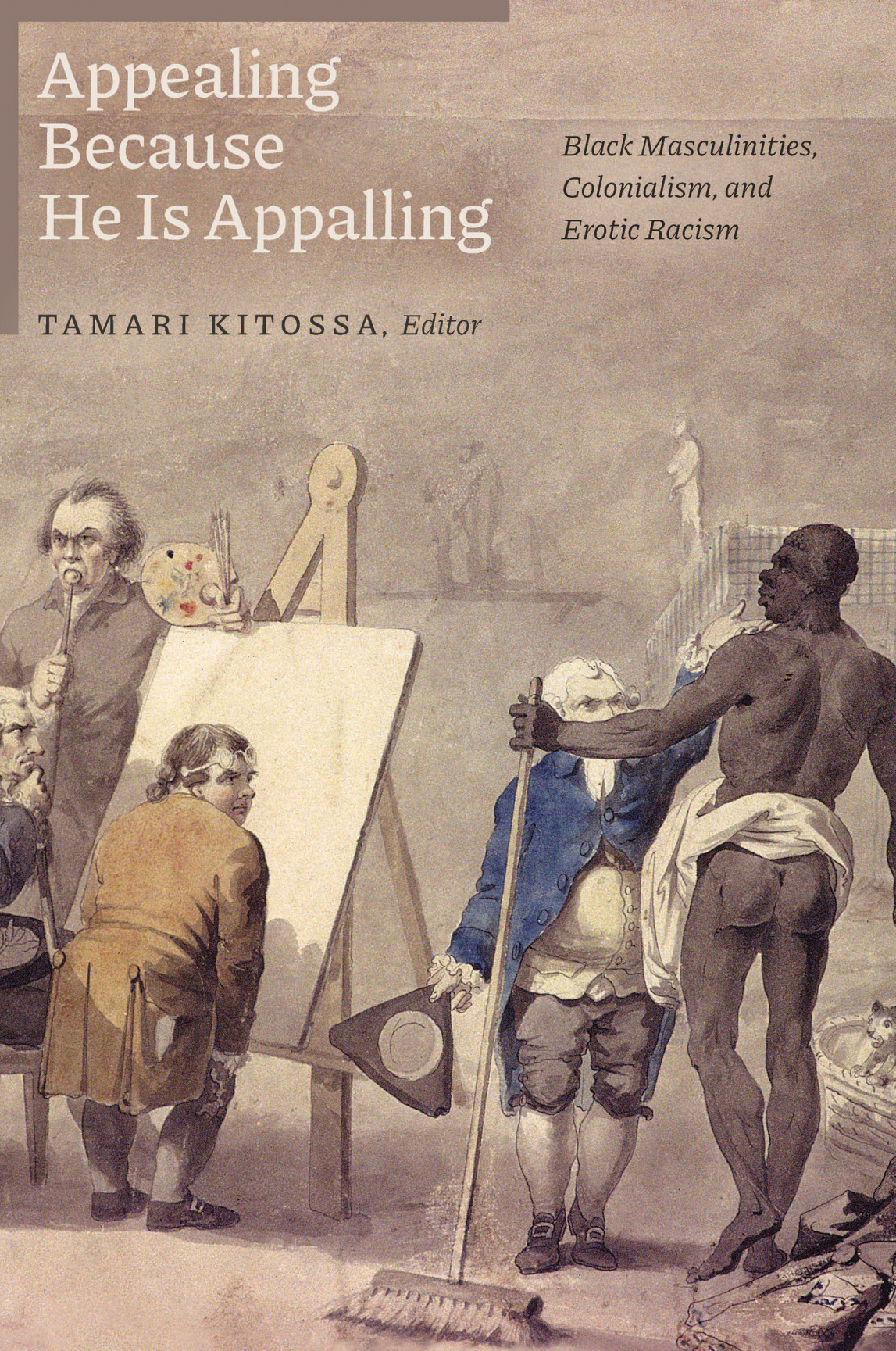
Maleness as deleterious category

Appealing Because He Is Appalling

Black Masculinities, Colonialism, and Erotic Racism

TAMARI KITOSSA, *Editor*



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For my son, Jelani.

