

“No Reparation”: Accounting for the
Enduring Harms of Slavery in Stephen
Crane’s *The Monster*

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The enslaved and battered millions have come, suffered, died and gone with all their moral and physical wounds into Eternity. To them no recompense can be made. If the American people could put a school house in every valley; a church on every hill top in the South and supply them with a teacher and preacher respectively and welcome the descendants of the former slaves to all the moral and intellectual benefits of the one and the other, without money and without price, such a sacrifice would not compensate their children for the terrible wrong done to their fathers and mothers, by their enslavement and enforced degradation.

—Frederick Douglass, “The Blessings of Liberty and Education” (1894)

Emancipation is important, but undoing the harms of slavery is . . . slow work.

—Kwame Anthony Appiah, “What’s Wrong with Slavery?” (2007)

Speaking at the dedication of an industrial school for black Americans in September 1894, just months before his death, Frederick Douglass reminded his listeners that “the labors and stripes imposed upon” the “Negro” were not “the sum of his wrongs.” Douglass’s

declaration is not merely an indictment of those citizens who complained of already having “done enough” for the freedmen but a meditation on redressing slavery’s injuries, a process which, he explains, must take as a point of departure the formidable task of ascertaining “the nature and extent of the wrong itself.” Yet a full accounting of the harms of racial servitude may resist the finite calculation Douglass’s use of “sum” suggests. For it is not simply that slavery’s “moral” and “mental” wrongs are of a “nature” that exceeds arithmetic representation; equally important is the fact that the duration of these injuries is scarcely discrete.¹ Douglass acknowledges as much when, in a portion of the address excerpted in the epigraph above, he glosses slavery’s “extent” by invoking the “descendants” of bound blacks. The ambiguity that results from the repetition of “their” in the final sentence is revealing. First pointing to the former slaves, and then to their children, the possessive’s referent wavers between generations by its third reprise: *their* “enforced degradation” (if not “enslavement”) seems to index both the parents’ and the offspring’s suffering.² The implication is significant: making amends may not merely require payment to descendants of slaves for the remuneration denied to their forebears; redress may also demand that we account for the harms suffered by the slaves’ children, though they never experienced bondage themselves.

On this occasion at least, Douglass does not pursue the idea he broaches here. But my essay proposes that an unlikely source takes up the task: Stephen Crane’s 1898 novella *The Monster*, which narrates the interconnected stories of Henry Johnson, a black hostler who is disfigured as a result of his attempt to save the son of his white employer from a burning house, and Ned Trescott, the child’s well-meaning father, who is beset by the contemplation of what he owes his servant in response. A haunting meditation on the racialized contours of wrong, debt, responsibility, and the movement of time itself, *The Monster* is deeply engaged with the philosophical dilemmas Douglass’s speech raises about the “nature” and “extent” of slavery’s injuries. Most significantly, the text grapples with the temporal puzzle that underwrites all interrogations of redress: what would it mean to attempt to repair a past injury such as slavery which continues to wield its harmful force, especially if, as Douglass suggests, the wrong may have less to do with literal bondage than with the social devaluation of blackness in the national imaginary resulting from the centuries-long reign of the peculiar institution?

As my use of “unlikely” implies, to turn to *The Monster* as a way of exploring this query is to unsettle a tacit consensus in modern scholarship on Crane which holds that this white writer seems to have little if anything insightful to say about race, let alone about racial redress. This view has been formed in part because of the predominance of a particular mode of historicism in the scholarship on Crane’s novella.³ Privileging the work’s contemporaneous context, this approach seeks to unravel the meaning of *The Monster* by uncovering historical analogues for its main characters and themes.⁴ A similarly narrow conception of history prevails even in the scholarship that takes race as its explicit focus. Elaine Marshall, Price McMurray, and Jacqueline Goldsby all have argued that Johnson represents Robert Lewis, a black man who was lynched in Crane’s hometown in 1892.⁵ From this perspective, *The Monster* may be about racial terrorism or the de jure discrimination that was part and parcel of Jim Crow. But it is not, it would seem, about slavery, despite the fact that these phenomena might be understood as manifestations of its afterlife, if not a kind of “second slavery,” to borrow a phrase from W. E. B. Du Bois.⁶

And yet, in perhaps the most crucial scene in a novella whose title itself was a common metaphor for racial bondage in the nineteenth century, the narrator makes this intriguing remark when Johnson enters the Trescott’s burning home and for a moment is nearly overtaken by the flames: “He was submitting, submitting because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect *slavery* to this conflagration.”⁷ It has been difficult for critics to recognize the presence of “slavery” in this line, much less to ask after its implications in *The Monster*. For in insisting that the novella remain tied to its synchronic historical moment, they effectively disqualify racial bondage as an eligible context for the work. More importantly, in so doing, they obscure the ways in which the text itself posits an idea of time and history that diverges significantly from the adherence to chronology and the associated notion of discrete epochs presupposed by such reading practices. In emphasizing “slavery” here, then, I mean to propose that we approach Crane’s engagement with history not primarily by placing his work in its contemporaneous context but rather by attending to the complex relation between past and present, genealogy and persistence, and blackness and bondage embedded in this passage and elaborated in the larger narrative.⁸

In both its manifest content and formal structures, *The Monster* gives imaginative shape to the process, if not necessarily the end, of accounting for slavery’s endurance through time. I deploy “accounting” in

the double sense of “narrating” and moral “reckoning” in order to underscore how making amends for racial bondage requires a collapsing, first of all, of the historical boundaries that demarcate past and present and, moreover, individual and collective models of responsibility.⁹ In this regard, the fact that the novella, set in the post-Reconstruction North, offers no evidence that its black protagonist himself ever had been a slave (or that his white employer descends from slave owners) actually testifies to, rather than detracts from, its force. For the tale’s power lies in the way it renders legible the persistence of the past in the present—the narrative task implicit in any project of redress.¹⁰

In this way, *The Monster* anticipates one of the primary insights that has emerged from recent scholarship on reparations in critical race theory, history, legal studies, and political and moral philosophy. Over the last decade in particular, scholars working in these fields, along with a number of activists, have argued that any attempt to come to terms with an injustice such as slavery must necessarily challenge the liberal paradigm that holds individuals responsible only for acts committed within the temporal span of their lives.¹¹ Crane’s prescience on this score is remarkable; indeed, in light of the fact that it is figures such as Douglass and Du Bois who largely compose the historical archive of these contemporary studies of redress, the possibility that Crane might have something to add to this conversation is perhaps reason enough to revisit *The Monster*. But Crane’s novella is much more than an additional nineteenth-century case study of the keywords currently animating work on reparations. For *The Monster* suggests a possible way out of a critical conceptual impasse confronting even the most recent debates about redress, particularly in political and moral philosophy. I refer here to the worry that basing claims for reparations on the wrong of racial servitude is unsound, given that such a move requires one to explain present racial disparities in terms of a cause that, chronologically speaking, is quite distant from the present. Why not turn instead to more plausible (because more historically proximate) cases of racial injustice such as Jim Crow segregation?¹²

As I will argue, *The Monster* develops a sense of the harm of racial bondage that has the potential to circumvent such concerns. In its conception of the fundamental injury of slavery as the degradation of blackness that survives abolition, Crane’s text links the plight of African Americans in the periods before and after legal emancipation. Accordingly, it forces us to reconsider what we presume to be the cause and effect of the racial domination that was slavery and, indeed, how

we define the relationship between cause and effect itself. In so doing, the novella offers us not simply a way of understanding more precisely what we might mean when we refer to the “legacy of slavery”; it forges a constellation among the concepts of time, history, responsibility, and agency that is essential to the task of imagining racial justice.¹³

Stephen Crane may have been no warrior in the fight for racial equality; he was no Frederick Douglass or W. E. B. Du Bois, to be sure. But the political vision of *The Monster* is hardly “profoundly conservative,” as John Carlos Rowe has lamented.¹⁴ Indeed, if, to paraphrase Jacques Rancière, the central task of politics is to insist on a relationship where (supposedly) one does not exist,¹⁵ then in showing how slavery’s afterlife claims Henry Johnson in the form of a devalued blackness and Ned Trescott in the shape of a debt that cannot be repaid, the novella exhibits a politically charged double vision whose force Ralph Ellison first glimpsed more than fifty years ago. Implying that *The Monster* held an explanatory key to the racial strife that marked the United States in the midst of the battle for civil rights, the author of *Invisible Man* wrote in 1960 that Crane’s text “is so fresh that the daily papers tell us all we need to know of . . . the timeliness of its implications.”¹⁶ This essay follows the unexplored path to which Ellison directs us, unraveling the “timeliness” of *The Monster* or, perhaps more accurately, its untimeliness: the way the text unsettles traditional temporalities in its expansive vision of slavery and the attendant obligation to repair the institution’s abiding wrong.

“Behind Time”: Causality, Responsibility, Reparation

The Monster begins with an instance of childhood amusement gone awry that results in what seems a harmless injury: Jim Trescott has crushed a peony while playing train in his father’s garden. In Crane’s oeuvre, however, games are rarely mere diversions, and this example is no exception.¹⁷ Sketching in miniature the conceptual units to which the novella will return in its (deadly serious) treatment of the injured black servant and indebted white employer at its center, the inaugural episode claims even as it troubles a relation between cause and effect, chronology and simultaneity, and responsibility and reparation. Here are the opening lines:

Little Jim was, for the time, engine Number 36, and he was making the run between Syracuse and Rochester. He was fourteen minutes behind time, and the throttle was wide open. In consequence, when

he swung around the curve at the flower-bed, a wheel of his cart destroyed a peony. Number 36 slowed down at once and looked guiltily at his father, who was mowing the lawn. . . .

