by stating, "He received all the benefits of slaveholding without its evils; while I endured all the evils of a slave, and suffered all the care and anxiety of a freeman" (Douglass 2001, 72). He had worked a business arrangement that held power imbalances but had provided him with a sense of agency. Douglass was able to choose work as long as his master obtained his payments. As Douglass explains, it offers a sensibility to his master as though he is of good service to his slave (which is problematic but will be later attended to) while Douglass obtains some sense of agency. With the scales of power tipped so drastically in the favor of masters oftentimes, they operated with a sense of invulnerability. And with a bit of money, they felt shielded from accountability by the very systems of oppression they perpetuated. Emphasizing the prevalence of these dynamics through historical junctures, I find similar patterns of behavior resonating amongst collegiate institutions towards their Black athletes, prompting me to wonder if I remain shackled to the traumas of history always informed by the idea of liberation but never truly understanding its meaning or significance.

<u>The Transhistorical Perpetuations of The Dehumanizing Forces of Slavery</u>

Pinn alludes to the pervasiveness of this system into our current context by referencing the role of athletes in contemporary times.

> Coaches and admissions officers offer parents education for their children in exchange for athletic services, and by extension for their physical bodies, which

> perform the services… These figures, unlike enslaved individuals, retain their status as subjects of property exchange, whereas enslaved Africans could only exist as objects of property exchange or as a lower and less-than-fully-human being. (Pinn 2003, 14-15)

As I engage in dialogue around these ideas, I oftentimes find this parallel being a particularly hard pill for many to swallow in consideration of the status and opportunities afforded to athletes. With our presence at a prestigious academic institution, the luxuries of free resources, and constant attention, many collegiate athletes are perceived to be living the dream life, but here Pinn explains how individuals exchange their bodies in turn for educational backing in order to secure some sense of stability or social mobility, and in turn, these academies oftentimes garner their statues off the toil of these individuals. He concludes that black athletes are not enslaved to the extent that our forebears were. Understanding how the enslaved were perceived as "objects of exchange" compared to our tendency to be "subjects of exchange," I explore these dynamics with intense care and emphasize the atrocities my forebears endured while also building connection. I do not intend on comparing and/or appropriating their trauma, but more so emphasizing its resonating impact. We are commodified in a manner that draws parallels to the enslaved in the sense that we are given a sense of limited subjectivity to the extent that we can produce profitable metrics, and, in this revelation, I provide space for articulation.

The auction block serves as a testament to the depths of human depravity, where individuals were commodified, stripped of autonomy, and subjected to unspeakable atrocities. Likewise, contemporary black athletes find themselves navigating systems where their bodies are objectified and monetized, reminiscent of the commodification of slaves.

Frederick Douglass acknowledges the emphasis that masters placed upon sports particularly within enslaved populations, stating "but by far the larger part engaged in such sports and merriments as ball playing, wrestling, running foot-races, fiddling, dancing, and drinking whisky; and this latter mode of spending time was by far the most agreeable to the feelings of our masters" (Douglass 2001, 55). At the end of the year, some enslaved people were given the holidays off. During this time, individuals were allowed to ***act*** at their own will. This tactic was used in order to create a sense of contentment, "keeping down a sense of insurrection" (Douglass 2001, 55). During their holidays, enslaved individuals were often compelled to consume alcohol excessively and participate in competitive activities as a form of diversion and

control. The masters strategically encouraged these behaviors to exploit and manipulate the enslaved population. By the end of these breaks, masters would assert that too much unstructured rest would render individuals incapacitated and aimless, creating a dependency on their masters for guidance and purpose. This coercive tactic was part of a broader strategy to maintain control over the enslaved population by undermining their autonomy and reinforcing the notion that they needed external direction to navigate their lives and find meaning. Ultimately, this exploitation highlights the insidious ways in which masters sought to perpetuate a system of subjugation and dependency among the enslaved. Building on this, Douglass explains how religious leaders misdirected slaves on Sabbath, stating "for they had much rather see us engaged in those degrading sports, than to see us behaving like intellectual, moral, and accountable beings" (Douglass 2001, 59). In this, Douglass reveals how masters deliberately misled slaves during periods of reprieve to prevent them from realizing their potential as autonomous individuals, diverting them from introspection and intellectual pursuits. This calculated interference was designed to maintain control over the enslaved population, ensuring they remained dependent and compliant.This reflection prompts me to question whether similar tactics have been employed to divert my own pursuit of self-discovery and empowerment.

In consideration of the manners in which colleges have handled athletes during the time they are actively enrolled to their projected statuses afterward, the exploitation of black bodies is astronomically impacted in comparison to their white classmates. Krystal Beamon speaks to the intentionality behind this occurrence stating,

> The function of schools is to recreate the conditions needed to reproduce the social division of labor… schools impart differing classes and social groups with the skills and knowledge needed to maintain the status quo in the labor force, which is stratified by the variables of class, race, and gender. The interrelationship of the institutions of sport and education has created a situation in which structural components (e.g., the NCAA, athletic departments, economy) and individual actors (e.g. coaches, teammates, family members) work together to reproduce the current stratification seen in the labor force. (Beamon 2008, 354)

Beamon's work is reflective of social reproduction theory, which is a sociological concept that focuses on the ways in which social structures, inequalities, and relations are perpetuated and reproduced over time within society. Originating from Marxist and feminist perspectives, social reproduction theory examines how various institutions and systems, such as education, family, and the economy, contribute to the maintenance and reproduction of social hierarchies, including class, gender, and race. At its core, social reproduction theory emphasizes the role of social institutions in not only transmitting knowledge and skills but also in reproducing and reinforcing existing power dynamics and inequalities. Following Beamon's work in social reproduction theory, I contend that through sports, educational institutions not only educate individuals but also socialize them into particular roles and positions within the existing social order we inhabit. Through this particular lens, we better understand the ways in which Black bodies are temporarily tolerated in order to garner wealth for particular institutions while appeasing white majorities. But through the perpetuation of social dynamics and all their inequities, these black bodies are thrown into large labor pools making a sliver of what was made by them, for their institution, during their time in college. Black athletes seemingly never escape this sense of working for white structures of power, so why continue?

Keeping my research close to the athletic portion of their occupational trajectory, I find myself frustrated with the irony of current coaching rhetoric. Despite collegiate coaches' constant reminder of the improbability of actually capturing the status of professional athlete, athletes are persistently urged to succeed in their athletic endeavors during their time in higher education, pushing me to wonder who actually benefits from this illusion.

Black athletes have more at stake compared to their white counterparts when signing their letter of intent for collegiate institutions. There are disproportionate needs for both communities, so a comparison in order to justify equal treatment is nonsensical. But, a comparison in order to understand how collegiate athletics exploit their athletes at disproportionate rates is necessary. Captured in interviews and studies in "'Used Goods': Former African American College Student-Athletes' Perception of Exploitation by Division I Universities" by Krystal Beamon and published in The Journal of Negro Education, here, I engage heavily with personal accounts and statistics from former athletes in order to provide depth to my claims.