"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

Contents

Foreword

Black Maleness as a Deleterious Category

BLACK MALE STUDIES has demanded a reappraisal of the previous scholarship concerning the role that maleness, manhood, and masculinity have played in white patriarchal societies for Black men in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere (Curry, 2017a). This collection of essays is a welcomed advancement of the conversation. With authors writing from all over the world, *Appealing Because He Is Appalling* builds on various interdisciplinary tools alongside the psychosexual perspectives of Fanon and Baldwin to reframe dominant narratives of Black male experience. Current analyses of Black males found in history, feminist thought, and popular culture literature are dominated by narratives emphasizing the lack, hypermasculinity, or sexism of Black males. This collection of essays is critical to challenging and changing these narratives. In order to understand the significance of this book's contribution to the field of Black male studies, however, it is first necessary to understand both the field itself and the broader landscapes of which it is a part.

Unpacking Black Male Studies

The dominant view of Black masculinity presented by intersectional and Black feminist theories in American universities asserts that Black men are less powerful white men and that they desire power and embrace social hierarchy in order to dominate Black women and other marginalized Black groups in the Black community (cf. Cooper, 2006; White, 2008).

These theories, which have reduced the study of Black males to a mimetic endeavour, are promulgated as the cumulative advance of gender studies over the last several decades.

This scholarship begins with the assertion that Black males' desire for completeness and manhood is achieved through their imitation of white masculinity (Curry, 2021). These works assert that Black men are lesser men because of racism and that Black men use violence to compensate for centuries of racial discrimination and injury. Because these theories are primarily applied to Black men and boys, very little effort has been made to empirically verify or ethnographically demonstrate and validate these theories. The idea that Black men were violent sexual predators who take pleasure in the murder and rape of others was a cornerstone of the subculture-of-violence theories coming out of criminology in the 1960s as well as the feminist theories of the 1970s. Despite there being relatively few attempts to verify whether Black males are driven to imitate the character of white men, mimeticism has come to be the premise from which all work on Black males begins. Theoretical research on Black men throughout various fields attempts to either affirm or refute the idea that Black men are deviant. In both cases, the attempts to affirm or refute the idea of Black male deviance (e.g., criminality, hypermasculinity, misogyny, violence) centre pathology as the origin of thinking about the Black male. The time has come for Black men and boys to be thought of and theorized differently.

Understanding Black Males' Disproportionate Death and Dying as Gendercide

The intensification of anti-Black racism, xenophobia, and right-wing ideology in the United States and Europe make the intellectual reconsideration of Black men and boys a timely and much-needed project. Heightened levels of fear, hatred, and xenophobia directed at negatively racialized groups throughout the world have especially made Black men a target for white and right-wing vigilantism, police brutality, and state violence. Black male death not only deserves scholarly attention, but also warrants an invigorated demand for understanding how Black male life is critical to the preservation

of right-wing and white supremacist structures and order throughout the world. Understanding the life, death, and dying of Black men and boys in the United States (the chief right-wing and white supremacist global hegemon) and elsewhere requires a systemic analysis of how the necropolitical destruction of Black male death plays into, supports, and enables racism—or, more specifically, racial domination. This requires an area of study dedicated to analyzing the global program of targeting and demonizing Black males not only throughout the Western world but also in other regions where anti-Black misandry may be less expected.

According to historian Amy E. Randall (2015):

> As scholars, human rights activists, and policymakers grapple with the challenges of how to stop genocidal violence before its starts…a focus on gender-specific actions and patterns might yield insights. Scholars have pointed out there is a high correlation between certain types of gender violence and genocide…In present-day conflicts, if gender-selective slaughter of a specific ethnic/racial/national group of male civilians occurs, it could be a warning that the more generalized destruction and mass murder of that population might soon follow. (p. 4)

The dehumanizing caricatures whites created and other non-white people have since inherited of Black males are the bases of the racist stereotypes imposed on the whole group (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; McConnaughy, 2017; McConnaughy & White, 2011; Thiem et al., 2019).

The proximity that caricatures of Black males have to the stereotypes of their larger racial group suggest that analyses of the distancing negativity associated with Black males are central to understanding the intent of racial violence throughout contemporary patriarchal societies. The killing of negatively racialized men and boys is connected to historical patterns of mass violence used to dominate and manage subjugated or conquered populations (Miller, 1994, 2004). These killings are enduring features of social organization within Western and other racialized patriarchal societies. Negatively racialized males are the canaries in the coal mine, so to speak, for

genocidal processes. Their condemnation, degradation, and, ultimately, elimination indicate rising levels of dehumanization for the groups to which they belong.