. . . Finally he went to the peony and tried to stand it on its pins, resuscitated, but the spine of it was hurt . . . Jim could do no reparation. (9)

In its figuration of Jim as “engine Number 36” engaged in a race against the clock, this passage registers the role the nineteenth-century railroad played in establishing the regularized temporality that came to be called, beginning in 1883, “Standard Railway Time.” Significantly, this temporality is forward moving; it is the kind of time in which it is possible to be “behind,” as the narrator says of the Trescott child. Indeed, because trains that fell out of sync with linear time risked causing a fatal collision, railroad companies took pains to ensure the accuracy of operators’ watches and designed procedures with the problem of tardy trains in mind.¹⁸

Read against this backdrop, the initial scene takes on additional significance. At first glance, the train’s lateness might seem sufficient to explain the cause of the accident. Yet a closer examination reveals that the crash results, more specifically, from the imaginary train’s increased velocity, signaled by “the throttle was wide open.” While this speed is necessitated by the fact that “engine Number 36” is running late, the narrator’s language seems to place as much causal emphasis on the train’s rapid movement as it does on its tardiness: “In consequence” refers to both of the independent clauses that constitute the sentence that precedes it, connecting the notion of causality it invokes not simply to “He was fourteen minutes behind time” but also (and arguably more tightly, given the latter clause’s placement at the end of the sentence) to “the throttle was wide open.” Explicitly foregrounding causality in a work that everywhere is concerned with the relation of cause to effect, this phrase implies that instead of enabling the train to avoid an accident, the vehicle’s effort to correct its lag may bring about the collision. By this curious logic, standardized time, with its rigid linearity and imperative to keep pace, would seem at least partly to blame for the crash.

The novella explores the subject of causality more concretely, though with no less ambiguity, in an exchange between Trescott and his son at the end of chapter 1. Jim seeks out his father to confess, yet he can do no more than point to the scene of the accident, repeating

“There!” Having finally recognized the damage, the doctor approaches his son:

... “Jimmie, how did this happen?”

The child answered, “Now—I was playin’ train—and—now—I runned over it.”

“You were doing what?”

“I was playin’ train.”

The father reflected again. “Well, Jimmie,” he said, slowly, “I guess you had better not play train any more to-day. Do you think you had better?” (10)

Putting an end to the game but hardly issuing the punishment Jim seems to have expected, Trescott lets his son off the hook. As Jacqueline Goldsby reads it, this evasion of responsibility is facilitated by Trescott’s “mangled speech,” which in “mixing” verb tenses, “confuses the relation between causes and effects.”¹⁹ Goldsby’s attention to causality in this passage is astute. But in focusing primarily on the language of Ned Trescott, she overlooks the fact that Jim’s speech is equally evasive of the relation between cause and effect. Notwithstanding the fact that he draws on the first-person pronoun twice in reply to his father’s initial question, the child’s response reads more like a review of indeterminately connected events presented in still frame than an acknowledgment that he is the direct cause of the fractured flower. If atonement for wrongdoing requires, at least initially, an admission of responsibility, as Goldsby implies, then Jim can do “no reparation” because he averts the requisite first step.

Yet, already in its opening paragraphs, *The Monster* hints that making amends for an injury does not depend entirely on an individual accepting blame—in this case, the child citing himself as the causal agent of the damage to the peony. Temporality plays a complicating role. Consider again Jim’s response to his father’s query: “Now—I was playin’ train—and—now—I runned over it.” Apparently bereft of the temporal language that would facilitate the kind of accounting his father’s question demands, he draws only on “now,” which functions to elevate simultaneity over chronology as the privileged temporal construct in this context. Jim is unable to put events into chronological order, that is, to narrate cause as temporally prior to effect. Instead, in his explanation, the two overlap: “playin’ train” (reported in the progressive tense) coincides with, rather than gives rise to, the damage to the

peony. Viewed from this angle, Jim quite literally cannot cite himself as the agent that brought about the damage to the flower, for he is unable to establish cause in the first place.

Through the disjointed sense of time on display in Jim's language and the game he plays, *The Monster* gestures toward the conceptual possibility whose imaginative power it will unfold in its exploration of Johnson's injury and Trescott's debt: cause and effect may not follow (or follow from) one another in a straightforward chronological relation. Which is to say: causality does not necessarily abide by the laws of linear time, the temporality of trains. The novella's opening section thus entreats us to wonder not simply about the place of causality and responsibility in the attempt to repair a wrong. In presenting a scene of injury that comes about to a certain extent "in consequence" of an attempt to keep pace with the forward movement of standardized time, and in subsequently troubling just what constitutes the notion of cause implicit in the very phrase it deploys to describe the accident, the narrative poses the further question of how temporality itself relates to harm and repair. To paraphrase the narrator, *The Monster* asks: what might doing (no) reparation have to do with time? A full answer to this question will have to wait until this essay's final pages, but to begin I turn from peony to protagonist, the flower given fleshy form.

Burning Down the House; or, The Stillness of Slavery's Time

In a richly wrought narrative sequence whose action unfolds across six sections in the text, and whose aftermath animates the novella's remaining pages, *The Monster* depicts the other scene of injury at its conceptual center. Entering the Trescott's burning home in an attempt to save the sleeping Jimmie from the flames that threaten to engulf his bedroom, Johnson is himself overtaken by the fire—the mounting force of which is figured at one point as "clan joining clan" (20)—and nearly dies. Rendered faceless by the conflagration, his visage literally burned away when a blazing chemical from the doctor's laboratory falls upon him, the black protagonist emerges from the fire less subject than object. As the narrator describes the moment of his rescue at the hands of "a young man who was a brakeman on the railway," Johnson is a "thing . . . laid on the grass" (26).

Such a tableau would seem to confirm Price McMurray's reading of the episode as "an allegorical miniature of American racial history: Henry resists and triumphs over the legacy of his slave fathers only to be destroyed by Reconstruction and the rise of segregation."²⁰ But while

McMurray underscores Jim Crow apartheid, leaving slavery to Johnson's fathers, *The Monster* thrusts racial servitude into the present in its staging of the fire. Indeed, the metaphor for the compound that scorches Johnson's face—a “serpent” crawling amid a space that is figured as a “garden,” given the polychromatic hue exuded by Trescott's chemicals ablaze (24)—recalls the very trope often used by slave authors to refer to their masters, if not also the way racial bondage was conceived of as the entrance of evil into the American Eden.²¹ Furthermore, one of the first sights the protagonist witnesses as he enters the house is the destruction of a particularly suggestive image: an “engraving” titled *Signing the Declaration*. As the narrator describes this crucial moment, to which I will return below, “a lick of flame had found the cord that supported” the picture, which “slumped suddenly down at one end, and then dropped to the floor where it burst with the sound of a bomb” (21). Exploding the myth of the postslavery status the nation claimed in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the conflagration marks the peculiar institution's continuing grip on a house which, if not quite divided, is nonetheless “haunted” by slavery's “bloody spectres” that throw a crimson hue on its windows, as if they “had been stained with blood” (20).

And yet, as the often-contradictory interpretations of this episode indicate, the presence of these details and what they signify are two different matters. Whereas for Jacqueline Wilson-Jordan the fire sequence functions as a “clear indictment of slavery,”²² John Carlos Rowe insists that this section makes just the opposite point. “Tempting” as it may be to understand this scene as staging an “insurrection against slavery and racism in America,” Rowe explains, such a reading will not hold, for the narrative aligns the fire *with* the force of slavery.²³ According to Rowe, that is, when the flames sear the engraving, the novella registers its commitment to the very logic of black inferiority that informed the race-based denial of equality embodied by the Declaration of Independence. In this respect, he points to passages that caricature the protagonist as a “cowardly and abject slave”²⁴—for instance, this line: “Johnson shrieked, and then ducked in the manner of his race in fights” (24).

But in the final analysis, Rowe gets as much right as he gets wrong. For while the text does indeed invest the conflagration with the force of slavery, and although its flames throw a decidedly slavish cast on the servant, *The Monster* does not traffic uncritically in representations of black inferiority. Indeed, far from foreclosing the possibility of racial critique in the text, these denigrating depictions of Johnson constitute

a vital element of that critique: *The Monster's* powerful representation of, to borrow a term Rowe himself uses, the “persistence” of slavery in the era of freedom.²⁵ Put differently, denigration is precisely the point of these passages, which function to show Johnson as his world sees him: a subjugated, inferior being, not unlike the dishonored bondsmen who were his ancestors. This possibility falls into Rowe's blind spot, however, because, like other readers, he ignores the temporal dimensions of this scene in particular and of the narrative in general.²⁶

In this respect, *Signing the Declaration* merits further discussion. The image that hangs in the entryway of the Trescott home is likely an allusion to one of the reproductions of John Trumbull's famous painting *The Declaration of Independence*, perhaps the 1823 engraving by Asher B. Durand (figure 1), which was commissioned by the artist in advance of the painting's installation in the Capitol Rotunda in 1826.²⁷ Often accompanying copies of *The Declaration* such as Durand's was a key that identified each of the figures in the representation by marking its head with a number. As McMurray contends, the juxtaposition of Johnson's (metaphoric, soon to be literal) “facelessness” with these white men's “overdetermined visages” speaks volumes about the sort of countenance—and, by extension, person—the nation values.²⁸

