THE EMOTIONAL POLITICS OF RACISM

How Feelings Trump Facts in an Era of Colorblindness

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CHAPTER 1

NEW YORK, NEW YORK:
THE RAGING EMOTIONS
OF WHITE POLICE
BRUTALITY

On the fateful August 9, 1997, evening that Haitian immigrant Abner Louima suffered through the sadistic police brutality of the New York Police Department (NYPD), he had gone to see a popular Haitian band play at a club in East Flatbush. Club Rendez-Vous, located on Flatbush between Farragut and Glenwood, was one of the few places to go see live Haitian compas music. The Brooklyn neighborhood is home to one of the largest concentrations of Haitians in the United States. The first Haitian newspaper in the United States, *Haiti Observateur*, was established here in 1971. Haitian restaurants infuse the air with the aroma of fried plantains and pork while animated discussions of politics are heard in Creole and English. Radio Soleil d’Haiti broadcasts news to Haitians from their studio at Nostrand Avenue and Tilden.

By the time Louima immigrated to the United States in 1991, several generations of Haitians had settled in New York City. Seeking reprieve from the political repression and violence of President François “Papa Doc” Duvalier’s administration, Haitians used the family reunification pathways offered by the 1965 Immigration Act to bring their relatives to the United States in the late 1960s and 1970s. As human rights violations, poverty, and oppression intensified after Duvalier’s son, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, took power in 1971,
people left Haiti using increasingly desperate measures. The arrival of boatloads of undocumented Haitians on the shores of the United States created a refugee crisis throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Unlike their Cuban counterparts, Haitian requests for political asylum were met with the highest rejection rate of any immigrant group. The refugees were routinely detained and deported by immigration authorities.

The U.S. rejection of Haitians at the end of the twentieth century has a long historical precedent. After enslaved people on the island of Santo Domingo (presently the Dominican Republic and Haiti) successfully overthrew slavery and established a Black republic in 1804, governmental and cultural depictions passionately warned Americans against the menacing ills of Haitian “contamination.” At a time when slavery in the United States was justified through popular beliefs in Anglo-Saxon biological superiority, emancipated Black Haitians posed a remarkable threat to its neighboring nation. Their successful slave revolt irrevocably disputed ideologies of Black inferiority and severely ruptured the European worldview that could hardly fathom the possibility of a Black republic. To compensate for these incongruences in the European colonial imagination, the United States constructed Haitians as menacing threats. Officials warned of Haitian “contagion,” projecting already existing fears of interracial mixing, or miscegenation, onto their newly emancipated neighbors. They warned that miscegenation would result in the white race’s biological degeneracy. They implied that interracial sexual and social relations (particularly marriage) would grant Black people access to property controlled by whites—a threat that would undo the social and economic order of the United States. Taking these threats as real and possible, France and the United States punished Haiti by preventing the island’s participation in international trade economies throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In doing so, the imperial nations essentially guaranteed the Haitian people’s impoverishment as a vengeful payback for daring to challenge European hegemony.

Almost 200 years later, U.S. governmental institutions, policies, and media discourses still considered Haitians threatening. Americans were warned that Haitians would infect them with disease, take their jobs, and deplete their social welfare resources. As a result of such ominous projections, among those seeking asylum in the United States, Haitians became the only national group required to take HIV tests. In 1983 Haitians were designated to belong to what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) called the Four H Club (homosexuals, hemophiliacs, heroin users, and Haitians). In 1990 the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) prohibited Haitians from donating blood. A New York Times editorial maintained that the “priority” of keeping blood donations “untainted” ranked higher than preventing racial discrimination. After being categorized as a high-risk group by the CDC and the FDA, Haitians living in the United States faced discrimination, which included losing work, being evicted, and experiencing racially motivated attacks. The George H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton administrations also fueled anti-Haitian sentiments when they instigated forced repatriations in 1991–1992 and 1994 on the basis that “boat people” were economic rather than political refugees. Rising fears over what was termed the Haitian stampede similarly justified the forced removal of Haitian refugees placed in custody at Guantánamo in March 1993.

Defiant of such stigmatizations, Haitians engaged in individual, collective, and political modes of resistance. Through public protests, cultural performances, religious organizations, and voudou rituals, Haitians consistently contested the U.S. government’s derogatory and demeaning policies. In response to the FDA’s stigmatization of Haitian blood, on April 21, 1990, 50,000 demonstrators marched across the Brooklyn Bridge, holding signs that proclaimed, “We’re Proud of Our Blood.” After similar demonstrations in several cities, including a march in Washington, D.C., from the Capitol steps to the FDA’s headquarters, the U.S. government’s ban on Haitian blood was rescinded in January 1991.

Cultural practices, music, and Afro-Christian religious rituals have been central to the development of Haitian collective resistance and democracy. Rara street festivals in Haiti bring rural peasant classes and the urban poor together at crossroads, bridges, and cemeteries to perform rituals for Afro-Haitian deities. The cast of characters who have a hand in the six-week-long event includes the captains, priests, queens, sorcerers, musicians, and armies of Rara members as well as the spirits of Afro-Haitian religion, the sanbò (recently dead), Jesus, Judas, and Jews. The festivals allow everyday people to bring their views on politics to public spaces.

The Haitian diaspora has recreated aspects of these musical and religious rituals in the United States. After the democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide was ousted by a military coup in 1991, Rara musicians and their followers played for weeks at the United Nations and in rallies on Capitol
Hill, protesting the attack on Haitian democracy. Rara bands gather regularly in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, using communally produced music and noncommercial performances to call for democracy in Haiti and justice in the United States. They create symbolic forms of opposition to oppressions, building Haitian resilience, survival, and collective solidarity.

When Louima’s story of police brutality spread, Rara bands gathered in Prospect Park to stage performances that contested the violence of the NYPD against Haitians and other Black people. Their rituals challenged logics that justified police violence and harassment against Black people in general and Haitians in particular. In doing so, Rara participants in Prospect Park reclaimed spaces, places, and politics in order to assert the dignity and value of Haitian immigrants and other oppressed communities.

GIULIANI TIME

New York City’s municipal policies and practices grew increasingly hostile toward people of color, poor people, and Haitian immigrants in the 1990s. Residents experienced significant shifts in policing once Mayor Rudolph Giuliani was elected in 1994. Giuliani largely reversed the governing approaches favored by David Dinkins, an African American mayor who had openly criticized police violence and instituted policies that demanded greater accountability. Only a few months into his term, Giuliani issued Police Strategy No. 5, a policy “dedicated to ‘reclaiming the public spaces of New York’.” This policy was established when New York City was experiencing a crumbling urban landscape, abandoned buildings, and a reduction in housing, education, and health care services. Hundreds of millions of dollars in tax-abatement bribes were given to multinational corporations to move into the city or to stay. Everyday workers, on the other hand, confronted soaring unemployment rates up to 10 percent. As the city’s housing became less affordable and work less available, public fears over losses in property, jobs, and security increased.