Black male studies scholars have suggested that racism is a form of misandric aggression (Curry, 2018). This statement adds nuance to formulations of racism that often articulate racism as a claim concerning the status or hierarchy between different racial groups, where one dominant racial group is thought superior to an inferior racial group. Conceptualizing racism as a complex system is often difficult. Ramon Grosfoguel (2016) defines racism as "a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the 'capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world system' (Grosfoguel, 2011)" (p. 10). As thorough as this definition may be, it says little about how racism is enforced or about the role violence against men plays in racist oppression. It is nonetheless clear that the disproportionality of lethal violence directed against Black males compared to whites or women in racist societies warrants serious study.

This difference in the magnitude of violence imposed on Black men through homicide, incarceration, police killings, and economic isolation offers evidence that the targeting of Black males (and other non-white racial male groups) plays a significant role in enforcing hierarchies and accentuating systems of racial domination. Despite this fact, it is not often analyzed. In my book *The Man-Not*, I argue that racism aims for the death and dying of the subjugated group such that the dominant racial group can aspire for a more prosperous and less perilous future for its progeny (Curry, 2017a). One of the primary strategies of racism is misandric aggression, or sex-specific targeting, of Black males in white supremacist societies. The benefits of the present volume include its expansion of this frame of analysis to the world and over time, and its incorporation of subtler methods of necropolitics.

The sex-specific killing of Black males by state agents and vigilantes, or what has been called (male) gendercide by some scholars, is empirically

substantiated (Jones, 2000; Curry, 2017a). Yet it remains a theoretically neglected area of concern for scholars working in Black studies and on race and gender more broadly. The extermination of Black men and boys operates to maintain social order and racial hierarchy. This is a sex-specific strategy of scholarly discourse that attempts to exclude the Black male from civil society through punitive programs and dehumanizing rhetoric (Wynter, 1994). As Augusta Del Zotto (2004) explains,

> In the United States, the systematic objectification and control of poor, particularly black males, likewise play an important role in maintaining the desired social order. In this case, it is informed by the long historical tradition of objectifying black males. While the black female as threat can be controlled through policies of manipulation, the black male as threat requires the implementation of policies of direct force to keep him at the margins, and policies of containment to ensure that he does not encroach upon the serenity of growing industrial parks and gated communities. (pp. 163–64)

This removal of Black males from American society through lethal violence, the prison industrial complex, and the poverty draft into the military has previously been described as a program of institutional decimation (Stewart & Scott, 1978).

Unlike previous research into the precarity of being Black and male in the United States and elsewhere, Black male studies seeks to illuminate *how* the oppression of Black men and boys is part of a historic aspect of racist patriarchal societies around the world. Such societies seek to exclude and eliminate negatively racialized males who are outside the racial kinship of the dominant group. Perceiving them as cultural and biological threats to the continuity of racial domination, whites and non-white groups in their own national contexts severely sanction Black men and boys. As shown in the United States by Shervin Assari and myself, Black men and boys are more severely restricted in their freedoms and their ability to elevate themselves than any other group (Assari & Curry, 2020). Because societies frame Black men and

boys primarily as deviants and criminals, their deaths are deemed to be necessary for the survival of the dominant groups of these same societies.

The emphasis of this latter observation is not meant to be specifically placed on the identity of being Black and male; rather, it is meant to reveal a repetitive pattern throughout history in Western patriarchal societies: that of subjugating and eliminating negatively racialized males. Even excluded from any particular kinship or racial bonds, the societal male "outgroup" has been found in most patriarchal societies throughout history to be the target of many of the most dehumanizing stereotypes and the most lethal violence. As Errol Miller (1991) explained several decades ago:

> Patriarchy has historically marginalized men not covered by the covenant of kinship…Throughout history such men have been perceived as threats and treated as such. Patriarchy's treatment of such men has always been more brutal and harsh than its treatment of women. This contradictory and inconsistent feature of patriarchy has been mostly ignored. (p. 342)

By focusing on the motivation patriarchal societies have to exclude rather than incorporate negatively racialized males, it becomes easier to see how lethal violence against Black males is not simply the product of fear or aversion, as many psychoanalytic theorists proclaim. It is instead a program aimed at securing a numerical majority, resources, and cultural influence within a particular geography. The effects of Black male death—and the ways in which dominant groups in society benefit from it—are cumulative.

The removal of Black males and their subsequent absence in a society produces an underclass of Black males that, economically, politically, and socially, fall below many of the women in that very same society (Chetty et al., 2020; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In other words, maleness, when claimed under the duress of racialization and white supremacy, is a deleterious category that inverts the gender relation found among whites in the metropole. The targeting of Black men is merely one example of how gender is an apparatus of racial propagation for whites but of racial diminishment and disposability for Blacks.