Such a gloss is no doubt evocative. Yet the most salient detail about Trescott's print may not concern faces, black or white, but rather the complex sense of time the tableau embodies. “There is not another like it in the world,” the art historian Irma Jaffe writes of Trumbull's painting, noting in the next sentence that the “very immobility of the figures and the airlessness of the room suggest the frozen instant in which had been born the new state.”²⁹ Without debating the more evaluative component of Jaffe's claim, one might wonder about her insistence on associating the scene displayed on Trumbull's canvas with the “instant” on July 4, 1776, when the Second Continental Congress formally announced its rationale for an independent “America.” Indeed, at its very center, the image represents an event that occurred not on July 4, when the Congress approved an altered version of the Declaration Thomas Jefferson had proposed, but rather the moment on June 28 when the Committee of Five—Jefferson, John Adams, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and Benjamin Franklin—presented the original document as drafted by its leading member.³⁰ In this regard, while it is often erroneously referred to as “The *Signing* of the Declaration of Independence,” the work's actual title also mischaracterizes a scene which might more properly be described in the plural, that is, as *Declarations of Independence*.³¹ For in



Figure 1. Asher B. Durand, after John Trumbull, *The Declaration of Independence* (engraving, 1823). Courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (LC-DIG-pga-01095; digital file from original print).

overlaying two different dates in the history of the founding—the event of June 28, depicted in its foreground, and that of July 4, implied by its singular title—Trumbull’s painting creates a visual, if not fully visible, palimpsest of two documents whose respective conceptions of what (or whom) freedom might look like in the new nation could not have been more distinct.³²

Indeed, among the myriad grievances it issues against King George III, Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration includes the accusation that the monarch “violat[ed]” the “most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people” by “captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere.”³³ While the document generally draws on servitude as metaphor, portraying the colonists as in bondage to the tyrannical king, the “slavery” under attack here is quite literal: the “persons of a distant people” to which Jefferson refers are Africans, and it is their “sacred rights of life and liberty” that George III abuses in the form of the transatlantic slave trade. Its obvious disavowal of Americans’ (not to mention Jefferson’s) complicity in racial bondage

and investment in the purchase of “men” notwithstanding, the passage is remarkable for what Betsy Erkkila identifies as its condemnation of slavery “as a violation of the universal laws of justice and right inscribed within human nature and shared equally by blacks as well as whites.”³⁴ We will never know what effect such language might have had on the place of slavery in the development of the new nation. For in the version of the Declaration accepted by the Continental Congress on July 4, this passage was nowhere to be found. As Jefferson reflects in his *Autobiography* (1821), it was “struck out” in “complaisance to South Carolina and Georgia,” which “still wished to continue” the traffic in persons, and in respect to the Northern colonies, which “felt a little tender under those censures” given their collaboration in the trade.³⁵

Bill Brown has characterized the novella’s reference to the engraving as an allusion to the “originary” moment of American racism.³⁶ But we might also understand this episode as a powerful meditation on slavery’s extent—its temporal reach—that troubles the very sense of fixity that an “origin” would imply. For just as Trumbull’s painting overlays the moments of June 28 and July 4, indexing the original version of the Declaration even as it subsumes this earlier iteration in its singular title, so *The Monster* suggests that the failure of late-nineteenth-century America to recognize Johnson as a co-citizen repeats the founders’ exclusion of Africans from the vision of equality and liberty they posited in the course of their own fight against virtual slavery. In burning the engraving moments after the servant enters into the house, that is, *The Monster* stages yet another elision of a principle which, as Trumbull’s painting shows, was already excised in the Declaration’s transformation from original to final form. Past does not give rise to present, origin to afterlife; rather, then and now overlap in a kind of simultaneous existence. It is as if, despite Revolution, Civil War, and emancipation, no time has passed at all.³⁷

The Monster enacts this temporal conjunction by way of the particular narrative structure it deploys at this juncture. Recalling the uncoupling of the standard relation between cause and effect from its opening pages, the text here presents the response to the fire before depicting the conflagration itself. In fact, it is not until the third chapter in the fire sequence that it becomes clear that the site of the incident is the Trescott abode. Just after Mrs. Trescott is pulled from her burning home by a neighbor, the narrator reports that “the time when Hannigan and his charge struggled out of the house was the time when the whistle roared its hoarse night call, smiting the crowd in the park, causing

the leader of the band, who was about to order the first triumphal clang of a military march, to let his hand drop slowly to his knee” (22). In almost cinematic fashion, the novella here rewinds the action that has unfolded over its previous pages, returning us to the moment portrayed two chapters earlier in which the whistle signaled a fire in district two. But the text’s attempt to reestablish the chronology from which it departed ultimately fails. For in its (belated) effort to make cause precede effect, this passage disorders linear time even further by enunciating a relation of simultaneity. In a perfectly balanced sentence underscored by the repeated phrase “the time when,” events which from the reader’s perspective register as past and present are made to overlap. The already reported blow of the whistle actually coincides with Hannigan’s rescue.

An ostensibly insignificant detail buried in the middle of the fire sequence reveals the racialized stakes of this overlap. In a “maniacal” state, Mrs. Trescott glimpses her employee: “‘Jimmie! Save Jimmie!’ she screamed in Henry’s face.” While she exclaims similarly in response to her neighbor’s instruction to “come down” from the second level of the structure a moment later, it is difficult not to hear in Trescott’s first cry a demand to her servant, issued out of desperation, perhaps, but a demand nonetheless.³⁸ Curiously, however, the novella implies that the matriarch may have wasted her breath. For as the narrator recounts, as soon as Johnson realizes the house is on fire, he runs toward it “with an almost fabulous speed.” In “plung[ing] past” the screaming Trescott, that is, the protagonist does not ignore the command (21); rather, he already has sprung into action.³⁹ If, according to Orlando Patterson, the condition of “having no being except as an expression of another’s being” in part defines servitude,⁴⁰ Johnson acts out the master’s fantasy of the perfect slave. He not only risks his own life to save that of Jim but he answers Mrs. Trescott’s call even before she literally can issue it. The protagonist seems more like his enslaved ancestors than a free black subject.

If in its initial chapter the novella thrusts linear, progressive temporality into the foreground in the furious attempt of “engine Number 36” to keep pace, then in the fire sequence *The Monster* takes up the lag encapsulated in the phrase “behind time.” For in embarking on his rescue mission, Johnson enters a site where the forward-moving temporality of the train is brought to a halt (it is, recall, a “brakeman” who finally drags Johnson’s limp body from the fire) as it collides with the time of slavery, in which simultaneity supplants chronology, and persistence

trumps progression.⁴¹ To be sure, this conflagration burns away much more than Johnson's face or Trescott's house; collapsing the distance between past and present, it places bound black and free black, ancestor and descendant, on coeval temporal terrain.

Slavery's Shame: Hereditary Social Inferiority

With the image of Johnson throwing himself into the Trescott home, I want to return to the passage cited at the outset of this essay: the narrator's remark that the black protagonist "was submitting, submitting because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to this conflagration" (23). While critics generally have understood this line as exemplary of what Adam Newton calls the text's "racist 'theorizing,'" ⁴² the narrator's attribution of Johnson's submission to "his fathers"—and, by implication, to his slave heritage—merits further consideration. For in moving the fire episode from a figure for slavery's persistence to an exploration of the source of Johnson's injury, the remark suggests that racial bondage, though formally abolished, nonetheless continues to harm purportedly free subjects. In so doing, the line embeds in the fire sequence a crucial meditation on injury qua injury that has yet to be pursued by Crane's readers, who tend to explicate Johnson's physical scar as a trope for social invisibility or for his status as an object as opposed to subject.⁴³ Johnson's defacement certainly represents all of these things. But is the harm he suffers reducible to—or even adequately explained by—the facelessness that results from the serpentine substance that burns his visage? What if Johnson's injury is not so much his defacement as the devalued self-conception, constructed and enforced by his society, that compels him to run into the burning structure in the first place?

In an essay titled "What's Wrong with Slavery?" Kwame Anthony Appiah develops a conception of the immorality of racial bondage that can help us to think through these questions. As Appiah has it, one cannot offer a philosophically coherent response to the query he poses simply by citing physical violence or sexual abuse—in other words, the seemingly obvious harms of servitude. While these elements were characteristic of the institution, and although they undoubtedly wronged the enslaved, as any nineteenth-century apologist for slavery would be quick to proclaim, such behaviors constituted abuses of the system, not the system itself.⁴⁴

Appiah's point is not of course to embrace proslavery arguments but rather to recognize that "physical cruelty is, indeed, not intrinsic to

the definition of slavery.”⁴⁵ One has to look deeper, toward bondage’s less apparent, but no less horrific, scars. For Appiah, what is truly wrong with racial servitude is the fact that it stigmatizes the enslaved, consigning them to a degraded social status and denying them what the political philosopher John Rawls has termed the “social bases of self-respect”: “confidence that one had a life whose aims were worth pursuing and that one was competent to manage that life.”⁴⁶ Recalling Douglass’s invocation of the phrase “enforced degradation,” this lesser status—what Appiah terms “hereditary social inferiority” but what we might also think of as a kind of social shame—constitutes slavery’s greatest injury.⁴⁷

As Appiah’s use of “hereditary” implies, conceived in this way, the harm of racial bondage is an enduring one. In the United States, he reminds us, there existed an “intimate connection between racial disrespect and slave status” such that “even free blacks were stigmatized because, though they were legally free, they belonged, unlike white people, to a kind of people that could be enslaved.”⁴⁸ Crucially, the idea here is not that this stigma results from the actual submission of Africans to slavery—as if racial servitude were the sign of the bad judgment of an individual subject as opposed to a complex system that secured domination over blacks through economic and social structures, through biopolitical practices as well as brute force. Rather, the point is that one of the components of this system—the stigma of slavery—was inextricably linked to blackness. And with such an equation between “black” and “slave” in place, the power of legal remedies and even the force of emancipation, while undoubtedly important, are diminished. For the devaluation of blackness codified by way of bondage is not easily undone by legal edict; as Sharon Holland explains, “a system such as slavery might be abruptly halted, but its dream lives in the peoples’ imagination,” structuring social recognition and demarcating the lines of inclusion and exclusion, superiority and inferiority.⁴⁹ Racial servitude may have been no longer on the books, but its concomitant shame, embedded in blackness, came to mark African Americans, North and South, free and enslaved.

