

AS BLACKNESS BURNS: AN AFROPESSIMIST READING OF BERNARD  
SANDERS' 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN ADVERTISEMENT "TOGETHER"

BY

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DEDICATION

*Soon it will be done  
Trouble of the world  
Trouble of the world  
Trouble of this world  
How soon it will be done  
With the trouble of the world*

-Mahalia Jackson, Trouble of the World

*For Gloria*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis evaluates Bernard Sanders' viral 2016 Presidential campaign advertisement *Together* using O'Connor's theory of Moving-Image Documents. The image-documents are then used to perform a "structural" reading of the advertisement via the emerging literature on Afropessimism to determine why supporters of Sanders created such a powerful and loyal collective and his proposed revolution against the 1% is ethical and possible. I conclude that his supporters created affective community in response to Sanders' multicultural ethos and that his revolution is in fact anti-black. Using the psychoanalytic theories of Afropessimism I also find the affective communities participate in the libidinal economy of antiblackness because of the psychic relief that participation brings.

Key Words: Afropessimism, Wilderson, Affect, Ahmed, Community, Bernie Sanders, Film Analysis, Lacan, Moving-Image Documents.

## INTRODUCTION

The 2016 race for the President of the United States was long and complicated from the start. There were more than a dozen hopefuls between the Republican and Democratic parties alone that made keeping up with who was even running an ordeal in and of itself. On the Democratic side, however, two front-runners emerged in Hillary Clinton and Bernard “Bernie” Sanders. Left-leaning Millennials were unhappy with Hilary Clinton. One of the major roadblocks to a successful campaign was her inability to drum up interest in the younger and more radical members of the party. By and large, she was framed as the “establishment” candidate that represented the same elitist politics that created the problems that plagued them. They felt betrayed by the Democratic Party which many perceived as directly responsible for pushing Bernard “Bernie” Sanders out during the Democratic Primary.

Sanders’ platform was much more in line with their politics and drew interest from those that saw their chance to create true change by striking a blow that would undo the inertia of government politics. Bernie was transformed from a long-shot fringe candidate and became the “candidate of the people”. He was lauded for his willingness to, “[fight] against income inequality, the political establishment, and political corruption” (Frizell, 2016). As his popularity grew, he became a beacon for difference, signaling to his supporters through a collective “we” that stood a chance against the establishment if, and only if, they fought together against the mire of the status quos. The telos of their revolution, even if utopian, would be to use the power of this newly minted collective to create long awaited, actual, and lasting change in Washington.

A devastating roadblock to strengthening the collective was Sanders' inability to gain traction in the black community. Some say that he lost the black vote as the campaign advanced, others argue that he never had it because his progressive vision never included a point of entry that black progressives could see themselves being a part of (Dixon, 2016). Although the black vote isn't a monolith and shouldn't be thought of as such, the campaign was unable to activate large sections of the demographic which speaks volumes about the campaign and maybe even the candidate (Meyerson 2016). The problem of black disinterest was exacerbated by decisions from the Sanders campaign leadership about where they wanted to spend their resources. Former black members of the campaign staff mentioned multiple times the black vote was ceded to focus on other sections of the electorate. Team Sanders made it difficult for teams responsible for black outreach to access resources. They refused to prioritize black students at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in favor of stadiums full of white 20-somethings, and gave canned speeches about economic inequality that did not answer questions about how Sanders' platform was going to resolve the specific needs of the black community (Starr, 2016).

In stark contrast, Sanders could pull interest from large sections of the non-black electorate, despite or even in spite of, the complaints of black voters. In fact, less than a month away from the general election Sanders was arguably the most popular politician in America (Murphy, 2016). During the election, Sander's political revolution was backed from everyone from socialists to "Bernie Bros", Rosario Dawson to Spike Lee, independent filmmakers to digital "Dank Meme" Stashes half a million members strong, and a bit of everyone in between (Caffier, 2016). The members of this collective were

reasonably and well within their rights to be upset when Clinton won the Primary Election and their revolution hit a glass ceiling for at least 4 more years. Although their hero was not named the Democratic candidate the revolution did not die because it didn't simply exist solely in favor of particular policy changes. It was also given life because of the shared passion and anger the collective felt in working against the establishment that made them a community (Caffier, 2016). This sentiment was in fact strong enough to fuel a revolution that purposefully excluded black Americans from the ranks of the collective. The question then must be posed: What could make that sentiment strong enough to imbue the individual with the desire to stake a claim to a revolutionary future despite the direct exclusion of blacks who are the necessary temporal victims that serve as the literal economic foundation for the revolutionary's institutional enemy? Further still, if the most revolutionary among us are willing to leave blacks behind, what hope is there for a future that is indeed revolutionary?

In this thesis, I will analyze what Dr. Frank Wilderson III calls the "multiculturalist ethos" of the Sanders community as represented in the advertisement "Together". Wilderson makes the sometimes-jarring claim that we should seek to understand that slavery is still with us. Further, that black people should be understood as objects, not subjects, removed from time and space and relation to civil society. His conclusion is thus that multiculturalist ethos was born out of liberal appeals to a collective existence within time and space occupied by Whites, Latinos, East and South Asians, and Blacks alike but that this ethic of commonality that coheres the Sanders community erases the specificity of the position blackness occupies within American politics (Wilderson, 10). This ethic of collectivity imbues liberal critiques of politics and

leaves them void of a structural understanding of the affective structures that undergird our political commentary and also attracted supporters of Sanders and his revolution. I evaluate the affective traces of this ethos within the cinematic discourses that represent the Sander's community using the developing scholarship on affect in race and film to determine if Sanders' revolution participates in an anti-black project that dooms its promise of equality to failure.

## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1982, historian Orlando Patterson published his survey of global slavery, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, adding to a conversation on the conditions necessary for and supported by the enslavement of people. Patterson's book was not largely criticized at the time of publishing and went mostly unnoticed by the academic community. The larger wake of his contribution would be noticed years later when theorists doing work on chattel slavery found the concept of social death useful for articulating the gratuitous violence of slavery in the United States. These theorists have created an emerging canon of literature known as Afropessimism that understands black life outside of the narrative of progress passed down from the Civil Rights era-style resistance and concludes that the violence, abuse, and terror of the plantation is still yet with us. The central tenant of Afropessimism is a political-ontological claim that any analysis that seriously evaluates the black position which is not distracted by the veneer of progressive sentiment will come to the conclusion that the plantation has been structurally adjusted, expanding beyond its historically accepted geographical boundaries, name, and shape in order to cause gratuitous violence to the descendants of slaves (Spillers, 87; Hartman, 97; Mckittrick, 06; Wilderson, 10; Sexton, 11; Warren, 15; Sharpe, 16).

The Middle Passage, the historical name for the African physical and metaphysical Holocaust necessary to give the rest of the world coherence, was an event that robbed millions of bodies of kinship structures and positioned them as generally dishonored in the face of those who were not enslaved (Wilderson, 2010). Put another way, "no slave, no world" thus, "our analysis cannot be approached through the rubric of

gains or reversals in struggles with the state and civil society, not unless and until the interlocutor first explains how the Slave is of the world. The onus ...is on the one who argues there is a distinction between Slaveness and Blackness (Wilderson, 2010). Since the Slave is not a subject, a counter-hegemonic Gramscian struggle for power is a theoretical impossibility. No matter how seemingly powerful the movement, no matter how moving the speech, or “ radical” the policy, how loud the calls for Justice and recognition from “allies” and subalterns, civil society isn’t elastic enough to include an emancipatory project for the Slave because ,” [b]lack subjectivity itself disarticulates the Gramscian dream as a ubiquitous emancipatory strategy, because Gramsci, like most White activists, and radical American movements like the prison abolition movement, has no theory of the unwaged, no solidarity with the slave if we are to take Fanon at his word “(Mitra, 2001; Wilderson, 02). This move to make the Middle Passage an ongoing event with ontological force that removes blacks from the world rather than a temporary moment that moved blacks within it asks us to think about the lives of those who are the descendants of Slaves (read objects) as subject to an eternal recurrence of “empty space and temporal stillness of absolute dereliction.” (Wilderson 2010).

Frank Wilderson III’s 2010 book *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* is the most comprehensive text do date which combines the theoretical progress of those writing in the Afropessimist tradition, using their shared framework to advance a psychoanalytic reading of desire as it circulates within and around three films created by, with, and for those who inhabit what he calls the structural positions of Red, Black, and White. He draws on his background as a film student at Columbia University to perform a close reading of what the narrative of these films tells

the audience and what parts of the go unspoken by evaluating the “grammars” or unspoken rules of Red and Black suffering that the cinematic discourse of the films attempts to hide. He suggests that we supplant current film and political analysis with a sustained focus on black suffering so we can confront the ever present violence that is foundational to our nation’s existence is still present (Wilderson, 2010). Where most film theorists, even black ones, would have us think of the characters within the films as maintaining the potential to be positioned as equals with a liberal enough reading of tvicil society’s record of progress, he specifically attends to the loss of Humanity ,or general claims to metaphysical coherence for black people that are guaranteed to white bodies as they change and reposition themselves as Settlers, then Masters, and now Whites throughout history.

Many in the academy and journalists alike have commented on the growing focus on the specificity of anti-black racism as a sedimented, structural force. Some of the loudest and most direct criticisms of Wilderson and Sexton specifically, and Afropessimism in general, have been criticisms of Afropessimism as a fatalist mode of analysis that is ahistorical and that denies a strong history of black resistance to systems of power and signification. This counter theorization hails blackness as an ontic (along with gender, class, and sexuality), rather than ontological, category that is free to change, as an unfinished project that is not determined by systems of force but that constantly responds to it (Moten, 2003; Harney and Moten, 2013; Hudson, 2013; Omi and Winant, 2013; Gordon,2017). Rather than critically interrogating historical categories of blackness, humanity, and whiteness , Afropessimism is supposedly guilty of relying on a faulty Fanonian distinction between whites and blacks that makes it impossible to

question the legitimacy and god-like quality of white humanity but all too easy to accept blackness' damnation with eschatological surety (Gordon, 2017). The thesis claim of proponents of ontic theorization is that Afropessimist theorization is a self-fulfilling prophecy that finds death when it looks for blackness because death is solely what it seeks. The implication of this claim is best defended by Frederick Moten who's writing is most often in conversation with Sexton and Wilderson unlike most critics who engage with Afropessimism via monologue (Moten, 2008; Moten, 2013). Moten splits the existential hair by severing blackness from the black as subject in order to theorize about both distinctly while also, in line with Afropessimism, tying blackness to the political and auto dislocating effects of the ocean and black people to dry land where they live life in abundance. This creates enough of a theoretical distinction to simultaneously agree with most of his opponents but to maintain distinction enough to establish a standalone position on blackness.