Obstacles to the Theorizing of Black Male Vulnerability to Sexual Violence

Over the last decade, there has been mounting evidence that Black men were routinely raped and subject to sexual violence during slavery and Jim Crow. The homoerotic violence of white men that manifested in sodomizing Black males has slowly come to the fore in our attempts to rethink the institution of slavery (Aidoo, 2018). While there is substantial evidence that white women systematically raped and sexually coerced Black men and boys during slavery and segregation, these historical facts have been resisted and deemphasized as an area of theorization (Foster, 2011; Sweet, 2003; Wells, 2010). The history of sexual violence against Black males requires a paradigmatic shift in how scholars understand what gender-based violence means.

That Black men are and have been vulnerable to rape and sexual violence has not only been an understudied aspect of anti-Black racism, but an aspect shrouded by denial. A more accurate history of colonization and slavery shows that anti-Black sexual violence was not restricted only to heterosexually oriented white males who violated Black women. The erotic dimension of anti-Black racism, colonialism, and slavery not only erases this fact but flips it on its head. The representation of Black men as hypersexual brutes and insatiable rapists precludes the possibility that Black men *could* be raped. In 1942, J.A. Rogers explained that

> [m]ost Southerners still believe, or will proclaim very loudly, that it is and has been unthinkable that any white woman in her sane mind will have any relations with a Negro…However, the records show something entirely different. They show that the white woman ran a not too far distant second from the white man in miscegenation in spite of the severe restrictions against her, and which by the way, shows what she might have done if she had been as free as the white man. (p. 232; see also Wells, 2010)

Despite the evidence of Black male sexual victimization, there has been a hesitancy in reformulating theories of gender and sexual violence to reflect this fact. As I have shown in *The Man-Not*, the history of Black men being

victims of rape and sexual violence is related to how Black males experience sexual assault in our present day (Curry, 2017a). The suffering of Black males has been solely attributed to the effects of racism; the effects of gender have largely been ignored. This account of Black male existence has made experiences of sexual violence appear to be exceptional and rare rather than systemic and repetitive.

This is, however, far from the case. In the United States and Africa, Black men who have been victims of slavery and apartheid remain disproportionately at risk for rape, sexual violence, and abuse. This research would help explain the current sexual victimization findings in the United States and South Africa concerning Black males. In the United States, Black males report higher levels of contact sexual violence (which includes rape, being made to penetrate, sexual coercion, and unwanted sexual contact) than Black women and white women over a 12-month period (Smith et al., 2017). Unlike some European countries, the Optimus Study in South Africa similarly found that the sexual assault of South African boys (who were often victimized by older African women) was higher than that of their female counterparts (Artz et al., 2016). Likewise, in the United States today, decades after the repressive regimes of slavery and Jim Crow were formally abolished, Black men and boys remain disproportionately vulnerable to interracial and intraracial sexual assault and violence (Curry & Utley, 2018).

The neglect of male sexual victimization, specifically Black male sexual victimization at the hands of women, is actually quite staggering. Until recently, the US Department of Justice defined rape specifically as "the carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will" (Carbon, 2012, para. 1). This definition was updated in 2013 to read, "penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (Carbon, 2012, para. 2). This new definition changes how rape victimization and perpetration is understood: male rape victims are now more accounted for in US data. Recent scholarship that takes this change of definition into account showed that men were raped and/or made to

penetrate at similar rates to women in a 12-month period in the United States (Stemple & Meyer, 2014). The most surprising finding, however, has been the high rates of female perpetration of sexual coercion, unwanted sexual contact, and made-to-penetrate violence against men (Stemple et al., 2017; Smith et al., 2017, p. 32).

Smith et al. (2017) found that, in the United States over a 12-month period, Black males reported higher rates (6.5%) of contact sexual violence than both Black women (5.8%) and white women (3.6%) (pp. 18, 21, 28). They also found that, over a 12-month period, Black women in the United States reported roughly 262,000 cases of rape while Black men reported roughly 272,000 cases of made-to-penetrate violence (Smith et al., 2017, pp. 21, 28). In the same period, Black men reported 865,000 cases of contact sexual violence while Black women reported 849,000 cases. These numbers show that Black men experience sexual violence at rates comparable to, if not more than, most women in the United States. And yet the racist mythology of Black men as sexual brutes—a myth that pervades the US imagination—has neutralized the study of Black males as sexual victims (Curry, 2019).

