“COLORED PEOPLE’S TIME”: PRAXIS AND TEMPORALITY IN THE STAND-UP PERFORMANCES OF RICHARD PRYOR AND JACKIE “MOMS” MABLEY

by

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

"COLORED PEOPLE'S TIME": PRAXIS AND TEMPORALITY IN THE STAND-UP PERFORMANCES OF RICHARD PRYOR AND JACKIE "MOMS" MABLEY

by

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Oppression can be interpreted as a process through which specific groups are created and subordinated for the purpose of mediating, and in so alleviating, the alienation of privileged groups. As oppression operates on many levels—e.g. the social, the economic, the psychological, the bodily, and in the academy—it leads to the development of a number of issues. Oppression can be conceptualized in terms of temporality. Those who are oppressed are atemporal: this atemporality is phenomenological in that oppressed groups feel as though they are socially and psychologically fixed. The oppressed internalize and reiterate their own oppression, oppression that the academy also perpetuates. While these dynamics call traditional methods of inquiry into question, comedic discourse bypasses these problems. Group laughter—based in relief, incongruity, or superiority—reflects a collective consciousness. More importantly, as a group these various types of laughter are indicative of psyches beholden to and free of the ideological constraints of oppression. Audio recordings of the stand-up performances of two of the U.S.'s most gifted and influential stand-up comedians—Richard Pryor and Jackie "Moms" Mabley—constitute rich cultural artifacts reflective of popular attitudes about black oppression and freedom.

This dissertation examines explicit and implicit theoretical articulations of oppression and freedom. Using the black existentialist writings of Frantz Fanon as a theoretical framework; my dissertation, a discourse analysis of the stand-up comedic performances of Moms Mabley and Richard Pryor, locates both Mabley and Pryor within the school of thought that frames oppression as a process defined by the phenomenal fixity of the subordinated. Part of the richness of Mabley and Pryor's comedy is that as the performers alternate between positions of subordination and positions of privilege they are able to detail how various types of oppression—those based on race, sex, gender, and nationality—are suffered, enforced, and transcended. For these comedians the transcendence of oppression is equated with a phenomenal residence in the present. This mode can be achieved by the appropriation—sometimes active, at other times passive—of violence, and praxis grounded in care. Overall, Pryor and Mabley argue that embracing all of one's possibilities of agency is the key to freedom.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Mom and Dad, who knew the time.

Prologue

My life's a culmination of my past achievements.
With a lotta heavy lifting,
Lotta deep breathing.
A lotta courage, lotta doubts a lotta mixed feelings.
A lotta love, a lotta luggage for a lotta reasons.

I ain't forgot about the pain and all the mistreatment.
I ain't forgot the little box they tried to wiggle me in.
I ain’t forgot about the flower deep
Underneath the crowded street
Sproutin’ in between the cracked cement, shoutin’ ‘Baby!’

Fought em’ like a lion in the Colosseum
And you be positive I think I'm in the mausoleum
You think I'll ever hang it up, oh Money stop dreamin’
You think I'll ever stop, oh baby now you're reachin’
I won't stop…

“Callin’ Out”
Later That Day (2003)
Lyrics Born

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Chapter I: Comedy as Expository Discourse

I ain't no joke
"I Ain't No Joke"
Paid In Full
Eric B. and Rakim

"What the Fuck Am I Doing Here?"

There are many popular stories about Richard Pryor. Before he became the cutting-edge comic that most people know him as he was by the standards of his day a successful black comedian—with the emphasis being on "black" (Pryor 1995). Early on in his career, when his day was 1967, he was performing standup comedy at one of the big Las Vegas casinos at the behest of entertainer Dean Martin; and at the time his act could best be categorized as a Bill Cosby rip-off, Cosby being that era's premiere black comedian.

Pryor took the stage and looked out at an audience that looked nothing like him—one can assume they were virtually all white—and he had a moment. Surveying the situation, he decided that it was not for him. Rather than leaving the audience empty-handed he left them with an insight into one of the plights that coincides with being black. More to himself than to them, he asked, "What the fuck am I doing here?" Then, he walked off the stage. Then, he became the raw comedian that many of us know (Pryor 1995).

There is a problem of time. Black people are fixed.

More so than—yet related to imposed conceptions of blacks in terms of historical time, perceived stage of emotional development, and their options for disposing of their

labor time—the atemporality of blacks addressed by this dissertation is phenomenal. It happens at the level of consciousness and experience; it results in a restricted sense of agency; and it is lived in terms of the body. This body that is spoken of is not strictly physical. Instead it is a psychical amalgamation of possible actions.

The intention of this atemporality is to create a subjectivity through which whites can relieve their alienation. Yet, the atemporality of blacks intersects with atemporalities of sex, sexuality, region, the broader category of race, and class to create other privileged subjectivities similar to that of whiteness.

Included in this problem of time are the ways in which the oppressed reiterate their oppression. While the location and experience of this atemporality is at the level of the body, the procedures through which this atemporality is affected are varied: physical, economic, psychical, social, cultural, and residential. The pervasiveness of this assault translates into conditions and situations where the oppressed emulate the process of their oppression. They atemporalize themselves and others. Even the words of the subordinated are sometimes structured to justify and reproduce the dynamics of their own atemporality.

For anyone, including sociologists, interested in understanding black experiences these issues lead to a series of important questions. How do blacks conceptualize their atemporality? Furthermore, how do they conceptualize colored people's time—the workings of and possibilities for embodying phenomenal experiences of time that transcend the atemporalities that they currently suffer? Finally, how can one—given the high degrees to which people reiterate their own oppression—glimpse unaffected responses to the two previous questions?

The temporality of oppression is covered or alluded to in a number of disciplines: sociology, philosophy, feminist theory, Harlem Renaissance thought, the Negritude Movement, post-colonial theory, post-Harlem Renaissance U.S. black literature, black feminist theory, and scholarship speaking to African-American experiences[1]. Frantz Fanon (1967) provides a clear exegesis of the issues of black atemporality and colored people's time in *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World*.

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hipnessAnzaldúa1 In classical sociology Karl Marx (Marx 1973; Marx 1977; Marx 1978a; Marx 1978b; Marx 1978c; Marx 1978d; Marx and Engels 1978; Marx 1992) discusses the temporalities of the proletariat. The various iterations of the dynamics of the problem of temporality are laid out in the philosophical works of Jean-Paul Sartre (1946, 1956, 1956, 1963a, 1964, 1975a, 1975b, 1975c, 1988, 1989), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), G.W.F Hegel (1975, 1977), Emmanuel Levinas (1987), Simone de Beauvoir (1993), and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002). Similarities to the descriptions of female temporality found in de Beauvoir's (1993) work can be found in feminist works by Virginia Woolf (1957), Friedrich Engels (1978), Julia Kristeva (1986), Betty Friedan (2001), Kate Chopin (2003a, 2003b, 2003c), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (2009).

Claude McKay (1956, 1957, 1970), Rudolph Fisher (1969, 1992), Langston Hughes (1993), Nella Larsen (1997), Alain Locke (1997b, 1997c), Jean Toomer (1997), and Zora Neal Hurston (2000) are Harlem Renaissance writers who discuss various forms of black temporality. Negritude poets Aimé Césaire (1983a, 1990, 2000) and Léopold Sédar Senghor (1991); and post-colonial theorists Albert Memmi (1965), Edward Said (1979), Johannes Fabian (1983), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988), Trinh T. Minh-ha (1989), Octave Mannoni (1990), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), Paul Gilroy (1993), Lewis Gordon (1993), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) offer non-U.S.-centric views on temporal subordination.

Post-Harlem Renaissance U.S. black novelists do a good job of examining the atemporality of blacks, especially as it intersects with the atemporalities of sex: this includes the work of Richard Wright (1940), Chester Himes (1945), Cecil Brown (1969), Toni Morrison (1970, 1987), Alice Walker (1982), and Ralph Ellison (1994). A focus on the intersection of blackness and sex is provided in black feminist works by bell hooks (1981), The Combahee River Collective (1982), Angela Davis (1983), Paula Giddings (1984), Audre Lorde (1984), Michelle Wallace (1989), Anna Julia Cooper (1990), Leith Mullings (1997), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000).

Various perspectives of black temporality are also provided by works addressing the nuances of African-American experiences: David Walker (1829), W.E.B. DuBois (1935, 1997, 1998), Oliver C. Cox (1948), Margaret Hodgen (1964), Kwame Ture and Charles Hamilton (1967), Carol Stack (1974), Stephen Steinberg (1980, 1995), Stephen J. Gould (1983), Eric Foner (1988), Booker T. Washington (1989), Gunnar Myrdal (1994), Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994), Melvin Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro (1995), Arnold Rampersad (1997), David Roediger (1999), and Fredrick Douglas (2003). And an excellent and accessible description of the process of atemporality can be found in the work of Dr. Seuss (1961).

Fanon (1967) dictates certain methodological necessities for studying black a/temporality. He suggests, given the degree to which academia perpetuates the atemporality of blacks, that a small number of cases be examined. In this manner he finds that cultural artifacts are an excellent source of information due to their ability to expose many unadulterated perspectives. Coupled with the veracity of these artifacts is their generalizability. Cultural artifacts popular among a large group of people testify to the group's perspective. Finally, Fanon (1967) identifies an easily accessible practice and sign which reveals the entry into colored people's time, the transcendence of atemporality: laughter.

The perspective that drove Pryor to abandon such a promising path to stardom can be discerned from an audio recording of a standup performance he gave recent to his departure from that Vegas stage. During an improv set (Pryor 2005a) a black audience member starts to ask Pryor to do what seems to be the act of a popular white comedian (The request is inaudible), and Pryor responds:

> Richard Pryor: Please, I'm doing us. This is my first chance to do us. All my life I've been doing them. *[Laughter]* Now I get to do us. Let me do us. *[Audience member interrupts]* What?
>
> White Audience Member: Your accent's not right.
>
> Richard Pryor: What do you mean my accent ain't right? There you go telling us how to be. *[Laughter]* *[Applause]*

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) defines the world as, "the field of our experience" (406) and, "a collection of things which emerge from a background of formlessness by presenting themselves to our body as 'to be touched', 'to be taken', 'to be climbed over'" (441). The constraint that the situation placed on doing standup comedy that articulated

black worlds (i.e. on "[doing] us") is what drove Pryor from that Vegas stage (Pryor 1995).

Barriers to authenticity are an important part of Richard Pryor's standup, and they were related to much of what Pryor experienced in his everyday life. The forces of constraint were always plaguing Pryor. Born in 1950 in Peoria, Illinois, he was kicked out of school at the age of fifteen because of his family's involvement in red-light enterprises (Pryor 1993; Pryor 2000). He joined the army at the age of eighteen; yet he also found that to be a stifling experience. His initial forays into comedy were successful, but as mentioned before the ghost of Bill Cosby haunted him; people expected him to be another version of someone else. Strangely enough, these expectations continued even after Pryor embraced and found success with his wild style. Professionally, he often clashed with executives about his ideas for movies and television shows, and his personal life also had him dealing with constraint. While he was married numerous times—five women, seven marriages (McCluskey 2008b)—he felt that the emotional and monogamous demands of marriage were often a hindrance (Pryor 1995).

The path of authenticity is the major leitmotif of U.S. black comedy, something which the standup of Pryor and other black comedians—often strives to articulate (Watkins 1994). Racial oppression and slavery have made constraint the defining condition of black existence in the U.S. (DuBois 1935; Cox 1948; Ture and Hamilton 1967; hooks 1981; Davis 1983; Foner 1988; Steinberg 1995). In terms of possible palliatives heaven is far off in the future. But, comedy is here and now; it serves as the major technique through which blacks in the U.S. deal with their oppression (Watkins 1994; Haggins 2007). The vitality of black comedy partially stems from the conditions of oppression. While overt physical and intellectual forms of resistance by blacks elicit harsh responses, comedy does not. The reason given by whites for this

is the confluence between U.S. black comedic practices and the supposed child-like nature of blacks (Watkins 1994; Roediger 1999). On the other side, in terms of black agency, comedy—and this is true for all people—represents an easy and accessible practice through which their conditions and situations can be considered and critiqued. Comedy is the major venue—in terms of popularity and efficacy—through which people of various backgrounds detail the nature of their oppression and the possibilities of freedom (Watkins 1994; Critchley 2002; Freud 2002; Billig 2005).

Standup comedy is a very authentic form of comedy (Watkins 1994), and one does not have to look hard to find another extremely successful and influential black comedian who, like Pryor, is similarly driven to give clear representations of black life in her standup performances. Like Pryor, Jackie "Moms" Mabley is a colossus in the field of U.S. comedy (Williams 1995). By the age of fifteen Loretta Mary Aiken's parents had passed away, each involved in a separate car accident in her hometown of Brevard, North Carolina. At the behest of her step-father, she was slated to marry a much older man; rather than yield to this fate she joined a traveling vaudeville show and went on to become the U.S.' first successful black female standup comedian. Groundbreaking, successful, and influential in a manner similar to Pryor; "Moms" Mabley was born in 1894, dead in 1975. She had a career that spanned very restricted to relatively numerous opportunities for black entertainers. Starting out on the black vaudeville circuit, it eventually got to the point where she was getting as much as $10,000 per week to perform standup at the Apollo Theater in Harlem during the 1960's.

Mabley was very successful: appearing on the stage, television, and in movies. Yet, even after garnering acclaim, like Pryor, she was forced to bear the expectations of

others. Popular during the beginning of the 20th century, Bert Williams was one of the first popular black entertainers; early on in her career Mabley was expected to be a female version of him. Also, like other successful black performers of her day, Mabley often had her material co-opted. Many white performers would go to black shows, then go back to their white audiences and pass bowdlerized versions of the stolen material off as their own. Mabley went so far as to state that she had only witnessed one comedian, white or black, who had not taken parts of her act: Jack Benny (Williams 1995)[2].

Like Pryor, Mabley also has as a goal the subversion of constraint through authentic portrayals of black worlds. Mabley often refers to her audience as her "children" (Williams 1995); and when explaining during a standup routine why they come to her show she (Mabley 1964) cites the hard to acquire experiences with which she provides them: an understanding and reflection of their perspectives coupled with authentic presentations of the world (i.e. "the truth"):

> I love all young people. I do, that's the truth. You all call them delinquents, but they ain't to me. They love Mom. But, they'll kill you if you mess with me. *[Laughter]*
>
> Because they know I dig them. Atomic age with an atomic mind.
>
> Don't worry about these children because they don't need worrying about them. You done lied to them now *[Laughter]*. Too late, let em go ahead. Let somebody talk to them that knows what's happening because you don't *[Laughter]* and you don't go nowhere to find out *[Laughter]*. That's the way that is.

[2] Pigmeat Markham, another successful black comedian and contemporary of Mabley, points out how white comedians such as Milton Berle and Henny Youngman would come to black shows and copy black material for later usage (Williams 1995).

The importance of having his performances resonate with black people, its centrality as a goal of Pryor's comedy, gets reinforced during a recorded interview that Pryor (2000h) did early on in his career during 1974:

> Interviewer: What was the happiest moment in your career so far?
>
> Richard Pryor: In my career? I think when people – when I first started and Black people recognized me. You know, I'd be in the so-called ghettos, Black people would know what I was doing and they'd come up and say hi to me. It wasn't like I was, like, a movie star or nothing like that. I was just some person they knew and they liked what I was doing. That was the beginning of high points and it's been all up since then. It just keeps getting better. But that means the most to me of all of it.
>
> It was like – 'cause one time, I went to New York. I was in New York with Redd Fox and I was doing [white shows]. And he took me up to Harlem, we were on Merv Griffin together and he took me up to Harlem and everybody was howling, 'Hey, Redd. Zorro.' That was his nickname, you know? 'Hey, Zorro.' And they all knew him. Not many people knew me, you know? And I said, 'Shit, something's wrong. I'm doing something wrong here. I don't know. I wanna be known up here.' 'Cause we were downtown together and a lot of White people knew me – come up to me and say hi. You know, I didn't resent that. I liked that, but I wanted to be known at home, too. And I said, 'I'm doing something wrong. I wanna get a grip on this.' 'Cause I liked that.

For Pryor (1995, 2000h, 2005a) and Mabley (Mabley1964; Williams 1995) standup comedy is a communal endeavor governed by a reciprocal relationship between the comedienne, her audience, and the comedienne's material. The comedienne is obligated to provide her audience with a vision of the world that condenses the haze of illusion into an authentic portrait of the audience's life. The problematic influence of ideology on society makes her labor necessary. Ideology hinders sociological research. However, along with producing responses that evade the oppressive mechanisms of ideology, comedy accentuates a collective consciousness. For these reasons, standup comedy performances are a useful object of sociological inquiry about issues of oppression.

The Problem of Ideology

Pryor and Mabley on Dominant Narratives

Pryor and Mabley condemn the dominant racial ideology in the U.S. because it distorts the nature of black life. Discourse about blackness elides the true nature of black worlds and black existence. Mabley makes this point in her discussion and reappraisal of a skewed popular narrative (1964):

> I wrote this book in here. I ain't got time to sit up here and tell you children's jokes. I ain't got time to read it all to you, but I wanna read ya' the one about little Cindy Ella. You all called it little Cinderella in that lying book that you all got. *[Laughter]* Once upon a time in a little Southern town, way down South, lived a little girl named Cindy Ella. She had long black hair, pretty brown eyes, pretty brown skin. Well, let's face it, she was colored. *[Laughter]*
>
> Little Cindy Ella dressed very shabby because she had to use her money to pay the note on her boyfriend's Cadillac. *[Laughter]* She worked for a mean, mean, mean old woman and her two ugly daughters. Ugly. UG-U-G-L-Y. Ugly. *[Laughter]* They was so ugly until they had a dishonorable discharge from the White Citizens Council. *[Laughter]* One day the mean old woman and her ugly daughters got an invitation to a prom dance. It was the biggest dance of the season. That was the time that they usually picked Miss Klu Klux Klan. *[Laughter]* The mean old woman and her two daughters left for the dance. Little Cindy Ella wanted to go, but she knew it was impossible so she sit down and started crying.
>
> Just about that time, a knock came on the door. And, guess who it was? Her friend, Bobby Kennedy. *[Laughter]* He had two magic wands in his hand, the Constitution and the Civil Rights Bill. *[Laughter]* He said, 'Little girl, why are you crying so hard?' She said, 'Because I want to go to the prom dance at the University of Mississippi because my boyfriend, James Meredith goes to school there.' *[Laughter]* One wave of the magic wand and her raggedy dress had turned into a beautiful white lace dress. On her pretty black head, she had a pretty blue ribbon. She looked down at her feet and her shoes had turned to gold and glass slippers. She went over to the mirror and [to] her surprise, she had turned as white as snowy bleach. *[Laughter]* She said, 'Mirror, mirror, on thee wall, who's the fairest of them all?' The mirror says, 'Snow White and don't you forget it.' *[Laughter]*

> Another wave of the magic wand and she looked out the window and there was a gold coach with a white horse and a white chauffer. Little Cindy Ella started out the door and Bobby said, 'Be sure and be back by 12:00.' Little Cindy Ella was having such a good time at the dance, all the men wanted to dance with little Cindy Ella and all at once she forgot what time it was. The clock struck 12:00, her beautiful white dress had turned to rags, her bow on her head turned to a stocking cap. *[Laughter]* She looked down and her gold slippers had turned to sneakers. *[Laughter]* She looked out the window and her coach had turned to a wagon and the beautiful white horse to an old nag and her chauffer had turned to [Pig Meat Markham]. *[Laughter]* Everybody was gazing on the floor at poor little Cindy Ella, the little colored girl, dancing with the president of the Ku Klux Klan. *[Laughter]* This story is to be continued, her trial comes up next month. *[Laughter]*

Secondary, in this case, to her sex and gender critiques are Mabley's critiques of discourse that fails to speak to black experiences[3]. This correction of the story of Cinderella is in line with Mabley's (1963, 2004a, 2004a, n.d.) general dismissal of fables. She finds that they foster misleading perspectives about the world that lead to horrible consequences. For instance, in this bit Mabley (1964) accurately points out the limits of de jure solutions to racial oppression and the burdens of labor heaped upon black women. What sets this condemnation of Cinderella apart from Mabley's general dismissal of fables is her statement that the lies told through the traditional story of Cinderella elide black presence in the world: white historical narratives exorcise blackness. In fact,

[3] Mabley's telling acknowledges and contravenes the idolization of white femininity. Even though Cindy has turned white, the mirror vociferously reminds her that Snow White, the zenith of white femininity, is the prettiest. Another unattributed version of this exchange ends with the mirror responding, "Snow White…you black bitch and don't you forget it" (Dorinson and Boskin 1988:175). Her black past taints. Yet, a minor phenotypical change—from having brown skin to having white skin—is enough to transform a pretty black girl into the most desirable girl at the dance. The aesthetic hierarchy, which includes Cindy and her employers, further evidences Mabley's critique of European notions of beauty. Prior to the minor phenotypical change, Cindy is still the most attractive of the four. Also of note is the eruption and squelching of white heterosexual male desire of black women, a historical source of repression of black females in the U.S. (hooks 1981; Hill Collins 2000).

Mabley takes it further. For her, the story of Cinderella has expropriated and white-washed a black experience[4].

Like Mabley, Pryor derides the status of blacks in dominant narratives. One such example comes up when he explains why he always roots against whites when there is any black-white interracial competition (Pryor 2005b). He admits that sometimes the white person may be more skilled and more deserving (e.g. basketball player Jerry West), but the predominance of black people's achievements being undervalued has influenced his rooting to the degree that it follows the dictates of extreme affirmative action. As an example, he cites the undue fanfare which follows the Osmond Brothers and the lack respect given to superior performers The Jackson 5. His frustration is so great that this particular skit climaxes with Pryor yelling, "Motherfuck an Osmond Brother." In this situation (Pryor 2005b), Pryor's ire is related to the obfuscation of the roles that blacks have had and continue to play in society. He does the same when he asserts the blackness of biblical kings David and Solomon (Pryor 2000i), undermining Hollywood's constant casting of white actors to play them.

Pryor is very consistent in undermining oppressive narratives. Sometimes it is subtle: such as when he describes World War II, in the context of its popularity as a

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[4] In a certain sense, Mabley is correct. All around the world one can find versions of the Cinderella story (Zipes 2000), yet it is often presented as a white story. The tactics employed by Mabley (1964) with the story of Cindy Ella represent her most consistent approach to rectifying the relationship of blacks (and black women in particular) to the elisions fostered by dominant historical narratives: she inserts a black person, most often herself, into prominent historical narratives. Famous black celebrities are sometimes used: such as when Martin Luther King Jr., Adam Clayton Powell Jr., Roy Wilkins, Dinah Washington, and Louis Armstrong are placed in high-ranking positions in the federal government (Mabley 2004b). At other times, both Mabley and other famous blacks make appearances. This is the case with one of the more prominent situations in Mabley's standup: Mabley (1963, 2002, 2003a, 2004a, 2004b, 2004b) as U.S. ambassador to various countries and the U.N., jobs that often include her interacting with President John F. Kennedy. In other skits she associates with President Dwight Eisenhower (Mabley 2004a) and President Richard Nixon (Mabley 1995a; Mabley 1995b), and one of her ambassadorships involves Mabley accompanying Jackie Kennedy to India (Mabley 2003a). She describes other interactions between herself and famous female social activists such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Clare Luce Booth (Mabley 1984) and Mamie Eisenhower (Mabley 2002).

setting for U.S. action films, as, "the good war. That's when [the U.S.] was the good guys" (Pryor 2005a). This is a sly statement that serves to point out that in many other conflicts the U.S. has often played the opposite role. In other cases Pryor's undermining of oppressive narratives is more heavy handed. Excluding slavery, on multiple occasions he attacks notions of benign imperialism and resultant narratives that obfuscate the role that oppression has played in the development of the U.S. and the world. The oppressive working conditions faced by Mexicans (Pryor 2005b) and Chinese workers on the California railroads are addressed (Pryor 2000c), as are the unjust means through which the U.S. has appropriated Mexican land (Pryor 2000h). The detrimental affects of Christian expansion (Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b) are covered. Also covered is the treatment of Native Americans and slaves and the anti-populist tendencies that define U.S. history (Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2005b). More importantly, he addresses the colonial attitude towards procuring and retaining private property and its relation to the writing of history. Most of these themes come together in one particular sketch (Pryor 2000d):

> Pryor imitating hillbilly: Golly. I'll tell you, you know this country's a goddamn good place to live.
>
> Fucking-a, you better believe it buddy. America's my home. I don't give a fuck. You love it or leave it goddamn it.
>
> My fucking forefathers, we come over to this fucking place, I'll tell you what, wasn't shit here.
>
> God damn bunch of Indians hoopin' and hollerin', makin' fuckin' noise all over, buffalo shit layin' around. [We cleaned] this goddamn place up and made it what it is today. You better fucking-a believe it.

The hillbilly's statement is filled with contradictions, and it obscures many of the violations carried out in the name of colonial expansion. The hillbilly says that the U.S. is, "a good place to live," but then he acknowledges that there are those who complain about their experiences living in this country. Next, the hillbilly states that there was nothing in the U.S. until his people came over, a statement that is followed by an acknowledgement that there were Native Americans and nature prior to imperialist expansion. Finally, and highly discordant with the actual experiences of subordinated racial groups in the U.S. (e.g. Mexicans, Chinese, Native Americans, and blacks) (Zinn 2003) is the assertion that his white ancestors provided the sole labor that has made the U.S. the unique monument it is today. Most pertinent is the revelation of what seems to be the biggest problem that Pryor has with dominant narratives: temporality and narrative only start with the introduction and pertinence of whiteness[5].

Pryor (2000h) drives this point home in another skit, one concerning the U.S. historical narrative about drug epidemics:

> I meet people – since I stopped doing drugs, I found out there's more motherfuckers doing drugs. I mean doctors and shit. Old ladies, 'Give me that blue one. And give me another red one, please.' *[Laughter]*
>
> Like, they call it an epidemic now. That means White folks are doin' it. *[Laughter]*
>
> 'Cause you all used to drive through our neighborhoods and shit and go, 'Oh, look at that. Isn't that terrible?' *[Laughter]* Then you'd get home, your 14-year-old would be fucked up. You'd go, 'Oh my God! It's an epidemic!' *[Laughter]* Maybe next time you see Black people in trouble, you'll help. Maybe. *[Laughter]*

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[5] Here Pryor's linkage of time and narrative is in line with French philosopher Paul Ricoeur (1983), who equates time with narrative.

Pryor is making an argument similar to Marx's (1978c) take on colonialism, which states that things such as property rights and freedom of religion are only acknowledged when they concern the colonizer. The hillbilly's description (Pryor 2000d) only addresses white experiences. As such, what was in what is now the U.S. is only to be acknowledged as existing since whiteness has been introduced. Similarly, only the labor of whites is temporalized. As he discusses epidemics, Pryor (2000h) once more describes a situation that only becomes a part of the dominant historical narrative once it begins to affect whites. Furthermore, in narratives about blackness, blacks carry the scent of scandal (Pryor 2005a). While Hugh Heffner is called a "playboy," a black man around Pryor's neighborhood doing similar things is called a "pimp." Pryor (2005a) surmises that, "It's not what you do; it's how you do it *[Laughter]*." When one does something as a black person dominant narratives will distort your presence. This absence of narratives that are authentic and resonate with blacks is something that both Pryor and Mabley seek to rectify, and this problem can be traced to the dynamics of ideology and how these dynamics interfere with the study of black life[6].

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[6] Famous is Karl Marx's (1978a) judgment that, "[religion] is the opiate of the people" (54), a statement which asserts the extreme and detrimental influence that dominant ideologies have on society. The prominence of oppression, including its ideological role in the construction of dominant narratives about the privileged and the subordinated, hinders authentic articulations of perspectives, which makes it a serious impediment to studying how subordinated people conceptualize their existence (DuBois 1935; Myrdal 1944; Cox 1948; Sartre 1948; Memmi 1965; Fanon 1967; Marx 1977; Marx 1978d; Said 1979; Steinberg 1980; hooks 1981; The Combahee River Collective 1982; Lorde 1984; Sartre 1988; Spivak 1988; Minh-ha 1989; Mannoni 1990; Mohanty 1991; Sochen 1991; de Beauvoir 1993; Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1994; Peller 1995; Steinberg 1995; Mullings 1997; Tuan 1998; Anzaldúa 1999; Césaire 2000; Hill Collins 2000; Friedan 2001; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002; Zinn 2003; Welcome 2004). So, the influence of oppression must be accounted for when examining how black people conceptualize the possibilities of freedom from oppression.

Marx (Marx and Engels 1998) goes even further in *The German Ideology*, stating that an epoch's dominant ideas are always those which support the ruling class. With these dominant ideas having their foundation in material relations, those relationships of production which define the epoch in question, the alienating nature of modern society means that this pervasive mindset is counter to the betterment of society (Marx 1992).

The Dynamics of Ideology

The internalization of oppression can cloud inquiries into the workings of society. Frantz Fanon (1967), in *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World*, details how dominant ideologies concerning race, sex, and class interfere with attempts to acquire an understanding of how people (both privileged and subordinated) view society and their role in it. Rather than providing a sincere answer people end up reiterating the dominant ideology, perspectives which support their oppression. The same point is made in Simone de Beauvoir's (1993) *The Second Sex*, a text that while dealing with race on a very basic level focuses on the oppression of women; and in Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's (2002) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, a text which analyzes racial and sexual oppression. A clear exegesis of the effects of ideology on research into the lives of blacks can be discerned from the work of Frantz Fanon (1967).

To be black is to be a problem (Fanon 1967). As the embodiment of all of society's evils, those who are black often find themselves misrepresented in the narratives that are supposedly about them. When blacks are studied, rather than their lives laying between the lines of books, paragraphs are filled with the neuroses of society. Rather than tales about their struggles to be free, supposed descriptions of black existence

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More than merely dominant in the sense of being pervasive; the dominant ideology, that which supports the existence of the dominant class, is presented as universal: the interests of the dominant class are presented as the interests of society as a whole. For Marx (Marx and Engels 1998) the ways in which power relationships and material life influence ideology are important. These issues are taken up and expanded upon by neo-Marxists Antonio Gramsci (1971) and Louis Althusser (1998). Gramsci (1971) focuses on the means through which understandings about society are enforced, distinguishing between the direct domination produced by the state and the hegemony of civil society. Althusser (1998) follows Gramsci (1971) in identifying two progenitors of ideology: the state apparatus and the ideological state apparatus, the latter being similar to Gramsci's (1971) conceptualization of civil society. This observation (Althusser 1998) is augmented by his analysis of the nature of ideology, wherein ideology is contrasted with social reality. The former is man's relationship to the latter. Other prominent social theorists (Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), whose work focuses on racial and sexual oppression, share these Marxist perspectives on the problems of ideology.

serve as mythical testimonies to the power of their oppressors. Most, but not all, of these issues can be traced to troubles concerning language. The language of a person encompasses their world, but the language ascribed to and provided by black people often is not their language. They are misrepresented by the ethnologist; and burdened by the messages they receive about who and what they are, blacks often misrepresent themselves.

Lewis Gordon (2009a) finds a similar formulation of blackness as a methodological problem in W.E.B. DuBois's(1998) *The Souls of Black Folks*, and scholarship about the oppressed is filled with additional examples (Ture and Hamilton 1967; Said 1979; The Combahee River Collective 1982; Lourde 1984; Spivak 1988; Minh-ha 1989; Mohanty 1991; Steinberg 1995; Anzaldúa 1999; Hill Collins 2000; Friedan 2001). Gordon (2009a) argues that the prominence of oppressive ideology means that all theory and methods must be questioned and that the overall effect of racial oppression and the institutions that foster it is the strangling of black voices. Part of the problem is the deification of method. The focus on various disciplines' established methods is often extreme to the point that the methods only purport to reveal social reality. Instead, method must be subordinated to the social reality and questions that are under investigation. Kindness, rather than wrath, must be extended to black voices. To do this any research about the oppressed must focus on how the group views itself, and it must also focus on exposing the dynamics of oppression[7]. Cultural artifacts afford these opportunities.

[7] Fanon (1967), like Patricia Hill Collins (2000), suggests that this entails respecting intra-group diversity.

It is hard to honestly look at one's self. In fact, this may be the hardest thing that people do (Gordon 2009a). Studying culture is problematic in that its soul often evaporates under rigorous examination. Yet, culture is one of the ways through which people make and describe their worlds. Fanon (1967) admits to the complications of his task, but he also provides options. Summarizing the problems of racial oppression and methodology necessary to its study, Fanon (1967) proclaims the necessity of "[finding] sense in non-sense," a process which is essential to the workings of comedy (Freud 2002).

These methodological issues of ideology are alleviated through the expository nature of jokes and laughter and the ability of jokes and laughter to reflect a collective consciousness (Freud 2002). This expository power makes the standup of Richard Pryor and Jackie "Moms" Mabley an excellent opportunity to understand how black people conceptualize oppression: their suffering and escape from it.

The Expository Power of Comedy

The pervasiveness of oppression and its intersection with the dominant ideology mean that the work of comedians is extremely serious business. Comedy is a universal human praxis: one not restricted to any group (Critchley 2002; Billig 2005). Most importantly it is a process through which power can be confronted and, albeit temporarily, annulled (Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993; Watkins 1994; Ellison 1995; Critchley 2002; Freud 2002; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). In black intellectual thought, suffering from oppression and freedom from oppression are framed in terms of

the dearth and abundance of laughter (McKay 1957; Fisher 1969; Cesaire 1983a; Hurston 2000), as exemplified by a passage from Fanon (1967).

Interacting with some of those who are privileged (i.e. a white woman and her young white son) and having been named, Fanon (1967) cannot laugh. To be sure, Fanon (1967) states that there is some amusement to be found in the situation. But, laughter is impossible:

> "'Look, a Negro!' It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.
> 'Look, a Negro!' It was true. It amused me
> 'Look, a Negro!' The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.
> 'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible.
> (Fanon 1967:111-112)

There is amusement in the sense that being named appeals to Fanon's (1967) sense of humor, but lacking is the temporary and playful respite that one associates with comedy. Rather in this situation he finds "rumination." Previous to this statement, Fanon (1967) equates his racialization with interacting with one's self as one interacts with a thing. This repetitive and obsessive behavior is annulled through a situation, which allows Fanon (1967) "[to] laugh." Integrated with establishing the enemy and "[making] a scene," laughter forms the quintessence of Fanon's (1967) freedom.

Fanon (1967) and other black intellectuals' (McKay 1957; Fisher 1969; Césaire 1983a; Hurston 2000) characterizations of laughter as an (albeit temporary) emancipatory event is consistent with the assessments other theorists of social temporality have made regarding the relationship between laughter and oppression. de Beauvoir (1993), in her treatise on the oppression of women, finds that the young girl uncomfortable with the

expectations placed upon her body uses obscene language and laughter in such situations as, "a method of combat [and as] a defiance of adults, a kind of sacrilege, a deliberately perverse form of behavior [that flouts] nature and society" (371). Laughter subverts:

> "Even though laughter is still the sign of force, of the breaking out of blind and obdurate nature, it also contains the opposite element—the fact that through laughter blind nature becomes aware of itself as it is, and thereby surrenders itself to the power of destruction…..It is a promise of the way home."
>
> (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002:77-78)

Intertwined with its subversion is its role as signifier of an act of rebellion. Sigmund Freud (2002)—whose ideas about laughter and the psyche have strong parallels in the work of Fanon (1967), de Beauvoir (1993), and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002)—along with linking laughter to rebellion, argues that concurrent laughter occurring in the context of the subversion of power reflects a cohesive social perspective.

Comedy is an important topic in philosophy (Critchley 2002). G.W.F. Hegel (1977) spotlights the unconscious contradictions of Being, and he identifies a specific discourse through which these contradictions can be revealed and addressed. That discourse is comedy. In comedy,

> "[the self] shows itself to be entangled in an actual existence, and drops the mask which it once put on in order to act its part. The self, appearing here in its significance as something actual, plays with the mask which it once put on in order to act its part; but it as quickly breaks out again from this illusory character and stands forth in its own nakedness and ordinariness, which it shows to be not distinct from the genuine self, the actor, or from the spectator."
>
> (Hegel 1977:450)

The dynamics of comedy in this statement (Hegel 1977) mirror those of the for-itself (Hegel 1977), whose movement is equivalent to the workings of temporality (Sartre

1956). This process of comedy (Hegel 1977) puts people in time, the latter being a process which out of necessity means being free from oppression (Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993).

Theories of comedy can be divided into three categories (Critchley 2002; Billig 2005): comedy stemming from feelings of superiority, comedy stemming from incongruity, and comedy stemming from relief. Aristotle (1996) and Thomas Hobbes found feelings of superiority over one's fellow man to be at the root of humor. With the incongruity theory, "Humour is produced by the experience of a felt incongruity between what we know or expect to be the case, and what actually takes place in the [joke]" (Critchley 2002:3). This theory has been put forth by Immanuel Kant, Aurthur Schopenhauer, and Søren Kierkegaard among others (Critchley 2002; Billig 2005). However, when describing the perspective that Pryor (1995, 2000h, 2005a), Mabley (Mabley 1964; Williams 1995), Fanon (1967), de Beauvoir (1993), and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) share about the power of comedy; the relief theory of comedy as described in the work of Sigmund Freud (2002) is most applicable.

Existentialist Emmanuel Levinas' (1987) comments about the Shakespearean fool echo those of Hegel (1977) and other relief theorists of comedy: the fool, "is the one who feels and bespeaks with lucidity the unsubstantiability of the world and the absurdity of its situations" (59). Jean-Paul Sartre (1975c) goes further in having one of the characters in one of his stories situate jokes as a form of praxis; they have, "more destructive power in them than in all the works of Lenin" (109). Such is the nature of joke-based laughter in the premiere treatise on comedy as a form of relief: Sigmund Freud's (2002) *The Joke and Its Relationship to the Unconscious*, a work which parallels the perspectives on

laughter found in the philosophies of Fanon (1967), de Beauvoir (1993), and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002).

Freud (2002) has as a goal the explication of comedy. However, he concludes that comedy is such an ambiguous entity that a thorough explanation is impossible; yet, he does highlight some of its properties. Comedy is an overarching system that includes humor and jokes. Jokes and humor are always comedic, but everything that is comedic is not always a joke or humorous. People find comedy, "in persons above all, and only by extension in objects, situations and the like" (175), and there are various methods through which comedy can be produced. Its ultimate result is a pleasure that is most social and distinctly tied to the reasons why comedy is made. Through comedy that which is high can be made low; it also allows alternate viewpoints on the world—such as viewpoints unhindered by the dominant ideology. Comedy is no joke[8].

While both humor and the joke are subcategories of comedy, their workings are different (Freud 2002). Humor draws upon "distressing" situations. When a person is able to push down the anguish that comes from being in distressing situation, "the pleasure of humor" is possible: an example being Fanon's (1967) initial reaction to being called "a Negro." A person or people finding pleasure in the distressing situation of another are experiencing the pleasure of comedy. In humorous situations we laugh at ourselves. Comedy and jokes are different from humor because at the very least they depend on a duo. In comedic situations we laugh at something other than ourselves.

The goal of the joker is to produce pleasure in at least one other person (Freud 2002). In fact the joke is the most social means through which the psyche can experience

[8] Freud (1949) argues that the biological functions (e.g. sex and eating) simultaneously carry out the destructive and creative instincts. His later work (Freud 2002) suggests that comedy is also universal in this regard.

pleasure. The joker's success hinges upon her ability to get others to participate in insulting something that her audience usually would not: the target of the joke is always that which is found to be privileged.

The major mechanism of the joke is to "find sense in nonsense." The joke begins as a play with words and thoughts (i.e. nonsense), which causes critical thinking to diminish.[9] As soon as this happens pleasantry develops. This allows the joke to support its thought, creating a barricade against reason. Last, the joke allies itself with tendencies struggling against oppression. Inhibition (such as that fostered by ideology) employs psychical energy; and because of social constraints, attacks against the privileged are inhibited. In this manner, the dynamics of the joke have the ability to (temporarily) circumvent inhibition. As this subversion occurs the psychical energy needed to suppress unsanctioned impulses becomes superfluous. It is discharged as laughter.

Joke-based laughter is a sign and event through which repression is circumvented. Furthermore, it represents a social bond. During the joke, the joker and her audience are unified against the privileged entity that is the subject of the joke. This cohesion is based on similar situations; the joker and her audience find the same things funny because they have a similar outlook: they suffer from a similar oppression.[10] According to Freud (2002) the necessity of this collective consciousness makes the joke the most social form

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[9] The joke's play on words is similar to that of hip-hop (Bradley 2009), and in both genres this process is linked to the subversion of oppression.

[10] Freud's (2002) analysis lends itself to two significant interpretations of racists and other oppressive jokes. Despite adhering to the form of the joke, oppressive jokes can be interpreted as comedy based on incongruity or superiority. Blackness (Fanon 1967) and Woman (1993) as other are both Other. As such they deviate from the norm (i.e. Whiteness and/or Male) which makes them incongruous. Similarly, as Other Blackness and Woman are opportunities through which the superiority of the One (i.e. Whiteness and/or Male) is articulated.

of comedy because it requires the joker to draw at least one other person into a comedic situation; laughter is the sign of the joker's success.