Although multiple and many times thoughtful, most retorts reduce Afropessimism to, "sentimental moralism" rather than sustained and nuanced investigation into the truly disorienting force unleashed when one does the work of theorizing from the hold of the slave ship (Marriot, 2012; Sharpe, 2016). Put another way, these responses pathologize those audacious enough to theorize the world that set the ships on their 400 years-long journey rather than that world itself. Afropessimists in the academy don't do any disservice to the social choices or performances of black people in and around the United States, freedom movements that take to the streets or to the halls of Congress or any outposts which prop up the America empire, or any theorists that would disagree with their readings of the world. However, they do theorize that empire from a level of

abstraction that allows us to focus on the intensity of Human (read White, Settler) power within civil society and the depths of the powerlessness of blacks as positioned within it without being distracted by the minor gains or moments of agency on the plantation. No Afropessimist *wishes* that black people continue to be haunted by the sting of the lash or the afterlife of the toxic conditions of the hold of the slave ship in overcrowded prisons, underfunded healthcare, or overpoliced ghettos. However, they do wish to understand the technologies that allow the plantation to extend itself throughout time and space while positioning, and repositioning blackness as Slaveness into perpetuity (McKittrick, 2006; Warren, 2015). They find death where they look because that is what the world offers, not because they somehow created it out of thin air. It takes an exhaustive capacity to love blackness and to correct the record of a people who are removed from it, to theorize from a place that is no place, to get lost at sea without wishing to be found in order to understand the depths of black sorrow in the first place (Wilderson, 2010; Moten, 2013). Sharing a common point of departure, i.e., black suffering, does not mean that some theoretical tools cannot be used within the particular contexts of the plantation as long as one remembers the structures of force. Despite their disagreement, authors on both sides of the debate are often in the midst of smaller conversations within a larger and sustained agreement (Moten, 2013). This defense could be read as forfeiting the stronger version of the pessimists claim but what is at stake is too great to ignore the nuances of Afropessimism and what it can include in a non-totalizing fashion in favor of articulate, but insufficient, jabs at the growing body of work.

In response to Moten, Jared Sexton has theorized about the ways in which the life and moments of living done by the theoretically dead interact with the pessimistic claims

I am defending. He explains, while acknowledging the claims of his detractors, that there is social life lived very fully and amazingly within the shadow of social death. He has contributed most heavily to defining and articulating the extent to which social death has implications for black life, understanding it as, "a notion useful for the critical theory of racial slavery as a matrix of social, political, and economic relations surviving the era of abolition in the nineteenth century" that can only be brought to an end by the end of the psychic structures that cohere it (Sexton, 2011). He indicates that social death requires that those who engage in the rhetoric of post-emancipation and progress revisit the most basic questions of what it means to speak of the space between slavery and freedom (Sexton, 2011). Given the onus on the pessimist to prove the totality of their claim, one must wonder why optimists who would have us reinvest in civil society would choose to call the ability to make more choices under the banner of slavery and call it freedom rather than make the choice to wait for a true and complete unshackling from the grips of a political-ontological death (Wilderson, 2010).

Additionally, it is a strength rather than an error to lean on Fanon's existential account of blackness, which Wilderson borrows from to support his call for "program of complete disorder" (Wilderson, 2002). Like his colleagues, Wilderson does not wish for more suffering for blacks but understands the ability for Whites to position themselves as god-like and tautologically valuable Being. It is Whiteness's power to determine truth and value that gives it the ability to position and re-position blackness at will as Humanity changes name and shape, always out of the grasp of blacks that run to it. It is this ontological, antagonistic chasm that separates the White, the Black, and the Red that rests upon the world itself. Until complete disorder, in whatever form it might take,

brings about the end of the psychic structures of civil society every move back to it fortifies the afterlife of slavery. It is here where Afropessimists make a gambit that is not for the faint of heart. Should they be wrong in their theorization, then they simply sustain disbelief in the grudgingly slow machinery of civil society while revealing valuable insight into the most ghostly, violent and soul crushing parts of a society that would one day find equilibrium regardless of their academic intervention from a perspective that no other theoretical lens can offer. But, should they be right, they hold the key to a beautiful and gratuitous freedom.

This theorization of blackness has direct implications for the ways in which revolutionary politics of politicians such as Bernard Sanders should be theorized. The project of multicultural politics is of interest given that when put into conversation with Afropessimism, the political-ontological distinctions between potential allies in struggle is evaluated in a new light. Specifically, in context of Sanders, multi-racial coalitional politics crowds out our understanding the specificity of the Slave's suffering from metaphysics at large rather than the economic configuration benefiting "the 1%" (Wilderson, 2010). It is not simply the appeal to difference that is troubling for understanding the position of blackness but is rather the refusal to have a truly radical comparative analysis of the existential differences between those who are black and those who are not (Sexton, 2010). The general focus on cultural differences was a project advanced by feminists and black advocates of education reform that came to fruition in the 1980's (Gorkski, 2009). The rise of multicultural ethos, or multiculturalism as a social schemata with ethical force, is demarcated by a social requirement that any analysis of power must be generic and in the service of anti-blackness. Direct questions

about blackness as a structural position rather than an identity politic within the chain of equivalences of subaltern subjects is met with accusations of “Oppression Olympics” rather than with scholarly rigor although activists and organizers for the causes of Muslims, Arabs, Latinos, and Asian-Americans to name a few will readily admit that the work and intellectual focus on blackness during the Civil Rights Movement paved the way for their causes (Sexton 2007, Sexton, 2010). In this way the multicultural project simply becomes a measure of black powerlessness or a constant social and institutional component of active black disempowerment (Sexton 07). What we lose, then, is the ability to understand the full complexities of racial rule that lock in black suffering at every political, social, and intellectual turn (Sexton, 2010, Curry, 2014).

