

## Beyond "Bitches and Hoes": Sexual Violence, Violent Sex, and Sexual Fantasy as Black Masculinist Performance in Richard Wright's "The Man Who Killed a Shadow"

by

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i'm so saddened that being born a girl makes it dangerous to attend midnight mass unescorted. Some places if we're born girls & some one else who's very sick & weak & cruel/ attacks us & breaks our hymen/ we have to be killed/ sent away from our families/ forbidden to touch our children. These strange people who wound little girls are known as attackers, molesters, & rapists. They are known all over the world & are proliferating at a rapid rate. To be born a girl who will always have to worry not only abt the molesters, the attackers & rapists/ but abt their peculiarities/ does he stab too/ or shoot/ does he carry an ax/ does he spit on you/ . . . those subtleties make being a girl too complex/ for some of us & we go crazy/ or never go anyplace.

- *ntozake shange*, "is not so gd to be born a girl" (1978)

He dragged me to my feet, backhanded me toward the bed, and I crawled onto the mattress on my stomach, praying that my nightmare was over. Straddling my buttocks, he continued his knife game, scraping my back, scratching my shoulders and my neck and my thighs with the blade. He laughed when I cried out when he ran the broken tip between my legs. I knew he was going to kill me, because the scratches got deeper and his enjoyment seemed to increase.

- "Personal Narrative of a Rape Victim" (1987)

*Daytona Beach, Florida*. A man who served less than half of a 15-year sentence for raping a woman returned to her house, raped her again and tried to stab her, shouting, "I'm going to kill you for putting me in jail!" police said.

- "Freed Rapist Returns, Tries to Stab Victim" (1999)

TOO MANY MALE HIP-HOP ARTISTS create and project themselves as "real" black men through their ability to talk dirty to and about women. Say it's old age, say it's professional stodginess, but I can't count the times I've suddenly switched my car radio from a popular hip hop tune when driving my twelve-year-old daughter and nine-year-old son either to chorus, art, or taekwondo classes. Not only is the talk dirty - and dirty talk, I imagine, can be quite satisfying in any mutually consensual adult context - this talk is further dirtied by raw images of sexual violence against women. In "Fuck You Tonight" (1997), The Notorious B.I.G. claims that sex with him is "no love makin', strictly *back breakin'*"; and in "One More Chance" (1994) that his penis will "*make [a woman's] kidney's shift*" and "*shatter [her] bladder*"; DMX, in "It's All Good" (1998) insists: "I got the white bitches sayin' 'It's a black thing'/ cause I leave that hoe with no dough/ And *plenty back pain*." The New 2 Live Crew's male persona in "Suck My

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

The *Richard Wright Newsletter* has now been in existence since the spring of 1991, a very respectable track record, we think, for a publication that still operates on a shoestring budget. When we temporarily disappear from public view - as we did recently - it is generally related to our skimpy resources. We always need money, of course, and for that we rely upon our loyal supporters to remember to renew their subscriptions to the *Newsletter* on an annual basis. More importantly, though, we need your ideas, your scholarship, and your notes and reflections about the challenges of teaching Richard Wright in the new millennium. We have a growing backlog of books about Richard Wright and his times that need to be reviewed. We also need your assistance in keeping the legacy of Richard Wright alive through organizing sessions on Wright at academic conferences where we are an allied organization - like the College Language Association and the American Literature Association. We can be a conduit for these efforts, but only with your active assistance.

One final note: the recent spate of tragic fires and mass deaths in night clubs in the United States recalls the April 23, 1940, fire at the Rhythm Club in Natchez, Mississippi - an inferno that left 209 people dead and just 17 survivors - that was the basis of the last novel Wright published during his lifetime, *The Long Dream*. Forty-five years after its publication, this novel certainly deserves scholarly reconsideration.

With this issue we welcome William J. Maxwell to the Advisory Board.