But this myth does not belong to the United States alone. In general, feminist theory has also had considerable difficulty imagining women as perpetrators of sexual violence and rape. As Claire Cohen (2014) explains, "rape is still the most gender-specific of all crimes [where] only a man…can be the actual perpetrator, only a woman the victim" (p. 3). This is an ontological problem that implicates the normative assumptions surrounding how maleness excludes particular outgroup males from the identity of the rape victim. Some scholars might suggest that intersectionality, specifically intersectional invisibility, might be more open to discussing the rape of Black males and other subordinate male groups given its origin in Black feminism in the United States. This, however, is not the case: Black feminist authors have insisted since the 1980s that Black men were not systematically raped during slavery or even now as part of police violence in the United States (Davis, 1983; James 1999). This view of Black males being invulnerable to sexual violence and rape, despite the overwhelming evidence that Black

men and boys have been and still are victims of sexual violence and rape, suggests the intersectional frame of analysis as mobilized by Black feminists has no way of analyzing the sexual victimization of subordinate males (see Jacobs, 2017). In other words, the apparent *need* of feminist theorists to proximally locate Black males within regimes of privilege and power *because* of their *maleness* is an obstacle to acknowledging the historic role that sexual violence has played in the oppression and subjugation of Black men by white men and women across the globe.

Many of the early feminist theorizations suggesting that Black men have power over Black women were based on the writings of subculture-of-violence theorists in the sixties and seventies. Theorists such as Marvin E. Wolfgang and Franco Ferracutti (1967), authors of *The Subculture of Violence: Towards an Integrated Theory in Criminology*, and Menachem Amir (1971), author of *Patterns in Forcible Rape*, were authoritatively cited as evidence that Black men rape more often and more brutally than white men. Despite their indebtedness to white male–inspired pathological accounts of Black male sexuality, feminist authors such as Susan Brownmiller (1975), and Karen A. Holmes and Joyce E. Williams (1981) feature prominently in Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) original formulation of intersectionality. Said differently, our present theories of intersectionality, race, and male gender identity tend towards viewing Black males as perpetrators of sexual violence and away from viewing Black males as victims of such violence. Black feminist discourse on sexual violence merely reproduces the more general problem of previous criminological and feminist anti-Black misandry. Masculinity framed as a rapist category does not allow for masculinity that is endemically vulnerable to rape. History reveals the latter is a part of the condition of Black maleness, contrary to the insistence of our present categories and disciplinary preoccupations with gender, masculinity, or patriarchy.

A Sterling Contribution to Black Male Studies

Black male studies offers a corrective to this skewing of Black male reality. It offers a way to empirically test and theorize visions that affirm Black

males—that help them and, by extension, their communities thrive. Tamari Kitossa's edited collection *Appealing Because He Is Appalling* makes a distinct and vital contribution to this endeavour by deeroticizing Black masculinity and reclaiming the facticity of Black male life from the anti-Black misandric gender analytic.

Appealing Because He Is Appalling reconfigures the boundaries of gender theory and of thought itself, which today remain deeply ingrained in various feminist-inspired accounts of a racist anti-Black male imaginary. Expanding the male category to include erotic subjugation under colonial and slaveocratic orders contributes to the establishment of a new register by which to think Black men and boys in relation to patriarchy, sexuality, and violence. Grounded in James Baldwin's and Frantz Fanon's affirmations of Black maleness, Kitossa's edited collection takes as its central focus the expansion of the erotic landscape that Black maleness makes possible: a landscape that is one of desire, horror, and terror (as in the case of the rapist) as well as one of sexual caricature and misrepresentation. In Chapter 1, Kitossa uses the works of James Baldwin and Frantz Fanon to reflect upon how and why "the presumption that Black men are hypersexual, priapic, and prone to rape White women has been a central animating theme in Western cultural psychology." This tripartite assemblage of Black men expresses what Kitossa calls the Black Phallic Fantastic. My own reflections on phallicism have striven to clarify the transubstantiation of Black male flesh through phallic representations surrounding savagery and feminization (Curry, 2017b, 2018). This simultaneity of the hypersexual rapist and the effeminate male (that is, the male who is capable of being raped) occupies a significant dynamic in the racial negativing of maleness. Kitossa similarly provokes our thinking towards the psychosexual construction of the Black male as a pathological entity without neglecting the vulnerability and coercive trauma Black male flesh endures during this process.