Oftentimes coming from lower socio-economic and educational backgrounds, black athletes are left more vulnerable to a lack of success in academic spaces. With the pervasive portrayal of black figures predominantly in sports within contemporary media, Black children are fed specific rubrics for their way of being. This contributes to the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes, particularly those regarding black males' athletic prowess. Krystal Beamon cites Harry Edwards, currently a sociologist and former Black Panther who was involved in collegiate sports at San Jose State college, confronting media's impact on the black family and black athlete, stating,

> The overemphasis on sports participation has drained Black talent away from other areas of economic and cultural success and argues that the push toward athletics as seen within Black families is hindering the social and cognitive growth of African American youth. (Beamon 2008, 352)

This oversaturation of intentionally limited perspectives reinforces the narrow and often one-dimensional image of black masculinity as exclusively athletic. In understanding the role that families serve in this conditioning, I acknowledge the harmful rhetoric that is used within the home, but my critique isn't aimed at Black families. I instead suggest we critically consider the social impetus that present limited options around survival to Black families, oftentimes forcing them to articulate success in a manner that works within these paradigms arguably rendering them victims also. Consequently, this perpetuation of stereotypes hinders the development of black children in other social spaces by confining them to predefined roles and expectations, neglecting the multifaceted nature of their identities and interests. Moreover, this skewed representation and perpetuation overlooks the intellectual, creative, and leadership capacities of black individuals, further perpetuating harmful social biases and hindering opportunities for holistic growth and self-expression among black youth especially within the confines of collegiate athletics.

During their stint in college, more than often, athletes' schedules are oversaturated with an abundance of athletic responsibilities, leaving minimal space for academic exploration and success. This dynamic is similar to some of the sentiments described by formerly enslaved persons who were interviewed by WPA. Tempie Cummins, a formerly enslaved women from Texas, notes, "The white chillun tries teach me to read and write but I didn' larn much, 'cause I allus workin'" (Cummins 1936). Maintaining minimum requirements in order to produce a

surplus of value for their particular institutions, individuals miss the educational promises preached by their institutions. Oftentimes in order to balance athletic impositions, athletes retain the bare minimum in order to keep up with their classwork. Black athletes, especially in football and basketball have "lower academic achievement, stronger expectations for a professional sports career, and are socialized more intensely toward sports than their White counterparts" (Beamon 2008, 352) In attempting to find success within this ordeal, black athletes become subjects exploited in this relationship and further objectified once their academic careers is served at their chosen institution.

Paying attention to the market, we notice "The sports media industry is an institution that is predominantly dominated by white males; making up the majority of journalists, editors, commentators, analysts, and owners" (van Sterkenburg & Knoppers, 2010). In this, black bodies are being constantly analyzed and consumed by white audiences, and under the cultural and institutional stigmas perpetuated/reinforced by these dynamics, they are again reduced to a subject up for exchange. When considering the low graduation rates and ratios between student and athlete particularly among black males at predominately white institutions, Derek Van Rheenen, a researcher within the cultural study of sports, states "Such exploitation is particularly pronounced at predominantly White institutions, where Black male college athletes comprise a significant proportion of all matriculated Black male students on campus" (Van Rheenen 2013). This realization implies the premium predominantly white institutions place on black male bodies by the rates in which they funnel black men into athletics comparatively to their white counterparts. This move serves as a form of reductionism and diminishes their humanity, emphasizing their athletic abilities over their multifaceted identities and personal narratives. The emphasis on performance metrics, statistics, and physical attributes often overshadows their individuality and academic endeavors in the classroom, relegating them to objects of entertainment and profit for various stakeholders in the sports industry.

The objectification of slaves and black athletes is intricately tied to pervasive stereotypes and distorted perceptions perpetuated by dominant societal structures further feeding into their lack of visibility. During slavery, racialized ideologies justified the dehumanization of black bodies, rendering them as mere chattel to be bought and sold. Similarly, black athletes face stereotypical portrayals that reduce their identities to narrow caricatures, advertised for consumption, oftentimes reinforcing harmful narratives of athleticism devoid of intellect or

agency. This ideology stands front and center in contemporary sentiments across the NBA expressing the "shut up and dribble" mantra, stemming from Laura Ingraham's criticism towards Lebron James for "talking politics." This stigma exemplifies social expectation around black athletes being tolerated when entertaining in their respective sports, but intolerable when speaking on moral/political circumstances that they feel inclined to. This dynamic attempts to sever black folk from their intellectual capacities while emphasizing their bodily abilities. With the persistent silencing, greater society limits the visibility of these athletes, further emphasizing their fixation on the black body. These perceptions not only shape societal attitudes but also perpetuate the cycle of exploitation, denying individuals the opportunity to assert their full humanity. They become endorsers for products, symbols of corporate brands, and tools for generating revenue. This commercial lens often commodifies their achievements and exploits their image for financial gain, overshadowing their individual agency and autonomy.

In these athletic spaces, athletes are pushed in order to find their physical limits, conditioning and callusing the mind in order to perform and produce. Captured beautifully in a manner that is painted to a positive effect, Jim Friedrick, a white athlete and episcopal priest captured the historical revelations of spirituality during training notably from the perspective of white athletes, stating that during these extreme bouts of training, athletes are "learning to die." In which he explains as,

> The operation of a mysticism where subjectivity is transcended and absorbed into a greater whole. The athletes who 'disappear' into the Zone or the Flow for a few fleeting moments may struggle to put language to it, but they know something extraordinary has happened that was not of their own making. (Friedrick 2017)

Again noting the fundamental social differences between Black and white students, I argue that in respect to their subjectivity, black athletes are not learning to die, but to better grasp my sentiments, I believe they are learning how to be killed. Pressured into pushing their bodies to the whims, they do not transcend this subjectivity but push themselves closer to objecthood. This disappearance has been painted to be an extraordinary matter due to its ability to tap into an animalistic manner, again serving white populations, allowing white populations to be entertained and profit at the expense of the toll it places on black bodies. I argue that this push is not for the betterment of our people but for the extraction. Black bodies, pushing for subjectivity, enter modes of being that impulsively bring about a sense of personhood, control, and agency,

but even within this framework, once exploited by white masses, the black body further struggles in this push for subjectivity. Perpetuations of grind culture, wears on the body, misdirecting our push for complex subjectivity.

Rest as a Sacred Tool in Our Pursuit for More

In tracing the trajectory of rest as a tool in the struggle towards subjectivity, narratives such as Frederick Douglass's provide poignant illustrations of the transformative potential of moments of respite amidst the oppressive structures of domination and control. Under the supervision of a slave master known for “breaking” slaves, Douglass explains the significance of rest during this time, stating,

> Sunday was my only leisure time. I spent this in a sort of beast- like stupor, between sleep and wake, under some large tree. At times I would rise up, a flash of energetic freedom would dart through my soul, accompanied with a faint gleam of hope that flickered for a moment, and then vanished. (Douglass 2001, 49)

Douglass's evocative depiction of his limited leisure time on Sundays unveils the profound impact of rest on his sense of self and agency within the confines of slavery. Embedded within Douglass's narrative is the dichotomy between moments of fleeting freedom and the crushing weight of despair that characterizes his experience of rest. As he describes sinking into a "beast-like stupor" under the shade of a large tree, Douglass captures the paradoxical nature of rest as both a refuge from the harsh realities of slavery and a reminder of the limitations imposed upon his autonomy and humanity. Moreover, Douglass's account reveals the internal struggle that accompanies moments of rest, as he grapples with conflicting emotions of hope and despair, freedom and captivity. The fleeting "gleam of hope" that briefly pierces the darkness of his existence is tempered by the harsh reality of his condition, leading to a profound sense of disillusionment and resignation.