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Dick" (1993) claims his large phallus will "knock [a woman's] voice box loose" and "suffocate . . . a trick bitch." Indeed, associating the inflicting of pain and even death upon a female partner during or as a sexual act seems the source of ultimate pleasure for these black male artists. Connecting sexual violence with black masculinity occurs even in the aggressive language some men use when posturing with other men about heterosexual intimacy: "*knocking her motherfuckin' boots*" (DMX "It's All Good," 1998); "when I *break* you off" ("Pony," 1996); "*whip it, flip it and rub it down*" (Eazy-E "Lickin,' Suckin,' Fuckin'" 1996)); "I was *banging* your home girl you went to school with" and "let me *hit* it" (Tupac "I Get Around," 1993); "My dick was sunk so far in her she said it felt like a *bulldozer barreling her*, squealing about she can't take it anymore in her" (Slick Rick "Adults Only," 1999); "*hitting* them guts" and "fucking 'til that ass gets *busted*" (The New 2 Live Crew "Pussy and Dick Thing," 1993); "*breaking* her off"; "*drilling* your vagina" (Sporty Thievz "Freeks," 1998); "wear[ing] it out" (The Notorious B.I.G. "Nasty Boy," 1997), "*popping* a cherry," or "When I finish with her ass, she won't be able to walk straight."

One of my male students in his early twenties offered the following contributions to this male sexual bravado ritual via violent language: "If it's old enough to bleed, *stab it till you kill it*"; "I'll make a pussy look like bloody raw ham"; "I'd fuck that bitch so hard I'd *knock the eye out* of a pregnant bitch's baby." Even the cover of the May 2001 issue of *Men's Fitness*, with a primarily white male readership, headlines: "Have *Slammin'* Sex the Rest of Your Life," offering health tips inside for aging males desiring to re-capture their youthfulness of "great, compelling, *head-banging* sex" (79). Automatically, this feature article rhetorically connects male physical fitness with aggressively violent heterosexual intimacy: *slammin'* and *head-banging*.

Clearly, the male partner is not the one being slammed or whose head is being banged.

I am certainly not one to pry into others' intimacies when they consensually desire to experience the pleasure/ pain blurring with spanking, slapping, squeezing, twisting, poking, prodding, stinging, pinching, biting, asphyxiating, or other torturing and mutilating. Within the public space of these particular musical performances, however, lies yet another dangerous cultural narrative - lived or imagined - that equates male sexual prowess and performance with domination of and violence against women: "fucking bitches 'til they *assholes bleed*" (Luke with The Notorious B.I.G., "Bust a Nut"); and "I'm hopin' to *slay* you, *rough and painful*, you innocent bitch" (2 Live Crew "The Fuck Shop," 1989). Others make the analogy between male sexual pleasure and violence against women graphically clear:

Swingin' with this here stud, you need practice,  
I'll leave you holdin' *your swollen backside* and  
rollin'

Fillin' all three holes just like bowlin'

...

For demonstrations, watch me slam her,  
You'll notice the sound of *steady poundin'*  
Like a *jackhammer* once on it, . . .

I'm *poundin' ya down until your eyeballs pop out*,

...

Because *you'll leave in a wheelchair*, dear, after I lay  
ya.

Get a grip on your headboard and hold on to it,  
Or get sent right through it.

*Bite your nipples* when I lick 'em.

*Not gentle* when I stick 'em, hum

I'll leave 'em *lookin' like a rape victim*.

...

I'm gonna *stretch your shit more than a gynecologist*.

I'm gonna *twist your ass to death*, miss,

And when you piss, you'll see more stars than an  
astrologist.

