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With/Out Sanctuary

Deborah Elizabeth Whaley

Teaching Race, Trauma, and Collective Memory through Photography in a Graduate Humanities Course

In 1911, a Midwestern Black woman, Laura Nelson, came to the aid of her son, L.W. Nelson, who was accused and convicted -- without any deliberation or trial -- of killing an Oklahoma police deputy. Mrs. Nelson confessed to the deputy shooting in an attempt to stall her son's fate, and as a result, both mother and son were imprisoned for the crime. On a May afternoon, Laura Nelson and L.W. Nelson were kidnapped from their respective prison cells, gagged with torn sack fabric, and hung from a bridge above the Canadian River. The two bodies dangled midway above the river-- listless and limp as they choked to their eventual deaths. For weeks after, hundreds of townspeople from the western region of Okemah, Oklahoma visited the bridge to view the hanging bodies and to have their picture taken on the bridge as they smiled and looked down upon Mrs. Nelson's and L.W. Nelson's hanging Black bodies. Not until the rope around the dead carcasses' necks gave way and the bodies dropped to the bottom of the river did white spectators cease to visit the execution site, which up until that point existed as a central site of the lynch mob's amusement.

In 1918, an eight-month pregnant Black woman, Mary Turner, expressed in public that she would work to ensure the lynch mob who murdered her husband would meet their punishment in a court of law. In response to Turner's public threat to hold the lynchers accountable for their crime, a white mob kidnapped Mary Turner, roped her ankles together, and tied her to the limb of a tree. While forcing her head downwards, the lynch mob drenched her clothing with gasoline and lit her dress afire. Barely alive, Turner's burned body quivered while a member of the mob took a sharp hunting knife and cut the eight-month-old pregnancy from her womb. When the fetus dropped from Mary Turner's hanging, burnt blackened body, another member of the mob stomped his boot on the fetus' head and crushed it beyond recognition. Days after, the Associated Press reported that although Mary Turner was dead, white Georgians remained upset over her imprudent remarks as well as her indolent attitude.(1)

Introduction

When the exhibition based on James Allen's collection of lynching postcards, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* opened, and Twin Publishers released its accompanying book, it re-ignited a dim fire under the horrors of lynching in the U.S., and the disparate race, gender, and sexual relations that informed them. The history

of lynching and its historical precedents is well known and documented in historical writing. (2) Yet, the Allen collection of lynching photos stands out as distinct because its collection primarily consists of postcards exchanged by living human beings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On these postcards, commentary on the backside spoke of general events and amusements curiously detached from the heinous visual image on the front side. Postcards that did acknowledge the front image expressed that the lynched body was an assumed thief, rapist, or simply stated that there had been a “Negro barbecue” or “coon cooking” that evening. As one correspondent jubilantly wrote to his father on the backside of a lynching postcard in 1916: “This is the barbecue we had last night; my picture is to the left with a cross over it, your son Joe.”

Joe’s postcard documents the prevalent description of Black bodies as a process of digestive consumption. Through the exchange of these images in the postal mail, recipients of the postcards re-consumed them in the open, free market. Joe’s backside commentary inscribes lynching postcards as commodities for exchange, which documents the demise of another human being. In 1911, distribution of lynching postcards through the postal mail became illegal. Nevertheless, this did not stop their production, demand, or trade. To the contrary, the law facilitated an underground trade market to emerge and flourish, where members of lynch mobs and willing spectators continued to exchange proof of their assumed racial superiority and their unquestionable power over the lives of Black Americans. As James Allen writes, the exchange of lynching postcards in the nineteenth and twentieth century reveal “the lust propelled by the commercial reproduction and distribution of the images,” which worked to “facilitate the endless replay of anguish.” “Even dead,” writes Allen, “the victims were without sanctuary.” (3)