Pushing further, I aim to construct a framework for understanding a black religious ethic of rest within the context of Black poetry. This section explores how Black poetic expressions embody foundational tenets that contribute to a broader theorization of rest as a form of resistance and self-determination. Organized around these tenets, this exploration illuminates the multifaceted nature of rest within Black cultural and spiritual traditions, offering insights into the quest for autonomy and empowerment. In this section, I articulate the tenets of a black religious ethic of rest, drawing from Black poetic expressions as sources of wisdom and resistance, but I do so with this structure in order to emphasize a communal undertone that captures a common struggle and push for a complex way of being, engaging with our realities and imaginations and

purposely interchanging the two. These tenets are integral to a larger theorization of rest as a transformative practice that challenges systems of oppression and affirms the agency and dignity of Black individuals within historical and contemporary contexts. By examining these tenets, we delve into the deeper meanings and implications of rest within Black cultural narratives, highlighting its significance as a foundational aspect of our push for complex subjectivity.

Considering Tricia Hersey's association between humanhood and our innate need for rest, Heresy proposes, "We must be more human. We want to bathe and soak in our complexities. We want to take our sweet time. We want to tap into the bottomless well of wisdom and surprise waiting for us inside the portal of rest" (Hersey 2022, 194), Hersey implores us to embrace our humanity fully, recognizing the depth and richness of our complexities. Through the metaphor of bathing and soaking, Hersey invites us to immerse ourselves in the intricacies of our being especially through rest-like practices, allowing us to revel in the multifaceted layers of our existence. The assertion that "we want to take our sweet time" speaks to the importance of slowing down and savoring the moments of our lives. In a world characterized by haste and urgency, Hersey reminds us of the value of patience and deliberate intentionality, encouraging us to linger in the present moment and allow ourselves the luxury of unhurried exploration and contemplation.

Serving as the founder of the Nap Ministry, she understands rest as a profound religious and spiritual practice that goes beyond mere physical relaxation but intensely integrates it. Hersey's perspective emphasizes the spiritual dimensions of rest within the context of Black experiences and cultural traditions. The Nap Ministry is not just about taking naps; it is a deliberate and intentional reclaiming of rest as a form of resistance against societal pressures and systems of oppression. Hersey views rest as a radical act of self-care and self-preservation, particularly for marginalized communities like Black individuals who have historically been denied rest and autonomy. Hersey's theorization of the Nap Ministry is rooted in a deep understanding of rest as a spiritual necessity. She sees rest as a means of reconnecting with one's inner self, cultivating mindfulness, and an attempt at reclaiming one's humanity in a world that often devalues rest and prioritizes productivity above all else.

The name "Nap Ministry" itself conveys the spiritual significance of rest in Hersey's framework. By framing rest as a ministry, Hersey emphasizes its sacredness and transformative potential. She invites individuals to engage in rest as a deliberate practice of spiritual liberation

and healing, challenging prevailing narratives that equate busyness with worth and productivity with value. Ultimately, Tricia Hersey's Nap Ministry underscores the importance of rest as a spiritual discipline that not only nurtures the body but also nourishes the soul and cultivates resilience in the face of systemic injustices and societal pressures. Through her work, she invites Black individuals and communities to reclaim rest as a fundamental aspect of their well-being and spiritual journey towards liberation.

Tenet 1: Poetry Offers Models of Rest That Push for Expansive Meaning Specifically Through The Use of Imaginative Space and Mythics

In consideration of how Black religious experiences happen in anti-black realities, Hersey proposes that our way of being is captured in the midst of— the through. Her assertion that "we rest to find our way through" underscores the transformative potential of rest providing space for us to traverse the complexities of being. In a world fraught with uncertainty and upheaval, rest serves as a sanctuary for reflection and renewal, offering respite from the relentless demands of existence and providing a pathway to liberation. By prioritizing rest, we equip ourselves with the clarity and resilience needed to navigate the myriad challenges that confront us on our journey. Rest, not only, physically resists grind culture and labor but also serves as a portal into imaginative space for expansive thought embodying ideas around mythics and self.

Throughout Hersey's work, DreamSpace emerges as a sacred sanctuary—a haven of knowledge and refuge from the burdens of the world. She states “When I think about DreamSpace, I think about a sacred place. A well of knowledge. A place we can go to that is unlike the weight of this world. A resting place for us to enter to work things out” (Hersey 2022, 187). Through the evocative imagery of a “well of knowledge,” Hersey invites us to envision rest as a realm where we can seek solace and clarity amidst the chaos of daily life. The characterization of DreamSpace as "unlike the weight of this world" underscores its transformative potential as a space in this world but not of it. In contrast to the oppressive forces that weigh upon us in our waking lives, DreamSpace offers a respite—a resting place where we can retreat to process, reflect, and rejuvenate. Hersey describes it as “a metaphysical space. A key component of this rest movement. This is the preparation, the request, the alternative, the counternarrative, the free fall” (Hersey 2022, 95). She suggests the utilization of an imaginative realm that is deeply rooted in physical engagement. This imaginative space is not detached from the corporeal world; rather, it is accessed and enriched through embodied acts such as sleeping, dancing, resting— poetry. By emphasizing physical activity, the passage underscores the intimate connection between the body and the imaginative realm. These states of being are not mutually exclusive and serve as tools in our quest for complex subjectivity, so by reframing rest as a spiritual and metaphysical endeavor, Heresy proposes we carve out space “to get to our liberation” (Hersey 2022, 55). Never truly describing a goal, she revels in the idea of the process and perpetual pursuit. Hersey challenges us to transcend conventional notions of relaxation and

leisure, urging us to tap into the boundless potential of rest as a means of healing in the midst of anti-Black and objectifying realities.

As I delved deeper into my research through historical Black poets, the theme of rest emerged as a recurrent motif, prompting me to contemplate the myriad ways in which it is articulated within the context of literature and cultural discourse. While the narratives of poets from the Harlem Renaissance movement offered rich insights into the complexities of rest and its significance within the African American experience, I found myself increasingly challenged to uncover similar notions in contemporary discourse possibly due to illusions around capitalism and meritocracy. Indeed, as Hersey aptly observes, "For many, rest feels elusive and there is no model for rest in our culture. We must create the model and dream up new ways of being." In acknowledging the absence of a prevailing model for rest within our cultural framework, Hersey encourages us to “embark on a journey of reimagining and reinventing rest for ourselves, drawing upon the infinite reservoir of imagination inherent within each of us as divine beings” (Hersey 2022, 60). Through the guidance of figures that parallel mythics that she has encountered through imaginative dream-like spaces, she organizes her way of being in the world.

Returning to Pinn, the notion of mythics offers insights into the nature of reality itself, unveiling the underlying impulses of particular communities. Mythics, throughout history, have served as beacons of original authenticity, illuminating the path to deeper truths and profound self-realization. Through communal relationships with mythics, individuals are inspired to embrace their own authenticity and live in alignment with their deepest values and aspirations.