While Freud (2002) does not directly make the point, it stands to reason that simultaneous laughter can serve as evidence of a collective consciousness even when its basis is not the Freudian joke: as in the case of group laughter based on feelings of superiority or group laughter based on incongruity. Emile Durkheim (1984) differentiates between mechanical and organic societies. With the former, the collective consciousness (i.e. shared thoughts) is responsible for holding society together; with the latter type of society this task is maintained by the division of labor. Erving Goffman (1959) frames laughter as a means of maintaining the collective consciousness: laughter, acting as a means of social control, occurs when norms are violated. Goffman (1959) finds humor to be important. He calls it, "a catharsis for anxieties, and a sanction for inducing individuals to be modest in their claims and in their projected expectations" (Goffman 1959: 14). George Herbert Mead (1967), like Freud (2002), identifies humor as a means through which unconscious dynamics can be accessed. Laughter can be grounded in the relief that one feels from not having to suffer a troubling situation. In the work of Goffman (1959) and Mead (1967) there is testimony to the laughter of the incongruous and the superior reflecting a shared collective consciousness when it occurs simultaneously within a group. With a basis in relief (Freud 2002), or incongruity (Goffman 1959), or superiority (Mead 1967) the laughter of a group reflects a shared perspective.

The probability of a group's laughter in response to a situation being indicative of a shared perspective regarding that situation makes standup comedy an important site of

social inquiry. The strength of standup comedy—“an encounter between a single, standing performer who behaves comically and says humorous things to an audience without much use of costume, props, or setting” (Olson 1988:110)—in regards to this dissertation reaches its zenith with the joke (Freud 2002) and its ability to frame group perspective in general while at the same time circumventing the problem of ideology by reflecting the audience’s authentic conceptualizations of oppression and freedom. This makes discourse analysis of standup performances a rewarding mode of sociological research. The problem of ideology, coupled with the role of laughter as a sign of its circumvention and the role that different types of laughter play in coalescing group opinion represent this project’s justification for using the standup performances of Richard Pryor and Jackie “Moms” Mabley as social artifacts to gain insight into how blacks in the U.S. conceptualize their oppression and emancipation—that is how blacks in the U.S. conceptualize colored people’s time.

Methods and Data

Oppression-Focused Discourse Analysis

The methodological perspective in sociological studies dealing with comedy varies. Some works examine the types of comedy and the purposes of comedy that develop in given social situations (Obrdilk 1942; Coombs and Goldman 1973; O’Quinn and Aronoff 1981; Sanford and Eder 1984; Spier 1998). Related to these are studies about how comedy is used to effect control (Stephenson 1951; Davies 1982; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001).

The dynamics of comedy are explored in terms of how people relate to comedic presentations (Cooper 2003) and in terms of how people create comedic situations (Katz 1996).

Rather than the aforementioned examples or a purely descriptive look at the content of jokes (Middleton and Moland 1959), this dissertation will perform an analysis of themes.

My dissertation follows the approach taken by Christie Davies (1992) in his use of comedy for a longitudinal analysis. He compares contemporary jokes with jokes popular during the development of Western capitalism. The themes of these jokes, following Max Weber (1992), are taken as a barometer of social perspective. Rather than comparing two time periods or narrowing down a specific time period, I am taking the standup of Pryor and Mabley to be indicative of 20th century U.S. black thought. My focus on exposition of themes is similar to that done by Limor Shifman and Elihu Katz (2005) as they examined a number of jokes to find out their implicit message about racial assimilation.

In their 2005 *American Sociological Review* article, Shifman and Katz perform a discourse analysis of jokes to understand the attitudes that 1930's Eastern European Jews in "Palestine/Israel" held concerning recent "well-bred German" Jewish immigrants. After amassing the jokes through a review of popular books about Jewish humor, and interviews, with the idea that such jokes would accurately reflect the overall social attitudes; the jokes were grouped according to topic and then analyzed in terms of the research question. This methodology, which includes a historical context for the jokes and a theoretical context for the workings of humor, allowed them to address the research question at hand. This dissertation employs a similar method.

Standup comedy is a very free form of comedic discourse. In fact, its popularity stems from the lack of restriction that governs it (Watkins 1994). Given the ability of comedy to reflect a collective consciousness (Freud 2002), disclose processes of constraint (Fanon 1967; Sartre 1975c; de Beauvoir1993; Critichley 2002; Freud 2002; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), the

resonance that Pryor and Mabley's comedy has and continues to have within the U.S. black community, and the influence of Pryor and Mabley's comedy on black U.S. comedy and U.S. comedy as a whole (Watkins 1994)[11]; discourse analysis of a selection of their standup material—transcripts from two and transcripts—"Live at Sing Sing (Mabley 1995a) and "Live at the Greek Theater (Mabley 1995b)—and audio recordings from twelve of Mabley's twenty-five exceedingly rare comedy standup albums and audio recordings and transcripts from the eight comedy albums that Richard Pryor intended for distribution, along with some of his additional standup material (See Appendix A)—will be used to determine significant themes relevant to how blacks conceptualize their constraint and its possible alleviation.

Pryor and Mabley produced many works. Along with his eight official albums, one of them being the double album *Wanted* (Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000f); Pryor had roles in more than forty movies and two of his own short-lived television shows (McCluskey 2008). Mabley was featured on twenty-five albums, twenty-three of which were comedy. She also had albums with other stars: four with comedian George Kirby and one with comedian Pigmeat Markham. She was in four films and participated in nine plays. There are several albums that Pryor did not intend for production released on Laff Records (Pryor 1995); for this reason they will not be included in the analysis. This issue of artistic self-determination is one of the primary reasons why this dissertation only uses audio recordings.[12] Both Pryor (1995, 2000) and Mabley (Williams 1995) were unhappy with the ways in which they, as black (and female) performers,

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[11] Elsie A. Williams (1995), who has written the definitive text on Mabley, finds similarities between Mabley, Pryor, Eddie Murphy, Andrew Dice Clay (a white comedian), Robbin Harris, and Sinbad. Mabley was a friend to Redd Foxx throughout his career, and Whoopi Goldberg cites her as an influence. In the black community, Mabley was one of the first and best-recognized female comedians. Richard Pryor's influence is legendary. He was the recipient of the first Mark Twain Prize for American Humor in 1998, and to hear many tell it (Watkins 1994; Grundfest 2003; Haggins 2007) Richard Pryor is the U.S.' the most influential standup comedian. He also won an Emmy, and his comedy albums have netted him five Grammies (Grundfest 20003).

[12] Another reason is the especially powerful nature of the praxis that spoken discourse spurs (Heidegger 1962; Fanon 1967).

were constrained by the culture industry: they both viewed their standup, rather than movies and television appearances, as the most authentic manifestation of their comedy.[13] And, when it comes to dispersion of their standup, at the time of initial production audio recordings were the most popular means of dispersal.[14]

The defining historical context of the standup Pryor and Mabley used for their standup is the U.S. Civil Rights/Black Power movement. In the standup of Mabley used for this project, whose date of recording seems to be between 1961 and 1971, the pacifist Civil Rights perspective dominates her topics and her point of view. Pryor's standup, recorded between 1966 and 1992, has topics centering around Pryor's life and a perspective in tune with the Black Power movement,[15] especially some speeches by Malcolm X (Pryor 1995). The types of skits vary. There are some instances where Mabley sings songs. However, most of the skits are monologues or multiple character narratives voiced by the comedians. There are interactions with others. Both Pryor and Mabley have skits where they interact with their audiences, and Mabley has skits where she interacts with members of the band that accompanies her. There are audio recordings of interviews of Pryor, but none for Mabley.

The material of Pryor and Mabley on which I will focus is repetitive to various extents. The repetition with Pryor is lower, with there being less than ten skits among the additional material that are versions of material found on the main albums. This repetition represents less than 20 minutes of the approximate ten-hour total of Pryor's material. The repetition within Mabley's material is greater. Sometimes the first half and second half of a record will contain similar material, recorded at different times. In these cases where an album has repeating

[13] This point may seem susupect in the 21st century given our rate of exposure and bias towards visual mediums.
[14] Even given Pryor's many standup movies, this seems to be the case (Pryor 1995; Pryor 2000).
[15] While 1966 to 1992 represents the complete span of Pryor's standup (McKluskey 2008), Mabley's discography starts at 1960 and ends at 1973 (Williams 1995).

relevant skits and in cases where an album has more than one relevant skit the album will be cited the requisite number of times. For instance, and album with two relevant or repeating skits would be cited "(Mabley 1963; Mabley 1963)." I estimate that the repetition accounts for at least 20% of the approximate seven and a half hour total of Mabley's material. Part of this repetition is due to the inclusion of a greatest hits album. The high level of repetition with Mabley's material is to be expected, as is the discrepancy between the amount of repetition to be found in the standup of Pryor and Mabley.

Pryor and Mabley were popular during different eras. During Mabley's era it was traditional for comedians to have a set of material that they repeated over a period of time: new material was not introduced that often (Olson 1988; Williams 1995). Pryor's performances seem to span the tail end of that era and an era when comedians were expected to constantly deliver new material.

This project's method of discourse analysis will follow the general guidelines of significant works that have the use of discourse analysis, the study of temporal oppression, and a Freudian perspective on laughter in common. Simone de Beauvoir's (1993) *The Second Sex*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's (2002) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and Frantz Fanon's (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World* all share these characteristics. In her analysis of the oppression of women, de Beauvoir (1993) examines five authors who have significant works that hinge heavily on their temporal portrayals of women. Examining the work of the novelists Henry de Monthernlant and D.H. Lawrence, poets Paul Claudel and Andre Breton, and man of letters Stendhal, de Beauvoir (1993) contextualizes the oppression of women. Similarly, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) use *The Odyssey* and a selection from

the works of The Marquis de Sade (e.g. *120 Days of Sodom*, *Justine*, and *Juliette*). With *The Odyssey* they use Odysseus's' travails as a map of the repressive dynamics of Western Enlightenment, and they use the work of de Sade to chronicle possible circumventions of these dynamics.

Fanon (1967) examines traditionally non-sociological texts from several genres to produce a picture of oppression: films, folk tales, comic books, and literature. In terms of literature he touches on the work of Mayotte Capécia, Abdoulaye Sadji, Rene Maran, Jean-Paul Sartre, Chester Himes, Richard Wright, Alan Patton, Georges Duhamel, and Léopold Senghor. When examining reverberating articulations of black life he focuses on the poetry of Aimé Césaire (1983a). After the Harlem Renaissance, the Négritude movement—primarily developed among blacks from France's colonies—was the next significant effort geared toward the legitimization of blackness (Eshleman and Smith 1983). The crown of this movement was Césaire's (1983a) *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, a poem reveling in the glories of black homelands. This text produced a shift in how many blacks viewed their blackness (Eshleman and Smith 1983; Fanon 1967)—the same can be said of the standup of Pryor and Mabley (Watkins 1994). So, Fanon (1967) took time to detail the emancipatory articulations of blackness that can be found in the poem, just as this dissertation will unearth similar articulations in the standup of Pryor and Mabley.

The methodologies employed by de Beauvoir (1993) and Horkhiemer and Adorno (2002) are similar to that of Fanon (1967), what Lewis Gordon (2009a) calls "a method

without a method."[16] The technique (Fanon 1967), loosely structured to accommodate the photosensitive nature of culture, entails,

> -Identifying general problem of oppression, including its ideological forms
> -Identifying solutions to problems of oppression via an analysis of an amalgamation of texts

This dissertation will follow the same guidelines, using laughter as a marker. The first step of this project is a textual analysis of the standup of Pryor and Mabley. This includes listening to their recordings and textual analysis of transcripts of their standup via the use of the Atlas.ti 5.2 qualitative software analysis package. With discussions of oppression isolated, the next step is to contextualize the isolation through the asking of two important questions: 1.) "Who is being oppressed in the relevant passage," and 2.) How are they being oppressed?" With a general picture of the dynamics of oppression in the work of Pryor and Mabley it will then be possible to 3.) analyze how atemporality is circumvented in their work.

With Fanon (1967) the question of oppression revolves around a specific object of inquiry: the body. The question of how blacks are oppressed is translated into a specific question of how black bodies emerge in the face of oppression. Fanon's (1967) conceptualization of the body is grounded in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) definition of the body. Merleau-Ponty (1962) distinguishes between the physical/objective body and the phenomenal body. The phenomenal body is "the true version of the body which we live by" (430-431). The two types of bodies mutually influence each other.

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[16] Like the intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance (Rampersad 1997), Fanon (1967) takes exception to the ways in which knowledge about blacks and blackness is produced. Part of his critique hones in on the techniques that are used to compile and analyze information about blacks. His response is a loosely structured "method without a method." There are parallels to be drawn between Fanon's (1967) approach and those of Hill Collins (2000) and Minh-ha (1989).

However, the phenomenal body is, “a system of possible actions, a virtual body with its phenomenal ‘place’ defined by its task and situation….wherever there is something to be done [the phenomenal body] outlines in front of [the actor] a possible habitat” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:250)[17]. Such is the body in its agency.[18] And, when Fanon (1967) describes black bodies oppressed or free from oppression he is describing the possibilities and difficulties of action that define their existence. This conceptualization of the body will help structure this dissertation’s inquiry.

The most important indicator used for this project in regards to these issues is laughter. Significant (i.e. loud and sustained) outbreaks of laughter within audio recordings and laughter as indicated in transcriptions will be used to demarcate social situations to which the aforementioned questions will be applied. The clarification of the ways in which blacks in the U.S. conceptualize their emancipation will rest primarily upon relief based-laughter, joke-based laughter at the expense of privileged entities of the Freudian variety (Freud 2002). This laughter will help form the picture of oppression, but it will not do so by itself. Along with relief, superiority and incongruity are found to be bases of comedy (Critchley 2002; Billig 2005). These two latter two interpretations of laughter meld to form important sociological points about the nature of the types of laughter that reflect the enforcement of oppression.

Contextualizations of relief-based laughter, laughter grounded in superiority, and laughter grounded in incongruity accentuate the various collective consciousnesses that the standup of Pryor and Mabley touch upon. However, for the purpose of narrative smoothness lists of the specifics instances and types of laughter will be replaced by the

[17] From this point onward, “body” will refer to “phenomenal body” unless otherwise noted.
[18] de Beauvoir (1993) in her discussions of “body” and “flesh” also references Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualization of the phenomenal body.

general points being expressed by Pryor and Mabley and being adhered to by their audiences. This process will allow the presentation of broad themes concerning black temporality.

Methodological Issues

At the height of his success Dave Chappelle, a popular black comedian, left his television show. When describing his decision he cited a concern about the reception of his material: are white audience members taking his material as a (Freudian) joke or is their laughter based on an agreement with the oppression that Chappelle is trying to undermine (Davidson 2006)? This issue of validity is the most important methodological issue facing this project. The wording and context of Pryor and Mabley's bits will be the basis of their classification as relief-based, superiority-based, or incongruity-based comedy; classifications which will determine the interpretation of their resultant laughter. Unfortunately, these classifications will lack certainty. This problem of validity is compounded by a problem of generalizability. The constitution of Pryor and Mabley's standup audiences for these audio recordings is unknown. Obviously they were not all black. Should they be viewed as a population or as a sample, and if they are to be viewed as a sample what population do they represent?

The issue of validity is mitigated by the popularity of Pryor and Mabley's standup. Chris Rock says that people search for comedy that reflects their lives (Friedman 2008). The standup of each was popular during their respective eras, and each has had an indelible influence on black U.S. comedy and U.S. comedy in general (Watkins 1994; Williams 1995). This continuing direct and indirect popularity must be viewed in terms of the role that black comedy plays in

U.S. culture. Firstly, black comedy is a cornerstone of U.S. comedy: its forms and content are some of U.S. comedy's major progenitors, a fact that is tied into the role that it plays in undermining the dominant social order. Secondly, comedy is the prime technique that blacks in the U.S. have historically used to criticize their oppression (Watkins 1994). These facts translate into the reasonable conclusion that while every laugh heard in response to the standup of Pryor and Mabley may not have been produced as the comedians intended the vast majority of laughter probably was, especially the laughter produced by their black audience members[19].

The issue of validity is also mitigated when discourse analysis of the proposed sort is placed within its proper methodological context. The application of discourse analysis to social artifacts is a fundamental tool in the field of sociology, as the consideration of highly resonant texts is a means of identifying core social themes and dynamics (Fanon 1967; Marx 1977; Weber 1992; de Beauvoir 1993; Gilroy 1993; Hill Collins 2000; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002; Freud 1988). This technique for studying groups is used by Karl Marx (1977) in *Capital: Volume 1*, by Max Weber (1992) in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and by Sigmund Freud (1988) in his research into the Oedipus Complex. Marx (1977) and Weber (1992) sought to identify the general dynamics of modern society, while Freud's (1988) focus was ideas important to the psyche. Like this dissertation, Weber (1992) and Freud (1988) focus on discourse which resonates, with the former targeting maxims and the latter targeting fictional tales that have displayed a continuing dominance in Western society. So, it is worth noting that one of the strengths of discourse analysis is its ability to hone in on broad, yet important, sociological

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[19] This emphasis on the ability of the standup to resonate with its audience mitigates issues concerning the veracity of the skits. Both Pryor and Mabley had co-writers: Pryor's most famous being Paul Mooney (Pryor 1995) and Mabley's being her brother (Williams 1995). What is most important is not so much that Pryor and Mabley's standup represent real-life situations or their personal perspectives, even though both comedians state that this is so (Pryor 1995; Williams 1995). For the purposes of this project, one that seeks to get a broad snap shot of opinion, what resonates is more important than the truthfulness of the performance.

perspectives. Neither Marx (1977), nor Weber (1992), nor Freud (1988) is arguing that these perspectives ruled in all cases; instead they are saying that the perspectives identified are popular to a degree that is significant. Similarly these works of Marx (1977), Weber (1992), and Freud (1988)—all founding fathers of sociology—do not identify specific populations. This dissertation and its methods operate under the same premises. Their generalizability is grounded in their focus on broad populations. This methodological approach is adhered to in the oppression-focused discourse analysis of Fanon (1967), de Beauvoir (1993), and Horkhiemer and Adorno (2002). In fact, the discipline of sociology has a number of important scholars who insist that such a non-traditional method and non-traditional bodies of inquiry are essential to understanding the conditions of oppressed peoples.[20]

The black worlds that Pryor and Mabley represent are in question. One could argue that Pryor puts forth worlds that are masculine and heteronormative. The same could be argued about Mabley. Yet, rather than being a shortcoming, the oppressive perspectives found in their standup can be a strength. Herman Beavers (1997) addresses the limits of the gender perspective to be found in Pryor's work. Pryor's heteronormativity is part of the reason that his work resonated with so many people. Furthermore, his standup is not completely oppressive in its gender perspectives. Identifying the regressive elements of Pryor and Mabley's standup and juxtaposing those elements with progressive elements paints a comprehensive picture of how their audience conceptualize processes of oppression and freedom.

[20] This approach to using artifacts of inquiry that are not traditionally sociological for sociological inquiry has been employed in a wide range of works focusing on racial oppression: Trinh Min-ha's (1989) *Women, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*, Paul Gilroy's (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Homi Bhabha's (1994) *The Location of Culture*, Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, and Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and Empowerment*.

Black Comedy in the U.S.

In 1958, Ralph Ellison (1995) wrote one of the most important pieces of analysis of black comedy in the U.S. He argues that jokes are an opportunity through which blacks in the U.S. can play with the mask that has been imposed upon them with the goal of "[slipping] the yoke" of oppression. The, at this date, penultimate study of black comedy in the U.S. is Mel Watkins's (1994) *On the Real Side: A History of African American Comedy from Slavery to Chris Rock*: in it he explores the ways in which comedy has allowed blacks to express their authenticity. Trudier Harris (1988) examines how Mabley employs the mask to violate social taboos, an article which is superceded by the work of Elsie A. Williams (1991, 1995). In *The Humor of Jackie Moms Mabley: An African American Comic Tradition* Williams (1995) explores the various elements of Mabley's stage persona—"woman of words," "trickster," and "fool"—and the major themes to be found in Mabley's standup. The two major themes being class and race issues with the latter being tackled through the lens of the U.S. 1960's non-violence perspective. Also of note is how Williams (1995) explores the ways in "Moms" was different from the traditional mammy: she was sexual; and she did not labor as a mammy would. The literature on Pryor's standup is more expansive. A recent edited volume by Audrey T. McCluskey (2008a) compiles new literature and previously printed materials.

I will pursue a different direction. Thematic analysis is recognized as an important avenue of study for standup comedy (Olson 1988), women's comedy (Dresner 1988; Sochen 1991), and racial and ethnic comedy (Dorinson and Boskin 1988). As such

Siva Vaidhyanathan's (2008) historical contextualization of Pryor; Kate E. Brown's (Brown 2008; Brown and Kushner 2001) analysis of Pryor's poetics of cursing; and Larry G. Coleman (1984), Keith M. Harris (2008) and Maxine A. LeGall's (2008) analyses of Pryor's storytelling will not serve as guides. Nor will my focus be biographical along the lines of Brian Escamilla's (1997) work on Mabley and Anne Janette Johnson's and David G. Oblender's (2000) work on Pryor. My analysis is more in line with Malik D. McCluskey's (2008) of the theoretical themes found in Pryor's standup.

Malik D. McCluskey (2008), following Watkins (1994) identifies broad themes in Pryor's standup, just as Williams (1995) does so for Mabley. My treatment is different in that it explores the way such themes translate into specific techniques. Williams (1995) in her own language highlights the importance of care to Mabley's standup. Herman Beavers (1997) in his discussion of the "cool pose" articulates a similar movement in Pryor's standup. This dissertation extends such scholarship as it links the themes to the larger drive to affect non-oppressive time.

Dissertation Outline

While this first chapter has outlined the methods, data, and necessity of this project—grounded in the ideological problems surrounding blackness, and comedy's authentic and social nature—Chapter II is an exegesis of the general and specific dynamics of oppression to be found in the standup of Pryor and Mabley. Pryor and Mabley's general theory of oppression is one of social mediation born of alienation: the

subjectivity of privileged entities occurs via the forced fixity of subordinated entities. Mabley details the extreme demarcation of the bodies of the privileged and the subordinated, the hierarchical relationship between the privileged and the subordinated, the subordinated as an anxiety producing entity, the intersectional nature of oppression, and society's narrow aesthetic standards. Pryor showcases the subordinate's burden of always having to conform to the expectations of the privileged, a fate that Jean-Paul Sartre (1948) terms being a metaphysical essence. Pryor also examines how blackness supposedly embodies evil and the ways in which various groups (i.e. blacks, women, other subordinated racial groups, homosexuals, and even nature) mediate subjectivity. These general and specific movements constitute the thesis against which colored people's time is articulated. Also, included in Chapter II is an analysis of the ways in which Pryor and Mabley associate themselves with privilege. Like the subordinated, the privileged is fixed. He makes himself fixed in order to gain a sense of security. Mabley asserts privilege in terms of her Western identity, racial superiority, and Western notions of beauty. Pryor asserts privilege in terms of heterosexuality, masculinity, racial superiority, and superiority over nature. This last dynamic is the underlying basis of subordination. Alienated from nature, man seeks redress; he finds it by forcing others to embody nature. The denigration of these avatars produces a sense of privilege. For blacks, subordination manifests itself as being confronted by one's body as if by a thing. These three aspects of atemporality—the fixity of the subordinated, the fixity of the privileged, and dealing with one's body as one would with a thing—will (along with specific projects of freedom) serve as the antithesis of the project's definition of colored people's time.

Chapter III explores how U.S. black comedy's leitmotif, authenticity, emerges in the standup of Pryor and Mabley. As it is in U.S. black comedy as a whole, authenticity is the major explicit theme of their standup. Also included in this chapter is an outline of how the concept of authenticity has developed in modern black intellectual thought. Finally, a brief philosophical rendition of the link between authenticity and a phenomenal residence in the present (i.e. to be authentic is to be in the present) and its manifestation as a project of freedom will be given.

While authenticity is the major explicit theme in the standup comedy of Pryor and Mabley, the most dominant theme is being in the present. Part of the emergence of this theme comes through concrete discussions of phenomenal experiences of the past, future, and present. Pryor and Mabley are ambivalent about phenomenal residence in the past and future, while they identify phenomenal residence in the present as the best mode of living. While Pryor and Mabley do not provide specific techniques for achieving such an existence, relevant literature identifies projects of freedom as such a means. Chapter IV, the first of three analytical chapters, will examine these issues.

The other aspects of Pryor and Mabley's focus on the present concern specific projects of freedom that demand bodies moving from fixity to phenomenal residence in the present. One such technique examined in Chapter V is the racially subordinated's appropriation of the heretofore oppressive. A sphere of violence defines black existence: the act, potentialities, and actualities of physical violence and its results. Both Pryor and Mabley appropriate the sphere of violence. Pryor's appropriation focuses on the act, while Mabley's focuses on the potentialities of violence. In the latter instance, rather than affirming the fixity of the subordinated, the potential of racial violence is used to

make a break with the racially oppressive situation. The same phenomenon happens through acts of violence in Pryor's standup, and in both cases these appropriations avoid reiterating the fixity of privilege and subordination.

Chapter VI covers another specific technique for moving bodies from fixity to colored people's time: the act of care. While black feminist thought speaks to the importance of care to the black community and care's epistemological role and while Martin Heidegger (1962) posits care as a means through which beings articulate their temporality, care's scope is much wider in the stand-up of Pryor and Mabley. In Pryor and Mabley's standup the act of care maintains an important position. Care offers a double movement out of atemporality. Through care both he who cares and he who is cared for experience colored people's time.

Examining Pryor and Mabley's standup and their articulations of fixity and counter-movements to fixity, the model to which it most closely adheres is Hegel's dialectic. The second movement of the dialectic is Essence, a mediating process defined by thinghood. The third movement is Notion. Here, rather than constructing mediating entities, consciousness acts as its own mediation. A similar process can be discerned in the standup of Pryor and Mabley. Rather than having others mediate one's agency (be they raced, sexed, or gendered), Pryor and Mabley—in their discussions of authenticity, temporality, appropriation, and care—are arguing that our agency should only be mediated by our own goals of existence. This falling back upon one's freedom is the overriding characteristic of the colored people's time articulated by Richard Pryor and Jackie "Moms" Mabley.

Chapter II: Social Mediation and Its Role in Oppression

The minute they see me—fear me.
I'm the epitome,
A public enemy.
"Don't Believe The Hype"
It Takes A Nation of Millions To Hold Us Back (1988)
Public Enemy

Social Mediation and Its Origins in Human Relationships to Nature

An Introduction to Social Mediation

Constraint and the antagonisms that underlie it are one of the most significant themes in Moms Mabley's work. One of the most powerful enforcers of constraint in Mabley's standup (1963, 1964, 1991, 2003a, 2003c, 2004a, 2006, n.d) is a group she identifies as the scourge of society, "old" people. Referring to a mind-set and manner of living rather than chronological situation, "old" people are those who restrict others, such as when they ask members of the younger generations to conform to outdated norms (Mabley 1963; Mabley1964; Mabley 2003a; Mabley 2004a). A specific instance of the detrimental activities of "old people" occurs when a man asks his acquaintance (both of whom are voiced by Mabley), a woman who has been a widow for twenty years, to explain how she has multiple children, the oldest being fifteen. She explains her situation to him: "[My husband is] dead. I ain't" (Mabley 2002). Setting up this tale, Mabley highlights an important technique employed by those who are "old": they are always, "[meddling] in other people's business." In this case, we have a man attempting to confine a woman's sexuality, a general theme in the work of Mabley (Williams 1995).

Mabley's (2002) presentation of this interaction is a bountiful harvest. The man's foremost question is not directly posed. First, he inquires as to the age of the woman's "oldest child," a phrase that lets the audience know that the woman in question has multiple children; then he expresses shock at the oldest child's age and recounts to the woman her own situation (i.e., a widow of twenty years). His statements and implied question about the age of the daughter are in essence a demand that the woman justify her intersection of viduity and sexuality.[21] The fact that this is implied rather than explicit speaks to the man's understanding of the power relations between him and this widow. He is privileged. She is subordinated; hence she has the obligation to answer. And, the woman's response speaks to how she sees her own self. She is not stagnant. She is free.

In the previous instance Mabley's (2002) description of constraint pertains to the situation of women. She also addresses the constraint suffered by blacks in general and by black women in particular (Williams 1995). Pryor does the same, and he talks about specific obstacles faced by black men. However, more so than in Mabley's repertoire, in Pryor's work there is a heightened sense of the way in which Pryor helps enforce the oppression of other groups. This process is especially clear in many of his bits dealing with women. Such is the case when Pryor voices a plethora of characters during one of his initial Mudbone sketches. A principle character—an old man and wise father figure named Mudbone (2000c)—recounts his long-ago experience of arriving in a new city, most likely in California given the working conditions described. Opportunities were scarce; so he had to pretend to be Chinese to get a job working on the railroad since the Chinese were an attractive source of labor because, unlike blacks, they were willing to

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[21]Frantz Fanon (1967) and Trinh Minh-ha (1989) both state that the privileged entity's inquiries and demands of speech from the subordinated are reflective of a dynamic that asserts the power of the privileged.

work for company scrip. To pull off this deception he got a "bowl cut," which at the time was a traditional Chinese haircut. Mudbone had a friend named Tutelum; and they entertained each other by telling each other tall tales, a deployment of comedy that allowed both some relief from their depressed situations.

Tutelum started dating a woman "from Louisiana," and Mudbone told Tutelum to end the relationship because the woman "knows something." She has magical powers. Later on a sick Tutelum drops in on Mudbone: Tutelum has swollen feet; a weak body; he's bleeding from his eyes; and he detests the woman with whom he is in love. Mudbone immediately knows what is wrong. Tutelum has fallen victim to a spell originating from the Louisiana woman, and Mudbone immediately knows what must be done. Tutelum must visit a voodoo sorceress, "Miss Rudolph." Owner of a mystical monkey's foot and a three-legged monkey who harasses everyone except her, Miss Rudolph has strong mojo. It and the stink from the severed monkey's foot keep most people away from her, yet Mudbone is willing to visit her in service to his friend. After Mudbone makes Tutelum pay for gas they ride Mudbone's car over to Miss Rudolph's house. When she opens the door, the odor from the house floors him (Pryor 2000c):

> And I'm looking up at her. She ain't got on no brassiere and the biggest titties in the world. They were swelled up, looked like that nigger's feets. *[Laughter]* And she had a tattoo on each titty. Had a big eye on one titty. And a pair of lips on the other. *[Laughter]* And I'm praying to God I ain't got to kiss nothing, see? *[Laughter]* So I was looking at this titty looking at me, and it looked like it winked at me. *[Laughter]* She said, 'Boy, get your ass in here. Get off the floor.'
>
> So I walked into the house. I'm kind of nervous 'cause bugs and shit crawling around all on the floor. There's a goddamn bat flying around like this, see. Now this monkey comes near and is fucking with me. Jumped all on my neck and shit, and it felt funny 'cause he got those little monkey hands, be fucking with your ears, you know? *[Laughter]* And

> I'm trying to act like I'm petting this motherfucker but I'm poking him in the eye, get him off me, see? *[Laughter]* 'Cause I don't want to offend this bitch with this monkey foot, see. 'Cause she scratch your ass with that foot, that's all over. *[Laughter]*
>
> And I said, 'Miss Rudolph. Miss Rudolph, please can you do something about the monkey?' She said, 'I don't have to do shit about the monkey. The monkey lives here, nigger. You visiting.' *[Laughter]* Well shit, I had to accept that, see. So I explained to her what was happening. I said, 'My partner's sick. Please, he needs some help. Would you be so kind as to help him?' I said, 'His feets are swelled up, eyes, and shit. He all messed up.'
>
> I said, 'Now first of all I got to explain to you I don't have no money.' I said, 'I'm posing as a Chinaman working on the railroad and all I got is that yang money.' She said, 'No, I don't want none of that.' She said, 'What you do, though, come Thanksgiving, bring me by a goose or a turkey.' 'That's all right,' I said. Well shit, that's fine with me. 'Cause it was June then. *[Laughter]* If I don't never see this bitch no more in life, it's all right with me, see? *[Laughter]*
>
> And just about that time, a big motherfuckin' tarantula, this big, crawled up my arm right up to my neck. I almost shit on myself, man. *[Laughter]* Went down this arm, under my hand. I tried to mash him. When I lift my hand up, he was gone. That's when I put my hand on my knife. 'Cause I figured if somebody get hurt in here, I ain't gonna be the last one, see? *[Laughter]*
>
> I said, 'Miss Rudolph, please tell me what happened to the tarantula.' She said, 'That ain't none of your goddamn business.' *[Laughter]* 'But if you don't bring me that turkey, you will see him again.' *[Laughter, Applause]* So when I left the house, I'm thinking turkey. There's a big pretty bird in my goddamn mind, see. I don't give a shit if she's in Timbuktu, the bitch got a turkey coming from me. *[Laughter]*

Miss Rudolph's juju is centered around three elements: the monkey's foot; words; and her body, more specifically her piss. She gets a big pan, delivers an incantation over it, urinates in it, "for fifteen minutes," and has Tutelum stick his feet in the liquid. Finally, she brushes her monkey's foot across Tutelum. The room gets loud. The insects and animals go crazy. The urine turns blue, and Tutelum removes himself from the tub, revealing his new, "little baby feets." Berserk after this violation of his body, Tutelum

kills Miss Rudolph's pet monkey, physically assaults her (kicking her with his little feet), takes her magic talisman, and swallows it. This last thing, "he shouldn't have done": the amateur attempt to control nature turns him into a polar bear, and now days he is confined to a zoo.

This routine clearly displays the defining characteristic of social mediation: the major instigator of oppression in the standup of Pryor and Mabley. The subordinated must always be fixed because her fixity allows the privileged to have a sense of subjectivity. In their role as members of the proletariat blacks and the Chinese mediate white subjectivity through their static roles as sources of labor. Like his white employers, Mudbone's denigrates Chinese labor (Pryor 2000c), in so propping up his own subjectivity. Only, instead of doing so through the appropriation of their labor, he does so via a subtle level of xenophobia that is made more definite in a later sketch on the same album (Pryor 2000c), a xenophobia spurred by the angst that comes with being unemployed. Yet, the condemnation of women in this sketch is most telling.

The two female characters—Tutelum's paramour and Miss Rudolph—are both presented as threatening figures that need to be controlled. This movement for control (i.e. to limit some combination of a person's physical and mental agency), as in the case of all forms of social mediation in terms of race (Fanon 1967; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) and sex (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), is spurred by an attempt to control that which the women embody—nature. The girlfriend "knows" magic, a field nestled within and drawing upon nature (Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Miss Rudolph's powers are also powers over and related to nature. She, herself, maintains control over nature: having animals that enact

machinations to which only she is immune. Her house is consumed by “funk,” the odor of a body close to nature (Fanon 1967). And of course, there is her specific magic, embodied by clipped nature, a monkey’s foot.

Her pulchritude is similar to that of an early earth goddess statue (Janson and Janson 1997); and, like the widow referenced in Mabley’s earlier sketch (Mabley 2002), she is symbolic of nature because of her associations with granting life (de Beauvoir 1993). Finally, in the sketch both women are saddled with the moniker, “bitch.” Both women are reduced to animals, shunted to the realm of nature.[22]

In Pryor and Mabley’s standup the major underlying dynamic of oppression is an effort to produce subjectivity on the part of privileged entities via the forced embodiment of nature on the part of the subordinated. This embodiment demands that the subordinated remain atemporal, fixed. Mabley’s (2002) and Pryor’s (2000c) descriptions coincide with analyses of social mediation found in important investigations of oppression. Frantz Fanon (1967) notes that blacks (unlike whites who are associated with the mind and civilization) are associated with the body and savagery. Simone de Beauvoir (1993) finds that much of the subordination of women centers on their preeminent role in the continuity of life. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) examines how these, and other, issues intersect to produce the social situations of black women. In the Marxist and psychoanalytically influenced work of Fanon (1967), de Beauvoir (1993), and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002) a developed explanation of social mediation and its basis in reduction of people to nature is provided.

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[22] Like the derogatory term used to describe Fanon (1967) "bitch" represents and instance where langauge is complicit in the mediation of the subordinated. However, denigrations of blackness are often explicit performative acts, whereas similar acts against women are often subtle and taken for granted.

Social Mediation as a Temporal Process of Oppression

The process of fixation-based mediation is oft cited as the origin of oppression. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) address atemporaltiy as it relates to anti-Semitism. Jean-Paul Sartre (1948) does so too in a text which is partially based on performed by Richard Wright, discussing how the social position of the Jew who has been subject to anti-Semitism is always static, with the Jew serving as a metaphysical essence—being resigned to a negative immutable quality—which bestows subjectivity upon the anti-Semite. Aimé Césaire (1983a) extends the scope of this idea as he characterizes the Antillean nation as "stranded." He brings up the point again in *Discourse on Colonialism* (Césaire 2001):

> the proof that at present it is the indigenous peoples of Africa and Asia who are demanding schools, and colonialist Europe which refuses them; that it is the African who is asking for ports and roads, and the colonialist Europe which is niggardly on this score; that it is the colonized man who wants to move forward, and the colonizer who holds things back.
> (46)

Fixation as a concept is widely used to structure analyses of race. Albert Memmi (1965) writes about how colonialism imposes a constant maintenance of the colonized, taking the colonized outside of time. Edward Said (1979) describes the Oriental as "known and ultimately immobilized" (208), "fixed," and "doomed" with the goal of producing subjectivity on the part of the Western world. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) examines how black women are reduced to a series of tropes that support the subjectivity of men, both black and white, and white women. Gloria Anzaldúa (1989) discussion of national,

cultural, sexual, and sexuality borders is highly temporal—as when she describes the colonized as, "[blocked], immobilized, [people] who can't move forward, can't move backward" (43). As she analyzes the story of white men saving brown women, Gayatri Spivak (1988) implores the historian to refrain from freezing women as "an object of investigation"; Chandra Mohanty (1991) makes a similar plea. Trinh T. Min-ha (1989) identifies this tendency to "fix" things (e.g. people, places, and cultures) to be one of society's most troubling dynamics. David Roediger (1999), influenced by Fanon (1967), looks at the ways in which physical and symbolic violence has been used to atemporalize blacks in the U.S. And, in discussing the Black Atlantic, one of Paul Gilroy's (1993) goals is to construct alternative temporalities and pose ideas counter to "fixed notions" of racio-national identity. Fixity is addressed by Homi Bhabha (1994), who calls it "[an] important feature of colonial discourse [and its] ideological construction of otherness" (94). Ato Sekyi-Out (1996) talks about restrictions that are spatial, and he talks about the temporality of racial oppression, contextualizing it via Marxist labor theory. The latter two works are heavily grounded by the thought of Fanon (1967), and all of the aforementioned generally follow his framework.

Fanon's (1967) theory of racial oppression includes three major stages: alienation, narcissism, and social mediation (i.e. "scapegoating"). Alienation—psychical, economic, and other—is identified as the defining characteristic (and problem) of modern Western civilization. With this ensuing separation, the self is crippled, and it seeks rehabilitation. The alienated self is pre-occupied with its individual existence and its individual image. This narcissism—a mode of atemporality—produces the desire for a mediating entity that will allow a sense of self for the narcissist. The scapegoat that Fanon (1967) addresses is

black (middle-class, heterosexual) males in their roles as subordinated racial beings. This alienation-narcissism-mediation is found, in some degree, in all of the aforementioned theories of fixation—some of which (Sartre 1948; Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993; Horkhiemer and Adorno 2002) have as their foundation the ideas of Karl Marx (1992) and Sigmund Freud (1949).

For these thinkers alienation from the self emerges in conjunction with alienation from nature, and the workings of this alienation are laid out by Karl Marx (1992) in a writing entitled titled "Estranged Labour." Marx argues that the labor that we perform should be intrinsic to our being: it should directly address a need. However, the modern conditions of labor—wherein the bourgeoisie controls most of the means and outcomes of production, while the proletariat only controls his labor—means that we are estranged from our labor, alienated. To be alienated in this sense is to have the process of labor confront you as a hostile force. The process of labor should entail many things: the development of the species, the development of the direct object produced by the labor, the development of the laborer himself, and a harmonious relationship with nature—the object which all labor utilizes. Alienation is a blight to this subjectivity. Mediation is the means through which damaged subjectivity is propped up. For the working-class, refuge is sought in, "[their] animal functions – eating, drinking, and procreating, or at most in [their dwellings] and adornment" (Marx 1992:327). Racial and gender oppression serve the same function.

Sigmund Freud (1949) has a theory of social mediation that mirrors that of Marx (1992). The psychical apparatus has three components: the id, the ego, and the super ego. The id contains basic creative and destructive drives (these two basic drives are both

incorporated into biological acts such as sex and the act of eating), while the super ego is the collection of social norms. The ego negotiates between the two with the ultimate goal of preserving the person. Freud (1949) points out how people's ids are thwarted, as the ego and the superego inhibit its satisfaction. Juxtaposing Freud with Marx—as was done by Fanon (1967), de Beauvoir (1993) and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002)—shows that nature and its satellites being closed off means that other avenues towards alleviating the damage to the relationship between people and nature must be explored; this includes the subordination of others so that these others mediate nature (Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Marx (1978b) sees this taking place with the bourgeoisie's oppression of the proletariat. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) offer a thorough description of this process through their examination of class, racial, and sexual manifestations of this forced mediation.

Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno are two theorists of the Frankfurt School. Attempting to explain why Karl Marx's predictions for class revolt have not come to fruition, the Frankfurt School addresses the role that cultural forms play in maintaining the dominance of the bourgeoisie. In conjunction with this project Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) provide an exegesis of the Western Enlightenment and modern society that followed in its wake. In Enlightened society, nature—the unknowable and primal potential force—is embodied and suppressed via the process of subordinating individuals.