(Kool G Rap "Talk Like Sex," 1994; emphasis added)

While some women may request, even prefer this "roughness," few women's voices are occasioned as consensual partners in these



performances. The absence of a female voice or narrative response does not prevent N.W.A. from insisting that real black men are just fulfilling a woman's fantasy by raping her: "And if you got a gang of niggahs, the bitch would *let you rape her/* She likes suckin' on dicks, and lickin' up nuts/ And they even *take de broomstick up the butt*" ("She Swallowed It," 1991). The real physical, emotional, and psychological trauma of rape for any victim, male or female, is absent from this narrative altogether. When white New York police brutally sodomized Haitian immigrant Abner Louima in 1997, not one account I've come across cites the victim's "pleasure" at such violent personal invasion.

Males' masculinist associations of deriving pleasure whether fantasized or realized from inflicting pain upon women is certainly not unique to black male hip hopsters. Undoubtedly, this cultural script for alleged manly behavior emulates white patriarchal power over people of color and women who historically could be controlled either by direct violence or by public threats of violence. Consider that Peter Gabriel wants to be a woman's "sledgehammer" and a "steam train," both phallic symbols of violent force and aggression ("Sledgehammer," 1986), and that Wang Chung, in "Dance Hall Days" (1997), advocates: "Take your baby by the hair/ and pull her close and there, there, there. Take your baby by the ears/ and play upon her darkest fears." Such masculinist performances of power and authority are evidenced even in nineteenth-century slave narratives, when white masters, for example, potentially derived sexual pleasure during the whippings of naked black female slaves. The rhetoric of some narratives recreates the act of intercourse rhythmically while using images of extreme violence. For instance, Mary Prince, in her narrative *The History of Mary Price, A West Indian Slave* (1831), details a beating she received from her master after breaking a cherished vase. The beating is rhythmically likened to a man's sexual performance:

He tied me upon a ladder, and gave me a hundred lashes with his own hand . . . When he had *licked me* for some time he sat down to take a breath; then after resting, he *beat me again and again*, until he was quite wearied, and so hot (for the weather was very sultry), that *he sank back in his chair, almost to faint.* (8; emphasis added)

Although the mistress also beats the naked Prince, only the master's beating rhetorically links the master's sexual pleasure with Prince's physical torture. As well, Frederick Douglass, in his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), lingers sensually in the moment of re-creating his witness of the jealous master's beating a bare-breasted Aunt Hester:

[Mr. Plummer] was a cruel man, *hardened* by a long life of slaveholding. He would at times seem to take *great pleasure in whipping a slave.* I have often been awakened at the dawn of day by the most *heart-rending shrieks* of an own aunt of mine, whom he used to tie up to a joist, and whip upon her naked back till she was literally covered with blood. No words, no tears, no prayers, from his gory victim, seemed to move his heart from its bloody purpose. *The louder she screamed, the harder he whipped;* and where the blood ran fastest, there he whipped longest. He would whip her to make her scream, and whip her to make her hush; and not until overcome by fatigue, would he cease to *swing the blood-clotted cow skin.* (Mack 652; emphasis added)

Full of phallic imagery and aural parallels with consensual sexual play, the passage presents Douglass as a participatory observer, either as a child witnessing and/ or an adult recreating the moments of his aunt's intense pain and suffering, of his master's and, by extension, his own sexual pleasure. Reiterates Deborah E. McDowell in her essay, "In the First Place: Making Frederick Douglass and the Afro-American Narrative Tradition,"



If, as Douglass observes, the slave master derives pleasure from the repeated act of whipping [female slaves], could Douglass, as observer, derive a vicarious pleasure from the repeated narration of the act? . . . Douglass's repetition of the sexualized scene of whipping projects him into a voyeuristic relation to the violence against slave women, which he watches, and thus he enters into a symbolic complicity with the sexual crime he witnesses. (51)

Similarly, a white male persona romanticizes antebellum master/ slave relations in The Rolling Stones's "Brown Sugar" (1971), displaying an autoerotic voyeurism when he hears a "scarred old slaver knows he's doing alright. Hear him *whip* the women just around midnight" (emphasis added).