Crane’s novella theorizes precisely this notion in its depiction of Johnson. While it at no point intimates that the black protagonist was ever legally enslaved, *The Monster* clearly reveals that he suffers a degraded social existence. The town lawyer refers to Johnson as a “coon,” and as he walks to visit his betrothed, a group of young men asks him if he plans to perform a cakewalk (14). Significantly, such treatment of

Johnson seems to have little to do with his literal defacement.⁵⁰ In fact, these pejorative comments occur *prior* to the conflagration that sears away his visage and (supposedly) renders him a “monster.” If the fire sequence marks the point in which Johnson’s degraded status most clearly and disturbingly manifests itself—finally coming to fruition in his facelessness—the episode merely literalizes the social shame he already had been enduring and the submission he already had been enacting in less extravagant modes.⁵¹ The law may have admitted Johnson to the domain of the human, but in the community’s imagination at least, he has not risen beyond the level of subperson.

Yet if we take a slightly more abstract view of “submission,” considering what it might mean conceptually and less from the perspective of plot, these details are in a sense beside the point. For the servant’s degraded status—prior to, during, and after the blaze—is not finally traceable to Johnson but rather to his “fathers.” And if, following Patterson, we understand the degradation of racial bondage as a “generalized condition” rooted in a “primal act of submission” that applied to even as it necessarily exceeded the particular slave subject,⁵² then even citing Johnson’s immediate parentage here misses the mark. Imbuing the protagonist’s acquiescence with a much more complicated genealogy, *The Monster* suggests that the social inferiority at the core of bondage reproduces itself through time, in a kind of infinite regress that, paradoxically, guarantees its persistence. In falling into the flames, Henry Johnson confirms the dishonor bequeathed to him because of his ancestry by replaying the submission his fathers were forced to enact—just as his fathers’ fathers were before.

In this way, the novella anticipates the most provocative insight that emerges from Appiah’s essay, an idea the philosopher himself does not fully pursue: the logic of the racial debasement that haunts free blacks like Johnson repeats the logic of slave degradation that marked his fathers. For at the foundation of both systems is a dishonor that derives from one’s ancestry, whether more immediate, as *The Monster* suggests of Johnson, or much more distant, as in Patterson’s account of the primal roots of slavery. In other words, the shame of slavery inheres not in the “submission” of a specific individual to bondage but rather, to paraphrase Appiah, in belonging to a kind of people that were made to submit—to a kind of people that were enslaved. Translating this point into the lexicon of causality, we might say that inferior status functions as an explanation both of slavery’s cause and effect: its justification and its mode of enforcement, the means by which it secures its institutional

power and the way in which it perpetuates its legacy. Simply put, hereditary social degradation is slavery's life and afterlife.

While framing bondage's endurance thus might seem to force us into a rather fatalistic conceptual position, quite the contrary is true. By conceiving of the injury of racial servitude as persistent and extensive, this model supplies the imaginative work required to overcome a serious philosophical obstacle impeding efforts to justify redress for slavery: the problem of causality. As the philosopher Bernard Boxill explains, one of the standard moves in theoretical accounts of reparation is the reliance on counterfactuals, or the assessment and measurement of compensation in terms of what it would take to bring the injured party to the “level of well-being he would have enjoyed had he not been harmed.”⁵³ Of the many dilemmas that emerge when such an approach is deployed, perhaps the most significant is that the counterfactual requires one to show that slavery is the *cause* of the problems confronting free blacks born post emancipation—in short, that slavery continues to harm years after it was legally abolished.

Boxill finds this requirement nearly insurmountable.⁵⁴ And yet he does not abandon the cause entirely (pun intended). Instead, Boxill modifies the counterfactual argument by focusing not on the injustice of slavery but on what he identifies as the injustice of nonrecovery, which was perpetrated by whites—and the government—against African Americans after abolition. As he explains, “The present black population is not entitled to reparation for the harms that slavery caused it because slavery, that is the slave holders and their helpers, did not cause it any harms. The succeeding white generations caused the harms that entitle blacks to reparation. They did so by preventing the slaves and their descendants from recovering from the harms that slavery caused them.”⁵⁵ Insofar as it skirts the problem associated with causation outlined above by drawing a distinction between the wrong of racial bondage and the subsequent wrong through which blacks were kept at the lower rung of the sociopolitical hierarchy, Boxill's innovation has the virtue not just of theoretical rigor but also a kind of explanatory appeal.

On closer examination, however, his distinction between the injury of slavery and the injury of nonrecovery largely rests on what exactly we consider to be the “harm” of racial bondage. And, curiously, this is a question to which the thinker devotes scant attention. While in the passage quoted above, he would appear to bypass the issue by glossing slavery's injuries rather ambiguously in terms of the behaviors of “slave

holders and their helpers,” Boxill offers a more explicit definition earlier in the essay, when he notes that the “greatest harms” suffered by bound blacks “stemmed from the loss of their liberty.”⁵⁶ This latter formulation is more satisfying than the first—to have one’s freedom denied is certainly to suffer a wrong. Nonetheless, such a conception is limited in scope. Literal unfreedom is not the only wrong of bondage, and, contra Boxill, it may not be the “greatest harm.”

Indeed, if, following Appiah, we look to the very wrong on which the denial of liberty to the slave was founded—hereditary social inferiority—then the boundary between the harm of slavery and the harm of nonrecovery fails to hold. Degraded status constitutes the persistent injury suffered by blacks in slavery and freedom; or more precisely, it is the wrong that relegates them to living a kind of racial servitude in the era of freedom. What Boxill envisions as a “double injustice” thus seems more like a single wrong repeated through time.⁵⁷

As that last phrase implies, much more than the definition of “injury” is at stake here, for questions of temporality are inextricable from notions of harm, and accordingly, time inflects arguments about reparations in significant ways.⁵⁸ It is important to note, then, that in positing a difference between the injury of slavery and the injury of nonrecovery, Boxill also draws a boundary between past and present, revealing an investment in linear time. Of course, this does not necessarily constitute a weakness. But if our aim is to resist such a border in an attempt to direct attention to (so as to begin to repair) slavery’s ongoing wrongs, then Boxill’s innovation may be counterproductive. *The Monster* helps to reveal why by bringing the time of trains and the time of slavery into tension through its depiction of Trescott’s response to Johnson’s injury.

The Shame of Slavery: Co-Responsibility

Peony and protagonist: the analogy *The Monster* forges between the two is crucial. Both the flower and Johnson suffer injuries, and, in response, the younger and elder Trescott endeavor to make reparation. In order to begin to uncover the complex relation that exists between the novella’s two central injuries and related attempts at repair—and the attendant constellation of father, son, and servant that *The Monster* thereby creates—we might ask just what the flower that figures so prominently in the initial chapter represents, and on whom it symbolically sheds light. Crane’s readers have suggested multiple interpretations of the peony, understanding it variously as a sign

of Trescott’s affluence, a prefiguration of Johnson’s near death in the conflagration, and an emblem of the doctor’s “capacity for moral sensitivity” on display in his effort to heal Johnson.⁵⁹ Yet an additional possibility heretofore has gone unnoticed: as Beverly Seaton points out in her study *The Language of Flowers*, among the nineteenth-century meanings of the peony was shame.⁶⁰ Insofar as the flower functions as a kind of double for the servant, this symbolic logic would seem to lend support to an analysis of Johnson’s injury not as primarily physical but as a degraded status and devaluation of self—in short, as slavery’s shame.

But, as the previous inventory of critical glosses implies, the peony may say as much about the white protagonists (father and son) as about Johnson. Consider Jim’s response to the doctor’s quasi reprimand: “he went away, with his head lowered, shuffling his feet” (10). Guilt at first would seem to capture the significance of such a posture: Jim knows he is responsible for the damaged peony even if he has avoided articulating his particular role in bringing it about. Read closely, however, the child’s stance indexes something more like shame, which has less to do with an individual accepting culpability for a specific action of which he is author than with the awareness of having lost esteem in the eyes of another, and not necessarily or primarily as a result of one’s deeds. In other words, does Jim’s downward glance primarily signify admission of responsibility or the fear of a wounded self-image brought about by the father’s scolding?