The times before the Enlightenment, the Dark and Middle Ages, were characterized by harsh conditions resulting from nature. Events like the Black Plague, which threatened the existence of the general European population, are examples of this harshness, examples of nature's potential to bring about nothingness. Despite nature's

cataclysmic potential, societies in all eras have maintained an ambivalent relationship with nature. As it provides, nature is the basis of humanity's existence. Yet, this provision is cyclical in the movement from Spring to Fall and back; and it is prone to devastating disruptions in the form of natural disasters.

Nature as it has the potential to produce nothingness is a threat to subjectivity. The intellectual advancement of the Enlightenment is the result of a longstanding Western effort to eradicate the threat embodied by nature. The first attempts to do so were magic and sacrifices to nature. Scientific advancement during the Enlightenment staved off nature's threat of nothingness, creating ways of protecting humanity from nature's vagaries. However, knowledge and the reality of the threat of nature are still present. As aspects of the threat of nature are still present, they represent an impingement on subjectivity. In an attempt to minimize this collision, nature, an ancient entity, is seemingly brought under control as various social groups (which unlike nature can be controlled to some degree) are created and subordinated, a process whose ultimate goal is to have them embody nature.

Eschewing rational explanations of race, those that follow the model of the Enlightenment and its deification of rationality, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), in their analysis of Nazi Germany, instead locate racism in the loss of Western subjectivity,

> "All the rational, economic, and political explanations and counter-arguments—however accurate they may be in part—cannot provide a justification [for Anti-Semitism] because the rationality associated with domination is also based on suffering. Attacking or defending blindly, the persecutor and his victim belong to the same sphere of evil. Anti-Semitic behavior is generated in situations where blind men robed of their subjectivity are set loose as subjects."
>
> (171)

The two key components of this formulation are: 1.) the "suffering" of the racist group, and 2.) the blindness of these attacks. The "suffering" of the racist group, an occurrence preceding racialization, is grounded in the aforementioned unpredictability of nature. Provider and destroyer, nature affords very few opportunities for subjectivity. This unpredictability of nature produces feelings of powerlessness, especially as it interacts with class dynamics. People have been promised happiness, but that promise goes unfulfilled. So, any perceived instance of the outbreak of the happiness that has been promised (e.g. the financial success of Jews, real or supposed) must be destroyed, as this outbreak is a constant reminder of the failure on the part of those who are not happy

Rather than being a primordial relationship, the intimacy between Jews and nature is a concerted effort by Enlightened society. As problematic as nature is, it cannot be completely abandoned by Enlightened society. Nature is acknowledged by Enlightened society, if only as a subordinated entity, because: 1.) it does provide, and in doing so it is the basis of society's existence, and 2.) the symbolic inversion of nature's power as the basis of Enlightenment's subjectivity demands some type of acknowledgement of nature. This is why the Enlightenment, through its pontifications about how advanced and civilized it is, only seemingly exiles cataclysmic nature to the historical past. Nature cannot be purely past. As it provides and is relevant to the existence of society nature must exist throughout historical time (or exist until human treatment of the environment renders it null). As it must be acknowledged, it must (because of narcissism stemming from alienation) be acknowledged in a manner that allows subjectivity; this is why subordinated entities embody nature. The Nature/Jew matrix is a response to the pathetically fallacious threat of nature and the failure of liberal society to deliver on its

promises of happiness. The oppressed middle and working classes realize that what has been promised to them has not materialized. Yet, because ideology and the culture industry have led these people to construct their sense of self around liberal ideology there are psychological barriers against any direct criticism of the liberal program. This realization is blindly unconscious, and the response to this realization is sublimation. The longing for freedom that characterizes the worker in the capitalist system is re-directed and re-formulated as hatred of Jews, and the sublimation of hostility toward the capitalist system realizes itself as anti-Semitic violence.

Preceding their examination of anti-Semitism, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) lay out gender subordination in a chapter focusing on Homer's *Odyssey*. Here, the workings of the oppression of women are revealed to be the same as the workings of Anti-Semitism. Women are reduced to nature. Beauvoir (1993) examines this general process in detail. For her, following Friedrich Engels (1978), women are the first social group that mediates, a process that can be traced to the role of the female body in procreation. The workings of this relationship are blatantly temporal. Enlightened society constructs man as active transcendence and woman as passive immanence. As a result, woman is the basis for man's connection to the world, his grounding in it. However, this hierarchy causes problems. The denigration of women leads to restriction as far as when and how men can come into contact with women, and coupled with the creation of restriction is the creation of desire. The nature and past, which women represent, are desired, but Enlightened society rejects them. Both de Beauvoir (1993) and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), as well as Fanon (1967), locate this desire in an inauthentic rejection of nature.

Beauvoir's work (1993) has additional value because it concisely articulates the mindset of the privileged. Traumatized by his true freedom, the privileged seeks to create a static existence. Part of that entails making the subordinated atemporal, but it also includes making himself atemporal. When whites are civilized and blacks are savage (Fanon 1967), when the bourgeoisie has happiness and the proletariat do not (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), when men are transcendence and women are immanence (de Beauvoir 1993): whites, the bourgeoisie, and men have transformed themselves into things in ultimately futile attempts to create a subjectivity that entails no exposure to threat. Pryor and Mabley examine these two types of static bodies (those of the privileged and those of the subordinated), and in doing so they detail various aspects of oppression.

The Subordinated Object in the Standup of Pryor and Mabley

Forced Separation and Hierarchy in the Standup of Mabley

Underlying the process of social mediation is the enforcement of an imagined eternal and absolute separation between the privileged and the subordinated: the subordinated is a metaphysical essence (Sartre 1948). This is true in terms of both race (Sartre 1948; Fanon 1967; Horkheimer and Adorno 20002) and sex-based subordination (de Beauvoir 1993). Part of Mabley's work takes up how whiteness maintains this separation by articulating itself as sacred through contrast with blackness' profanity. Similar to Emile Durkheim's thoughts about the sacred and the profane (Durkheim

1995), in Mabley's analysis whiteness seeks to separate itself from blackness at any cost. This comes across in a sketch highlighting both optimism about the possibilities for erasing racial oppression and the intransigence of the privileged. A young white Southern man joins the Peace Corp and ends up in an amorphous third world country (Mabley 2006; Mabley 2006). His experiences with blacks lead to a shift in his worldview; and this shift is discussed during a phone call to his mother, who is beside herself about his career choice. She's happy to hear his voice. She expresses her happiness once again when she finds out that he has expanded his world-view and gotten married. Then her son tells her that he married, "a nice looking colored girl."

Southern feminine gentility reigns. His mother tells him to bring his new wife home; then she makes sleeping arraignments. Presumably, the new wife will sleep with her new husband in her new in-laws' bedroom. The father will sleep on the couch, but the mother says he will be sleeping alone. Having been asked by her son where she will sleep, the mother explains that her future repose will not require lodging. After she hangs up, she plans on jumping out of the window (Mabley 2006).

The optimism comes through as a variation of a theme found in both Mabley and Pryor's (2000h) standup. Sharing experiences causes people to develop and allows them to do away with group conflict. The intransigence is exemplified by the mother's twice used phrase, "I don't know what to do" (Mabley 2006). Both times, it is delivered in response to the son's new situation. She is incredulous about his choice to do service for the poor and black. His contact with the profane is seen as having reached even greater and intolerable heights when he announces his marriage, a violation the mother cannot

stomach. Whiteness has been contaminated by blackness at an intimate level. Her family-line will forever be altered, so there is only one recourse. She will kill herself[23].

This enforced isolation in the name of the sacred and the profane is displayed in another of Mabley's skits. Some of Mabley's (Mabley 2003a) young fans had requested a performance that she was reluctant to give because it required travel to the South: traveling there requires her to re-paint her new shining white car brown. In the South you have to be the same color as your car; the process of mediation must be transparent. With this example separation of the sacred and the profane is supremely enforced. But, beyond this separation, Mabley (2004b) finds that whiteness fears blackness, as evidenced by "The Dream of a Southern Governor":

> The dream of a southern governor. *[Laughter]*
> The governor had retired to his executive suite
> When something he ate disagreed with him just before he went to sleep. *[Laughter]*
>
> He had such a terrible nightmare dream. He almost fell out of bed. His wife asked him what he'd dreamt about and this is what he said:
>
> 'I dreamed I was listening to the election results and my ears began to ring
> When the commentator said, 'Our new president is Martin Luther King.' *[Laughter]*
> I started twisting and a turning *[Laughter]*.
> Oh, I was turning and a twisting.
> I was twisting and turning, baby, all night long *[Laughter]*.
> But wait, but wait, but wait, it seemed all Congress was colored, but you ain't heard nothing yet.
> The Supreme Court judge wasn't reading the law, he was sitting up there reading Jet. *[Laughter]*

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[23] The lengths to which whiteness will go to keep blackness from invading the family line are important themes in Nella Laren's (1997) *Passing* and Kate Chopin's (2004a) "Desiree's Baby," both significant feminist works. Pryor (2005a, 2005a) also has skits that deal with white families hostile to the possibilities of racial intermarriage. This theme also emerges in Jewish humor, and there is a racially homogenous Jewish version of the joke, with the mother being more orthodox and the daughter-in-law being a shiksa. The overlap is not unusual given the similarities between black and Jewish humor (Dorinson and Boskin 1988).

> I rushed over to the Capitol, and this is honest fact:
> I started in the front door and Roy Wilkins made me go around to the back. *[Laughter]*
> I asked to see the head of state and then let out a howl
> For in his place, with a smile on his face, was Adam Clayton Powell. *[Laughter]*
> He gave my nose a nasty tweak and said, I can't help you son.
> Take your problem to the head of Foreign Affairs, Ms. Dinah Washington.' *[Laughter]*
>
> I started twisting and a turning.
> Oh, I was turning and a twisting.
> Yes, I was twisting and a turning, ooh, all night long.
> Wait a minute, so I ask her, I said, 'Please, Ms. Washington, what does all of this mean?' She said, 'I don't know what you're talking about, honey. From now on just call me Queen *[Laughter]*.'
>
> So, I went over to see the chairman of the Board of Ways and Means
> And there sat Louis Armstrong eating ham hocks and collard greens. *[Laughter]*
> He said, 'Greetings, Gate. You're just in time to breeze *[Laughter]*,
> Wrap your chop around this soul food while I put your mind at ease, yeah.'
> When you are gone, your dog eyes remember you still,
> Yes I will, because you was the biggest drag on Capitol Hill,
> Yeah. [He] said, 'You're the biggest drag on Capitol Hill, oh, yeah.'"
> *[Laughter]*

Two things are of particular note: the content of the dream and reaction that this content elicits. In general, the topic of the dream is a U.S. government controlled by black people, an inversion of the racial hierarchy. Ludicrous at the time it was delivered (i.e. 1962) a black man—one of the foremost civil rights leaders of his day—is president; a black man is on the Supreme Court reading a popular U.S. black magazine; and there is a black Secretary of State—Adam Clayton Powell II, who at the time was a black Congressman. Furthermore, all of Congress is black. After finding this out the Southern governor goes on to suffer indignities which, while common to blacks dealing with whites during those times, must have seemed particularly degrading to a white man,

especially a white Southern governor. He is forced to come in the back door by a black person of power (a civil rights leader no less), the door that was traditionally called "the colored entrance." Next, his nose tweaked in a moment of paternalism. He must unduly treat a famous black female singer as the embodiment of the feminine ideal, and he is berated by jazz musician Louis Armstrong while being forced to eat food that does not agree with him.

The consequences of the dream, that is the reactions of the Southern governor, further illustrate whiteness' insistence on the separation between profane blackness and sacred whiteness (Mabley 2004b). Dreams are an opportunity to deal with that which troubles us (Freud 1949), and the content of the governor's dream reveals psychological elements of whiteness' interpretation of blackness. Not only is blackness profane (Mabley 2006), but—as nature is to Enlightened society—it is also a source of mortal terror, as evidenced by the governor's reaction to the inversion of racial hierarchy, a long-term bodily disruption—his "twisting and turning."[24]

In all, Mabley's (2004b) presentations of whiteness frame it as a drive that has an irrational and fearful reaction to blackness, similar to the ones detailed by Fanon (1967) and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002). A similar contravening movement is evident in Mabley's portrayals of black women.

A major issue of post-colonial femininity is the terrible tendency to posit gentile and heteronormative white femininity as the universal female ideal which stands atop the hierarchy of women (hooks 1981; Davis 1983; Lourde 1984; Minh-ha 1989; Mohanty 1991; Anzaldúa 1999; Hill Collins 2000). This, like the degradations in play during

[24] Bernard Wolfe's (1949) work also suggests this interpretation.

Mudbone's story about Ms. Rudolph (Pryor 2000c), is a reduction of women to nature (de Beauvoir 1993). Mabley undermines this abjection by positioning herself (a black woman) at the same level or above white feminine (and masculine) ideals. This happens mostly through her tall tales. The White House, a pinnacle residence of status in the U.S., has a large role in these articulations. During a presidential inauguration she lunches there with Eleanor Roosevelt and Clare Luce Booth (Mabley 1984): one a former first lady, both prominent political activists. Yet, Mabley declines their invitation to sleep there. Instead she privileges the sphere occupied by non-upper class black women as she chooses to spend the night at her niece's residence in the black part of Washington D.C. Another visit to the White House—a pow-wow with President Eisenhower, Adam Clayton Powell II, a governor, and black blues musicians Bo Diddley and Big Maybelle—leads Mabley (2004a, n.d.) to conclude that if Elizabeth can be in charge of England than Mabley has the qualifications to be president of the U.S., especially since men are messing things up. She repeats her qualifications for president in another sketch (Mabley 1963). Her ambassadorships (Mabley 1963; Mabley 1964; Mabley 2004b; Mabley 2004b) make her a woman of importance, and during all them she is intimately related to the first family, referring to John F. Kennedy and his wife as "her children." During one visit with them they request she accompany Jackie Kennedy to India (Mabley 2003a), a role that went to Jackie Kennedy's sister in real life (Bradford 2000). Mabley highlights the intersectional nature of oppression through these movements.

In some cases black femininity is positioned as superior to white femininity. This occurs in bits where the Cinderella tale is altered to make the protagonist an attractive woman of color working for a wicked white mother and her daughters, the latter being

particularly “ugly” (Mabley 1964; Mabley 2006). The most subtle and extreme inversion of the white feminine ideal comes during another visit to the White House when Mabley’s commandingly informal address of Mrs. Eisenhower (i.e. “Listen, Mamie”) is greeted with, a demure, “Yes, Miss Mabley” (Mabley 2002). Not only does the first lady adhere to Mabley’s command, she does so with a degree of respect—calling her “Miss”—that has traditionally been absent from white salutations of black women (Roediger 1999). A similar inversion occurs when she chastises Presidents Eisenhower (Mabley n.d.) and Nixon (Mabley 1975b)—both of whom she addresses with the term “boy”—and a doctor (Mabley 2004a) for failing to understand that children should be made “hip” as soon as possible. Lastly, Mabley overturns the gender hierarchy when she tells Nikita Khrushchev, “Maybe my boys can’t whoop your boys, but we – doggone it, we women of America, they whoop your women” (Mabley 2004b). The ways in which mediation is imposed on the subordinated receives a more thorough and varied evaluation in Pryor’s standup.

Pryor and the Relentless Burdens of the Mediating Object

Pryor’s (2005a) standup strictly adheres to assessments and condemnations of the Enlightened impulse to compartmentalize (Sartre 1948; Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002):

> Pryor: I liked being a kid very much. I do. I really loved it because then if you was a kid you didn’t have to be anything else. I was a kid ’til I was about eight, then I became Negro. *[Laughter]* Because they made me do it in school. *[Laughter]*
>
> Pryor: The teachers tell me, ‘You are negro. Now say it, Negro.’
> Eight year-old Pryor: ‘Negro.’
> Pryor’s teacher: ‘Good. You learned your lesson well. You get an A.’

> Pryor: I used to go home, 'Daddy, I'm a Negro.'
> Pryor's father: 'Really? I thought you were Polish.' *[Laughter]*[25]

Upon reaching maturation a change occurs. Just as the body grows, so does the threat; so it receives a new name, along with new restrictions. Like Fanon (1967), Pryor (2005a) finds that only adherence to mediation can bring acceptance from white society. Failure to do so on the part of blacks often leads to surreal reactions from whites. During the improvisation set quoted in Chapter I (Pryor 2005a), prior to his statement demanding the opportunity to represent black worlds, he is asked to repeat a bit he did on The Pat Boone show. After an audience member describes the bit, the following exchange takes place between Pryor and the white audience member:

> Richard Pryor: Wrong. *[Laughter]*
> Audience Member: That wasn't you?
> Pryor: I can do it but - [barely audible audience member comment] That's Flip Wilson.
> We all look alike don't we? *[Laughter]* [*Applause]*
> I thought it was just a joke when they said that.
>
> Pryor imitating himself: 'He ain't never seen me do that on television.'
> Pryor imitating white audience member: 'I saw you though.' *[Laughter]*
> 'Boy, I tell you.'
>
> Pryor: No, but that's Flip Wilson.[26] I know what you're talking about though. But that's another comedian.
> [Another audience member chimes in saying it was]
> Pryor: No, that wasn't me. It wasn't me. It wasn't me. You can't make it me no more. *[Laughter]*
>
> Pryor: [If white people] used to do that in the old days, [blacks would] say, 'Yes, ma'am. That was me.' *[Laughter]*

Facing metaphysical essence (Sartre 1948), Pryor's own memory and knowledge of himself is disputed, and that of the privileged individuals is trumpeted. And, when the

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[25] Pryor's revelation is similar to that experienced by W.E.B. DuBois (1998)
[26] Flip Wilson was a popular black comedian during the 1960's and 1970's (Watkins 1994; Haggins 2007).

white audience members try to counter Pryor's claims a slight hint of annoyance on their part is detectable, as if Pryor's disruption of their perceived narrative is somewhere between rude and criminally offensive. This surreal negation of black subjectivity is more discernable during some of Pryor's discussions about general white reactions to Muhammad Ali.

According to Pryor (2000c), Ali is disparaged because he is successful at boxing even though he fails to succumb to the brutality of his sport. His gracefulness diminishes the conflict's violence, and Pryor reveals complaints about this by whites to be another manifestation of the metaphysical essence (Sartre 1948). Fanon's (1967) coverage of racial oppression implicitly assesses the tendency to deny the agency of the subordinated, while Jean-Paul Sartre's (1948) explicit description covers how the dynamics of racial oppression lead to granting the subordinated agency in situations where such a dispensation makes no sense. Pryor (2000c) highlights how the lack of violence in Ali's fights is not Ali's fault. The other fighters have the opportunity to engage in and instigate heated fisticuffs, but they choose to not do so.[27] There are other detractions of Ali (Pryor 2000e): he was not better than Jack Dempsey, and his body is aged. Pryor counters these by reminding the audience about Ali having been champion more times than Dempsey and Ali having continuing success. While Pryor comedically highlights sports announcer Howard Cosell's ridiculous opposition to Ali, the comedy is less evident when he addresses a general social dynamic of expecting blacks to share whites' rejection of Ali (Pryor 2000e). At one point Leon Spinks was champion, and he gave Ali another shot at the title (over the brawler Ken Norton) (Edmonds 2005). This infuriated many whites.

[27] Pryor's response here is partially mitigated during a different skit (Pryor 2000e) which acknowledges Ali's propensity to hold his opponents. However, the later date of this skit may reflect a change in Ali's tactics.

Since it went contrary to their wishes, many whites labeled Spinks "dumb" because of his decision and other intellectual shortcomings, such as his English language deficiencies. Worse, they expected Pryor to agree. Subordination calls for the subordinated to be complicit in his own subordination (Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993; Horkhiemer and Adorno 2002). Even though both Pryor and Spinks agree that Spinks is not intelligent, it pains Pryor when white people deride the boxer's intelligence. Part of this seems to be because they are doing so mainly because any failure to conform racial oppression is labeled as unintelligent, and if Pryor agrees or disagrees he will be denigrating himself in their eyes. In all, Ali (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000e) and Spinks (Pryor 2000e) circumvent many aspects of the white world, and for that they are disparaged.

Pryor chronicles other ways in which blackness is reduced to a metaphysical essence. First, there is the idea that all black men have large penises (Pryor 2005a). Next, while working at a military base in Germany he is partnered with a supervisor who thinks all blacks steal (Pryor 2005a). And, he documents a tendency among his white audience members to assume that blacks sitting in close proximity to each other are related (Pryor 2000e). Also, like Mabley (2006), he addresses the imperative to romantically separate whiteness and blackness (Pryor 2005a): black men should not be involved with white women.[28] Last, similar behaviors by blacks and whites will always be interpreted differently. The treason of President Nixon gets pardoned, but the IRS charges against boxer Joe Louis do not (Pryor 2000c). And, Pryor (2005a) makes the following remark during a bit about his trip to the Playboy mansion:

[28] There is one instance where black women make this assertion about black men who marry interracially (Pryor 2000b).

> Got an invitation from Hugh Hefner to come to his house. That was exciting. You know Hugh Hefner. He invented Playboy Clubs and Playboy magazine, and they call him a playboy. In my neighborhood they call him a pimp. *[Laughter]* It's not what you do; it's how you do it. *[Laughter]*

Yet, Pryor also details whiteness' attempts to incorporate blackness. Sometimes it is sexual, as in cases where white men see black adolescent prostitutes (Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b). At other times these attempts are cultural. Pryor talks about a white teenager who desperately wanted to be accepted and consecrated by the black members of his gang (Pryor 2005a) and Elvis's appropriation of black culture (Pryor 2005b). Pryor and Mabley castigate their and others' reduction to mediation. Unfortunately in their standup they often repeat this procedure as they atemporlaize themselves and others to create a sense of privilege.

En-Soi: The Privileged Object in the Standup of Pryor and Mabley

Fanon (1967), Sartre (1948), Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), and de Beauvoir (1993) all detail situations where the subordinated reiterate the subordination which they have experienced upon others. De Beauvoir (1993) equates these situations with *en-soi* (in-itself):

> Man experiences with anguish his being turned loose, his forlornness. In fleeing from his freedom, his subjectivity, he would fain lose himself in the bosom of the Whole. Here, indeed, is the origin of his cosmic and pantheistic dreams, of his longing for oblivion, for sleep, for ecstasy, for death. He never succeeds in abolishing his separate ego, but at least he wants to attain a solidity of the in-himself, the en-soi, to be petrified into a thing. It is especially when he is fixed by the gaze of other persons that he appears to himself as being one (282).

Similarly, along with pro-black/feminist movements there are regressive elements to Mabley's gender presentations. Her stand-up fails to criticize U.S. imperialism, and she invokes and legitimates normative masculinity when during her "School Days" parody (1991, 2003c) and in a confrontation with Nikita Khrushchev (2004b, 2004b). In keeping with being hip, Mabley (2006) authentically acknowledges the debilitations that come with chronological age. There are honest assessments about needing money to retire (Mabley 2003b) and not being able to take the rigors she used to be able to take (Mabley n.d.; Mabley n.d.). Enmeshed with these are declarations about problems with her appearance, having to wear a wig, and general physical unattractiveness (Mabley 1991; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003c). In doing so Mabley subtly reiterates aspects of the feminine ideal that she lays low in other sketches: "Do you know I remember when I was young all I had to peep over my pocketbook and smile and I could get any man I wanted. But now, I have to have the pocketbook open with the money showing" (Mabley 2004b). Sometimes this hostility takes off when discussing women who are not hip (Mabley 2004a; Mabley n.d.). Yet, most of the time it is directed towards women who do not meet society's standards for attractiveness (Mabley 1963; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2004a; Mabley n.d.). These discussions of other women's physical shortcomings contain a rancor similar to that which coincides with her ambivalence about other subordinated entities: Communist China (Mabley 2002), Fidel Castro (Mabley 1963; Mabley 2002), Nikita Khrushchev (Mabley 2002), and Moise Tshombe (the leader of the Congo) (Mabley 1963).

The perspective of whites' view of blackness that Mabley criticizes mirrors some of the reactions that Mabley has to other subordinated racial groups. In some cases the

racism is casually stated, such as her statements about Communist China (Mabley 2002). A major component of Mabley's comedic character is her role as a government worker, mostly as an un-official (yet highly valued) ambassador. In one such instance she was working at the U.N. as a door holder and gatekeeper (Mabley 2002). She lets in foreign countries (e.g. India and Egypt). The Russians gave her trouble because she had to hold the door through all of their repeated entrances and exits. She let everyone in (i.e. "people of all nations"), except for "Red China" because "[she] didn't know how many of them there is" (Mabley 2002). She also found their habits to be strange. According to Mabley, they name their children by throwing utensils into the air. The sound made when it lands on the floor is the name that is given to the child (i.e. "Pling, Dong, Pong, Bing…") (Mabley 2002).

While there are similarities in how subordinated racial groups are treated, some burdens center around certain groups. As immigrants (real or perceived) and as Asians, Asians in the U.S. bear the image of the rampaging horde. Also, they are seen as inscrutable and mysterious. This is how they are seen, and it is why they are feared (Tuan 1998). Mabley's (2002) treatment of communist (i.e. "Red") China adheres to this perspective. It seems as though neither their foreignness nor their general non-white raciality is the unique basis for Mabley's anxiety. She lets other foreign groups into the U.N. (e.g. Russians), and she lets in non-white foreigners (i.e. Cubans, Egyptians, and Indians). This suggests that China's specific Asian nature is a key motive for their exclusion. The power of Mabley's anxiety regarding China is further evidenced by another aspect of her allowing Russia into the U.N. Mabley, adhering to her era's Cold War fears, frames Russia as a force bent on the demise of the U.S. Yet, she lets them in.

And presumably, since communist China was the only country excluded, she let in other Asian countries (e.g. Japan, etc.). Mabley is willing to let in an acknowledged destructive force and vastly different cultures; but she refuses entry to a country that she perceives as vast, mysteriously different, and destructive.

Mabley's denigration of the foreign is not always purely racial. Sometimes it is more political. She is highly critical of Castro (Mabley 1963; Mabley 2002)[29]. Part of this is linked to what she sees as his condescension toward blacks, as evidenced by his bringing chickens to Harlem; part of it is linked to what she sees as his destructive overtures toward the U.S (Mabley 2002). For these crimes, Castro's distance from civilization is emphasized via real and imagined qualities (Mabley 2002). She criticizes his wild hair, from his chin and his head (even though she makes fun of Khrushchev for having a bald head). In addition, Mabley reveals his uncivilized habit of eating soup with his hands. During Mabley's (1963) discussion about the Congo, the denigration of the foreign is both racial and political. Her political criticisms of Moise Tshombe deploy many of colonialism's techniques. She criticizes his alignment with Russia. This criticism is particularly interesting because Tshombe was anti-communist. The Congolese leader of the era most closely linked to Russia was Patrice Lumumba (Zeilig 2008). This suggests one of two things. Either Mabley is willfully conflating the two, or she is mixing them up. Each of these is an example of the metaphysical essence in action; the only question is one of degree.

Also, most of her criticisms of Tshombe conform to the primitive reduction to nature heaped upon subordinated blacks and Africans (Fanon 1967; Gould 1983). When

[29] This interpretation assumes that Mabley's criticisms of Castro stem from his political orientation rather than his racial and/or ethnic identity.

representing his voice she employs primitive syncopated sounds and rhythms. His response to her initial question is, “Binga, banga, bongo. What’s the matter with the Congo?” (Mabley 1963). She questions his intelligence. How could he be so stupid to align himself with the Russians against the U.S.? They tricked him, and they are laughing at him just like they are laughing at Castro. Last, she criticizes his attractiveness. Calling his face “ugly” in this context coincides with a deification of Western standards of beauty; this and her painting those who are different as savage are specific methods of used to subordinate blacks (Fanon 1967; Gould 1983). Unlike Pryor, Mabley’s comedy contains no critique of U.S. imperialism.[30] A Mabley’s derision of that which is foreign and different can be ranked. Relatively benign is a joke she tells about a Jewish man who, while believing the correct answer to be Moses, responds, “St. Patrick” so that he can win the $500 an Irishman is offering to the person who can name, “the greatest person that ever lived” (Mabley 2004a). The malignant stereotypes of this joke are surpassed by her condemnation of communist China because of the fear and hostility that this mysterious group elicits (Mabley 2002). Between these two are her condemnations of communist Russia (Mabley 2002), hostility with less fear. Castro’s condescension and unruly countenance place him above the Russians (Mabley 1963; Mabley 2002) in terms of eliciting Mabley’s ire. Most negative is her treatment of Tshombe (1963). He and Castro are the only ones to really have their intelligence questioned since both are unable to foresee the eventual consequence of their actions—a charge which has been historically pernicious when leveled against subordinated groups

[30] This may be one of the reasons why Mabley was seen by some blacks as an Uncle Tom (Williams 1995).

(Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993).[31] And, while the physical appearance of Khrushchev (Mabley 2002) and Castro (Mabley 2002) are faulted, only Tshombe is called "ugly " (Mabley 1963).[32]

Despite, this Mabley is ambivalent about Africa. During the U.N. record, Mabley (2002) has a member of the Congolese delegation play the trickster role so prominent in black humor (Watkins 1994). He asks for a room at an Arkansas hotel and is denied because the white proprietors "don't cater to his kind" (Mabley 2002). He explains that their discrimination will not be an obstacle to him procuring a room; his wife is not like him. She is one of them. In another instance, Mabley tacitly acknowledges the relatively privileged status of some Africans. An African-Ameriacn man goes into a new and swanky (i.e. white) hotel to get a haircut, and the assumption is that he's there to apply for a job as a porter. Having been denied service, he asks if Ghanian heritage would exempt him from the segregation norms (Mabley 2003c). It would not. Mabley's ambivalence toward Africa and the foreign, an arbiter of nature, coincides with similar feelings about gender dynamics. In some cases Mabley eschews the subordination of women and the deification of male power. In others, Mabley validates them (1984, 1991, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003b, 2003c, 2006). Similarly, Pryor often derides the racial

[31] Constantly being accused of being unable to imagine the future, an example of which is perpetuated by Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu (1986), is one of a couple of instances in which the subordinated is alienated from the future. Both de Beauvoir (1993) and Fanon (1967) discuss how the future of the subordinated is often pre-determined: there seem to be no opportunities for agency. In this sense, just like the past, the future haunts.

[32] Anti-African sentiment emerges differently in one of her later sketches. During "Live at the Greek Theater" (Mabley 1995b), one of her latter albums recorded around 1970, she tells a joke about a black man who falls asleep in the chair of a white barber. When the man wakes up, "he [has] a ring in his nose" (1995b). Prior to his nap, the man had asked for, "the Afro look." The dynamics of the joke call for deep analysis. However, having only examined the transcript, I am forced to speculate. There are two major ways in which this joke can be interpreted: the audience laughing at the white barber, or the audience is laughing at Africanness. Her inflection would offer strong proof, but bereft of such data I am inclined to believe that the humor centers on the quality of being African. Of the seven jokes that precede it, only one (which acknowledges Mabley's sexual nature) is not grounded in superiority or incongruity.

oppression suffered by blacks, while in other cases he effects a colonial perspective on blacks and other racial and/or ethnic groups. And, in the majority of cases Pryor conforms to colonialism's perspective on women, especially as it intersects with violence as a form of social control.

Included in the previously mentioned sketch where he talks about "[becoming] a Negro," Pryor (2005a) goes over the process of self-subordination:

> Pryor: I remember when I was a kid they used to play a game that people said, 'I never ever played that.' We used to play last one to the store is a nigger baby, right.
>
> Audience Member: Yeahhh.
>
> Pryor to Audience Member: You played? Of course you played. *[Laughter]*
>
> Pryor: I used to run like hell myself. I didn't want to be it. I didn't know I lost before the race started.

Pryor's (2005a) tone is the melancholy of a man placed in an intractable position. Similar to Fanon (1967) and The Negro of Sartre's (1989b) *The Respectful Prostitute*, Pryor laments having his destiny determined for him. Yet, there is something else. Pryor's delivery looses steam halfway through the quote, a quote coupled to the back-end of the earlier quote where Pryor is, at the age of eight, forced to be a Negro. The first part has Pryor affecting a child-like voice. Then when he does the teacher's lines ("Now say it, 'Negro'") his voice is one of masculine authority. His energy is high until the second part when he gets to the words "nigger baby." There the energy is low, the drop-off having started at "we used to play," as his memory juxtaposes childhood with the undertaking of self-hatred as a game. Afterward, there is a silence and a void from Pryor. The concurrence of an audience member seems to be the only thing that prevents this

void from spreading. This quote is funny (as evidenced by laughter), yet it has a downshift in energy and an upswing in seriousness of tone that is solemn; and so it is indicative of a pattern. When Pryor is discussing the self-hatred of others, comedy is high. When discussing his own, the aforementioned solemn shift occurs.

Deplorable is any black person co-signing the oppressive treatment of blacks by the police (Pryor 2005b). He refers to such a person as, "a nigger that [white people] hire" (Pryor 2005b). Yet, Pryor is particularly angry at black police officers who, to facilitate their success in the department, single out for abuse (2005b) or tolerate the racial abuse of black arrestees (2005a). He calls these types of policemen "Uncle Remuses," and he hexes a black judge who exhibits the same behavior, earnestly declaring, "I cursed him in my mind. 'I hope you turn white'" (Pryor 2005a). When the racial revolution comes, Pryor (2000i) suspects that a lot of blacks will be in trouble. Pryor admits that the word "black" is not something that dark people of African descent in the U.S. have always embraced, yet he acknowledges that people in the U.S. being united under one banner has its benefits (Pryor 2005b).

Pryor has not always embraced blackness. As a teenager he used chemicals to alter his hair with the hopes of being able to pass for Puerto Rican (Pryor 2005a). And, while shooting a movie in a prison his thought process about the vindictiveness of the U.S. police statement went through a reversal: "I was there six weeks and I talked to some of the brothers there. Thank God we got penitentiaries" (Pryor 2000g). Later on in his career he admitted to having sometimes maintained a general anti-black position: "I used to have a white folks' disease and I'd hang out with 'em. The motherfucker dropped some acid in my drink, taught me a lesson. 'Let's watch the nigger freak out'"

(Pryor 2000i). This ambivalent position on the position of blacks in society and their representing nature constitutes one of the most serious conflicts in the work of Pryor, as it also does in the work of Mabley. Like Mabley, Pryor has many moments when he subordinates other groups.

Most important is Pryor's subordination of women, closely linked to his investigations into their subordination. In Pryor's standup women are idealized, dynamic, dangerous, and tortured—all characterizations Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) and de Beauvoir (1993) associate with the plight of women. In Pryor's standup women bare many burdens, and all of these qualities pulsate in the maternal figures that Pryor discusses. With his mother and father absent, Pryor's grandmother took care of many children (1995, 2005a). She was dedicated to doing her job, to the degree that if a child missed bath time another child would have to pick up the slack and receive multiple bathings just so her minimum quota could be maintained. She was so diligent she would wash dirty children on principle, even if they were not one of hers (Pryor 2005a).

Sometimes Pryor's grandmother nurtured in tandem (Pryor 2000e). Pryor relished the atmosphere after his stepmother's funeral. To support the bereaved people came to the funeral, and then came to house bringing food. One dear old woman, Miss Irene, who had assisted Pryor's grandmother with his upbringing, provided some dressing. Since it was delicious, everyone was eating it. Until someone noticed some little feet sticking out of their dressing. Pryor tried to frame the roach as an isolated incident. But, his grandmother, in a moment of authenticity, refuses to let him do so. She quiets Pryor, insisting that he speak not a word to Miss Irene. The latter is old and going blind, yet she wanted to do something for the grieving family for whom she cares

so much. This last point is unstated, but it is implied when Pryor's grandmother explains that Miss Irene probably neglected to close the stove at some point. The grandmother then consolidates the group, explaining that they all had roaches. Finally, in a statement that could be either truth or ameliorating lie, she proclaims the tastiness of the roaches. This serves as a testament to Miss Irene's culinary skills and possibly as a statement about how care dispersed amongst a group can make unbearable situations better. Yet, in Pryor's work those who shoulder the burden of care are most often women, and the person most often cared for is Pryor himself.

The dynamic powers of the maternal figures in Pryor's life are evidenced by their ability to get him to stop or reduce his ingestion of controlled substances. His aunts practiced a subtle art (Pryor 2000g). Pryor snuck around to freebase cocaine to hide his habit from those left in his life who loved him dearly. However, a crack user is not the most clandestine of people, so his aunts would notice his drug paraphernalia. Then they would make rye comments: "'Oh, you a chemist, huh, son?' *[Laughter]* 'Can you move that so we can fix the greens?' *[Laughter]* 'No, baby. You ain't no junkie. No, Lord. Unh-unh'" (Pryor 2000g). His grandmother had more flair. When confronted with his cocaine usage she pretended that the shock would lead to her death. However, she quickly, and angrily, recovered when she discovered that Pryor's flushing the drugs down the toilet meant missing a profitable opportunity to remainder the sixteen hundred dollars in leftovers (Pryor 2000e). This anger was central to Pryor's relationship with his grandmother. He often performed misdeeds, which earned him painful bouts of corporeal punishment (Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2005a). Yet, as devastating as Pryor's maternal figures could be, he also saw them as tortured. Pryor was critical of religion, so to him his

grandmother's close association with the church meant that she was basically a mark (2000e, 2005a). When his mother complained about the pain of childbirth, Pryor promised to, "buy [her] a new one" (Pryor 2005a). Also, this woman, a prostitute (Pryor 2005b), suffered physical abuse at the hands of his father, which in Pryor's eyes she embraced to a certain degree (Pryor 2000b).

Listening to Pryor's standup one is impacted by the importance that heteronormative sex plays in his life. Yet, his work also displays and supports heteronormative feminine ideals that while partly sexual, are not wholly so. There are traditional white feminine ideals such as the Southern belle (Pryor 2000a; Pryor 2005a). And, there are vibrant black women (Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b). Pryor marvels at the power and the nature of the feminine image, as society tells women not to "fart" (2000a) or have bowel movements (2000c). Pryor respects this ideal; this is reflected in one occasion by his offering a white woman his seat on a crowded train and the offense he and others take when she refuses (2005a). This respect for gentility has its limits though. He sees women who abstain too long—religious women and prisoners' wives—as imbalanced (Pryor 2000i). They are refuting the dynamic force that Pryor so cherishes—heteronormative sex, an element that contributes to, but is not the sole basis of, what Pryor finds to be the dynamic nature of women.

Eschewing money, Pryor (2000c) says that sex is the best thing that there is:

> Niggers be holding them dicks, too, jack. *[Laughter]* Them white people go, "Why do you guys hold your things?" Say, "You done took everything else motherfucker." *[Laughter]* Nigger be checking.[33]

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[33] Here the penis also holds value through its embodiment of masculine power.

And, his holy grail is a woman with mystical control of her sex (i.e. a woman with a "snapping pussy") (2005b).[34] He even wants to die while having sex (Pryor 2000e). Don't we all? As it is for men, Pryor also thinks that sex is women's best moment also (2000d). However, sex is not the sole basis of women's dynamisms. They raise children (Pryor 2000h), and in women Pryor finds a preternatural ability to adapt to changes in circumstance (Pryor 2000a; Pryor 2000f). Yet, when it comes to women validating men, Pryor's prime examples have a sexual element. The climax of a woman is affirming to the man with whom she is having sex because it validates his agency (Pryor 2000d). Plus, men always want to impress women. According to Pryor, even God is caught up in this situation. He created mankind to impress his wife (Pryor 2000a). Women play a major role in men's self image (Pryor 2005b). Without women, men would not be having sex (Pryor 2000h). The affirmation that women as sexual beings provide is even intertwined with race. Having sex with a white woman is presented as redress for macro-level instances of racial oppression (Pryor 2005b). But women are dangerous because of the physical and emotional monopoly they have on things that men value.

Whether they stay, if they leave, if they are white, or if they are black, Pryor thinks women are dangerous.[35] When they leave the loss of emotional and physical support is unbearable (Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000f; Pryor 2000g). Yet, if he is in a relationship, his access to other women is hindered (Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b). And, women place a huge demand on men. Mudbone explains why this is so (Pryor 2000h) after he tells the audience that in his long life he has only been with less than five women: "[Women will] drain ya." As in the work of Horkheimer and Adorno

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[34] In virtually every case when Pryor is talking about sex, he is talking about heteronormative sex.

[35] Yet, Pryor (2000g) sees this destruction as significant and inevitable; like Zora Neal Hurston's (2000) perspective on the lives of women, heart break at the hands of the opposite sex ushers in adulthood.

(2002), de Beauvoir (1993), and Edward Said (1979), Mudbone frames women as a voracious force and an eternal wellspring (Pryor 2000h). Sex with one is a story that will find its way to the women's friends. After which, Mudbone would be faced with increased demand, "eight or nine" women with whom he would have to have sex. Eventually they would deplete him. So while Pryor looks forward to death by orgasm (Pryor 2000e), he also fears it (Pryor 2000h). For black men, white women are dangerous in the most traditional sense of the word. Jail or worse can be the fate of a black man involved in this type of interracial relationship (Pryor 2000a; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2000i Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b), and he will find the public opinion of whites and black (women) against him (Pryor 2000b). Yet, comparatively so, Pryor finds relationships with black women to be more restrictive (Pryor 2000d). The dynamism he admires in black women (Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b) translates into a woman, "you can't pull [shit] on" (Pryor 2000h). However, none of the aforementioned is the biggest problem; in Pryor's eyes, the scariest and most dangerous thing about women is that they have options other than men. Technological advances in the art of self-pleasure mean that men who base their subjectivity on having sex with women should consider themselves "lucky" (Pryor 2000h).