THE PECULIAR CONDITIONS of American race relations have spawned myths and folklore that intertwine race, gender, sexuality and violence. Richard Wright's "The Man Who Killed a Shadow," in his collection *Eight Men* (1940), complicates this interconnectedness of sexuality, violence, gender, and race, showing that for the central character, Saul Saunders, myth and reality are one and the same. Although he is married presumably to a black woman, he can define ultimate black manhood only through a violent pseudo sexual attack upon a white female. Wright demonstrates in Saul's story a soul lost in the mire of all-consuming American racism.

Scholars who attend Wright's story appropriately look at some of its folkloric qualities. For instance, Eugene E. Miller, in "Folkloric Aspects of Wright's 'The Man Who Killed a Shadow,'" claims that the story "is not a folktale" but derives from "the folk mode, developed according to expectations traditional in both form and content to black American folklore" (222), citing the story's structural model as "the tale of the old maid, the master's sister" (221). Miller believes

that the reality of violence against black men because of alleged violations of white female purity provokes Saul's (re)actions. Indeed, the 1923 Rosewood (Florida) tragedy as well as the 1930s trial of the nine Scottsboro (Alabama) boys accused of raping two white women remind us of the senseless destruction caused by white women who recognize their power to manipulate white men's behavior through false claims of being sexually violated by black men. Earle V. Bryant, in "The Sexualization of Racism in Richard Wright's 'The Man Who Killed a Shadow,'" joins Miller in blaming a white woman for a black man's violent actions, perpetuating myths that white women actually want to be ravaged by violent and sexually aggressive black men, and that black men can not control themselves sexually if tempted by the forbidden white female fruit. Joseph A. Barry, in his head note for the story in *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America* (1968), contends that the black male's fate in Wright's story is controlled by "the fantasies of some white people [i.e., this white woman] about sex [with black people, here a black man]" (226). Barry's emphasis is faultily on the relatively silent white woman than rightfully on the story's black male narrator. In his chapter, "The Negro and Psychopathology," Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), further insists that white women fantasize about the sexually violent and aggressive black man, calling this phenomenon the white woman's "A Negro Is Raping Me" fantasy:

First the little [white] girl sees a sibling rival beaten by the father, a libidinal aggressive. At this stage (between the ages of five and nine), the father, who is now the pole of her libido, refuses in a way to take up the aggression that the little girl's unconscious demands of him. At this point, lacking support, this free-floating aggression requires an investment. Since the girl is at the age in which the child begins to enter the folklore and the culture along the roads that we know, the Negro becomes the predestined depository of this aggression. If we go farther in to

the labyrinth, we discover that when a [white] woman lives the fantasy of rape by a Negro, it is in some way the fulfillment of a private dream, of an inner wish. Accomplishing the phenomenon of turning against self, it is the woman who rapes herself. We find clear proof of this in the fact that it is commonplace for women, during the sexual act, to cry to their partners: "Hurt me!" They are merely expressing this idea: Hurt me as I would hurt me if I were in your place. The fantasy of rape by a Negro is a variation on this emotion: "I wish the Negro would rip me open as I would have ripped a woman open." (179)

Fanon obviously confuses the aggression of mutually consensual sexual intimacy with aggressive sexual assault. Yet this same attitude prevails among those who see Wright's story as another instance of a white woman consciously manipulating a black man because of the racial and gender-specific sexual myths that have created them both. Yoshinobu Hakutani, in *Richard Wright and Racial Discourse* (1996), maintains that Saul's murderous actions are self-preserving, that Saul is again victimized by "a white seductress, a sexually starved white woman, a temptress who falsely 'cries rape'" (237). Surely, Wright's story is less about Saul's victimization by a white female than by his warped initiation into manhood through sexual violence, violent sex, and sexual fantasy. Saul's psychological confusion about the violent act he commits reiterates his dangerous social perpetuation of the myth of the black male rapist, a myth that prescribes real or imagined intimacy with a white woman - in its myriad forms and possibilities - as a definitive performance of black masculinity.