Maya Angelou, a prominent poet and dancer/entertainer during the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, was invited to speak at President Clinton’s Inaugural Address. She would go on to read her poem “On the Pulse of Morning,” stating, “Here, root yourselves beside me./I am that Tree planted by the River… History, despite its wrenching pain/Cannot be unlived, but if faced/With courage, need not be lived again/Lift up your eyes upon/This day breaking for you./Give birth again/To the dream” (On The Pulse of Morning, Maya Angelou). Symbolically, she articulates a connection between rebirth and dreaming, evoking themes of renewal, transformation, and the boundless potential of the human experience. At its essence, giving birth represents the push for new life, the emergence of a new existence in the world, and dreams serve as a realm of limitless possibility, where the imagination takes flight and the boundaries of reality dissolve. In this sense, both birth and dreams symbolize the genesis of something new, the

awakening of potential and the commencement of a journey filled with infinite possibilities. In Angelou's poem, the imagery of birth and dreams intertwines to symbolize profound moments of emergence and potential. Birth represents the literal beginning of life, a powerful metaphor for the genesis of new possibilities and experiences. Similarly, dreams in Angelou's poem evoke a realm of boundless imagination and creativity, where limitations are dissolved, and the mind soars into uncharted territories. This idea resonates with Hersey's notion of DreamSpace within the Nap Ministry framework due to its embodiment of DreamSpace, offering a state of rest where individuals can explore their inner landscapes, tap into their creative energies, and envision new realities. It aligns with Tenet 1 of a black religious ethic of rest by conceptualizing rest not merely as passive relaxation but as an active process of rejuvenation and rebirth. The model of rest presented in this context suggests that true rest involves more than physical recuperation—it encompasses a spiritual awakening and a renewal of purpose.

Just as birth signifies the beginning of a new life journey, dreams symbolize the awakening of possibilities within the subconscious mind. This resonates with Hersey's vision of rest as a transformative practice that fosters personal growth, resilience, and spiritual enrichment. Therefore, Angelou's poem encapsulates the essence of Tenet 1 by portraying rest as a dynamic process of birthing new ideas, perspectives, and aspirations. It aligns with Hersey's emphasis on DreamSpace as a sacred realm where rest becomes a catalyst for personal and collective evolution, reflecting the interconnectedness of birth, dreams, and the limitless potential inherent in rest as a spiritual and transformative experience.

Angelou continues on to express how nature calls to humanity offering new ways of being in the world. Early in the poems, she expresses, “If you will study war no more. Come,/ Clad in peace, and I will sing the songs/ The Creator gave to me when I and the/ Tree and the rock were one” (On The Pulse of Morning, Maya Angelou). In avoiding our own indulgence in meaningless wars with other nations, the river will sing the song of the “Creator.” The river emerges as a metaphorical beacon of wisdom and renewal, inviting humanity to embrace the transformative power of peace and unity. Moreover, the river's assertion that the song of the Creator is echoed not only in its own melodious currents but also in the immutable embrace of “the rock” and “the tree” underscoring how God, as a mythic, is manifested in nature. In this profound revelation, nature emerges as a sacred vessel through which the divine essence of the Creator finds expression, imbuing the natural world with a transcendent beauty and harmony

emphasizing our need to implement rest practices that return us to a space of holistic living despite our daily drudgery. Angelou continues by stating “root yourselves beside me.” Despite the tumultuous currents of human conflict and brutality, nature extends an impassioned call to all, beckoning them to its tranquil shade and shores. In this symbolic gesture, the river embodies a profound essence of rest. Embodying intentional stillness, nature proposes that we root ourselves similar to a tree, evoking a divine and holistic essence of ourselves .

Claude McKay was a key figure in the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement that celebrated African American art, literature, and music in the 1920s and 1930s. Born in Jamaica in 1889, McKay was a prolific writer known for his poetry and novels exploring themes of race, identity, and social injustice. One of McKay’s notable poems is “I Shall Return,” written in 1922. This poem reflects McKay's deep connection to his homeland of Jamaica and expresses sentiments of longing and nostalgia for the landscapes and memories of his youth. “I Shall Return” evokes vivid imagery and sensory experiences, transporting readers to the lush and vibrant setting of Jamaica. McKay concocts imagery through expressions like “At golden noon the forest fires burn,/Wafting their blue-black smoke to sapphire skies” to paint a picturesque scene that captures the essence of his homeland's natural beauty and tranquility (I Shall Return, Claude McKay). The core themes of "I Shall Return" revolve around the longing for home and the idea of finding solace and rest in a familiar place. McKay's poem conveys a sense of yearning for a sanctuary—a DreamSpace—that offers comfort and rejuvenation amid life's challenges and uncertainties.

His poetic composition “I Shall Return” serves as a profound thematic tapestry of sorrow and remorse. As the plot unfolds, the poet expresses his longing to reconnect with his native Jamaica. A return. Emblematic of the Harlem Renaissance movement, McKay artfully employs a rhetorical device of repetition, notably manifested in the recurring refrain, "I shall return," iterated six times throughout the poem, emblematic of the poet's resolute determination. Emphasized by the adherence to a uniform metrical scheme, each line was crafted to comprise ten syllables thereby holding a rhythmic cadence. The rhythm is further noticed in the pervasive use of alliteration, as evidenced by phrases such as “dances,” “dear,” and “delicious,” evoking a sense of urgency that underscores the poet's passion. The brisk tempo and recurring sounds serve as a critical foundation to include in discourse which may have not been captured in traditional methods. In reflection of McKay's passionate poetic remembrance and longing for his native

land, we better understand how poetry serves as a dream space that poets used to push for complex subjectivity. Situated under the dehumanizing forces of the US, McKay uses his verses which evoke a visceral experience to dwell in a space that allows for expansive ways of being.

Building on McKay's evocative imagery and thematic exploration of a cherished homeland, “I Shall Return” indeed serves as an example of DreamSpace within the Black community. McKay's poetic language invites readers on a sensory odyssey, immersing them in the sights, sounds, and emotions of his beloved Jamaica. Through the portrayal of Jamaica as a safe and comforting space, McKay creates a DreamSpace that differs from the tangible realities of his audience, offering a place of rest and reprieve in order to aid in their efforts in pushing for complex subjectivity. This imagined space becomes a sanctuary where individuals can escape from the hardships of everyday life and reconnect with a sense of belonging and identity. McKay's use of vivid imagery and nostalgic tones taps into a collective longing for a place of refuge and renewal—a DreamSpace that resonates deeply within the Black community. By invoking memories and landscapes that evoke a sense of peace and familiarity, McKay's poem becomes a source of solace and inspiration, encouraging individuals to seek their own DreamSpace within their realities. In essence, “I Shall Return” exemplifies the concept of DreamSpace as a transformative and restorative space within Black cultural imagination, offering a vision of home and belonging that transcends physical boundaries and fosters emotional well-being and spiritual connection.

As DreamSpace serves as a space of imaginative thought beyond our tangible realities, Hersey emphasizes the necessity of it in order to handle the historical trail of grief that may come from our acknowledgement and reasoning for using DreamSpace in the first place. Hersey supports the use of rest as a space for handling grief and healing by stating, “Rest supports our grieving by allowing space… (Hersey 2022, 15). In so, rest serves as a powerful catalyst for emotional processing and expression in response to labor and exploitation also. In the gentle embrace of rest, individuals are afforded the opportunity to engage in introspection and self-reflection, unraveling the layers of grief that shroud their hearts and minds. By granting themselves permission to surrender to the healing rhythms of rest, individuals cultivate a sense of subjectivity and holistic living, allowing grief to unfold in our own time and in our own ways.

