Candyman and the Afterlives of Slavery

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ABSTRACT

The near absence of the horror genre in Black Studies scholarship about the afterlives of slavery can be attributed to the fact that scholars are discussing the "afterlives" of slavery in a non-mystical way while the horror genre traditionally presents "afterlives" in supernatural forms. While these connotations of afterlives certainly mean different things, they converge in *Candyman* demonstrating the potential harmony between the two uses of the term. In this paper, I place both versions of *Candyman* in conversation with recent Black Studies scholarship as well as national discourses about racial inequality and white violence in order to argue for *Candyman*'s relevance to contemporary debates about slavery and its afterlives as a conceptual framework. In addition, I zero in on the 2021 remake to demonstrate how Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021) clarifies the legend's relationship to the afterlives of slavery and operates as a corrective to Bernard Rose's 1992 film. The intersection of the supernatural afterlife and the afterlives of slavery as understood by Black Studies scholars comes forth in DaCosta's sequel that centralizes the operations of white supremacy and resulting Black trauma.

Keywords: Black horror, afterlives of slavery, lynching

Candyman y el más allá de la esclavitud

RESUMEN

La casi ausencia del género de terror en la erudición de Black Studies sobre las vidas posteriores a la esclavitud se puede

atribuir al hecho de que los académicos están discutiendo las "vidas posteriores" de la esclavitud de una manera no mística, mientras que el género de terror tradicionalmente presenta "vidas posteriores" en formas sobrenaturales. Si bien estas connotaciones de vidas posteriores ciertamente significan cosas diferentes, convergen en Candyman, lo que demuestra la armonía potencial entre los dos usos del término. En este artículo, coloco ambas versiones de Candyman en conversación con estudios académicos afroamericanos recientes, así como con discursos nacionales sobre la desigualdad racial y la violencia blanca, para defender la relevancia de Candyman en los debates contemporáneos sobre la esclavitud y sus vidas futuras como marco conceptual. Además, me concentro en la nueva versión de 2021 para demostrar cómo Candyman (2021) de Nia DaCosta aclara la relación de la leyenda con el más allá de la esclavitud y funciona como un correctivo para la película de 1992 de Bernard Rose. La intersección del más allá sobrenatural y el más allá de la esclavitud tal como lo entienden los estudiosos de Black Studies surge en la secuela de DaCosta que centraliza las operaciones de la supremacía blanca y el trauma negro resultante.

Palabras clave: horror negro, ultratumba de la esclavitud, linchamiento

标题：《糖果人》与奴隶制的来世

摘要

关于黑色恐怖的黑人研究学术几乎从未关注过奴隶制的来世，这可能归因于一个事实，即学者以非神秘的方式讨论奴隶制的“来世”，而恐怖片一般以超自然的方式呈现“来世”。虽然来世的这些含义显然意味着不同的事物，但《糖果人》将这些不同事物汇聚在一起，证明了该术语的两种用法之间的

潜在和谐。本文中，我将两个版本的《糖果人》与近期黑人研究以及有关种族不平等和白人暴力的国家话语进行了分析，以论证《糖果人》（作为一项概念框架）与关于奴隶制及其来世的当代辩论的相关性。此外，我聚焦于2021年的翻拍版，以证明尼娅·达科斯塔(Nia DaCosta)导演的《糖果人》(2021)如何阐明了传说与奴隶制来世的关系，并对伯纳德·罗斯(Bernard Rose)导演的1992年《糖果人》进行了修正。按照黑人研究学者的理解，超自然来世和奴隶制来世的交叉出现在达科斯塔的《糖果人》中，后者聚焦于白人至上的一系列操作和由此产生的黑人创伤。

关键词：黑色恐怖，奴隶制的来世，私刑

BLACK STUDIES AND HORROR

White fears of Black people and African diasporic religions have been overrepresented in horror films since the very beginning of the genre's conception. But what about Black fear? Where are those narratives and where is their validation? And given the history of racial violence and oppression in the United States, who should really be afraid of whom? Even in the twenty-first century, a looming danger characterizes the Black experience in the U.S. where on any given day, Black people are prone to being racially attacked. This vulnerability is also a characteristic of the horror genre. The protagonist of a horror film remains on edge, uncertain about their fate and their capability to defeat the monster. In the horror film of American history, that monster is racism, which creates an atmosphere of ter-

ror for Black people who are steeped in fear. It would appear then that the horror film would be an effective form of Black representation, but the genre's history of racial stereotyping has long prevented horror from being thought of as a viable vehicle through which to engage with issues of racism in a way that actually disrupts the operations of white supremacy. The situation changed when Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017) kick-started new Black horror, a critical contribution to Black popular culture that has allowed Black writers and producers to look back at oppressive texts by creating their own distinct horror tradition. This new and burgeoning genre, which includes films such as Gerard Bush's *Antebellum* (2020) as well as television series such as Misha Green's *Lovecraft Country* (2020), indicates a need for a theoretical foundation for new Black horror that can fully grasp its critical intervention. In particular, Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021), a sequel to Bernard Rose's *Candyman* (1992), intervenes in horror discourses, representing white terror as a real and legitimate trauma for Black Americans on the big screen.

The new Black horror aesthetic offers insight into the way in which whiteness appears in the Black imagination and how Black people experience racial fear in the midst of white terror. These frameworks operate as a form of resistance by inverting white hegemonic tropes and allowing the Black perspective to be heard in a space where it was previously silenced. DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021) achieves this aim by reversing the gaze in Rose's original film and retelling the story through a Black lens that brings the legend to its fullest potential as a Black studies framework. While audiences might be tempted to see DaCosta's *Candyman*, and Black horror more generally, as mere entertainment, this film engages in serious theoretical work. The film offers modes of understanding the "afterlives" of slavery, which Saidiya Hartman defined in *Lose*

Your Mother (2008) as "skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (47). By referring to traces of chattel slavery in contemporary society as "afterlives," Hartman elucidates the uncanny and supernatural nature of the ongoing cycle of racialized violence and oppression. Akin to zombies or ghosts and other forms of the undead, slavery reincarnates in the present, taking on a different form. DaCosta's *Candyman* becomes the perfect metaphor for this fundamental concept in Black studies: the film evokes the historical pattern of white violence in the form of a ghost story that draws a direct line between white violence in the past and present. Moreover, it visualizes the deep-seated pain that this history has left, literally haunting a Black community.