While it is easier for some than others to blame the female victim, as is too often the case in actual rape situations - Did you smile at him? Did you wear something too revealing? Did you kiss him with open mouth? Did you communicate your attraction to him? Did you invite him to escort you home or to your car? - blaming the female victim for a male's actions, regardless of

race, occurs in early critics' responses to Saul's plight. David Bakish, in *Richard Wright* (1973), maintains that "Saul is teased by a sexually appealing white woman" (60), suggesting that her attractiveness to Saul provokes his uncontrollable violence against her. Marian E. Musgrave, in "Triangles in Black and White: Interracial Sex and Hostility in Black Literature" (1971) affords a lengthy and albeit weak "justification" for Saul's actions with the white librarian:

The sex-starved old maid librarian does not see that Saul is just a teenaged boy. She perceives only blackness and maleness; according to the stereotype, therefore, he should lust after her. She does not recognize her projection, her lust for him-or perhaps not for him but simply her dues as a woman . . . [T]he white woman . . . expects the black man to free her somehow from rigidity, frigidity, and ingrown virginity, an expectation doomed beforehand to frustration since she is not really seeing the particular black man before her, but only her mental image of what a Black must be. This error often leads to violence and death in Wright's works, even without overt sex, as in "The Man Who Killed a Shadow." (449-450)

Musgrave offers no evidence of the white woman's provocations beyond what Saul tells us. Instead, she speculates on the white woman's thoughts and raises no questions about Saul's credibility as a witness to the unfolding events. Even if Saul had not "killed" the white librarian, she is no more responsible for his actions than the cultural mythologies that seduce Saul from fearful to fearless. If in fact the white librarian calls Saul a "black nigger," as he would have us believe, her alleged name-calling and "sexual appeal" do not justify his actions. If we accept that the actions of this white woman are part of Saul's inner personal and psychological race and gender drama, a drama based on and directed by cultural myths that create black men as brute rapists in pursuit of white female virgins-the basis of D.W. Griffith's infamous *Birth of a Nation* (1915), which justified violence against

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alleged black male brutes pursuing young white female virgins-then Saul is acting out, not necessarily challenging what has historically become a black man's greatest racial fear: being accused of violating white racial purity. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, in *Lynching in the New South, Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (1993), clarifies:

The belief that black men posed a ubiquitous threat to white women, however irrational, rested on the assumption that the southern racial hierarchy depended on the prohibition of sexual access of black men to white women. . . . Even more threatening, black men, driven by an uncontrollable attraction to white women, who personified a purity and civilization beyond either experience or reach, were moved 'to gratify their lust at any cost and in spite of every obstacle.' Because sexual relations, let alone sexual attacks on white women, could not be separated from contemporary attitudes that bound sexuality, gender, and power, violations of the racial barrier in sexual relations were blows against the very foundations of society and, in the eyes of whites [particularly white men], were the most abhorrent of all crimes. (59)

Indeed, Saul's perpetual state of psychological and racial paranoia throughout the first sections of the narrative - "sweatin' like a nigger at a white woman's funeral" ("Capital Punishment in America" 1992) - is mixed with a compelling curiosity about and subsequent playing into the sexualized racial mythologies about which he had been warned as a child: "if you were alone with a white woman and she screamed, it was as good as hearing your death sentence, for, though you had done nothing, you would be killed" (Wright 159). Saul has been nurtured on myths about southern black-white race relations. Hence, this individual woman has little power over Saul. The mysterious power attributed to the white librarian who allegedly "forces [Saul] to notice her," according to Trudier Harris, in *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (1984), symbolizes the power and allure of invading forbidden

whiteness. While she may control Saul's awareness of her presence, she can in no way "force him to acquiesce in seducing her" (51; emphasis added). Saul is a free agent with the ability to resist rather than flirt with temptation. His community's efforts to educate him in what Richard Wright terms "the ethics of living Jim Crow" - not looking lustfully upon or publicly acting out an intimate attraction to a white woman-become for Saul the greatest commandment for a young black male's survival. Contrastly, in Saul's mind, being a young black male alone with a white woman screaming - for whatever reason - motivates his dangerous foray into black manhood.