Women have the power to destroy a man's subjectivity (Pryor 2000c):

> Me and my lady, boy. I don't mind women leaving me, though, see, but they tell you why. Fuck that, just leave. Right? 'Cause there ain't shit you can say when they're talking to you, right? You know it's true. All you can do is stand there and look silly, right? [*Applause*] And shit gets too thick, right, nigger's got a great answer. 'Well, fuck it, then. [*Laughter, Applause*] Take your shit and get out. Yeah, motherfucker, pack this, shit, you packing shit, pack this motherfuckin' shit. You fucking with me. Goddamn it. I don't give a fuck. Put it under your

> drawers. [*Laughter*] I don't give a fuck where you put this shit. Shit, I'm gonna find me some new pussy.'
>
> Woman come back at your ass, though, right. 'You had two more inches of dick, you'd find some new pussy here.' [*Laughter*]
>
> I say, 'Nah.' I say, 'You just trying to fuck with me, see. No, you don't want me to jump on your ass so you have something to say when you leave. Unh-unh. I ain't going for that shit. I know the dick was good to you. If it wasn't good, why was you hollering?' 'I was hollering to keep from laughing in your face.' [*Laughter*]
>
> 'Not all the time???'

There is despair on both sides though. As torturous as women are they are also tortured. The worst female experience is rape (Pryor 2000f).[36] At best, the tortured women in Pryor's work are ignored (Pryor 2000c). Suffering are those who are condemned to be prostitutes (Pryor 2000c; 2005a; Pryor 2005b), obligated to pimps who take advantage of them (Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005a). Up there with the physical and financial toll of being a prostitute is the emotional toll: being relegated to an inauthentic life lacking in fulfillment—Pryor's greatest fear according to two interviews he did (Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2005b)—as indicated by the flat and monotonous voice Pryor uses while delivering the following black prostitute's reaction to a client's question about the quality of their interaction: "Oh, yeah, get it, baby. *[Laughter]* Oh, shit, daddy, yeah. *[Laughter]* Oh, yeah, honey, ain't no white man ever fucked me like you, baby" (Pryor 2005b).

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) situate violence against one's fellow men as a childish attempt to employ avatars to elicit redress for nature's assault on subjectivity. Underlying many of the aforementioned examples and present in additional ones is the

[36] Pryor's framing of rape (Pryor 2000f) is different from how he frames general violence against women. Exemplified by a skit about the contours of marriage (Pryor 2005b), Pryor sees violence with in the course of a relationship as natural.

high degree to which violence against women, real and potential, is used to mediate the subjectivity of men in Pryor's standup. Sometimes the control aimed at is general (Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000i), such as when a lady is threatened because she declined a subway seat (Pryor 2005a). At other times the violence emerges in situations where men are trying to control women's labor, the aforementioned pimp/ho dynamic being the prime example (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b). Finally, violence is used in intimate interpersonal relationships as a means of procuring obedience (Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b).

There are numerous instances where Pryor addresses how other racial groups are subordinated. Often when he does so, the multivalence of racial oppression is covered. He talks about racial violence against Puerto Ricans, Jews, blacks, and Italians in one skit; and in another he addresses the historical suffering of Native Americans, slaves in the U.S., and Jews who suffered under the Nazis (Pryor 2005a). The pervasiveness of racial hostility in the U.S. South, where they have, "white people that scare white people," is explained in skit that touches on anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S. via the context of World War II: here he also questions the legitimacy of Cold War (i.e. anti-Russian) tensions (Pryor 2000h). Pryor addresses the immorality and irrationality of U.S. expansionism. Much of the U.S. is stolen Mexican land, and after it was stolen many Mexicans were ordered to return to their homeland (Pryor 2000h). Even though he has these skits where he recognizes the ubiquity of racial oppression, there are many skits finding which Pryor subordinates other racial groups.

One story has a doting Italian mother (Pryor 2005b). In another piece on Italians, Pryor (2000g) relates a story, which he presents as fact, about working in a mafia club in

Ohio; so it is hard to judge if the voices and the content that he uses are real, exaggerated stereotypes, or something in between. Pryor is dismissive of Indian Hindus (2000f), just as Mabley (1963) was of Castro and Tshombe; the refusal of the former to eat sacred cows even though they are starving is a position he could not abide (2000f). Jews in their foreignness and by way of traditional Enlightened conceptualizations of their being (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) are used to enhance jokes. Detailing world history, he uses a mix of German and English to represent World War II Nazis; this is rebuffed by a humble voice mixing English and Yiddish (Pryor 2005a). One of his old men characters, establishing his worldliness, asserts that he knew Jesus and warned him that dealing with Jews would be problematic if he did not have any money (Pryor 2005b). Jewish embodiment of Enlightened society's greed is also evident when Mudbone says that during the turn of the 20th century there were only a couple of people living in Hollywood; the one Jewish person "lived in Beverly Hills" (Pryor 2000i). Finally, the significance of Jewish caricatures to comedy is shown in conjunction with one of Pryor's more serious moments, one of his most direct attacks on whiteness. To move back to comedy, he tells a joke that starts off, "These two Jews were walking down the street, okay?" (Pryor 2000i). The track does not provide the rest of the joke, but immediately after that line the audience laughs. And, it is not a nervous one. There seems to be a release of tension with Pryor have moved from a harsh criticism of whites to making fun of Jews, the latter an accepted and expected comedic activity (Critchley 2002; Freud 2002).

Most of Pryor's subordination of other racial groups comes across as an attempt to employ socially acceptable stereotypes for comedic effect. This is true of most of his

renditions of Asian speech. He (Pryor 2005a) uses gibberish to indicate Japanese dialogue in a skit about a Japanese mime and in another skit (Pryor 2000a). Other routines have Asians speaking in stilted English (Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000f), presentations that support Asians being viewed as an impenetrable group (Tuan 1998). Yet, these representations are devoid of the effete stereotype that is often imposed on Asian males (Tuan 1998). Instead Pryor (2000d) goes the opposite route, generalizing the ability to use martial arts. This ability hovers above a skit (Pryor 2000f) that has some aspects of Asian as horde. Noting that there are almost one billion of them, he speculates that maybe he should stop talking about the Chinese before they all turn up outside to fight.[37] Another, seemingly positive representation of Asians is Pryor anointing them (i.e. "the Chinese") the smartest racial group and being impressed with the amount of sex it takes to produce a billion members of their group: "A billion people, that's some fuckin'" (Pryor 2000f). However, there are some instances where Pryor's subordination of a racial group is more rooted in authentic Enlightened fear. These situations are marked by xenophobic denigration of Asian immigrant labor. In the first example, Mudbone complains about, and to a certain degree, dismisses the willingness of Chinese labors building the railroads in California to work for scrip (i.e. "yang money") (Pryor 2000c). Their doing so undercuts the railroad's need for black labor. In another, skit Pryor (2000c) addresses the influx of Vietnam refugees. He is upset that the blacks

[37] There is a skit (Pryor 2000d) where Pryor's framing of Asianness is hard to characterize. It finds Mudbone in Hollywood during its early years auditioning for a part. He's excited when he finds out he'll be playing a king, but he is unhappy with the king's surname: "Shit, that's a pretty good part. You know? Change that motherfucker's last name, you know, to Williams or somebody, you know. A little Chinese, that Kong shit. You know?" (Pryor 2000d). Kong is a traditional Chinese surname and an unusual name for a black man in the U.S. For this reason, I see Mudbone's response as more assertion of authenticity than as anti-Asian sentiment. The two instances where Pryor (2000c, 2000f) expresses amazement at the skill with which Chinese people to eat with chopsticks strike me as slightly less benign.

who will be losing jobs to these immigrants had no say in the matter. While both instances find Pryor engaging in the weary hostility of the foreign which helps define modern racialization (Fanon 1967; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), he acknowledges in both cases the role that larger social forces are in play against the immigrants: the general unfairness of railroad labor conditions with the former and how U.S. society demands in exchange for opportunity that the Vietnamese immigrants be anti-black racists with the latter: “They got all the Vietnamese in the army camps and shit, taking tests and stuff, learning how to say nigger so they can become good citizens. *[Laughter]*” (Pryor 2000c).

Mabley’s standup is pro-LGBT. She recounts lesbian love and intimacy (Mabley 1984; Mabley 1984; Mabley 1991; Mabley n.d.), and her descriptions of gay men are varied. Sometimes these men are effete (Mabley 1963; Mabley 2002), but they are never chastised for being so. Mabley tells the story of a nervous novice train robber active during the days of the Wild West. Arriving on a train, he states his intention to “kiss the men and rob all the women” (Mabley 2003c). When an old woman suggests that he do the reverse, she is shouted down by a man who favors the initial proposal. This is one of many examples (Mabley 1995a; Mabley 1995b; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003b) where Mabley affirms homosexual desire. However, this desire and homosexuality in general are not always attached to effete men. She has bits that pertain to homosexuals willing and/or able to deploy violence against those who would repress them because of their sexuality (Mabley 2002; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2006; Mabley 2006). Pryor’s presentation of the LGBT community is more, but not completely, negative.

Lesbians, in terms of the ire they receive in Pryor's standup, are a neutral group. Pryor (2005b) does not pass any judgment when he finds out that his wife is sleeping with her female friend (whom Pryor also slept with), and he (2000i) presents lesbianism as the only legitimate reason for a woman going a long period of time without sleeping with a man (although the specific language of the skit reduces proper sex solely to an activity between men and women). On the negative side, Pryor does not produce an outright condemnation of lesbianism, but Mudbone (Pryor 2000h) commiserates with the audience about changing gender roles: "Mens is womens. Womens is mens." To illustrate this point he cites an interaction with a hirsute waitress, deep of voice. This woman's failure to live up to a feminine ideal is threatening like the sexually active widow in Mabley's sketch (Mabley 2002).

Richard Pryor does, at a tertiary level, acknowledge the subordination of homosexuals. In a skit (Pryor 2000a; Pryor 2005a) about a play put on in a prison, the prison warden initially objects when he finds out that the plot of the play involves a young Southern belle falling in love with a black man. Having been mollified when he is told that the play includes the death of the offending black man, the warden allows the presentation of the play. However, he was misled. The play ends with plans for an inter-racial marriage that will serve as a beacon in the South, so the deceived warden insists on a black man's stage death. If this does not happen he is going to stage the real death of one of his gay prisoners. Transgressions against the racial hierarchy must be accompanied by violence, real or imagined, against the subordinated—as a metaphysical essence any subordinated entity will do.

In this skit, Pryor couples the subjugation of blacks with the subjugation of homosexuals. Both must be highly policed. At the beginning of the skit, when the prisoners are settling in to watch the play, the warden warns the homosexuals not to use the play as cover for sexual behavior. This warning is the last of three initial segregations. First the black prisoners are directed to an area; then the white prisoners are directed to an area. Finally, the aforementioned restrictions are placed on homosexual bodies. While all of the prisoners are told not to masturbate, the homosexual prisoners receive additional directives. This is the only instance in Pryor's material where there is such any type of open acknowledgement of societal level subordination of LGBT people, and it is one of two instances where Pryor in any way acknowledges the oppression of homosexuals. Most of Pryor's take on this group is decidedly retrograde.

In Pryor's standup terms denoting alternative sexualities are used to denigrate. A macho teenage boy calls a less macho teenage boy "sissy" and "faggot" (Pryor 2005a). When a black nationalist is unhappy with the order in which the guests have been introduced on a television show, of which he is the last one, he uses the same word to address a white television show host (Pryor 2000a). Richard Nixon is derided as a lesbian (Pryor 2005b). An arresting officer calls Pryor a "punk" (2005b),[38] and Pryor (2005b) mentions that at one point during his hardscrabble youth not having a ringworm meant you were a "punk." Mudbone remembers the days, "when [only] womens used to go to the bathroom together" (Pryor 2000h). Intersecting with this trend is the use of effete qualities to label and denigrate those who are perceived as being homosexual. Pryor (2005a) uses an effete voice to represent comic book superheroes Batman and

[38] Here the term could have a strictly criminal connotation.

Robin and their relationship, with the same technique being used to conceptualize cartoon strip heroes Prince Valiant and Sir Lancelot. Yet, Pryor (2000h) does acknowledge the subjective nature of gender norms. While in Zimbabwe he was struck by the practice of men dancing together and walking down the street holding hands. He quickly dispensed with his objections when he was told that the behaviors followed the dictates of Robert Mugabe, the country's powerful leader.

At its most oppressive levels, Pryor's standup denigrates homosexuality for its failure to conform to the heteronormative order. Addressing the military's class distinction, a lieutenant who exempts himself from "kill class" (presumably because he will never have to place his life in danger in service of his country) is given an effete voice (Pryor 2000a). During a funeral routine whose major theme is the inevitability of death, homosexuality is a dangerous temptation (Pryor 2000c). Bereft of his female companion, the recently deceased succumbed to a gay liaison. He died when the man's partner (i.e. "husband") found them and shot him[39]. Finally, in 1983 in line with the early years of AIDS, Pryor plays epidemiologist and offers his analysis of the history of the disease: "People say they don't know how they got AIDS and shit. I know. *[Laughter]* You get fucked in the ass. That's how you get AIDS. *[Laughter]*" (Pryor 2000h).

Representations of homosexuality in Pryor's standup are also used to indicate power relations. A white hillbilly salivates at the chance to be fellated by a "big black buck" (Pryor 2005b). Pryor (2000c) equates his own abuse at the hands of a judge with being penetrated; he implores the judge not go in too far. Carrying on with this judicial theme Pryor (2000c, 2000c, 2000g) thrice addresses men having sex with men in the

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[39] This skit ends with the preacher's insistence that the congregation does not want the recently deceased up in heaven with them. It is unclear if this statement is based upon the deceased's habit of having had sex with men.

context of prison confinement. In one instance, he speculates about the nature of the confinement of Richard Nixon (Pryor 2000c), insinuating that prisoners would be quick to rape him. Being a victim of sexual assault is something that Pryor (2000c) ardently avoided during his own time in jail[40]. His prodigious comedic talents allowed him to protect his anal virginity. His fellow prisoners were too busy laughing to think about raping him. Pryor (2000g) explicitly reinforces the idea that power relations determine certain instances of men having sex with men during a bit which addresses prisons and prisoners. After having established the brutish nature of the prisoners by referring to information he gleaned whilst filming a movie in an Arizona penitentiary, Pryor relates an encounter that he had with an overly-friendly co-star (i.e. Gene Wilder) who was prone to socializing with the prisoners. Wilder, on the basis of his heterosexuality, dismisses Pryor's assertion that such fraternizing with the prisoners may lead to his sexual victimization. Pryor's counter-claim is, "That ain't got nothing to do with it. They don't fuck you 'cause they like it. *[Laughter]* [They just want] to see that look on your face. *[Laughter]*" (Pryor 2000g). Along with dismissing homosexual desire and presenting it like nature and a threat, here Pryor lays out a theory about the power dynamics of certain aspects of men having sex with men.

However, during this same skit Pryor's (2000g) conflicts over gender norms and heteronormative sexuality are on full display. Pryor highly prizes masculinity, and he sees the ability to deploy violence as one of its major components. Following this, it is hard for Pryor to conceive of "two murderers…fucking each other." Yet, this

[40] While he was successful during his times in jail, his childhood is not without its scars (Pryor 1995).

incredulousness is part of Pryor's acknowledgement that such actions do happen.[41] And, even though his commentary on this particular type of interaction ends with another subordination of homosexuality—wherein one murderer threatens to kill the other if their transgression, obviously shameful, is disclosed—it signals the start of Pryor's contravention of gender norms. This counter rhythm, while rooted in the high value that Pryor personally places on sex, also speaks to the generally high heteronormative sexual impulse Pryor attributes to all people. This impulse leads Pryor to confess that given enough time in prison he would have sex with another man—"Forty years, I'd fuck something"—as the appearance of an anus is gender neutral. This necessity of this market contraction is replaced by a muted and partial acknowledgement of homosexual desire in the skit where Pryor talks about having had sex with a homosexual (Pryor 2005b) (the second instance where Pryor acknowledges the subordination of homosexuals), a skit that might refer to a real life event where he dated a transvestite (Pryor 1995). Here Pryor (2005b) states that he was the only person in his neighborhood who would have sex with a homosexual and admit it. He suggests that there are many men who deny doing so during the day, only to engage in such behaviors at night. But, here Pryor still suffers from the power of heteronormativity. He was ashamed when he encountered the man ten years later.

Pryor reduces people (e.g., maternal figures, feminine and sexual women, and members of the LGBT population) to nature. Closer to nature than people, and also used for mediation in a manner directly following Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), are animals. In Pryor's standup they are commanded (rarely), but more often they serve as a

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[41] As pointed out by Williams (1995), in Mabley's discourse and performances prisons operate as a free space wherein homosexuality can escape silencing. Here, Pryor (2000g) uses prisons in a manner similar to their usage on Mabley's (1995a) "Live at Sing Sing."

support for humanity, be it through their anthropomorphization alone or coupled with actions which directly help ease the troubles of human life. During a routine that has Mudbone racially oppressed by a number of people, the only thing that Mudbone commands is a horse named Ginger (Pryor 2000c). He also commands Lassie, a racist dog who only barked at black people (Pryor 2000i). In another skit, Mudbone wakes up early because, "[if you] get up early, you can hear [the birds and shit] talk to you. They tell you what happened last night" (Pryor 2000d). This is one of the instances when Pryor draws nature closer to humanity, in so making it less fearsome. With two pet monkeys, Pryor (2000f) finds a mirror of the human condition. The first, a male, was in dire need of female companionship. He would attempt to have intercourse with inappropriate partners (e.g. people's ears). Once Pryor got him a female friend with whom he could satisfy his needs he was much calmer. The monkeys died, breaking Pryor's heart. But, the anthropomorphized dog from next-door comforted him:

> [He] said 'Hey you, Rich, what's the matter?' *[Laughter]*
> I said 'My monkeys in there, they died.'
> He say 'What? Your monkeys are dead? You mean the ones that used to be in the trees?'
> He said. 'Damn. I was gonna eat them, too.' *[Laughter]*
>
> He said 'Life's a bitch, ain't it?' *[Laughter]* 'One day you're here, the next day you gone.
> Well, don't linger on it too long. That shit can get to ya.' *[Laughter]*
> [I told him,] 'Thank you.' And he went away.
> He walked back to the fence and he got ready to jump over and he turned around and looked at me and he say 'You know I'm gonna be chasing you again, tomorrow.' *[Laughter and Applause]*

In this bit, Pryor displays much of man's varied relationship to nature. First, nature is a mirror to man. The male monkey's obsession with sex mirrors Pryor's; in so it validates it. You can hear the pride (and awe) in Pryor's voice when he describes his salacious pet

and his shenanigans. But this attachment, like his attachment to women (Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000f; Pryor 2000g), will have a nadir. Yet, even during this time nature comforts, if only temporarily, before it relapses into its threatening mode, which is more dominant in other sketches.

During his first visit to the Nairobi bush, Pryor (2000g) quickly realized that its denizens were nothing like those he had observed in zoos. To the prey of lionesses he assigns fearful reactions (i.e "Oh, fuck!"), and he imagines a conversation between two hunting cheetahs. Their speed makes them prideful; they refuse to start chasing animals until they are far enough away to pose a challenge. But, even for animals pride comes before a fall. In this case, the fall is literal; one of the cats gets juked and embarrassed in front of his friend, so he promises revenge to the offending gazelle. Pride is an attribute the Pryor also ascribes to his dogs (Pryor 2000f). His malamutes are very meticulous about what they eat, and they are too high class to guard against burglars. He has a cowardly Doberman, an exception to the fierce nature of the breed. Pryor insists that people need, "[pets] to help you out." One of his dogs provides words of comfort when Pryor's female partner leaves (Pryor 2000c). In the ends he tells Pryor to "take care"; then the dog urinates on the floor. Pryor's menagerie also includes a miniature horse (Pryor 2000f), an object of lust for his numerous dogs. When Pryor prevents them from using it to live out their romantic (and then culinary) fantasies, Pryor becomes their new copulative object. Pryor's children have no such problem with the dogs, which happily comply with abuse at the children's hands.

Pryor (2000f) having to fend of this sexual assault is one of a couple of clear instances where animals are presented as a threat. In jail (Pryor 2000h), Mudbone's

greatest obstacle was crabs. They would mess his body up. Ants in the woods sabotage two of Pryor's (2000f) favorite activities: eating and sex, and roaches spoil funeral meals (Pryor 2000e). Like women, animals are ultimately posited as a destructive force. The appearance of a composite animal as described in the Bible is supposed to herald the end of times (Pryor 2000d). And, Pryor (2000f) points out the illusory and temporary nature of man's power over animals: without guns people in the woods would be in serious trouble because of bears and snakes. And, of course, there are animals that are destructive at human behest such as police dogs (Pryor 2000e).

Physical nature is a beautiful and peaceful thing in Pryor's world (Pryor 2000f). He's glad his father taught him to appreciate this embodiment of God. It is also portrayed as an ameliorative force that our racially oppressive society closes off to blacks (Pryor 2000g). But, nature is also destructive, along the lines of the interpretation of Horkheimer and Adorno (2002). Its cyclical catabolic nature is evident in Mudbone's recall of the droughts suffered in the U.S. during the beginnings of the 20th century (Pryor 2000d). And sadly, Pryor's (2000d) comedic rejection of disease, a natural force, during a skit about a preacher's un-Christ-like condemnation of his "deaf and dumb" parishioners can be contextualized via skits about his multiple sclerosis done during his later years (2000i). Like drought, disease is an anorectic natural element. This includes STDs (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000h), and the disease that is old age (Pryor 2000i). Yet, in the end, the purest forms of nature are the most powerful. While multiple sclerosis wracked Pryor's (2000i) body, the most devastating experience presented in his standup may be his having caught on fire: it was a death and a rebirth as it cleansed him of his anger (2000h, 2000i).

The last element of Pryor's subordination of the other is his glorification of Africa. Pryor's first visit to Africa was spurred by advice from his therapist (Pryor 2000i). Traveling there is a palliative. While there he had a well-known transformation (Watkins 1994; Pryor 1995; Pryor 2000g): having viewed the continent's beauty, he no longer felt the word "nigger" had any place in his vocabulary. Viewing people free from the everyday interpersonal effects of racial oppression allowed him to conceive of the heights that black people around the world might reach (Pryor 2000g; Pryor 2000h). When discussing Africa on his *Bicentennial Nigger* album (Pryor 2000d), Pryor voices a recent inductee into slavery. Rowing a slave ship, he explains to his laughter to a fellow captive: "Yesterday I was a king." For Pryor, Africa symbolizes a return to privileged (masculine) status. To this end, Africa—like women, other racial groups, and nature—through its deification (a dynamic that sometimes occurs in the work of Mabley) allows Pryor to lighten his load and increase his imagination.

Conclusion

The temporality of black bodies has been a persistent theme in modern black intellectual thought, and one work which offers significant insight into this phenomenon is Ralph Ellison's (1994) *Invisible Man*. The true chronological start of Ellison's (1994) novel introduces the reader to a young black man, the class valedictorian of an all black school in the South. Set in the U.S. during the 1940's, the novel covers his transition from inauthentic situation to inauthentic situation, all of which are concomitant with atemporality, some of which are externally imposed.

The most blatant instances of atemporality in *Invisible Man* (Ellison 1994) are externally imposed. Throughout the novel, The Invisible Man, in his existence as a subordinated racial

being, is constrained to certain modes of existence by whites exercising their rights as privileged racial beings. All of these situations find the Invisible Man's and/or some other black bodies being subject to constriction. In the first chapter he, along with other black males, are made to fight in a battle royal. In the second chapter he is forced to drive a white trustee, Mr. Norton, of his all-black college to talk to a black man who has sexually assaulted his own daughter. This conversation leaves Norton mortified, so the second chapter also finds our protagonist in a bar filled with "shell-shocked" black war vets—people whose movements are heavily policed in general and in this specific instance in an effort to grant Mr. Norton some relief.

At the end of Ellison's (1994) tenth chapter, having stumbled into a union meeting, The Invisible Man is eventually—and generously—granted his leave by the white union members. Upon returning to the basement to work with an old black employee of the paint factory, a Mr. Brockway, he is set upon when the latter mistakes him for a member of the union. After the ensuing fight, an explosion—incited by Mr. Brockway—leaves The Invisible Man hurt. Therefore, the eleventh chapter of the novel finds him in the factory hospital. Similar to Fanon (1967) and published in the same year (i.e. 1952), Ellison (1994) explores many of the dynamics underlying the racial oppression of black people; and, like Fanon (1967) and de Beauvoir (1993), Ellison (1994) identifies an atemporalized body as the site of this oppression.

The aforementioned temporal restrictions entail relatively indirect control of The Invisible Man's body: the possibility of the wealth and higher status that a college education might give him induce him to enter the battle royal. These same possibilities convince him to sacrifice his free time to drive around Mr. Norton, and while he is driving Mr. Norton the possibility of losing these opportunities causes him to ignore his better judgment. Yet, in chapter eleven, the control of black bodies and the inevitable resultant atemporality is more direct.

Under the guise of curing his blackness, doctors and nurses set upon The Invisible Man. For much of the chapter, he cannot move; and, most, but not all, of this immobility is due to being placed in a glass box that physically restrains his movement. The rest of his atemporality can be traced to the experiences that he has in the hospital. Named. Traumatized. Rent. Classified. Infantilized. Silenced. Displayed. Politicized. Organized. Integrated. Clothed. Erected. Freed. Damned. Both Ellison (1994) and Fanon (1967) ground racial oppression in atemporality, while grounding atemporality in various restrictions of the body; just as de Beauvoir (1993) constructs a similar explanation of gender oppression. This focus on atemporality can be found in a number of post-colonial works and in the work of Fanon (1967) and de Beauvoir (1993) a specific dynamic of oppression—what Fanon (1967) labels a "third person" consciousness—is explored.

One finds a narrative parallel to *Invisible Man* (Ellison 1994) in Fanon's (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World*. In the widely cited "The Fact of Blackness," the book's fifth chapter, Fanon (1967) autobiographically details the dialectical transition from blackness-in-itself to blackness-for-itself (Welcome 2007)—from atemporality to colored people's time. The process is grounded in discourse and starts with a naming: "'Dirty nigger!' Or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'" (Fanon 1967:109). Having been classified via a reverse baptism, Fanon (1967) develops a consciousness of his body and concomitantly finds himself "burdened" by "the white man's eyes" and the white world. The naming is a veritable outside force which atemporalizes. Only after shedding externally imposed conceptualizations via laughter does Fanon (1967) enter time.

Fanon (1967) has no real hierarchy of racial naming: "'Dirty nigger!' [and] 'Look, a Negro!'" (Fanon 1967:109) are equally as bad, both derogatory even though only one of the

phrases is profane. Side by side, the two phrases disclose some of the general dynamics through which bodies are made atemporal. The act of naming performed by the privileged racial being brings Fanon (1967) into the colonial world, while at the same time suggesting an inescapable position within it. Fanon tries to break free, but initially he cannot: “I could no longer laugh, because I already knew that there were legends stories, history, and above all historicity, which I had learned about from Jaspers” (Fanon 1967:112). Here the power of discourse and its reiterative powers stem from its ability to impose lived experiences. “Nigger.” “Negro.” Both recall and reinforce every form of racial oppression that Fanon has experienced. It is not the mere idea of race, the stereotype, or their various manifestations which atemporalize; it is the ability of all of these things to ground Fanon’s body in the concrete and primary experiences of subordinated racial beings; not just his, but those of his group, both present and past:

> “In America, Negroes are segregated. In South America, Negroes are whipped in the streets, and Negro strikers are cut down by machine-guns. In West Africa, the Negro is an animal. And there beside me, my neighbor in the university, who was born in Algeria, told me: ‘As long as the Arab is treated like a man, no solution is possible.’”
>
> (Fanon 1967:113)

Here the naming re-activates physical conditions, those concrete experiences of black bodies always under threat.

Sartre (1956) defines historicity as, “the unique and incomparable mode of being of a selfness” (221), uncovered temporality that is displayed by reflection. As a subordinated racial being, Fanon’s historicity is schizophrenic. Some of his experiences involve explicit and direct racial oppression. Other experiences of racial oppression are subtler, seemingly benign instances were the disavowals of race act as a form of racial oppression. In the end these experiences lead

Fanon (1967) to have a "third-person consciousness" of his body: he confronts his body as a thing. Instead of inhabiting the body, the body is accessed as one would something at a distance.

Part of the richness of Pryor and Mabley's standup is that it presents a very complete picture of oppression. In their standup, oppression functions as a means of mediating the subjectivity of privileged entities, and they both envision it as a process wherein the subordinated embodies nature. While this theoretical framework—one richly sociological in its parallels to the work of Frantz Fanon (1967); Simone de Beauvoir (1993), and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002)—is beneficial, of equal importance is the sense that Pryor and Mabley provide of how oppression is both suffered and enforced. The counterpart of this portrait of oppression is the portrait of freedom to be found in their work. In the standup of Pryor and Mabley two over-lapping conditions of freedom are voiced: being authentic and maintaining a phenomenological residence in the present. Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) argues that being authentic is synonymous with being in the present. While Pryor and Mabley are vocal about the importance of authenticity/phenomenological residence in the present, they are not as forthcoming about the underlying dynamics of this process.

Fanon's (1967) reduction to thinghood (similar to that described by de Beauvoir (1993) in her explication of en-soi) will form a third, and most concrete, indicator of colored people's time. In general colored people's time represents a phenomenal residence in the present that must be devoid of the fixity of both 1.) subordination and 2.) privilege. It demands bodies that are intimate and inhabited rather than distanced. Focusing on authenticity in conjunction with the inhabited/distanced dichotomy of bodies will help reveal the workings of colored people's time.

Chapter III: The Importance of Authenticity

"My word of advice to you is just relax.
Just do what you got to do, if that don't work then kick the facts.
If you a fighta',
rida',
bita',
flame-ignita',
crowd-excita',
Or you wanna jus' get high, then just say it.
But then if you a liar-liar,
pants on fire,
wolf-crier,
agent wit' a wire
I'm gon' know it when I play it."
"Hip-Hop"
Let's Get Free (2000)
Dead Prez

Pryor and Mabley's Call to Authenticity

The production of authenticity is Mabley's vocation. She often speaks about how it is her responsibility to "hip" her audience (Mabley 2004b; Mabley 2006). These are the most reflective insights about her standup to be found in her standup. Mabley's nickname is "Moms." She viewed her self, and was viewed by her audience, as a surrogate maternal figure: not a mammy, but someone who held the responsibility of making sure people understood the way things really are (Williams 1995). The given root of this perspective originates in an event that serves as the basis for a story that often surfaces in her material. To be hip is to be "wise" (Mabley 2004a). Making a statement whose truth she emphasizes, Mabley (2006) says that her elderly grandmother hipped her because the old woman was frustrated with the lies that so many others had been exposed to and the subsequent ignorance that these lies produced. Wanting to save her

granddaughter from this fate, Mabley's grandmother made it her mission to hip Mabley. Similarly, Mabley carries out this same mission amongst her audience, which is amongst her children.

In a second statement, Mabley (2004a) expounds upon the importance and dynamics of bringing hipness about. Hipness must be inculcated at an early age and continually reinforced. Mabley poses a question to President Dwight Eisenhower:

> I asked Ike a simple question. I said, 'Listen, boy.' *[Laughter]*
>
> I say, 'How old would you say a child should be before you hip it?' Now, for the benefit of you children that don't dig jive, hip means wise.
>
> He said, 'When he gets along school age.'
>
> I say, 'And you talk about juvenile deloncacy, or whatever you talkin' about.' *[Laughter]*
>
> The time to hip a child is the minute that it's born into this world. The first words you say to that child, it's like a blank record. There it is, just comin' to the world, ready to be hip or be a square for the rest of his natural life. *[Laughter]*
>
> Just like you put that needle on the record all you wanna, but until you speak, it don't register. But, the minute you speak, it registers.
>
> That for your first words to that child is that child's lifeline. Instead of you tellin' that baby the truth, you go put your old dirty hands up in front of that baby's face, talk about, 'This little piggy went to market –' *[Laughter]*
>
> 'And this little piggy –' *[Laughter]*
>
> That baby don't wanna know about no damn pig! *[Laughter]*

This is one of Mabley's most fiery statements[42]. As she poses her question she's on the far side, but not completely removed, from being confrontational. Eisenhower's response

[42] Mabley (1995b) makes a similar statement in a conversation with Nixon.

sends her over to the other side. Her cadence picks up; her intensity rises to even greater heights; and, her anger prevents her from properly pronouncing "delinquency." Instead she gives it the ring of an unfamiliar and illegitimate concept. By the end of the quote, when she discusses nursery rhymes, her indignation has turned into dismissiveness. Along with the general comedic element of speaking truth to power (Watkins 1994; Critchley 2002; Freud 2002), Mabley (2004a) aligns herself with the nurture side of the "nature vs. nurture" argument. For her, the newborn child is tabla rasa, and exposing it to anything except the truth will produce detrimental effects (i.e. "squareness")[43]. Rather than follow the traditional sequence wherein people are misled—a process that forces them to become something that they're not (most often in regards to race and sexuality) (Mabley 2006), results that they might not overcome—Mabley (2004a) zealously champions authenticity, what she calls, and "the truth."

Contrary to calls for truthiness, Mabley's call to authenticity (i.e. "the truth"), along with general dictates to be yourself and think, entails an honest assessment of the situations and conditions at hand[44]. With the specter of another Great Depression looming, Mabley (2004a, 2006) encourages people to live according to their finances. She then relates the tale of some of her neighbors from a high-rise building in New York City. Their rent was such a huge portion of their bills that they hardly had any money for

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[43] Here the initial moment is of utmost importance, but the content of Mabley's standup implies that continual reinforcement and any introduction of hipness is important.

[44] "Man is defined first of all as a being 'in a situation'" (Sartre 1948:59), a situation being something that a person,

> "cannot be distinguished from, [as] it forms him and decides his [possibilities, even though] it is he who gives it meaning by making his choices within it and by it. To be in a situation, as we see it, is to choose oneself in a situation, and men differ from one another in their situations and also in the choices they themselves make of themselves."
> (Sartre 1948:60)

While situations refer to individuals, "[conditions are] nothing more than the…ensemble of abstract characteristics common to all situations" (Sartre 1948: 60).

food. Visiting her to play with her grandson, one of the neighboring family's young children was racked with hunger pains as Mabley prepared hog neck-bones that had been sent to her by relatives down South. Well-mannered, the boy initially refuses Mabley's entreaties that he eats. But, eating hordes of lettuce (so much that he and his siblings "hop like rabbits") made him so hungry that he eventually takes up her offer. Having been faced with the prospect of real food he faints when he sits down to eat. Failing to accurately assess their situation, the actions of Mabley's adult neighbors are not truthful even though these actions produce a certain level of enjoyment, that which comes from living in a posh residence; and their inauthentic actions harmfully effect those close to them.

This story's (Mabley 2004a; Mabley 2006) emphasis on enjoyment taking place within the context of an honest assessment of situations and conditions is an example of Mabley's more general emphasis on the causal relationship between accurate assessment and the advancement of the truth. For Mabley (2006), the antithesis of the person that is hip is the person that is old; and for Mabley, being old is not determined by one's age. A person is old when they plan actions that they cannot carry out. In this sense, one who has a chronologically induced relatively restricted range of action is not necessarily old. Nor is the person who has a relatively expanded range of action necessarily hip. Along with having a failing internal critique, a failing external critique is the other characteristic Mabley associates with being old. When people do not understand others and the world around them, they are old. Differences between generations (Mabley 1963; Mabley 1964; Mabley 2003a; Mabley 2004a), sexes (Mabley 2002), and sexualities (Mabley 2003a) must be accepted.

Finally, being authentic means accepting, along with your possibilities of agency, the complete nature of your being (Mabley 1991):

> Two ladies on a streetcar were having a little chat
> When [one] spied a little bug on the other lady's hat.
> She reached over to pick it off, but very much to her dismay,
> Oh, she was very embarrassed to hear the other woman say.
>
> 'Put it back, put it back.
> Now it don't belong to you, so put it back.
> Now be it a bug, beast, or flea,
> It don't belong to you, it belongs to me.
> And by the time that I count to three, put it back.'

The bug proprietor's voice is weary, yet determined. More important than decorum and social propriety is accepting all of what one is. Read as a metaphor, it must be understood that everyone has socially unacceptable components to their person; but these must be embraced. A similar perspective defines Pryor's stance on authenticity.

In a series of interviews Pryor (2000h, 2005b) outlines the call for authenticity underlying his comedy. Discussing racial injustice, he says that his comedy is not geared towards evening out discursive attacks; it is about him being authentic. He thinks everyone should be authentic, even though being so is hard work (Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2005b). Pryor (2005a) complains about minor impediments to authenticity such as not being able to get a cab to take you where you want to go and not being able to get into a bar (Pryor 2005b). And, he glories in mundane acts of authenticity: getting desired off-menu items at a Chinese restaurant (e.g. "You got any pork-fried duck?") (Pryor 2000f), ordering creative alcoholic drinks (Pryor 2000b), and insisting that people bawl at his funeral (Pryor 2000i). A crucial site for inauthenticity in Pryor's standup is the physical body. Restrictions on inherent biological necessities such as passing gas (Pryor 2000a;

Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2005b) and masturbation are discussed (Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000g; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b); the latter being allied with Pryor's concerns about sexual and relationship restrictions such as those which coalesce around pornography (Pryor 2000e), adult men being sexually attracted to teenage girls (Pryor 2000i), men having sex with men (Pryor 2000g; Pryor 2005b), and monogamy (Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2005b).

A major account for Pryor's authenticity is the beauty he associates with difference. In a story about a bar (i.e. "Hank's") from his home town—an example of the stories that Pryor started to develop after he stopped trying to be like Bill Cosby (Pryor 1995)—Pryor (2005a) talks about the link between authenticity and beauty and how one can learn by observing difference. The theme of the skit is, "It was a beautiful place with beautiful people. Everybody was different. Everybody was an individual" (Pryor 2005a). This point is driven home as Pryor voices four characters: two of whom are examples of authenticity, with the last two representing the forces of inauthenticity. Mr. Perkins is one of Pryor's old, black, male characters; characters very important to his repertoire. He pontificates upon the importance of truth through a discussion about craps:

> Hank, now let me tell you. I'm going to fix this for you. Now listen, I'm going - don't talk about no money right now until I tell you what I'm going to do. See, I'm going to take - see how you got them cushions up there? You ain't got them cushions - them cushions ain't but that thick. Now, see, them boys can come lick them dice and they can beat you out of house and home because they slick. They slick. Watch this. Throw me them dice. Watch this. See how they lick. They just throw - see that five? Jump it right back and watch. I ain't lyin' to you. Look at that. You see that? See, that's the truth. Them dice don't lie. You ain't got that board up there. See, you got to have four to five inches of cushion up there, Hank. You get that cushion up there and them dice gotta come off and tell the truth. *[Laughter]*

> They got to come off straight see. See I was over at the Elks, and they beat me out of $60.00 over there. See them niggers over there are tough. *[Laughter]* They don't be bullshittin' you. I'm tellin' you the truth. You get you a cushion, see. They put that velvet down in there and crease it down in there. I'm going to take some satin, and I'm goin' to whoop over the top over the table. I'm going to put them big four inch - them four inch tacks in there. Big ones, see, they gonna go in there thick and hold that together. When they go over there they can't do nothin' but tell the truth every time they come off that. That's the truth. I like you, Hank. That's why I'm going to do it for you. *[Laughter]*
>
> I knew you when you was a little boy. I knew your mother, and she always treated me nice. *[Laughter]* She was a good woman. I don't play no dozens. I'm serious. She's a good woman, man. She's a good woman. Your mother's a good woman. I'm goin' to do this for you because I like you for $35.00. *[Laughter]* You couldn't get nobody else to do that. Jesse and them guys charge you $80.00 to even think about I. I'm goin' to do it for nothing, for the $35.00 and maybe a fish sandwich. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Perkins provides both an example of authenticity and discourse about it. As a person, he is adamant about expressing himself, making himself and authenticity known. Perhaps his concern for Hank's welfare is based on his prior experiences with the Elks. Regardless, Mr. Perkins is insistent about producing the truth. He demonstrates his point as he manipulates the dice to produce the desired point. Perkins, Pryor, and Pablo Picasso all employ the "lie that tells the truth": "them dice don't lie." When the discussion proceeds to the economics of the transaction, talk which Mr. Perkins put off until he had proven his point, a discounted price is offered because Mr. Perkins was treated kindly by Hank's mother. Mr. Perkins staves off a round of snaps when he tells Hank that he does not play the dozens. As when it comes to games of chance, Mr. Perkins is about the truth. In terms of the dynamics of the sketch, Mr. Perkins is similar to Mabley (2004b, 2006). He is wary of inauthenticity; and even though (unlike Mabley) he seeks some material benefit, ultimately he values the truth and sees extending the truth to those to whom he is attached as an important personal responsibility. Yet, in terms of

Pryor's standup, Mr. Perkins articulates the major explicit theme of Pryor's standup: the importance of being authentic. The dynamics of authenticity are demonstrated by the sketch's other characters.