The question is important, because the difference between guilt and shame is also the difference between an individualistic, agent-centered conception of responsibility for wrongdoing and a more capacious, relational one which defies standard accounts of author as cause as well as the logic of chronology more generally. As the philosopher W. James Booth explains, “Whereas guilt is a clear threshold concept, and so is a property of discrete events in our life, shame is more pervasive and seems to be bound up with the long duration of our lives and of our communities.”⁶¹ With its emphasis on the *longue durée*, shame enables us to conceive of wrongs that endure not simply across the course of an individual life but over the lives of collectivities and generations. The “sign of persistence,” it unsettles notions of past and present, cause and effect, tearing them out of their linear order.⁶²

Accordingly, standard models of responsibility in which an individual accepts blame for some wrong will not suffice. What shame requires, instead, is a sense of co-responsibility, which as Booth defines it, forges

links not simply “among members of a present community” but more importantly, between past and present citizens; it thus “speaks to an identity across time and through change, an identity that is ethical at its core yet is not dependent on notions of authorship and causal connection.”⁶³ On this model, nineteenth- and twenty-first-century white Americans alike might feel responsible for bondage, for the salient point is not whether they or their forebears owned slaves but rather that, by virtue of their membership in a formerly slaveholding nation, these citizens benefit from the material and psychological structures codified by racial servitude. Put differently, the shame of slavery is not something exclusive to black Americans. It claims whites as well, though less as a felt history of degradation than as a kind of moral obligation.⁶⁴

In a short story he published just months after *The Monster*, Crane gestures toward something like Booth’s sense of co-responsibility. “The Blue Hotel” (1898) tells the tale of a “Swede” who travels from New York to a Nebraska lodging house. In the course of a game of cards with the owner’s son, Johnnie, and two other boarders—a “cowboy” and an “Easterner”—the Swede accuses Johnnie of cheating, initiating a fight in which the visitor triumphs. Leaving the hotel after the brawl, the Swede comes upon a saloon, where he forces a local gambler to join him in a drink. Not amenable to such coercion, the gambler responds to the Swede’s demand by pulling out a blade and killing him. In its closing section, the text depicts a conversation between the cowboy and the Easterner in which the latter character reveals that Johnnie was in fact cheating and accuses his companions and himself of being complicit in the murder: “We are all in it! . . . Every sin is the result of a collaboration. We, five of us, have collaborated in the murder of this Swede.”⁶⁵ While none of the boarders inflicted the fatal wound, the Easterner suggests, they all are in a way responsible for the Swede’s death, as is the gambler. The actual “sin” may not be the same with respect to every character, but the wrong is collective.⁶⁶

Crane himself saw “The Blue Hotel” as the proper companion to his novella in an 1899 collection of his works, noting in a letter to his agent that the two pieces “fit” together.⁶⁷ The writer does not specify a reason for his claim, but, as we have seen, the idea of collective wrong held out in the closing lines of “The Blue Hotel” is very much on display in *The Monster*, which underscores the notion’s temporal dimensions from its opening page. While Jim evades individual accountability in his response to his father, the sense of simultaneity manifest in his answer would seem to supply precisely the concept needed for a vision of what

might be required for coming to terms with slavery. That is, if bondage unsettles standard models of causality and temporality, might not the task of imagining the conditions for making amends require an equally expansive time frame?

The novella's staging of Trescott's deliberations about what he owes Johnson for saving his son points provocatively in this direction. Crane's readers have been critical of the way the text shifts focus to the doctor in its latter half, thereby occluding Johnson's suffering in favor of his employer's plight.⁶⁸ But the privileging of white pain over black is not the only possible interpretation of this change in perspective. Given the analogies between protagonist and peony, father and son, this portion of the novella might also be read as a meditation on the conditions required to make “reparation” (to cite the narrator) for Johnson's injury. Indeed, while the doctor never frames his actions explicitly as a redressive project, his incessant ruminations on what he owes Johnson seem almost to call out for interrogation. For if we recall that Crane clearly indicates that Trescott, not his servant, actually rescues Jim, then the doctor's deliberations take on a more metaphorical shape, inviting a reading of his meditation on debt in terms that exceed his personal relationship with Johnson.⁶⁹

Consider Trescott's conversation with his neighbor, Judge Hagenthorpe, in the aftermath of the fire. With Johnson's life hanging in the balance, the doctor effectively moves in with Hagenthorpe, in whose home the black protagonist languishes, his bandaged face allowing a single eye to protrude and stare “unwinkingly” at the judge. At dinner one evening, Hagenthorpe poses an uncomfortable question: “No one wants to advance such ideas, but somehow I think that that poor fellow ought to die.” The doctor demurs, but the narrator reports that “there was in Trescott's face at once a look of recognition, as if in this tangent of the judge, he saw an old problem.” Hagenthorpe's death wish for Johnson may reveal less about a “system of belief in which black regression and eventual extinction were givens,” as Price McMurray has argued,⁷⁰ than an anxiety over an issue presumably thought to be dead—slavery, that “old problem” in the human form of Johnson—may in fact linger on, its “unwinking eye” gazing at the judge, as if to implicate him in the national evil (31).

But if Trescott's “look of recognition” signals that he grasps, and perhaps even shares, the temporal anxiety implicit in Hagenthorpe's remark, his evasive reply suggests he does not endorse his friend's recommendation. He may glimpse an “old problem” brought back into the present in Johnson's eye, yet he does not turn away. In fact, after ensuring Johnson's continued existence, Trescott remains committed to his

servant—repaying the debt he feels he owes him for saving Jim’s life—even as this allegiance renders him an outcast.

Trescott’s marginalization as a result of his association with Johnson allies him with another character in the text: Martha Goodwin, the town’s resident spinster. As the narrator explains, Goodwin, who “lived with her married sister,” “performed nearly all the house-work in exchange for the privilege of existence. Every one tacitly recognized her labor as a form of penance for the early end of her betrothed, who had died of small-pox, which he had not caught from her” (49). Perhaps the most intriguing detail in this description concerns the character’s curious relation to causality and responsibility: she suffers from the effects of a death she did not bring about. In this regard, “guilt” would seem the wrong word to describe her condition.⁷¹ We might say, more accurately, that Goodwin represents shame, but not the kind that emerges from the social protocols that render a single female the town outcast. Rather, her loss of status is the sort connected with the philosophical concept of co-responsibility. For while we might have reason to wonder about the exact nature of Goodwin’s situation—to be sure, it hardly seems to rhyme with the kind of justice co-responsibility seeks—her circumstances nonetheless render her an emblem of the indirect sense of causality and agency associated with this notion.

If Goodwin embodies the disjoining of the relation between agent and act, cause and effect, in an especially provocative way, she is just one figure in a series of tableaux that troubles standard models of responsibility and causality, especially as these concepts relate to temporality: from Jim’s crushing of the peony, to the fire sequence, to the very nature of Johnson’s injury. These episodes are not perfectly symmetrical; but taken together, they gesture toward the notion that, most broadly interpreted, *The Monster* gives narrative form not simply to the persistent injury of slavery but also to the abiding obligation to repair the harms of bondage. The time of slavery gives rise to the time of reparation, for just as the black protagonist was never technically in racial servitude but nonetheless suffers its enduring wrongs, so too is Trescott accountable for repairing an injury he himself may not have inflicted. To paraphrase the end of “The Blue Hotel,” the novella understands slavery as something “we are all (still) in.”

(Ac)counting the Debt

If in one reading *The Monster* suggests that slavery’s endurance claims Trescott as much as Johnson, the doctor’s particular method of

accounting that debt complicates matters. In one of his most overt statements of allegiance to his servant, the white protagonist reflects: “What am I to do? He gave himself for—for Jimmie. What am I to do for him?” (32). Articulated thus, the obligation is scarcely the kind that would accord with the sense of co-responsibility held out by the novella’s presentation of his deliberation as the attempt to come to terms with an “old problem.” Consider the logic of exchange manifest in this passage; it is as if Trescott’s commitment to Johnson is little more than reciprocation. Note, too, the chronology and narrow sense of causality on display in the doctor’s phrasing: the servant’s actions precede, and thus give rise to, Trescott’s. Conceived in this way, the obligation evinces more of the logic associated with the time of trains than with the simultaneity and overlap that are part and parcel of the time of slavery. *The Monster* thus offers two ways of understanding Trescott’s debt: one suggested by the novella’s accounting, its staging and structure gesturing toward the vision of enduringness required to repair the ongoing injuries of slavery; and the other, brought into relief by Trescott’s accounting, which privileges the chronological, the finite, and the discrete.

Read from this latter vantage point, the doctor’s attempt at (material) repair does more harm than good. Perhaps the most devastating manifestation of the logic of exchange embedded in Trescott’s sense of obligation is the way in which Johnson comes to occupy the status of an item. When the black protagonist first emerges from his convalescence, we see him traveling with Trescott in a carriage, en route to the home of Alek Williams, the African American character with whom the servant will live. While the situation appears rather benign—the doctor explains to Johnson that “I will pay all your expenses, and come to see you as often as I can” (33)—these boarding arrangements function to remove the servant from the main section of town where Trescott and Hagenthorpe reside, containing Johnson’s haunting presence within the Williams household.

As McMurray has pointed out, in light of the fact that the United States Supreme Court handed down its decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) just two years prior to the publication of *The Monster*, the marginalization of Johnson on display here seems less a “general statement about intolerance” than a specific reference to the legal codification of Jim Crow segregation.⁷² Indeed, Crane’s novella draws our attention to the crucial temporal concern underlying this landmark case about the racialization of space. At the heart of *Plessy* was the

question of what precisely constituted the afterlife of slavery. According to Justice Henry Billings Brown, who authored the majority opinion, the statute enacted by the state of Louisiana in 1890 requiring the segregation of railroad passengers on the basis of race had no significant relationship to slavery. As Brown understood it, the law merely recognized a basic “distinction” between black and white Americans, a distinction “which must always exist so long as white men are distinguished from the other race by color.”⁷³ Accordingly, Brown wrote, it was “too clear for argument” that the statute did not violate the Thirteenth Amendment, which he understood as abolishing only the most literal kind of racial servitude.⁷⁴

But Brown went further. In the conclusion to his opinion, he refused the notion that “the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority.” “If this be so,” he continued, “it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it.”⁷⁵ In upholding the statute, then, Brown characterized as purely subjective the sense of shame that the Louisiana law imposed on black Americans. More importantly, by disavowing the devaluation of blackness that underwrote both racial slavery and racial segregation, he disallowed any connection between past and present.