Whereas Black male studies insists upon the end of the presumptive teleologism of gender imposed upon our considerations of the Black male, this collection reintroduces the Black male as a sociohistorical entity capable of inquiry without the pathological sexual apriorism entailed by current

gender theories after this teleological suspension. The deeroticization of the Black male enables *genuine study and analysis* of the Black male "as is"—that is, study and analysis of Black manhood that is not preoccupied, as current disciplinary dialectics are, with where to locate Black males on the line between "rapist" and "nonrapist." The starting point for scholarly inquiry into the Black male must be reconfigured. The seemingly intuitive and obvious ends of gender analyses that suggest Black men are sexually aggressive and invulnerable to sexual assault, made-to-penetrate violence, and rape are not the results of inquiry. Rather, they are analytic assertions attached to the general category of maleness. The historical and sociological evidence simply does not confirm or conform to the prevalent ideologies used to analyze Black male sexual victimization. Feminists, gender theorists, and criminologists continue to assert that Black males are predominately the perpetrators of sexual violence. This is despite the fact that Black males experience higher rates of sexual victimization than whites, Black females, and other female groups in the United States. This suggests that the sexual vulnerability Black males have had to sodomization and sexual coercion at the hands of white men and women historically, and Black women currently, challenge the analytic assumptions undergirding the intervention of gender into our contemporary analyses, showing that these analyses fail to accurately represent the full extent of the violence *gender* intends to clarify.

Appealing Because He Is Appalling leads the reader through an impressive conceptual terrain making visible new topographical constructs through the exegetical approach deployed by Kitossa and the collection contributors. By emphasizing the vulnerability of Black males, the chapters in this volume unveil a positive phenomenology of Black male life that exceeds the limitations and descriptions of the corpse. From this excess, we gain an understanding of Black male disability, queerness, transnational context, and *being*—an understanding that is currently veiled by the dominant disciplinary episteme.

Ultimately, this collection shows that there is far more to Black masculinity throughout the world than the tropes that dominate in anti-Black racist societies today. Our present mode of intellectually engaging the Black male is found wanting. The historical, sociological, criminological, and philosophical

assertions of masculinity draw legitimacy not from meeting the standards of evidence in history, sociology, criminology, or philosophy, but from the analytic presumptions of the gender category itself. These presumptions project a Fanonist phobogenetic framing of Black masculinity and sexuality (Oyěwùmí, 1997). These paradigmatic constraints on how we think about Black men and boys render much of our present scholarship not only empirically incorrect but inefficacious in the task of study. The essays in this collection are an essential contribution to Black male studies; their commendable interventions reject the mimeticism of the dominant intersectional mode of race and gender theory and show the urgent need for a genre study of Black male death and dying within this context.

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2020

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Preface

FROM ACROSS TIME, and different places and spaces, this book narrates the construction and the sociopolitical and psychological implications of the representation of the hegemonic Black[1] man as hypersexual, priapic, and prone to commit rape. However imperfect, I have taken to calling this unified and overdetermining fantasy the *Black Phallic Fantastic*. Asking who invented this fantastic spectacle, this recursive and persistent trope, and how, in spite of its irrationality, it continues to be invested with meaning, is as important as examining how it is renewed and recycled. It is equally important to demontrate the concrete and psychosocial uses to which it is put, how it is accommodated and appropriated, and—not least—how and at what cost it is resisted. For Black men, all too often, the cost is their lives.

There is something sticky, yet slippery, about how Blackness and maleness have come to be imagined, and which makes the Black Phallic Fantastic commonsensical. With few exceptions, masculinity studies, and much of feminist and gender writing, have done little to coherently deconstruct and explicate this trope. In fact, there seems to be a dependence on it, principally, I think, because these fields are largely Eurocentric, middle-class preoccupied, and deeply informed by sexual mythologies about Black men. Manifesting as a form of "bad faith," there is a tacit dependence on representing Black men as sexualized beings and refusing their humanity. I think that academia's epistemic dependence on sexualized tropes of Black men is a protective shield that prohibits deconstruction. What is at stake is not only the stability of the aforementioned academic disciplines, but also the uses to which they are put for the state and capital in

the maintenance of social order and the oppression of Black communities. Also implicated are the identities and the personalities of theorists, being themselves the product of anti-Black misandry. As with the Black Phallic Fantastic, its historical foundations, and the social bases for its reproduction through discursive formations and regimes of representation, we must ask questions about how it has come to stick to the very insides of academic disciplines and theory. These questions are tied up together; this book is a series of meditations on them. Here, I offer four central points from which to begin.