With an academic fetish placed upon difference for its own sake, most analysis fails to rise to the level of structural and remains within a political one that cannot confront the unspoken rule of black suffering. In the words of Wilderson, “ [t]here's no need for analysis when a singular kind of white/multicultural affect is running everything—standing in for a critique of power relations” (Wilderson and Williams, 2016). Affect, rather than reason, is what makes things like the multiculturalist project so enticing. This claim is one of the least controversial in this paper given the objective failure of more diverse government, representation on executive boards, in police uniform, and in the classroom to bring about the end of White Supremacy in America as a whole, let alone stereotyping, commodification, and exploitation of identity in any one locale (Wolsko et al., 2000, Novak & Kwapis, 2005, Ryan et al., 2007;).

Affect theory first appears in the work of Benedict de Spinoza. In 1677, his writings in *Ethics* gives rise to the first study of emotion as a non-physical force that can

alter the capacities of the physical. He created a list of those “affections” that can occur within the body that can increase or decrease the body’s power (Spinoza 1677). The change in bodily power is explained as a vital force from within the body giving it the ability to work within or against other forces of nature. This work is then revived by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in 1980 and lays the groundwork for the modern philosophical field of Affect studies. Deleuze and Guattari expand this work by constructing affect as beyond a list of emotions that can be quantified and named while insisting on a framework of unknowable limits. They argue that to describe it, “one could try to create... a patois of sensual delight, [that leaves] physical and semiotic systems in shreds, asubjective affects, signs without signifiacnce where syntax, semantics, and logic are in collapse.” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Their affect lends itself to their conception of the virtual body where things are considered by their capacity or potential for change.

Affects are not simply that which singular, real bodies feel by themselves but are those pre-linguistic, inexplicable sentiments that exist outside of language or signification. Those sentiments cannot be registered on a finite list because they have potential beyond themselves and beyond the individual body that they begin inside of. Affects go beyond the limits of single persons and allow us to think through the capacity of those emotions as pure potential that can be shared through, in between, and within bodies. The actual boundaries of these networks (which is not to say that they could not continue to grow) are known as Affective Communities (Harris 06). Affective Community, then, gives us a way to comprehend how emotion is shared and turned into “narrativizable action-reaction circuits” wherein the individual negotiates culture and politics (Massumi, 2002). Once expressed, affects bump up against known cultural and

social markers and have to continually be negotiated once they come into being. They, “endow the self and other with meaning and value” that give birth to these political and social forms of social presence that creating sets of feelings shared by community s (Ahmed, 2004).

Affect theory is not without its detractors, many of which make very broad criticisms of the basis or applications of the theorists without denying the existence of the pre-cognitive phenomena that the theory itself accounts for. Most generally, affect theorists are accused of not giving enough weight to the context that decisions are made in but instead attributing intentionality to the all-powerful force of interpersonal affective pulls (Martin, 2013; Slaby 15). Their criticism posits that the interpersonal focus of affect ignores the ways in which the media, institutions, discourses, and even architecture have effects on how moments are experienced in totality (Slaby, 2015). Massumi is directly criticized for using evidence of lower order decision-making preceding higher order, intentional decisions as gospel for the foundation of his project which would dismiss these larger contexts from our evaluation altogether (Martin, 2013). It is further argued that these disconnected pre-cognitive linkages can then be scaled up to justify affective communities that assume a universal human that is no longer responsible for its actions within civil society because of the structuring capacity of affect that precede higher order decisions (Colebrook, 2016). The complexity with which these responses are crafted miss the very point of theories of desire being necessary for theorists to be able to capture the feelings, sentiments, and notions that precede entrance into language. In informal conversation, it would be acceptable to simply point to a feeling that one cannot put into words without explanation for why those feelings exists. The need for more context is not

precluded by acknowledging those feelings. In fact, the structural work of Afropessimism forces attention to the larger contexts that give life to intimate and internal feelings on the plantation, whether they have reached others or if we are theorizing about the moments that precede affective linkage, and who is responsible for them.

What is left to be theorized, when considering the need to evaluate both contexts that give rise to sentiment and the sentiments themselves, in the specific context of Bernard Sanders and the affective communities that I posit that he creates, is how the distinctions between blacks and non-blacks determine which sentiments circulate and from where they begin and end. Affect theory, specifically the work of Ahmed which has been called out for, “plac[ing] bodies in spatial relation along racially defined lines... [as] some bodies are captured and held by affect’s structured precision” from an analysis that starts at death (Hemmings, 2005). Here is where we should and must focus on the distinction between “*some*” and others when talking about the power of capture within affective communities in order to better understand who can belong to or relate to them. The some, in this context of non-blacks and blacks, are blacks that structural analysis would lead us to think of as always already psychically captured beings within the without the ability to circulate sentiments and desires that are not generally dishonorable or to be free to float in between and outside of meaning (Wilderson, 2010). Where concerned with the circulation of desire the racial line drawn between the some and others, the blacks and non-blacks, is drawn with the pen of dereliction because blackness is the psychic repository for all violence; blackness is the repository for all violence. There is no other body that, on the psychic registers of the Symbolic, Real, and Imaginary, that is so captured maximally and definitively by death to the point where

there can be no relation between the living and the dead (Wilderson, 2002). Wilderson explains that at the level of the Symbolic blackness has no analog in the historical record because it represents a paradox, a presence without a past, a people without a heritage (Wilderson, 2002). At the level of the Imaginary, blackness stands in for all forms of violence and death, and at the level of the Real blackness is magnetized to bullets, astonishing rates of HIV/AIDs, and imprisonment (Wilderson, 2002).