Giuliani skillfully used such social anxieties to pass increasingly punitive policing measures that protected the property interests of the wealthiest neighborhoods and corporations while further disenfranchising the most impoverished populations. Giuliani identified “homeless people, panhandlers, prostitutes, squeegee cleaners, squatters, graffiti artists, ‘reckless bicyclists,’ and unruly youth as the major enemies of public order and decency, the culprits of urban decline generating widespread fear.” The cleanup of the city was to be accomplished by the police, who were encouraged to use proactive and zero tolerance methods. Constraints on police power were dismantled for the sake of reestablishing law and order. Rather than working to create opportunities for the city’s most vulnerable populations, Giuliani redefined New York City residents’ freedom to be “about the willingness of every single human being to cede to lawful authority a great deal of discretion about what you do.”

Giuliani’s rhetoric of law and order was codified to suggest that the presence of the culprits posed a threat to commodified or commodifiable property. To justify the culprits’ removal, Giuliani and the police had to criminalize and refigure them literally as assaults on public space. As the culprits were criminalized, they became threats to those who had the power to commodify and control public space. The presence of the impoverished people, not their actions, was redefined as criminal. As one of Giuliani’s aides argued, “I regard someone approaching someone else, putting them in fear of bodily harm as a criminal act. . . . The police will again be given discretion, trained properly, commanded properly, managed properly to stop that kind of behavior.” In embodying a threat to public space, the culprits were systematically removed from what were deemed clean streets but permitted to stay in what the NYPD called dirty blocks or streets—spaces where illicit activities were purposely overlooked by the police. “The analogy is clear: the clean street, the clean body and body politic, clean white public space.” The confluence of whiteness, wealth, and commodifiable space defined law and order, whereas the presence of people of color, poor people, and illegitimate immigrants defined criminality.

New York’s homeless population (estimated at 100,000 in the 1990s) was cleared out in order to demarcate Manhattan as an attractive location for multibillion-dollar corporations such as Disney. The aggressive Welfare to Work Program cut off thousands of public assistance recipients. Between 1995 and 1998, 365,000 people were taken off the city’s welfare roles; spending for child welfare was especially targeted, and recipients could receive checks only if they performed work, usually for the city government. The city replaced thousands of full-time workers with welfare recipients, whose payments translated into below-minimum-wage levels. In this general climate of expelling populations through restructuring policies that favored the wealthy and big businesses, it
was clear that the New York City police, the mayor, and those who supported the mayor's practices were set on applying various disciplinary mechanisms not only inside institutions such as prisons and asylums but also on the level of everyday life and civic space. As Allen Feldman argues:

This externalization of discipline can be measured in a wide variety of phenomena, including the development of what Mike Davis terms \textit{scan-scapes} and \textit{social control districts} and the emergence of the militarized, high technology office building and shopping mall and what are locally termed by the New York City police as \textit{safety corridors}, which are, in effect, sites of police colonization in inner-city neighborhoods. Guinnis also has noted the establishment of privatized and volunteer vigilante police forces that patrol such areas as Times Square, Grand Central Station, and the West Village.\textsuperscript{17}

A flood of police officers were sent to East Harlem, Hunts Point in the Bronx, Maria Hernandez Park in Brooklyn, and Guy Brewer Boulevard in Queens to close down various public drug markets. These operations, unlike past selective raids and arrests in drug operations, involved complex mechanisms of spatial and bodily control: condoned street sweeps by police working with the warrant squad to arbitrarily stop and check individuals; temporarily detaining and searching young males found congregating on the streets or gathering in fast-food places; road blocks and checkpoints to stop vehicles; extensive undercover bicycle patrols; huge numbers of police units pulled from throughout the city to make the theatrical surveillance of the state perfectly clear.\textsuperscript{18}

This omnipresent surveillance of poor people and of communities of color endorsed by Giuliani's rhetoric of clean public space affected every aspect of daily life for those whose racial identities or class status marked them as assaults. Like African Americans, Haitians and other Black immigrants were constantly imagined as criminals and often presumed as such by the police. Haitian bodies were part of a semiotics that identified them as threatening people who were intent on taking over public spaces presumed to belong to white people and/or American citizens. A 28-year-old Guyanese musician keenly summarized such normalized policing projections as follows:

\begin{quote}
I am so tired of riding the train, walking down the street, or just standing still, and if cops are around, they will always ask me what I'm doing... like I'm bothering them. I would ask them why they are harassing me, but I know that they need very little motivation to shoot me. Giuliani has showed us over and over again that police have the right to shoot black men in open daylight for no reason and that they can get away with it.\textsuperscript{19}
\end{quote}

These shifts in the political geography of New York City had significant effects on the ways that police officers performed their duties and the ways that they understood the limits of their power. Certainly, not all police officers used Giuliani's zero tolerance methods as an excuse to abuse their authority. But such punitive methods encouraged NYPD officers to feel as though their power should not be challenged. Moreover, such methods fostered a police culture that was increasingly unaccountable to people's integrity and dignity. As Louima recalled, one of the police officers who brutalized him at the 70th Precinct declared, "It's Giuliani time, not Dinkins time."\textsuperscript{20}

\section*{The Case That Shook The City}

Louima and his cousin, Jay Nicholas, had just seen King Kino and the Phantoms play at Club Rendez-Vous.\textsuperscript{21} Louima had seen the Phantoms numerous times, and the compass band members knew him by name.\textsuperscript{22} The band was important to the Haitian community, particularly following the 1992 release of their song "Cowboy." The song's unabashed critique of right-wing paramilitary troops in Haiti became widely popular, and eventually Kino was forced into exile in the United States. When Kino returned to Haiti in 1993, the Phantoms played to an audience of 60,000 Haitians, and the audience collectively sang "Cowboy" with a little help from its creator.\textsuperscript{23} That night, Haitians in Flatbush welcomed the Phantoms, participating in a long collective tradition that testified to Haitian people's resistance to oppression through music.

Louima and Nicholas were about to go home when a fight broke out between two women. Louima and Nicholas got out of their car to see what was going on. As more people spilled out in front of the club, the police arrived. Among the police officers who came to the scene were Officers Thomas Bruder, Charles Schwarz, Eric Turetzky, Justin Velpe, and Thomas Wiese. The cops attempted to disperse the crowd using increasingly forceful tactics and demeaning words.