First, the White supremacist invention of the Black-man-as-sexual-demon is an epistemic object for the normative claims of scholastic feminism, gender studies, and White-male-determined masculinities studies. As a productive commodity for knowledge workers, abstractified Black men are transformed from complex, whole, and varied human beings into theoretical objects for (unaccountable) scopophilic, dependent ontology. In other words, since no one innocently theorizes about the social, ontologies, which consist of preexisting conceptions and sentiments rigorously denied as such, are in many respects biographical sketches inductively applied to the world. Black men are, in effect, brought into being as spectacularized objects of sexual desire and revulsion. They are constituted as bestial, framed as archetypes of "toxic masculinity"; imagined as overcompensating "patriarchs"; framed as supremely misogynistic; understood to be quintessentially homophobic; regarded as sexually unrestrained, crotch grabbing "thugs"; assumed to be violent rapists; and so on. Conceptualized as genital and as being concerned only with their genitals as a compensatory negritude for "possessing" so little else, there is at the heart of academia and White supremacist popular culture an eroticized desire for *the* Black man as a problem upon whom, and through whom, others work out their sense of themselves and their place in the world. The tacit overdetermined sexualization of the Black man simultaneously visibilizes and invisibilizes him as a negated personhood for the ontological productivity of theorists for whom the social is gendered, masculine, and patriarchal. In short, the sexualized, tropical Black man,

always able-bodied and heterosexual, is a scapegoat object for the working-out of the agency and moral innocence of various theorists.

Second, as a sexualized discursive formation, the Black man is a compendium of negative traits, assuring that correcting and disciplining him is a constant procedure achieved even at the price of killing him— for how else can he be saved. "Crisis," "problem," "crotch-fixated," "misogynist," "homophobe," "transphobe," and "toxic" are the watchwords for Black men. This is evident in middle-class projective fantasies—irrespective of the theorist's race and sex—and none of it seems aware of itself, nor of the real Black men who are desired, feared, and loathed. Even as agents doing things—adapting, accommodating, challenging, resisting—they are crushed by the weight of sexualization that overdetermines how they are imagined: as always in need of correction, tutelage, and direction. It seems that the genitalized Black man whom James Baldwin and Frantz Fanon made known to us exists, especially among the academic class, as a universal type—a problem to be changed, criticized, and fixed. To be "cool," for example, is imagined as the socially constructed poor, urban, and young Black man appealing to an embedded sexual repertoire rather than other possibilities. How else can others make themselves socially useful except by self-righteously correcting and pontificating about "him"?

Third, as nonbeings constructed to serve others, what is missed in all this is that the quality of Black men's lives, irrespective of social station and whether the most marginal among them live or are killed by those who imagine them to be monsters, is in no small measure informed by the unified trope of the Black Phallic Fantastic. However Black men cope, handle it or are handled by it, no Black man goes untouched. I know from personal experience how deforming and devastating is the notion that Black boys and men are neither (sexually) fragile nor vulnerable. I have spoken to Black men from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, and North America about the implication of this tripartite trope on their lives. Various men told me of being sexually abused as children by males and females, of being sexually exploited in their adolescence by women two and three times their age, and of being sexually manipulated as adults.

Being sexually abused by males was coded in speech, discerned only by inference; being sexually abused by females was equally mystified through the use of the term "sexual experience." These sorts of encounters shape the identities, self-esteem, sexual and social lives of Black men, indeed their sovereignty; yet the implications are hardly considered a topic worthy of inquiry in the scholarly literature. Blackness and maleness, it would seem, make it unimaginable that boys and men can be sexually endangered and hurt. In addition to witnessing and listening to Black men about their vulnerabilities, we should scrutinize Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) point of departure—borrowed from the groundbreaking collection edited by Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott and Barbara Smith (1982)—that "all the women are white; all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave." Equally dubious is bell hooks's (1984, 1990, 1992a, 1992b, 2004) claim that from the plantation to the present, Black men have been both fixated on their genitals and have colluded with White men to oppress Black women. The *au courant* idea among some that "straight Black men are the White people of the Black community," also demands an account for the demonizing, invisibilizing, and "woke" profiteering from the dehumanization and murder of (straight) Black boys and men. It ought not to be accepted as an article of faith that Black men are both beneficiaries and responsible for the invisibilization of Black women.