The horror genre's historical omission, marginalization, and caricaturing of Blackness has caused Black studies scholars to overlook horror as a critical terrain of scholarship, even though the language of horror often appears in their work. "Haunting," "monstrous," "afterlives," and "horrors" are keywords that echo within recent Black studies scholarship, increasingly so in the last decade. Notably, Saidiya Hartman, M. NourbeSe Phillip, and Christina Sharpe have all used these terms to describe modern versions of slavery that maintain the tradition of exploiting and persecuting Black Americans.[1] These terms also function as primary characteristics of the horror genre, and yet the horror genre rarely appears in these academic discourses about the hauntings, afterlives, monstrosities, and horrors of slavery. Put simply, Black studies scholars are clearly using the same language as the horror genre to theorize how past racial violence reappears in the

1 These keywords appear in Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* (2008), Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake* (2016) and *Monstrous Intimacies* (2010), and M. NourbeSe Philip's *Zong!* (2008).

present, but hardly ever engaging with horror films, due to the genre's infamous reputation.

Many Black studies scholars would agree that Black characters have primarily appeared as props, primitive natives, obsequious servants, seducers, and charmers, and as monsters in and of themselves. Robin R. Means Coleman's foundational work *Horror Noire* (2011) surveys stereotypical representations of Black people that permeated American horror films throughout the twentieth century. Peele's *Get Out* inspired scholars and Black artists alike to revisit Coleman's book, which was turned into a documentary directed by Xavier Burgin in 2019. In the documentary, Black writers, film producers, and actors/actresses express their frustrations with the horror genre and discuss the peculiar evolution of Black casting in film. Before the 1930s, Black roles were played by white actors in blackface, such as Gus from D.W. Griffith's infamous film *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which Coleman and film historian Tananarive Due regard as a horror film for Black viewers.[2] Then, as filmmaker Monica Suriyage explains in Burgin's film, monsters and aliens began to function as "stand-ins" for Black people. Cultural theorist Mark H. Harris also appears in the documentary and explains that when Black people actually began to appear in horror films, they were limited to a few roles including "quiet servant," "tribesmen," or "comedic buffoon." Therefore, from the very beginning of the horror genre, Black characters were either absent, marginalized, or dehumanized through ridiculing stereotypes and monstrous

2 Griffith's *Birth* popularized the Black Buck, which Donald Bogle, one of the earliest scholars on images of African Americans in film, explains was a racist caricature in the post-Reconstruction era that painted Black men as strong, unruly, and violent creatures with a sexual appetite for white women. According to Bogle and Wil Haygood, who also specializes in Black cinematic history, the infamous film reinstated the Ku Klux Klan.

representations, and this pattern continued well into the early 2000s.[3]

The monsterization of Black people in American popular culture played a major part in keeping representations of Black people as subhuman alive in the national frame of mind. Bernard Rose's *Candyman* (1992) is no exception. Although seemingly progressive for the time period, Rose's film still proved problematic by perpetuating the Black male rapist myth, executing its vilified Black antagonist, and generally failing to offer a sustained critique of white liberalism. Like the mirror in *Candyman* (1992), cinema in the twentieth century often reflected the terror of whiteness that was projected onto Black characters, similarly to the way white lynch mobs projected monstrosity onto their Black victims before executing them. When white film producers attempt to interrogate whiteness, the films tend to merely reformulate the structures and values of white supremacy. This is why Jordan Peele's contributions to the horror genre, and his decision to participate as a writer for Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021), are so significant. The reboot was necessary given the original film's failure to address issues of race head on. Rose's decision in the original film to make the story less overtly about racism and America's dark history likely stemmed from a reluctance to offend a largely white audience and/or the brewing racial tensions at the time that some feared could evolve into civil unrest.[4] Cinema was still a white-dominated industry in the

3 For more on this topic, see Coleman's *Horror Noire* (2011), Wil Haygood's *Colorization* (2021), Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks* (2001), and Anna Fahraeus's "Historicising Racialised Objects of Horror" (2011).

4 Apparently, "Rose struggled to calm studio anxiety that a black horror villain might stoke racial tensions," and one of the camera trucks was actually struck by a bullet during the filming of *Candyman* (1992) (Dalton).

1990s with even Black-casted films such as Sig Shores's *The Return of Superfly* (1990) being supervised, if not altogether directed, by white filmmakers and screenwriters. Now, in the twenty-first century, Black artists have found themselves less restricted in their portrayals of race. The rise of the Black Lives Matter movement seemingly allowed the new Black horror genre to be born, as the movement encouraged open and honest conversations about race in America. DaCosta and Peele's remake, released in August 2021, targets a largely Black audience, although some critics have noted that the film also caters to non-Black audiences by simplifying complex ideas about race and centuries of exploitation.[5] In contrast to Rose's *Candyman*, DaCosta's *Candyman* directly and explicitly critiques gentrification, Black trauma, and the temporality of white violence. By doing so, the film operates as a form of alternative education for white viewers while validating the experiences of Black people and allowing Black viewers to see their stories and their truths represented in the theater.

DaCosta's *Candyman* is a direct sequel to Rose's *Candyman*. Since the original film's references to issues of race are confined to the margins, a close reading of Rose's film is required in order to draw out the film's subtle engagements with the history of racism. *Candyman* 1992's most valuable element as it relates to Black studies is its nuanced portrayals of how the history of slavery continues to haunt the present. Although *Candyman* (1992) may not have been completely successful at tackling issues of Blackness, it offers an interesting case in point about the compatibility between the idea of the afterlives of slavery explored by Black studies scholars and the supernatural forms of afterlife more commonly associated with the horror genre. Nia DaCosta's *Candyman*

5 For more on this topic, see Roshanian, Arya. "*Candyman* Is Pretty Scary, but Who Is Its Audience?"

(2021) reifies the legend's relationship to the afterlives of slavery and operates as a corrective to the original film. The intersection of the supernatural afterlife and the afterlives of slavery as understood by Black studies truly comes forth in this sequel, which centralizes the operations of white supremacy and Black trauma resulting from racial violence in the past and present. New Black horror films like *Candyman* (2021) signify that the genre is now being mobilized against its own oppressive history, and analyzing these new films can bring them into conversation with Black studies literature on haunting and the supernatural. The legend of Candyman has become an integral horror motif in Black popular culture that embodies the afterlives of slavery as conceptualized by scholars like Hartman. While "afterlife" in the supernatural sense and "afterlife" in Hartman's theoretical sense have different implications, they converge in both versions of *Candyman*. The intersection of these two theoretical terrains, where the supernatural afterlife converges with the historical/sociopolitical afterlives of slavery, inspires a more complex conversation about recent Black studies scholarship, and *Candymans'* (1992/2021) relevance to contemporary debates about slavery, its afterlives, and the enduring legacy of lynching. While horror films have long been studied in terms of how they are racially oppressive, the critical potential of new Black horror to disrupt racism has yet to be theorized. Revisiting *Candyman* (1992/2021) can illuminate where the horror genre and Black studies intersect, the uncanny nature of the afterlives of slavery, and contemporary discourses about America's historical pattern of white violence.

