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Black Studies

In the Wake

CHRISTINA SHARPE

How can we marry our thought so that we can now pose the questions whose answers can resolve the plight of the Jobless archipelagoes, the N.H.I. categories, and the environment?

—Sylvia Wynter, “No Humans Involved”¹

You see, it’s not just an intellectual struggle. You could call it a psycho-intellectual struggle. Then you could understand why in the ‘60s it wasn’t just a call for Black Studies; it was a call for Black Aesthetics, it was a call for Black Art(s), it was a call for Black Power. It was an understanding that, as Lewis Gordon has been the first to keep insisting, we live in an anti-Black world—a systemically anti-Black world; and, therefore, whites are not [simply] “racists.” They too live in the same world in which we live. The truth that structures their minds, their “consciousness,” structures ours. SO THE GREAT BATTLE NOW IS GOING TO BE AGAINST “THE TRUTH.”

—Sylvia Wynter, *Proud/Flesh*²

Defend the dead.

—M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong!*³

To call this essay Black Studies: In the Wake⁴ is not to announce that black studies is dead or to call for its memorialization. Black Studies: In the Wake is, among other things, a staking out of the need for the rereading, reinvigoration, and reengagement with the work of black studies and a recognition of

the many ways that that work is being done. Black studies in the wake is a renewed call for black studies to be at the intellectual work of a continued reckoning the longue durée of Atlantic chattel slavery, with black fungibility, antiblackness, and the gratuitous violence that structures black being, of accounting for the narrative, historical, structural, and other positions black people are forced to occupy.⁵ Black Studies: In the Wake is both the project that I am currently working on and a call for, and recognition of, black studies’ continued imagining of the unimaginable: its continued theorizing from the “position of the unthought.”⁶ To frame this call for a black studies in the wake as a problem for black studies, I take up M. NourbeSe Philip’s call in *Zong!* 15 “to defend the dead.” How do we who are doing work in black studies tend to, care

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for, comfort, and defend the dead, the dying, and those living lives consigned, in aftermath of legal chattel slavery, to death that is always-imminent and immanent?⁷ How might theorizing black studies in the wake—and black being in the wake—as conscious modes of inhabitation of that imminence and immanence (revealed every day in multiple quotidian ways) ground our work as we map relations between the past and present, map the ways that the past haunts the present? The existence of black studies as an object of study does not ameliorate the quotidian experiences of terror in black lives lived in an anti-black world.⁸ To do that, I argue that we must be about the work of what I am calling “wake work.” Wakes are processes; through them we think about the dead and about our relations to them; they are rituals through which to enact grief and memory. Wakes allow those among the living to mourn the passing of the dead through ritual; they are the watching of relatives and friends beside the body of the deceased from death to burial and the accompanying drinking, feasting, and other observances; a watching practiced as a religious observance. But wakes are also “the track left on the water’s surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming, or one that is moved, in water; the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow; in the line of sight of (an observed object); and (something) in the line of recoil of (a gun);”⁹ finally, wake also means being awake and, most importantly, consciousness. Living in the wake as people of African descent means living what Saidiya Hartman identifies as the both the “time of slavery” and the “afterlife of slavery,” in which “black

lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.”¹⁰ A black studies in the wake would inhabit this knowledge as the ground from which we theorize; would work from the positions of knowledge and belief of the existence of what Wynter terms “rules which govern the ways in which humans can and do know the social reality of which they are always already socialized subjects” (Wynter 1994, 68).

“No Humans Involved”

We must now undo their narratively condemned status.

—Sylvia Wynter, “No Humans Involved”

In 1992, in the wake of a Simi Valley jury that had no black jurors on it, retuning a not guilty verdict for the four white officers on trial for the beating of Rodney King, Sylvia Wynter wrote an open letter to her colleagues at Stanford University. Published in abbreviated form in 1992 and in its entirety in 1994, “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues”¹¹ again centers Wynter’s unflinching unmasking of “classificatory schemas,” the ordering of Euro-Western knowledge, and the “present conception of the human being” as “Man.”¹² “No Humans Involved” issues a renewed call that is redoubled by its publication alongside her “A Black Studies Manifesto,” that the work of black studies requires a full

recognition that we live in a “systemically anti-Black world . . . and, therefore, whites are not [simply] ‘racists.’ They too live in the same world in which we live. The truth that structures their minds, their ‘consciousness,’ structures ours” (Wynter 2006, 7).