This approach to analyzing how desire circulates around and through blackness understands that blackness is not the site of origination of desire but is captured by systems of desire as a repository for non-desirability (Sexton, 2011). As explained by Jared Sexton in correspondence with Wilderson, the libidinal economy which structures these desires is the , “distribution and arrangement, of desire and identification (their condensation and displacement), and the complex relationship between sexuality and the unconscious... [ that regulates] a dispensation of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, and phobias capable of both great mobility and tenacious fixation” (Wilderson, 2010) This economy is very important to understand the mechanism through which social death entrenches itself on a daily basis but affect theory , in my view, is a necessary supplement to explain the mediator for white choices among their “contemporaries”. Put plainly, only Whites and other Non-blacks can produce affect within their communities, create linkages, and create feelings not already captured by signification where blacks are always already captured and outside of the terrain where linkages occur. The libidinal economy might explain why Whites engaged in flight away from the ghettos, but affect explains intimate and freely chosen connections created between Whites who are similarly classed, politically aligned, and educated.

A political reading of affect theory would conclude that black people have presence within civil society but a structural one understands blacks as completely absent and lacking any relation at the level of being. This lack of relationality precludes blacks from the negotiations of meaning at a structural level but is necessary to attune theorizing to the distance between the Slave and the Master (Wilderson, 2007). Moreover, affect might be able to push and pull on subjects that precognitively respond to their communities but the claim under an Afropessimist framework is not a biologically determinate one, in the same way it is not theorists of Affect. Masters make choices driven by a desire, a sentiment, for black as death, (i.e, AIDs, as prisoner, as criminal, etc). because of the relief that non-blacks are served by their ability to remain free. The political or social utility served to non-blacks by lynching, exploitation, or rape is limited but the psychic utility is limitless insofar as it allows the expansion of Human affective community through the circulation of anti-black desire and their acts of self-creation for which they are more than responsible (Wilderson , 2010).

## CHAPTER 2: TOGETHER

The result of the 2016 election was based heavily on feelings, ideologies, and the creation of affective communities more than it was decided on facts. The digital age in which we live accelerated the distortion of facts that were presented by increasing the number of authorities on truth found on the internet, whether they were credible. This era is distinguished by a need for speed and compulsory connectivity which is fraught with an endless onslaught of advertisements, reviews and vlogs, viral videos, memes, breaking news posts, and new forms of content produced at faster speeds every day (Culp, 2016 ;NYT, 2016). Audiences are inundated with images at all times but not given the skills or the time to think about what they are seeing, not because they are incapable of thought, but because the purpose of those advertisements aren't to engage in rational dialogue with potential supporters. These forms of content are simple and short narratives that transport the viewer and were created to tap into a lifetime of memories, ideas, and sentiments held by the viewer (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Regardless of which candidate scholars might have personally wished to see cross the finish line first, from a political communication perspective, this election created an excess of advertisements, pundit and blog coverage, and viral content to analyze that will likely influence many institutional changes on both the right and the Left.

The advertisement "Together" is of special importance because of its unique relationship to "the people's candidate", Bernard Sanders. Advertising from campaigns usually originates with the campaign not from outside of it with supporters but this particular ad was able to blur the difference because it and its name represent thoughts about Bernard Sanders from both inside and outside the campaign. From the outside

those who had taken up the “banner of the revolution” at the storytelling agency called Human created “Together” as a short film that they believed represented what Sanders represented (Corasanti, 2016). The film was submitted to the campaign which purchased it and used its success to inspire supports to use the viral hashtag #VoteTogether (BernieSanders.com, 2016).

The advertisement begins with the sound of a roll of film on an old projector that has been salvaged to show a film that has not made its way to more modern formats. A few seconds in the “film” begins and audio from a Sanders stump speech, with his notorious raspy yell rings out to an audience that can be heard in the background. As he speaks the words, “Our job is not to divide, our job is to bring people together”, they appear on the screen one at a time in a bold black text over a grey background. When his opening statement ends, a barrage of photographs flicker across the screen. The background around the pictures is now glossy white and well lit. The photographs, headshots specifically, are joined by a simultaneous introduction of the sounds of a piano repeating notes that build suspense for what is to come. The photos represent individuals from the diverse population in the United States as members of the audience that Sanders is attempting to address; there are pictures of men and women, old ones and young ones, with lighter skin and darker, long hair and short, who Sanders argues are being divided and ignored by “them”. Sanders’ voice continues to ring out and he is heard telling the audience, “If we do not allow them to divide us up by race, by sexual orientation, by gender”. As he speaks the word *divide* the photos of the many Americans that he is addressing are manually ripped down the middle, one by one, by a pair of white hands that leaves the edges of the prints jagged and raw. The hands disappear and the rest of the

photos, also ripped in the same fashion, flash on to the screen in rapid succession.

Sanders' speech forges on with him stating, "By not allowing them to divide us up by whether or not we were born in America, or whether we are immigrants." As the words *born in America* leave his lips a new barrage of pictures begins to flash across the screen.

These new images are no longer of individuals but of groups of friends and families from eras long gone. These images, as chronologically diverse as they are racially, speak to multiple pathways and the time it takes to become American. The bolded words "When we stand together" return to the screen with their grey background to remind the viewer of the purpose of the speech and the "film" that they are watching. As Sanders assures the audience, "When we stand together as white and black and Hispanic and gay and straight and woman and man." the ripped photographs return to the screen by sliding towards the middle of the frame but the ripped halves do not return to their matching piece. The jagged halves find a different half of a different photo but seem altogether less jagged and not out of place. More miss-matched, or now perfectly matched, photographs continue to pile onto one another's jagged edges as the piano continues to play in the background. The statement "When we stand together" returns to the screen but is now translucent and white, superimposed over the patch-work photographs rather than obscuring them with the grey background.