"The party's over, clear the street, go the fuck home!" shouted one cop. Turetzky threatened to kick a pregnant woman in the stomach.\textsuperscript{24} The Haitian crowd disobeyed and resisted. They talked back and some of them threw bottles. The crowd grew increasingly agitated, letting the police know that they would not
tolerated being disrespected. By virtue of their numbers, Haitians dominated the space. A drunk Haitian man by the name of John Rejouis was verbally confronting Volpe, insisting he had rights. Attempting to prove his authority, Rejouis showed Volpe a badge, indicating that he was a New York City prison guard. In response, Volpe slapped his hand, knocking the badge and Rejouis to the ground. Seeing this exchange, Louima confronted Volpe regarding his treatment of Rejouis. Volpe began pushing Louima away, and tensions rose as Louima refused to budge. Louima was hit and knocked to the ground. Suddenly, Louima’s cousin Nicholas sucker punched Volpe on the side of his head, knocking him to the ground. Nicholas took off running. By this time the crowd was shouting, “Fuck these cops!” Police officers who saw Volpe on the ground began chasing Nicholas. Mistakenly thinking that Louima was the one who struck him and that Louima was the one who took off running, Volpe joined the chase.

Patrick Antoine, another Haitian immigrant, was walking in the neighborhood unaware of what was happening at Club Rendez-Vous. Coming up behind Antoine, Volpe yelled, “You fucking guy!” and hit him on the back of his head with a flashlight. As other officers caught up to Volpe, they started beating and kicking Antoine. The officers placed Antoine under arrest, charging him with felony assault, obstructing government administration, disorderly conduct, and resisting arrest. As Volpe and Bruder took Antoine into their squad car, Officers Schwarz and Wiese announced over the police radio that they had in custody the guy who had sucker punched Volpe. Mistaking Louima for Nicholas, they had picked Louima up at Glenwood and Bedford.

Louima arrived at the 70th Precinct around 4 a.m. with a bruised and lacerated body. He had been beaten twice in the patrol car before arriving at the precinct. Schwarz and Wiese presented Louima to Sergeant Jeffrey Fallon at the front desk and began filling out paperwork. Volpe arrived at the precinct shortly after Schwarz and Wiese and saw Louima at the front desk. Furious over the night’s events, Volpe walked to the juvenile questioning room, found a wooden broomstick, and cracked it in half over his knee. He placed the bottom of the stick behind a locker and placed the upper half behind the garbage can in the precinct bathroom.

A moment of planning and premeditation? Imagining—so far in fantasy only—what he would do with the upper half of the broomstick, Volpe asked Officer Mark Schofield, who was standing near the front desk, for a pair of gloves. Schofield offered Volpe a pair of leather gloves. At some point Volpe put the gloves on. The court’s testimonial record states that as Louima was being processed at the front desk, “his pants and underwear fell to his ankles.” However, Louima claimed in an August 14, 1997, interview that “the cops pulled down my pants in front of the desk sergeant… They were grabbing my wallet. They found some money and took it out.” When Sergeant Fallon finished the processing, Volpe and another officer took Louima to the bathroom. He had to shuffle because his pants and underwear were still around his ankles. Other officers complied with Volpe’s wish to avenge the night’s events.

“I kept screaming, ‘Why? Why?’” said Louima. “All the cops heard me, but said nothing. What they said to me I’ll never forget. In public, one says, ‘You niggers have to learn how to respect police officers.’” Once the bathroom door was closed, Volpe picked up the broken broomstick that he had hidden behind the garbage can and told Louima, “I’m going to do something to you. If you yell or make any noise, I’ll kill you.” Volpe threw Louima to the ground with his head near a toilet bowl and kicked him in his naked groin. As Louima began screaming, Volpe put his foot over Louima’s mouth. Volpe and the other officer punched him in the head and body. The accomplice grabbed Louima by the handcuffs and lifted him from the ground. Leather gloves on, Volpe forced the broken broomstick approximately six inches up Louima’s rectum. The impact perforated Louima’s colon and bladder. “When they pulled it out,” Louima said, “it was covered with blood and feces.” The Memorandum and Order of United States of America v. Justin Volpe states that Volpe held the feces-covered stick in front of Louima’s mouth and taunted him. Louima, however, remembered the feces-covered stick, which he believed was a toilet plunger, being rammed into his mouth. Louima’s broken teeth bore witness without words.

Volpe slammed the stick against the wall, leaving traces of Louima’s feces and blood. With Louima crying in pain, Volpe lifted him to his feet and took him to the same holding cell where Antoine was also being held. Before putting him in the cell, Volpe told Louima that if he told anybody what had happened, Volpe would kill him. Volpe returned the leather gloves he had borrowed to Officer Schofield, who protested that they were soiled. “So wash them off,” said Volpe. Schofield washed the gloves and put them on top of a locker to dry.

“I broke a man down,” Volpe stated to other cops in the precinct. Taking Sergeant Kenneth Wernick to the bathroom, Volpe showed him the stick used...
in the sexual assault and declared, "I took a man down tonight." Then Volpe showed the stick to Officer Michael Schoer. Smelling the feces on the stick, Schoer asked, "What is that, dog shit?" "No," Volpe responded, "human shit." Finally, Volpe threw the broom handle into a trash can outside.33

Inside the holding cell, Antoine would later describe Louima as so badly beaten that he could not stand up. "He was in really bad shape. His pants were hanging. They even fell to his ankles. He couldn’t stand. He looked cold. He kept holding his knees like he was cold."4 Four hours later, an ambulance took Louima and Antoine to the hospital. The medics, who were required to have a police escort to proceed to the hospital, had been waiting for two hours. At the hospital the police officers told the emergency room doctors that Louima had been injured in a gay bar and found on the street.45 Later, Louima would recall, "I kept saying, ‘Please, God, don’t let me die.’ I was praying to protect my life because if I died, I didn’t know who would take care of my children."36

THE PSYCHOSYMBOLIC PUNCH

The retelling of this story of racialized and sexualized violence raises grave questions. Rather than evoking indignation, repeating narratives of gendered racial violence might instead "immune us to pain by virtue of their familiarity . . . and especially because they reinforce the spectacular character of black suffering."37 As Saidiya Hartman asks:

Are we witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened in the face of the world-destroying capacities of pain, the distortions of torture, the sheer unrepresentability of terror, and the repression of the dominant accounts? Or are we voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and sufferance? What does the exposure of the violated body yield? . . . At issue here is the precariousness of empathy and the uncertain line between witness and spectator.38

By narrating Louima’s torture, I am unable to avoid processes that potentially reinforce the spectacular nature of Black suffering. There is no guarantee that the retelling of this story will not trigger some people to engage in the guilty enjoyments of voyeuristic sadism or other emotional economies that justify Black people’s violation. Yet the retelling can also engender emotional economies of outrage, indignation, and anger that can be used to create resistance.

Those who find such scenes of violence morally indefensible can become collective witnesses who seek redress, healing, and justice.