“Where,” writes Wynter in “No Humans Involved,” “did this classification system come from?” that produces an acronym N. H. I.,¹³ one that comes to be “used routinely” by the Los Angeles Police Department and by “public officials of the judicial system of Los Angeles” to malign young black men, in particular those young, black men [and women] who read as jobless or lower class within dominant epistemologies, with *the* indicator of non-humanity? (Wynter 1994, 42). “Why,” she continues, “should the classifying acronym N. H. I., with its reflex anti-Black male behaviour-prescriptions, have been so actively held and deployed by the judicial officers of Los Angeles, and therefore by ‘the brightest and the best’ graduates of both the professional and nonprofessional schools of the university system of the United States? By those whom we ourselves would have educated?” (Wynter 1994, 43). Such death-dealing episteme continue to be produced in “think tanks” and in the university, by teachers, lecturers, researchers, and scholars, and then reproduced by the students who have been educated in the classrooms and institutions where we labor, sometimes in black (or Africana) studies departments and programs.

What is to be the task of black studies in the university now in producing knowledge of our realities as the twenty-first century nears the middle of its second decade—twenty years after the full publication of “No

Humans Involved” and “A Black Studies Manifesto”? In the anti-black “post-racial” social reality animated and subtended by a black US president, non-humans weaponize sidewalks; shoot ourselves while handcuffed in the back of police cars; are brutally murdered while asking for help; incarcerated, assaulted, and stopped and frisked for walking, driving, and breathing while black.¹⁴ What will be the work of black studies now to defend those who are subject to such overwhelming and gratuitous, narrative and actual, discursive and material death? To do what I am calling wake work would necessitate a turn away from juridical, philosophical, historical, or other disciplinary solutions to blackness’s ongoing abjection toward a black studies through and in the wake that would activate those multiple meanings of wake and inhabit them, live them, as blackened consciousness.¹⁵

In theorizing the black everyday in the wake of the slave ship and the hold, we would recognize their continued existence; recognize “the ways that we are constituted through and by vulnerability to overwhelming force though not only known to ourselves and to each other by that force.”¹⁶ To occupy the wake in all of its meanings as consciousness demands, for example, that we know we are positioned in the world by an order of knowledge that produces and enforces links, discursive and material, between the womb and the tomb in order to represent black maternity and therefore black childhood or youth as condemning one to a life of violence; condemning one to black life lived in/as proximity to knowledge of death. What, for example, is the status of those young black and blackened people

swept up and gathered under the sign of “urban youth?” Do we understand the phrase “urban youth” and its constitutive parts to be a representational, a geographical, or an ontological category? What additional forms of disregard are activated through a black embrace of a naming that comes out of the same anti-black conjuring as “welfare queens” and “crack babies”?¹⁷ A “condemnation of blackness” (to borrow Khalil Gibran Muhammed’s apt phrase) taken, now, as so much “common sense” and traceable back to slavery’s law of *partus sequitur ventrem* that established that the children of a slavewoman inherited the mother’s condition. The mother’s condition (her non/status) reappears in the present in the ways that all black people, regardless of sex/gender, but especially the young and poor and working class have become in the United States (and not only in the United States) the symbols of the less-than-Human being condemned to death.

“Cradle to Grave”: The Afterlives of Partus Sequitur Ventrem

The function of the curriculum is to structure what we call “consciousness,” and therefore certain behaviors and attitudes.

Sylvia Wynter, Proud/Flesh
Interview with Sylvia Wynter

The researchers concluded that the present work finds that people assume that, relative to whites, blacks feel less pain because they have faced more hardship. . . . Because they are believed to be less sensitive to pain, black people are forced to endure more pain.¹⁸