The grey background then returns as Sanders brings the film to a close. As he states "And demand that this country works for all of us", the words "All of us" take their place, one by one, in bolded black text. The frame cuts away from the grey, tightens, and the viewer sees only the halved photos where they meet the other remnants coming together at an accelerated pace. Sanders continues his statement, juxtaposing "all of us"

with “rather than the few, we will transform America.” His last sentence begins with, “And that is what this campaign is about...” Bernie is seen speaking from a podium for the first time and is waving his hands for punctuation. As he brings his hands towards one another he explains what his campaign is really about. “... it’s about bringing people together!” His final words appear across the screen in white translucent text as the crowd cheers and whistles in favor of their candidate. As the shot of Sanders begins to blur the hashtag “Vote Together” makes its way to the middle of the screen as the cheering continues. The final images of the advertisement include dozens of small headshots racing by behind the white and translucent text, “Together. Vote”

“Together” is framed around an “Us vs Them” dichotomy that pits those who are for the revolutionary politics of Sanders’ campaign against those who are in favor of the “ruling class” of elites continuing to run the nation. In theory, this advertisement could follow the traditional electoral capture strategy. It does not explicitly address the concerns of black Americans and creates a message without using any inflammatory rhetoric. Sanders does not attack any third parties; he does not mention the “elite,” “The Republican Party”, or make any possible mention of who “Them” is. Rather, he focuses his rhetoric on painting an image of the non-threatening multicultural “tossed salad”. His mentions of differences are included in the speech only so that he can call for a more unified notion of politics that transcends the culture or identity politics that any individual one of “us” might wish to cling to.

### CHAPTER 3: METHOD

I will use O'Connor's theory of Moving-Image Documents to place the advertisement "Together" within its historical context using an Afropessimist analysis. I will evaluate both the form and content of the advertisement through conventional film analysis techniques that include analyzing specific sequences, sound, and rhetoric used to create the finished product. This method will provide sources of cultural data from which ideological underpinnings and desires of the Sanders community can be analyzed. I will further analyze those desires as they interact with the antagonistic projects of ending or nourishing the psychic structures that give the advertisement its coherence.

The approach of treating Moving-Image as Documents as evidence for cultural and social history can provide important additions to the field of Communication studies. Given the saturation of digital advertisements during the 2016 election cycle and a political climate not seen before, using advertisements to capture the attitudes and beliefs of the moment give us important sources of data for the development of critical media skills and insight into the psyche of American society. Those advertisements are particularly important part of our history; every record for campaign spending has been broken because of the outpour of millions of dollars on digital advertising during the 2016 election (Kurtzelben 2015; Kurtzelben, 2016; Nolter 2016). This could be seen as innocuous but it represents a radical shift in how the institution draws followers into their brands of politics as the politics continues its collision into the digital.

Deconstructing Moving Image Documents such as "Together" produced by media is important because it adds to literacy necessary to critically examine those which audiences are inundated with (O'Connor 1987). Many communication scholars have

taken a social science approach to the measurement and analysis of what they term cultural indicators in the media, however O'Connor argues that there are several benefits to engaging film as rhetorical artifacts. First, while traditional history study lets students know what people in the past knew or believed, film and television study can aid in understanding what they felt and what they desire. Second, the field is rich for studying changing attitudes towards race, gender, urban or rural lifestyles, and scores of other issues. Finally, studying culture as a scientific artifact is too straightforward an approach that misses the nuances of history because it has analysts run the risk of seeing culture as too stable and comprehensive. However, things like tastes, values, attitudes, etc. are always in flux and can never be subject to quantitative certainty but can be understood in their historical contexts. The deeper historical contexts that Moving Image Documents allow us to access are in the flows of desire that shape those attitudes and sentiments as we gaze upon the screens, as we read through the evidence in the documents, that produce cinematic discourses that have the power to alter our lives (Mulvey, 1989)

#### **CHAPTER 4: ENCOUNTERING THE PLANTATION, TOGETHER**

This chasm of relation between the Slave and the Master, between Bernard Sanders and his revolutionaries and black detractors, demarcates the function of affective communities and exposes the antiblack violence that fortifies civil society. Bernard Sanders's affective community did not and will not need to get blacks on board with a movement against the 1% because the movement is only meant to achieve a universal freedom for those who are already free of slavery (Sexton, 2010). Without the ethical requirement to attune itself to the demands of the Slave, despite the revolutionary promises of freedom made in its name, Sanders' campaign gains the uncanny ability to engage in an ethical double speak that at once concerns itself with black death and that also necessitates. When faced with this reality is not surprising that black suffering gets no time for reflection in earnest, but is reduced to the spectacularized moments on the nightly news (Sexton, 2006). Whites, in their relationship to the political, can't be expected to confront a type of suffering beyond comprehension when they can't even confront trauma amongst their contemporaries (McGowan, 2015). In the context of the Sanders affective community and the advertisement "Together", his near colorblind rainbow revolution obscures the way being reactive to trauma returns power not to the people, but to the same institution that orchestrated, sustained, and promoted the problems it rails against. It is here that one can see that regardless of the analysis done, structural or political, of Blacks or non-blacks, Human or dead, the failures of Sanders's politics are imminent. There is always one more bill, one more vote, one more election, and an endless stream of justifications for a continued belief in the system regardless of the results, whether one is doing political or structural analysis. The reliance on revolution on the horizon to fix the social ills of America is telling of an ethical