This paper consists of reflections on teaching disturbing racial imagery in American life within the context of race, trauma, and collective memory in a graduate American Studies course at a doctoral granting, urban public university in the New England region of the United States. I argue hereon that lynching postcards and similar visual documentation are a useful pedagogical tool in casting attention to the attitudes that led to these extra-legal (i.e., outside of the law) executions. In view of the horrid nature of the act of lynching, the graphic content of the photographs that documented them, and the inhumanity suggested in their postal exchange, what pedagogical function do lynching postcards serve other than the recapitulation of guilt, national shame, and anger? Lynching postcards are relevant for examination and worth pedagogical consideration because they are tangible examples of remorseless racism. By remembering lynching, discussing the exchange of lynching postcards, and locating modern manifestations of the attitudes that gave birth to these and other odious acts of violence, the possibility of isolating and not repeating subtle and overt forms of racism becomes a probability. As a pedagogy piece written in the name of social

justice in education, this paper makes no claims to recapitulating the history of lynching, nor do I present a review of the extant literature on lynching. Rather, I utilize the photography exhibition *Without Sanctuary* and its exhibition catalogue essays as a starting point to explore pedagogical approaches to teaching visual images of race, ethnicity, and national identity “without,” as Stuart Hall writes of the uneasy materialist work of anti-racist cultural transformation and counter knowledge production, “guarantees.” (4)

That is to say, this paper assumes teaching about/of race is a process of struggle without easy resolve and guarantees of success ahead of time. It accepts as a working premise that pedagogical experiences are an unfinished process completed, at times, years after the initial experience. Notwithstanding the lack of assurance in the success of any one pedagogical approach, I draw on the interdisciplinary outcome that emerges from encouraging and directing diverse skill development with photographic images. I begin with a discussion of lynching postcards and a review of the voices that provided the narrative for their recent exhibition. Next, by walking through a term assignment I developed for graduate students on this subject, I explore the problems and possibilities that focusing on race, trauma, and collective memory through visual images enable for students. Thus, the first part of the paper provides a context to understand the complex meanings that the images invoke as forms of material culture and as objects of mass consumption. The final portion of the paper uses student voices and projects to report on the interdisciplinary methodology and multi-cultural literacy developed after the completion of the assignment.

Bittersweet Profits and Bitter Still Prophets: The Struggle to Make Sense and Meaning of Lynching Postcards

Cultural critic Farah Griffin observes in the documentary *Strange Fruit*, which critically explores the cultural work of singer Billie Holiday’s song of the same title, that a latent script exists in images of lynching. Rarely, observes Griffin, were the lynched guilty of the crime purposed by mobs. Lynching thus emerged as “ways to police Black communities when there was a sense that Black people were making too many economic and political gains.” (5) In January of 2000, the exhibition *Without Sanctuary* opened in a small gallery on Manhattan’s east side of New York and transformed the hidden scripts Griffin refers to into monstrous, intertextual artifacts for racially mixed audiences. The exhibition drew thousands of spectators, thus forcing the collection to move to New York’s Historical Society building and prompting a subsequent national tour. Four voices, collector James Allen, *New Yorker* journalist Hilton Als, Congressman John Lewis, and historian Leon F. Litwack illuminate modern spectators’ relationship to the exhibition of lynching postcards and to the controversy the exhibition caused in Twin Publishers hardbound installation catalogue. The authors blend self-reflexive narratives, cultural contexts, historical precedents, and

aesthetic interpretations to unpack the complex meanings and current relevance of an under-examined area in the history of lynching.

Without Sanctuary's authors attest that while sexual transgression or sexual jealousy was often the underpin of the ideology that justified lynching, the assumed offenses of Black Americans that preceded their lynch-pin death also consisted of acts that broke the unspoken racial code created in the dominant culture's imagination. As Leon Litwack, a historian of African American history and author of several articles and books on lynching explains:

Many of the transgressions by Blacks would have been regarded as relatively trivial if committed by whites and were not grounds anywhere else for capital punishment: using disrespectful, insulting, boastful, threatening, or incendiary language; insubordination, impertinence, or improper demeanor (a sarcastic grin, laughing at the wrong time, a prolonged silence)...being troublesome...and (in the eye's of whites) trying to act like a white man. (6)

The psychological and behavioral framework Litwack adds to the lynching story explains the multiple reasons they occurred throughout history. Yet, in Litwack's analysis of post mortem lynch sites, he also adds description about the thoughtlessness that took place after Black men and women were illegally disposed of through the lyncher's tortuous rope. Again, writes Litwack, "What ever their values as laborers, Black people were clearly expendable and replaceable in the Antebellum era." (7) Expendable they were indeed, and for the lynch mob, news of the lynched body and efforts to captivate the proud acts via photography and to disseminate those images were immediate. For example, in the lynching of Thomas Brooks, a Black man in Tennessee, the lynchers' haste to trade evidence of their act was a chilling site of what one might consider Bakhtinian (8) carnivalesque:

Hundreds of Kodaks clicked all morning at the scene of Thomas Brooks' lynching. People in automobiles and carriages came from miles around to view the corpse dangling from the end of a rope... Picture card photographers installed a portable printing plant at the bridge and reaped a harvest in selling postcards showing a photograph of a lynched Negro. Women and children were there by the score. At a number of country schools the day's routine was delayed until boy and girl pupils could get back from viewing the lynched man. (9)

The *Without Sanctuary* exhibition and accompanying text did not situate lynching in the past alone, as it exposed the feelings and violence that gave rise to lynching as an ongoing (though certainly transformed) process within current social relations. Hilton Als, a writer and reporter for the *New Yorker*, explains that there are intertextual connections between the history of lynching and current social relations between

Black men and women and white Americans. In his writing about how the exhibition affected him as a Black male spectator, Als reveals that in the photographs and postcards he re-viewed an existential reincarnation of himself: “I am not dead” as the bodies in the photographs, explains Als, “but I have been looked at, watched, and it’s the experience of being watched, and seeing the harm in people’s eyes—that prelude to becoming a dead nigger.” “What is the relationship,” he asks as a Black male intellectual and writer, “of the white people in these pictures to the white people who ask me and sometimes pay me to be [their] Negro?” (10)

Similar to Litwack and other historians of lynching in the U.S., Als reveals that the idea behind the lynch mob mentality is to deny the inhumanity of the act by dehumanizing the victim, exacerbating and manufacturing their guilt, and legitimating and affirming their right to use extra-legal means as a tool to silence dissent and assert social control. Lynching is a dialectic between not only the lynchers, lynched, and the whites that stand by and watch then, but lynching is also a dialectic between the lynched and the members of the group who identify with the mutilated body racially, culturally, or ideologically. Because lynching is a means of social control, essential to the act is to intimidate others who might cross and transgress similar boundaries. Als uses the example of lynching to suggest that in our current racial milieu, this leads historically marginalized groups to “exercise a similar sensitivity where white people are concerned, [in order] to avoid being lynched by their tongues or eyes.” (11) On this form of intimidation, Als asks the reader/viewer to consider the trauma that the families of the lynched throughout history incurred, too. He writes: “Did the families in these pictures stand at the periphery and wait for it all to be over, when someone, maybe the youngest among them, could climb the tree and cut Cousin or Mother or Father down?” (12)

In the essay, “Can You Be Black and Look at This?” cultural critic Elizabeth Alexander uses the example of the 1955 murder of Emmet Till and the 1991 beating of Rodney King to illustrate that as witnesses to acts of violence against Black Americans, family members and other Black members of that community are left with the collective memory of the event and therefore bear the hidden text of the act in their own flesh. Those of this group that are not physical witnesses, she writes, become witnesses nonetheless by ocular means; they know the truth of the story behind the lynching. (13) Family members of the lynched and their compatriots are the historical actors absent from lynching photographs--these warriors went on and tried to recover after the murder of consanguine or direct-blood kin.

While Litwack provides a historical lens and Als a more personal, insurgent one, the collector of the images answers the questions that literature on lynching up until recently did not address, that is, their commodification. As a collector of material

culture, James Allen came upon the postcard collection by accident while at a rummage sale in search of antiques and miscellaneous artifacts. Allen recalls:

A trader pulled me aside at the flea market and in conspiratorial tones offered to sell me a real photo postcard. It was Laura Nelson hanging from a bridge...that image of Laura layered a pall of grief over all my fears. I believe the photographer was more than a perceptive spectator at the lynching. Indeed, the photographic art played as significant a role in the ritual as torture or souvenir. Studying these photographs has engendered in me a caution of whites, of the majority, of the young, of religion, of the accepted. (14)

What does the consumption of the images as postcards and currently in the form of their recent exhibition offer historians and cultural critics in thinking through the linkages between transformative pedagogy, aesthetics, production, and consumption? An examination of the consumption and trade of lynching postcards among different racial groups provide at least two competing narratives of their social, cultural, and political function. These narratives help one see lynching postcards as more than tools of spectacle and cultural hegemony. Postcards of lynchings certainly became a form of braggadocio for those who condoned these mass-inflicted executions. Lesser known, however, is that Black Americans would also use and send lynching postcards for alternative means to warn, document, and disseminate news about them to family, relatives, and friends, so that they too would know about the unlawful executions.