On February 6, 2013, the education section of the *New York Times* published an article titled “A Hospital Offers a Grisly Lesson on Gun Violence.” The article begins, “In a darkened classroom, 15 eighth graders gasped as a photograph appeared on the screen in front of them. It showed a dead man whose jaw had been destroyed by a shotgun blast, leaving the lower half of his face a shapeless, bloody mess.”¹⁹ The fifteen eighth graders present on this particular day are middle school students, largely black, and they are participants in a program at Temple University Hospital in North Philadelphia called “Cradle to Grave.” Do we understand “cradle to grave” as a command or as a description of black life? Likewise, “participant” can be the correct word to describe the children in attendance only if we hear and feel in it Frederick Douglass’s description of himself as “witness and participant” to his Aunt Hester’s beating, his knowledge that that is also his fate, his certainty that his entrance through slavery’s violent “blood-stained gate” is imminent. We read that Cradle to Grave “brings in youths from across Philadelphia in the hope that an unflinching look at the effects that guns have in their community will deter young people from reaching for a gun to settle personal scores, and will help them recognize that gun violence is not the glamorous business sometimes depicted in television shows and rap music” (Hurdle n. p.). In other words, Cradle to Grave exposes children, many of whom are already experiencing trauma from material, lived violence, to photos and reenactments of graphic violence as a deterrent to more violence. We read, “As the 13- and 14-year-olds gathered around a gurney on

a recent visit, Mr. Charles told the story of Lamont Adams, 16, who died at the hospital after being shot 14 times by another boy" (Hurdle, n. p.). Charles, who is the hospital's trauma outreach coordinator, says that in the program's seven-and-a-half-year history, no parent has ever complained that their child was shown these images. Charles's statement, however, does less to reassure readers of the correctness or appropriateness of the program than it does to portray childhood while poor and black as abandonment. I would wager that those same doctors and administrators would not want their early teenaged son or daughter exposed to such graphic violence. I would wager that they would not consider it simply an "education" for their children to be positioned facedown on an empty body bag and tagged with orange dots to mark each of the twenty-four points of entry and exit for the bullets that struck, and eventually killed, sixteen-year-old Lamont Adams.

In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*, Saidiya Hartman writes that "nineteenth-century observers" of a coffle of enslaved people described that coffle (in its formation and its movement/passage) as "a domestic middle passage."²⁰ In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Hortense Spillers writes that slavery transformed the black woman, she "became the principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world," and that Africans packed into the slave hold of the ship were marked according to Euro-Western definitions not as male and female but as differently sized and weighted property. "Under these conditions," she writes,

"we lose at least *gender difference in the outcome* and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver not at all gender-related, gender-specific" (Spillers 206).

Reading together the middle passage, the coffle, and, I argue, the birth canal, we see how each has functioned separately and collectively over time to disfigure black maternity, to turn the womb into a factory (producing blackness as abjection much like the slave ship's hold and the prison), and turning the birth canal into another domestic middle passage with black mothers, after the end of legal hypodescent, still ushering their children into her condition; her non-status, her non-being-ness. By way of confirming this, we need look no farther than our Twitter time lines, the news, or to the series of anti-abortion websites and billboard ads by groups like "Life Always" (the now defunct thatsabortion.com) that feature images of pregnant black women or black children and text that reads, "The most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb."²¹ Despite an alarming lack of access to prenatal care,²² the most dangerous place for an African American (for US blacks and blacks in the United States) is not in the womb. The many dangers faced by black people, children or not, increase exponentially once one emerges from that passage, once one is birthed by and from a black woman. Womb to tomb all over again.

In December 2013, the *New York Times* ran a feature called "Invisible Child: Dasani's Homeless Life in the Shadows." As it stands, the series is as much an exposé of Dasani Coates's inheritance of a life of precarity because of the bad choices of a parent

(primarily her mother) as it is of the massive and systemic failures of programs set up to address poverty and homelessness. The feature focused on Dasani,²³ an eleven- and then twelve-year-old black girl child, and her family (seven siblings and two parents) who live in one of New York City's family shelters.²⁴ In Part 1 of the series, readers are introduced to Dasani at home and as she makes her way to the Susan S. McKinney Secondary School of the Arts—a school whose already tight space, we read, may be made even tighter with its impending displacement from its third-floor performance spaces by an unwanted and contested charter school.

Once the narrative brings us into the school, we are introduced to Ms. Holmes, the principal of the McKinney School, who is described as a formidable woman. A “towering woman, by turns steely and soft,” Ms. Holmes “wears a Bluetooth like a permanent earring and tends toward power suits. She has been at McKinney’s helm for fifteen years and runs the school like a naval ship, peering down its gleaming hallways as if searching the seas for enemy vessels. . . . She leaves her office door permanently open, like a giant, unblinking eye” (Elliott n. p.). Both the woman and the school-ship are described as sanctuaries and sites of surveillance.²⁵ Dasani’s homeroom has “inspirational words” like, “success does not come without sacrifice” (Elliott n. p.). But who and what are to be sacrificed for such “success[es]” and on whose and what terms? Reading that Ms. Holmes suspends Dasani for a week for fighting, we are to understand that for Dasani, “To be suspended is to be truly homeless” (Elliott n. p.). Maritime and

martial metaphors like ships, success, struggle, sacrifice, and surveillance activate this narrative of precarity about Dasani Coates.