Another authentic character present in Hank's bar (Pryor 2005a) is Black Erma. Pryor indirectly links her beauty to the pride that she takes in her blackness and her womanhood. She is a big black woman. While not expressly presented as a prostitute, Erma does insist that her relationships have an element of quid pro quo. She refuses to become socially intimate with men who will not financially contribute to her well-being. More importantly, she is very vocal when it comes to making this point—ending her exclamations with, "kiss my ass." Erma's words are essential to her expression of who she is, and her insistence on recompense speaks to the historical problem of the pilferage of women's labor (Engels 1978; hooks 1981; Davis 1983; de Beauvior 1993). Overall, Black Erma is intent on making her authentic being known.

Weasel and Coldblood, the latter being one half of a pimp duo, also pursue their desires. However, their pursuits hinge upon foisting inauthenticity upon others in the name of social mediation. Weasel sells people things by playing to their alienation: "[degrading] you, [making] you think that you had to have something" (Pryor 2005a). Using his powers, he attempts to get people to wear overcoats in the summer, buy shoes a couple of sizes too large, and buy musical instruments that they do not play. Coldblood also employs degradation, but his motives are more psychological than financial. By picking out and picking on someone who had less material wealth than him (i.e. Pryor) he could boost up his ego by articulating his superiority over that person. By calling Pryor, "Little Dick"—a double-entendre based on Pryor's name and a metaphor that served as

an accurate representation of Pryor's sex life at the time—and putting down Pryor's clothing; Coldblood is able to exalt his own relationships with women and his own sartorial presence.

Coldblood serves as a parable deriding inauthenticity in a double sense. First, like Weasel, he represents the forces and reveals the workings of the forces that urge people to be inauthentic. Finally, he represents the pitfalls of inauthenticity. Coldblood presents himself as a masculine ideal: wealthy and successful with women. Yet, when he is confronted with a superior power his façade falls. Tarcey, a black cop, comes to Hank's place and stops the fun. Accosted by the cop, Coldblood is forced to reveal that the Tarcey busted him and took two of his charges of the street, making Coldblood broke. Furthermore, he reveals that his motorcycle, which he had been bragging about to Pryor, is in arrears. Most devastating is the final blow dealt to his manhood. His back talk to Tarcey gets Tarcey angry; and having been threatened by the cop, Coldblood replies that anyone with a badge can act tough. The skit ends with Coldblood having been knocked out by Tarcey, and a warning is implicitly given: do not pretend to be something you are not; doing so will get you in trouble[45].

Mabley and Pryor have similar mottos, Mabley's (2006) being , "If you can't make it, don't fake it. Let somebody else take it," and Pryor's (2005b) being, "shit don't come true, leave it alone." Pryor also shares other positions with Mabley, such as his emphasis on just being yourself. Yet, when it comes to the larger importance of authenticity, Pryor and Mabley differ. While Mabley sees her authenticity and her

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[45] In another similar skit, "Crap Game" (Pryor 2005a), the black cop's motives for entering the club are a very subtle portrayal of another instance of inauthenticity. The cop, along with his white partner, is looking for a black man named Jesse, who has been accused of assaulting a woman. When he questions the crowd, one of the responses he gets is, "They got some white Jesses. They knock people in the head. Why don't you go over there, nigger, look for a Jesse?" (Pryor 2005a).

support of authenticity as a social justice program, Pryor's has self-fulfillment as his goal. In an interview he states that he is not trying to be anyone else, and he does not view his authenticity as an attempt to right the wrongs of the world (Pryor 2005b)[46]. However, in that same interview Pryor does recognize large scale forces which enforce inauthenticity: "[Just] be yourself…. to have to jive all the time just to deal with people … is the bad part about it…. I wanna be accepted, but, usually, to be – in order to be accepted by white people, you have to compromise so much from your 'Hello'" (Pryor 2005b). Strangers' expectations are also a problem, such as people seeing him and expecting him to be a black version of comedian Lenny Bruce, a comedian whose content (e.g. sex and drugs) and perspective were similar and contemporary to Pryor's. Also detrimental to authenticity and his creative process is the desire to, and actually, having money (Pryor 2005b).

The possibility of being inuathentic scares Pryor (2005b), and this is also a basis for his call to authenticity: he wants to be able to look back and know he lived his life for-itself. In Pryor's standup, unlike Mabley's, authenticity is not a basis for large-scale social change. He (Pryor 2000h) cites the dangers of seeking to make a contribution to society by trying to bring about macro-level social change; to him this is an un-realizable goal. The tension of Pryor's call to authenticity is different from Mabley's, as demonstrated by one of his near-death experiences.

During an acid trip, unable to breathe, Pryor (2000c) screams out "I'm gonna die! I don't even know who the fuck I am. I'm gonna die." (Pryor 2000c). In an interview

[46] Pryor's (2005a) description of Hank's bar also has a more nihilistic take on the negative implications of authenticity: "A lot of tricks used to go there, and a lot of farmers used to go there looking for 13 year old girls. 'Just give me one of them girls, one of them 14-year-old ones, boy. Come on now. I got a little money.' It was rough, but that was the way it went down" (Pryor 2005a).

Pryor (2000h) states that everyone has something inside that, "is dying to express itself." Mabley's call for authenticity is more social as she seeks to bring something to the world. Pryor's call to authenticity is more individual. He fears inauthenticity like the pits of hell. The spirit is a light that must shine, and rather than focusing on being that light for others, Pryor sought to be that light for himself. The process is hard (Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2005b), but simple: beware of false bravado (Pryor 2000c) and simply say "I don't give a fuck" (Pryor 2000i)[47]. For Pryor and Mabley the search for authenticity demands strength of character in two areas—the ability to hold one's self above everyday expectations and workings and the ability to see one's self as one truly is. These two principles are at the heart of the drive towards authenticity found in intellectual theories of social mediation, especially those that fall under the broad category of black intellectual thought.

<u>The Drive Towards Authenticity in Theories of Social Mediation</u>

During the Harlem Renaissance Langston Hughes (1993) laid down the parameters of black authenticity:

> "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn't matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves." (95)

[47] This "not giving a fuck" with the purposes of being authentic (Pryor 2000i) is different from the problematic "not giving a fuck" the Pryor associates with a numbed detachment from life via drug usage (Pryor 2000d).

The context and necessity of Hughes' statement stemmed from the historical place that blacks had (and continued to hold) in Western society. In the modern world, as early as the introduction of chattel slavery to the U.S. and the larger Western world, blackness has been associated with inferiority (Gould 1983): this denigration of blackness helped shape a general black social project in the U.S. While this project took many forms, from the birth of the nation to the early 20th century, for blacks in the U.S. trial by labor was the dominant perspective in terms of the possibilities of positive black social mobility. It is to this Fredrick Douglas (2003) was responding when he argued that given the chance blacks would prove themselves worthy of the rights of citizenship. Booker T. Washington (1989) as he urged blacks to, "let down your bucket where you are" and W.E.B. DuBois (1998, 1903) in his discussions about black progress and the necessity of a "talented tenth" spoke to the same idea.

This perspective met up with opportunity as the U.S. entered into World War I. Labor shortages opened up opportunities for blacks to move into industries and positions that heretofore had been the exclusive purview of whites (Steinberg 1995). Blacks thrived in the factories, on the battlefields (Aptheker 1973; Klinker and Smith 1999), and on the cultural front. The latter occurred as black soldiers introduced jazz to the European continent (Hobsbawm 1975). The cultural inroads which blacks achieved in the name of the U.S. are all the more impressive because for many a year the U.S. had been trying to establish a cultural and artistic reputation. Picasso had awakened Europe to the presence of African artistry with some of his earlier Cubist paintings, one of the most significant artistic advancements of its time. Part of Cubism's draw was its link to the primitive. As the country that had sustained Rousseau, France had a well-established and loving

relationship with the primitive. It was this relationship that fostered the French love of jazz (Gioia 1990).

Success at home, success on the battlefield, and the creation of the first true art form to come from the U.S and its international recognition; given these achievements one would think that blacks had succeeded in their trial by labor. They did. Nevertheless, the response that their success elicited was horrific. In the U.S. the end of the Great War signaled the start of the Red Summer. During the war the treatment of black soldiers had been of concern. Soldiers stationed in Houston had been subject to a sham trial after they defended themselves against attacks from white soldiers, and black soldiers in New Jersey had been shot by white soldiers (Aptheker 1973). This treatment served as a preview of what was to come once large numbers of black and white soldiers returned home. Blacks—some of whom were returning soldiers, some of whom were not—weathered attacks across the U.S. during the summer of 1919: including attacks in Charleston, Chicago, and the District of Columbia (Norvel 1970). The immediate damage that stemmed from these riots was great. However, having gone through the trials of labor that heretofore had been associated with positive mobility, having met the expressed goals, and having suffered harshly; a new perspective—embodied in the above-mentioned quote by Hughes (1993)—on the black experience was fostered; a perspective which crystallized with the Harlem Renaissance (Rampersad 1997).[48]

Alain Locke (1997c), editor of one of the Renaissance's seminal works, *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*, complained that that, "the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being" (3). For Hughes, and some others, responding to

[48] There were conservative takes on the issue, such as Countée Cullen's, "[wish] to be known as a poet who happened to be Negro, rather than as a Negro poet" (Rampersad 1997:xxi). Hughes (1993) offers a rejoinder to this point.

this atemporal formulation of the Negro entailed a rejection of external conceptualizations of blackness and analyzing the dynamics of racial oppression. For them, black bodies should no longer be governed by what others thought of them.

This emphasis on the issues of authenticity can be found in many Harlem Renaissance works (McKay 1956; McKay 1957; McKay 1970; Larsen 1997; Locke 1997b; Locke 1997c; Fisher 1969; Fisher 1992; Hurston 2000) and works which grew out of that tradition: such as Richard Wright's (1940) *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison's (1994) *Invisible Man*, and the work of the Negritude movement.

After the First World War, France experienced an influx of black students from its colonies. Similar to, and influenced by, many of the black artists of the Harlem Renaissance, these students were attempting both to give voice to and to modify their black existence (Eshleman and Smith 1983; Dixon 1991).

While France had an appreciation for jazz and for primitivism, this love affair with that which was dark did not translate into a universal acceptance of people of African descent; there was a qualified acceptance of those from the colonies. Similarly, there was also "liberty, equality, and fraternity." However, all of this was governed by the idea that the cost of acceptance was that anything foreign to France had to adopt a French patina, and those things that could not had to be discarded. This is the atmosphere in which many black intellectuals from French colonies found themselves in when they journeyed to Paris to further their educations (Eshleman and Smith 1983; Dixon 1991). Like Douglas (2003), Washington (1989), and Dubois (1998); like the thinkers of the Harlem Renaissance, both liberal and conservative; blacks studying in post-World War I Paris were faced with the shibboleth of black cultural deprivation. Leaning heavily on

ideas which flowered during the Harlem Renaissance a group of intellectuals from this era fostered the idea of negritude.

The concept of negritude first appears in Martinican Aimé Césaire's (1983a) "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land" (Eshleman and Smith 1983). Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (1983), translators of Césaire, categorize negritude as, "a response to the century-old problem of the alienated position of blacks in history" (5), a movement which, "set as its initial goal a renewed awareness of being black, the acceptance of one's destiny, history, and culture, as well as a sense of responsibility towards the past" (6). With both Césaire (1983a, 1983b, 2000) and the Senegalese poet Léopold Sédar Senghor (1991) negritude exists in counter-distinction to Western civilization (Eshleman and Smith 1983), grounded in the call for a true unity with nature where neither man nor nature is object.

Emphasis on authenticity grounds a number of theories of social mediation. Césaire (1983a, 2000) directly influenced Fanon (1967), and post-colonial theorists other than Fanon have done important studies whose solutions hinge upon the authenticity of subordinated beings. Post-colonial studies (Memmi 1965; Said 1979; Spivak 1988; Minh-ha 1989; Mohanty 1991; Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1994; Anzaldúa 1999; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002), feminist theory (Engels 1978; Kristeva 1986; de Beauvoir 1993; Friedan 2001; Chopin 2003b; Chopin 2003c; Gilman 2009), black feminist theory (Morrison 1970; hooks 1981; The Combahee River Collective 1982; Walker 1982; Giddings 1984; Lorde 1984; Mullings 1997; Wallace 1999; Hill Collins 2000), critical race theory (Peller 1995), the Black Power movement (Ture and Hamilton 1967), and whiteness studies (Roediger 1999) all have important works which, at some level,

associate the alleviation of oppression with increased authenticity. With Fanon (1967) authenticity is linked to a phenomenal residence in the present.

The Movement Towards Authenticity as an Emphasis on Residing in the Present

Movements towards authenticity are temporal. Authenticity is for-itself (Hegel 1977; Marx 1978a; Marx 1978b) and in Jean-Paul Sartre's (1956) *Being and Nothingness*, a work that directly influences many important works of social mediation (Memmi 1965; Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993), the movement towards the for-itself represents the dynamic of time. The concept of the for-itself is important to the field of sociology and theories of liberation as it plays an important role in Karl Marx's (1978a) differentiation of class-in-itself and class-for-itself. The former represents the immediate oppressive results of capitalism. However, Marx (1978a) finds within this condition the seeds of class revolution. As oppressive as capitalism and its resultant factory are, they create conditions that foster class-consciousness. Two inter-related dynamics are at play. The first is the creation of situations that support the development of class-consciousness in the proletariat. Via the factory, workers realize that they constitute a class. Second, the actual physical structure of the factory (e.g. its packed environment) produces a space wherein the proletariat can realize the nature of modern class dynamics, a situation that also leads to the coalescence of the workers into a revolutionary force. Class-in-itself covers the proletariat's inauthentic situation. Class-for-itself covers the authentic possibilities of being working class grounded in their appropriation of their current conditions. Like Sartre's (1956) explicit formulation of the relationship between time and the for-itself, Fanon's (1967) implicit formulation of race-in-itself and race-for-itself

(Welcome 2007), and de Beauvoir's (1993) analysis of female inauthenticity and authenticity; Marx's (1978a, 1978b) take on the in-itself and for-itself owes a debt to G.W.F. Hegel (1975)[49].

Examining *Hegel's Logic* (1975), we can gain an understanding of his conceptualization of thought-in-itself and thought-for-itself. For Hegel, thought is the "highest and most inward life" of the mind (Hegel 1975:15). Thought serves as the object of the mind:

> "[Thought's goal is to come] to itself; for thought is [the mind's] principle, and its very unadulterated self. But while thus occupied, thought entangles itself in contradictions, i.e. loses itself in the hard and-fast non-identity of its thoughts, and so, instead of reaching itself, is caught and held in its counterpart. This result, to which honest but narrow thinking leads the mere understanding, is resisted by the loftier craving of which we have spoken. That craving expresses the perseverance of thought, which continues true to itself, even in this conscious loss of its native rest and independence, 'that it may overcome' and work out in itself the solution of its own contradictions."
>
> (Hegel 1975:15)

Here, (Hegel 1975) focuses on two elements of thought as an object of the mind: thought entangled in its contradictions and thought immersed in the necessity of coming "to itself." These two elements represent thought-in-itself and thought-for-itself respectively.

This in-itself/for-itself distinction underlies core formulations of race in the work of Sartre (1948, 1975c, 1988, 1989b) and Fanon's (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World* (Welcome 2007), just as it structures de Beauvoir's (1993) discussion of sexual oppression. In these works, being authentic (i.e.

[49] Hegel's (1975) conceptualization of the in-itself and for-itself is also important to Sartre's (1956) discussion of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, a discussion which underlies the latter's equating of the movement of the for-itself with the movement of time.

for-itself) is synonymous with being in the present following the dictates of temporality laid out by Sartre (1956).

Hazel Barnes (1956) defines Sartre's temporality as a,

> "subjective process whereby the For-itself continuously lives its project of nihilating the In-itself. Through temporality the For-itself sets up its own measure for the duration and self-identity of things. Time is not in things but flows over them. The For-itself as what it has been (Past) is a flight (Present) toward what it projects to be (Future)."
>
> (807)

For Sartre (1956), the present is equivalent to the for-itself and temporality is the complete act by which the for-itself (i.e. the present) negates (i.e. "nihilates") the in-itself (i.e. the past). When Sartre (1948, 1975c, 1988, 1989b) and Fanon (1967) discuss racial oppression they frame the end of racial oppression in terms of the subordinated racial being's authenticity. de Beauvoir (1993) also frames the end of sexual oppression in terms of female authenticity. Both Fanon (1967) and de Beauvoir's (1993) directly translate this authenticity into temporal terms. Oppression will end when subordinated individuals—both the objectifying and the objectified—are able to live in the present.

While the drive towards authenticity and representations of authentic bodies are the strongest explicit theme in the standup of Pryor and Mabley, and U.S. black comedy in general (Watkins 1994), in their work the annulment of oppression is equated with a residence in the present. The general and the specifics of this emphasis on authenticity/the present constitute colored people's time—an annulment of the fixity of oppression—and the discussion of the importance of the present in Pryor and Mabley's standup are multi-dimensional. It revolves around a skepticism about residing in the past or future and an explicit emphasis on bodies residing in the present.

Chapter IV: The Importance of a Phenomenological Residence in the Present

After all this time, I'm still bussin' up the chifforobe
"Us"
Death Certificate (1991)
Ice Cube

Secondary Temporal Concerns

The Past

Pryor and Mabley's attitudes about the past and the future are ambivalent, unlike their embracement of the present. To them, the past (i.e. what has been) and the future (i.e. what can be) and phenomenal residence therein lead to both positive and negative effects. Mabley's major complaint concerning the past is the tendency to live in it. She excoriates those who pine for the good old days (Mabley 1995b; Mabley n.d.). In the past, you were worked like a slave and you had to specifically follow every direction given to you (Mabley 2002). Hence, Mabley (1995b, n.d.) does not understand the tendency to deify the past: she was there, and it was not how people like to present it. Problems with living in the past for Mabley include things other than deification. It also includes a willingness to relish past experiences in lieu of present experiences. This is especially true in terms of romance. Mabley (2003b) "ain't looking for no memory." Finally, Mabley criticizes the past because it haunts. Old things, originating in the past, are malignant. This includes "old pretentious lies" (Mabley n.d.), the limited opportunities she had "to live" (Mabley 2004a), and the lies told to children (Mabley 1963). Yet, she also sees the past, even its negative aspects, as a positive thing. In the past her grandmother taught her many of the things she has used to get through life

(Mabley 2006), and her past marriage to an old man was part of the process of her becoming an independent woman (Mabley 2004a; Mabley n.d.).

Pryor shows the same ambivalence. Mudbone (Pryor 2000g) is against being content with a memory; like Mabley (2003b) this point gets made in a sexual context. When it comes to remembering the last time he had sex, Mudbone only wants his memory to have to extend as far as yesterday (Pryor 2000g). As with Mabley (1963, 2004a, n.d.), with Pryor the past haunts. For him the most prevalent manifestation of this haunting is slavery. While there are other topics where Pryor's intent veers between seriousness and straight comedy; his discussions of slavery, more so than his discussions on any other topic, are often serious. During his "Wattstaxx" monologue (Pryor 2005b) he touches upon it briefly. This also happens during *Here and Now* (2000h). However, during one of his extended pieces on slavery, one found on his *Bicentennial Nigger* (Pryor 2000d) album, an album whose year of release coincides with the 200th anniversary of the U.S. (and the month of my birth); Pryor abandons straight comedy in favor of muted satire:

> Pryor: Do you all know how black humor started? It started in slave ships, you know, cat was on his way over here rowing. And a dude say, 'What you laughing about?' [Cat said], 'Yesterday I was a king.'
>
> Pryor: We're having a bicentennial. Two-hundred years. Gonna have Bicentennial Nigger. They will. They'll have some nigger, 200 years old in black face. With stars and stripes on his forehead. Little eyes, lips just a-shining. And he'll have that lovely white folk's expression on his face, but he's happy. He happy 'cause he been here 200 years.
>
> Said, [Pryor as Bicentennial Nigger] 'I'm just so thrilled to be here, over here in America. I'm so glad you all took me out of Dahomey. I used to could live to be 150, now I die of the high blood pressure by the time I'm 52 and that thrills me to death. I'm just so pleased America is gonna last. They brought me over here in a boat. There was 400 of us come over

> here. Three hundred and sixty of us dies on the way over here. I love that. That just thrills me so. I don't know.'
>
> Pryor as Bicentennial Nigger: 'You white folks is just so good to us. Got over here, another 20 of us died from disease. Ah, but you didn't have to doctors to take care of us. I'm so sorry you didn't. Upset you all something too didn't it? Then they split us all up. Yes-siree. Took my momma over that way, took my wife that way, took my kids over yonder. I'm just so happy. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do if I don't get 200 more years of this. Lord have mercy! Yes siree. I don't know where my old mamma is now. She up yonder in that big white folks in the sky.
>
> Y'all probably done forgot about it, but I ain't gonna never forget it.'

Secondary, but closely linked to the primary haunting described during this section, is the role of a non-oppressive past. Pryor is guilty of breaking Mabley's (n.d.) tenet about not glorifying the past. Yet, Pryor's invocation of African sovereignty serves as an effective tool for contrasting the before and after of U.S. chattel slavery. More pressing are the direct conditions of slavery and the relationships between slaves and whites in the antebellum U.S. Overall, this memory is characterized by violence and death: the forced forfeiture of freedom, the direct and indirect violence done to black bodies, and the specific types of death that awaited so many slaves. "Y'all probably forgot," recognizes the value whites place on these experiences. The violence faced by blacks in the past and the little thought given to it is one more example of Pryor's representation of oppressive temporality: if actions do not happen to whites the actions are given no place in social memory. This skit ends with a rejection of this aspect of colonial temporality and the strongest embracement of the haunting to be found in the work of Pryor and Mabley: "I ain't never gonna forget."

Pryor's standup does contain neutral and positive representations of the past. Sometimes there is only the façade of neutrality, such as when Pryor (2005a) describes

how hillbillies used to go to Hank's after-hours club to look for black adolescent prostitutes. At other times, such as when he discusses his early failures as a lothario (Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b) and when he discusses his having had sex with a man (Pryor 2005b) there is a more authentic neutral tone. Pryor's positive assessments of the past are, in a mode less idealistic than his slave-as-king (Pryor 2000d), linked to an exaltation of the freedom that he had in his past. As mentioned early (Pryor 2005a), he enjoyed being just a kid, that time before he was forced to be black. He enjoyed the time he spent listening to Mudbone (Pryor 2000c) and Mr. Perkins (Pryor 2005a). He also enjoyed his relationship with one of his wives before he got married (Pryor 2005b): one more iteration of the theme of not settling for a memory (when married he had to "fuck from memory"). Through all of the discussions of the past, Pryor and Mabley to some degree, emphasize historical continuity. The past, positively or negatively, affects the future. This is reflected in their analyses of the future. Both see it as connected to the past, and ambivalence once again defines their evaluation of an aspect of temporality.

The Future

Mabley's view of the future is ultimately positive. The only caveat is her insistence that that future, like the present (Mabley 1991), includes both baleful and positive experiences. Reaching the inevitable latter means dealing with the former. This comes across in her "End of the Road" and "Everything Is Going to Be Alright" songs (Mabley 1991). In the first, Mabley (1991) voices her acceptance of the "dark" days and "thorns" that characterize her present. The "end of the road," the inverse of these circumstances, will be pleasant. Mabley voices a Judeo-Christian religious ethic that is intimately related to black social movements in the U.S. (Carson et. al. 1991; Klinkner

and Smith 1999). This last element may seem to coincide with a perspective found among whites in the U.S regarding race that was described by Gunnar Myrdal (1944): things will eventually get better. However, Mabley (Mabley1991; Mabley 2002) differs from the former in that those responding to Myrdal (1944) thought that they could be inert in regards to racial issues, with the amelioration of these issues being inevitable: Mabley thinks that change can only come when people, regardless of whether the conditions they live under are positive or negative, are active and authentic in their present.

On "Everything is Going to be Alright" Mabley (1991) locates the key to a happy future in being consistently religious (in the Judeo-Christian sense). This is a peaceful existence, which will ensure a pleasant future: the same future referred to in "End of the Road" (Mabley 1991). During the course of the song, Mabley affirms her faith in the future of the children. Also, repeated is the idea that things cannot be fixed by mere human intervention. Instead, divine help must be sought. The approach espoused by Mabley is universal. "Everybody" is encouraged to do it: this seems to imply both blacks and whites. Congress and even old foes such as Castro and Khrushchev are encouraged to pursue this path. Lastly, Mabley exhorts, "the boy that [she loves] so much," President John F. Kennedy to follow the path that she has laid out. During this song, rather than being ambivalent, Mabley (1991) maintains a delicate balance. While most space is given to a focus on the future, the key to the song is actually a focus on the present. Constant supplication at the feet of a Supreme Being and praxis are the keys to the future. At its core, this song, through its discussion and emphasis of the present, contextualizes the future. Pryor's bits also use the present and future to contextualize each other.

The problem with dominant historical narratives is that they, like more explicit oppression, exorcise the subordinated from the flow of time. Pryor (200d) once again covers this point as he discusses a science fiction film, *Logan's Run*. The film is set in the future, and it has no black people. Pryor takes this to mean that, "white folks ain't planning for [blacks] to be here" (2000d), an observation which spurs Pryor to the conclusion that blacks need to make their own films (i.e. historical narratives), something that he strived to do in real life (Pryor 1995). And, the films which blacks produce must diverge from the blaxploitation trend of presenting blacks as pimps and prostitutes because the truth is that white folks are pimps while blacks are their top earners (Pryor 2000d).

Pryor uses inappropriate foci on the future to emphasize the importance of the present. One of his major critiques of whiteness is its undue focus on the future. Along with Weasel trying to sell people winter coats during the summer there is the misplaced white concern about the advent of black power (Pryor 2005a):

> Pryor: No, white people are so worried. You all getting uptight.
>
> Pryor imitating white people: 'Black power is coming.' 'Black power is coming.' 'Black power. Aiee!".
>
> Pryor: And everybody – they really get uptight. But the white knight comes stickin' people, that's cool.

Pryor's (2005a) comments on this hypocrisy, along with conforming to Mabley's (2004b) identification of the spectral role that blacks play in the white psyche, show how a focus on the future is used to elide responsibility for transgressions occurring in the present. This disjunction between the present and the future coupled with efforts to control often has destructive results, such as the possibilities of a nuclear holocaust which Pryor (Pryor

2000h) links to Ronald Regan's unsubstantiated fear of the U.S.S.R. Pryor also presents disjunctions between the present and the future as a detrimental force in his own life. Worrying about his contribution to the world is something that Pryor (2000h) labels a pitfall. Towards such a contribution he is ambivalent (Pryor 2005b):

> Dracula, Frankenstein, Wolf Man, Invisible Man, and Hercules don't scare me. The FBI, the Anti-American Committee, J. Edgar Hoover, President Nixon, President Johnson, Martha Mitchell and her husband, or her man, or her woman, Ethel Kennedy, all the Kennedys, the Bank of America, Chase Manhattan, Rockefeller, none of these people scare me. What scares me is that one day my son will ask me, "What did you do, Daddy, when the shit was going down?"

Here the future influences the present. This also happens during a skit where Mudbone explains that he saves his money so that he won't be destitute in the future (Pryor 2000d). Pryor also descries the importance of the present via a discussion of the future during another Mudbone skit. Having established the mysterious nature of the future (including one's eventual demise) and the impossibility of recovering the past, Mudbone concludes that it is best to ground one's life in the present (Pryor 2000g):

> [You] didn't ask to come to this motherfucker and you sure can't choose how to leave 'cause you don't know when you're gonna go. So don't take this shit sad. You better have some fun and plenty of it. 'Cause when the shit old and you ask for a recharge, it's too late. *[Laughter]*

Pryor does think about his future and how he would like it to be. He'd like to die having sex (this is how his father died) (Pryor 2000e), and he wants people to cry over his death (Pryor 2000i). A present experience (2000e), his father's death, contextualizes both his present (the pursuit of his goal), his imagining of, and how he imagines his future. The present is also important in its own right in the sketches of both Mabley and Pryor.

Primary Temporal Concerns

The Present

The ultimate focus of Mabley and Pryor's standup, the specific temporality in which they locate the emancipatory phenomenon that this project is calling colored people's time, is phenomenal residence in the present. Along with serving as the over-riding thrust to be found in their work, each of them makes definitive statements to this effect: "You livin' in the greatest days, now, you children, there ever was or ever will be in this atomic age. This is it. *[Laughter]* Don't worry about nothin'. This is it. *[Laughter]*" (Mabley n.d.). The modern world, so full of promise, is for Mabley (n.d.) the pinnacle. Yet, in making this statement, she was not just talking about a specific chronological present, she was talking about all presents.

Mabley's discourse is a call to carpe diem. Part of this comes across through her elderly woman stage persona. It serves as a perfect explicit and implicit foil for her dismissal of obstacles. She tells her audience, "Never too old" (Mabley 2003b). Made while previewing what her performance will cover, the statement lacks a subject, leaving it open. She's, "[never] too old." You're, "[never] too old." The expansive scope of "Everything Is Going to be Alright" (Mabley 1991) suggests that the proper interpretation of the statement should be, "[None of us are ever] too old."

The "carpe" aspect of Mabley's call, is also reflected in "Everything Is Going to Be Alright" (Mabley 1991). Linked to Mabley's emphasis on the present is her call for an active and open interrogation of one's situation and conditions. Like an ancient general (Sun Tzu 1991) Mabley links effective engagement of one's surroundings with

proper knowledge. Sometimes accurate assessment in itself is pushed, such as when she (Mabley 2003b) chastises a friend of hers:

> [He said, 'You] can't fool me. I been to school.'
>
> I say, 'Oh, you ain't so smart.' I said, 'If you is so smart, I want you to answer one question.' I said, 'How many sides does a house got?'
>
> He said, 'Four.'
>
> I said, 'That's so dumb.' ________. 'A house has got eight sides.'
>
> He said, 'It's got four.'
>
> I said, 'I said it's got eight.'
>
> He said, 'I said it got four.'
>
> I said, I said, 'Name them four sides you're talking 'bout.'
>
> He said, 'North side, south side, east side, and west side.'
>
> I say, 'Inside, outside, topside, and bottom side, fool. *[Laughter]*[50]'

The present is a "sculpture of milieu." This focus on the importance of looking at something from all sides take a lighter tone when she points out that the nature of her performance is foreshadowed by the palindromic and invertible nature of her name (Mabley 1984). The importance of knowledge that comes from looking at all things is fundamental to one of Mabley's (Mabley 1984) slogans: "Do what you want to do, but know what you're doing." This perspective allows one to take full advantage of the present. Mabley criticizes those who do not follow this ethos and points out the error of their ways. Explaining her high quality of life, Mabley (1964) roots it in her ability to

---

[50] As much as proper perspective, here Mabley pushes humility. Part of being in the present is not relying on the past. While there are examples where she lauds education (Mabley 2006), in this instance Mabley's friend's schooling produces burdensome perspectives which hinder his phenomenal residence in the present.

understand her situation. Many other women try to live her life style: "[looking] good" and "[living] good." Some fail because they misjudge their situation. Older women seeking to squire young men often fail to emulate Mabley because these women perpetrate delusions. Young men tell them they love them and the old women believe them. Mabley does not blame the young men; she blames the women. These women fail to adequately understand their situation, unlike Mabley who realizes that, "when [she] was young all [she] had to peep over [her] pocketbook and smile and [she] could get any man [she] wanted, but now, [she has] to have the pocketbook open with the money showing" (Mabley 2004b). In this case, as in others (Mabley 1984), contextualization of the whole of an experience is necessary if one wants to be grounded in the present.

Pryor has his own critique of the atemporal which reveals an emphasis on the present. Like Mabley, he uses contrast to make his point. Pryor (2000a) contrasts the experiences of Clark Washington and his alter ego, Super Nigger. While Super Nigger's existence is defined by super speed, x-ray vision, and heroics; Washington's existence is defined by monotony. As a janitor, he spends all of his days cleaning up floors just so others can mess them up again. During the "Bob Bond" (Pryor 2000a) skit a passing comment is made: "The devil created time." This bears out in Pryor's characterizations of atemporality. Not being in time is the thing that Pryor (2000i) avoids: pre-life was so monotonous that he, unlike others who complain that they did not, asked to be born[51].

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[51] Another aspect of Pryor's emphasis on the present is an emphasis on the efficient use of time. Pryor makes this point as he speculates about black versions of white films. Pryor critiques "jive" white films (2005b). For instance, it's possible to have a white film, two hours or greater, about a woman vacillating about her impending childbirth. A black film on the same subject would, "be a five-minute short. *[Laughter]* Bitch, have the baby or don't. *[Laughter]*" (2005b). Both films revolve around the same issue, but the approach is different. This would also be the case in a black version of *The Exorcist* (Pryor 2000b). There would not be much of a movie because as soon as the devil spoke a black person would abandon the house. Then the credits would roll.

The conflict between atemporality and a present-centered orientation also comes up in Pryor's improvisation skits and his description of them in "Improv, Pt. 1": "sometimes it's really great, and again – sometimes it's great. Sometimes it's sort of like not bad. But it's never boring" (Pryor 2005a). In another skit, "Improv, Pt. 2", Pryor (2005a) further elucidates and demonstrates the benefits of this technique. In this latter instance, he resorts to improvisation because of a temporary state of stagnation. Lending himself to the wishes of his audience, he asks them to plot his future actions. The first, as mentioned in Ch. II, request confuses him with Flip Wilson.

To this request, Pryor demands the right "do us," a demand to articulate his present as he sees fit. Throughout Pryor's work one finds such calls to the present. This call is most clearly expressed on the eponymous track from his album *Here and Now* (Pryor 2000h). During this routine, Pryor (2000h) applauds the New Orleans' attitude towards death. In this southern city, they party, "at the drop of a hat." Funerals, or no reason in particular, are enough. The thinking behind this impulse to party is that the present moment must be appreciated; it must experienced in all of its richness.

Conclusion

An orientation in the present is sine qua non. Claude McKay (1957) claims as much in *Banjo: A Story Without a Plot* through the novel's eponymous character:

> "'Nevah no moh is indeed mah middle name,' said Banjo, 'but brown me ef I'm a telling-it-too-much kind a darky. I ain't got no head for remembering too much back, nor no tongue for long-suffering delivery. I'm just a right-there, right-here baby, yestiday and today and tomorraw and forevah. All right-there right-here for me now.'"
>
> (33)

While Mabley's insistence on looking at things from all sides and Pryor's emphasis on the necessity of escaping monotonous durees of time, enjoying all of life, and being efficient represent aspects of their respective emphases of the present, their foci on time and the present lends itself to greater specificity. But, they do not directly vocalize detailed techniques for residing in the present. However, since the subversion of oppression entails an inherent residence in the present, an examination of the means through which oppressive situations are subverted will reveal specific techniques for achieving colored people's time.

Simone de Beauvoir (1993) presents a concrete marker of residence in the present with her differentiation between negative liberty and positive freedom. The former refers to the cessation of a condition, while the latter entails a constant pursuit of one's existential possibilities.

Two such situations of subversion that conform with this dissertation's established markers of colored people's time—1.) no fixity of the subordinated, 2.) no fixity of the privileged, 3.) no "third-person consciousness" of one's body (i.e. treat one's body as a thing), and 4.) a project of freedom—are making a break with the racially oppressive world and the negation of gender mediation. With this first mode of subversion the technique of appropriating heretofore-oppressive situations is a means of phenomenal residence in the present.

Chapter V: Colored People's Time Technique #1-The Appropriation of Heretofore Oppressive Situations

Who's world is this?
The world is yours.
The world is yours.
"The World Is Yours"
Illmatic (1994)
Nas

Introduction

The World

Laying out the means for social change, Frantz Fanon (1967) paraphrases Jean-Paul Sartre's call that the "rhythm" and "chain of command" of the world be displaced; and in calling for the end of the colonial world, Fanon (1967) seemingly adheres to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) definition of the world. Merleau-Ponty (1962) defines the world as, "the field of our experience" (406) and, "a collection of things which emerge from a background of formlessness by presenting themselves to our body as 'to be touched', 'to be taken', 'to be climbed over'" (441). The agent's subjectivity, experiences, her gaze, and the movement of her objective body create the world. Merleau-Ponty (1962) also provides a description of how one's world can be changed:

> "By taking up a present, I draw together and transform my past, altering its significance, freeing and detaching myself from it. But I do so only by committing myself somewhere else….[displacing what came before with] a new pulsation of time with its own supports and motives. The same applies in all cases of coming to awareness: they are real only if they are sustained by a new commitment."
>
> (455)[52]

[52] The sentence which follows this quote, "Now this commitment too is entered into in the sphere of the implicit, and is therefore valid only for a certain temporal cycle" (Merleau-Ponty 1962:455) is also

Merleau-Ponty's (1962) description of the transformation of the world entails a utilization of that world. Fanon (1967) highlights how, for the oppressed, this transformation entails a utilization that is an appropriation of the world that oppresses them. This is what Fanon (1963, 1967) emphasizes through his quotations of Aimé Césaire's (1990), "And the Dogs Were Silent."

Written in 1946, "And The Dogs Were Silent" (Césaire 1990), chronicles the experiences of a black rebel who has been jailed for killing a white man. During a fall day, the rebel's "very good master" comes to the rebel's dwelling and inspects the rebel's son. While doing so, the master discusses the son's possibilities. The son will be,

> …a good Christian and a good slave, a good
> subject, utterly devoted, a good slavedriver for an over-
> seer, with a sharp eye and a strong arm…
> (Césaire 1990: 39)

With this possibility on the table for his child, the slave kills his master. Fanon (1963, 1967) cites the play numerous times as an example of the post-colonial political action that needs to take place. In *Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World* (Fanon 1967) he includes the following passage:

> The master's bedroom was wide open. The master's bedroom
> was brilliantly lit, and the master was there, very calm
> …and all of us stopped…he was the master…I entered.
> It's you, he said, very calmly…It was me, it was
> indeed me, I told him, the good slave, the faithful slave,
> the slave slave, and suddenly my eyes were two cock-
> roaches frightened on a rainy day…I struck, the blood
> spurted: it is the only baptism that today I remember.
> (Césaire 1990:41)

---

important as it serves to emphasize Merleau-Ponty's extreme emphasis on phenomenological residence in the present.

This passage details two murders. Two deaths. The first of which is the physical death of the white master, murdered at the hands of his slave. Yet, this is secondary in importance. The rebel makes another killing; he kills those internal forces which limit his being: "he was the master…It's you…It was me, it was indeed me" (Césaire 1990:41). This last execution is the goal of the colonized individual (Fanon 1967), and this point is reiterated in another quote employed by Fanon (1967): "afraid of myself, frightened of myself….Gods…you are not gods. I am free" (Césaire 1990:27). No longer "frightened of [himself]," the slave (Césaire 1990:27), in a move that directly adheres to both Marxist analysis of alienation (Marx 1992) and existentialist thought (Sartre 1948; Sartre 1956; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993), no longer invests others with responsibility for his situation. This dismissal of godhood (i.e. colonial hierarchy) is necessary to him throwing himself back upon his status of having and being responsible for his phenomenal body, and it is made via an appropriation of one of the primary tools of oppression: violence. Pryor and Mabley frame violence as an imperative of repression. However, in their standup dealing with racial oppression they appropriate the concussive sphere of violence—the act, potentialities, and actualities of physical violence and its results—as a means of subverting oppression's fixity, a means of residing in the present[53].

Violence as an Imperative of Racial Oppression

During 1976, the 200th anniversary of U.S. independence, Richard Pryor (2000d) produced a fitting reflection of the condition of blacks in the U.S. at that time—

[53] While Mabley's standup concerning racial oppression that was examined does not witness any instances of the subordinated employing violent redress, her standup concerning gender oppression does. The most significant examples concern gay men deploying violence against those who are homophobic (Mabley 2002; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2006; Mabley 2006). However, Trudier Harris (1988) presents an example where there is implied violent redress on the part of blacks.

Bicentennial Nigger. The album's fourth routine, "Bicentennial Prayer," finds him employing one of the major stock figures populating his oeuvre; the old black man, in this case, the black preacher. Slowing down his speech and adopting the voice of an older and more rural black man, Pryor summarizes the experiences that blacks have had in the U.S. during the two hundred years since the official founding of the nation. In doing so, he touches upon the role of nature: interpreting it through the lens provided by the Enlightened world (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). More importantly, he refracts post-colonial perspectives on colonial power, providing an interesting and effective take on their workings:

> Richard Pryor as black preacher: We are… [*Applause]* gathered here today, to celebrate, this year of bicentenniality…in hope of freedom and dignity.
>
> We are celebrating two hundred years…
> Of white folks…
> Kickin' ass. *[Laughter]*
>
> Now, white folks have had the essence of dis-understanding on their side for quite a while.
> How-essen-ever, we offer this prayer.
> And the prayer is…How long will this bullshit go on? [*Applause]*
>
> How long?!
>
> Audience member: How long!
>
> Richard Pryor as black preacher: How long?!
>
> Audience: How long!
>
> Richard Pryor as black preacher: How long will this bullshit go on?
> That is the eternal question men have always asked, 'How long?'

Similar to Kant's order of time—the before and after of time (Sartre 1956)—Pryor lays out an order of colonial power as it is exercised upon black people: an order atemporal

with the past, present, and future being the same. The condition of the colonized is defined by the continuity of violence. In the past, blacks were the subject of ass-kickings. Blacks experienced similar conditions during the present within which the routine is delivered (i.e. 1976), and the preacher speculates (unfortunately, rightfully so) that after the U.S.' bicentennial these ass-kickings will continue. Pryor (2000d) describes a colonial narrative of power grounded in atemporaltiy: a world whose past, present, and future are defined by an enduring state of "bullshit"—the kicking of black and other colored "asses" by "white folks[54]."