Significantly, Louima’s courage to tell his story created the possibility for others to become ethical witnesses rather than indifferent spectators. Despite Volpe’s death threats and other police officers’ complicity in covering up the story, Louima began publicizing his story to journalist Mike McAlary of the New York Daily News only a couple of days after he was beaten. Louima’s audacity and inability to stay silent ruptured structures of discourse and feeling that normalize voyeuristic consumption of violence against terrorized Black bodies. Speaking for himself, Louima refused to have his experience go unacknowledged. This was no easy task, particularly because his admission would have to include the sexual dimensions of the brutality. Louima’s testimony was in many ways a continuation of the defiant acts begun at Club Rendez-Vous. Just as Louima had confronted Volpe for insulting Rejouis, he was now staging a massive attack on the NYPD’s legitimacy in general and Volpe’s authority in particular. After all, it was in some ways incomprehensible that Volpe and the other cops would react with this level of sadistic violence simply because a Haitian man punched a cop.

If we place the police violence within a larger historical context, we begin to see that the punch dealt by Louima’s cousin was not the primary threat to Volpe and the other cops. What the cops could not integrate into their worldview and structures of feeling was the fact that Haitians like Louima had dared to challenge their authority. Because the officers’ authority was itself predicated on socially and legally sanctioned white male entitlements, the Haitians’ defiance conjured long-established antagonisms between Black communities and white cops. In other words, the threat to the cops’ physical safety was miniscule compared with the symbolic threat Haitians posed to American state authority when embodied and executed by white men. The scene at Club Rendez-Vous not only suggested that Haitians were willing to defy law and order agents but that they also would not permit white cops to do whatever they pleased in their neighborhoods. The cops, who had mostly grown up in the white suburbs of Staten Island and Nassau County, viewed the Haitian neighborhood through stereotypically racist projections of criminality and deviance.39 Their last names—Volpe, Schwarz, Wiese, and Bruder—suggest that they were the descendants of Italian and German immigrants who had chosen the advantages of moving to homogeneous white suburban neighborhoods, spaces where
property and social values depended on white people's dissociation and distance from people of color.  

Even if people are not consciously aware of it, a people's history lives in their embodied movements, modes of being, patterned responses, and value systems. The punch and the Haitian crowd's defiance were part of a long cumulative history of Haitian resistance to U.S. hegemony. As is well documented, the Haitian Revolution made Haiti the ultimate symbol of resistance in the cultural imaginaries of slave societies such as the United States. News of the Haitian Revolution motivated the U.S. postmaster general to warn Georgia's senator in 1802 that allowing Blacks to be postal riders would breed slave revolts. By acquiring and spreading information, the postmaster cautioned that Blacks "will learn that a man's rights do not depend on his color." Haiti's constitutional disintegration of racial hierarchies and categories threatened the very core of a U.S. society whose vicious maintenance of the color line was integral to preserving white supremacy.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the United States consistently intervened to keep Haitian people dependent and impoverished. Whether directly occupying Haiti (1915–1934), supporting François Duvalier's dictatorship (1957–1971), or helping overthrow the democratically elected government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide (1991–2004), the United States had consistently destroyed Haitian freedom dreams. In an unending dialectical struggle, Haitian cultures of resistance engendered emotional economies that defiantly opposed oppressive authorities at home and abroad. The grassroots Lavalas movement, which worked tirelessly to elect the Catholic priest Aristide as president and establish policies that benefited poor people in Haiti, as much as the musical protests of Rara bands and followers created ideological disidentification with authoritarian oppression and emotional economies that struggled to align with justice.

The punch to Volpe, then, conjured these cumulative emotional economies of Haitian defiance. But the sucker punch also signified Haitians' symbolic affinity with American genealogies of resistance that challenged the legitimacy of law and order. Throughout American history, law and order campaigns have justified people of color's exclusion from accessing and owning property, prohibited them from voting, and prevented them from exercising basic rights. Law and order has more often than not been the government's code for protecting the interests and entitlements of white majorities. As such, the punch also dislodged the idea that law and order is really about everyone's protection, highlighting the ways people of color are rarely the subjects being protected.

It is as though—in a flash—the punch conjured the long history of struggle against the advantages and authority of white patriarchy and the haunting figures responsible for those uprisings. African fugitives from slave plantations were building maroon communities in Jamaica, the Guianas, Suriname, South Carolina, and Georgia. An alliance among West Indians, Africans, Spanish, Irish, and Native Americans (the "outcasts of the nations of the earth") were plotting the 1741 New York conspiracy. Nat Turner was rounding up his troops for insurrection. The charismatic Jamaican Marcus Garvey was building a movement for Black political freedom. Ida B. Wells was demystifying the key motivations behind lynching and advocating self-defense. Mamie Till was displaying Emmett Till's mutilated body. Rosa Parks was refusing to give up her seat. Fannie Lou Hamer was testifying on national television about being beaten. Puerto Ricans were building an independence movement against colonizing forces. Black Panther Party members were exercising their right to bear arms in self-defense. These interlocking signifiers testify to the presence of a genealogical legacy of resistance that also engenders affective value, motivating people and cultures who have been obstructed and challenged by white patriarchal power to stay the course.

Of course, I am not suggesting that the police officers thought consciously about historical resistance to white patriarchal power or about Haitian histories of defiance as they brutalized Louima. Rather, their bodies were attuned to responding in accordance with these histories. In the immediate moment the cops simply sought to recuperate their authority, express their vengeance, and reconstitute the psychic organization through which they understood themselves and the world. Each blow the police officers dealt to Antoine and Louima offered an emotional reward and psychic compensation for what the cops felt they had lost at the Club Rendez-Vous scene. But their acts and emotions followed well-established methods for asserting and recuperating white male police authority. Within the white patriarchal logics that Volpe embodied and enacted, any person who defied police authority deserved retaliation.

Importantly, the officers' psychological and emotional interests trumped all other reasonable considerations. The cops' desires to enact immediate punish-
ment and retribution took primacy over the possible long-term legal and monetary ramifications of their actions. Their actions suggest that recuperating what W. E. B. DuBois called the “public and psychological wages of whiteness” was more important in that moment than the monetary, legal, or social losses they might face later on.

UNPROTECTED BODIES

When Volpe came out of the precinct bathroom after raping and beating Louima, he told his fellow officers, “I broke a man down... I took a man down tonight.” Broke a man down into what? Into an animal? Into a slave? Into a woman? Into a homosexual? To “break a man down” suggests a shattering of his symbolic, psychological, and bodily integrity. The acts Volpe performed to break down Louima followed scripts of sexualized racial violence that have been repeated numerous times throughout U.S. history against Black people. The sexual humiliation achieved Volpe's goal of retribution more effectively than bodily brutality alone.