Hers is also a narrative of instruction. That is, not only does the “Invisible Child” series feature the education of Dasani but it is, itself, featured in the *Times* education section, as the series becomes part of a larger curriculum as a narrative of individual resilience, and overcoming. A “Teaching and Learning with the *New York Times*” subtended by the traumatizing and retraumatizing of black children for the education of others. Cradle to grave in the hands of the state that needs their death over and over again; traumatized children being forced to endure more trauma; children in pain being subjected to more pain.²⁶ And while we are told that McKinney functions as a ship *in* the storm for Dasani, we must still acknowledge the ship as the storm. How can the very system that is designed to unmake and inscribe her also be the one to save her?

Responding to a new wave of criticism (initiated by Elliott’s article) that during his three terms as mayor, New York City’s rates of homelessness, particularly among families and young people, climbed higher than they had been in decades, outgoing Mayor Michael Bloomberg denies that the problems are systemic. “This kid [Dasani] was dealt a bad hand,” Bloomberg said. “I don’t know quite why. That’s just the way God works. Sometimes some of us are lucky and some of us are not.”²⁷ On January 1, 2014, *The Guardian* published a “Comment is Free” written by a young black man identified by a photograph and the first name William.²⁸ William, who is seventeen and a junior in high school, identifies himself

as one of the 22,000 homeless children in New York City, and he speaks to the tremendous difficulties he has faced in and out of school because of the material and psychic tolls of chronic homeless. Framed as a direct response to Andrea Elliott's *New York Times* profile of Dasani and also to Bloomberg's comments, William outlines a series of failures when he writes, "I don't think I was dealt a bad hand in life, but I think I was passed a bad hand from my mother. But it's OK because she also slid an ace down my wrist and told me to save it. She is the ace. As long as she's there, no matter how terrible my hand is, we make it through"²⁹ (William, n. p.). William, like Bloomberg, bypasses a structural critique of poverty and makes use of Bloomberg's language of the bad hand. But, William insists that this bad hand was not dealt to him directly (or, by extension, to Dasani). In other words, he wasn't in the game; he didn't make that choice, the hand was passed to him by his mother, who also slipped him "an ace" (in her continued presence, her continued support). Put another way, William lays both the fault of needing knowledge of/for survival and the acquisition of that knowledge for survival squarely at his mother's feet.

To return briefly to Philadelphia and Temple University Hospital's Cradle to Grave program, as the students hear about Lamont Adams's horrible death, Mr. Charles says: "The wounds he finds most moving were those in the boy's hands. 'He holds up his hands and begs the boy to stop shooting, . . . He [the boy] had not prepared himself for how terrible this would be.' As the details of Lamont's story unfolded, one girl struggled to keep her composure. Another hid her face

in her friend's shoulder. Lamont died about 15 minutes after arriving at the hospital, . . . " Following these graphic details, Dr. Goldberg concludes the lesson with a question. "Who," she asks, "do you think has the best chance of saving your life?" Her answer? "You do" (Hurdle n. p.). This is a narrative condemnation of urban youth; STET a wholesale abandonment of black children to their own devices; a making manifest under the guise of education that the lives of black children (not seen as children) are in their own hands (not in the hands of those who would protect them) as they face a series of catastrophes still wholly "unprepared for how terrible this would be."³⁰ At the end of "Invisible Child," when we read that Dasani imagines herself designing her own video game, and if she could, "she would call it 'Live or Die' and the protagonist would be an 11-year-old girl fighting for her own salvation" (Elliott n. p.), I am returned to the questions of who and what we imagine has the best chance of undoing our "narratively condemned status"? My answer is *Black Studies: In the Wake*.