While Pryor (2000d) has an explicit theory about the racial dynamics of colonialism (i.e. continuous ass-kickings) and no specific solution, Mabley has a specific solution and an implicit formulation of the problem. Her theory (Mabley 1963) of colonialism, dissimilar to that of Pryor because it lacks definitiveness, corresponds as both identify violence to be a key drive of colonialism:

> But they ain't so bad down there [in the South], though. They gettin' better. A sheriff locked up a colored boy the other day.
>
> He said, 'I'm [g]onna give you a break, you know it?
>
> An' I'm [g]onna do something for you.
>
> An' I'm [g]onna get you a good lawyer. An' see that you get fair trial.
>
> An' then I'm [g]onna hang you.' *[Laughter]*

Once again there is testimony to the continuity of colonialism's tendency towards violence. This bit is preceded by a short statement about an un-identified racist Southern

[54] This is a dominant theme in Pryor's work. He talks about the violent appropriation of Mexican land by the U.S. (Pryor 2000g), U.S. colonial influence in Vietnam (Pryor 2000c), and, right after the "Bicentennial Nigger" (Pryor 2000d) skit, he discusses his fears about the ultimate end of these modes of behavior, fears he developed after watching a movie about the future—a world with no black people .

governor, which establishes the contemporary state of racial oppression in the South. Following that phrase with a longitudinal analysis (i.e. "[The South is] gettin' better") implicitly establishes the continuity of this violence: it has been going on and it is still in existence. Beyond that, Mabley (1963) comments on the irrationality of this violence. Regardless of whether the young man gets quality legal representation, regardless of whether he "[gets a] fair trial," regardless of whether he is found guilty or not, and it can be speculated that regardless of the severity of the crime; he will face society's most drastic punishment—death. While Pryor (2000d) also emphasizes continuity, Mabley's (1963) outlook is more pessimistic as she identifies death as the pre-destined fate of the subordinated; and unlike Pryor, Mabley finds this violence to be endemic to a specific region: the U.S. South. So, Mabley's break is two-pronged: a simple call for blacks to get out of the South and a call for the South to change. She emphasizes the former.

Comedy often speaks truth to power (Freud 2002). Like Pryor, Mabley has a theory of colonial oppression grounded in the deployment of violence against blacks. However, hers is not expressed as concretely. Pryor frames the U.S. as a space and institution defined by its deployment of racial violence. Mabley, for the most part, uses the same general conceptualization. Yet, she only renders this judgment upon the U.S. South. States like Alabama and Mississippi are deemed "foreign countries" (Mabley1984; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2004b; Mabley 2004b; Mabley 2004b) [55]. And, in doing so, Mabley addresses an issue brought up in one of the 20th century's most important works on race (Steinberg 1995). In *An American Dilemma: The Negro*

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[55] The effectiveness of this designation could possibly be linked to the anxiety that the Cold War was engendering in the U.S. at the time of Mabley's performances. As mentioned in Chapter II, her discussions of Cuba, The Congo, and the U.S.S.R follow the Enlightenment's subordination of the foreign as savage and dangerous.

Problem and Modern Democracy, Gunnar Myrdal (1944) tries to explain the disjunction between the racial oppression in the U.S. and white U.S. citizens' professed belief in the "American Creed." He explains this by distinguishing between personal beliefs and wider social beliefs: how one lives one's life does not have to reflect the way in which one views the larger society. Mabley's assessment of this disjunction is simpler. Finding Southern actions to be inconsistent with the American Creed, Mabley excommunicates the South form the U.S.

Mabley (1963) and Pryor's (Pryor 2000d) analysis and conceptualization of the colonial narrative has elements found in the work of Max Weber (1958). Just as Weber (1958) defined the state in terms of its "legitimate use of social force," Mabley defines the South and Pryor defines the U.S. in general in terms of their legitimate use of racial violence.[56]

For Pryor and Mabley the world of the colonized is a concussive sphere defined by the inevitable potentialities and realities of violence. In total, what Pryor and Mabley are arguing for is a break in this duration. In voicing this call, they take up one of the major issues of post-colonial theory. Frantz Fanon (1967), citing Aimé Césaire (1983a, 1990), calls for an end to the modern, Western, civilized world. Audre Lorde (1984), Trinh Minh-ha (1989), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) propose their own versions of this event. These intellectuals are addressing and calling for the circumvention of the

[56] Of note is the fact that this violence, and most of the violence that Pryor addresses, is effected by men against men. While Pryor does talk about heterosexual (Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b) and homosexual (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2005b) domestic violence in passing and while corporeal punishment rained down by parents upon their children (Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b) is a comparatively prominent theme when contrasted with the former; black men's experiences with the interpersonal and institutional racial violence are the largest sub-themes in Pryor's bits addressing violence in general and racial violence in particular. This disparity in regards to the experiences of women (black and other) is one more example of how in Pryor's stand-up discursive movements reinforcing colonialism blend with and support movements undermining colonialism.

atemporality that defines oppression, what Sartre (1948) describes as a "metaphysical essence"— the subordinated always being required to be a certain thing (e.g. the subject of ass-kickings). Like these other intellectuals, Pryor and Mabley are calling for an end to the colonial world. In their work a break with the colonial world occurs via appropriations of violence, the latter being a legitimized method of racial oppression.

A useful description of this disruption of the narrative of colonial power and how it can take place—one whose emphasis on violence, time, the body, and informal discourse is in line with the work of Pryor and Mabley, and this dissertation's broader focus on phenomenal residence in the present—is suggested in the work of Paul Gilroy (1993).

As mentioned previously, Gilroy (1993) has championed black popular music as an informal discourse with and through which fights against racial oppression are waged. He contrasts black popular music with novels, arguing that the form and content of the former is superior: a superiority that is partly due to music's accessibility. While the black middle-class prefers novels, black popular music has a wider and more inclusive audience as lower and working-class blacks favor it[57]. It bears repeating that the accolades that Gilroy (1993) bestows upon black popular music seemingly reach the superlative level with black comedy. While the types of jokes told may vary, black comedy that addresses racism is enjoyed throughout the black community (Watkins 1994). Also, while specific instances and influences of black popular music may have a greater rate of dispersal, comedy is more egalitarian. The number of people who can create good music is extremely limited in comparison to the number of people who can

[57] Hill Collins (2000) also cites the ability of both novels and music (as well as other cultural forms) to affect the type of phenomenological break that was covered earlier.

make jokes and/or find comedy in the world. The ability to create and find comedy in the world is an inherently human trait (Watkins 1994; Freud 2002).

One element of black popular music that Gilroy (1993) highlights is "the break." This musical chord change is signaled by the ascension of the rhythm section as the instruments and/or voices charged with the melody fade into the background. "The break" is one of the key elements of hip-hop, where it is articulated to the point that it becomes a song's primary, rather than secondary, rhythm (Chang 2005)[58]. Gilroy (1993) describes this break as a, "a dialectic of rescuing appropriation and recombination which creates special pleasures" (104),[59] a revitalizing affect he then credits with being able to break the fixity which characterizes racial oppression. This break occurs because of the music's ability to disrupt the durée of oppression, a disruption that accompanies a bodily restructuring (Gilroy 1993) that can appropriately be deemed phenomenological in the Fanonian (1967) and Merleau-Pontian (1962) sense. This type of break can be found in the work of Pryor and Mabley.

Pryor and Mabley's Appropriation of Violence

Racial Violence in Mabley's Standup

An over-arching movement serving as a counterpoint to the emphasis on the present in the work of Pryor and Mabley is restriction. Mabley's bits concerning the racial restrictions of colonialism range from discussions of restriction in general to

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[58] The links between Pryor, Mabley, and hip-hop are numerous. There is feminist hip-hop (Chang 2005). And, Mabley's female centered sexuality is a precursor to it. Pryor's sexual content has a similar trajectory. Also, his take on state violence and blacks is similar to that found on many albums. N.W.A. (1991) paid homage by sampling Pryor's (Pryor 2000b) skit, "Niggers vs. Police."

[59] Gilroy's (1993) conceptualization of the break is very similar to Fanon's (1967) implicit conceptualization of race-for-itself (Welcome 2007), Sartre's (1956) for-itself, Hegel's (1975) for-itself, and Marx's class-for-itself (1978b).

political violence in the U.S. But, most of them revolve around the U.S. South, and the break with the racially oppressive world that is trumpeted through Mabley's words is equivalent to blacks making a break with the U.S. South[60].

Some of her points about restriction are very basic, such as when she states that she will not work in a place were she cannot go to the bathroom (Mabley 2003b), a reference to the rampant segregation in the U.S. South. This is one of the few instances during her performances where the racial restrictions proffered by colonialism are somewhat benign; another happens when she describes going to get a slice of cheesecake in Philadelphia early in the 1960s: Moms loves cheesecake (Mabley 2002). She sees a piece in a window and goes into the store to get some. After the (presumably) all-white patronage of the establishment stops eating and gazes at her she exclaims, "I don't wanna go to school with ya. I just want a piece of cheesecake. That's all I want" (Mabley 2002). In these two cases the restrictions are somewhat innocuous, yet many of the other racially restrictive experiences in her standup deal with intense violent threats. When two bank robbing killers, one black and one white, are sentenced to death by hanging; the black bank robber attempts to instill some stoicism into his crying white partner (Mabley 2003c). He tells him to "face it like a man." The soon to be hung white bank robber replies, "That's easy for you to say 'cause you used to it" (Mabley 2003c). Here, Mabley articulates an idea found in her bit about blacks dealing with the Southern judicial system (Mabley 1963) and Pryor's "Bicentennial Prayer" (Pryor 2000d): being threatened with violence and death is an ever-present reality for blacks in the U.S. Mabley's cheesecake incident occurred in the North, and the location of the robbery is absent. These are

[60] There is an obvious corollary in the actual Great Migration which took place during World War I, a movement which took many blacks out of the South (Steinberg 1995), lessening their exposure to direct racial oppression and racial violence.

exceptions because when Mabley discusses racial violence she overwhelmingly relegates it to the group of "foreign countries" (1984, 2003b, 2004b, 2004b, 2004b) known as the U.S. South.

Even though Mabley was from the South (Williams 1995), she calls its states "foreign" places (1984, 2003b, 2004b, 2004b, 2004b). Alabama and Mississippi are most frequently named, no doubt because of the racial violence they hosted during the 1960's (Carson, et. al. 1991). Georgia and Texas are also deemed exotic. These foreign countries are home to racial violence both indirectly and directly political. Mabley's expulsion of the South from the realm of civilization also occurs when she gives it the vague moniker "down there" (1963, 1964, 1984, 2003a, 2003a, 2003b, 2003b, 2003c, 2003c, 2004a, 2004a, 2004b, 2006, 2006, 2006), a move which also recalls the Christian hell. Hence, because of the threat of violence Mabley sees no real reason to visit these places. Why take Greyhound to the South when the bloodhounds will chase you out of it (Mabley 1984)? She tells a story about a young man's potential visit to the area (Mabley 2004a; Mabley 2006). Having inherited some property in the violent South a Northern black man is apprehensive about going down there to claim it. He contacts a psychic so that he can consult his dead reverend; and during the séance the reverend advises him to go down there with a fully loaded gun, a sharp knife, and the ability to run. Thankful for the advice the beneficiary goes on to ask the spirit of the reverend to accompany him on his journey. The reverend agrees to go with him as far as Washington D.C. After that, the man is on his own. The South is so dangerous to black people that even the souls of black folk will not risk going there. It might be possible to get killed twice, or to experience something worse than death. Mabley (2003b) herself notes that in order for

her to travel down there she'd have to possess "immortality." This is not the only black man in Mabley's discourse for whom the South holds the threat of violence and death. Three white men and one black man had a singing quartet (1964). While performing their theme song (i.e. "Home on the Range") in Mississippi one of the singers stopped the performance because the black singer was not singing. In response to his partners' inquiries as to his silence, the black singer says that he thought he "heard a discouraging word."

Mabley also provides a number of first-person stories about the threat of racial violence percolating in the South. Mabley (2004b) went down to "No Man's Land, Number 2" (i.e. the South). As a member of AAA, she was entitled to go to any hotel with their symbol on it. The KKK ran the one at which she stopped, however, so she was in trouble. During another trip to the South, Mabley (2003b) went through a rural town in South Carolina on her way to "They-ami" (i.e. Miami). Having run a red light, she is pulled over by a policeman. She explains to him that since all of the white people were proceeding on green, she figured that the black people were supposed to go on red. After reaching her final destination she finds out that her audience is the KKK. This spurs a tremendous comedic performance on her part. Violence in the South is such a threat to Mabley that she does not like any reminders of it. She was unhappy with her trip to Geneva as a U.S. ambassador because she does not like dealing with men wearing sheets (Mabley 2004b; Mabley 2004b).

The threat of racial violence is a relatively small part of Mabley's material dealing with race and violence. In most instances the violence manifests. Mabley (2004a, 2006) warns her audience to be careful when they go through small towns in the South (i.e.

“down there”). A black boy went through one such town and was flippant towards the white police officer that had pulled him over. A slap across the face from the officer’s pistol quickly brought him in line. Another black man joins an inter-racial congregation in one of those “foreign countries” (i.e. “Alabama or Mississippi”) (Mabley 2003b). During his baptism, the preacher repeatedly asks him about his beliefs. He finally responds that given the vigorous nature of the baptism his main belief is that the preacher is trying to kill him. These routines emphasize the pervasiveness of colonial racial violence in the U.S. South. Slight offences or none at all can elicit violence. It is the mere presence of the subordinated racial being which is the true determining factor. Even those charged with maintaining the moral order, such as the police (Mabley 2004a; Mabley 2006) and clergymen (Mabley 2003b), carry out this imperative.

While some of the racial violence in the South discussed by Mabley is not directly political, much of it is; and one of the primary political events around which this violence circles is blacks’ right to vote. Voting in the South can be an anxious experience for blacks. As Martin Luther King and the freedom marchers found out, it can land you in jail (Mabley 1964; Mabley 2006). In one of her performances, this situation is cited as the cause of Mabley leaving the South. She lived in New Orleans, but she accepted money to leave (Mabley 1991; Mabley 2003a): she became a “freedom rider from the South” because of the threats to those blacks attempting to vote. However, while trying to vote in the South can land a black person in jail (Mabley 1964; Mabley 2006), it can also lead to worse consequences. While telling a tale about trying to vote in the South, Mabley (1991, 2002) relates a dream she had about her quest for equal rights for blacks. In the dream, Mabley finds herself in line, not to vote, but to get hung.

The second category grounding Southern overt political violence in the performances of Mabley is the pursuit of education by blacks. While trying to get that piece of cheesecake Mabley (2002) attempts to placate the customers, at the same time inferring that there is an established hierarchy of anti-black hostility to be found among the white population. They are over-reacting: their given response—one laden with the potential for violence—would be acceptable (i.e. in line with traditional racial responses) if she were trying to, "go to school with [them]" (Mabley 2002). Once a black student is in a white school, the hostility will continue. In North Carolina, Mabley (2003c) escorted a friend's grandson to school. During a spelling test two of his white classmates were given the words "cat" and "rat." He was given "chrysanthemum." Mabley (2003c) summarizes the problem in the "Third Movement [of her] Southern Opera":

> I ain't gonna sit the back of no bus,
> And I'm goin' to the white folk's school.
> I'm gonna praise the Lord in a white folk's church,
> And I'm gonna swim in a white folks pool.
> I'm gonna vote and vote for whoever I please,
> And I'll thumb my nose at the Klan,
> And I'll double dare 'em to come out from behind them sheets and face
> me like a man.
> They don't scare me with their bum threats.
> I'll say what I wanna say,
> And there ain't a damn thing they can do about it…
> 'cause I ain't goin' down there no way.
> [*Laughter and Applause]*
>
> And you know why?
> Because it took the Marshall, the Army, too,
> JFK, and I don't know who,
> Every law and every rule,
> To try to get one boy in the Mississippi School.
>
> School days, school days,

Barnet[61] said 'to hell with the Congress and the rule' days.
[Laughter]
Lead pipes and black jacks and pistols, too,
Those are the books that they take to school.
They don't study Science or History.
They only study Hate and Bigotry.
They been scarin' the heck out of you and me
Since we was a couple of kids, kids, kids.

What kinda school is this?
The school they call 'Ol' Miss'?
I know that sticks and stones will break my bones, but this is ridiculous.
[Laughter]

Mabley's (2003c) voice is always raspy; recalling numerous smoked cigarettes, drinks, and loud conversations. The majority of the first stanza is delivered with a slight crescendo in volume and a high degree of pomp. The crescendo culminates with the second to last line, and the last line, "'cause I ain't goin' down there no way," is delivered in a conspiratorial whisper. This line totally alters the meaning of the stanza. While the initial aggressive delivery might first lead the listener to assume that Mabley is presenting herself as a vanguard in the fight for civil rights, one who will put her objective body on the line to integrate the South; the last line of the stanza shows Mabley to be in possession of an extremely pragmatic disposition. The rights that she will enjoy will be those rights readily available in the North. In Mabley's discourse, racial violence is always avoided, and this avoidance is coupled with a delegitimization of the condition responsible, residence in and the workings of the U.S. South. The concussive sphere which violence produces is utilized via an appropriation to absolve blacks of this condition. The possibility of violence is used to expound upon the necessity of freedom and to articulate an escape from oppressive conditions. There is less avoidance in Pryor's

[61] Ross Barnett, Mississippi's governor, opposed James Meredith's entrance to the University of Mississippi, because he felt that in that situation state laws were more applicable than federal laws.

discourse. In some cases, Pryor and other blacks are powerless victims; in other instances, instances that serve as spiritual resolution to the aforementioned events, Pryor (true to his Black Power leanings) redresses colonial violence against blacks.

Racial Violence in Pryor's Standup

One pertinent movement in the work of both Mabley and Pryor, one that contributes to the changes to the phenomenal body that they institute, is the grounding of their discourse in moments of oppression. The beginnings of many of Mabley's albums address the restrictions placed on her and other women (1963, 1984, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2006). These statements often set the table for her discussions about racial oppression (Williams 1995). Usually, Pryor follows a similar pattern. However, while Mabley's points are often succinct, Pryor's points mostly develop through vignettes. Many of his best articulations of breaks with the racially oppressive world come in stories dominated by his old wise men, a group of people dedicated to the betterment of the world. There are three categories of old wise men in Pryor's work. The first category is general old wise men. This group includes Mr. Perkins from Hank's Place (Pryor 2005a) and those who chastise his comedic style (Pryor 2000b); these are old men who are simply trying to make the world right. Another example is an old man who provides color commentary for, but never financially participates, in dice games (Pryor 2000a). In the second category of Pryor's old wise men are Pryor's winos. They are characterized as being unconcerned with the state of the world. Pryor (2000i) grants drugs the ability to effect a bodily distortion; sometimes they are partaken of as a means of dealing with the hostile world (Pryor 2000a). Like drunken kung-fu masters, Pryor's winos, through their libations, have attained a certain equilibrium in the world (2000b, 2000b, 2000b,

2000g, 2000h, 2000i, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b).

Pryor's third category of old wise men contains only one man—Pryor's paramount old wise man—Mudbone. Mudbone is based on a man that Pryor knew as an adolescent. This man used to tell tall tales, a staple of black humor (Watkins 1994) and the comedy of both Pryor and Mabley[62]; and Pryor (2000c) loved him for it. However, the stories in and of themselves were not the sole reason that Pryor loved Mudbone. Intermingled with these stories is the wisdom they embody: "[You] learn something when you listen to old people. They ain't all fools, see. You don't get to be old being no fool. [*Applause]* A lot of young wise men, they're dead as a motherfucker, ain't they? *[Laughter]*" (Pryor 2000c). Pryor (2000c) respects Mudbone; and through Mudbone he asserts that the elderly, as a group, should be respected (Pryor 2000h). This does not mean having to agree with them (Pryor 2000b). Mudbone, along with serving as a prism through which the wider world can be observed and analyzed, also serves as a means through which Pryor can put his own life into perspective: the character talks about Pryor's problems with drugs (Pryor 2000g), and he serves as the narrator for Pryor's (1995) bibliography[63].

The wisdom of old wise men is the first reason that Pryor values them[64]. This

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[62] Tall tales have many of the same characteristics of surrealism, the latter being a technique which influenced post-colonial theory (Eshleman and Smith 1983).

[63] Pryor's black preachers (2000b, 2000c, 2000c, 2000d, 2000e, 2005a, 2005b), such as the preacher in the "Bicentennial Prayer" sketch (2000d) sketch, while being portrayed with a voice similar to Pryor's old men (i.e. wizened slightly Southern drawl) are being excluded because they are the opposite of charitable and lacking in wisdom. A faith healer (Pryor 2005a) takes money from the poor (including Pryor's grandmother) and makes members of his congregation sicker. Also, the bicentennial prayer preacher incompetently drowns some older folk when he is supposed to be giving them baptism (Pryor 2000d). Other people's fathers are also excluded from this category. While Pryor (2005b) once describes his father as an old man and refers to fathers who fight boys trying to have sex with their daughters as old men, for the most part fathers in Pryor's work are also lacking a beneficent mission.

[64] Unlike Mabley, Pryor's standup lacks wise women. He does have knowledgeable women such as the sorceress Ms. Rudolph (Pryor 2000c), but she is not helpful to the degree that his wise old men are.

wisdom intersects with a strength of character that comes with having had many experiences, a natural byproduct of being old. Pryor (2000b) lays out the relationship between experience and strength of character in a skit that explains why black people would not be afraid of Martians:

> Nothing can scare a nigger after 400 years of [racial oppression]. I mean a Martian ain't got a chance, boy. A nigger'd warn a Martian: 'Better get your ass away from 'round here. You done landed on Mr. Gilmore's property.'

Experience with racism produces something, not an immunity, but a state of mind often possessed by the veteran athlete. After a while, the game slows down. The hits still come; and they still hurt, but there are less of them because of foresight, and he is better prepared to deal with them. And, as a group, Pryor's old wise men are prepared to deal with racial oppression and its violence because they have experienced a lot of things: they've known God, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (2005b); been in the Merchant Marines, in the F.B.I., swam across the equator, and rode

with Pancho Villa (2005b); helped build the California railroads (while posing as Chinese immigrants) (2000c); suffered from the Great Drought of 1934[65], served in France during World War I and been a part of Hollywood's Golden Years (2000d, 2000i); and witnessed Patty Hearst's forays with the Symbionese Liberation Army (2000i).

However, once when establishing his authority Mudbone (Pryor 2000g) invokes his preceding and creation of an important old wise woman: Moms Mabley:

> I remember, see, nobody remember when I started in show business. I gave Moms Mabley her break. Moms was a ugly child. *[Laughter]* I told her. I said, "Girl, you ought to go into comedy." She was about two then and she still had that funny voice. *[Laughter]* I'm the one that started her.

[65] Although it sounds as though he is saying "1924," directly after stating the date of the drought he goes on call it the "Great Drought." This drought happened in 1934.

All of Pryor's old wise men reflect the shift that his comedy took as it went from being an imitation of Bill Cosby to its more radical form (Pryor 1995). Pryor wanted to represent the world around him, and he used characters such as these to do so. T he advance of time makes old age precarious (Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000g; Pryor 2000i); but having survived, the old wise man, like the Bicentennial Nigger (Pryor 2000d), becomes a repository of memory and perspective, characteristics which feed into the final quality of Pryor's old wise men: they have no fear. This characteristic is most clearly expressed in Pryor's description of winos. The only thing a wino really fears is losing his wine (Pryor 2000b). Possession of these qualities makes Pryor's old wise men the perfect facilitators of and commentators on subversions of colonial violence.

In some of his skits; Pryor, whose real life was populated by prostitutes and pimps (1995), laments a world that allows white men to use black women as sexual objects (2005a, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b). Although, Pryor's standup is often and obviously sexist (See Ch. II), in these moments one senses something authentic about his concern, even if this concern were to be only the result of his mother having been a prostitute (Pryor 1995). Like Mabley, Pryor presents circumventions of the colonial narrative of power. In one bit, Pryor (2005b) has a black male protagonist who tells his story of fighting the power to an old black wino. The wino, the sovereign of the street corner upon which he stands, is met by a high-functioning junkie (both of whom are voiced distinctively by Pryor). The junkie is being pursued by the police, and he explains to the wino why this is so: the junkie hit a rural white man who had come to the club searching for a young black girl to have sex with.

Standing in front of the club, a rural white man calls out to the junkie, asking him

about black teenage prostitutes[66]. In this moment, the junkie is in a racial situation similar to when Fanon (1967) was unable to laugh: the junkie is, "too hungry to be funny." The junkie takes up the role of pimp that has been imposed upon him (an example of being constrained) and tells the man that he has a black teenage girl waiting for him in the back of the alley. Pointlessly locking up his car (if black people want to steal the car, they will steal the car and the lock too), the would-be john follows the junkie down the alley. The dark recesses therein find the junkie admitting that there is no girl waiting. He then goes on to offer to fellate the yokel[67]. Excited about the possibility of having, "a big buck suck [his] dick" (Pryor 2005b), the rural man pulls his pants down. Once he is fully exposed, the junkie hits him, presumably in his primary sexual organ and testicles. Then the junkie robs him and flees.

Pryor's (Pryor 2005b) rendition reflects a trickster tale (Wolfe 1949; Ellison 1995; Watkins 1995) whose stakes have been raised. Rather than, focusing only on differentials in wit, this tale includes issues of physicality and masculinity as well. Both the junkie and the yokel are physically imposing men. As the junkie approaches him, the wino tells the story of how the junkie beat up a number of policemen, and the junkie—a physically imposing man himself—says that the yokel is a big man. While physically similar, the junkie dominates in terms of masculinity. Before being set upon by the yokel, the junkie had turned down a prostitute's offer of sex in exchange for twenty-dollars. The portrayal of this event within the context of the larger narrative suggests two

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[66] Specifically, he asks for a "black girl" (Pryor 2005b). However, Pryor's complaints made in another bit (2005b) and in his autobiography (1995) suggests that the man in question was looking for an under-age black girl.

[67] The sexuality governing this proposed interaction is vague as the junkie is offering a service whose consideration, if any, is ambiguous. It is also unclear if the junkie is presenting himself as a willing homosexual, a homosexual prostitute, or as a heterosexual willing perform homosexual acts for money. Similar questions arise in relationship to the yokel.

things: first, the junkie, in comparison to the yokel, has greater opportunities and/or less desperation when it comes to participating in sexual encounters (or his situation was financially precarious). Second, the junkie chooses to have a dangerous interaction with the yokel. Having been propositioned earlier, the junkie knew where to find a black prostitute[68], meaning his initial interaction with the yokel was an opportunity for him to conform to a moment of constraint (i.e. being a black pimp) which had been imposed upon him. Instead, he pursues the more violent option of robbery. This can be read as a moment where racial solidarity trumps economic interests, a moment of asserting black masculinity, or some combination of the two. Finally, there is a bodily domination of the yokel beyond the physical blow dealt to his manhood. Describing the yokel's phallus as a "little pink dick," the junkie avows his own sexual superiority and the idea that black is beautiful.

The plight of the wino and the junkie reflects aspects of colonial oppression. Racial oppression, gender oppression, class oppression, and the oppression of women of color are all examined. And, the junkie's assault on the yokel's sexual organs serves as an obvious metaphorical redress against white oppression given the ways in which white male, heteronormative sexuality has been utilized against blacks—the rapes of black female slaves and the castration of black males, both of which position the heterosexual white male phallus as superior (hooks 1981; Gilroy 1993; Hill Collins 2000).

Like Fanon (1967) and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), Pryor finds the culture industry, one more avenue of colonialism, to be particularly malicious. Having seen a futuristic movie, Pryor (2000d) notes that the movie did not have any black people. This

[68] The prostitute in question may or may not have fit the yokel's criteria. She is described as another women's sister and as "little." This "little" may be a reference to her size, the fact that she is younger than her sister, her age, or some combination of the aforementioned.

led him to conclude that, "white folks ain't planning for [blacks] to be here" (Pryor 2000d). Probably most famous of Pryor's critiques of the culture industry are his "Super Nigger" skits (2000a, 2005b). Bemoaning the lack of black heroes in the movies, he workshops his own: a black version of Superman. With so many versions of "super white dudes" (Pryor 2005b) and the lack of black heroes to be found in television (Pryor 2000a), Pryor conceptualizes "Super Nigger." In a story that parallels that of Superman; Clark Washington, a custodian at the Daily Planet, is actually Super Nigger. When the paper's editor tells him that there is a fire at a warehouse, Super Nigger rushes to the scene: he's worried about his "stash [of drugs]" burning up. Super Nigger's music is funky, and his clothing makes him look like "a bad motherfucker." Beyond these bodily liberations—that which comes with music (Gilroy 1993) and that which comes with clothing (Marx 1992; de Beauvoir 1993)—Super Nigger is free from two imperatives which, in previous chapters, have been understood to define the colonized (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2005a). Super Nigger is not freely named (Fanon 1967). When named in a manner he does not like, he violently contests the act. The name he is called is, "Supper Nigger." Yet, when a white person designates him so, he rejects it because it is a constraining occurrence rather than the authentic experience that Super Nigger intends his naming to be[69]. Also, Super Nigger controls his labor, contrary to the dictates imposed upon the subordinated (hooks 1981; Davis 1983; Roediger 1999; Hill Collins 2000). When asked to help put out the fire, he explains that he does not work without being fairly compensated.

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[69] Super Nigger's verbal response to the white woman who does so, "Bitch, don't call me nigger *[Laughter]*" (Pryor 2000d) presages much of the black feminist critique of black masculinity and its role in black social movements in the U.S. He asserts his racial independence through the violent subordination of women (hooks 1981; Wallace 1999; Cohambee River Collective 1982).

Pryor (2005b) further criticizes the culture industry, in so advancing another argument for authentic media, when he disparages white movies. They are too jive. This includes being too racist, as testified by the Tarzan movies (Pryor 2005b). Mudbone confronts this avenue of oppression during his trip to Hollywood (Pryor 2000d)[70]. After coming home from World War I, Mudbone went out to Hollywood to become a star and was called in to audition for what he thought was the part of a king. He was correct; he was auditioning to play King Kong. Once he found out that they wanted him to play a monkey, he expressed his displeasure at the historical reiteration of being black and being reduced to nature: "I ain't no gorilla"(Pryor 2000d). He then throws the script on the floor. As security officers are throwing him out of the studio, Mudbone unsheathes his banana knife and cuts off one of the arms of the one of the guards escorting him out. Mistaking the arm for Mudbone's, the guard laughs superiorly until he realizes that it is his own arm that is pointing at him. Like the junkie's (Pryor 2005b) earlier assault, Mudbone's (Pryor 2000d) dismissal of the script and amputation of the guard's arm serve as metaphorical redressing. Equating blacks with monkeys is one of the founding principles of racial oppression (Gould 1983), and the hand is one of the primary means of action. Both are damaged in this routine (Pryor 2000d) as Mudbone in an authentic moment, through his use of a "banana knife," appropriates for his own uses society's reducing him to nature.

Each album on which Mudbone makes an appearance finds him criticizing colonial oppression, but not always the oppression of blacks. On the album *Here and Now* (Pryor 2000h), Mudbone argues the case of Mexicans; who, because of the

[70] These skits reflect the various troubles Pryor had with the movie industry. He was unhappy with the parts that were offered to black actors and with how blacks were treated by the culture industry (Pryor 1995).

machinations of "White folks," lost most of their land. A different Mudbone skit (Pryor 2000c) provides one of Pryor's most significant disruptions of the colonial narrative of violence:

> ….'I had to leave Tupelo 'cause I was workin' down there.
> I was in charge a' da' levy in Lawrence County.
> So one night the levy bust and de' blamed it on me, see?
> Shit, ain't a nigger in the world can hold back no water when it want ta go.
> *[Laughter]*
>
> And de' asked me, de' said, 'Why didn't you warn the people?'
> Well, shit, I couldn't be running through that water warning nobody.
> They wa' gonna find out sooner or later anyway.
> *[Laughter]*
>
> I worked for this white man.
> His name was Bud Jenning.
> And I worked for – he was all right to work for. See? He was all right.
> For a white man, he wasn't bad.
> But he had a son named Junior.
> He was cockeyed. We called him Cockeyed Junior.
> And he was hard to work for man, 'cause his eyes went every which a way, see?
> He'd say, 'Nigger, pick that up.' And four or five niggers bend down, see?
> *[Laughter]*
>
> He fell in love with this girl from Pittsburgh.
> I went to the depot to pick her up, see?
> I had a horse named Ginger. I hooked her up and went down there and picked her up at the depot.
> She got off the train.
> Big woman.
> Weighed about 460 pounds.
> She got off the train sideways.
> They was pushing her ass off a' them.
> When I saw her I said, 'Well, shit, it's fine for him. He cockeyed.
> It don't mean nothing to him.'
> *[Laughter]*
>
> And, I walked over and introduced myself.
> 'Ma'am? Miss Ma'am? My name Mudbone,' and I tipped my hat.
> Bitch slapped me across my head, said, 'Nigger, pick up the bag.'

Well, I said, 'Goddamn.
What kind of shit? I ain't never – goddamn, what kind of shit?' Ya, know.
I said this to myself. *[Laughter]*

Oh, in them days, that's all a nigger could do was get mad, see?
So I got mad.
And I tried to help her in the buggy.
The bitch snatched away from me.
Ya' know an old uppity bitch, see?
Say, 'Goddamn.' She stepped on the buggy and da' goddamn thing turned over on her. *[Laughter]*

Well, I couldn't laugh, see?
I had to bite a hole in my goddamn lip.
Blood trickling down and shit.
Horse stepped all in her face.
[Laughter]
I took my time 'bout gettin' that buggy off of her.
[Laughter]

So I set it up for her, helped her in the buggy, and I was, 'Ginger, home,'
You know? Goin' home.
Bitch leant over and slapped me upside 'da head again.
One of them good ones, too, sounded 'Pa-yooow!' Like that.
I said, 'Maybe this bitch shot me,'
Shit.
[Laughter]

Well, we kept on home.
I'm thinkin' of shit to do with her now.
So I got home and went to the tool shed and got me one of them [jigsaws].
And I sawed the bottom out of the outhouse.
And I hid in the bushes and waited for this big collard green eating bitch to go to the bathroom, see?
[Laughter]

Well, 'long 'bout 8:30, she commence to go to the bathroom.
I'm in the bushes lookin' at them.
She wobbled out to the outside
And then opened the door, went in, and shut the door, and I heard a big splash.
That's when I got in the tractor and drove up here.
[Laughter]

I wasn't mad no more, either.'
[Laughter, *Applause]*

With this routine the symbolism is not as complicated, but the layers of redress are. There are three major manifestations of colonialism: Bud Jennings (a manifestation of seemingly benign racial oppression), Cockeyed Junior, and his overweight fiancé; the latter being a perpetuator of irrational violence. Cockeyed Junior is penalized twice: he is cockeyed and he has an overweight fiancé. The fiancé is slighted six times. She is in a relationship with a cockeyed man. She is overweight. She has to be pushed off the train sideways. A horse buggy turned over on her. A horse stepped on her face. And, her presence collapsed an outhouse. These last two signal nature's revenge. The numbers of indignities suffered are correlated to her irrational use of violence. Without direct provocation she twice assaults Mubdone; testifying to Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), Sartre (1948), and Fanon's (1967) observation that the mere presence of the racially subordinated is enough to incite violence. Afterwards she is punished: the buggy falls on her, the horse steps on her, and the outhouse is collapsed upon her[71]. Yet, the biggest round of laughter during the skit (and perhaps of all the data covered in this dissertation) occurs when Mudbone describes the bodily transformation that happens as a result of his appropriation of violence—"I wasn't mad no more either" (2000c). The ideas in this skit and the ideas of all of the previous skits adhere to the post-colonial imperative to change the world. And, they all hinge upon appropriation of moments of violence as a means of making a break with the racially oppressive world.

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[71] Nature obviously plays a role in the horse stepping on her, but it also plays a role in the collapse of the outhouse. Horkhiemer and Adorno's (2002) discussion of Odysseus spotlights his proficiency in controlling his body, an action which is equal to controlling nature (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkhiemer and Adorno 2002). The fiancé's inability to control nature, here materializing as fiber-rich collard greens, plays a role in her downfall.

Pryor and Mabley's Appropriation of Violence's Concussive Sphere

The Violent Break

Paul Willis' ethnography *Learning to Labor* (1981) provides an explanation as to how working class boys get working class jobs, and one of the dynamics uncovered in this ethnography of male working class high-school students in Great Britain is the gulf between the habitus and capitals (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) of these students and the habitus and capitals emphasized by the school systems in which they partake. This disjunction produces an oppressive monotony for these "lads." Laughter and violence are techniques they use to overcome it. Violence,

> "is the ultimate way of breaking a flow of meanings which are unsatisfactory, imposed from above, or limited by circumstance…[it makes] the mundane suddenly *matter*. The usual assumption of the flow of the self from the past to the future is stopped: the dialectic of time is broken. Fights, as accidents and other crises, strand you painfully in 'the now'. Boredom and petty detail disappear. It really does not matter how the next seconds pass. And once experienced, the fear of the fight and the ensuing high as the self safely resumes its journey are addictive. They become permanent possibilities for the alleviation of boredom, and pervasive elements of a masculine style and presence."
>
> (Willis, 1981:34).

Willis' observations about time and violence find support and extension in G.W.F. Hegel's (1977) famous parable about the slave and the master. As they fight,

> "they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case. And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; only thus is it proved that for self-consciousness, its essential being is not [just] being, not the immediate form in which it appears, not its submergence in

> the expanse of life, *but rather that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment (my italics)*, that it is only pure being-for-self. The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness."
>
> (Hegel 1977: 113-114)

Having one's life at issue and experiences which coincide with being the subject of physical violence, along with placing a subject in the present, affirm one's being. For Hegel (1977) the slave's freedom is intrinsically tied to confrontation and domination of his master. A similar idea emerges in the work of Paul Gilroy (1993), W.E.B. DuBois (1998), and in Sartre's (1989b) "The Respectful Prostitute," where the failure of "The Negro" to violently confront those seeking to kill him is a presented as a failed opportunity at freedom.

Oppressive mediation entails the subordination of another (i.e. reducing them to nature) with the goal of constructing one's subjectivity. The dynamics of the Hegelian (Hegel 1977) slave's contestation of his master are the same. In both cases a suitable existence depends on the domination of a powerful force, with this domination being an inversion of the traditional order. The slave is entangled with his master because the slave cannot be freed until he confronts and dominates his master. Audre Lorde (1984), echoing a larger sentiment found in black feminist thought (Combahee River Collective 1982, hooks 1981; Hill Collins 2000), argues that, "the master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house" (111). Pryor and Mabley adhere to this perspective as they utilize the concussive sphere of violence as a means of making a break with the racially oppressive world, while at the same time foregoing Hegel's (1977) imperative to dominate. Rather than presenting violence as a substantive means of establishing emancipation—as it is in the work of Hegel (1977)—Pryor and Mabley frame the

concussive sphere of violence as an opportunity to realize and pursue one's possibilities by means of a rejection of the entanglement and the need for possession of an Other inherent in colonial utilizations of violence. This appropriation of that which has heretofore been oppressive is a technique for articulating colored people's time—an alleviation of oppressive fixity.

Violence is a primary existential trigger as it detaches us from the everyday world and grounds us in the present (Heidegger 1962; Fanon 1967; Hegel 1977; Willis 1977; Césaire 1983a). Hegel's (1977) master-slave confrontation positions violence as a means through which emancipation can be achieved; as the slave puts his life on line against his master he is in a position to gain his freedom through a domination of his master. Hegel's (1977) take on emancipation coincides with a number of black theories of social change (McKay 1956; Ture and Hamilton 1967; Gilroy 1993; DuBois 1998), but all of these mirror Enlightened notions of power which are predicated upon the control of Others (Weber 1958; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). The actions of Hegel's slave (1977) are problematic because, like the colonialist, he requisitions an Other as a means of creating his subjectivity (Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002).

Black feminist thought, functioning as one of the most thorough articulations of rejections of the colonial impulse, offers a trenchant criticism of colonial power and attempts on the part of the subordinated to employ it because as a body of work black feminism strives to reject all types of harmful social mediation (hooks 1981; Combahee River Collective Staff 1982; Lorde 1984; Hill Collins 2000). Despite the contradictions underlying their work, Pryor and Mabley adhere to a similar philosophy even though

violence—an act they present as a colonial imperative—plays a major part in its articulation.

Pryor and Mabley's take on violence and death diverges from the parameters of Hegel's (1977) master-slave conflict, and it avoids one of its major shortcomings. Hegel (1977) states that this conflict shows, "that there is nothing present in it which could not be regarded as a vanishing moment" (114). Does not the freedom Hegel (1977) speaks of necessitate that this also be true of the conflict itself? Must not violence at some point become a vanishing moment? Instead, Hegel (1977) makes the conflict between master and slave a necessary conflict, even though he has predicated the freedom which this conflict produces upon, "[self-consciousness] showing that it is not attached to any specific existence" (113). For Hegel (1977) near death experiences place individuals in the present, and Heidegger (1962), Fanon (1963, 1967), Sartre (1963a, 1989b), Gilroy (1993), DuBois (1998), Douglas (2003), Pryor, and Mabley agree. Yet, Pryor and Mabley, in their skits on racial violence, differ from all of former—except Fanon (1963, 1967)—in that they effect this articulation independent of the subordination of the Other.