requirement to engage a futurism in politics in good faith regardless of the historical record or the bad faith of institutions (Warren, 2016). This leaves blacks with an excess of plans and promises that have increased our willingness to speak and write about political disasters but has left us lacking the ability to speak specifically to black suffering, (Sexton ,2006). This is sustained by a fantasy of progress from the Left that crowds out the ability to deal with trauma, both Human and other. What remains is a pressure to commit to an infinite number of political projects painted with the bright and edited faces of the representatives of diversity in that will, one day, bring political subjects that invest it a false sense of relief, in the same way that adding yet another Panda Express or Taco Bell to the American cafeteria will fix the foundational politics that makes its employees, customers, or owners unethical in the first place<sup>1</sup>. The fantasy continues when ads such as “Together” force the perspective of the viewer into a narrative arc that causes identification with the ideological structures of multiculturalism within its cinematic universe that locks in investment to the status quos (McGowan, 2015). In order to evaluate the sentiment and desire within the cinematic discourse of “Together”, the three parts of the psychic structure of civil society must be analyzed. It is not only the Imaginary that the film entertains that is important to a structural analysis, but also the Real that it obscures, and the Symbolic means by which the Humanist fantasy of the ad is constructed.

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<sup>1</sup> The metaphor of the multicultural cafeteria is borrowed from a private conversation with Ben Crossan, a scholar and friend, living and working in the Bay Area and employed by the University of California Berkeley.

The promised a future of diversity and justice does not exist prior to the stale and unjust status quos. It also does not exist for its own sake, somehow independent of those material conditions that it draws the viewer away from. The fantasy is of our psychic Imaginary that works to secure the rickety construction of our shared hallucination of the world, the beautiful big top that covers the horrors of the circus at the level of the real, necessary to keep us distanced from that reality (McGowan, 2015). It supplements the symbolic by giving it a pleasant backdrop which feigns wholeness for a symbolic world that cannot sustain itself at all times. The Real is a symbolic impossibility, ie., there will always be gaps in what it has captured and the Imaginary is the illusion of plenitude that hides this impossibility (McGowan, 2015). It is this impossibility that the multicultural ethos of “Together” covers up and it also the mechanism by which it gains credibility. The inability to confront trauma at the level of the Real at all times creates this psychic necessity which gives the subject of language a reprieve. This is not just true of “Together” because the, “credibility and salience of any object of identification relies on the ability of the fantastic narrative to provide a convincing explanation for the lack of total enjoyment” ( Gylnos& Stavrakakis, 2008).

The primary fantasy that Sanders’ affective community rests upon is the always already given nature of “America”, the ultimate backdrop of politics for the world at large. America summons the sentimental patriotic narrative of the bustling nation-state, with all of its people, conflicts, and culture that sustain the political project at the heart of civil society. To uncover the fantastical part of this narrative requires us to split the geographical from the imagined. In “Together” Sander’s raspy voice informs the viewer that they have a choice to be united “whether or not we were born in America, or whether

we're immigrants". But the notion of America, the legal status of citizens and immigrants, and the very lines drawn in the actual sand that demarcate America are fictional. This analysis is not in itself groundbreaking, but it exposes the often-ignored stakes that ground our big top against the wind. These stakes make possible the larger fantasy makes is possible to engage the impossible task of retaining our investment in the possibility of fictional political parties by which revolutions like Sanders' may be enacted before they are even born. The Imaginary serves a similar function to Borges' story of the map that blotted out and replaced the territory leaving behind only the tattered remains civilization beneath it, a place where the subjects that inhabit the map no longer dare or even remember to entertain (Borges, 1998) Just like the subjects of the map, no subjects of language can ever actually engage the object of their fantasy's identification. There was never a moment in which Sanders' revolution could create the future his foot soldiers were promised and the affective communities from which those soldiers were drawn can have no hope of finding wholeness via the fiction of America, the Left, or multiculturalism. The community the revolution depends on is, in and of itself, the problem because it extends a futuristic promise of collectivity and peace where the subject can and will only find violence. The question, then, is why do subjects and cinematic commentaries, especially on the Left, engage in the endless return to the fictional revolutionary well when there is clearly no water there to drink? Even under the banner of revolution, the aim of political projects must ignore the very circuitry of desire that subtends their demands because of the entry of those demands into language. "Together" is a small part of a world of speaking subjects that are driven to return to a non-existent past moment of abundance, but, given that the subconscious is aware of the

fantasy, it literally forces the subject to find beauty in the struggle so that it never has to confront the totality of trauma (McGowan, 2015). However, to continue to prevent dissatisfaction, or a confrontation with the Real, the subject is beset with an endless stream of enjoyable smaller roadblocks that impede the revolution on the horizon.