Volpe sought to feminize Louima for daring to consider himself equal to Volpe as a man. Ana rape was a way to symbolically castrate Louima of his manhood and reduce him to what heteropatriarchal societies consider the naturally subordinate position of women or homosexuals. Forcing Louima to swallow the phallic object with which he was raped allowed Volpe to regain the white patriarchal dominance he had lost when he was punched to the ground. Converting Louima into a feminized subordinate forced to figuratively suck his dick gave Volpe the rational emotional thrill gained from possessing the power to humiliate and desecrate. But it also allowed Volpe to reconfigure the rape as something Louima wished. The sadistic sexual violence that forced Louima to swallow the phallic object constructed “a vision of the castrated black man as one actively seeking the pleasures of castration.” To disavow their perverse violence, violators like Volpe often construct their victims as both desiring and deserving of domination. Forcibly situated in a powerless feminized position, Louima was terrorized into assuming the docile role he had originally refused to take in relation to white police authority.

Understanding Volpe and the other cops' actions within a white supremacist legacy that regularly used sexual brutality to subordinate Black people who dared to consider themselves equal shows us that no act of violence is simply individual. Volpe's attempt to strip Louima of the possibility to consider himself an equal man, a rights-bearing human, a father, and a husband illuminates the ways in which emotional responses and actions are culturally inflected and informed. Read through signs of sexual and racial difference, consigning and disciplining Louima to the feminine position is an attempt to avert the threat of masculine sameness (and therefore equality) between white and Black men. To allow gendered sameness between Volpe and Louima would have entailed permitting Louima an equal symbolic claim to patriarchal power, something that would undo the racial hierarchies between men of color and white men. As Robyn Wiegman argues, "In the context of white supremacy, we must understand the threat of masculine sameness (between white men and men of color) as so terrifying that only the reassertion of a gendered difference can provide the necessary disavowal." In other words, Louima had to be symbolically castrated and feminized through rape in order to stop him from being a threat to Volpe's white patriarchal authority.

Volpe's violence hauntingly mimicked the scripted violence of lynching scenes. Fears over Black men's access to citizenship and political and economic power following Emancipation in 1863 eventually led to the rise of ritualized and widely attended lynching scenes. To bind the real and fantasized threat that Black men's political-economic enfranchisement presented to white masculine dominance, the Black male body was constructed as hypersexual, hyperviolent, and prone to raping white women. These mythological constructions justified Black men's violent emasculation and death. The public culture that regularly displayed Black violated bodies on postcards, in newspapers, and through other commodities helped terrorize Black people into socially subordinate positions. Paradoxically, the projection that Black men possess the power to steal white men's full enjoyments and privileges through their hyperphysical and hypersexual power left white masculinity always fearful, tenuous, and lacking. Thus entrapped, the white male finds “in sexual violence the sexual pleasure necessary to uphold both his tenuous masculine and white racial identities.”

Even though Volpe's violation of Louima might be interpreted as an attempt to regain the coherence of white heteropatriarchy, Volpe's proximity to Louima's exposed body, particularly in the acts of penetrating Louima's orifices (anus and mouth), suggests the covert presence of a sadistic homoerotic desire.
In lynching scenes white men's unconscious homoerotic desire for the Black male body is generally revealed through the division of the lynched victim's body parts among the mob, particularly among men. Some accounts speak of the division of the genitals and/or body as the culminating scene in what by the turn of the twentieth century had become a ritualized and nationally celebrated form of spectacle lynching. The distribution of the body parts and the genitals became an acceptable form of homoerotic exchange, a communal bonding over "the same penis they were so overdeterminedly driven to destroy."\(^5\)

Similarly, in the 70th Precinct scene, Volpe spectacularly parades the phallic broomstick covered in Louima's blood and feces around the precinct. He recruits other police officers to participate in his sadistic scene. First, he marks the wall of the precinct bathroom with the blood and feces. As he exits the bathroom, he testifies to his fellow officers that he broke a man down. He then takes Sergeant Wernick to the bathroom and shows him the scene of the violation and the stick used in the sexual assault. Volpe then shows the phallic symbol to Officer Michael Schoer. Smelling the feces, Schoer asks if the stick is covered in "dog shit." To this, Volpe responds, "No, human shit." Volpe returns the bloodied gloves he wore while raping Louima to Officer Schofeld, as though to communally display the instruments used in the violation. No officer interrupts the scene of complicit consent Volpe creates. This reveals that "the power of racial abuse is not just a sign of pathology, or legal loophole, or failure in police procedure; it is fueled by a culture and community of consent."\(^5\)

But Volpe's wish for absolute mastery could not be publicly endorsed in 1997 with the same unashamed audacity of a lynching mob. In other words, the sadistic homoerotic communal bonding over the instruments used to violate Louima and the shared police power derived from the exchange had to happen in secret and be concealed. Volpe threw the broomstick away, Schofeld washed the bloodied gloves, and somebody must have cleaned the bathroom.

Volpe's sexualized acts of racial violence are further complicated by the fact that he was planning to marry Susan, a 26-year-old African American woman who worked as a civilian employee at the 70th Precinct.\(^5\) They had been dating for two years and were living together when the brutality happened. In an August 18, 1997, interview with Mike McAlary of the New York Daily News (before Volpe confessed), Susan defended her fiancée. Believing that he was incapable of committing such heinous crimes, Susan described Volpe as different from the other officers at the 70th Precinct who were normatively racist. "I am an educated woman," Susan declared. "In the police world at that precinct you have to be aware of racism," Susan claimed. "There was nothing from Justin. . . . What color were our children going to be? It's just like Justin tells the guys in the station, Susan isn't my black girlfriend. She is my girlfriend, period."\(^5\) They had been on vacations together to the West Indies and the Bahamas. They had talked about racism many times. "Cried about it at night," said Susan. Volpe had brought her to his parents' Staten Island home. "I have been to his house many times. His father, Robert, and Justin's mother treat me like their daughter." Susan built a case that Volpe was not racist and therefore incapable of doing what people suspected he had done.

The pressures of being a Black woman engaged to a white cop were heavy enough. Susan regularly faced other Black men's critiques for her partner choice. "The black guys say to me, Has he brought you home to meet his parents? It's just sex, nothing will come of it. . . . Black people will say, 'How can you stand by him and believe he is innocent.'" Such suspicions are based on a long legacy of white men taking advantage of Black women's bodies to assert racial domination over Black people. Cultural projections of Black female hypersexuality have historically functioned to conceal white men's systematic crimes of sexual exploitation during slavery and its aftermath.\(^5\) Innumerable testimonies during the era of Jim Crow also testify to white men's violation of Black women as a way to deny Black men's claims to familial, economic, patriarchal, and legal authority.\(^5\) Of course, the warnings Susan and other Black women confront suggest that some Black men project their resentful emotions for being denied patriarchal authority by white men onto Black women. Telling Black women what they should or should not do with their sexuality suggests that some Black men also long for the social and psychological rewards of male domination, a power often denied to them because of their nonwhite racial identities.