In doing so Pryor and Mabley provide a developed articulation of one of the foundational points of black feminist theory. Angela Davis (1983), bell hooks (1981), Audre Lorde (1984), The Cohambee River Collective (1982), Michelle Wallace (1999), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) all criticize the ways in black males have dealt with racialization in the U.S. One of the most prominent reactions by black men to racial oppression has been to assert their patriarchal power over black women, often via violence. This appropriation of colonial power is what Audre Lorde is criticizing when she says, "[The] master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (1984:111).

There are instances where Pryor and Mabley appropriate colonial techniques. Both of them subordinate women and other (subordinated) racial groups. Yet, when it comes to dealing with their direct sufferings of racial violence the mediation which Hegel (1977) speaks of is not in play. This is how Pryor and Mabley's contestation of racial oppression—Mabley's relinquishment of the South and Pryor's redress of colonial violence—should be read.

Analysis

Horkheimer and Adorno (2002), rather than viewing fascism as an aberration, view it as the natural outcome of the Enlightenment. With an ambivalent relationship to the entity that determines its existence (i.e. nature), man tries to emulate it: man seeks to create, destroy, and rule racialized and gendered beings. Complicit in both of these movements is the exercise of violence and control. Upset over perceived indignities at the hands of nature, man seeks to enforce these indignities upon others. de Beauvoir (1993) voices a similar argument. In her work, women, as nature, are both loved and hated; and an aspect of men's interactions with women is a creation of men: "physical strength" which is used to implement power through possession, the latter being one of the primary iterations of colonial power. de Beauvoir (1993) describes the underlying logic of possession (and implicitly describes the violence that often underscores it), including how it supports subjectivity:

> "In the first place, it is always impossible to realize positively the idea of possession; in truth, one never has any thing or any person; one tries then to establish ownership in negative fashion. The surest way of asserting that something is mine is to prevent others from using it. And nothing

> seems to a man to be more desirable than what has never belonged to any human being; then the conquest seems like a unique and absolute event" (162)

Possession is a means by which the self can create subjectivity (de Beauvoir 1993), and it occurs by denying others their subjectivity. However, this possession is problematic; it demands sitting at the top of a hierarchy, existing in solitude (de Beauvoir 1993). This leads de Beauvoir (1993) to adhere to the path followed by Horkheimer and Adorno (2002); she rejects colonial godhood: "The false hero, to persuade himself that he has traveled far, that he soars high aloft, looks constantly backwards and downwards; he scorns, he accuses, he oppresses, he persecutes, he tortures, he murders" (225-226). This rejection of colonial power in the work of de Beauvoir (1993)—as modeled in the work of Marx (1977, 1978b, 1978c), Oliver Cox (1948), Césaire (1983a, 2000), and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002)—forms the foundation of the break with the racially oppressive world in the work of Pryor and Mabley.

While they use different methods to do so Pryor and Mabley eschew becoming a "false hero" (de Beauvoir 1993). In skits where violence is used to articulate racial emancipation, the violent episode is a "vanishing moment" in the Hegelian sense (Hegel 1977): it is a temporary incident serving the larger goal of articulating self-consciousness. There is no direct life-and-death struggle, nor is there subordination. Violence, heretofore a defining element of racial oppression, simply provides a break with racial oppression. Pryor appropriates the actual technique of violence. During the "Street Corner Wino" (Pryor 2005b) sketch a punch is used to quell a malevolent colonial sexual impulse. Mudbone (Pryor 2000d) slices off the Hollywood guard's arm as part of his protest of the reduction of blacks to nature, and he sabotages the outhouse (Pryor 2000c)

after a slew of affronts. After all of these he keeps it moving. Life and death struggles have no priority. Instead, after each climax all of these sketches end with their protagonists seeking new and better experiences. These violent episodes which redress racial injustice allow these men to access new worlds.

Mabley's intersections of racial violence and transcendence of the oppressive range transform real and potential racial violence into the beginnings of journey to liberation. A beneficiary is advised not to return to the land of his parents (Mabley 2006) because of the South's potential violence. Here, rather than beginning a new journey, the safety of the current journey (i.e. being in the North and free of violence) is emphasized. In other cases, Mabley advises people to leave their past (i.e. the South) behind. Mabley says that, "it ain't no disgrace to come from the South. It's a disgrace to go back down there *[Laughter]*" (Mabley 1984). In this and other instances the South is equated with one's past experiences and one's origins. But, Mabley believes that despite this intimate association the past is something that sometimes has to be left behind. Mabley often explains her own journey to the North using this context. Mabley (1991, 2003a) becomes a freedom rider, only she turns herself into a "freedom rider from the South" after being "advised" to leave by whites. She fictitiously cites a dream about being lynched as the reason for leaving Georgia (Mabley 1991) (here presented as her home). And, in a story (Mabley 2006) that is in line with her biography (Williams 1995), Mabley explains that the potentially violent working conditions faced by blacks in the South make New York City life the only life for her. Mabley uses the violence enacted against blacks to articulate physical breaks with the South that are also breaks with the past of people who are from the South. While these breaks and the subsequent entries into post-colonial

worlds address the general threat of violence that hangs over the racially oppressed, when looking at the breaks that occur through Pryor's articulations of emancipatory racial violence one finds breaks that are in tune with more specific of intersections of racial oppression and violence which have historically plagued blacks.

Pryor (2000i) talks about the white gaze under which blacks often suffer:

> Richard Pryor: Prejudice is a bitch, 'cause there's just so much weight to carry. I wish sometimes you [white people] could go out and just be black for a little fuckin' while. You guys have no idea. You see a concept; you think somebody's being in a bad mood. But the concept of somebody fuckin' with you because of your color is really strange.
>
> You goin' somewhere and you get that look before you get there, you know you ain't getting the job. *[Laughter]*
>
> You getting ready to show up all that energy, and you see that look. *[Laughter]*
>
> [Richard Pryor laughs] It's just a certain thing that white people have. They do it, not outta malice or something, it's just something they figure they have that look. It's a certain look. *[Laughter]*
>
> It's funny. I like to confront that. 'What you lookin' at motherfucker?' *[Laughter]*
>
> Richard Pryor to imaginary white person: 'Yeah, I'm talkin' 'bout you. If I don't get no job, ain't no motherfucker in here getting one.' *[Laughter]*
>
> Richard Pryor: 'We gonna turn it out.'[72]

Pryor and Mabley's appropriations of violence, that which had heretofore been oppressive, are a means of "[turning] it out"—an effective technique for articulating colored people's time. But, it is had relative shortcomings. This technique has as its focus the world of the individual. It can be employed by large groups of people, but in

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[72] de Beauvoir (1993) makes a similar point in terms of the effects of oppression. She brings up how people often say that women are crazy. She agrees and points out the reason that this is true is because society makes them that way.

the standup of Pryor and Mabley it is a method through which individuals are transformed. However, there is a socially broader technique for articulating colored people's time in their work. The practice of care pulls both she who cares and she who is cared for into the present. This is evident in Pryor and Mabley's discussions of gender-based mediation.

Chapter VI: Colored People's Time Technique #2-Care

My emancipation don't fit your equation
"Lost Ones"
The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill (1998)
Lauryn Hill

Gender-Based Mediation: The Masculine Imperative to Control

Jackie "Moms" Mabley, the first great U.S. black comedienne (Watkins 1994; Williams 1995), uses one of her standup routines to relate the story of a fictional marriage between her fifteen year-old self and an eighty-four year-old man (n.d.). This marriage comes up multiple times in her standup (Mabley 1963; Mabley 1964; Mabley 1984; Mabley 2002; Mabley n.d.), as does a more general criticism of the restrictions women in relationships with old men must face (Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2003c). Attempting to describe what it is like being married to an old man, a situation so devastating that its description is almost impossible, Mabley (2004a, 2006) ultimately likens it to, " [T]ryin' to push a car. Up a hill. With a rope" (Mabley 2004a). In doing so, Mabley criticizes the imperative to control which accompanies acts of oppression. Pryor tells what at first glance might seem an un-related tale via Mudbone (Pryor 2000d). Discussing his retirement, Mudbone explains the development of his current (i.e. 1976) financial situation; having worked thirty-five years, his monthly pension was about thirty-five dollars. What both Mabley and Pryor are referring to and criticizing is the way in which oppression controls bodies with the goal of marshalling their labor.

Simone de Beauvoir describes the masculine imperative to control (1993); and it has been thoroughly covered by U.S. feminist, mostly in regards to heteronormative

relationships. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1998), Kate Chopin (2004a, 2004b, 2004c), Virginia Woolf (1957), and Betty Friedan (2001) examine this process. Gilman (1998) and Chopin (2004b, 2004c), through fiction, chronicle the detrimental effects that heteronormative marriage can have on women. Gilman's (1998) protagonist suffers a physical sickness before breaking free. Two of Chopin's (2004b, 2004c) heroines ultimately succumb to death. In all of these cases the expectations with which men hinder women are exposed. Woolf's essay (1957) explains how masculine imperatives suppress the intellectual development of women. Betty Friedan (2001), in a work of non-fiction that is credited with setting off the second wave of the U.S. feminist movement, explores the same issues. Querying her former college classmates Friedan (2001) identifies, "the problem that has no name." Members of her cohort had been given a prime directive. They were told that a successful husband, children, and a nice home would give them the fulfillment that they desired. The "problem" was that even after reaching these goals, they found that their lives were still lacking something essential. While important, these works are lacking as they often fail to directly speak to the experiences of women who are not Western, white, and wealthy.

U.S. black feminist writers expanded this narrative in terms of race and class, focusing on black women who often were not rich. Nella Larsen (1997) does so in terms of race as she compares the successful marriage of a prosperous black couple with the doomed union between a white man and his wife who is passing for white. The Caucasian husband is extremely strict and demanding in terms of the actions he expects of his spouse. Zora Neal Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (2000) uses contrast to the same effect. Hurston, at one time, collaborated with Mabley on theater projects

(Williams 1995); in the work of both one can find a rejection of old men. Hurston's (2000) black female protagonist has three marriages. The first two are highlighted by the restrictions that she faces. During the first (to an older man) she is expected to be the hard working housewife. For the second she is expected to be the refined lady. Only with the third marriage can she be herself.

As previously mentioned in Chapter II, women are one of the Enlightenment's avatars for nature, hence the imperative to control them (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Many of the post-colonial theorists who cover this point also cover how this imperative to control manifests in physically and emotionally intimate relationships. In conjunction with detailing Gustav Flaubert's romanticization of the Orient, Edward Said (1979) discusses Flaubert's love for prostitutes (from that and other regions). These consorts allowed Flaubert to experience the feelings that he desired, a process that is mirrored in the Occident's relationships to the Orient. Both Julia Kristeva (1986) and Gayatri Spivak (1988) cover ideological and practical ways in which marriages force women to follow debilitative dictates, an idea famously covered by Friedrich Engels (1978) and Simone de Beauvoir (1993). Chandra Mohanty's (1991) analysis of the discursive trend to carelessly aggregate third world women together speaks to many of the above-mentioned points.

Another element of masculinity's imperative to control is its heteronormativity. The Combahee River Collective (1982), Audra Lorde (1984), and Gloria Anzaldúa (1999) lament society's marginalization of those who are not heterosexual. All of these ideas, in whole or in part, concerning the masculine imperative to control that manifests in interpersonal relationships have received attention from important black feminist

scholars (hooks 1981; Giddings 1984; Cannon 1985; Wallace 1989; Mullings 1997). Of particular note is the work done in Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and Empowerment*.

Clearly articulated in the work of Hill Collins (2000) is the role that controlling images play in the oppression of women. The mammy, the matriarch, the welfare queen, the jezebel, and the Sapphire are five such images of black women that are employed in the U.S. The mammy is, "the faithful, obedient domestic servant." Traditionally elderly and asexual, the mammy takes care of white families, addressing their emotional and domestic needs, often at the expense of the needs of her own family. While the mammy is defined by her labor in the service of white families, the matriarch is the head of a black household (often a household devoid of an adult male presence) who can be found working outside of the domestic environment. One underlying theme of the oppression of black women is the identification of the matriarch, through her displacement of male authority, as the cause of the decline of black society (hooks 1981). The welfare queen, an unemployed woman with numerous children whose livelihood is based on government assistance, is charged with the decline of society in general. Traditionally young, the jezebel is highly sexual with the siren's power to undermine men everywhere. While the degenerative (and affirmative) powers of the jezebel stem from sexuality; the Sapphire, a harridan, is strictly pestilential.

Women are forced to embody nature, and their labor underpins modern society (Kristeva 1986; de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). And, with the controlling images identified by Hill Collins (2000) the various iterations of the embodiment thrust upon black women are laid out: the mammy is nature in its strictly

nurturing role, while the matriarch represents nature's ability to circumvent society's masculinist order. The jezebel is nature satisfying the two drives of the id, and the Sapphire is nature's destructive force. Following this, the relationships associated with these images tell morale about the appropriate and inappropriate ways of dealing with nature. When nature is confined it has positive benefits. Of these the mammy is the most corralled embodiment of nature, and she does the most good. Her work is the backbone of the family, a white family that is not hers. de Beauvoir (1993) argues that male as it manifests as "men" is the positive and neutral as it manifests as "human being": "female" is the negative. In a similar manner, the mammy's labor for white families establishes "family" as a strictly white phenomenon. The jezebel is a prize to be won. Independent she is more threatening, yet when she is attached (i.e. subsumed by a man) the threat dissipates. The other tropes refer to women outside the bounds of heteronormative union; in these cases the women are cast in a negative light. The matriarch's failure to place herself under the control of a man creates adverse situations. Worse is the welfare queen, society's leech. Finally, the Sapphire (sometimes attached, sometimes independent of men), in her subversions of masculinity, is posited as an active counter-productive force. Women, specifically black women, through their intimate relationships, are forced to conform to and expected to be controlled by the masculine imperative. Yet, the targets of the Enlightened imperative to control are not always women (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002).

Critiquing Gunnar Myrdal's (1944) citing of ideological dynamics as the prime impetus for racial oppression in the U.S., Oliver Cox (1948) posits an alternative theory based on a relationship between labor dynamics and racial dynamics: racial oppression,

such as that at work in the U.S., is a way to acquire labor and materials necessary to capitalist production. While not a Marxist (Steinberg 1995), Cox's assessment does follow the ideas of Karl Marx. In *Capital, Volume I* (1977) and in "On Imperialism in India" (1978c) Marx frames capitalism as a ruthless and hypocritical reaver of foreign lands and foreign peoples. Other scholars have made the same assessment[73]. Both, Cox (1948) and Marx (1977) implicate the state in these maladaptive conditions. This point is intimately conjoined to Kwame Toure and Charles V. Hamilton's (1967) conceptualization of institutional racism. It is also important to analyses of the failure of U.S. Reconstruction done by Eric Foner (1988), Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1994), Stephen Steinberg (1995), and Howard Zinn (2003); all of whom find that labor necessities undermined Reconstruction progress towards racial equality. Aimé Césaire (1983a) offers a detailed poetic statement on the processes through which black labor is shanghaied, one he later complimented with a precise academic treatise (2000). His "Notebook of a Return to the Native Land" (Césaire 1983a) influenced a similar outlook on the part of Frantz Fanon (1967). The latter also drew upon similar points made by Octave Mannoni (1990), and Jean-Paul Sartre (1948) and Albert Memmi (1965) also frame labor demands as a major drive behind racial oppression. However, the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002) and Simone de Beauvoir (1993) is particularly relevant because of their analyses of how labor demands fuel subordination,

Both Simone de Beauvoir (1993) and Edward Said (1979) describe the masculine

[73] Black literature produces the same rebuke. Claude McKay's novels *Home to Harlem* (1956) and *Banjo* (1957) both link the repression of blacks and exploitation of black labor. The inauthentic working conditions that blacks are forced to endure are addressed in Randolph Fisher's (1969) *The Walls of Jericho*. These themes are also present in Sartre's work. One thing that drives the protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre's (1975c) "Childhood of a Leader" is the desire to paternalistically control workers, while the police and the state exact an irrational pogrom against blackness in Sartre's (1989b) "The Respectful Prostitute."

imperative to control. Said (1979) writes about how the West has articulated the Orient as feminized, an entity to be "penetrated" and controlled. Like Said (1979), Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) emphasize how Western society is bent on the control of nature. They discuss how Enlightened society seeks to corral nature for its bidding; and as a primary model for the ideal Enlightened ruler of nature they identify Odysseus, with the witch Calypso as a primary model for nature. This framing (i.e. Odysseus as Enlightened ideal, Calypso as nature) exposes how the imperative to control manifests as a masculine prerogative.

Calypso is a force greater than Odysseus, way so. The same can be said of the crew at his disposal. Yet, Odysseus, to carry out his objectives, uses rational thought to marshal their forces (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). In this way Calypso and the crew are the proletariat to Odysseus' bourgeoisie (Marx and Engels 1978; Horkhiemer and Adorno 2002), the former a powerful force inappropriately consigned to the goals of another. The witch and the crew labor on his behalf, and little consideration is given to the hardships that they will accrue in his service. The man who controls is the primary Enlightened being; and woman, forever consigned to be his subordinate, is an object which he manipulates. A parallel occurs with modern labor as the bourgeoisie manipulates the proletariat (male and female). The tricks are different—anti-Semitism (Sartre 1948; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) and racial oppression (Cox 1948). The results are the same: the drive to control labor and/or sexuality—as it is seen as the unique right of men as a sex, the bourgeoisie as a class, and whites as a race.

Horkheimer and Adorno's (2002) analysis of Calypso allows a deeper understanding of the oppression that occurs in heteronormative relationships. Engels

(1978) and de Beauvoir (1993), in varying ways, emphasize the labor that women perform in society; much of it is occupational/physical: housework is done, but more importantly women are the avenue through which the species continues. Women, especially third world women (hooks 1981; Lorde 1984; Anzaldúa 1999; Hill Collins 2000), perform emotional labor in conjunction with their physical labor, as they take care and provide emotional support for individuals and families not their own. Pryor (2000h) suggests that heteronormative sex is also a type of labor (also inherently emotional) for women as he trumpets technology's superiority over man in terms of satisfying women (in so making men redundant to the sexual pleasure of women) and the fact that women, as sexual beings, have exclusive control over a commodity strongly desired by a number of men. The tropes identified by Hill Collins (2000), when juxtaposed with the work of de Beauvoir (1993), bear this interpretation out. The mammy is consigned to labor which is occupational/emotional (i.e. domestic labor). The jezebel is restricted to sexual/emotional labor. The welfare queen is a warning against sloth. She does not work, and like the matriarch she fails to place herself under the masculine domain. These two images of black women support capitalism's proclaimed right to marshal labor to its benefit as it sees fit (Thompson 1967; Marx 1977). Finally, the Sapphire is a warning against the perils of having the most dominant voice not be male.

Another opportunity arises when one looks for other specific vehicles through which this masculine imperative to control manifests. Karl Marx (1977) highlights the state as a vehicle through which control is exerted over society. This point is developed in the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971) and Louis Althusser (Althusser and Balibar 1998). Cox (1948) and Ture and Hamilton (1967) also link the impulse of the state to

marshal labor to racial oppression. Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) do the same, presenting fascism as the natural destination of the bourgeoisie state (rather than as an aberration) because of capitalism's imperative to control.[74] The demand for occupational labor as it is related to an imperative to control is framed as a source of atemporality in the work of Mabley and Pryor. In both, labor—be it occupational/emotional or sexual/emotional intimate—is posited as a specific site of atemporality. With Mabley both types of labor are linked to atemporality. With Pryor, both types are also important. Pryor's descriptions of sexual/emotional labor often develop through en-soi (as covered in Ch. II). Yet, in his discussions of occupational/emotional labor a shift takes place. In Pryor's analysis of occupational/emotion labor and in Mabley's analyses of occupational/emotional labor and sexual/emotional labor the masculine imperative to control is navigated. Care nihilates the imperative to control and its affects over subordinated bodies: the act of care leads to residence in the present

The Imperative to Control Labor in Pryor and Mabley's Standup

Mabley on the Imperative to Control

Mabley's eradication of gender-based mediation and her subversion of the tropes that plague black women mostly materialize through her articulation of phenomenal bodies engaged in labor, occupational and intimate. Mabley's narrative concerning traditional occupational labor contains two aspects. Sometimes Mabley labors for others, such as during those moments when she strives to "hip" her audience. This happens on

[74] Their (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002) analysis of Odysseus also present the state as a masculine entity and its actions as masculine imperatives.

all of the recordings used for this study. Mabley (2004a) insists on telling her children "the truth":

> Ain't nothing wrong with these children. Don't blame it on them. Blame it on the parents. You all know it ain't these children's fault. Why didn't you tell 'em the truth? I've been begging you for the years. Tell these children the truth….That's the only thing wrong with 'em. Stop sitting down, telling these children about the good old days. What good old days? When? I was here. Where was they at? *[Laughter]*

She sees such an activity—both the delivery and the reception of the truth (i.e. to "hip")—to be essential to producing people who can successfully navigate the world (Mabley 1963; Mabley 1963; Mabley 1964; Mabley 1964; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2003a; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2006; Mabley 2006; Mabley 2006; Mabley 2006; Mabley n.d.; Mabley n.d). Another instance of Mabley's labor for others occurs in her tall tales about the work that she does for her government. These tales have Mabley visiting the Congo (1963), India (2003a), Geneva (2004b, 2004b), and working at the U.N. (2002) to represent U.S. interests. Both pursuits entail Mabley making the effort to positively affect the world around her on behalf of herself and on behalf of her fellow human beings.

Connected to the weight given to this last type of labor is Mabley's focus on repose. Sometimes the emphasis is subtle, such as when Mabley insists upon taking a seat (1963, 1964, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b, n.d., n.d.): rather than standing at attention while performing, she insists that her body inhabit a mode of relaxation similar to that of her audience. The emphasis on repose is also present in her discussions about laziness. On the same album, Mabley (1991) rejects and affirms the idea that she is lazy. In the former instance, she admits to being slow, but rejects the notion that she is lazy: all of the

hard work she puts in as an entertainer belies such a label. Later, she admits to being lazy, but she places her laziness in context. Intoxicated while watching television, she (Mabley 1991) (in semi-song) rebuffs her young paramour's complaint about her refusal to wash the dishes:

> He said, 'You ain't nothin' but lazy.'
> I said, 'That just goes to show you, you're crazy.
> I'm just as drunk as I can be.' *[Laughter]*
>
> 'Baby, my rent's paid; and I got it made.
> Ain't no need me working hard now.'
> The thing that Brooks has got to understand
> Is that I've done the best that I can.
> And, if he don't understand, I ain't gonna work no more, no how.
> *[Laughter]*

Here, the emphasis on repose is grounded in a history of labor. Mabley explains that she has worked hard all of her life. Now that she has accrued some "security," she insists upon rest and relaxation. This focus on laboring for herself is highlighted in skits where Mabley insists upon the value of her labor. Her labor must be compensated: this is revealed during a routine where she talks about taking up an employer's bed as protest against non-payment (Mabley 2002) and during the ending of one of her albums (Mabley 2003a) when she explains to her audience that although she thinks dearly of them she does not believe in un-remunerated overtime. The emphasis on the value of her labor does not always originate in its exchange value. Mabley also insists that her work hold some dignity: echoing one of the major issues of the 1960's U.S. Civil Rights Movement (Carson, et. al. 1991) she refuses to work where, "[she] can't pee" (Mabley 2003b).

The sense of restriction, inherent in the gender-based mediation of racialized and gendered bodies (Fanon 1967; de Beauvoir 1993), which Mabley shuns in terms of her

occupational labor is also rejected in the domain of her inter-personal relationships, domains of purely intimate labor. In these relationships and in life, restrictions manifest as "old" people in general, and old men in particular. The various impositions forced upon Mabley by old men come up in another routine that denigrates the "good old days" (n.d.). Mabley vociferously condemns any movement to romanticize the past, a period which her truth telling reveals as a time of struggle. Children were especially beholden to their parents; any failure to follow directions would elicit a brutal response. Her description of the situation concerning parents and children is similar to the one between slave owners and slaves (Mabley n.d.):

> Everything your parents picked for you to do - who do you to love; who you to go out with; who you even to marry. Think of somebody pickin' somebody for you. Got to spend the rest of your days with.

Parents had control over every aspect of their children's lives, even to the point where they chose who you would love and marry; and this parental authority rested with the father, an embodiment of Mabley's old person ethos: "Make no difference what condition it was in. If daddy said so, that was it" (n.d.). These are the circumstances that led to the fourteen year-old Mabley (1963, 1964, 2006, n.d.) being married off to an elderly man.

Yet, Mabley's general harangues against the elderly are directed against a certain type of person. For Mabley (1991, 2003c), "old" is not a purely chronological designation. The term refers to anyone who restricts the movement and opportunities of others. This is the grounds for Mabley's complaints about old men. Her elderly husband was death incarnate. Along with being unable to perform in the bedroom and in life, his restrictions became hers. His inability to do anything prevented Mabley (1964, n.d.) from fully experiencing her sexual existence. While the "old" people Mabley critiques

are often figurative; when identifying old men, a force restrictive in a manner similar to the father (n.d.), she is being literal.

For Mabley (2003c) chronologically and figuratively old men are the ultimate phenomenal burden for women advanced in age: she does not view this as a personal prejudice; she views it as a fact (1964). Not only are they an encumbrance when they are alive, they can be an encumbrance when they are dead (Mabley 1964). Mabley urged her dying husband to take out some life insurance; he refused, stating, "When I die, I want it to be a sad day for everybody" (Mabley 1964). Mabley does not always frame, as she does in the previous instance, the restrictions foisted by old men upon women as an aggressive act. Most often, she frames it as something that comes across as much worse. Many of her discussions of her fictional marriage (Mabley 1963; Mabley 1964; Mabley n.d.) present melancholic men, aware of their inadequacies and the burden they represent to Mabley, yet unwilling to take action to remedy the situation. This double burden, two forms of atemporality—the restriction on Mabley's existence and her husband's (and other old men's) unwillingness to change—are summed up in one of Mabley's (2006) most biting quotes; the aforementioned juxtaposition of old men, pushing a car, and a hill (2004a, 2006).

The impotence of old men, with "old" always being an existential as well as sometimes being a chronological assessment, is all the more damning given the potency that Mabley ascribes to women. Mabley (2006), repeating a point made by her grandmother, makes a vital distinction between men and women: "A woman is a woman as long as she lives. But see, at a certain time of life, a man has to go to a place they call over the hill" (Mabley 2006). Mabley reinforces the notion of eternal female sexuality

(i.e. once sexual, a woman is sexual until she dies)—an idea that lies at the root of the fear which women elicit in Western society and the concomitant repression they face (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002)—throughout her standup. She talks about the sexuality of other older women (Mabley 1984; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2003b; Mabley n.d.). More often, she affirms her own sexuality.

Mabley makes slightly (2002) and not so slightly (1963, 2004b, 2006) veiled references to aspects of her primary and secondary sexual organs and their importance to manifestations of her sexuality. After receiving a passionate, kiss her, "big toe [shoots] up in the air" (Mabley 2002). At home, she has an "old drum" upon which one of the young attractive members of her band can beat (Mabley 2004b). Mabley's (1964) sexuality, which has its own special rules, is complicit in the good life that she leads:

> People are always saying, 'Mom, how come you look so good?' Because I live good. That's right. A lot of old woman try to live like me, but they don't know how, you understand what I mean? They naturally don't know how to live. Some old woman's gonna be crying talking about, 'I've got me a young man too, but he told me he loved me.' Right there showed you a square *[Laughter]*. Love you for what? *[Laughter]* You look like a crossword puzzle *[Laughter]*. Her then give up all of her money and they're saying - I said, 'Let me tell you something, any time that the bait start costing more than the fish, stop fishing.' *[Laughter]*
>
> A lot of people say, 'Mom, you still with Brooks?' Yes, until next year. He knows that *[Laughter]*. The deadline is next year. He'll be 29 *[Laughter]*, too old for me *[Laughter]*. Next time you see me with a man over 23, he's one of my relatives *[Laughter]*. No, if you're gonna live, live. If you ain't, go ahead and die. You're better off *[Laughter]*.

In this, Mabley (1964) lays out many of the major parameters for her approach to life, parameters which cover both her occupational and purely intimate relationships. This is an approach to how, for what, and for whom people should labor.

First, Mabley states that she, unlike many other elderly women, “naturally” knows how to live. Placed in context, with the proper context being the skit about the knowledge she gained at her grandmother’s knee (Mabley 2006), this phrase refers to the latter rather than the former element of the “nature vs. nurture” debate. Mabley (2006) credits her folk wisdom to her grandmother, who sat her down at a young age and promised to protect her from the lies of society. Further evidence for this interpretation of “naturally” occurs when Mabley (1963) chastises today’s parents. She says that any problems with today’s youth can be traced to the lies told to them by their parents. These lies prevent people from “naturally” understanding life. The final piece that reveals Mabley’s (1964) emphasis on “nature” to actually be an emphasis on “nurture” comes about when she discusses the proper moment to “hip a child” (2004a, n.d.). She poses this “simple question” to President Dwight Eisenhower who, in citing the period when a child starts her education, fails to answer appropriately. The correct answer is, “the minute that it is born into this world” (Mabley n.d.). Combining these statements with Mabley’s (2004a) emphasis on “truth telling” shows that for Mabley a “natural” way of life consists of consistently receiving, from birth, a truthful understanding of the world and how it works. Finally, this is a social responsibility. While parents (Mabley 1963), the government (Mabley n.d.), and the educational system (Mabley 2003c) (i.e. civil society and the state) are faulted; Mabley’s (1984) excoriation of “old” people (i.e. someone who restricts the body of another) is so wide that it suggests that everyone has the responsibility to spread the truth.

The next element that Mabley’s (1964) description of her life reveals is a focus on authenticity. Not only does Mabley embrace her sexuality, she embraces various real

world truths. In another routine (Mabley 2003c) she states that she is unwilling to forgo her sexuality because of the deficiencies of old men, those whom she, and other old women (Mabley 2002), are supposed to be eternally attached to. Yet, she acknowledges—tacitly here, explicitly in other places (Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2004b)—that her chronological age causes the exclusion of her desired demographic (i.e. young, handsome, smart, hip men) from her traditional dating pool. Therefore, she uses her financial resources to entice men. However, when she does this she does it authentically: she admits to the dynamics of the relationship. Her acquaintance's failure to do so leads to her downfall (Mabley 1964). A third element of Mabley's life, briefly hinted at here (1964), is her rejection of possession. Her liaison with Brooks has a firmly limited life span. Even though she has moments when she does subordinate herself to the men in her life (Mabley 1984; Mabley 1984; Mabley 1991; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2003a; Mabley 2003b; Mabley 2003c; Mabley 2006), she sets such limits for her own relationships; and, Mabley has many skits which criticize long-term relationships in general. Between chronicling infidelity in long-term monogamous relationships (Mabley 2002; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2004a; Mabley n.d.; Mabley n.d.) and general relationship hardships (Mabley 1984; Mabley 1984; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2004a; Mabley n.d.), Mabley makes it clear that she finds any long-term constricted intimate labor to be problematic.

Pryor on the Imperative to Control

Mabley bemoans the influence of her father: "If daddy said so, that was it" (Mabley n.d.). Pryor has a similar perspective on gender gender-based mediation, except that the manifestations of paternalism in his standup are more varied. Even so, he also

cites fathers as a mode through which the masculine imperative to control emerges. Pryor (2000e, 2005a, 2005b) most often complains about corporal punishment received at the hands of his father, yet underlying these complaints is Pryor's (2000e) unhappiness with how his father subverts his manhood. On one occasion Pryor told his father that he was going to the movies. His father's response was, "Say nigger, you wanna take that bass out your voice when you talk to me?" (Pryor 2000e), an example of his father's intimidator tactics: things Pryor's father would say, "just to scare [Pryor]." Inevitably—if Uranus and Kronos, Kronos and Zeus, and the ideas of Freud (1988) are indicative of a larger trend—Pryor (2000e) contests his father. But, since he is neither titan nor god, his is a different ending:

> Pryor: One time I got tired of him kickin' my ass, you know, I had a fight with him in the front yard. Well, it wasn't exactly a fight. I did the best I could. *[Laughter]* I say,
>
> Pryor in trembling voice: 'Man, I'm tired of taking these ass whuppin's. I ain't taking no fuckin' more.' *[Laughter]* 'And that's it.'
>
> Pryor imitating his father: 'What you a man, now, motherfucker?' *[Laughter]* 'Yeah, okay.'
>
> Pryor: And he'd hit me in the chest so hard that my chest just caved in and wrapped around his fist *[Laughter]* and held it there. I wasn't letting that fist go.
>
> Pryor: I didn't give a fuck what he did. My chest had that fist and everyway he moved his arm, I was hangin' on. [*Laughter and Applause]* And I didn't know he wasn't gonna kill me. He grabbed me by my throat, my eyes was getting big as shit and he bust my head against the cement and some blood came out of that, and when you see your own blood, you freak. I started trying to push that shit back down in there. *[Laughter]* I said 'Dad, I'm your son. I'm your son. I'm your son.' He say 'No, motherfucker, you was a man a minute ago.' *[Laughter]*

While the physical aspect of the confrontation is significant, its meaning and goal are

delivered in the quote's last line. The father's goal is to dampen Pryor's agency. In Pryor's (2000a, 2000g, 2005b) standup this is an attribute of fathers in general in their interactions with young men courting their daughters, and even though Pryor resents this masculine imperative he also carries it out.

One such avenue is a masculine imperative to control women, specifically their aforementioned intimate (i.e. emotional and sexual) labor. In some cases the violence that men distribute (Pryor 2000i), or attempt to distribute (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d) against their significant others is given little context. There is a case when violence is referenced in regards to Pryor's tortured women (See Ch. II): Pryor (2005b) relates his failure as a pimp to his inability to properly discipline his workers. However, most of the causes of violence used to control women center around emotional and/or sexual issues. Pryor's father again sets the stage for Pryor (2000b). Seeing his parents fight once, Pryor attempted to intervene on his mother's behalf; doing so he asserted his case by screaming, "That's my mama!" His father's retort was, "That's my woman!," establishing the heteronormative intimate relationship as the pinnacle of possession—men possessing women. Once again, Pryor gets beat.

The dynamics of this interaction (Pryor 2000b) mirror many of the others that occur when violence is mixed with heteronormative intimate relationships. Analyzing such fights, Pryor identifies the cause as the damaged male ego. If a woman he is with hurts his ego, he and she have to fight (Pryor 2005b). A specific sub-category of wrongdoing is a lack of sex: "[We] either fuck or fight" (Pryor 2005a). There are other examples of Pryor or Mudbone using violence or the threat of violence to control women (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000h), but they are not the only ones

who do so in Pryor's standup. A wino relates how Joseph offered a similar response after Mary explained her expectant child's paternity: "He damn near killed her with a kill-stick up there" (Pryor 2005b); and Pryor's own wife behaves similarly when she finds out that the woman she was secretly having sex with was also having sex with Pryor (2005b).

Pryor's examination of the imperative to control also extends to how it factors into class dynamics. Pryor (2005b) establishes the difficulty that comes with poverty: when you are poor the odds are stacked against you meeting your needs: the class system controls the poor. Pryor gives a lot of time to a certain circumstance to which women in poverty are forced to succumb to: prostitution. Pryor (2005b) presents prostitution as a complement to masculinity, as when Pryor explains his desire and failure at being a pimp. Yet, more often he, like many black feminists (hooks 1981; Davis 1983; Hill Collins 2000), presents the class system as a gendered and racially charged form of labor oppression. Men of many kinds sexually exploit women across U.S. society, but when a white man does it (i.e. Hugh Heffner) he's a playboy; when the man doing it is black he's a pimp (Pryor 2005a). Most often, most likely drawing on his mother having been a prostitute and his grandmother having been a madam (Pryor 1995), and keeping with significant trends in black feminist theory (hooks 1981; Hill Collins 2000), Pryor explores the role that sexual exploitation of black women plays in meeting the needs of white men[75]. In the worst of cases it is black female teenagers who are the object of exploitation (Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b). Sometimes it is his mother (Pryor 2005b), but in many cases (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2005b) prostitution, not just racially charged prostitution, as a type of labor is an imposed

[75] There are some circumstances where Pryor's discussions of this are played mostly for comedic effect (2005a, 2005b), but most of these discussions have a hint of dourness.

hardship for black women.

Unsurprisingly, another one of Pryor's most visited points concerning society's masculine imperative to control labor is the unjustness of slavery. Pryor (2000d, 2000g, 2000h) often paints Africa (past and present) as an idyllic place[76], so his narratives about the advent of modern chattel slavery recall the Biblical fall (Pryor 2000d). Through the suffering of slaves and others, the U.S. was able to reach great heights. Columbus could be thankful for what he had, but his possessions were the result of work done by Native Americans and slaves (Pryor 2000a; Pryor 2000i)[77]. And, while the U.S. eventually outlawed slavery the de facto slavery which characterized the post-Civil War South meant that little had changed for the ex-slaves/new sharecroppers (Pryor 2000a).

The conditions of modern workers are also examined. Pryor's discourse addresses how racially subordinated groups are exploited for their labor. He talks about the importance of Mexican-American and Chinese-American labor to the building of U.S. railroads (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2005b). This exploration of U.S. exploitation of what is sometimes erroneously called foreign labor—Mexicans in California are not foreigners (Anzaldúa 1999)—is not just a pre-20th century phenomenon. One of the positive outcomes for the Vietnam War for the U.S. bourgeoisie was an influx of Vietnamese immigrant labor, "new niggers" (Pryor 2000c).

Yet, Pryor mostly focuses on hardships that seem very related to the black life in the U.S. Mudbone's work in the South (Pryor 2000c), as discussed in the previous chapter, was hindered by ridiculous expectations. He was expected to run through

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[76] Although, in keeping with early 1980's political consciousness he excoriates South African apartheid and U.S. complicity in the phenomenon (Pryor 2000h).

[77] This anachronism which pulls together two related but chronologically distant moments of New World oppression is another example of Pryor's articulation of colored people's time.

floodwaters and risk drowning to warn his (most likely) white employers of danger. Also, the racial situation demanded that while working he be constantly and illogically active. His “cock-eyed” boss reduced his black workers to an amorphous mass. To direct, he used the word “nigger” instead of a proper name. Without individuation each black worker lived in anxiety as each had to attempt to carry out the given command (e.g. “Nigger, pick that up”), never knowing if it applied to him or her. These hardships are presented as a conscious racial directive. For instance, the restricted opportunities that blacks have to access sunshine is presented as a purposeful racial imperative (Pryor 2000g).

Pryor’s standup also addresses manifestations of this imperative to control with in the entertainment industry. Sometimes he uses Mudbone to do this. The work and some of the attempts at work that Mudbone has had in Hollywood have been demeaning (Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000i). He was asked to play a monkey (Pryor 2000d) (as mentioned in Chapter V), and he had, “to clean up after Lassie…. [who would] shit anywhere…[and] was kinda prejudice, too, ‘cause he’d growl at nothing but niggers” (Pryor 2000i). These circumstances are derided, but despair only creeps in when Pryor discusses missed/passed opportunities. The problem with making a good black film is that it can’t be “jive” (Pryor 20005b). Pryor imagined a black Hollywood musical, vibrant with the rhythms and issues of black life; but his, “heart wasn’t in [making] it” (Pryor 2005b). Maybe, it was because “jive” is the role that blacks dealing with whites are forced to take up. Part of this entails white society’s co-optation. Just as gunpowder was appropriated from (and maliciously used against) the Chinese (Pryor 2000d), Hollywood appropriates black labor. Sometimes it is a narrative appropriation, such as when movies portray the

Biblical King Solomon and his accomplishments as white endeavors (2000i). Other times, the appropriation is intellectual. As a metaphor, Mudbone ascribes the development of the close-up to black thinking. Yet, it is W.B. Griffith who gets the credit (Pryor 2000i)[78].

One of the effective tools that Pryor uses to highlight adverse labor conditions is contrasting his own privileged position with that of the majority of blacks. Addressing Pryor's issues, Mudbone advises Pryor to, "enjoy [himself] 'cause there ain't many black motherfuckers out there doing it" (Pryor 2000g). This statistical unlikelihood can be linked to lack of viable labor opportunities for blacks. During a different skit, Pryor (2000i) informs his audience that they should be very happy that comedy worked out for him. If it had not he'd be walking around hitting people on the head with a sock that held a brick in it; not because he would be robbing them, but because he "was good at it." It would be the only viable opportunity open to him.

Pryor (2000d) relishes the opportunity to address the success of some successful black entertainers that have graced his audience. Part of this comes from how impressive it is for blacks in the entertainment industry to have overcome the unique challenges which face them. Adverse conditions originating in racial oppression (e.g. harsh labor conditions) have often been identified as sources of mental instability (Fanon 1967; Larsen 1997). Pryor (2000i) agrees:

> Now, see, black people are frightened to death of therapists. For some reason, of all the people on the planet in America, we some motherfuckers that need some therapy. *[Laughter]*

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[78] This seems to be an unsubstantiated point, but one of the most anti-black (and innovative) films having part of its origins in the theft of black ideas produces irony that is extremely effective in conveying Pryor's (2000i) point.

> You believe me. 'Cause we [are] fucked up. *[Laughter]*
>
> We fucked up 'cause—we can't—we got to be insane 'cause we ain't killed you motherfuckers. [*Laughter and Applause]*
>
> (Laughs) So you know we insane 'cause you all, white folks, wouldn't take this shit for a minute. *[Laughter]*
>
> Less on 200 years. Give you motherfuckers a week and that be it. You motherfuckers be in the streets with guns, killin' babies, motherfucker ever come to your house talkin' 'bout, 'Get on the boat.'