That Saul is inebriated during most of the narrative action of the story is one of the first clues that the details he offers the reader are suspect. Rarely is he sober of mind but rather is drunk on alcohol and equally drunk with an intense fear and sexual curiosity: "When he took a drink of whisky, he found that it helped to banish the shadows, lessened his tensions, made the world more reasonably three-dimensional, and he grew to like drinking . . . He felt that whisky made life complete, that it stimulated him" (159). Wright's use of "growing" and "stimulated" signals Saul's lustful stirrings growing from the sexual possibilities he imagines with the racially forbidden and dangerous. The whisky blurs lines between the real and imagined for Saul and emboldens him to assume the role cast by a cultural script specifically outlined by America's peculiar history of violent racial and sexual relations.

Because Saul is totally absorbed in his own fantasy of black manhood in relation to white society - "the white world . . . surrounded the black island of his life" (Wright 158) - his feelings of lust, uneasiness (157), uncertainty, fear (157, 159, 161, 163, 165) and anger (161, 163) at his own perceived powerlessness are manifested in his aggressive gestures toward the white librarian. Ironically, the personal dangers of the lived past of black men castrated and



lynched because of perceived or real intimacies with white women in American history excite him physically and emotionally, so much that he is unable to separate his scripted role as a black male from the librarian's equally scripted role as the sought after white virgin. In the drama of his mind's stage, Saul directs the librarian's actions, gestures, and writes her lines. According to his direction and selective and creative memory, the white female librarian stares at him, calls him a nigger, spreads her legs invitingly, and speaks in code when she requests that he, the library's janitor, "sweep under her desk" (162). There is no ambiguity in who's staring at whom when Saul admits in his recollection of the tragic/celebratory sequence of events that he could not resist staring at the white woman: "Many times, however, he would pause in his work, feeling that his eyes were being drawn to her and he would turn around and find her staring at him . . . One morning while sweeping the floor he felt his eyes being drawn toward her and he paused and turned and saw her staring at him" (161). Saul would have us believe that the "tiny, blonde, blue-eyed [white woman], weighing about 110 pounds, and standing about five feet three inches" (161) - evidence of Saul's detailed studying of the white woman's physicality - was the curious aggressor. And just as Ice Cube in "Cave Bitch" (1993) speculates about the circumstances of Emmett Till's fatal flaw inside the Bryants' store in Money, Mississippi in 1954 - that "the bitch probably threw it [her sexual curiosity about black men] in his face/ Southern belle ain't nothing but a trick/ nasty as hell, stinky little cave bitch" - Saul insists that the white woman "always stared at him" (162). Importantly, he also admits his inability to resist her alleged flirtations:

He went and stood before her and his mind protested against what his eyes saw, and then his senses leaped in wonder. She was sitting with her knees sprawled apart and her dress halfway up her legs. He looked from her round blue eyes to her white legs whose thighs thickened as they went to a V clothes in tight,

sheer, panties; then he looked quickly again into her eyes. Her face was a beet red, but she sat very still, rigid, as though she was being impelled into an act, which she did not want to perform but was being driven to perform. (163)

Saul's credibility with the reading audience is lost not only because he admits being so intoxicated that "he blotted out almost everything from his consciousness" (162) but also when his own words describing the white woman's alleged behavior are punctuated with penile penetration imagery: "thickened," "tight," "beet red," "rigid," "impelled." His aroused sexual energy consciously turns to violence when he recognizes that he is being sexually controlled by his desires for the white woman: "Her legs were still spread wide and she was sitting as though about to spring upon him and throw her naked thighs about his body" (Wright 163). Even if this woman were sitting with her legs apart, or as Anne O. Cauley, in "A Definition of Freedom in the Fiction of Richard Wright," claims, "boldly exhibit[ing] her bare legs to him and then scream[ing] when he fulfill[ed] her warped premonition that he [would] gaze at them" (331) - we have no reason to believe that her sitting position consciously or unconsciously invites his aggressive assaults. His courage to explore the forbidden drives his actions as he admits feeling "overwhelmed by a sense of wild danger" (163). Hence, slapping the white female becomes for him a kind of sexual foreplay, followed by swinging blows to her head with a heavy piece of wood, a substitute for his own penis, with jagged, sharp edges (164).