Whereas Brown privileged the linearity characteristic of the time of trains in ruling segregation constitutional, Justice John Marshall Harlan grasped how the epoch of slavery extended itself into the era of freedom in the literal space of the railroad car. The lone dissenter in the *Plessy* ruling, Harlan argued that the Thirteenth Amendment “not only struck down the institution of slavery” but it also “prevents the imposition of any burdens or disabilities that constitute badges of slavery or servitude.”⁷⁶ In this subtle shift from the past to the present tense—from “struck down” to “prevents”—Harlan discloses a conception of the wrong of racial bondage as ongoing and persistent. And to his mind, the Louisiana statute was a case in point. For what did the law do if not “pu[t] the brand of servitude” on African American citizens by telling them they “are so inferior and degraded that they cannot be allowed to sit in public coaches occupied by white citizens?”⁷⁷ That is, did the statute not recognize nominally free African Americans as slaves?

As I have suggested, this is the very question *The Monster* puts before us.⁷⁸ It is precisely through its depiction of the fundamental injury of racial bondage as hereditary social inferiority that the novella collapses the boundaries between past and present, cause and effect,

slavery and segregation, the “free” Johnson and his enslaved ancestors. Indeed, if, as Saidiya Hartman has noted, the “most universal definition of the slave is a stranger”—the “perpetual outcast” who is “dishonored and violated”—then Johnson, who is formally relegated in this scene to the literal outskirts of the community, certainly fits the bill.⁷⁹

For his part, Johnson seems to want nothing to do with Trescott’s plan. Signaling his protest in what Goldsby has termed “the antebellum way,”⁸⁰ he absconds, terrorizing the community in the process. Henry Johnson on the run: the tableau surely conjures the image of a fugitive bondsman. Yet reading this escape as an anachronistic allusion to the subversive strategies of slavery misses the way this gesture suggests that the time of racial servitude does not end with the shift from antebellum to postbellum America. Recall that Johnson’s first flight—his running entrance into Trescott’s home—troubles precisely the barriers between ancestor and descendant. Accordingly, the decision to flee from a white man whose attempts at repair seem to reenslave might be just the right move for this supposedly postslavery moment, in which fathers and sons bear a disturbing resemblance.

While that last phrase alludes to the narrator’s description of Johnson’s submission, it proves equally significant in reference to Ned and Jim Trescott. No moment clarifies this idea more powerfully than the scene near the end of the novella in which the young and elder Trescott mirror one another to haunting effect. Having been transferred from the Williams household (back) to Trescott’s after his flight, Johnson sits on a box in his employer’s back garden, his face cloaked by a “veil” (52) that recalls Jefferson’s famous comment that black skin is like an “immoveable veil” even as it anticipates Du Bois’s portrait of the color line.⁸¹ Jim entertains his friends by treating Johnson as an object, in a manner not unlike the way his father deals with the servant in his bid to make amends. As the boys challenge one another to move nearer to Johnson, the narrator explains that Jim “seemed to reap all the joys of the owner and exhibitor of one of the world’s marvels” (53). Bill Brown notes that “Jimmie’s pride of property” suggests a “kind of residual slavery that was in fact perpetuated by the ‘owners’ of African-American prodigies” late into the nineteenth century.⁸²

Yet we need not turn to contemporaneous historical events such as the freak show and the minstrel stage, or even the *Plessy* decision, to grasp the “residual slavery” in this episode. For in the ensuing section, Crane’s novella offers another model for understanding slavery’s

persistence through time: it is perpetuated by father and sons, both black *and* white. Having witnessed the child's gathering, Trescott breaks up the group, and confronts his son the next morning, asking: "Jimmie, what were you doing in the back garden yesterday—you and the other boys—to Henry?" Jimmie replies:

"Why, we—why, we—now—Willie Dalzel said I dasset go right up to him, and I did; and then he did; and then—the other boys were 'fraid; and then—you comed."

Trescott groaned deeply. His countenance was so clouded in sorrow that the lad, bewildered by the mystery of it, burst suddenly forth in dismal lamentations. "There, there. Don't cry, Jim," said Trescott, going round the desk. "Only—" (57)

The explanation promised by the dash never comes. Jim has injured Johnson, and, in a replaying of the opening episode, he again is not held accountable by his father, whose mournful face perhaps indicates his regret at his failure to make clear to his son the nature of the harm he has done. But Trescott himself does damage to Johnson, treating him as a degraded being in his very attempt to repay the black protagonist. Thus the doctor's "sorrow" might also be a sign of a kind of a shame, not the sort that implies atonement for slavery's enduring wrong but something closer to complicity for its persistence across time through a denial of culpability—co-responsibility most negatively construed.

For what this scene presents, finally, is a family line in which father and son perpetuate an injury that is itself reproduced by way of ancestor and descendant. That the child's response, though no less marked by grammatical errors than in the first chapter, makes repeated use of "then" instead of "now" here is particularly significant. These two words do not simply serve as structural bookends, reminding us of the novel's abiding concern with past and present. More important is the fact that the term that signals simultaneity has been supplanted by one that indexes chronology. Whereas the opening episode holds out the very conceptions needed for the reordering of the relation between past and present, cause and effect, that is essential to the task of coming to terms with the shame of slavery, this scene turns to the chronological "then." In so doing, it projects a haunting vision: a series of black sons, who like their fathers, suffer slavery's dishonor, and white sons, who like their fathers, can do no reparation.

The Monster therefore might appear to end in a disturbing state of stasis suggestive of failure and resignation. To be sure, Trescott remains committed to Johnson, but he offers no moral rallying cry to explain his defense, and it is far from clear whether the servant's status will ever rise above the object-like state in which we leave (and find) him. Instead, the final image of the novella is one of the doctor comforting his crying wife, who has been shunned by her friends because of the family's association with Johnson. Gazing at the unused table setting prepared for absent guests, Trescott finds himself “occasionally trying to count the cups. There were fifteen of them” (65). For Susan Schweik, this “anticlimactic” ending implies that “nothing has concluded, nothing can be repaired.”⁸³

In the world of *The Monster*, however, such a claim does not necessarily imply failure: the recognition that slavery has not ended but in fact lives on constitutes the first step in making reparation. And while Trescott's particular attempt may be futile, it is far from insignificant that Crane's novella has provided us with the terms to recognize his effort as such. Staring at the cups along with Trescott in the arresting final scene, we see that the sort of finite and narrow accounting embodied by his calculations will never bring about reparation. For, as *The Monster* suggests, the task of coming to terms with slavery's enduring wrong requires an altogether different method: one that jettisons the finite and the discrete, and the linear time of trains, for a more expansive vision in which past and present, bondage and freedom, coincide, holding out the possibility of a (model of) time in which sons do not share in the shame of their fathers.

Notes

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1. Frederick Douglass, “The Blessings of Liberty and Education,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, ed. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, ser. 1, vol. 5 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 623.

2. *Ibid.*, 624.

3. Though they are less common than the historicist approaches on which I focus here, biographical interpretations of Crane's literary production also have played a role in shaping this notion. See, for instance, John Cleman, “Blunders of Virtue: The Problem of Race in Stephen Crane's ‘The Monster,’” *American Literary Realism* 34, no. 2 (2002): 119–34, and Stanley Wertheim, “Unraveling the Humanist: Stephen Crane and Ethnic Minorities,” *American Literary Realism* 30, no. 3 (1998): 65–75.

4. Hence one of the most common moves in the criticism is to identify the “real” Henry Johnson—the source on whom Crane might have drawn in developing this character—and

analyze the novella accordingly. As Susan Schweik has it, for instance, Johnson stands in for Levi Hume, a laborer in Crane's childhood home of Port Jervis, New York, who was afflicted by facial cancer; and, consequently, the text is an unraveling of the sociological construction of disability. See "Disability Politics and American Literary History: Some Suggestions," *American Literary History* 20, nos. 1–2 (2008): 217–37. Or, according to Jonathan Tadashi Naito, Johnson is the fictive incarnation of William Kemmler, the first person to be executed in the electric chair (an event that took place in New York state); and, therefore, *The Monster* is a meditation on the social implications of modern technologies. See "Cruel and Unusual Light: Electricity and Effacement in Stephen Crane's *The Monster*," *Arizona Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2006): 35–63. For similar approaches, see Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economies of Play* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 208; Linda H. Davis, *Badge of Courage: The Life of Stephen Crane* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 217; and Alice Hall Petry, "Stephen Crane's Elephant Man," *Journal of Modern Literature* 10, no. 2 (1983): 346–52.

5. Elaine Marshall, "Crane's 'The Monster' Seen in the Light of Robert Lewis's Lynching," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 51, no. 2 (1996): 205–24; Price McMurray, "Disabling Fictions: Race, History, and Ideology in Crane's 'The Monster,'" *Studies in American Fiction* 26, no. 1 (1998): 51–72; Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 105–63.

6. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999), 15. Goldsby notes that Johnson is "figuratively" the "slave" of Trescott, but racial bondage does not hold a central place in her argument. *Spectacular Secret*, 150. Nan Goodman treats slavery similarly in her analysis; see *Shifting the Blame: Literature, Law, and the Theory of Accidents in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 120.

7. Stephen Crane, *The Monster* (1898), in *The Works of Stephen Crane*, ed. Fredson Bowers, 10 vols. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1969–76), 7:23, emphasis added. Further references are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text. On the "monster" as a trope for slaves and the peculiar institution itself, see Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 47–55.

8. My methodology in this regard is influenced by Peter Coviello's sense that exploring "the peculiarities of idiom, figure, syntax, and diction" that mark a literary work is one way to engage in a "different sort of historicism," a historicism that can "resist the potentially flattening effects of contextualization." *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 13, 14. For other interrogations of historicism that have informed my thinking, see Russ Castronovo, "Death to the American Renaissance: History, Heidegger, Poe," *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 49, nos. 1–3 (2003): 179–92; Wai Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 123–41; and Jeffrey Insko, "Anachronistic Imaginings: *Hope Leslie's* Challenge to Historicism," *American Literary History* 16, no. 2 (2004): 179–207.