Endnotes

1. Wynter. "'No Humans Involved,'" p. 65. The inaugural issue was titled "Knowledge on Trial."
2. "ProudFlesh Inter/Views Sylvia Wynter."
3. Philip, *Zong!*, pp. 25, 26.
4. My current book project is *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*.
5. In addition to the contributors to this special issue I would like to point to the work of Joy James, João Costa Vargas, Saidiya Hartman, Frank Wilderson, Jared Sexton, Sylvia Wynter, Lewis Gordon, Hortense Spillers, Jemima Pierre, Dennis

Childs, Calvin Warren, David Marriott, Rinaldo Walcott, Dionne Brand, M. NourbeSe Philip, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and Simone Browne.

6. See Hartman and Wilderson, "The Position of the Unthought," pp. 189–190. Hartman says, "On the one hand, the slave is the foundation of the national order, and, on the other, the slave occupies the position of the unthought. So what does it mean to try to bring that position into view without making it a locus of positive value, or without trying to fill in the void?"

Additionally, in the acknowledgments of *Red, White, and Black*, Wilderson thanks Hartman and calls her a ship mate who "looked unflinchingly at the void of our subjectivity, thus helping the manuscript to stay in the hold of the ship, despite my fantasies of flight."

See also Fred Moten and Stefano Harvey, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Composition, 2013).

7. When I speak of the immanence of black death I mean the ways that black death is built into the various systems that demand those deaths to produce something mistaken for and called freedom for others. As Joy James and João Costa Vargas write: "What happens when instead of becoming enraged and shocked every time a black person is killed in the United States, we recognize black death as a predictable and constitutive aspect of this democracy? What will happen then if instead of demanding justice we recognize (or at least consider) that the very notion of justice . . . produces or requires black death as normative." James and Costa Vargas, "Refusing Blackness-as-victimization."

8. In my response to Jared Sexton's "Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts," I phrase this in a slightly different way. "Will the fact of black studies ameliorate the quotidian experiences of terror in black lives lived in an anti-black world? And, if not, what will be the relationship between the two?" Sharpe, "Response to Jared Sexton's Ante-Anti-Blackness: Afterthoughts."

9. Oxford English Dictionary online.

10. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, p. 6.

11. A short version of the open letter was published in 1992 in *Voices of the Black Diaspora* (pp. 13–16) but was later published in its entirety in 1994 in *Forum N.H.I.: Knowledge for the 21st Century*, inaugural issue "Knowledge on Trial."

12. Wynter writes, "Being human can therefore not pre-exist the cultural systems and institutional mechanisms, including the institution of knowledge, by means of which we are socialized to be human." Wynter, "No Humans Involved," p. 6.

13. The expulsion from the realm of the human that the negating N. of N.H.I. redoubles with the erasure of that expulsion imposed by the lone "N" of the "n-word," as nigger is disappeared from air during the O.J. Simpson trial. The "N-word" takes hold purportedly because of the discomfort of the news anchors forced both to play repeatedly the recordings of Mark Fuhrman on which he can be heard using the word "nigger" more than forty times and to speak repeatedly the word "nigger" on air. As the news anchors substitute the "n-word" for "nigger," the effect is that the violence of Fuhrman's speech and actions was muted, as were the anti-black practices of the LAPD that authorized it.

14. I recognize that there have been too many black lives taken to name them all, but I acknowledge by name: Trayvon Martin, Chavis Carter, Renisha McBride, Aiyana Stanley-Jones, Ramarley Graham, and Conor and Brendan Moore, ages two and four, refused shelter during Hurricane Sandy.

15. Here I draw on Dionne Brand's formulation and theorization of the real and mythic "Door of No Return" as the site of black diaspora consciousness. She writes, "The door signifies the historical moment which colours all moments in the Diaspora. It accounts for the ways we observe and are observed as people, whether it's through the lens of social injustice or the lens of human

accomplishments. The door exists as an absence. A thing in fact which we do not know about, a place we do not know. Yet it exists as the ground we walk. Every gesture our body makes somehow gestures toward this door. What interests me primarily is probing the Door of No Return as consciousness." Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, pp. 24–25.

I draw, too, on the work of Frank Wilderson, especially *Red, White, and Black*, in which he argues that violence against the black is gratuitous and not contingent; not violence that occurs between subjects at the level of conflict in the world but violence at the level of a structure that required, indeed invented, the black to be the constitutive outside for those who would construct themselves as *the* human. Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*.

16. Sharpe, "Blackness, Sexuality, and Entertainment."

17. Spillers, "Mama's Baby Papa's Maybe." "Sticks and bricks might break our bones, but words will most certainly kill us."