Danez Smith, a contemporary black poet highly involved in LGBTQ+ efforts, exemplifies the way in which mythics serve as inspiration in our current time of need in the

midst of grief. In “Genesissy,” Smith builds on biblical verses around the creation story and inserts personal revelation in a manner that expands the verses with new ones offering space for themselves and their community. They state,

> And on the 13th day, God barely moved/ he sat around dreaming of glitter,/ happy with the shine of it/ but sad so many of his children/ would come home covered in it/ the parades cancelled due to rain/ of fists and insults and rope and bullets (Genesissy, Danez Smith)

“Genesissy” is a poem that delves into themes of gender identity and self-discovery. The title itself—a play on words combining “Genesis” and “sissy”—suggests an exploration of identity rooted in biblical and cultural narratives, particularly within the context of gender expression and queerness. In this poem, Smith navigates the complexities of gender identity and the journey towards self-acceptance and empowerment in the midst of cultural stigmas and impediments. In the context of grief associated with historical trauma brought about by communal “shame,” “hate”, and physical violence imposed upon these bodies, dreaming serves as a divine space, offering a moment of review and speculation for God. In the midst of this momentary pause and imaginative state, God sifted through emotions during times of mourning. Oftentimes overwhelmed by the weight of grief, marginalized people are left emotionally and physically depleted. God, the mythic, serves as an instructive being for the human spirit. It is during these moments of vulnerability that rest emerges as a crucial balm for the wounded soul, providing a space for healing through reflection and imagination which serve as the foundations of my first tenet. Rest, in its essence, is a form of self-care and self-compassion, allowing individuals to honor their emotional needs and prioritize their well-being amidst the turmoil of grief. By embracing moments of stillness and quiet contemplation, individuals may create sacred spaces within themselves where they can confront their pain, process their emotions, and gradually begin the journey towards healing.

In Langston Hughes' poem, “Dream Variations,” the poet employs a nuanced juxtaposition of stanzas to delineate the stark contrast between idealized aspirations and harsh realities experienced by African Americans in the early 20th century. Through the prism of a dreamlike space in the first stanza, Hughes articulates a yearning for a life unencumbered by racial oppression—a life characterized by leisurely pursuits, serene contemplation, and communion with nature, stating, “To fling my arms wide/ In some place of the sun,/ To whirl

and to dance/ Till the white day is done./ Then rest at cool evening/ Beneath a tall tree/ While night comes on gently,/ Dark like me—That is my dream!" (Dream Variation, Langston Hughes). The evocative imagery of "rest at cool evening beneath a tall tree" conveys a pastoral lot, symbolizing a yearning for respite from the relentless toll of racial discrimination. Then with the emphasis of the exclamation mark, the declaration of the speaker's dream, imbued with a sense of certainty and elation, underscores the power of dreams as vehicles for envisioning and manifesting a reality that transcends the limitations of the present.

However, this idyllic vision is swiftly dispelled in the following stanza, wherein Hughes delineates the dissonance between aspiration and actuality, stating, "/ To fling my arms wide/ In the face of the sun,/ Dance! Whirl! Whirl!/ Till the quick day is done./ Rest at pale evening . . ./ A tall, slim tree . . ./ Night coming tenderly/ Black like me" (Dream Variation, Langston Hughes). Here, we notice the second stanza's repetition and variation, with personifying the sun and imbuing it with symbolic significance. The shift in meaning from the first stanza's association of the sun with whiteness to a more nuanced interpretation in the second stanza underscores the speaker's acknowledgement of oppressive forces represented by clarifying a particular complexion with the sun's cycles. Introducing ambiguity through the transformation of "cool evening" to "pale evening," Hughes invites readers to question the shifting dynamics of light and darkness. The ellipses at the end of these lines disrupt the reader's sense of stability, mirroring the speaker's own sense of disorientation and uncertainty. Then the poet depicts the grim reality of ceaseless toil, expressing dance in a manner that extracts, expressing it as exclamation evoking a sense of instruction. No longer beneath the envisioned "tall tree," the metaphor expresses how in the absence of refuge and sanctuary we are vulnerable to the dehumanizing forces of society. The final line shifts from "dark like me" to "black like me," signifying a transition from an intermediary stage to a state of complete darkness, mirroring the progression from evening to night. This shift underscores the speaker's sense of familiarity and comfort in the darkness, symbolizing a form of acceptance of one's identity.

The tonal trajectory within the poem is striking, transitioning from an initial aura of optimism to a palpable sense of disillusionment and vulnerability. The initial stanza exudes an air of lightheartedness and hope, supported by the vivid imagery of a utopian existence. Yet, these notions give way to a more somber and plaintive tone in the subsequent stanza, reflective of the crushing weight of societal inequities and unfulfilled dreams.

In summary, the first tenet of a black religious ethic of rest emphasizes the transformative and healing potential of rest, particularly during times of vulnerability and emotional distress. This ethic recognizes rest not simply as physical relaxation but as a profound spiritual practice that fosters self-care, self-compassion, and inner healing. The poems discussed in this section, including those by Maya Angelon, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay,and Danez Smith exemplify this ethic by depicting rest as a sanctuary—a DreamSpace—where individuals can confront their pain, engage in introspection, and envision new possibilities for themselves and their communities. Through vivid imagery, emotional depth, and thematic exploration, these poems invite readers to reimagine rest as a sacred act of resistance and self-preservation, reflecting the enduring resilience and creativity within Black cultural and spiritual traditions. By embracing rest as a form of spiritual nourishment and empowerment, these poets contribute to a broader conversation on reclaiming rest as a fundamental aspect of Black liberation and well-being.

Tenet 2: Poetry Functions as an Intimate Space for Complex Subjectivity in the Act of Writing

Throughout history, writing has often been more than a mere act of communication or artistic expression. For marginalized black communities, writing has served as a sacred and profoundly religious experience—a means of preserving cultural heritage, articulating spiritual beliefs, and reclaiming subjectivity in the face of oppression. From the earliest narratives of enslavement to the literary and artistic movements of the Harlem Renaissance and beyond, black writers have wielded the power of the written word to forge connections with divine forces, articulate the complexities of faith, and assert their humanity in the face of dehumanizing forces. In this exploration, we delve into the rich tapestry of black literary traditions, tracing the ways in which writing has served as a conduit for religious expression, spiritual space, and collective empowerment for marginalized black communities throughout history, but I do so through literature and specific poems, offering a complex dynamic that unravels the complexities of black poets expressing the meaning and significance of their work through their work.Through an examination of black poetry, we uncover the profound intersections between writing, religion, and identity, illuminating the enduring significance of these connections in shaping the lived experiences of black individuals and communities across generations.

As a Professor in religious academia, Stacey Floyd-Thomas constantly critically engages with students, further prompting them to explore the manners in which they dwell in self, space, and community. She proposes a method of learning she refers to as mining the motherlode. Her intention with this is,

> To teach each other how to use the frameworks of our own disciplines and social locations in order to produce a living laboratory that would allow us to scrutinize self and subject as they have been institutionalized. Mining the motherlode, then, is the process of delving into that which seems impenetrable and sacred in our lives. (Floyd-Thomas 2002, 14).

The concept of “mining the motherlode” involves a collaborative effort to utilize the frameworks of our respective disciplines and social contexts to create a dynamic and transformative space. This “living laboratory” enables us to critically examine ourselves and others in ways that challenge established institutional norms and assumptions. To mine the motherlode is to delve deeply into aspects of our lives that are often religious and sacred. This process entails

excavating hidden or overlooked aspects of personal and collective experiences, uncovering valuable insights and perspectives that have been obscured or marginalized within dominant narratives, rendering us a bit more visible to ourselves and each other. By engaging in this process, we confront entrenched power dynamics and seek to redefine and reclaim narratives that have been historically marginalized or dismissed. Through Floyd-Thomas's proposition of mining the motherlode, we better develop a deeper understanding of self and society, acknowledging the complexities and multiplicities of human existence.