9. My definition here draws on Eric J. Miller, "Reconceiving Reparations: Multiple Strategies in the Reparations Debate," *Boston College Third World Law Journal* 24, no. 1 (2004): 45–79, and Nell Irvin Painter, "Soul Murder and Slavery: Toward a Fully Loaded Cost Accounting," in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, ed. Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 125–46.

10. The bibliography on reparations is extensive, but for an overview of the basic stakes of the debate, see Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* 92 (2005): 1–15; Alfred L. Brophy, *Reparations: Pro and Con* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Michael T. Martin and Marilyn Yaquinto, "On Redress for Racial Injustice," the introduction to their edited volume, *Redress for Historical Injustices in the United States: On Reparations for Slavery, Jim Crow, and Their Legacies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1–27. On the imaginative dimensions of reparations politics, see Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon, 2002), 110–34. For an important exploration of the relation among reparations, history, and politics, see Thomas McCarthy's linked essays: "Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the USA: On the Politics of the Memory of Slavery," *Political Theory* 30, no. 5 (2002): 623–48, and "Coming to Terms with Our Past, Part II: On the Morality and Politics of Reparations for Slavery," *Political Theory* 32, no. 6 (2004): 750–72. On reparations and democracy more generally, see Lawrie Balfour, "Act and Fact: Slavery Reparations as a Democratic Politics of Reconciliation," in *The Politics of Reconciliation in Multi-*

cultural Societies, ed. Will Kymlicka and Bashir Bashir (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 94–113. Finally, for treatments of reparations from a legal perspective, see Ariela Gross, “When Is the Time of Slavery? The History of Slavery in Contemporary Legal and Political Argument,” *California Law Review* 96, no. 1 (2008): 283–321, and Robert Westley, “The Accursed Share: Genealogy, Temporality, and the Problem of Value in Black Reparations Discourse,” *Representations* 92 (2005): 81–116.

11. Randall Robinson’s *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York: Plume, 2000) is perhaps the most provocative articulation of the argument for a model of collective responsibility. On this topic, see also J. Angelo Corlett, “Reparations to African Americans?” in Martin and Yaquinto, ed., *Redress for Historical Injustices in the United States*, 170–98, esp. 187–90, and Charles W. Mills, “Contract of Breach: Repairing the Racial Contract,” in *Contract and Domination*, by Carole Pateman and Charles W. Mills (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 106–33, esp. 126–32. Though not about reparations per se, George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), esp. 17–21, offers an important account of the way liberal individualism disavows responsibility for historical racial injustices.

12. Brophy outlines the complications surrounding issues of cause; see *Reparations*, 106–9, 153–55.

13. A few scholars have approached *The Monster* as a text that displays the kind of conceptual richness I explore in this essay, but the racial dimensions of the narrative do not factor into their analyses. See Patrick K. Dooley, *The Pluralistic Philosophy of Stephen Crane* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Adam Zachary Newton, *Narrative Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 177–239; and Michael D. Warner, “Value, Agency, and Stephen Crane’s ‘The Monster,’” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 40, no. 1 (1985): 76–93.

14. John Carlos Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism: From the Revolution to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 163. Young points the way toward an alternative understanding of racial politics in the narrative; however, she remains conflicted about whether Johnson functions as an ironic “exposure” of black stereotypes or “an enactment” of them. *Black Frankenstein*, 87.

15. Jacques Rancière, *Dis-Agreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 88.

16. Ralph Ellison, “Stephen Crane and the Mainstream of American Fiction” (1960), in *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*, ed. John F. Callahan (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 127. Goldsby explains that the author’s reference is to lynching, a phenomenon that plagued Ellison’s era as it did Crane’s. *Spectacular Secret*, 355n26. But “fresh” and “timely” might also be taken more broadly, as adjectives that describe one of the novella’s abiding subjects: temporality.

17. See, for instance, Brown, *Material Unconscious*, and Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 140.

18. On the impact that railroad transportation had on time, see Ian R. Bartky, *Selling the True Time: Nineteenth-Century Timekeeping in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 1, 19–31.

19. Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 141.

20. McMurray, “Disabling Fictions,” 65.

21. To take just one example, Douglass describes Edward Covey, the “negro breaker,” as “the snake.” *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855), in *Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994), 265, original emphasis.

22. Jacqueline Wilson-Jordan, “Teaching a Dangerous Story: Darwinism and Race in Stephen Crane’s ‘The Monster,’” *Eureka Studies in Teaching Short Fiction* 8, no. 1 (2007): 55.

23. Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism*, 152, 151.

24. *Ibid.*, 153.

25. Setting out the reading he ultimately rejects, Rowe writes that the fire scene “seems charged with . . . revolutionary significance in response to the persistence of American racism.” *Ibid.*, 151. Goldsby ascribes this scene’s racist depictions to the narrator as opposed to Crane himself, but her reading of the text’s treatment of Johnson does not differ radically from Rowe’s. *Spectacular Secret*, 144.

26. Routinely acclaimed for its artistry, the fire sequence has long attracted the attention of critics, who have read the scene variously as a fictive representation of the outbreak of the Civil War, a meditation on the figure of writing in Crane’s work, and a reflection on the gap between act and intention that informs moral judgments. See, respectively, Malcolm Foster, “The Black Crepe Veil: The Significance of Stephen Crane’s *The Monster*,” *International Fiction Review* 3, no. 2 (1976): 88; Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins*

and Stephen Crane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 94–101; and Warner, “Value, Agency, and Stephen Crane’s ‘The Monster.’” For analyses that underscore the episode’s racial dimensions, see, in addition to those by McMurray, Rowe, and Wilson-Jordan discussed above, Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 157–59, and Nick LoLordo, “Possessed by the Gothic: Stephen Crane’s ‘The Monster,’” *Arizona Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (2001): 41–45. None of these readings is attentive to the place of temporality in the episode.

27. My account of this image and its history draws on Irma B. Jaffe, *John Trumbull: Patriot-Artist of the American Revolution* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), 318–19; Jaffe, *Trumbull: The Declaration of Independence* (New York: Viking, 1976), 64, 94–96; and Jules David Prown, “John Trumbull as History Painter,” in *John Trumbull: The Hand and Spirit of a Painter*, ed. Helen A. Cooper (New Haven, CT: Yale University Art Gallery, 1982), 22–92. Engravings of the *Declaration* circulated widely, and it is likely that Crane himself encountered the image. Indeed, given that Crane was named after an ancestor who his parents believed was a Revolutionary War hero, and in light of the fact that Crane’s mother, Mary Helen Peck Crane, was an aspiring painter, it seems possible that the author’s family even counted a reproduction of the image among its possessions. On Crane’s genealogy, see Davis, *Badge of Courage*, 5. Mrs. Crane describes her interest in art in a series of letters to her parents, all of which are in the Stephen Crane Papers, accession #5505, the Clifton Waller Barrett Library, Special Collections Department, University of Virginia; see in particular Mary Helen Peck Crane to George and Mary Helen Myers Peck, September 1, 1853, box 4, folder 27, and Mary Helen Peck Crane to George and Mary Helen Myers Peck, November 19, 1855, box 4, folder 28.

28. McMurray, “Disabling Fictions,” 63.

29. Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 117.

30. Prown, “John Trumbull,” 76. Describing the painting in a catalog he prepared for an exhibition and later appended to his autobiography, Trumbull admits to departing from “fact” with respect to procedural matters such as the “usual practice of reporting an act,” but he does not address the use of artistic license regarding the dates of the event(s) he portrays. Indeed, he includes “July 4, 1776” as part of the painting’s title. See *Catalogue of Paintings, by Colonel Trumbull, in Autobiography, Reminiscences and Letters of John Trumbull, from 1756 to 1841* (New Haven, CT: B. L. Hamlen, 1841), 417.

31. After consulting with Jefferson and John Adams, Trumbull resolved to include in his work not simply the actual signers of the document but also those who abstained, such as John Dickinson. See Jaffe, *John Trumbull*, 106–7, 242–43.

32. More than two drafts of the Declaration exist, but the changes made to the document before it was presented to Congress were not significant—hence my focus on the original and final versions here. See Julian P. Boyd, *The Declaration of Independence: The Evolution of the Text*, ed. Gerard W. Gawalt (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 16–38.

33. Thomas Jefferson, *Writings*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Library of America, 1984), 22.

34. Betsy Erkkila, “Radical Jefferson,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2007): 282.

35. Jefferson, *Writings*, 18.

36. Brown, *Material Unconscious*, 229.

37. On a more global level, the narrative gestures toward this idea in the name of the locale in which its drama unfolds: “Whilomville,” or, as Naito renders it, “former-town.” “Cruel and Unusual Light,” 43. Yet “former” is not the only way to translate “whilom.” In fact, among the nineteenth-century senses of the word is “while,” which, like Jimmie’s “now” and the progressive structure of “playin’ train” in the opening chapter, indexes simultaneity. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “whilom,” accessed September 12, 2012, <http://www.oed.com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/oed2/00284506>.

38. For a parallel reading, see Goodman, *Shifting the Blame*, 121.

39. David Halliburton offers a different take on the racial implications of this moment in *The Color of the Sky: A Study of Stephen Crane* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 186.

40. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 78.

41. My formulation here paraphrases Saidiya Hartman, “The Time of Slavery,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 4 (2002): 759.

42. Newton, *Narrative Ethics*, 199.

43. See, in order, John R. Cooley, “‘The Monster’—Stephen Crane’s ‘Invisible Man,’” *Markham Review* 5 (1975): 10–14, and Brown, *Material Unconscious*, 213. See also Lee Clark

Mitchell, “Face, Race, and Disfiguration in Stephen Crane’s *The Monster*,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 1 (1990): 174–92.