THE LEGEND OF CANDYMAN

Bernard Rose's *Candyman* (1992) follows Helen Lyle and her partner Bernadette, two graduate students majoring in

anthropology at the University of Illinois, as they seek to demystify the legend of Candyman. Helen, a liberal white woman, voyages through Cabrini-Green, a Chicago public housing project, determined to prove that Candyman is nothing more than a fictitious folktale used as a coping mechanism by the Black community. Candyman, as narrated by a British professor by the name of Philip Purcell, was the son of a slave in the 1890s who was well educated, grew up in "polite society," and happened to be a talented artist (00:30:10). Disaster strikes when Candyman (formerly known as Daniel Robitaille) impregnates the daughter of a wealthy landowner who hired him to capture his daughter's "virginal beauty" (00:30:50). In pursuit of revenge, the father hired "a pack of brutal hooligans" who sawed off Candyman's right hand with a "rusty blade," smeared honey over his naked body before summoning bees to sting him to death, burnt his body on a "giant pyre," and "scattered his ashes over Cabrini-Green" (00:31:33-00:32:15). Candyman, however, does not completely die; he continues to live on as a haunting spirit that sheds "innocent blood" when someone calls his name five times in the mirror, and through a gang leader, who adopts the name Candyman and commits murders and various other crimes in Cabrini-Green (00:45:40). In more ways than one, Candyman continues to reside in Cabrini-Green even though his body has been physically destroyed. He sustains his legacy through a grotesque form of seeking justice that involves killing people who do not believe he existed and who make a mockery of his brutal death.

Nia DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021) centers on visual artist Anthony McCoy and his cohabiting girlfriend, art gallery director Brianna Cartwright, as they unravel the legend of Candyman from a Black contemporary viewpoint. Anthony, who is tasked with creating a new art piece for an upcoming

show, turns to Cabrini-Green and the legend of Candyman as his source of inspiration. William Burke, a native of Cabrini-Green, helps Anthony with his investigation by recounting the story of Candyman and its history of violence, which he witnessed as a child. Anthony is enchanted by the legend, and through his art, he attempts to come to terms with all of the cruel injustices that the legend represents. As the plot unfolds, it is revealed that Anthony is the baby boy that Candyman kidnapped in the original film.[6] William becomes a conduit for Candyman and abducts Anthony in a rather cynical attempt to stop the cycle of gentrification in Cabrini-Green by appointing a new Candyman through a ghastly ritual. Brianna attempts to rescue Anthony, only for him to be prematurely shot down by white police officers who attempt to detain and frame her. Anthony's spirit slaughters the officers as retribution, and he becomes the fifth Candyman, carrying on the centuries-old tradition.

THE HORRORS OF GENTRIFICATION

By choosing to set *Candyman* in Cabrini-Green, a Black Chicagoan neighborhood that has a long history of segregation, poverty, and gentrification, Rose and DaCosta connect horror with the historical terror Black Chicagoans experienced via housing projects. Gentrification—the forced removal and relocation of Black bodies in the interest of white profit—is yet another contemporary manifestation of the legacies of slavery. As Christina Sharpe proclaims, it is an "injury" of the "ethnographic gaze" that is "practice[d] across time and [in] administrative process[es]" along with "segregation, lynching, touristic display, ethnographic display, incarceration, vigilantism" and other "conditions of slavery" (*In the*

6 Anthony also finds out that he was born in Cabrini-Green, not Brownsville, as his mother told him.

Wake, 44). In other words, the gaze on Black bodies informs all these practices of white supremacy throughout American history, and they confirm that the racial hierarchy is still being enforced centuries after its implementation. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of white violence like the institution of slavery and lynching merely evolved over time, manifesting in different forms of racial oppression that continue to execute Black people today. For this reason, gentrification and other housing-related government intrusions on the Black community cannot fully be considered without taking transatlantic slavery into account. To quote from Jesse A. Goldberg, "separating the two events from each other via a strict periodization that contains the past as discrete from the present ignores the hauntology of circum-Atlantic memory that continues to exert force on the present" (116). Candyman, a lynching victim whose raging spirit continues to haunt Cabrini-Green, represents the "hauntology" of transatlantic slavery that ruptures the present and similarly wreaks havoc on the Black community.

The *Candyman* films draw a correlation between the history of lynching and the housing projects, demonstrating the pattern of white violence that has been used against Black people throughout American history to maintain white dominance. This correlation has even been verified by lynching research scholars such as Robert DeFina and Lance Hannon, who concluded that modern housing segregation served to restore southern lynching as they both have the objective of maintaining the racial caste system by "remind[ing] blacks of their inferior status" and "prevent[ing] the use of their newly acquired freedoms" (168). Ultimately, lynching and housing segregation both served as control mechanisms over Black Americans to prevent their upward mobility, and both versions of *Candyman* suggest that lynching is a necessary

starting point in any discourse about the conditions of Black life in post-emancipation America. After all, it is through the legend of Candyman that viewers are able to piece together the relationship between the reincarnation of lynching victim Daniel Robitaille and the reincarnations of slavery that simultaneously keep Black residents in Cabrini Green terror-stricken and impoverished. Early on in *Candyman* (2021), Anthony McCoy and Brianna Cartwright briefly narrate the bleak history of gentrification and racial oppression in Chicago.[7] Brianna remarks, "white people built the ghetto and then erased it when they realized they built the ghetto" (00:08:30). From the segregation line that denied Black Chicagoans the ability to move outside of Cabrini-Green to the gentrification of the community that they came to call home, white rule persevered, carrying into the present the logic of slavery that gave white people the right to lay claims to any land they desired and to exploit Black people for their own gain. The imagery in *Candyman* (1992) refers to this history of gentrification. The swarm of bees, symbolic of Daniel Robitaille's death, that scatter across the city in the film comes to represent the spreading of the remains of slavery that plague Chicago via segregation and racial inequality.