In the opening pages of her book "Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics," Floyd Thomas exemplifies the significance the act of writing has for oneself through a quote by Pearl Cleage, a Black writer and poet, stating,

> I am writing to expose and explore the point where racism and sexism meet. I am writing to help understand the full effects of being Black and female in a culture that is both racist and sexist. I am writing to try and communicate that information to my sisters first and then to any brothers of good will and honest intent who will take the time to listen. . . . I am writing to allow myself to feel the anger. I am writing to keep from running toward it or away from it or into anybody's arms. . . I am writing, writing, writing, for my life. (Cleage 1990)

Pearl Cleage's quote illuminates the profound significance of writing as a transformative tool for self-exploration and resistance within the intersecting realms of racism and sexism. Through her words, Cleage articulates a multiplicity of motivations behind her writing endeavors and their significance.

First and foremost, Cleage seeks to expose and explore the intersection where racism and sexism converge, shedding light on the unique challenges faced by Black women within a culture characterized by systemic discrimination. By documenting and analyzing her experiences through writing, Cleage deepens her understanding of the complex effects of being Black and female in a society rife with discriminatory structures. Moreover, Cleage underscores the importance of communication and advocacy through writing. She endeavors to share her insights and knowledge with her fellow sisters, offering a platform for collective empowerment and solidarity. Additionally, Cleage expresses her need to confront and process her emotions, particularly her anger, through the act of writing. By channeling her thoughts and feelings into

words, she navigates her emotional landscape with intention and purpose, avoiding destructive impulses and seeking genuine catharsis. Above all, Cleage describes writing as a form of survival—an act of empowerment and resistance against oppressive forces. Writing becomes her lifeline, allowing her to reclaim agency and attempt to assert her subjectivity in a society that seeks to diminish it. Through her revelation of writing "for her life," Cleage exemplifies the transformative power of writing as a means of personal liberation and collective empowerment. Her words serve as a testament to the enduring legacy of Black women writers who use their voices to challenge injustice, cultivate resilience, and inspire social change.

In seeking evidence of this through other Black writers, I found Audre Lorde, a Black feminist thinker and poet that paved way for complex ways of being through her engagement in the feminist movement during the 1960s and 1970s, as a staple figure exemplifying these sentiments. Audre Lorde's eloquent proclamation, "Poetry is not only dream and vision: it is the skeleton architecture of our lives," encapsulates the profound significance of poetry as more than mere illusion, but as the very framework upon which our lives are built. In her claim that it is "not only dreams and visions," Lorde seconds Hersey's claims around the tangible active element to dreaming. Despite the intensive use of imaginative space that I elucidate in the first tenet, the act of writing forges our dreams and visions into reality. It serves as a tangible space for our dreams to be revisited and reproduced. By asserting that poetry is "the skeleton architecture of our lives," Lorde highlights its essential nature as a structural element that underpins our existence. Much like the bones that support and sustain the body, poetry provides a framework for navigating the complexities of human experience, offering a means of expression and exploration that transcends the limitations of conventional language.

Additionally, Lorde states, "It lays the foundation for a future of change, a bridge across our fears of what has never been before." By daring to imagine and articulate what has never been before, poetry empowers us to confront and transcend the barriers that constrain our thinking, opening up new possibilities for growth, understanding, and transformation guiding us in our push for complex subjectivity. In essence, Lorde's words affirm the profound capacity of poetry to illuminate the human condition, challenge the status quo, and inspire meaningful change. Through its evocative imagery and incisive insights, poetry emerges not only as a source of beauty and inspiration, but as a potent force for social and personal evolution—a testament to the enduring power of language to shape our lives and our world, at large.

Melvin Dixon, a prominent Black poet during the late 20 century, creates poetry that resonates deeply within the context of marginalized communities, particularly within the intersectionality of black and LGBTQ+ identities. His articulation of his paramount fear—dying— exemplifies the ways in which poetry has served as a lifeline despite his illness. Dixon's declaration, made in the face of his own mortality, serves as a reminder of the enduring legacy of artistic creation and truth-telling. In "Heartbeats," a poem resembling a daily tasks list, start with lines stating, "Work out. Ten laps./Chin ups. Look good./Steam room. Dress warm./Call home. Fresh air./Eat right. Rest well./Sweetheart. Safe sex." Towards the end, it transitions into "Today? Tonight? It waits. For me./Sweet heart. Don't stop./Breathe in. Breathe out" (Heartbeats, Melvin Dixon). Despite the inevitability of his physical decline, Dixon's declaration to fight and continue to breathe is a testament of his unwavering commitment to life. He knows death waits for him, so in producing this artistic expression, he not only reveals a deeply moving truth, but in writing this, he engages in battle. While knowing once we read it, his presence will endure wherever art thrives and truth-telling prevails. In this way, he pushes to transcend the limitations of his own mortality, becoming a timeless guardian of cultural memory and a beacon of inspiration for future generations of black folk.

In summary, the second tenet of my black religious ethic of rest emphasizes the profound and transformative nature of writing poetry as an intimate space of complex subjectivity. Poetry is not merely an imaginative endeavor but a deeply personal and introspective process that allows poets to delve into their innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Through poetry, individuals can articulate and assert diverse identities and perspectives that may defy societal norms and expectations. This intimate expression of complex subjectivities within poetry serves as a powerful tool for resistance and self-discovery within Black cultural and literary traditions. It provides a platform for navigating personal and collective challenges, transforming pain into beauty, and complexity into empowerment. Poetry becomes a sanctuary where authenticity is celebrated, and where individuals can attempt to reclaim agency over their narratives and experiences. In essence, my second tenet highlights the transformative potential of poetic creation and expression as a means of asserting and embracing expansive ways of being.

Tenet 3: Poetry Reinforces Communal Connection Through a Collective Embodiment of Complex Subjectivity Further Emphasizing The Sacrality of Black Poetry

Throughout Hersey's work, we are invited to contemplate the transformative power of rest as a means of reclaiming autonomy and navigating the complexities of existence. There is a delicate balance between the personal and communal revelations of such resistance. In pursuing liberation, she states that "our collective rest will save us" (Hersey 2022, 3). Emphasizing the necessity of community in our perpetual pursuit of subjectivity, she explores the ways in which enslaved people found space to rest despite the impositions of plantations and slave owners. She states, "The way they created a world within an oppressive one to test out their freedom and regain autonomy reminds me of the spiritual and metaphysical ways we must reimagine and shape-shift our way to intentional rest" (Hersey 2022, 135). The dynamics she proposes between the collective creation of a spiritual/reimagined space comparatively to that of an oppressive/tangible one is purposeful. It speaks to the possibilities of expansive being specifically through a communal engagement of intentional rest due to the collaboration of oppressive disrupting our humanhood. This tenet posits that the sacredness of these texts is intrinsically linked to their role in fostering community cohesion, identity, and shared understanding in the midst of common struggle.