As though to avoid the 'I told you so' warnings from Black people, Susan attempted to give incontestable proof that Volpe did not violate Louima. "You can't lead one life and then do that, in the precinct bathroom. Racism isn't some switch you can turn on and off." Despite her defense of Volpe, there were moments in the interview when Susan considered the possibility that he committed the act. "I can't imagine being married to . . ." She couldn't finish.
the sentence, as though not wanting to pursue the line of thought. McAlary recounted: “This is like the cliché, ‘I can't be a racist. Some of my best friends are black.” Understanding how it sounded, Susan attempted to explain: “I know. But I know he is not an evil person. His life with me would have to be a lie. We are planning on getting married and having children. If Justin Volpe did this, he did it to me and his children.”

Susan’s comments in her interview with McAlary make it clear that she saw a fundamental connection between herself and Louima on the basis of race. That is, if Volpe beat and raped Louima, Susan would have to retrospectively reconstitute her sexual relations with Volpe through a frame of racialized sexual exploitation and denigration rather than a frame of love and mutuality. Her use of the past tense (“He did it to me and his [unborn] children”) suggests that she saw a radical incongruence between Volpe’s sexual intimacy with her and his violation of Louima.

What enabled the lack of contradiction between Volpe’s acts of raping and beating Louima and having a relationship with Susan and planning to have children with her? If we consider the historical record, we see that the logics of white patriarchal supremacy are able to reconcile the coexistence of interracial sexual relationships and sexualized racial violence. Under these logics Black men can thwart white men's full enjoyments of patriarchal and sexual privileges. These privileges include having unrestrained access to intimate sexual relations with Black women. Punishing and violating Black men offers a way to eliminate competitive threats to this understanding of white male prerogatives. If the general structure of patriarchal treats women as objects of exchange between men who are fighting to prove their superiority by possessing women, the structure of white patriarchy uses Black women as objects of possession to disempower men of color and widen their prerogatives. Such logics create people’s sense of value and worth through the denigration and possessive control of others, particularly Black women. Of course, systems of value and worth that do not require others’ subordination exist and can be practiced. I am not suggesting that all interracial relationships subscribe to these logics, even if these historically repetitive practices of sexual and racial violence circumscribe the ways that interracial relationships are perceived. But the dominant value system of U.S. society suggests that racial and gender oppression is necessary for accessing a sense of superior value and worth.

“NYPD: SAME AS TON TON MACOUTES”

Louima refused to accept the long legacy of police brutality and sexual denigration legitimated by white supremacist logics without a fight. From his hospital bed, Louima recounted his experiences to McAlary. Demanding an investigation into the night’s events, he forced the police officers at the 70th Precinct to account for their roles in the events of August 9. His story implicated New York City’s and the nation’s public, asking that they position themselves as ethical witnesses rather than passive spectators. As his story became widely read in the Daily News, people began organizing.

Haitian immigrants, Haitian Americans, and the larger Brooklyn Afro-Caribbean community raised critical voices against the NYPD. They understood Volpe’s rape and beatings alongside a continuum of police harassment and violence against Black immigrant communities. Five days after Louima was tortured, Brooklyn’s radio station Radio Soleil was flooded with calls by Haitians who voiced their outrage at Louima’s story, claiming it as a systemic problem: “Most people are saying that this is not some isolated incident involving one or two bad cops,” summarized Riciot Dupuy, manager of the radio station. “They are saying that they feel it’s the entire New York City Police Department.” Innumerable testimonies of police violence were articulated. A native of Gambia, Simbala Jauwar, described his encounters with the police: “They’ve yelled at me, they’ve kicked me, they’ve called me n—-r.” Community leaders substantiated the complaints. Ronald Auberg, a policy analyst for the Haitian Centers Council declared, “The Caribbean community as a whole has experienced many problems with the police. There seems to be no accountability in the Police Department.”

To New York communities of color, Louima’s story signified the constant threat of arbitrary police brutality. These communities were quite direct in waging a political critique that addressed police brutality as systematically targeting people of color. As Manfred Antoine, president of the Alliance of Haitian Migrants, reiterated, “When a Haitian sees a police officer, instead of thinking this is someone there to protect them or serve them, they think this is someone to be careful around, to stay away from as much as possible.” Louima’s violated body signified what Feldman calls a “sacrificial model of memory formation.” The scenario became emblematic, symbolizing “the prescriptive memory of an entire collective.” In other words, Louima’s story did not signify his wound
alone. It spoke to innumerable stories of police harassment, violence, and killings against people of color that had remained untold and unaddressed.

On August 16, 1997, approximately 4,000 people gathered in front of the 70th Precinct to protest. Signs at the protest reflected the fact that Haitians were drawing parallels between authoritarian forms of state violence in Haiti and those in the United States. “N.Y.P.D. same as Ton Ton Macoutes,” stated one poster, referencing the paramilitary troops that enforced Duvalier’s dictatorship in Haiti. This connection enabled Haitian immigrants and Haitian Americans to realize that the critiques they had waged against authoritarian practices in Haiti were also pertinent in the U.S. context and specifically applicable to the NYPD’s treatment of Haitians. Jacques Paul, who had arrived in the United States only three years before, recalled marching in protests in Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital. “It was very dangerous. A lot of policemen beat the people and killed them, and the people were unarmed,” he stated. When asked whether he expected similar problems in New York, he exclaimed, “To find this kind of thing? No!”

But Haitians also articulated the different expectations they had of the United States as a nation that proclaimed its ideological commitment to civil rights and democracy as foundational. Pierre Beaux, a Haitian livery cab driver, described police brutality as “a part of life” in Haiti. “But we’re not in Haiti,” he said angrily. “I have a vote here, and I have rights, and I’ll be stone-cold dead before I’ll let anyone take them away. This is what this horrible thing has taught us.”

The August 16 demonstration in front of the 70th Precinct also drew connections between the legacy of U.S. anti-Black racist violence and Louima’s case. “KKK must go!” the crowd chanted. “Pig! Shame on You! Seven-O, KKK!” Drawing parallels between Louima’s torture, state-sponsored U.S. violence against African Americans, and authoritarian violence in Haiti, protesters were able to unravel the mythology of equality and democracy in the United States as far as communities of color were concerned.

Although the marches were primarily organized by Haitian organizations (Haitian American Alliance and Haitian Enforcement Against Racism), representatives from the Irish, Asian, Latino, and Jewish communities pledged their support for a march across the Brooklyn Bridge at the end of August. Anthony Stevens, a member of the Council of Dominican Educators, stated that more than 400 Dominicans from Washington Heights in Manhattan would participate in the march. Referring to interethnic divisions between Dominicans and Haitians, Stevens declared, “We want to show that in New York there are no divisions between Dominicans and Haitians. We’re in this together.”