The woman's subsequent screaming immediately thrusts him into an active sexual encounter where the woman's screams signal in his confused mind her alleged intense pleasure at his sexual performance. As he bludgeons the woman to death-motions that parallel the penetrations of a thrusting phallus in both rape and consensual intimacy-we witness Saul's psychological drama as his first real sexual encounter with a white

woman: "hotness bubbling in him and urging him to do something"; he was "wild and hot inside"; "he stiffened"; "knife in his pocket"; "plunged it deep." His illusion of his own black manhood is intensified by his presumption of the white woman's sexual purity. Images of a female's lost virginity - in this case clearly from rape - prevail in his recounting:

He dragged her again and her dress came up over her knees to her chest and again he saw her pink panties. It was too hard dragging her and he lifted her in his arms and while carrying her down the short flight of steps he thought that the pink panties, if he would wet them, would make a good mop to clean up the blood. Once more he sat her against the wall, stripped her of her pink panties - and not once did he so much as glance at her groin - wetted them and swabbed up the spots .... She was in full view, easily seen. He tossed the wet ball of panties in after her. (166)

Sexual violence and black male sexual fantasy become one for Saul, re-creating in his mind this encounter as a kind of gentle romance: he tried "not to hurt her, not to kill her" (164). Note that his narrative recounting which constitutes most of the story is importantly sprinkled with the language of suspicion and uncertainty: "she was sitting *as though* about to spring upon him" (163; emphasis added); "He was not certain" (165); "He could not be sure" (167). Saul's total unreality about his violent actions is confirmed in the sobering moments after the bloody encounter: "He could not remember what he had done. Then the vague, shadowlike picture of it came before his eyes. He was puzzled, and for a moment he wondered if it had happened or had someone told him a story of it" (166-167). Hence, when he is arrested for the murder of the librarian, he is convinced that "the woman was screaming *as though* he had raped her" (164; emphasis added) when in fact he has not actually touched her sexually.

IF SAUL CAN CONVINCE himself and us that he did not rape this woman, it becomes equally disturbing that some hip hopsters see nothing problematic in glorifying violence against women as masculinist performance: "*fucking bitches 'til they assholes bleed*," says Luke with The Notorious B.I.G. in "Bust a Nut"; "*crushing pussy*" and "*guaranteed to fuck her till her nose bleed*," says The Notorious B.I.G. in "One More Chance" (1994); and "*hijack[ing] the pussy from the back and dismantl[ing] it*," says Geto Boys in "This Dick's for You" (1993). A 2 Live Crew male boasts that his personified "Dick Almighty" will "*kill that pussy*" and "*tear the pussy open causing satisfaction*; the bitch won't leave; it's *fatal attraction*" (2000), and that a woman's father will be "disgusted" when "*he sees [his daughter's] pussy busted*" ("Me So Horny," 1989) while Keith Sweat brags that he will "*leave [a black woman's] cherry all split up*" ("Nobody Can Freak You," 1997). Not only does the male in The New 2 Live Crew claim he will "*pump [his dick] up [a woman's] windpipe*," but he also recounts a previous sexual encounter where he was "*killing this hoe, just laying that pipe*" ("Suck My Dick," 1993). Sticks and stones are not the only weapons that wound, maim, and mutilate. If these sentiments can be articulated, they can be imagined. If they can be imagined, they can be realized.