BLACK CHICAGOANS AND POLICING

Candyman (1992/2021) also depicts the anti-Black climate that Christina Sharpe calls the "weather," through Black characters' futile interactions with law enforcement (102). The "weather," as defined by Sharpe, encapsulates the devaluation of Black life and the normativity of Black death that plagues American society as part of the legacy of slavery. In the orig-

7 This history is outlined in greater detail in Aaron Modica's article about Cabrini Green, and Ronit Bezalel's documentary *70 Acres in Chicago* (2014).

inal *Candyman* (1992), Anne Marie McCoy, neighbor of victim Ruthie Jean, emphasizes that the police were called two times but did not attend to Ruthie Jean: "I heard her screaming … I dialed 911 [but] nobody came" (00:28:25). The failure of the police to take her concern seriously and come to her aid raises the issue of racial disparities in police deployment. A study conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois concluded that African American neighborhoods experience significantly longer wait times after an emergency call (if a police officer is dispatched at all) in comparison to predominantly white neighborhoods.[8] Consequently, Black Chicagoans are made more vulnerable to attack as they cannot rely on the police to respond when they need help and protection.[9]

Even Helen recognizes Chicago's prioritization of white life over Black life when she is beaten by a gang member in the course of her search for Candyman. After she identifies her assailant, who goes by the name of Candyman, at the police station, she inquires about Ruthie Jean and the little boy who was castrated, and she learns that the police department did very little to detain the well-known gang leader before her incident with him.[10] Castration was a common feature of

8 For example, in Grand Crossing, a minority district, the dispatch time was 4.5 times longer than Jefferson Park, a predominately white district.

9 This data suggests that many Black Chicagoans have been abandoned by the police. Racial biases, like the superpredator myth and the stigmas around public housing developments that characterize these residents as dangerous criminals, likely play a part in this negligence. According to the EJI, the superpredator was characterized as "radically impulsive, brutally remorseless," "elementary school youngsters who pack guns instead of lunches" and "have absolutely no respect for human life." For more on this, see "The Superpredator Myth, 25 Years Later."

10 In the film, a young Black boy by the name of Jake says he can show Helen where Candyman is, so she follows him only to find that the Candyman Jake was referring to is actually a gang member who then proceeds

lynching; a manifestation of anxieties about Black sexuality, including the supposed sexual prowess of Black men.[11] As such, the castrated Black boy evokes the lynching of the real Candyman, Daniel Robitaille, calling attention to the ongoing destruction of Black bodies. Upon her return, Helen protests, "two people get brutally murdered and no one does anything, a white woman gets knocked down and they shut the whole place down" (00:43:05). By comparing herself getting "knocked down" to two Black people getting "brutally murdered," Helen highlights the privileges of white womanhood, and the vast disparity between the level of effort authorities put into cases involving Black versus white residents. This element of the film again comments on a ramification of slavery, one that has been validated by a year-long investigation conducted by The Trace and BuzzFeed News.[12] Law enforcement's lack of willingness or eagerness to go after the murderers of Black people in the United States results in more deaths, and conveys the message that Black Americans are not protected by the law and their lives are disposable. It is the logic of slavery, the apathy for Black lives, that seeps into the present through state failures to come to the aid of suffering Black Americans. *Candyman* (1992) condemns these failures and highlights the fear they engender in Black Chicagoans who are susceptible to attack and have no recourse.

DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021) extends this ongoing conversation by demonstrating how Black Americans are not only

to beat her.

11 For more on this topic, see Tommy J. Curry's *The Man-Not* (2017).

12 The study extracted data from twenty-two major cities in the United States between 2013 and 2016, and it found that when "a black or Hispanic person is fatally shot, the likelihood that local detectives will catch the culprit is 35% — 18 percentage points fewer than when the victim is white," and for gun assaults, "the arrest rate is 21% if the victim is black or Hispanic, versus 37% for white victims" (Ryley).

abandoned by law enforcement, but how law enforcement transforms into an even more threatening culprit than the originally perceived danger. At the end of the film, the police officers prematurely shoot Anthony to death and then threaten Breanna to force her to cooperate with their fabricated story. The scene alludes to a long history of police brutality in Black communities where officers too often adopt a "shoot first then ask" mentality and utilize extreme violence in situations where it is clearly unwarranted. The tragic deaths of Rodney King, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner are just a few high-profile examples of this pattern of injustice. The title of Anthony's painting, *Say My Name*, pays homage to these victims of police brutality, clearly evoking the Black Lives Matter movement. In several of these cases, police officers in question avoided prosecution, which has created a divide and lack of trust between them and the communities they take an oath to serve and protect.[13] This hostile relationship appears inevitable when viewed in light of the origins of law enforcement; racist policing is rooted in a much longer history of racial subjugation. DaCosta's *Candyman* (2021) explores this succession by drawing a direct line from lynching in the 1800s to police brutality in the present.

Several Black studies scholars have examined lynching, police brutality, and mass incarceration as continued chattel slavery. In *The Racial Contract* (1997), Charles W. Mills argues that the nonconsensual Racial Contract is enforced via violence, and when lynch mobs were outlawed, "the state, then-the police, the penal system, the army" became the new "enforcers" (84). In other words, the abolishment of slavery (and later Jim Crow laws) did not nullify the racial contract—lynch

13 For example, in *State of Florida v. George Zimmerman*, and *State of Missouri v. Darren Wilson*, the defendants were either acquitted or not even charged.

mobs took on the role of slave holders, then law enforcement took on the role of slave patrols, each group working to keep nonwhite people subjugated by detecting and destroying challengers to the old racial order. In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010), Michelle Alexander similarly argues that the racial hierarchy did not die with slavery or Jim Crow, and proponents of the racial hierarchy from each generation actively found new ways to maintain the old racial order. Alexander maps the eerie parallels between slavery, Jim Crow, and mass incarceration, demonstrating how the racial caste system is redesigned over time, merely adapting to changes in the social and political system. DaCosta's *Candyman* also argues that modern day police brutality is a descendent of lynching and other historical forms of white violence and racial oppression but does so through the form of a ghost story. It shows why ideas about the undead in the horror genre work so well to explore how America's past operates in the present—it is a way of articulating the literal reappearance of someone or something that is presumed to have perished—in this case slavery—in different forms here and now. This is brilliantly visualized in the puppetry at the end of the film where the original story of lynching victim Daniel Robitaille is told as a point of origin for the police brutality victims that followed, including, but certainly not limited to, Sherman Fields, who is shown being brutally and wrongfully killed by officers in a flashback early on in the film, and Anthony McCoy. In accordance with the logic of Mills's *Racial Contract*, the lynch mob in the original *Candyman* is merely replaced by police officers in the new *Candyman*. The puppet show suggests that the custom of lynching has an ever-present influence on race relations and engendered later forms of racial violence. The direct lineage between these victims in *Candyman* (2021) personifies the

afterlives of slavery and brings awareness to the influence the legacy of slavery has on modern-day law enforcement.