Audio of Songs Protesting Lynching

Such was the case with the postcard in the collection that documents the 1908 hanging of three brothers: Virgil, Robert, and Thomas Jones. On the backside of the lynching postcard, the sender writes, "I bought this in Hopkinsville, 15 cents each. They are not on sale openly...I read an account of the night riders affairs where it says these men were hung without any apparent cause or reason whatsoever." (15) The written inscription of the sender is key to understanding the complexity of lynching postcards in their trade. On the front side of the postcard, there is a rationalization for the Jones' brothers lynching via a caption beneath the photo, which claims the three men assaulted a white woman. In contrast, this particular sender acts as a conduit of truth, by sharing with the intended recipient that the lynching and the proposed crime was unfounded based on counter information. In addition, the sender's inclusion that the postcards were on sale through a discreet, underground market to white and Black Americans, show that the consumers of lynching postcards changed and particularized their own meanings of what the postcards meant.

For those who chose to act as an insurgent witness against lynching, they could do so by buying them secretly for different means and ends. Black American's dissemination of the cards created an alternative form of collective memory from the accounts dispersed by those whites who wished to contain and restrain Black citizens through acts of harassment and torture. As forms of material culture then, lynching postcards serve different psychological and cultural functions for the collector based on their subject positions, intention of use, and worldview. The exhibition catalog *Without Sanctuary* the text encouraged new witnesses to come to terms with historical and current manifestations of racism and lynching. The exhibition *Without Sanctuary* traveled across the nation to document, teach, and share the possibilities that arise from mixing self-reflexive text with visual documentation.

New Witnesses: The Challenges and Prospects of Teaching Race, Trauma, and Collective Memory through Photography

After teaching a graduate course on race, ethnicity, and nation for the first time a few years ago, I began to rethink ways to help students – the large majority of whom were white – draw connections between theories of race and how racial attitudes pervade individual consciousness and hold material consequences for historically marginalized groups. At the time, the *Without Sanctuary* exhibition had recently moved to the University of Georgia and was at the tale of its national tour. Its stop in Athens, GA was particularly controversial because the state of Georgia was the site where several of the lynchings pictured in the exhibition took place. For university students and other visitors at the University of Georgia exhibition, lynching leaped from the pages of history books and became horrifically real. The names of those lynched, women like Laura Nelson and men like the Jones brothers, became human beings instead of dead, burnt, hanging black bodies. With their narratives placed alongside the postcards, which often included the backside note and salutations on the cards, the intent of the perpetrators became ever more clear. Those who exchanged lynching postcards were not impotent bystanders; whether good or bad in their intentions, they were social actors and historical agents whose actions or inaction had material effects.

These narratives would hold relevance for students in ways that might invoke self-reflection and humanistic learning. As objects produced for consumption and re-consumption through monetary and then free trade via the postal mail, lynching postcards carry the potential to serve several vital pedagogical functions. Lynching postcards tell a didactic, multi-layered story of race, trauma, and collective memory. These postcards also mark a significant historical moment of violence against a historically marginalized group during a moment when Black Americans' status, not to mention the lynchers' status, was unstable and in flux. Lynching is just one example

where one might connect the overlapping concerns of race, trauma, and collective memory.