This insanity is related to capitalism's imperative to control labor. During World War I, Mudbone worked in France treating black soldiers, some of whom had suffered mustard gas attacks (Pryor 2000d). One soldier had not put on his mask, and Mudbone inquired as to why. The soldier thought the directive to wear the mask was just another deception employed by white folks. So caught up was he in the machinations that pertain to his labor, he could not take his employers at their word. His doing so is a specific disputation of the legitimacy of the state and its interactions with black bodies. Many more follow in Pryor's work[79].

Gramsci (1971) and Althusser (1998), along with criticizing the state, criticize civil society and the role it plays in social control. Pryor also provides both types of criticism. While not directly linked to labor, civil and state control of black bodies does contribute to the transformation of blacks into cheap labor (Fanon 1967; Césaire 1983a). Although his critique of marriage is not as labor conscious as that of Mabley and de Beauvoir (1993), Pryor finds the civil institution of marriage to be particularly problematic. Pryor (2000g) does acknowledge that it has some positive elements: "the loving part is so wonderful," and the fact that you meet someone who loves you is a

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[79] One such example is the white gaze which accompanies occupational segregation (Pryor 2000i). This is the gaze that inspires Pryor to "turn it out," as discussed in Ch. V.

miracle (2000i). However, he also believes that conflicting drives are bound to doom marriages between men and women: men love sex/sex is really good for men (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000f; Pryor 2000g; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2000b), and marriage demands monogamy (Pryor 2000g; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b[80]). This contradiction and other reasons (Pryor 2000a; Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000f; Pryor 2000g; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2000h; Pryor 2005b) mean that women will always be leaving their male partners, and this leads to various types of heartbreak. Mostly it is emotional (Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000f; Pryor 2000g), but sometimes it is financial (Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2000h).

To Pryor, as it is to de Beauvoir (1993), marriage represents a type of societal control. But, he doesn't ascribe this masculine impulse to control to any particular institution. With his thoughts on religion, one finds an institution linked to general and detrimental types of control. Even Mudbone points out that, "religion isn't [Pryor's] thing" (Pryor 2000g)[81], partly because Pryor found it to be maliciously deceptive. Isn't there something wrong with killing someone and then worshipping them (Pryor 2000i)? How can you have faith healers that are sick (Pryor 2005a)? Mostly, Pryor found religion's financial workings to be shameful: "Go to church with no money and [don't] you feel bad? *[Laughter]*…. 'You didn't even put nothing in the collection plate.' 'Kiss my ass.' I'll shit in it. Y'all want some shit. You give me shit. Here's some more" (Pryor 2005b). He laments preachers dressed in expensive finery, purchased with tithes from their humble parishioners (Pryor 2005a), a process linked to what he saw as

[80] In this case his wife was also being unfaithful; both he and she slept with the same woman.
[81] Although in his later years, after burning up and contracting multiple sclerosis, Pryor (1995, 2000i) did become religious.

religion's position that greed (by certain people) is good (2005b). Next, just as he associates the conditions which structure black labor with a mentally debilitating condition, he finds religion fosters a similar process. Religion is oppressive to women. Like de Beauvoir (1993), Pryor (2000i, 2005b) argues that its emphasis on sexual purity is contrary to the social needs of women, weakening their ability to function in the everyday world[82]. Finally, when Pryor (2005a) rejects religion he's rejecting one more form of racial control:

> I learned when I was a kid black people didn't have a god because we worshipped things like air, water, trees, each other. And it was considered pretty savage by the white man because he said, 'Why worship those things savage, when you can worship me—white man!?'

Pryor's condemnation of religion has many aspects. However, the ideal which drives it is best summed up in an interview he did (Pryor 2000h). Ideas are hard to come by and harder to express. An idea which haunts Pryor is pulling Jesus off of the cross. Religion did some work, but we as a society need to let it go. Unfortunately, there are still forces which use it to impose control.

Like Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) and de Beauvoir (1993), Pryor frames the state and its imperative to control as a specifically masculine dynamic: "That's why [Ronald Reagan wants] them [MX missiles] and shit, so he can get off. *[Laughter]* You know, 'Shoot one of them big babies off' *[Laughter]*" (2000h). State-sponsored violence serves is a remedy for the blocked id. He also finds that the state's search for control extends to other venues. Like the penis (Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b) the state demands that the gaze which addresses it be closely policed. In

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[82] Although part of Pryor's condemnation of female abstinence is similar to bourgeoisie insistence that all possible resources be made available for exploitation (Marx 1977) he also associates this repression as a starting point for racial violence (Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2005b).

early war movies, the U.S. is always presented as the "good guy" (Pryor 2005a). Participation in the state is limited: Washington D.C. residents, the majority of whom are black, did not having certain voting rights in 1978 (Pryor 2000e). The state is so pernicious that Pryor (2000g) thinking about registering to vote is a sign to Mudbone that drug use has left Pryor really "sick." In fact, the pinnacle of statehood hinges upon the control that it extends of its black population: "Peoria is a model city. That means [it has] the Negroes under control" (Pryor 2005a). This level of control is the singular goal of two specific promoters of the state and its power: law enforcement and the courts.

The given task of the police is to control and abuse blacks [83]. As a performer, Pryor personally experienced the police's irrational repression. An interview (Pryor 2005b) recounts how, while performing in the Carolinas, a white club proprietor did not like some of the things that Pryor said about Jesus; so he called a white club owner in Virginia and set it up so that Pryor would be arrested for indecency. In his standup, Pryor gives other personal examples of racially arbitrary police confinement of blacks. As a teenager he would often get brought in to do the police line-up on the weekend (Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2005b). In some ways it was fun: it was like being on stage. Yet, the reasons and possible outcomes of these visits to the police station were dangerous. White women with no sexual prospects would falsely claim that a black man had raped them. Pryor and the other black men in the lineup knew these women were lying. The police knew these women were lying. But, if, "you got picked [as the rapist that] was your ass" (Pryor 2005b) because Enlightened society's repression of embodied nature (in this case black males) must always rear its head.

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[83] In order for a black cop to be effective, he must do so more than his white partner (Pryor 2005b).

Not only does being white allow one to have one's unjustified claims defended, it also exempts one from being subject to the impulses of the law (Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2005b). Pryor (2005b) contrasts the treatment of three people who have been arrested, two black and one white. The first is a car thief who asks to press counter-charges against the woman who filed a complaint against him. Having mistook her car for the one that belonged to his mother, he got in and attempted to drive off. While doing so a woman, "scratched [his] hand *[Laughter]* and shit [*Laughter*] and yelled loud in [his] ear and hurt [his] ear and everything" (Pryor 2005b). After he explains this to the officer in charge he is threatened with an, "ass whupping." The next arrestee is being charged with "handing out anti-government literature," something completely within his First Amendment rights, which goes unstated, yet implied. It is likely that the last arrestee will be let go. He is white, and he has friends on the city council. These qualities will save him from being prosecuted for child molestation (Pryor 2005b)[84].

The violent repression that blacks come into contact with during police interactions is rarely potential in Pryor's standup. He talks about one of his adult experiences witnessing this phenomenon. Any real or perceived failure to adhere to the police means that, "you can get a ass whupping in jail and nobody care" (Pryor 2005b). Worse, the police constantly kill blacks (Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2005b). Pryor (2000e) humorously states that in California the police manual expressly sanctions it. Coupled with this possibility of death is the court's disregard for judicial appropriateness (Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2000c); which, like the other aspects of the state, is decidedly masculine in its imperative to control: "I had my pants all down by my ankles when [the judge] was

[84] Pryor (2000c) also talks about how Nixon will be spared his appropriate fate.

finished. 'Just don't stick it in too far, your honor. Please'" (Pryor 2000c). Pryor bemoans this type masculine drive to control and utilize black (male) bodies, such as when it materializes during the strip search he receives when he enters jail, because it is a violation of his own masculinity (Pryor 2005b):

> I don't know what they looking for. I said, 'What you looking for, man? *[Laughter]* In my ass. *[Laughter]* There ain't nothing in my ass. If I had a pussy, I might could dig it, but— *[Laughter]* You know, 'cause you can hide something in your pussy. But in my ass? What I'm gonna hide in my ass? *[Laughter]* A pistol? *[Laughter]* Gonne come out with a .45? *[Laughter]* Up against the wall, motherfucker.' *[Laughter]*

The legal/juridical system is driven to dominate those subordinated entities with which it comes into contact. So, it is no surprise that the Pryor once again feels compelled to locate it as the source of the subordinated's anxiety, especially when a standard approach by the police is, "Get outta the car. There was a robbery. Nigger look[ed] just like you! All right. Put your hands up. Take your pants down and spread your cheeks" (Pryor 2000b). Pryor deplores the imposition of masculinity upon another; he labels rape, "some vile shit to take somebody's humanity" (Pryor 2000f). So, it is fitting that the maintenance of another's humanity is articulated as a form of praxis which puts people in time. Like in the work of Mabley, care acts as a positive praxis in the work of Pryor.

<u>Care as a Catalyst for Temporality</u>

The Power of Care

Family, both formal and informal (Stack 1974; Mullings 1997) has always been an important tool used by blacks to deal with racial oppression. In black feminist literature real (Morrison 1970, 1987) and informal family (Walker 1982; Larsen 1997;

Hurston 2000) often help the subordinated navigate racial atemporality. This emphasis has not gone unnoticed in academic circles, where the nurturing qualities of family-life help serve as a basis of black feminist praxis (Combahee River Collective 1982; Hill Collins 2000).

Hill Collins (2000) finds that black women have a unique, "overarching theory of knowledge" that is grounded upon, "lived experience as a criterion of meaning" (257), dialogue as a means of evaluation, "personal accountability," an acknowledgement of black women as knowledge producing beings, and an "ethics of caring." This last component has as its foundation the aforementioned and highly emphasized authenticity (i.e. "individual uniqueness"). A second foundational aspect of these ethics is an emotional investment in knowledge, a testimony to the investment in the knowledge being expressed. The final foundational aspect is an environment of empathy. Yet, when it comes to gender-based mediation and other forms of the imperative to control, dynamics whose major product is stagnation (de Beauvoir 1993), care has an even greater role. Martin Heidegger (1962) identifies care as one of the most important elements of existence. Furthermore, he locates "common concern" at the root of positive social interaction.

Heidegger (1962) defines care as, "ahead-of-itself—Being-already-in (a world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world)" (364). This complicated existential rendition is useful as it hints at the temporal aspects of care, aspects which Heidegger (1962) goes on to clarify:

> As care, Dasein is essentially ahead of itself. Proximally and for the most part, concernful Being-in-the-world understands itself in terms of that *which* it is concerned. Inauthentic *understanding* projects itself upon that

> which one can concern itself, or upon what is feasible, urgent, or indispensable in our everyday business. But that with which we concern ourselves is as it is for the sake of that potentiality-for-Being which cares. This potentiality lets Dasein come towards itself in its concernful Being-alongside that with which it is concerned. Dasein does not come towards itself primarily in its ownmost non-relational potentiality-for-Being, but it *awaits this* concernfully *in terms of that which yields or denies the object of its concern*. Dasein comes towards itself from that with which it concerns itself.
>
> (386)

Heidegger (1962) asserts that the future is the most important context of existentiality (375). And concern propels Dasein toward the future.

Explaining the driving force behind her labor, Mabley states, "I like to see children live, 'cause I didn't have an opportunity to live" (Mabley n.d.). And, Mudbone's insistence that Pryor "enjoy [him]self 'cause there ain't many black motherfuckers out there doing it" (Pryor 2000g) is haunted by Mudbone's suffering at the hand of powerful forces (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d). Both Mabley (n.d.) and Mudbone (Pryor 2000g) try to create positive experiences for others, experiences that they themselves did not receive. That is why this project's working definition of care is Fanon's (1967) definition of love (romantic and other), a concept that often comes up in his work (Fanon 1967): "true, authentic love [is] wishing for others what one postulates for oneself, when that postulation [is] freed of unconscious conflicts" (41). In Fanon's (1967) work care plays an important role in the subversion of racial conflict. Steeped in post-WWII ethical awareness, Fanon (1967) disputes the barrier between blacks and Jews: racial oppression is a solitary impulse that will consume all. Hence, caring about those outside of one's traditionally recognized group is the only way that it can be stopped. Pryor and Mabley employ a similar outlook.

Mabley's Lithe Bodies

A noticeable aspect of Mabley's comedy is that incorporates movements away from and returns to traditional notions about women's bodies and their labor. These movements can be understood using Hill Collins' (2000) tropes as a backdrop. Mabley moves in and out of these tropes to the point that they do not represent an effective lens for black femininity. Mabley (1991, 2002, 2003a, 2003b) works for herself and she works for others (1963, 2002, 2003a, 2003c, 2004b). The mammy trope used to subdue black women (Hill Collins 2000) and general conceptualizations of women's labor frame women's labor as a pre-destined service for men (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). This is in keeping with general bourgeoisie labor ideals which chastise any circumstance wherein proletarian labor is used contrary to bourgeoisie desires (Marx 1977). The ideals of the mammy and the Jezebel disintegrate under the glare of Mabley's interpersonal relationships. While she is definitely sexual, Mabley's age circumvents her Jezebel status. Under colonial guidelines the potency and dearth of nature are assigned separate spheres, with distinct spheres serving as the foundation for mediation (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Mabley's melding of two such categories—elderly (i.e. frail) and vibrantly sexual—invalidates these categories. A second level of invalidation occurs when one looks at who Mabley does and does not have sex with. Eschewing old men is another way in which Mabley rejects the cycle of life and death that is associated with nature (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). While the union of old men and young women is seen as the birthright of men, with young women serving as an elixir (de Beauvoir 1993) Mabley's inversion of the dynamic twice iterates male mortality. First, it undermines the use of women as a

mediation/distraction against impending male mortality, and it places men and women on two different tracks. Coupled with old men, old women are forced to take up a forced impotency, one that mirrors the inevitable natural impotency which is associated with maleness (de Beauvoir 1993; Mabley 2006). Mabley separates old men and old women: in movement and content the dynamics of such discussions restore the life-long sexuality which sexual oppression denies women (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Championing sex with young men performs the same function, and it eradicates the barrier between the nurturing and sexual elements of women, a barrier which is important to constructing women as Other (de Beauvoir 1993).

Mabley rejected the label of mammy (Williams 1995), and one can see how she is beyond such a title. Inherent in the idea of the mammy is a female paternalism. The children in the mother's care must be taken care of because they cannot take care of themselves (de Beauvoir 1993; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). This mother is seemingly emancipative, yet really restrictive. She frees the child from worrying about certain things, but in doing so she takes away the opportunities for growth that come with responsibility (de Beauvoir 1993). Finally, there is an intense attachment between the mother figure and the child (de Beauvoir 1993). Mabley eschews attachment, but she maintains responsibility. The former is controlling, while the latter is about constructing an environment where development can take place. This point is made during a routine (Mabley n.d.) that covers the importance of hipping a child as soon as they are born. This type of labor will allow a baby the wherewithal to exist independently. Having done so, when the parents want to go out they will not need a babysitter. Having hipped the infant from its inception the parents can just explain their plans to the baby, and the baby will

take care of itself. The care Mabley provides is geared towards expanding the responsibilities of her charges, rather than relieving them of responsibilities and the accompanying possibilities of agency.

Much of this entails Mabley's emphasizing care of one's self. Mabley's laziness is the end product of having done so much work. In this way the labor of women, and mothers in particular (as "Moms" was Mabley's chief designation) is elevated to its proper foundational status (de Beauvoir 1993; Hill Collins 2000). The label of welfare queen does not fit. Neither does the role of Sapphire because the verbal abuse that she dishes out is a defense against immediate, past, and future physical and symbolic violence (Mabley 1984; Mabley 2002; Mabley 2003a; Mabley 2003b). And, since men are an integral part of program for maintaining her life (both platonically and sexually) (Mabley 2003b) the label of matriarch does not fit either. Given Mabley's life, these tropes come across as arbitrary designations used to repress women.

These moments of subordination are an important part of Mabley's stand up. Mabley (2003a) discusses the emotional toll of her relationship with one of her young boyfriends. He harbors a sublimated hostility towards her, similar to the hostility that de Beauvoir (1993) and Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) find to be prominent in many male-female relationships. His taking her shoes, her hat, and her glasses come across as passive-aggressive attempts to degrade her; attempts which mirror man's degradation of woman—a passive-aggressive attempt to degrade nature. This, like Mabley's other eradications of the tropes used to define black female existence, disintegrates through care.

In Mabley's standup, following Fanon (1967), various bodies fully experience existence, and one of the means through which they move out of their stagnation is a praxis of care. Describing the elements of black feminist epistemology, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) emphasizes the role played by empathy. A willingness to understand the plight of others in this context is important to the production and dissemination of knowledge. Yet, when it comes to the imperative to control, a dynamic whose major product is stagnation (de Beauvoir 1993), care has an even greater role. Martin Heidegger (1962) identifies care as one of the most important elements of existence. Furthermore, he locates "common concern" at the root of positive social interaction. Mabley employs care in a manner that adheres to the dictates of both Hill Collins (2000) and Heidegger (1962).[85] Care by Mabley for her "children"—an expansive designation that even includes personal foes such as Nikita Khrushchev (2002)—creates a double movement beyond the imperative to control. First, it seeks to prevent the children from being contingent. Second, it centers the existence of Mabley's stage persona. Her caring is the reason she performs, the basis for her discursive activity (Watkins 1994; Williams 1995; Mabley 2004).

Including a sense of responsibility, care is the basis of the circumvention of the problems of the problems of mediation identified by Fanon (1967) and de Beauvoir (1993). The Fanonian problems go from being in-itself issues (i.e. constrictions imposed by the outside world) to for-itself issues (i.e. conditions stemming from the subject). The schism of the third person body—interacting with one's body as one interacts with a thing—becomes reflection. Mabley urges her audience to consider the course and nature

[85] Emmanuel Levinas (1987) also formulates care as a key component in the articulation of temporality.

of their actions. This is what she is doing when she describes the elements necessary to a "good life" (1964). When care is infused into the triple person (i.e. an atomized body responsible for self, group, and the history of one's group) (Fanon 1967), burdens of gender-based mediation become the necessity of social responsibility. Criticizing a wide-range of people for failing to hip the children, Mabley (1963, 1984, 2003c, 2004a) accentuates a condition wherein rather than being responsible for the perceived sins of one's self and one's group, people take responsibility for helping themselves and others move into mitten—harmonious being-with (de Beauvoir 1993). Finally, care is the basis of Mabley's rejection of possession, if only indirectly. It is intermingled with the authenticity that demands that people accurately assess their relationships. When things are not working out they must be changed. This is Mabley's (2004b) motto. Here rather than caring for others one cares for one's self, an indirect message that comes when she talks about suffering at the hands of her boyfriend (Mabley 2003a).

Richard Pryor's Nurturing Masculinity

Care is an important element of Pryor's standup. He situates it as integral to the circumvention of racial oppression. This perspective is expressed during Bicentennial Nigger's (Pryor 2000d) speech. Describing the situations of slaves in the U.S.—their low life-span, the horrors of the Middle Passage, the lack of health care, and the fractured families—Bicentennial Nigger says, "Ah, but you didn't have to doctors to take care of us. I'm so sorry you didn't. Upset you all something too didn't it?" (2000d). What is alluded to in that statement in expressed concretely in Pryor's discussion about the drug epidemic in the U.S.:

> Like, they call it an epidemic now. That means White folks are doin' it. 'Cause you all used to drive through our neighborhoods and shit and go, "Oh, look at that. Isn't that terrible?" *[Laughter]* Then you'd get home and your 14-year-old would be fucked up. You'd go, "Oh my God. It's an epidemic." *[Laughter]* Maybe next time you see Black people in trouble, you'll help – maybe. *[Laughter]*

Care (including deficits of care) is an important part of Pryor's life: both in terms of his intimate relationships (Pryor 2000g) and in terms of his relationship to his audience. During tough times in his life, Pryor (2000g, 2000h, 2000i) is always appreciative of the support shown to him by his fans. The positive effects of care are on full display in Pryor's standup.

In Pryor's (2000a) "Prison Play" skit, the one where Ben the black blacksmith falls in love with the Southern belle—care is the driving force for social change. While her brother is initially hesitant to accept his sister's inter-racial union, Ben's love for his sister fosters a change in the brother's attitude. It touches the brother to such a high degree that it annuls his racism. Care exercises similar powers throughout Pryor's standup.

Pryor's standup is filled with such examples of the exercise of care. "Hank's Place" (Pryor 2005a) has Mr. Perkins trying to save Hank from being swindled, and it has Tarcy the Cop attempting to prevent Pryor from getting into situations that could lead to trouble. Yet, those who exercise care are not always human. In Pryor's standup an aspect of the anthropomorphism of animals in the care that they provide. Mudbone relates how early rising gives him a chance to garner information about, "last night" (Pryor 2000d). Once, after one of Pryor's (2000c) ladies left him, he was comforted by their dog briefly before the dog took off with her. On an album filled with references to animals Pryor (2000f) states, "You got to have pets and shit to help you out" (Pryor

2000f). Support for his thesis comes later on in a skit where Pryor describes the death of his two pet monkeys, the hurt that it caused him, and the consolation given to him by the traditionally hostile German Sheppard from next door. During this (Pryor 2000f), and other instances (Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000f) Pryor demonstrates how care from animals helps you through hard times.

The care provided by animals in another example of the ambivalent relationship to be found in Pryor's standup between man and nature. However, the strongest examples of care found in the work of Pryor, examples free from the subordination that affects Pryor's relationships with women and with nature is found between men. During these moments of nurturing masculinity the masculine imperative to control is subverted. With nurturing masculinity care is employed, free of en-soi, between men to alleviate the implications of oppression's imperative to control.

The example par excellence of care in Pryor's standup is Mudbone. Mudbone told stories that Pryor learned from, an activity which Pryor understood to be Mudbone's vocation (Pryor 2000c). With Mudbone as storyteller and Pryor as listener, Pryor was able to learn; and he loved Mudbone because of these opportunities. After Pryor's free-basing incident (Pryor 2000g), Mudbone expresses his concern and reveals the history of his and Pryor's reciprocal caring relationship:

> So I watched this boy's career 'cause he used to come by and give me a dollar here, 50 cents there. He was all right. He wouldn't never lend me five, though. But he let me have them twos and fews. So I felt for the boy. I went over there and talked to him. And he ignorant 'cause I sit down and talked to him and don't let him get none of that powder in his nose. *[Laughter]* That's like trying to talk to a baboon then. I talked to the boy seven days and seven nights. He was still on the same subject. *[Laughter]* 'Where can I get some more?'

In this situation, the nurturing masculine relationship strives towards repairing Pryor's body, ending his drug usage. In other situations its target is oppression's imperative to control.

Mudbone's pre-work activities are always relaxing. He and his friend Rainbow Johnson would engage in farting contests (2000d). And, while posing as Chinese and working on the railroad, a job whose situation was deplorable, the "lies" that Mudbone and Tutelum told are positioned as a contrast to bourgeoisie labor oppression; Mudbone says, "[Tutelum would] make [him] laugh all day long" (Pryor 2000c)[86]. The state's imperative is to control, and blacks often suffer during run-ins with the law (Pryor 2000a; Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2000b; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000c; Pryor 2000d; Pryor 2000e; Pryor 2000g; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2000f; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2000i; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005a; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b; Pryor 2005b). This manifestation of oppression is also nullified via this nurturing masculinity. After having been brutalized by the police, Pryor (2005a) was agitated to the point that he started planning to attack the offending guard. Then a white prisoner convinced Pryor to keep his cool. Pryor (2005a) had been angry and afraid, but the prisoner was able to, "[sing him] right into peace." Such annulment of the mediation and control effected by the state at one point intersects with an annulment of the problems effected by nature. Mudbone (Pryor 2000h) had a friend named Sweet Chocolate Brown, a man found highly attractive by women both black and white. Like Mabley's friend (2004a, 2006) Sweet Chocolate was too "pretty," a condition which when found in blacks is sure to invite repercussions. White

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[86] This skit (Pryor 2000c) also finds nurturing masculinity at the center techniques for addressing nature. Cursed by his girlfriend, Tutelum turns to Mudbone for assistance, and despite his fears of Ms. Rudolph Mudbone goes with him to see her.

women would come up to Sweet Chocolate and lick him, so Mudbone convinced him that they needed to flee the South. While in jail in California with Sweet Chocolate Brown and a Mexican friend named Jesus, Mudbone (and his friends) sometimes suffered from crabs in their pubic hairs. Jesus would provide a balm, easing their dealings with confinement by the state and attacks from nature.

Only one of Pryor's two strongest examples of masculine care directly counters the imperative to control. A failure of care shows how along with others caring for you, you have to care for yourself. Drawing on a real-life example Pryor (2000g) discusses his freebasing and the efforts of Jim Brown to get him to rehab. In Pryor's standup drug use is presented as a means of dealing with alienation (2000a, 2000a, 2000a, 2000c, 2000c, 2000c, 2000c, 2005a, 2005a, 2005a, 2005a, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b, 2005b). Jim Brown tried hardest to help Pryor find some alternate way of dealing with his pain; Pryor (2000g) says that out of all of his friends Brown was the one most dedicated to getting him off of drugs. He came to Pryor's house, and Pryor tried to play it "cool." He asked Brown if he wanted to freebase. In reply, Brown asked, "What's free about it?" Pryor adopted a libertarian stance arguing that he had a right to do as he pleased. Brown's next response, in its description of how and why people should relate to each other, echoes Mabley's stance on care: "Well, damn. I guess you don't want me for a friend….I guess you don't want me for a friend, motherfucker. If I can't tell you nothing, fuck it. I don't want to see you destroy yourself" (Pryor 2000g). On an earlier album, Pryor (2000f) describes Brown as a long-time friend and a man of "integrity." Those qualities are evident in the skit where Brown tries to get Pryor to detox (Pryor 2000g). When Pryor realizes that Brown has come to his house and the reasons Brown

has for coming to his house he's scared because he knows of the "love" that Brown has for him, and he's afraid of what that love will force him to confront.

In another skit (Pryor 20005b), the performance which I find to be both Pryor's best and the one which most closely adheres to the goals of authenticity which Pryor (2000h, 2005b) establishes for his comedy, centers on a destitute junkie and a wino [87]. The wino has "seen the world" and he "understand the facts of life." He's been around the world, and he's had significant experiences: first black FBI agent (commended by Hoover himself) and first Merchant Marine. Now, he watches over (i.e. cares for) where he lives, such as when he implores drivers to slow down because this place is not an impersonal space (i.e. "a residential district"); it is, "[his] neighborhood. [His] people live around [there]" (Pryor 2005b). The appearance of the junkie (different from the high functioning junkie who robbed the hillbilly) leads the wino to mourning. He remembers how the junkie used to be, "a genius." That was before the drugs: "Now [this junkie] can't recognize his own body" (Pryor 2005b). But, the memory of the junkie's former self precedes the wino advising him to improve his situation, "get a job, boy, go to work" (Pryor 2005b). Only the junkie has had his fill of work having pressed license plates while in jail. Once out of jail he went to the state job agency; he even let his genius shine through: "[he] put on his white voice" (Pryor 2005b). However, this deviation from expected characteristics worked against him. The woman in charge invented arbitrary criteria of knowledge (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977); faced with such restrictions he determined that, "he'd rather be high." Even so, the junkie—who has been rejected by

[87] Support for my evaluation partially hinges upon a comparison of this version (Pryor 2005b) with a later version: "Wino and Junkie" (Pryor 2000c). The latter elicits more laughter, but the former seems to establish a more powerful hold upon the audience.

his parents and betrayed by the state—realizes that he is sick. So, he turns to the wino for support (Pryor 2005b):

> I's sick, man. I don't feel good, you know what I mean? But if you walk with me, you old motherfucker, *[Laughter]* talk a little shit to me 'til about 2:00. I can get it together, you know what I mean? *[Laughter]* 'Cause my mind and shit be going around, thinking about shit I don't wanna think about, you know, and I done run outta the story. *[Laughter]* And if you lying to me, I'll be all right. *[Laughter]*

The junkie (Pryor 2005b), like Ralph Ellison's (1994) Invisible Man, has lost his place in the world, so he turns to the wino for help in finding it. And, this the wino does because he is convinced that the boy has "potential."

Conclusion

Pryor and Mabley's descriptions of care (juxtaposed against their overarching emphasis on phenomenal residence in the present) extend the care's scope as a means of praxis. Rather than a merely relatively individual phenomenon (Heidegger 1962) and/or an epistemological practice (Hill Collins 2000), with Pryor and Mabley care is a potential group-level process of bringing people into the present. Rather than pulling an inert object, care is a means of transforming how individuals (both she who cares and she who is cared for) relate to their bodies. This new relationship is also evidenced in the appropriation of that which is oppressive: in both circumstances bodies are thrown back upon their own potentialities and necessities of agency. This present-progressive viewpoint is an effective lens for summarizing the work of Pryor and Mabley.

Chapter VII: Colored People's Time

I'm thinkin' outside the box
Off ya' blocks
And outside ya' concept of time
Off the clocks
"Duck Down!"
The Tipping Point (2004)
The Roots

Subordination, Essence, Notion, and Present Progressive Agency

An effective lens for understanding social mediation and the articulation of colored people's time is found in the work of G.W.F. Hegel (1975). Hegel's conceptualization of Matter (1975, 1977) is an elucidating model for formulations which posit racialization as a move to create subjectivity on the part of a privileged racial group. Through determinations of Matter "[being] attempts to secure itself," and the nature of Matter can best be understood in juxtaposition with Hegel's dialectic (1975). The dialectic has three parts: Being, Essence, and Notion. With these three types of thought movement occurs through negation. The thought is negated; then as the thought and its negation are united a new mode of thought is achieved: the next mode of thought. This process defines movement from Being, to Essence, to Notion. Being represents thought "in its immediacy." Essence represents thought "in its reflection and mediation" upon itself. Notion represents thought "[in] its return into itself, and its developed abiding by itself" (Hegel 1975:121). Within the dynamics of Essence, we confront the nature of Matter.

Hegel (1975) conceived of Being as an aspect of thought, "thought in its immediacy." Being is limited in that it is a reference to self (Hegel 1975). In this

immediacy Being fails to take into account the world around it. Governed by the dynamics of such a limited purview, Hegel (1975) stipulates that the existence of Being demands its opposite: Nothing. With its opposite marking its horizon, Being which is neither,

> "'fixed nor ultimate' is subject to passing over and becoming Nothing. As such Being attempts to secure itself. It does so by discovering some fixed predicate for Being, to mark it off from Nothing. Thus we find Being identified with what persists amid all change, with matter, susceptible of innumerable determinations—or even, unreflectingly, with a single existence, and chance object of the sense or of the mind"
> (Hegel 1975:127)

As a "fixed predicate," Matter protects Being from passing over into Nothing, with the latter signaling the end of Being. In Being the reflection that takes place via the "fixed predicate" of Matter is immediate and any "chance object of the sense or of the mind." In Essence, thought is mediated and related to itself.

In Essence, Matters are, "the characters of the thing distinguished from one another (as reflected-into-self)…existences reflected into themselves as abstract characters" (Hegel 1975:182-183). In Essence, the determinations that Matter assumes the form of have both positive and negative elements. The positive elements are recognized as aspects of Being. The negative elements go unacknowledged, with their recognition only coming as they are associated with an Other: the embodiment of the negative principles, an entity which allows denigrated elements of the Being to have existence; the Other serves as an object of reflection and mediation. These workings of Matter conform to the descriptions of the atemporality of thinghood found the work of Frantz Fanon

(1967), Simone de Beauvoir (1993), and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno (2002).

Just as Matter, an aspect of Essence, provides an apt lens for looking at the atemporality and oppressive mediation that define the conditions of the subordinated and the privileged; the Notion (Hegel 1975) models the workings of colored people's time. While Essence is defined by the mediation performed by an Other, with the Notion the self directly mediates itself. This mediation of the self by itself (rather than by an other) is emphasized in the standup of Richard Pryor and Moms Mabley.

Fanon's (1967) criticism of Sartre (1988) can be encapsulated in a single quote: "My Negro consciousness does not hold itself out as a lack. It is. It is its own follower" (135). This statement is a reaction to the pre-determined fate which Sartre (1988) assigns blackness. Rather than passive muteness, Fanon (1967) defines black existence in terms of an ever-active agency. de Beauvoir (1993) identifies such muteness as the problem that all people face; she finds its origins in the child's separation from the initial "nourishing body," and it culminates in en-soi: "[the desire] to be petrified into a thing" (282).

Pryor and Mabley's Self-Mediation

Even though they sometimes utilize this type of mediation themselves, Pryor and Mabley are ultimately critical of constructing subjectivity through the denigration of others. Mabley's (1963, 1964, 1991, 2003a, 2003c, 2004a, 2006, n.d) condemnation of old people is a condemnation of mediation which depends on atemporalizing Others.

Pryor makes a similar rejection which he walked off that Vegas stage (1995) and when he rails against his forced transition from kid to Negro (2005a). Instead of having others define one's existence, they emphasize authenticity: a process which entails an individual being the primary force in the definition of his/her existence. The importance of authenticity drives Mabley (2004b, 2006) to perform her social responsibility of making sure that her audience is "hip." It drives Pryor (2000h, 2005b) to suffer the process that allows him to express his ideas.

Mediating one's own existence also underlies the major dominant theme in the standup of Pryor and Mabley: phenomenal residence in the present. Mabley describes the present as, "the greatest days [there] ever was or ever will be" (n.d.). Pryor's emphasis on the present is rooted in the preciousness of life. He says as much when he workshops Super Nigger (Pryor 2000a), a character free from racial restriction, one who—unlike Clark Washington—is fully able to take up his present[88].

The techniques that circumvent the fixity of thinghood—circumventions whose end product is a phenomenal residence in the present—found in Pryor and Mabley's standup are defined by self-mediation. Violence is a defining tool of racial oppression and oppression in general (Horkhiemer and Adorno 2002). However, rather than accepting the sphere of racially oppressive violence—the acts, potentialities, and actualities of physical violence geared towards racial oppression and its results—Mabley and Pryor employ this heretofore racially oppressive sphere to make changes in their

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[88] Beyond the scope of this work is an elucidation of an alternative temporality articulated by Pryor and Mabley. Martin Heidegger (1962), Emmanuel Levinas (1987), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) all have theories of time. However, I have used Jean-Paul Sartre's work (1956) as a guideline. Sartrean temporality (1956) is defined by the movements of being-for-itself. In Pryor and Mabley's comedy there are instances where the heart of time is defined by what is best described as being-with-others. As evidenced by their positions on care, our positive relationships with others are a basis for a unique and ameliorative temporality.

worlds. The potentiality of racial violence is supposed to fix the racially subordinated. However, Mabley (1991, 2003a) appropriated the potentiality of racial violence and used it to make a phenomenal and physical break with the South: she became a "freedom rider from the South." Pryor's skits show actual violence employed to this effect. Mudbone's (Pryor 2000c) booby trapping the outhouse in preparation for its visit from his boss's fiancé is an appropriation of actual and potential violence, and it precedes a ride to freedom similar to that taken by Mabley (1991, 2003a). Furthermore, these appropriations are devoid of the oppressiveness of racial violence. Rather than being a permanent subordinating practice whose purpose is the maintenance of subjectivity, Mabley (1991, 2003a) and Pryor's (2000c) appropriations of the sphere of violence are temporary measures used to improve their worlds.

In Pryor and Mabley's standup, the most comprehensive technique for entering the present is the praxis of care. While the appropriation of the sphere of violence is effective, it must be temporary; lest the employment of violence become concomitant with en-soi. There are no such limits with the praxis of care. Furthermore, care effects a double movement. It moves both the caregiver and the subject of care into the present. This will happen when parents act like Mabley (2004a), and stop telling lies to the children. And, it does happen when the wino offers to tell stories to the junkie (Pryor 2005b)[89].

During a discussion of the trials that successful black entertainers have to go through, Pryor (2000d) cites his friend ,writer Cecil Brown, as someone who has passed through the fires. Brown's (1969) novel, *the Life and Loves of Mr. Jiveass Nigger*, is

[89] These dynamics of care are opposite the recognition Odysseus seeks from his father (Homer 1995). Whereas Odysseus wants acknowledgement of his status, the junkie wants to re-establish balance with the world (Pryor 2005a). Mabley (2004a) seeks to affect a similar balance.

mostly set in Copenhagen. And, many of its characters are black men trying to serve as gigolos to white women. George Washington, known to himself as "Mr. Jiveass," is one such gigolo; however, he finds himself ill suited to the task. He lacks the hardness of a true gigolo. And, he's not tough enough to avoid ass-kickings. His experiences in the world lead him to a conclusion:

> "[Everybody] in this town...seems to be living off someone or something else. Everything but their insides. Black men fancy themselves potent when they can flatter themselves to be gigolos. But for me now it seems that that's only an excuse for not being able to live off their *insides*."
> (Brown 1969: 203)

This living off of one's insides, this self-mediation, is Pryor and Mabley's solution to the problem of atemporality. In calls for a certain style in the Merleau-Pontian (Merleau-Ponty 1962)[90] sense of the word (Pryor 2005b):

> [The rummage sale] was hip. I'd be clean as a motherfucker for a night. Niggers know how to dress. Well, niggers invented style. These ain't our clothes anyway. So since we have to wear 'em, niggers say, 'Well, shit, if I gotta wear 'em, I'm gonna make 'em look nice.' Niggers be talking about, 'Ahhhh, I look good now looking bad. This ain't no good shit, you know, but I even look good in this. Better than the honkey who made it for me. *[Laughter]*. He made it for me to look bad in. *[Laughter]* I look better than he planned. He mad, [that] motherfucker, if he sees me, [says,]'Take that shit off nigger.'

This present progressive Notion-like (Hegel 1975) taking up of one's situation, a process that is often hard, is Pryor's description of how the world should be approached. Similar thoughts drive Mabley's work:

> Nothing wrong with these children. Don't blame them, blame the parents. This atomic age happened so fast until you middle-aged people, and you old people didn't dig it. *[Laughter]*. You still living in what has

[90] Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) defines style as, "a certain manner of dealing with situations" (327).

> happened, and these children livin' what's happenin'. That's the only thing wrong with 'em. Stop sittin' down tellin' these children about the good old days. *[Laughter]*. What good old days? *[Laughter]* When *[Laughter]* I was there. Where was they at? *[Laughter]* You livin' in the greatest days, now, you children, there ever was or ever will be in this atomic age. This is it. *[Laughter]* Don't worry about nothin'. This is it….

For Fanon (1967), de Beauvoir (1993), Sartre (1956) the problem of agency reduces itself to that of the individual. For these thinkers, attributing one's potentialities for agency to any outside party is self-deception. Agency rests in the hands of the agent. Richard Pryor and Jackie "Moms" Mabley agree; and their perspective is echoed in the work of another intellectual who in chronicling black thought emphasized the role that the self-mediating-its-own-self has in agency:

> "afraid of myself, frightened of myself….Gods…you are not gods. I am free"
>
> (Césaire 1990:27)

Epilogue

I wanna be as free as the spirits, of those who left
I'm talking Malcolm, Coltrane, my man Yusef
Through death, through conception
New breath and resurrection
For moms, new steps in her direction
In the right way
Told inside is where the fight lay
And everything a nigga do may not be what he might say
Chicago nights stay, stay on the mind
But I write many lives, they
Lay on these lines
Wave the signs of the times
Many say the grind's on the mind
Shorties blunted out and everyone wanna rhyme
Bush pushing lies, killers immortalized
We got arms but won't reach for the skies
Waiting for the Lord to rise
I look into my daughter's eyes
And realize, 'I'ma learn through her'
The Messiah, might even return through her
If I'ma do it, I gotta change the world through her
Furs and a Benz, gramps wantin 'em
Demons and old friends: pops, they hauntin' him
The chosen one from the land of the frozen sun
Where drunk nights get remembered more than sober ones
Walk like warriors, we were never told to run
Explore the world to return to where my soul begun
Never looking back, or too far in front of me
The present is a gift
and I just wanna be

"Be"
Be (2005)
Common

Appendix A

Moms Mabley Albums

-*Moms Mabley at the Playboy Club*. (1961).
-*Moms Mabley at the U.N.* (1961).
-*Moms Mabley Breaks It Up*. (c. 1961).
-*Young Men, Si, Old Men, No!* (1962).
-*Moms Mabley at the Geneva Conference*. (1962).
-*The Funny Sides of Moms Mabley*. (1963).
-*I Got Somethin' to Tell You!* (c. 1963).
-*Out on a Limb*. (c.1964).
-*Live at Sing Sing*. (c. 1970).
-*Live at the Greek Theater*. (c.1971).
-*Moms Mabley on Stage*. (1984).
-*Mom's Dream*. (1991).
-*Comedy Ain't Pretty*. (2004).
-*Funniest Woman in the World*. (n.d.).

Richard Pryor Albums

-*Richard Pryor* (1968)
-*That Nigger's Crazy* (1974)
-*Is It Something I Said* (1975)
-*Bicentennial Nigger* (1976)
-*Wanted*, (double-album) (1978)
-*Live on The Sunset Strip* (1982)
-*Here and Now* (1983)
-"That African-American Is Still Crazy: Good Shit From The Vaults" from *...And It's Deep Too!: The Complete Warner Brothers Recordings (1968-1992)* (2000).
- "Early Years: 1966-1974." from *Evolution/Revolution: The Early Years-Evolution* (2005).
- "Revolution: 1971-74." from *Evolution/Revolution: The Early Years- Early Years* (2005).

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