Both versions of *Candyman* portray the profound impact inequitable policing and police brutality have on the Black family. In *Candyman* (1992), Anne laments, "I'm scared … scared for my child … they ain't never going to get him … Candyman" (00:28:25). Anne is depicted as fending for herself, a Black single mother in a destitute and crime-ridden apartment building where she is not offered any comfort or security. Not only must Anne fear the gun violence in her community, but she must also face the failure of the state to help protect her and her child, one of the most basic promises of the constitution. As Christina Sharpe asks, "what kind of mother/ing is it if one must always be prepared with the knowledge of the possibility of the violent and quotidian death of one's child?" (78). The lack of autonomy Black parents have over their Black children and their inability to protect them in a precarious white world is an afterlife of slavery that can turn mothering into a horror film. In a nation where Skittles and toys are mistaken for weapons, and hashtags memorializing Black youth killed by the police abound, Black mothers like Anne live in perpetual fear for the safety of their Black children who are not allowed to be children.[14] To Sharpe's point, this denies Black mothers and Black children the joy and innocence that typically come with motherhood and childhood respectively, and inequitable policing only serves to exacerbate this condition of Black life post-emancipation.

DaCosta's *Candyman* furthers this discourse by making the adultification of Black children a focal point in the film.[15]

14 Trayvon Martin was carrying Skittles, and 12-year-old Tamir Rice was carrying a toy gun when he was killed.

15 For more on adultification, see Phillip Goff's "Black Boys Viewed as

In the opening scene of the film, young William Burke acts out a police brutality scene through puppetry before he is called by his mother to do his laundry, which requires him to go to the building next door. William's acting game underscores that he has already been conditioned to fear the police, and it foreshadows the horror that is to come when his fear is validated. The officers in William's puppetry symbolize the officers in real life that terrorize Black residents in Cabrini-Green. On his way to the laundry room, William indeed walks past two white police officers who are looking for Candyman (00:02:45). Moments after doing a load of laundry, a chore that further emphasizes his adultification and the regularity of white terror, William witnesses the brutal beating and killing of Sherman Fields, a traumatic memory of his childhood that stays with him forever. Young William is filled with fear, fear of what they could do to him in that moment and fear of what they could do to him when he gets older and grows into a Black man like Candyman. Early on, Black children like William are made intimately aware of the monster of racism that is constantly out to get them. The irony is that Black children are not allowed to be children because they must tread through the white world carefully so as to avoid the monster of racism that threatens their lives, while also being conscious of the way they are monsterized through adultification, even though they are clearly the victims in these horror stories.

ACADEMIA AND THE ART WORLD

The "weather" can also be seen through *Candyman's* (1992/2021) depiction of academia and the art world, both of which have contributed to racial oppression. In *Candyman* (1992), Helen, a white liberal academic, is dedicated to writ-

Older, Less Innocent than Whites, Research Finds."

ing a thesis about how "an entire community starts attributing the daily horrors of their lives to a *mythical* figure" (00:17:41, emphasis mine). Her ethnographic gaze prevents her from recognizing what the "mythical" figure of Candyman represents, which is the trauma of lynching and other forms of racial violence that continue to resurface in Cabrini-Green. What she does not understand is that the Black community is not "attributing the daily horrors of their lives to a mythical figure," but to a real event—slavery. As Laura Wyrick similarly observes, Helen is blind to the fact that Candyman's "slave ancestry and death by a lynch mob" directly connects to the "social and economic disenfranchisement of Cabrini-Green's current residents. The 'daily horrors' suffered by these residents are thus inextricably tied to the past horrors of slavery and racialized violence" (103). Cabrini-Green, isolated and poverty stricken, is haunted by the legacy of slavery and the systems of inequality that slavery produced. By not believing in Candyman, Helen denies the history of slavery and American racism necessitating his return. As Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren explain, by way of haunting, a ghost "demands justice, or at least a response" (9). Thus, moments after she receives news about growing interest from a publisher, Candyman finally appears and says to her "you doubted me … you were not content with the stories, so I was obliged to come" (00:45:50). After Helen is imprisoned and accused of murder, he continues "your disbelief destroyed the faith of my congregation … now I must kill you" (00:46:30). Candyman "demands" a "response" from Helen and obstructs the publication of Helen's work because it poses a threat to Candyman's legacy and very existence. By publishing a dissertation that dispels the "myth" of Candyman, Helen would be invalidating Candyman and the hauntings of slavery that so clearly pervade the North Side of Chicago.

Moreover, Helen would be appropriating an "urban legend" that does not belong to her or the university. As a white, middle-class woman, she and Professor Purcell, a white British man, are far removed from these stories, and by way of the ethnographic gaze, impose more violence on the Black people who are at the center. Anne Marie McCoy expresses these qualms in *Candyman* (1992) when she asks Helen regarding her study), "what you gone say … that we're bad … we steal … we gang bang … we all on drugs?" (00:26:30). Anne is aware of the stereotypical narratives about Black people that have historically been produced and perpetuated by academia and related institutions such as archives. In the article "Venus in Two Acts," Saidiya Hartman grapples with the obstacles presented by archives because of their tendency to either misconstrue and disfigure Black subjects or dehumanize them further by their very absence. Hartman points out that sources featuring Black people are often "not about them, but rather about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, transformed them into commodities and corpses" (Hartman 2). When Helen tells Anne that she is doing a "study," these are the kinds of reports that come to her mind and arouse apprehension. Candyman, as a narrative, is subject to the same sort of abuse Hartman finds inflicted on Black subjects in the archives. Arguably, Rose's film is an example of white writers narrating stories about Black figures and Black pain in problematic ways that perpetuate cycles of white violence and exploitation. As previously mentioned, the film perpetuates the Black male rapist myth, which had deadly consequences for Black men during the lynching era.[16] In addition, while characters in the

16 It does this by depicting Candyman as lusting after Helen and desiring her to be his "victim," as in, subject to his will (00:46:30). In a scene similar to Gus's pursuit of Flora in *Griffith*'s *Birth*, Helen is seen standing over a bridge, seemingly contemplating suicide rather than be joined

film question whether Candyman is real, they do not inquire about his character, beliefs, or everyday life. In fact, the only humanizing depiction of Candyman lies in his lair, where a painting of him as the educated, polite, and talented artist that he was before the horrific deed committed against him is imprinted on the wall.