Returning to Pinn, I emphasize his sentiments stating, "It must be understood that this (complex subjectivity) does not entail a turn toward strict individualism. This subjectivity means individual fulfillment within the context of concern and responsibility for others" (Pinn 2003, 159). He derives these claims from Robert Birt's proclamation that "Since the violation of the human being is social, the struggle to create an identity is also social" (Pinn 2003, 159). So in this, I emphasize how sacred texts, within the Black community, derive their significance through communal engagement, interpretation, and application within the context of collective religious or cultural practices, further pushing me to consider poetry as a sacred text in the ways in which it embodies complex subjectivity while also informing and reinforcing the community at large.

During Bill Clinton's inaugural address, Maya Angelou described the conditions of the country in her work "On the Pulse of Morning." She expresses how the human experience is characterized by a prevailing sense of division and detachment, stating "each of you, a bordered country" and later she would list many different identities spanning through communities like "The Asian," "The African," "The Gay," "The Rabbi," "The homeless," "The Teacher." With each individual tethered to the confines of a specific identity, individuals are paradoxically

rendered fragile, their sense of identity tethered to superficial markers such as race, color, or economic status. Despite purported advancements in societal development, this fractured landscape remains fraught with conflict, as nations engage in perpetual power struggles, often at the expense of marginalized communities. She states how some have been “forced on bloody feet.” In this, the poet evokes the plight of those who labor tirelessly to sustain, only to find themselves exploited and marginalized by those in positions of authority. Through her poetry, she urges us to think past these realities and to “root yourselves beside (the tree which is planted by the river).” In the light of a divided nation, she urged for us to come together. Through evocative language and incisive imagery, the poet sheds light on the enduring struggle for justice and equity, underscoring the urgent need for collective action and solidarity in the face of systemic oppression.

Langston Hughes expresses sentiments around the collective in “Dream Variation.” Central to the poem's resonance is its narrative universality, facilitated by the absence of a designated narrator. By abstaining from a singular, identifiable voice, Hughes invites readers to inhabit the experiences and emotions articulated within the verses, fostering a sense of collective empathy and solidarity. Through the strategic use of first-person pronouns, the poem cultivates an intimate connection between narrator and reader, engendering a shared sense of empathy and recognition of shared struggles within the African American community. Through poetry, the expression of the personal stimulates communal religiosity offering a sense of reprieve through understanding and connection. In expressing sentiments in line with “I am you, and you are me,” we begin stimulating a shared sense of humanhood through imaginative work.

This blurring between poet and audience is also significant in Ishmael Reed’s poem, “Beware: Do Not Read This Poem.” The nuanced irony of its title underscores its thematic exploration. Despite the density of the earlier stanza, the simplicity of the seventh stanza succinctly declares, "this poem is the reader & the / reader this poem" (Beware: Do Not Read This Poem, Ishmael Reed). This circular assertion blurs the distinction between reader and poem, implying a sense of acquiescence rather than critical engagement. In consideration of the title, a paradoxical fusion of reader and text serve as a cautionary reminder of the dangers of complacency and passive consumption in the face of societal inequities. The poet implores readers to resist the temptation of stepping into the mirror, thereby engaging in a meta-reflection on the role of poetry itself. By drawing readers into the very fabric of the poem, Reed

demonstrates how poetry functions as a mirror, reflecting both cultural identity and existential presence. However, the poem warns against the potential negation of one's cultural heritage or existential significance if poetry stays on paper.

The tone of the title reverberates throughout the poem, resonating with the grim statistics presented in the final stanza. Reed states' "statistic: the US bureau of missing persons re-/ports that in 1968 over 100,000 people/ disappeared leaving no solid clues/ nor trace only a space in the lives of their friends" (Beware: Do Not Read This Poem, Ishmael Reed). This stanza presents these statistics in formal, dispassionate language, with purposeful spaces throughout, detailing the plight of missing persons. Yet, amidst the cold calculus of numbers, Reed infuses an acknowledgment of the human toll exacted by such losses. The final lines tenderly recognize the profound sadness that permeates the void left by the absence of these individuals. These spaces, both literal and metaphorical, serve as haunting reminders of lives extinguished and communities bereft of their presence. I argue this poetry serves as a space that allows for the collective to connect with those beyond the tangible realm, building sacred community and communion.

In so, Reed's poem serves as both a mirror and a warning, inviting readers to confront the complexities of identity and existence while cautioning against the complacency that leads to societal indifference and loss. Through its artful interplay of irony, symbolism, and thematic depth, the poem challenges readers to engage critically with their surroundings and to cultivate empathy and awareness in the face of human suffering and societal injustice. Poetry stimulates the community, and through communal stimulation, poets' propositions of healing can be internalized and used as a tool of resistance. Reed's poem encourages readers to embrace a multiplicity of viewpoints, transcending the self-absorption of Narcissus or the vain "ol woman" who only perceive themselves. It champions an awareness of shared humanity and diverse perspectives as a bulwark against societal stagnation and the erasure of individual lives further emphasizing a method in which we can implement to create healthier collectives.

Indeed, this collaborative effort towards acknowledgement and empathy reflects the nature of black poetry and the connections it fosters to forge a communal space for rest. The focus on missing persons and the collective grief experienced by those left behind highlights the communal aspect of mourning and remembrance. Within the framework of a black religious ethic of rest, this poem can be seen as calling for a communal approach to rest and healing. Rest,

within this context, extends beyond individual relaxation to encompass communal solidarity and support. The poem invites readers to collectively engage with the emotional weight of loss and to acknowledge the human toll of the statistics presented. By recognizing and honoring the lives of the missing individuals, the community comes together in shared grief and remembrance, creating a sacred space of communal communion. The concept of rest, in this interpretation, involves not only physical rest but also emotional and spiritual rejuvenation within a supportive community. Through collective mourning and reflection, individuals find solace and strength in community bonds, allowing for healing and resilience in the face of profound loss. Furthermore, the poem's focus on acknowledging the void left by the absence of loved ones underscores the importance of restorative practices within communal settings. Rest becomes a communal call—a shared endeavor to provide comfort, empathy, and space for healing among those affected by loss.

An example of poetry functioning as a sacred text can also be captured in Melvin Dixon's "Heartbeats." Through his poetic work, he uses his own troubles with HIV to connect with a community broader than himself in his push for more expansive meaning around his conditions. Within the context of the AIDS epidemic, his call to action for black gay and lesbian writers to "breathe" despite bodily degradation resonates with the overarching theme of life and humanity. Using literary and artistic works serves as a rallying cry against the forces of systemic oppression and erasure that have historically sought to silence and marginalize their voices.

In emphasizing the imperative for these writers to not only practice rest and create art but also preserve the art of others that bears witness to their everyday experiences, Dixon underscores the instructive and transformative power of storytelling and artistic expression. In writing himself and his lifestyle into art, he creates space for his humanhood by means of reclaiming agency and asserting visibility within dominant cultural narratives, and this can be extended to those reading it. By centering their own lived experiences and amplifying the voices of their peers, these writers contribute to the ongoing process of cultural preservation and collective empowerment, ensuring that the rich tapestry of their identities and experiences is not relegated to the margins of history. In emphasizing the ways in which black poetry has functioned in ways that push for subjectivity through the writing itself and the connection to others, we better understand how poetry has served as a tool towards complex subjectivity and how poets provide communities with sacred text offering wisdom through personal revelation.