The August 29 protest brought 15,000 people out to protest police brutality. The photographs of the march across the Brooklyn Bridge, where only seven years earlier Haitians had protested the FDA’s ban on their blood, show a remarkable assembly of conscious people intent on being ethical witnesses to Louima and other violated Black people. Through their numbers and their racial, national, and linguistic diversity, the protestors created reverberating emotional economies of care that insisted on the sanctity of people of color’s bodies and rights. Waving toilet plungers (the object initially believed to have been used by Volpe to violate Louima), the protestors revealed the illegitimacy of the state, the NYPD, and all the hegemonic powers that deemed communities of color criminal and undeserving. Instead, they pointed to the criminality of the state. Explaining the gravity of the plunger as symbol, Haitian student Parentz LeFargee said, “Waving these plungers in the face of the police is a reminder of what happened. The plunger may become a symbol of oppression to Haitians, much as in the same way a lynching rope has become a symbol of oppression to Southern blacks.”

Protestors played on Mayor Giuliani’s “Courtesy, Professionalism, Respect” public relations campaign, reformulating the slogan to “Criminals, Perverts, Racists.” Genevieve Lagerre Dazon, a 61-year-old Haitian immigrant, summarized her participation in the protest in fundamental terms. “We are human,” she said. “And that was not human. Just not human.”

**PUBLIC (DIS)IDENTIFICATIONS WITH THE U.S. STATE**

Although the wider New York public generally maintained an empathetic attitude toward Louima, not all constituents agreed that police brutality against people of color was ubiquitous or systemic. Whether one took the view that Louima’s story represented something normative or aberrational largely depended on whether one belonged to or identified with communities of color. It also depended on whether a person’s racial and gender identity was assumed to warrant police protection or symbolized purportedly criminal or alien threats to law and order. It depended on whether one understood America’s historical legacies of sexualized racial violence and the collective memories of resisting the terrorizing practices of white supremacy.
Arguing that patterns of police brutality were being exaggerated, William J. Bratton, New York City police commissioner from 1994 to 1996, cited a 1994 study conducted by the NYPD to make the claim that the police force was not excessively forceful. The study "found that although officers made nearly 275,000 arrests in 1993, fewer than 100 people were hospitalized as a result of these encounters. This number includes people who violently resisted arrest—including those who shot at officers."70 Although Bratton never mentioned race as a central issue in patterns of police brutality, he implied that people of color were suffering from false delusions. His use of statistics attempted to minimize the significance of everyday people's testimonies of police harassment, illegal searches, and arbitrary killings.

Bratton did not mention that the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) in New York City had received 20,535 complaints against individual police officers from July 1993 through June 1997.71 This number is likely much lower than actual instances of police misconduct because New York City residents often believe it is a waste of time to file a formal complaint against the police. Because the CCRB's recommendations for reprimanding officers are regularly disregarded by the NYPD, residents believe it is futile to even try to hold cops accountable. Nor did Bratton mention that the Mollen Commission had revealed numerous instances of police officers being "violent simply for the sake of violence" in a report published in 1994.72 An exchange between the commission's investigators and a police officer working in the Bronx indicated that police officers regularly used excessive force to establish their dominance.

"Did you beat people up who you arrested?"
"No. We'd just beat people in general. If they're on the street, hanging around drug locations. It was a show of force."
"Why were these beatings done?"
"To show who was in charge. We were in charge, the police."73

Describing the Internal Affairs Division of the NYPD as a "do-nothing agency," the Mollen Commission report also described instances of a group of officers engaging in rape and terror. Police officers "raided a brothel in uniform, ordered the men to leave and the women to line up. The cops then picked their victims of choice and proceeded to terrorize and rape them without compunction."74 Because such instances of terror, torture, and rape were regularly left unad-

dressed and unprosecuted, the Mollen Commission concluded that police brutality emboldened NYPD cops by making them feel invulnerable. The emotional rewards derived from exercising limitless and unchecked methods of terror gave officers a sense of invincibility. Such emotional rewards may have also produced feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse over time. But in police and legal cultures where brutality is collectively condoned, such moral reminders are unlikely to change actions.

Systematic patterns of police brutality and arbitrary killings are purposely obfuscated by the state. The Justice Department does not keep data on instances of police brutality.75 This not only makes it difficult to make sociological arguments but also helps to diminish and disaggregate the testimonies of those who are most affected. Patterns of police violence are converted to aberrational instances of individuated disorder. By contrast, independent organizations that keep track of police killings confirm the testimonies of the most affected. In 1997 the Slain Lives Project reported 27 fatal killings by the police in New York City alone.76 Since four officers shot 41 rounds of ammunition at Amadou Diallo while he was reaching for his wallet in 1999, Slain Lives has listed an additional 239 fatalities at the hands of the NYPD.77 Most of the slain lives are young Black and Latino people.

Even when cops are prosecuted for brutality, guilty verdicts are extremely rare. Because local district attorneys who regularly depend on the police to prosecute their cases are responsible for investigating police misconduct, the officers' actions are rarely found to be legally excessive.78 The defendants almost always argue that they were acting in self-defense. As the world witnessed in the 1992 Rodney King trial, the police officers, the prosecution, the judges, and the jury worked to convert King's brutalization into police self-defense by emphasizing King's previous police record and staging his body as a threat to the police officers—projections that could only be believed under conditions of white paranoia that normatively understand Black men as inherently criminal.79

The extremity of violence against Louima and the massive public outrage he helped create through his early testimonies made it difficult for state representatives to treat this case as they usually did. Louima's rectal wounds did not lend themselves to being interpreted as acts of self-defense on the part of the cops. What's more, Louima had no previous criminal record, was working as a security guard, and was a married family man with a wife and child. His
delegitimation on the basis of a past record of crime therefore proved difficult. The Haitian community’s mass protests had done much to sway the court of public opinion in Louima’s favor.

Once it became increasingly clear that Louima’s story was true, state representatives such as Mayor Giuliani and Police Commissioner Howard Safir publicly vowed to hold the officers accountable and to break down the “blue wall of silence” of the 70th Precinct. The NYPD, and by extension the state apparatus, was forced to align itself with Louima to regain its legitimacy. Louima’s torture took place in the middle of a mayoral election, and newspaper accounts continued to expose the police’s attempts to cover up their tracks. King Kino and the owners of Club Rendez-Vous, who had received a ticket for disorderly conduct the day after Louima was brutalized, exposed the NYPD’s attempts to portray the club as a place that condoned violent gay sex. On August 16, 1997, Kino played again at Club Rendez-Vous, adding a verse to the song “Cowboy” to show that the NYPD cowboys had the same violent spirit as the paramilitary cowboys in Haiti.

The way I see it, the cops are like a group of guys who are against the people. To me, it become [sic] no different than the Ku Klux Klan—racists that hate people, that think they have the power to hit you on the head, slap you in the face, kick you in the butt. They can do whatever they want... So, I look at them like a gang like that... The same police brutality we had in Haiti since I was a kid was the same police brutality that I meet in 1997 in front of a club where I’m playing. So I make no differences. The same U.S. government that sent people to train people in Haiti for police brutality is the same government that has the worst police brutality. But I never heard a story that they put a stick in someone’s butt in Haiti.