In DaCosta's *Candyman*, white art critics take the place of academics, similarly seeking to profit from stories that are not only not about them, but that are constructed out of the violence that their ancestors have historically inflicted upon Black Americans. Art dealer Clive Privler pushes Anthony to "dig into that history of yours, dude," as in Black history, and when Anthony shares that he is from Brownsville, a middle- to upper-class neighborhood, Clive dismisses the "South Side" as "played" and encourages him instead to look into Cabrini-Green, as an abandoned, impoverished neighborhood in Chicago with a dismal history of white violence and gentrification (00:13:45). Despite Clive's initial question of "who are you, man," he displays very little interest in knowing who Anthony actually is, relying instead on stereotypes about Black people to characterize and judge him, and dismissing Anthony's "hometown" in favor of appropriating the history and culture of the projects (00:12:55). Chicago's renowned Finley Stephens is no different—she chastises Anthony during an art show, calling his piece clichéd. The word "cliché" has a particular connotation, echoing the idea of the art world's preoccupation with the newest trend. Finley goes so far as to accuse Anthony and other Black artists like him as being "the real pioneers of that cycle" of violence

with Candyman. In the background, Candyman says, "all you have left is my desire for you," which once again paints him as a sexual predator and Helen as the prey whose white femininity needs to be protected (01:18:20).

and "descend[ing] upon disenfranchised neighborhoods" so that they can profit (00:27:14). Finley clearly represents white liberals who refuse to see their own participation in Black oppression. She unsympathetically claims that the subject of racial violence and the gentrification cycle has been exhausted, repeating the post-racial myth that denies slavery's reincarnation in the present. The label beside Anthony's piece explains that "the mirrored doors coldly reflect the viewer's gaze, while indicting the desire to 'open' a work," and it becomes clear that art critics like Finley and Clive impose their white gaze onto Black artists and fail to truly look inside them (00:26:00).

In the film, even Black curators are guilty of capitalizing on Black trauma and pain. Brianna Cartwright is unsettled when Danielle Harrington, a Black female museum curator, suggests "between these tragedies and your father's legacy [an artist who committed suicide], you've got a fascinating story" (01:02:05). This invites the question of whether or not the film is engaging in its own self-critique by acknowledging the fine line between art that thoughtfully and sensitively depicts Black pain in order to confront and expose white racism, and "Black trauma porn" that seems to indulge in excessive violence with little purpose beyond mere entertainment (Okundaye). This has become a criticism of some new Black horror productions such as Lena Waithe's series *Them* (2021).[17] Although DaCosta's *Candyman* focuses on art, the same critique of white appropriation of Black culture and pain can be applied to cinema and television. In art and motion pictures, there remains a history of misrepresentation and dissonance between how white America sees Black people and how Black people see themselves, which creates

17 For more on this topic, see Jason Okundaye's "'Black Trauma Porn': *Them* and the Danger of Jordan Peele Imitators."

racial tension. The gaze inherent in these visual arts can create a power dynamic between the viewer and the subject, and they are also both very commercialized institutions in American culture. This means that when these forms of representation are used to address issues of race, Black stories can still be vulnerable to exploitation. DaCosta's narrative reflects on this pattern and deliberately works to subvert it.

THE AFTERLIVES OF SLAVERY

Ghosts and other forms of the undead can help to articulate the effects of the past on the present, the afterlives of slavery, because they are both real and ephemeral; they have literal effects on people and the physical world, but they do not follow the rules of physical time and space—they in fact traverse time and space. Candyman, the ghost that haunts each film, represents the afterlives of slavery that remain unburied because of the brutal history that caused them and also cause their constant resurrection. In Rose's film, the scattering of Candyman's ashes over Cabrini-Green symbolizes the planting of racial violence that would continue to grow in the soil of the land where such spectacles of horror took place. Anne Gardulski, professor of geology, reports that "because nutrients cycle through the ocean … the atoms of those people who were thrown overboard are out there in the ocean even today" (qtd. in C. Sharpe 40). The same concept applies to soil; research confirms that the blood, sweat, and tears from lynching victims can still be found in the soil of sites where Black people were lynched. Bryan Stevenson, who collects and preserves the soil from lynching sites in jars, maintains that "the soil in these jars represents the lives of countless Americans who never had a proper burial, who met unspeakably violent deaths for 'serious offenses,' like arguing with a white man" (Couric). Here,

Stevenson underscores the triviality of the so-called transgressions that precipitated lynching and the horrifying spectacles of violence that terrorized Black communities, whose memory continues to haunt future generations. Candyman represents all of the countless lynching victims who were denied funerary rights and whose families were denied the opportunity to commemorate their deceased relatives. According to Jenny Sharpe, "slaves believed that their earthly shadows lingered behind unless the appropriate burial rituals were performed" (xi). Following this train of thought, slavery and its sufferers continue to haunt because their bodies and their stories were never properly entombed, literally or metaphorically. In a manner that reflects this, Candyman is unable to rest because of the wickedness of his death and because of the failure to honor his life with a respectable funeral. He is also unable to rest because his death represents broader and historical societal violence that has yet to be entombed and continues to victimize Black men like himself. Candyman's ashes in the film are literal human remains, but they also conceptually represent historical trauma, as do the remains of Black ancestors in American soil and in the ocean, as described by Gardulski and Stevenson.

The attempt to redress such injustice is the intent of the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI), which is geared towards national healing through confrontation with the past. Stevenson, who is also the founder of the EJI, explains that "the law will [continue to] be insufficient to create justice if we don't also create a consciousness about our history and address the burden that so many Americans carry" (qtd. in Pilkington, n.p.). According to him, the instances of racial violence we see today are all symptoms of the same sickness that was created when lynching executors "made their little kids watch human beings be burned or drowned or beaten. That has created a

disease where we have become indifferent to the victimization of black people" (qtd. in Pilkington, n.p.). The violence of lynching and the violence of witnessing the lynching of Black bodies has conditioned many Americans from childhood to be immune to Black suffering and to perceive Black people as less than human. Even Americans who did not personally witness a lynching have been shaped by the il/logic of slavery, which allowed whites to mentally and physically dismember Blacks with unrelenting barbarism.

The consequences of lynching for both Black and white people that are passed from generation to generation through emotions and behavior is the exact kind of thing that the idea of a ghost like Candyman can represent—ghosts are ephemeral but also concrete. In the original film, the "weather" constituted by these consequences surfaces in the newspaper clippings of Ruthie Jean, where her slaughtered bloody body is pictured on the cover with "Life in the Projects" as the headline, in the police department's lack of commitment to finding the murderers of Black citizens, in Helen's careless intrusion into the bathroom where a Black woman died, and in the way the Candyman "myth" is narrated with laughter and amusement throughout the film.[18] By narrating Candyman with such humor, Purcell and other white characters downplay the real terror that was used against a rather outstanding Black man (and many others like him) whose education and stature could not safeguard him from white violence in the late 1800s. In DaCosta's *Candyman*, the lack of empathy for Black people is reflected in characters who remain insensitive to Brianna's as well as Anthony's trauma, wishing to commodify their pain by putting it on display in an art exhibition

18 Namely by Professor Purcell, who laughs hysterically before and after narrating the horrific tale, and in the opening scene of the film where a young white woman jokingly recites the tale to her boyfriend.

or museum. Clive Privler seeks to appropriate the painful histories of Cabrini-Green; Finley Stephens seeks to appropriate the painful history of Candyman in conjunction with the deaths around Anthony's artwork; and Danielle Harrington, although Black herself, attempts to commodify the tragedy of Brianna's father, who committed suicide right in front of her when she was a child.