Peter Nien-chu Kiang, a professor of Asian American Studies, American Studies, and Education explains his experience in using a particular historical event—Japanese internment in WWII—as a lens to open up issues concerning race, nation, and class struggle in a graduate course. His intent was to maintain personal commitments to transformation within an intellectual context to a largely homogenous graduate student body, while still providing for student voice and instructor self-reflexivity:

During my first semester...graduate students in my weekly social studies design course openly rebelled after the first class meeting, in which I described my broad commitment to antiracist, multicultural education and my specific intent to use the Japanese American internment experience as the focus [for the course]. [But] . . .by using oral histories, poems, video excerpts, role plays, and reflective writing activities within our own class, I . . . moved many students. . . .As a result, they began to reflect more critically and concretely about their own responsibilities to become effective teachers. (16)

Kiang speaks of the complications, challenges, and resistance that arise when teaching and training white adults to function effectively in a multi-culture, multi-lingual, and poly-national nation state. He also implicitly suggests that subject position of the teacher and student shapes the discussion and reception of this work within a material context. Kiang's narrative shows an earnest concern for his students despite difficult racial dynamics. A host of texts, anthologies, and essays suggest that the above experience is common for minority and non-minority professors with transformative intents. (17) However, Kiang was able to intensify students' multi-cultural literacy and cognitive sophistication through the case study of Japanese Internment. Furthermore, publishing his account provided an important model for teachers and students alike to realize pedagogical transformation against the odds.

Pedagogy theorist Paulo Freire writes that transformative education emanates from educators who humble themselves in order to learn from their students. He prescribes that educators avoid the 'banking method of education,' where a perceived expert transmits knowledge into an empty receptor. "The banking method of education," writes Freire, "will never propose to students that they critically consider reality." (18) Thus, a trusting teacher/learner realizes that it is necessary to step back from a learning environment, in order for learning to step forward for students. My own goal in teaching about race, trauma, and collective memory was the following: How could I structure the classroom so our predominantly white students and their ideas might emerge as central where they had the opportunity to grapple with the difficult material in our course that focused on race, ethnicity, and nation?

As a way to speak to this concern and in the tradition and spirit of Kiang's and Freire's critical and transgressive teaching methods, I designed a term assignment to facilitate students to engage in the type of critique found in the Without Sanctuary exhibition catalogue. The richness of the varied voices—that of the collector, journalist, historian, politician, and critic provided us with muscular written examples of interdisciplinary writing about the very difficult subject the class was to grapple with: race, trauma, and collective memory. Through this term assignment, students would have the opportunity to use the course to think through the many dimensions of race and at the same time hone skill development in vital areas in humanities training: aesthetic, cultural, historical, and self-reflexive analysis. The aim of the assignment was to encourage students to think through race and ethnic relations from an interdisciplinary and personal standpoint, instead of within an adversarial relationship with the groups under examination, not to mention the person in a position to grade and evaluate their work. The structure of the assignment would situate students as producers of original cultural knowledge on issues of race, ethnicity, and nation from a variety of frameworks.

Students would likely know of the general history of lynching, especially as this was a graduate course. However, I structured the assignment so that students might delve deeper into the psychology behind more ambiguous historical actors Hilton Als refers to in *Without Sanctuary's* lynching story. This would include actions that do not necessarily classify as overt forms of racism. For example, what of those who snapped the troublesome pictures, looked on and did not act, smiled on at the hanging carcasses, traded lynching cards, or received them in the postal mail with anticipation? What of those who imagined that the demise of one Black body would allow them to rise as central and triumphant? As cultural critics, what might one learn from Black Americans who used lynching postcards for subversive means? The aforementioned historical actors and questions point to a host of un-resolvable contradictions much more ambivalent than the assumed outright racism of the actual 'lynchers.' Students were thus encouraged to collectively grapple with these contradictions in their own writings about images that document race and ensuing trauma experienced by a historically marginalized group, however aesthetically subtle or brutally graphic in their photographic documentation.

The images chosen by students, like lynching photography, might allow for the tangible evidence of racial inequities and would avoid the epistemological solipsism that at times results from the reading of purely written texts (i.e., if I don't see it or experience it, it does not exist position). The only restriction in the assignment insofar as the actual imagery chosen was that students not choose lynching photography for examination, since this was the textual example they were to use as a point of departure. The assignment required that students find images that document racial violence and the ensuing collective response by a variety of ethnic groups,

including but not limited to: the white working class, Latinos, Asian Americans, African Americans, Euro-ethnic groups, American Indians, and Arab or Middle Eastern Americans. Of great importance in the writing about these images was to consider how the writer (students) sees themselves within the middle of the contradictions the images pose, as spectators, as historical actors, and as agents. The precise assignment was as follows:

The final project asks you to incorporate the objectives for this course into one 20-30 page written and multi-media project on the subject of American nationalism, ethnicity, and racialization. This collaborative project requires that you work with another student. After reading, viewing, and digesting Allen's *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* and our readings on race, trauma, and collective memory, you will try your hand at the cultural and historical analysis of controversial racial imagery in American life. You will take two photographic images of race and trauma and juxtapose the images' representational, historic, political, and cultural meanings. Students will combine their visual images, written analysis, and other forms of multi-media into one portfolio per group. You might think of this assignment as an opportunity to try your hand at well-written historical, cultural, and visual interpretation in a detailed, succinct manner--a writing exercise that may help you with your MA degree project, curriculum development, or MA internship. I included that the intended outcome of their collaborative venture and written portfolio was four-fold:

- 1) First, students will acquire the skills to write about visual imagery in three primary ways (aesthetic, cultural, historical).
- 2) Second, the written portion will prompt ways to think self-reflexively about how difference impacts social relations and individual lives.
- 3) Third, finishing the department's final project, curriculum, or internship requirement for the MA program may necessitate creating a relationship of intellectual, writing, and emotional support with another peer. This collaborative project may lead to creating a meaningful and lasting relationship.
- 4) Finally, students will learn how to write about and discuss images and topics that are often disturbing and controversial in an accessible, collegial manner.

Taken as a whole, student portfolios would work as an interdisciplinary project of cultural, historical, and visual analysis. Of the presentation of their images outside of the written portion, students in the class would:

Host an exhibition open to the campus community where pairs of students will discuss their images and how the images demonstrate the material effects of racialization. The format of the reception is similar to that of an art exhibition, therefore, while you are required to speak about your art installation and prepare,

your discussion of the project will constitute informal conversations with interested spectators. In fact, if it seems applicable, part of your participation at the reception (and in your written pages) might take into account how you would teach your visual representations in a cultural and historical context to students in secondary education or in a professional sphere. If you were a high school teacher, journalist, librarian, archivist, or grant writer for the National Endowment for Humanities, how would you discuss these images and their impact to your students, constituents, or readers for educational purposes?

Every student was responsible for writing up his or her own findings. Students split their research, written, and visual work 50/50 and signed a contract that identified their topic, the commercial and/or documentary photographs under examination, and the responsibility of each student for portions of the writing assignment. Most significant, is that in their collaboration with another peer on the project students would exchange their ideas on race, ethnicity, and nation with each other, thus providing an alternative intellectual space in addition to formal class time. In their production of the portfolios, they would concentrate their energies on the final project, the research, and developing an intellectual relationship with a peer. Given Italian theorist Vilfredo Pareto's 20/80 Distributive Law Theory used in Organizational and Business and Economics Theory, that is, that 20 percent of the workers do 80 percent of the work, group work certainly has its limitations. (19) However, by placing the students in dyads and requiring each student to designate specific sections of the assignment to complete, for the most part, it curtailed issues that arise in collective intellectual ventures. This was one of the successes of the assignment.

There were a variety of responses by student-colleagues. One student wrote to me after the exhibit noting that s/he:

felt strongly that the exercise was well worth the effort on the part of the students. I liked the whole idea ... and the entire idea/selection of the final project should certainly remain in the flow of this class. It really culminated what we learned both educationally and also as presenters of information. I think as students start to move out of the context of academia and go out into occupations that will force them to prepare and present information, this will have been a very worthwhile exercise.

Indeed, many were excited about creating their project after reading the essays and texts on race, ethnicity, nation, trauma, and collective memory, expressing that *Without Sanctuary* in particular was "the most interesting thing they had ever thought about," "a powerful way to begin and end a course," and a useful opportunity to integrate "visual and intellectual analysis." Others felt uncomfortable in viewing the images and reading the text in *Without Sanctuary*, because of its (in their view) coffee-table-book-aesthetic that might desensitize its audience through inundation of