How can it be that Ralph Ellison's complaint that Black men are invisible rings as true today as in 1952? What is not being seen when so many Black men and boys languish in prisons; are murdered by police, vigilantes, and their peers; commit suicide; are detained in schools when not pushed out of them; are locked out of employment; are unhoused; are deprived of the vote; and are forced to "scavenge," as Tommy Curry (2017) puts it, a living on the margins and underworld of society? This is the privilege of being a Black boy and man? The idea that the lives of Black men and women should be examined as separate realities, rather than the *we-ness* of their relational differences under White supremacy, leaves little room to imagine, in fact and theory, the reality of their mutual dependence and that what affects one affects the other. I hasten to add, this is not a Polyanna view which

obviates the tangle of conflict, contradiction, difference and paradox within Blackness.

Finally, despite sound criticism of the thesis that patriarchy is the "gender domination" of women by men, there seems, both intellectually and politically, little appreciation that this is an innovation of nineteenth-century White male intellectuals who were heavily invested in colonialism, Eurocentricsm, and White supremacy. Black men in the West were enslaved, were just recently emancipated, or had lived through the reality of the partition of Africa and settler colonialism at precisely the time that Freidrich Engels, Henry Maine, Lewis Henry Morgan, and other White men were elaborating the matriarchal and patriarchal theses from which theories of gender and feminism were born. We would do well to return to the origin of this theorizing to apprehend, as did James Baldwin and Frantz Fanon, that "patriarchy" should be understood not as the domination of universal man over universal woman, but instead as an articulation of the antagonism and contest between groups. This does not, however, displace the dialogic between gender and sexual contradiction *within* groups, necessarily stratified to engage in intergroup conflict. That the discourse of "patriarchy" has been displaced in the West in favour of "masculinities" and, at the same time, has been outsourced, through the "war on terror," to the Global South as a means of explaining suicide bombing and the refusal to permit women to drive or go to school, makes little difference to my mind. As will be shown throughout this book, "patriarchy," as an epistemic construct, not only suppresses cognitive awareness that it is an intergroup, competitive, racial dynamic in and through which males are the first targets of other males attacking minoritized communities, but also that women from the dominant group are directly complicit in maintaining and sustaining patriarchy as a form of "in-group" dominance of "outgroups."

In my opinion, sexualized tropes about *the* Black man deny Black men personhood in the eyes of others, make of him an object toward the ontological and theoretical affirmation of others, obfuscate his experience of trauma and coping with sexualized objectification, and stabilize and mystify the imperialist and white supremacist theory of "patriarchy." If there is merit

to these opinions—opinions which inspired the composition of this book—there is an urgent need to reimagine how Black men are sexually imagined. I think doing so needs to begin with an honest appraisal of *the* Black man, especially the eroticized and sexualized trope of the Black man, as a fiction made real by a vast range of constituencies who continue to recreate him as a disembodied and unruly penis. The eroticized objectification of Black men that forms the backdrop to this book is both personal to me and informs the perspective of the book's contributors who are concerned with generating alternative accounts of Black men and the implications of their sexualization through the component parts of the Black Phallic Fantastic.

It is my hope that this book reveals the (re)production of the actual and symbolic nakedness of Black men. As a result, I hope that readers will understand that Black men are routinely violated, and that bad faith toward their Blackness and their maleness not only obfuscates this violation but legitimates it. With the eroticized snuff film of George Floyd[2] being sadistically murdered by Derek Chauvin in mind, I want this book to help make it impossible to avoid the fact that the Black man is sexually gazed at, fixed in the scopophilic gaze as always genital, and imagined as a defective being by virtue of the debased meanings of sex—meanings attached to his body. My wish is that this book contributes to other works that aim to refract the scopophilic gaze on the Black man back to its source, compelling those who derive innocence from the Black Phallic Fantastic to come to terms with the cultural and ontological magnitude of their dependence on this fiction. The prospect of an empathetic and humanizing orientation toward Black men, without apology, without qualification, is what is at stake.

This is a book of big thoughts and daring ideas, and it comes with risk-taking. As its curator, I present it to everyone who will read it—with the humility of a student. If there are errors that I and the contributors are responsible for, my hope is that we are clear about them so that we may be just as clearly corrected.

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2020

Notes

1. Capitalization of race/colour adjectives is not consistent throughout this volume. Each contributor to this book uses these adjectives in ways that suit their sensibilities and politics.
2. Elsewhere (Kitossa, 2020), I present an integrative analysis of how the sexual demonization of Black men and women leads to their actual and ritual destruction.

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