Despite Giuliani’s public relations campaign vowing to address dirty cops, the Haitian community exposed him as the leader who time and time again sanctioned police harassment and violence.

Midway through his trial Volpe confessed to raping Louima, and on December 19, 1999, he was sentenced to 30 years in prison. Charles Schwarz was initially sentenced to 15 years in prison for violating Louima’s civil rights. However, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit overturned Schwarz’s conviction in 2002 on the basis that he was denied a fair trial. As a result, Schwarz served only a 5-year sentence on a perjury charge and was released in 2007. Thomas Wiese and Thomas Bruder, charged with conspiracy to obstruct a federal investigation, were also initially convicted on March 9, 2000, but a federal appeals court overturned their convictions in 2002 on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

Volpe’s conviction gave communities of color in New York the sense that a little bit of justice had been served. Holding a cop accountable for egregious police brutality case against a Black man was a legal novelty in New York. As a result, the communities that protested the NYPD’s violence achieved a certain collective satisfaction. Louima’s case symbolized a victory for all the police brutality victims whose suffering had gone unnoticed or had failed to afford legal recognition or compensation. Louima continued to be an advocate against police brutality, appearing with Al Sharpton after Sean Bell was killed in 2006. He used his settlement money, the largest in New York City history, to establish the Abner Louima Foundation, which funds children’s education in Haiti.

Communities that supported Louima largely framed their visions of justice through the law. Because of long historical patterns of denying people of color legal forms of redress, obtaining legal recognition for Louima’s suffering was prioritized in the demands of oppositional communities. But such demands for accountability and remunerative redress still looked to the state for solutions, reinforcing the idea that the criminal justice system was the primary venue through which to obtain justice. Consciously or unconsciously, such legal frames for justice continue to reinforce emotional economies of revenge and punishment. Volpe’s incarceration was supposed to be the punishment for his transgressions, but this hardly interrupted dominant ideologies and structures of feeling that equated justice with punishment. Framing justice through the law diminished possibilities for imagining other forms of justice. Ideas for restorative justice that did not involve incarceration but still created forms of accountability to Louima and other victims of police brutality were not articulated. Although Louima received monetary rewards for his unspeakable suffering, it is unclear whether this compensation was capable of creating a mode of healing that did not reinforce normative public appetites for revenge and punishment. So long as publics equate justice with punishment, even when it comes to people like Volpe, it is unlikely that the state’s extralegal tactics and the normative violence in U.S. cultures will be overhauled.
To ethically witness Louima's story means to engage in an act of translation, one that reads the specter of racial and sexual violence in a way that cultivates the complex legibility of the one who suffers. The act of ethically witnessing Louima's story entails an emotional disengagement from the pleasures of aestheticized spectatorship. But it may also mean disidentifying with state-sanctioned forms of punishment and incarceration in order to imagine other forms of individual and group accountability. Being an ethical witness means cultivating indignation and resistance toward racial and sexual violence, but it also means critically imagining how to undermine the public emotional patterns and institutional structures that perpetuate its existence. It means creating modes of community accountability that do not reinforce a state and legal apparatus that is constitutionally predicated on violence and the injustices of mass incarceration. In other words, ethical witnessing demands that we imagine forms of justice that do not reinforce the state apparatuses that perpetuate the very oppressions we are trying to critique. It demands that we posit a basis for social relations rooted in dignity and mutual interdependence rather than the pleasurable enjoyments of punishment, however deserved that punishment may be. The story of Abner Louima, a story of inconsolable and inexpressible suffering, hopefully teaches us to participate in cultivating an ethics of care wherein the dehumanization of others not only becomes unjustifiable but also undesirable.
saying broadcasts from Port-au-Prince and from rebel and underground radio throughout the United States. Laguerre, *Diasporic Citizenship*, 133.


20. Louima would later recant his assertion that Volpe and the other officer said this, claiming that he had been encouraged by a family member to politicize his story in this way. We might assume that it was necessary to recant the statement given Giuliani’s political support for Louima. But the political implications of the statement were already in play, regardless of its truth value.

21. Much of the description that follows, unless otherwise noted, is outlined in the Memorandum and Order of United States of America v. Justin Volpe. It is important to note that several details of what happened are portrayed differently by various persons. As such, my retelling of this story does not attempt to be accurate but rather weaves together the sometimes contradictory narratives of different voices. For the full Memorandum and Order, see “78 F. Supp. 2d 76: United States v. Volpe,” Justia US Law, December 13, 1999, law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSSupp2/78/76/12588594/ (accessed July 16, 2014).


28. The identity of the second officer was suspected to be Thomas Schwarz, but this could not be confirmed by either Louisa or the court testimonials.

29. McAlary, “Victim and City.”

30. McAlary, “Victim and City.”


34. GarciaIazo, “Bid at 70th.”


53. For an in-depth analysis of the psychosocial dimensions of sexualized racial violence in lynching scenes, see Marriott, *On Black Men*, 1–22.


64. Feldman, “Political Terror,” 62.


69. Kifner, “Thousands Call on City Hall.”


73. Herbert, “Connect the Dots.”

74. Herbert, “Connect the Dots.”


76. Fresh in the memory of New York communities of color were numerous arbitrary deaths and beatings: Kevin Cedeno, 16, Black, fatally shot in the lower back at close range by Officer Anthony Pellegini on April 4, 1997; Charles Campbell, 37, Black, fatally shot three times by Officer Richard Diguglielmo on October 4, 1996, over a parking space; Nathaniel Gaines, 26, Black Navy veteran fatally shot in the back by Officer Polo Colecchia on July 4, 1996; Lebert Folkes, Jamaican immigrant, shot in the face by an undercover officer while being pulled out of his sister’s car on February 11, 1996; Yong Xin Huang, 16, Chinese youth shot in the back by police officers after having his face smashed into a glass door on March 4, 1995; Anibal Carasquillo, 21, Puerto Rican, unarmed, fatally shot in the chest on January 22, 1995, by Marco Calderon; Anthony Baez, 29, Puerto Rican, choked to death by Officer Francis Livori for accidentally hitting a police patrol car with a football on December 22, 1994. Stolen Lives Project, Stolen Lives: Killed by Law Enforcement (New York: National Lawyers Guild, Anthony Baez Foundation, and October 22nd Coalition to Stop Police Brutality, Repression, and the Criminalization of a Generation, 1999), 232–63.


78. For a detailed account of multiple cases in which police officers accused of brutality or unjustifiable shootings were exonerated, see Amnesty International, Police Brutality and Excessive Force in the New York City Police Department, June 1996 (AI Index: 51/36/96).


80. “King Kino.”


82. Wiese and Bruder’s convictions of 60 months in prison were overturned on appeal. See United States v. Schwartz, 283 F.3d 76 (NY Cr. App. 2d Cir. 2002).