the images. Some expressed that the images and text in *Without Sanctuary* made them feel ashamed, but purposely wanted to confront issues of shame with their own juxtaposed visual installations. A few students struggled with the difference between historical analysis (situating the image in time and space) and cultural analysis (examining the cultural values, norms, and practices from which the image speaks to) in their research and initial writings about their visual images. Yet, most of these problems withered as they collaboratively worked with their learning partner and had the opportunity to exchange their own historical knowledge, delved into researching the images, and made sense of their own meanings and interpretations throughout the semester. The deconstruction of the images' aesthetic qualities came the easiest to students, and they wrote their self-reflexive analyses in a thoughtful and introspective manner. Since the assignment encouraged students to explore areas of race, ethnicity, and nation that interested them, they could in effect make sense out of our reading material by pursuing what captivated them intellectually and personally. Those who felt distanced from the *Without Sanctuary* collection found that their skepticism of the use of visual images actually prodded them to carefully think through how they would discuss their own chosen photographs.

Students' projects speak volumes about the benefits of writing analytically about material forms of racialization via photography and visual images. For example, a variety of topics were enthusiastically covered by students, including: images of Boston busing, American flag imagery, school desegregation, the Persian Gulf War, child violence and hunger, the American Indian Movement and Indian genocide, Chicano murals and suicide, and genital mutilation in Africa. The night of the class' exhibition, students explained their installations to the class, and while they spoke, we listened to the musical selection they chose to accompany their projects. Students spoke of the significance of their choice of music as necessary framing for their visual images and research. A diverse array of music, including African, classical, jazz, folk, heavy metal, and R&B presented aural landscapes of meaning for student/co-teachers and interested spectators. In addition, students shared how they came to see their visual images as invoking trauma on a minority collective in a substantial way. Nearly all students included that their feelings of the images changed over the weeks of the semester, growing deeper as they had to articulate what emotion, or lack of emotion, the visual texts posed to them as citizens. As each group presented on their projects, they became the teachers in the course, and had the opportunity, via the images, to explain what race meant to them, and what they believed was credible documentation of racialization, which necessitated a collective response by a minority group. In this evening—in this sustained two and one half hour space—race became more than a social construct—race became real.

Conclusion

In Dwayne Wiggins' 2000 remake of Billie Holiday's song "Strange Fruit," "What's Really Going On"--Strange Fruit," he reinterprets the song as a metaphor for modern manifestations of lynching. He uses the example of being 'watched' by white society and the problem of police brutality experienced disproportionately by Black men on a day-to-day basis for his re-interpretive claims. For Wiggins, the lynch mob's rope has morphed into racial profiling and subsequent harassment, both physical and mental. His lyrics convey that while 21st century racism is different from 19th and early 20th century racism, the ideology of assuming Black Americans as always-already guilty and mistrustful remains intact. This is apparent in the following stanzas and chorus about his own experience with law enforcement and mainstream society:

*Looked into my rearview
Someone is watchin' me and you
I knew it had to be the man
He told me, "Turn off your car"
I was breakin' no laws
So why'd you have to put your hands on me?
Southern trees bear strange fruit (Hey, hey, hey)
Blood on the leaves, blood on the roots
Society, there's no truth
Tell me what's really goin' on (Yeah).*

Wiggins's modern lynch odes situate lynching as a current rather than a past occurrence. Just being, as he informs, is a source of alarm in the eye's of law enforcement—just being a Black man "rollin' down the street" can incite humiliating detainments and near death beatings. What is most striking about his account is that as much as academicians can theorize and write about race, trauma, and collective memory, "What is Really Going On--Strange Fruit" is happening in the streets as we write and as we teach. As learners and co-teachers, perhaps our biggest hurdle to overcome is taking the next step from learning new ways of seeing and interpreting to changing the social relations that surround us, which must indelibly start with the self. In her exhibit review of *Without Sanctuary*, cultural critic Dora Apel reminds that the lynch mob mentality directed at Black Americans remains, as seen and documented in recent hate crimes. She also notes that the term itself, that is lynching, is a floating signifier with multiple and expansive meanings. (21) Understanding, revisiting, and teaching about lynching and modern manifestations of race, trauma, and collective memory should think through how to combat it by recognizing and aborting its current psychology. Some of this work might entail what sociologist Michael Ashmore describes as self-reflexive writing practice in the humanities and social sciences: "wrighting." Ashmore's relevant articulation marks the integration of writing

resistance and writing to right to produce transformative intellectual work that encourages an increase in consciousness, accountability, and pro-action. This scholarly writing strategy admirably and respectfully represents the fundamental connection between the social struggles that affect us all as responsible citizens to our everyday practices. “Wrighting” therefore has the potential to hail readers to read with compassion and self-reflexivity to know, place, and position the self, and to dare to act justly on a day-to-day basis in an unjust world. (22)