DaCosta's film centers on repressed and unresolved traumas that resurface when Candyman is summoned. Anthony's mother attempts to confine Candyman to the past and to safeguard her son by not revealing his connection to him. However, when Candyman is once again summoned, Anthony becomes possessed by the ghostly figure that continues to haunt because of his gruesome death and his unyielding desire for his subjects to remember all. Stevenson contends that in order to treat our nation's "disease," America will have to confront all of its destructive past, even the ugliest chapters. Candyman can be read as forcing a confrontation with history as viewers become participants in a film that, ultimately, is about a lynching sufferer whose soul continues to haunt Chicago. Soon-to-be victims look in the mirror and repeat his name five times as they gaze at their own reflections and await his appearance. The invocation of Candyman in the mirror is the calling forth of the ghost of slavery, who because of the violence of his death, inflicts more violence as he seeks to be remembered. As Hartman contends, "our lives and even those of the dead depend on such acts of remembrance" ("The Time," 758). American history shows that the act of forgetting does not erase the past nor does it help to alleviate its aftereffects. On the contrary, attempting to forget and repress the past only strengthens its influence on the present. In this way, the mirror in both versions of the film symbolizes the need for Americans to face their own reflections and their

own complicity in America's brutal past and the revival of the institution of slavery.

In "The Time of Slavery," Hartman addresses the consequences of dismissing the legacy of slavery when she says that "claims for redress based on this history and its enduring legacy are disqualified and belittled as ridiculous or unintelligible" (771). By refuting slavery's continued influence on the present, propositions to repair the resulting damages can be thwarted. Those who deny the continuing influence of slavery fail to recognize that its past "coexists with the present" and remains "active yet unseen" (J. Sharpe xii). This is powerfully demonstrated through Candyman, who remains invisible, but whose destruction remains vividly apparent and painfully clear. Candyman makes himself visible to the protagonists in each film to counter their disbelief, but since they are the only ones that can actually see him, they are presumed crazy, and in Rose's film, Helen is even accused of murder and confined to an insane asylum. In DaCosta's film, Candyman makes himself visible to Anthony to force him to confront an unknown part of his history, but Anthony similarly loses his mind as his art piece inspired by the legend becomes the thread in a series of unsolved deaths. The decision to make Candyman only visible to Helen, Anthony, and the audience is a compelling illustration of the way slavery's past functions: the slavery institution may not be physically with us today, just as Candyman is not always (if ever) physically present in each film, but the damage caused by its raging spirit is conspicuous.

To summarize, the legend of Candyman offers a conceptual framework that is useful for thinking through the operations of the afterlives of slavery. Through a Black specter, who carries multiple layers of symbolism, the central narrative of

Candyman sits at the intersection of the afterlives of slavery and the supernatural, which elucidates the otherworldly dimensions of Hartman's concept. As the EJI's lynching memorial suggests, the project of dismantling racial inequity is inextricably tied to the project of laying to rest the deceased, or as Toni Morrison would say, exorcising the ghosts of slavery, whose lives were violently robbed from them.[19] *Candyman* conveys a similar argument—Candyman *is* one of those ghosts, one that reincarnates in the 2021 film. Furthermore, in her remake, DaCosta maintains the fundamental components of the legend, but reworks the problematic elements of the original film. Most importantly, her sequel brings the legend of Candyman to its full potential by retelling the story through a Black male protagonist. As cultural critic Noah Berlatsky assesses, "sometimes a story has to circle a while before finding its perfect teller." In DaCosta's film, Candyman has finally found the right voice to say his name. The "right voice" for Candyman is a Black voice that steers clear of condemnation and stereotyping in its storytelling about Black trauma and white racism. While Briefel and Ngai once concluded from the original *Candyman* (1992) that "the horror film ultimately may be an inadequate vehicle for addressing the issues Candyman wants to address," DaCosta shows that horror films are actually pivotal vehicles when the stories are told from the Black perspective (90).

THE NEW *CANDYMAN* (2021)

DaCosta corrects problematic elements of the original *Candyman* in multiple ways, making the afterlives of slavery

19 This idea is centered in her foundational novel *Beloved* originally published in 1987. Similar to Candyman, Beloved is killed as a ramification of slavery and her spirit comes back to haunt the living. At the end of the novel, Beloved is exorcised, and this frees Sethe and allows her to move forward.

real and visible in the cinematic world. One key factor is that DaCosta humanizes the Black male protagonist from Rose's film by clearly painting Candyman, and all the Candymen that came after him, as innocent victims of white terrorism. While the story of Daniel Robitaille, the "first" Candyman, remains the same, DaCosta extends his story by introducing a contemporary Candyman. Unlike Daniel Robitaille, this Candyman is not a lynching-by-rope victim; instead, he is an innocent victim of police brutality. The new Candyman, also known as Sherman Fields, is wrongfully accused of putting razor blades in candy and passing them out to children. The police respond to a young white girl's grievance by posting wanted signs for Cabrini-Green's Candyman, the assumed-to-be culprit. The young William Burke finds Candyman hiding in the walls of the laundry corridor of an apartment building, and—initially frightened—he screams, unintentionally disclosing Candyman's location. When the police sirens begin, William says that he saw the "true face of fear" emerge on Sherman (00:19:28). The fear in this scene is cleverly displaced; viewers might expect fear to be generated by the ominous Candyman, but that expectation quickly dissipates once William realizes Candyman is harmless, and Black fear of the police takes its place instead. The police officers become the source of horror in this opening scene, and William and Sherman's fear is validated. As William recounts, the officers "swapped" Sherman and "killed him right there on the spot" (00:20:10). The horrific and unjust manner in which Sherman is executed reflects the American history of police brutality that continues to lynch Black Americans. The officers take his life into their own hands without due diligence, let alone a trial for Sherman, who turns out to be innocent of the purported crime.