44. Kwame Anthony Appiah, “What’s Wrong with Slavery?” in *Buying Freedom: The Ethics and Economics of Slave Redemption*, ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Martin Bunzl (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 254.

45. *Ibid.*, 254–55.

46. *Ibid.*, 256.

47. *Ibid.*, 255. Appiah identifies a second wrong—“heteronomous personal life”—but I focus on hereditary social inferiority both because of its resonance with *The Monster*’s depiction of Johnson and because Appiah himself grants it a kind of priority in his conceptual schema. As he puts it, inferiority “undermines one’s belief in one’s capacity to run one’s own life,” while the “imposition of heteronomy denies one the exercise of that capacity” (257).

48. *Ibid.*, 255.

49. Sharon Patricia Holland, *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 14–15.

50. As more than one reader of Crane’s text has observed, the pre- and post-accident incarnations of Johnson actually differ little. See Cooley, “‘The Monster,’” 12; James Nagel, “The Significance of Stephen Crane’s ‘The Monster,’” *American Literary Realism* 31, no. 3 (1999): 56; and Catherine Prendergast, “And Now, a Necessarily Pathetic Response: A Response to Susan Schweik,” *American Literary History* 20, nos. 1–2 (2008): 240.

51. Wilson-Jordan notes that Johnson is “‘always already’ the Monster by virtue of his blackness,” yet she leaves open the question of how, precisely, this devaluation relates to the protagonist’s racial identity. “Teaching a Dangerous Story,” 49.

52. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 78.

53. Bernard R. Boxill, “A Lockean Argument for Black Reparations,” *Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 1 (2003): 67.

54. In this regard, Boxill is hardly alone. Philosophers have taken various approaches to dealing with the challenges of counterfactuals in the context of reparations scholarship. For a few significant entries into the debate, see Stephen Kershnar, who argues that the “nonidentity problem” defeats any reparations claims that deploy counterfactuals. In short, this objection suggests that the very existence of the descendants of slaves depends upon racial bondage and thus it is impossible to imagine a world in which these descendants are no worse off and slavery did not exist. *Justice for the Past* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 69–91. For a persuasive debunking of this objection, see Seana Valentine Shiffrin, “Reparations for U.S. Slavery and Justice over Time,” in *Harming Future Persons: Ethics, Genetics and the Nonidentity Problem*, ed. Melinda A. Roberts and David T. Wasserman (New York: Springer, 2009), 333–39. In a recent essay, Derrick Darby seeks to sidestep the causality problem by shifting the discussion “away from the normative ideal of corrective justice and toward the normative ideal of freedom as self-development.” The latter model stakes its claim for racial justice not on the basis of establishing a causal relationship but rather on the commitment of a “truly liberal society” to “eradicating racial inequalities—whatever their causes—in the interest of achieving a greater realization of individual freedom.” “Reparations and Racial Inequality,” *Philosophy Compass* 5, no. 1 (2010): 64. Darby’s suggestion is intriguing, but one might wonder about how the legacy of slavery—with its degradation of the black self, indeed the very idea of black selfhood—complicates his reliance upon the precepts of liberal individualism.

55. Boxill, “Lockean Argument,” 87.

56. *Ibid.*, 70.

57. *Ibid.*, 86.

58. See Westley, “Accursed Share.”

59. See, in order, Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 140; Mitchell, “Face, Race, and Disfiguration,” 188; and James Hafley, “‘The Monster’ and the Art of Stephen Crane,” in *Stephen Crane’s Career: Perspectives and Evaluations*, ed. Thomas A. Gullason (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 445. For a psychoanalytic reading, see Joseph Church, “The Black Man’s Part in Crane’s *Monster*,” *American Imago* 45, no. 4 (1988): 375–88.

60. Beverly Seaton, *The Language of Flowers: A History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 188–89.

61. W. James Booth, *Communities of Memory: On Witness, Identity, and Justice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 40. See also Marina A. L. Oshana, “Moral Taint,” *Metaphilosophy* 37, nos. 3–4 (2006): 353–75. While I draw my understanding of the concept largely from

recent philosophical literature, this sense of shame as relational and situational has a long history. According to the *OED*'s primary definition, which was in circulation well before the nineteenth century, shame is a "painful emotion arising from the consciousness of something . . . in one's own conduct or circumstances (or in those of others whose honour or disgrace one regards as one's own), or of being in a situation which offends one's sense of modesty or decency." *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "shame," accessed September 12, 2012, <http://www.oed.com.turing.library.northwestern.edu/oed2/00221772>.

62. Booth, *Communities of Memory*, 40.

63. *Ibid.*, 41, 41–42.

64. Of course, just how to conceive of this obligation is open to debate. Robert Fullinwider argues, for example, that the strongest case for reparations relies not on a conception of personal or group liability—one's identity as white or black—but rather on a model of "civic responsibility," the "responsibility of each citizen to do his fair part in honoring the nation's obligations." On this model, African Americans are "citizens as well as victims"; in fact, "their equal citizenship is reflected in their civic obligation to support government reparations," even when such initiatives are intended to benefit blacks themselves. "The Case for Reparations," in Martin and Yaquinto, ed., *Redress for Historical Injustices in the United States*, 123, 125, original emphasis.

65. Stephen Crane, "The Blue Hotel" (1898), in *The Works of Stephen Crane*, 5:170.

66. In his reading of "The Blue Hotel," Halliburton notes that what "Crane envisages is something like a continuum of responsibility," though he later argues that the Easterner "makes all the actors seem equally guilty when it was he, and he alone, who held the power of validating the Swede's position." *Color of the Sky*, 224, 226. Though Halliburton is not addressing co-responsibility as I am here, it is important to note that this concept does not necessarily imply that each actor is equally responsible, that is to say, responsible in the same way or to the same degree.

67. On February 7, 1898, Crane wrote to Paul Revere Reynolds that "it would be absurd to conjoin 'Death and The Child' with 'The Monster.' They don't fit. It would be rotten. Now, 'The Blue Hotel' goes in neatly with 'The Monster' and together they make 32,000." *The Correspondence of Stephen Crane*, ed. Stanley Wertheim and Paul Sorrentino, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 1:336. "The Blue Hotel" appeared in *The Monster and Other Stories*, published by Harper and Brothers in the United States in December 1899.

68. See, for example, Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 142, and Rowe, *Literary Culture and U.S. Imperialism*, 153.

69. Commenting on the doctor's curious sense of indebtedness to his servant, Warner notes that "Crane has put in question the kind of relation between those agents and their acts that we must assume in order to understand our machinery of valuation." According to Warner, that is, Johnson's attempt to save Jim may seem to call out for the label of "moral courage," but on close inspection there is no "basis for that value," for one cannot directly tie his efforts to the act of salvation that would warrant such praise. "Value, Agency, and Stephen Crane's 'The Monster,'" 85–86, 85. But Warner's reading holds only if we presuppose that the concept of the moral requires a tight causal connection between agent and act, doer and deed—premises, I will argue below, that *The Monster* does not necessarily accept.

70. McMurray, "Disabling Fictions," 55.

71. Mitchell uses this term to describe the link between Trescott and Goodwin. "Face, Race, and Disfiguration," 192n16. See also Halliburton, *Color of the Sky*, 194. Molly Hiro reads the novella through the conceptual lens of shame, but her definition and subsequent analysis differ significantly from mine; see "How It Feels to Be without a Face: Race and the Re-orientation of Sympathy in the 1890s," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 39, no. 2 (2006): 200.

72. McMurray, "Disabling Fictions," 52.

73. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537, 543 (1896).

74. *Ibid.*, 542. While I focus here on the debate surrounding the definition of "slavery" as it related to the Thirteenth Amendment, the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment was also at issue in *Plessy*. For an overview of the case, see Brook Thomas, ed., *Plessy v. Ferguson: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford, 1997), 11–18, 31–38.

75. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 551. In this argument, Brown followed Justice Joseph Bradley, who wrote the majority opinion in the 1883 *Civil Rights Cases*, which declared unconstitutional the legislation Congress enacted in 1875 to ensure that all citizens could use public accommodations and facilities without fear of discrimination on the basis of race. As Bradley famously put it: "When a man has emerged from slavery, and by the aid of beneficent legislation has shaken off the inseparable concomitants of that state, there must be some stage in the progress of his elevation when he . . . ceases to be the special favorite of the laws, and when his

rights as a citizen, or a man, are to be protected in the ordinary modes by which other men's rights are protected.” *Civil Rights Cases*, 109 U.S. 3, 25 (1883). Though he does not cite this particular passage, Brown expresses a similar desire to mark the end of slavery's legal significance. The idea that laws that discriminated against black Americans constituted “badges of servitude” was articulated by Senator Lyman Trumbull, sponsor of the 1866 Civil Rights Acts. See David Skillen Bogen, *Privileges and Immunities: A Reference Guide to the United States Constitution* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 40.

76. *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 555.

77. *Ibid.*, 562, 560.

78. Brook Thomas contends that it is often left to literature to articulate the way the “actual social conditions” of African Americans are “affected by the heritage of slavery” and thus to make the case for a more expansive sense of “racial servitude” than the law would allow. He cites the works of Albion Tourgée, Charles Chesnutt, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison in outlining this project. I suggest we add Crane to this list. “*Plessy v. Ferguson* and the Literary Imagination,” *Cardozo Studies in Law and Literature* 9, no. 1 (1997): 56.

79. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 5. See also Hartman's discussion of the *Plessy* case in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 191–201.

80. Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 149.

81. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787), in *Writings*, 264–65; Du Bois, *Souls*, 10.

82. Brown, *Material Unconscious*, 208.

83. Schweik, “Disability Politics and American Literary History,” 228.