Returning to Frederick Douglass, I conclude this chapter emphasizing the need for rest for black bodies and communities. Even amidst the depths of his despair, Douglass's narrative hints at the resilience that sustains him in the face of adversity. He states, " I sank down again, mourning over my wretched condition. I was sometimes prompted to take my life and that of Covey, but was prevented by a combination of hope and fear. My sufferings on this plantation seem now like a dream rather than a stern reality" (Douglass 2001, 49). Despite contemplating the act of suicide, he is ultimately restrained by a combination of hope and fear, underscoring the complex interplay between agency and constraint that characterizes his experience of rest. Enslavement entailed not only physical bondage but also the erasure of cultural heritage, familial ties, and individual autonomy. Within the confines of his oppressive circumstances, moments of rest and imaginative escapism provided crucial opportunities for psychological sustenance and resistance.

Douglass's narrative serves as a powerful testament to the transformative potential of rest as a site of resistance and renewal within the context of oppression. Through moments of respite, however fleeting, individuals like Douglass are able to assert their humanity and reclaim agency over their own lives, even in the face of overwhelming adversity. As such, Douglass's narrative offers a compelling insight into the multifaceted role of rest in the struggle towards subjectivity and liberation that has been supported by the poetic emphasis on rest that has been articulated by black poets throughout history.

Concluding Remarks

With this work, I present to you a glimpse into this journey—a symphony of hurt and hope woven together to form a tapestry of introspection and resilience. As my thoughts conclude, I urge you to question, to ponder, and to reflect over the sentiments of these experiences.

The objectification of athletes in today's sporting landscape echoes a persistent struggle within the realm of athletic competition. As a community deeply invested in the world of sports, we witness a recurring theme where Black athletes, often revered for their physical capabilities, face a complex form of objectification. The emphasis on performance metrics, statistics, and physical attributes often overshadows their individuality, relegating them subjects of exchange in entertainment and profit for various stakeholders in the sports industry. Their bodies become scrutinized, dissected, and often publicized, reinforcing a cyclical narrative that prioritizes physical attributes over their character, intellect, or personal experiences.

In summary, the exploration of black religiosity through cultural production, particularly in the realms of slave narratives and black poetry, unveils a narrative of resistance, rebellion, and the relentless pursuit of expansive meaning within the confines of the New World and its objectifying perpetuations. Through the lens of Anthony Pinn's concept of complex subjectivity, I have elucidated how rest, as emphasized in contemporary black poetry, serves as a crucial tool in the ongoing push for complex subjectivity within black religion. This narrative journey, informed by Pinn's insights and Charles Long's ideas on the Hermeneutics of the Ontological Dimension, underscores the intricate interplay between history, culture, and consciousness in shaping our understanding of black religiosity and black life.

By foregrounding the concept of complex subjectivity, I have illuminated the transformative potential of rest as a means of resistance and self-discovery in the face of oppressive systems and societal expectations. In drawing parallels between the historical objectification of enslaved individuals and the contemporary commodification of black athletes, I have highlighted the enduring legacy of dehumanization and exploitation within systems of power and privilege. Through nuanced analysis and empathetic understanding, I have sought to bridge the gap between past and present, acknowledging the resonance of historical trauma while also recognizing the agency and resilience of black individuals in shaping their own narratives of liberation.

Through the lens of black poetry, specifically focusing on models of rest that push for expansive meaning and serve as spaces of intimate complex subjectivity, I have explored the sacred dimensions of rest within black communities. The pursuit of complex subjectivity and the embrace of rest as a transformative force are not only vital aspects of black religiosity but also fundamental to the ongoing struggle for liberation and self-determination. By centering narratives of resistance, resilience, and renewal, we honor the legacy of our ancestors while also charting a path forward towards a more just and equitable future. Through poetry and collective action, we continue to push the boundaries of what is possible, forging new pathways toward expansive ways of beings for generations to come.

In our ongoing pursuit of complex subjectivity, we live through the legacy of historical enslavement and must examine how it continues to reverberate through contemporary structures, manifesting in persistent racial inequalities, intergenerational trauma, and systemic injustices. Black poetry serves as a space of resistance. Expressed in her own poetry, Adrienne Maree Brown, show gratitude for Maya Angelou stating, “In the midst of battle you let us rest in poetry, in your arms, in your faith that Yes, we were precious./You didn’t whisper, nor did you shout, but measured each word as an ode to our humanity” (Resting in Poetry, For Maya Angelou, Brown). Recognizing our daily battles, poets promote social justice and racial equity through coping strategies that situate our communities in a religious quest for subjecthood. Moreover, by understanding the role of rest through poetry and also being able to rest in poetry, we gain trauma-informed approaches to healing and community resilience in modern contexts.

It is in this essence of rest that imaginative space fuels our collective struggle—a wrestling match against forces of dehumanization and exploitation, a perpetual pursuit of liberation. And though the road ahead may be fraught with obstacles, I persist by the knowledge that we do not wrestle in vain. For every blow struck, every challenge faced, keeps us pushing for our shared humanity. So let us continue to push for more, my friends. Let us continue to grapple with the complexities of existence, armed with nothing but the essence of hope and the unwavering belief in a better tomorrow imagined during our moments of reprieve. With that, I urge my brothers and sisters to rest up… We have plenty of work in the morning.

“Mama, I’m Tired”

Epilogue

A slave no more. A slave no more.

Amidst a backdrop painted with the brushstrokes of affirmative action's promises, the ascension of black leaders to the pinnacle of power, and the facade of equal rights echoing through corridors of societal rhetoric, a reality remains veiled beneath this superficial veneer. It's a reality where proclamations of emancipation collide violently with the enduring weight of racialized traumas, the legacy of a past that reverberates through the present. In the midst of this apparent freedom, where assertions of liberation cloak the collective conscience, I sit in my empty apartment deep in contemplation. Surrounded by the illusion of progress, I grapple with the symbolism of my existence—a black body supposedly unshackled from the chains of history.

Yet, as I walk the halls of my university, I cannot help but feel the metaphorical tug of those very shackles, pulling me back to an estate reminiscent of a plantation. The term "damaged goods" reverberates within the corridors of my mind—a label pasted to parcels mishandled during transition. My reflections turn to my own journey through collegiate sports. Much like the way my forebears were crammed into the bowels of ships, I find myself packed into and shipped by buses and airplanes, traversing new landscapes, where uncertainty looms as a constant companion.

As I progressed through my career, an illusion of the rusted chains that melodied the journey of my forebears increasingly weighed on my wrist and ankles as though this was my rightful inheritance. Bathed in the delusion of social mobility, I realized that in the world of athletics, the pursuit of more often leads athletes on an endless quest for success, marked by intense training regimens and demanding schedules that inhibit our wholeness. The fields echo the sentiments of bondage, and we must resist its alluring temptations in consideration of our community and personal well being at large.

My blackness is wholly black. Holy black. Unruly, fluid, and resistant to any identities and categories that attempt to capture it. It is an experience that cannot be completely embodied in words, but I attempt to share essences of it through my art. I hope it ties itself to your consciousness and inspires the ways in which you dwell in space until we meet again in the beyond;

Appendix

Poems in the order they appear in “Mama, I’m Tired: A Black Religious Ethic of Rest”:

On The Pulse of Morning (1993) by Maya Angelou

I Shall Return (1922) by Claude McKay

Dream Variation (1926) by Langston Hughes

Genesissy (2014) by Danez Smith

Beware: Do Not Read This Poem (1970) by Ishmael Reed

Heartbeats (1995) by Melvin Dixon

Resting in Poetry, For Maya Angelou (2014) by Adrienne Maree Brown

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