18. Silverstein, "I Don't Feel Your Pain." Silverstein writes, "The more privilege assumed of the target, the more pain the participants perceived. Conversely, the more hardship assumed, the less pain perceived."

19. John Hurdle, "A Hospital Offers a Grisly Lesson on Gun Violence," *New York Times*, February 6, 2013; www.nytimes.com/2013/02/07/us/07philly.html?_r=0. "On a recent day the eighth graders, students from nearby Kenderton School, gathered around Mr. Charles at the start of a two-hour visit. Most said they knew someone who had been shot. [...] 'Our goal here isn't to scare you straight,' Mr. Charles told them. 'We're just trying to give you an education.'"

Despite Mr. Charles's assurances, it seems that the program, like much of US education directed at black and blackened peoples, is precisely in the model of Scared Straight's education in/as terror.

20. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, p. 32.

I think here of Richard Wright's description of his encounter at age four with the disfiguring coffle (or chain gang) of black male prisoners he at first sees not as men but as a row of elephants chained together: "The strange elephants were a few feet from me now and I saw their faces were like the faces of men!" For Wright these men are transformed into something else and at first sight the only men Richard recognizes as men are the white men guarding the black men on the gang. Wright, *Black Boy*, pp. 57–58.

21. Other billboards have read, "Black Children are an Endangered Species" and "Choice Kills Those Without One." The websites for Life-Always.com and ThatsAbortion.com no longer exist. Now toomanyaborted.com and the Radiance Foundation seem to be the primary creators of this work.

22. See the statistics from the Office of Minority Health: <http://minorityhealth.hhs.gov/templates/content.aspx?ID=3021>.

23. Elliott, "Invisible Child." While the *Times* profile did not reveal Dasani's surname, she was later identified as Dasani Coates when she appeared as a guest at the swearing in of Letitia James as New York City's public advocate.

24. Since the publication of the feature, Dasani, her family, and many of the other families have been moved from Auburn and housed elsewhere; www.nytimes.com/2014/02/21/nyregion/new-york-is-removing-over-400-children-from-2-homeless-shelters.html.

25. "If we are to take transatlantic slavery as the antecedent of contemporary surveillance technologies and practices as they concern inventories of ships' cargo and the making of 'scaled inequalities' in the Brookes slave ship schematic (Spillers 1987, p. 72), biometric identification by branding the body with hot irons (Browne 2010), slave markets and auction blocks as exercises of synoptic power where the many watched the few, slave passes and patrols, black codes and fugitive

slave notices, it is to the archives, slave narratives and often to black expressive practices and creative texts that we can look to for moments of refusal and critique. What I am arguing here is that with certain acts of cultural production we can find performances of freedom and suggestions of alternatives to ways of living under a routinized surveillance that was terrifying in its effects." Browne, "Everybody's Got a Little Light Under the Sun," p. 547.

26. See Schulten and Brown, "The Learning Network." "Once a semester, we choose an important, long-form *New York Times* article that we think young people should read, and we invite anyone age 13 to 19 to come to the Learning Network blog and discuss it. We have a few ground rules for this feature, which we call Reading Club, but our main goal is to inspire thoughtful conversation."

27. See Campbell and Barkan, "Bloomberg Defends Homeless Policies While Calling Dasani Story 'Extremely Atypical.'"

28. William, "I, Too, Am One of the Estimated 22,000 Homeless Children in New York," Comment Is Free, January 1, 2014; www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/01/homeless-student-new-york-city-speaks.

29. In an interview with Maya Mavjee about *A Map to the Door of No Return*, poet, novelist, and activist Dionne Brand activates another understanding of luck: "In *Map* I talk about all these interpretations that you walk into unknowingly, almost from birth. If you're lucky you spend the rest of your life fighting them, if you're not, you spend your life unquestioningly absorbing." Mavjee, "Opening the Door."

30. Indeed, in Cradle to Grave's formulation we are returned to Douglass's illustration of his position as witness and soon-to-be participant in slavery's many scenes of subjection. This new knowledge does not prevent subjection; it makes one know that one's subjection is unavoidable.

Also, recent articles on a study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* detail what many of us already know: Black children are not seen as children. "People—Including Cops—See Black Kids as Less Innocent and Less Young than White Kids"; www.thewire.com/politics/2014/03/people-including-cops-view-black-kids-less-innocent-and-less-young-white-kids/359026.

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