At some point, argues Nathan McCall, commenting to *Newsweek's* John Leland in "Criminal Records: Gangsta Rap and the Culture of Violence," "We need to acknowledge that there are obviously some correlations between the constant, negative, violent messages that are being put out in [some] rap and the violence that exists out in the real world" (64). No, Saul did not "touch" the white woman - "On examination of the genital organs there was no evidence of contusion, abrasion, or trauma, and the decedent's hymen was intact" (Wright 170) - yet he thinks he has "killed" a shadow. But has he? His initiation into true black manhood via a white woman rather than through his presumed

intimacies with his black wife resurrects what Angela Davis recognizes as “timeworn racist myth of the black rapist” (259) - “one of the many ways in which racism nourishes sexism, causing white women to be indirectly victimized” (256) by white patriarchy. Having played his role according to racist cultural script, Saul can now live happily ever after in the psychological world created for and by sexualized racial mythologies larger than Saul and the white female librarian. And if we can dismiss and excuse Saul because he did not sexually violate the dead librarian, it becomes easy still to dismiss those hip hopsters’ rhetorical boasts of sexual violence against women as inconsequential empty words or meaningless performances. Can we so comfortably conclude that such aggressive movements toward black manhood artistically or physically as does Ice T when he dismisses some black male artists’ accountability for their creations and actions: “Violence, sex and ostentatious excess have always entertained people; it’s food of human beings, whether or not it provides much spiritual nourishment” (Leland 67)? Although there are limited instances wherein women willingly participate in these public performances of violent sexual aggression against women - Trina, Shawna, and Foxy Brown insist that they want a real man who can “knock the booty” and “bang my ass” in Ludicris’s “What’s Your Fantasy?” (2000), and a female voice in QB’s Finest’s “Oochie, Wally” (2000) wants a “thug and gangsta type . . . who really really trie[s] to hurt me” - the violated women in the male fantasies of too many hip hopsters are as voiceless as Wright’s dying then dead white librarian. All of these women are unable to defend themselves from the violent sexual assaults of those males in pursuit of and actively perpetuating this demonstration of twisted masculinist power:

So fellows, next time they try to tell a lie  
That they never suck a dick.  
Punch the bitch in the eye

And then the hoe will fall to the ground.  
Then you’ll open up her mouth,  
Put your dick in and move the shit around  
And she’ll catch on and start doing’ it on the raw  
Acting like she’s trying to suck the meat off a  
chicken bone.

N.W.A. “She Swallowed It” (1991)

While these males boast of what they will and can do to women in the name of sexually pleasuring themselves and their women - “Gut from the front and grind from the side and fuck from behind and grab her hair, slap her ass. She screaming like she dyin’ . . . I’ll beat that pussy up. . . beat that pussy up real quick then send home the bitch” (“Oochie Wally”) - Saul can only define himself as a real black man by physically violating a white woman in this pseudo-sexual act of aggression. And just as rape is not about sexuality but about demonstrating a male’s power to make a woman powerless, Saul’s manhood rings hollow as he sits behind jail walls nursing his illusions about himself and his place in the world.

Reminiscent of W.E.B. DuBois’s poetic use of the Veil and shadow images to concretize racism and the clearly defined boundaries of America’s black/ white color line in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Wright presents through Saul a dramatization of self-destructive, racially and gender-specific double consciousness, “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (215). Since Saul can only see himself as weak and ineffectual in a racist patriarchal society that equates black manhood with fear and powerlessness, Wright suggests in his story’s title that if Saul is to “kill” a shadow, he must singe from his mind his negative self-perceptions. He must extinguish the light of racial inferiority that creates the illusion of all-consuming white omnipotence. In the fairytale world of Saul’s spiritual reality signaled through Wright’s romantic rhetoric - “it all began long ago” and “so, from the beginning” (157); “one day” and



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"but one morning" (160, 161) - Saul is fully capable of but ultimately unwilling to forfeit his role as the displaced young prince searching for manhood in a racist society bent on destroying his very existence.

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