In a poem about Billie Holiday’s song “Strange Fruit,” titled “Canary,” the Black poet Rita Dove writes of the relationship between knowing, self, and community. Dove’s mix of prose and metaphor show how Billie Holiday’s music as enunciated in her voice and performance was infused with contradictions, her experiences, growing consciousness of the world around her, and despair in the seemingly limited opportunities for change in US race relations. Dove writes:

*Billie Holiday’s burned voice
had as many shadows as lights,
a mournful candelabra against a sleek piano
the gardenia her signature under that ruined face.
[...]
Fact is, the invention of women under siege
has been to sharpen love in the service myth.
If you can’t be free, be a mystery. (23)*

The candelabra of light and sultry voice and performance of Billie Holiday in her song “Strange Fruit” bears an underlying subtext of race, trauma, and collective memory. Her voice of protest is one that we must not forget; her subject matter is one that we must continue to teach and try to understand; her melancholy performance is one that should incite action against, as Dwayne Wiggins’ reminds, “What is Really Going On/Strange Fruit” in our everyday lives. Billie Holiday’s explication of strange fruit, James Allen’s exhibition of lynching photography, and a caring pedagogy show that to live without sanctuary produces a yearning to “wright” of and for it, and to live with sanctuary bears a responsibility to extend it in the global, national, and local spaces we defend as and call home.

End Notes

- (1) I paraphrased and condensed these two accounts of lynchings by Leon Litwack (Laura Nelson's story) and James Allen (Mary Turner's story) from the hardbound installation catalogue book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*.
- (2) Hine et al, 2003; Fitzhugh, 1993; Ingalls, 1988; Shapiro, 1988; Harris, 1984; Barnett, 1969.
- (3) Allen, 2000.
- (4) Hall, 1996.
- (5) Griffin, 2002.
- (6) Litwack, 2000.
- (7) Ibid.
- (8) Bakhtin explains carnival as the site where power, sex, and racial relations transverse, transpose, and converge into a site of disassembled social protocol. See Bakhtin, 1983. On lynch crowd looking politics see also Esteve, 2003.
- [9] Litwack, 2000.
- (10) Als, 2000.
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) Alexander, 1994.
- (14) Allen, 2000.
- (15) Ibid.
- (16) Kiang, 2001.
- (17) See for example the documentary, *Shattering the Silences* (1997) on faculty of color in the academy and *Skin Deep* (1995) on college campus racism and racial and ethnic reconciliation, both available from California Newsreel, 149 9th Street San Francisco, CA 94103. See also Freyberg, 1993; Wright Myers, 2002; Lim ed., 2000; Padilla ed., 1995; Miheuah and Wilson, ed., 2003.
- (18) Freire, 1970.
- (19) Pareto, 1968.
- (20) Apel, 2003.
- (21) Apel, 2003.
- (22) Some of this important work is already underway. For example, on October 3-6 2003 a conference on lynching at Emory University included one paper that was explicitly about Black women lynched: Renee Ater, University of Maryland, College Park "Visualizing a Woman Lynched: Meta Warrick Fuller and Mary Turner: A Silent Protest Against Mob Violence" and a panel: Artistic Responses to Lynching and Racial Violence: Black Women Playwrights. This panel explored the subject of lynching as written about by Black women playwrights. Presenters included: Koritha Mitchell, University of Maryland, College Park, "A Different Kind of Strange Fruit": Understanding Lynching Drama by Black Women," Barbara Brewster Lewis, New York University, "Rehearsing Citizenship: Three Early Twentieth-Century Lynching Dramas

by African-American Women,” and Judith L. Stephens, Penn State University, “Georgia Douglas Johnson's Lynching Dramas.” On the term “wrighting” see Ashmore, 1989. (23) Dove, 2000.

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