In DaCosta's *Candyman*, William recalls that Sherman's face

was "beaten so badly it was unrecognizable," clearly alluding to the lynching of Emmett Till.[20] Both Black male victims were wrongfully and brutally put to death on the unfounded grounds that they had offended a white girl/woman. This allusion evokes the fictitious rape charge that was used as an excuse to execute Black men. The mere thought of a Black man violating a white woman sent white men into lynching frenzies even though the actual act of rape was rarely proven. As Jonathan Markovitz explains, the rape charge was "valuable to lynchers because it covered up less honorable motivations for mob violence" like "securing white supremacy" (13). Sherman Fields and Emmett Till are successors of Candyman, and all three are victimized by the glorification of white womanhood. Throughout DaCosta's film, viewers are compelled to view all the Candymen, lynched by rope or lynched by way of police brutality, as inseparable, and this is perhaps the most important part of the film's adaption of the old legend. As previously established, police brutality is a descendant of earlier forms of white violence, such as lynching and slave patrolling, that have been used against Black people throughout the course of American history. Although the last recorded lynching in the United States was Michael Donald in 1981, lynching continues to manifest in contemporary forms of white on Black violence that maintain the tradition of exterminating Black Americans.[21] By casting Sherman, and later Anthony McCoy, who are both victims of police brutality, as Candymen, DaCosta's film calls viewers to reconsider Candyman not as an isolated incident, but as representative

20 Emmett Till was a fourteen-year-old Black boy who was brutally murdered, beaten to the point that his face was no longer recognizable, after being accused of offending a white woman at a grocery store in Mississippi in 1955. For more on this topic, see Katie Nodjimbadem's "Emmett Till's Open Casket Funeral."

21 For more on this topic, see Neal Conan's "The 'Last Lynching.'"

of all Black men who have lost their lives to racist violence and the collective Black trauma that these killings have produced.

Candyman *is* the afterlives of slavery, the premature death, impoverishment, and in the words of Christina Sharpe, the "everyday mundane horrors that aren't acknowledged to be horrors" (*Monstrous Intimacies*, 3). As an adult, William Burke explains:

> Candyman ain't a he. Candyman's the whole damn hive. Samuel Evans, run down during the white housing riots of the '50s. William Bell, lynched in the '20s. But the first one, where it all began, the story of Daniel Robitaille … a story like that. Pain like that. Lasts forever. That's Candyman. (00:51:45)

The hive imagery evokes M. NourbeSe Phillip's work on the haunting of the slave ship Zong, which disrupts the living because of the holes in the archive that prevent us from properly burying the dead. It also reflects the collective Black trauma that continues to fester because of the continuation of racial violence. In William's line, Samuel Evans, which is seemingly a fictional name, represents countless Black men who were "run down" and killed during the white housing riots of the 1950s in Chicago. These riots were spearheaded by white supremacists wishing to deter Black Chicagoans from moving out of the increasingly overcrowded and destitute South Side, and into white neighborhoods. In particular, the Cicero riot of 1951 drew worldwide attention as a white mob (reminiscent of a lynch mob) of approximately four thousand white Chicagoans set fires to and destroyed an apartment building housing a single Black family. William Bell, an actual lynching victim in the real world, was a thirty-three-year-old mar-

ried man who had migrated to Chicago from Georgia when a racist mob crushed his skull with a baseball bat in 1924. Bell's brutal murder only recently received recognition as a result of the EJI lynching memorial. The planners for Bell's memorial reassured the public that they will not differentiate Bell's death from the others in the memorial even though he was not lynched by noose, as is typically assumed when the term lynching is used. This approach is in alignment with DaCosta's expanded concept of Candyman. At the end of the film, the original figure of Candyman rises, and then numerous figures of Candymen rise behind him, establishing the idea that Candyman represents an entire lineage of Black men who were victims of racial violence, lynched by noose or otherwise. The film's movement back and forth between film characters and real people emphasizes that the horrors that are presented, although wrapped within a ghost story, are meant to be taken literally and prompt serious critique of America's historical pattern of white terror.

In *Candyman* (2021), when William says that "Candyman is how we deal with the fact that these things happen … That they're still happening," he means that lynching and other forms of racialized killings are still happening all around them and that the Candyman legend is a form of displacement, one that allows the Black community to cope with the pain derived from Black death in the past and present (00:52:45). Although told as a ghost story, one initially disbelieved by Anthony and Brianna, the Candyman legend turns out to be real, and the pain from the lynching of Daniel Robitaille is reignited every time a Black man is wrongfully killed by law enforcement. This excruciating pain "lasts forever," impacting generations and generations of Black Americans. William's lamentation that "a story like that. Pain like that. Lasts forever" furthers the earlier point about the remnants

of slaves from the Middle Passage in the ocean and the remnants of lynching victims in the soil today. The blood, tears, and flesh of Black bodies literally "lasts forever" in the Earth and metaphorically "lasts forever" in their constant resurrection through new Black bodies that are pulverized through atrocious acts of violence that carry the same logic of slavery, and in some ways even repeat the same methods of execution. The fact that Candyman is told as a ghost story clarifies the relationship between the supernatural afterlife and the afterlives of slavery. Slavery repeats, resurrects like a ghost once assumed to be dead. Candyman is the ghost of slavery that continues to reincarnate and haunt the Black community through gentrification, mass incarceration, systemic and structural racism, and ongoing white violence.

The legend of Candyman, when seen through the lens of academic discourses around the afterlives of slavery and American lynching culture, opens up critical lines of inquiry that relate to the intersection of the horror genre's depiction of afterlives and that of Black studies. Black studies and the horror genre have a shared interest in the return of some sort of monster—whether it be a serial killer, an evil spirit, or the slavery system—horror films and Black studies scholarship have both interrogated vicious cycles of brutality. DaCosta's *Candyman* makes this connection explicit by amplifying the ghost and using the supernatural to represent generations of injustice. She also brings the central narrative of Rose's film full circle and improves it by shifting perspectives, humanizing the Black male protagonist, avoiding white redemption, and centering the afterlives of slavery. In these ways, DaCosta's *Candyman* demonstrates that horror can be used to inflict an "oppositional gaze," a term used by bell hooks to mean a rebellious look or a look back at white oppressors who have always been in possession of the gaze (115). The legend of

Candyman that Rose's film introduces is a powerful metaphor for the uncanny nature of cycles of racial oppression and Black trauma, but by telling the tale through a white female protagonist and a white filmmaker, its potential to do critical work was undermined. DaCosta reclaims Candyman and allows Black people the opportunity to take control over a narrative that was always, at its core, a horror story about Black death and Black pain. As Elizabeth Alexander has argued, a "white-authored national narrative deliberately contradicts the histories our [Black] bodies know" (80). Black-authored stories like DaCosta's *Candyman* grant Black people the power to control the narrative and tell their own stories, which liberate rather than traumatize the Black community. The genre of Black horror is a form of storytelling that powerfully demonstrates how the supernatural can operate as a key theoretical framework for the legacies of slavery and racial trauma.

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