To say that community will never be complete or that the moment of abundance that the subject expects to find is fictional does not necessitate that those community s don't exist in some shape, form, or fashion. The argument is simply that the way in which we conceptualize those things is mired in our struggle for plenitude rather than a realistic vision of what those things will actually be. The implication of this understanding is that until the subject can come to grips with its fundamental relationship to trauma and nagging loss, the politics on the horizon will continue to move out of view. What is required to understand the extent of violence is a structural understanding of the politics of Sanders' cinematic universe that would act as a stop gap for the free flow of multicultural affect that stands in for a true analysis of power (Wilderson, 2016). Although Human subjects in Sanders' affective communities may need to come to understand that their relationship to one another is mediated by violence, a sustained focus on violence for the black is still outstanding. The deeper cruelty in the fantasy of "Together" is that the dream for American wholeness is pre-figured by black death. In fact, Sanders's outcry denies that he is a Master that needs neither the consent or the permission of the Slave to complete his political project in a move to make his structural position (at the head of what is more mob than revolution) as a harbinger of violence disappear (Wilderson, 2010). This move to "innocence" is central to the multicultural fantasy being sold by Sanders because it allows him to sustain the afterlife of the

plantation via a schematic for inclusion while also promising the accompanying Slaves and Jr. Partners a short walk to freedom (Mawhinney, 1998; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The forced perspective of the advertisement helps to construct this fantasy in that it necessarily breaks the people of color, and black bodies in particular, out of their historical contexts as their airbrushed images fly across the screen. The images from the gamut from pristine headshots from the present to photographs of the past of blacks at graduations, Indians at weddings, and other moments of personal significance for people of color but none of them include the violence of the historical record that underwrites the fantasy of American inclusion.

It is unlikely that their perspective could hold up if it included the pictures of dogs attacking black children during the Civil Rights Movement, Koreans shooting black people or selling them skin whitening creams, experimentation on or diagrams of Sara 'Saartjie' Bartman the "Hottentot Venus" or Ota Benga's exposed bodies, or the poisoning of Tuskegee Airmen, the theft of cells from Henrietta Lacks, one of thousands of black lynchings, rapes, or beatings or any one of dozens of moments of gratuitous violence that are circulated and pre-figured by the libidinal economy. The police brutality that black bodies have and continue to intimately know as they lay bloody and broken in the streets and circulated via images on the social media site of the month are the part of the world that the narrative of *Together* keeps behind the curtain of fantasy so that we do not have to confront it. Its discourses engage wishfully with the possibility of a mass movement that mobilizes us all to the voting booths to take a stand on election day but ignores that politics does not always make room for all us to vote, especially in the context of those who are stripped of the right to vote at disproportionate levels because of

the over policing of black neighborhoods (Alexander, 2016) ). This is the implication of social death as a part of our conversations on race and on the future. Antiracist violence does not just bring about theoretical death; it requires blood to be spilled regularly and often in the name of the psychic health of civil society.

Holding up the given narrative is what puts the Real and the Imaginary in constant conflict. This gives fantasy the burden of creating an ideological effect that makes viewers perceive the possibility of their own lives within civil society being bettered via the improvement of the lives of those in the film (McGowan, 2015). These effects of the cinematic narrative can subdue the ethical demand of the Slave for freedom that exceeds the ability to make mundane choices like marry or celebrate. The ennui one is left with after such movie magic points toward freedom towards an attending to the dead and the Real. Although the Human, as a subject of language, must deal with the effects of language on the living, they have no ability to deal with those who are on the other side of signification. Structural readings see blacks in the paradoxical position of living amongst death non-relational and beyond wielding the power of signification, just as the corpses of Humans are freed from the restraints of language (Wilderson, 2010). The dead are cannot be attended to through linguistic or fantastical solutions but must be addressed as fleshy, violated non-subjects.

“Together” is dependent on signification and the viewer doing the labor of creating change because of its inability to deliver anything despite its endless promises. The words that flash across the screen at the opening, “Our job is not to divide, our job is to bring people together”, are the first sin of the ad. These words flash across the screen to do more than assist the viewer in understanding the message being directed at them,

but in order to force their inner voice to speak along with Sanders as a member of his community. This is done for far less than even a moment given the short length of the film but it has the effect of monumentalizing the ego of subjects and objects alike and further prevents dealing with the trauma of subjectivity (Wilderson, 2010). This draws the viewer into a denial of pain and farther away from attending to black suffering because it trades of with a confrontation of the way that language alienates the subject from a self that can never be known or signified. The ego is another effect of the psyche distancing the subject from an encounter with the Real that “Together” that tells the subject that there is more than signification when they refer to the pronoun “I”. But that pronoun loses coherence when subjects becoming caught up in systems of desire because their understanding of themselves is caught up in language that is for and controlled by the other (McGowan, 2010). There is a slippage within the ad that attempts to address the alienation of the subject that leaves them less than whole. The images of the rainbow coalition of American subjects that are ripped in half point to the incompleteness of the subject under the ego, but makes the wrong move when it gives those images wholeness by reconstructing them with parts of other images. Rather than accepting trauma and incompleteness, “Together” continues a search for wholeness in others, which is the problem that language creates that created the original problem of the ego in the first place.

This search for wholeness leads viewers down the wrong road, specifically in its use of collective pronouns when Sanders yells about “us” and “we”. This collectivization flattens out the differences between blacks and non-blacks, Humans and non-humans, subjects and objects by positioning the dead on the same side of language as the living.

This creation of contemporaries misunderstands the way in which a structural reading would, “shit on the inspiration of the personal pronoun “we” because the black is outside of the realm of relationality which is why the affective communities in which Sanders has the viewer invest do not reciprocally invest in the black (Wilderson, 2010). The revelation that signification cannot bring about liberation from the ego begs the question of what full speech, or an acknowledgment of the trauma of subjectivity and the fantasy of the ego, can do for the Slave. When engaging in full speech, Wilderson asks us to consider if and how White people become (re)liberated Masters? Are Slaves narcissistic and less free if they continue in empty speech under the yolk of the ego? This solution continues to speak to solutions for the pain of Whites but not the suffering of blacks because it still focuses on a collective solution rather than one that provides a sustained focus on the impossibility of relationality.

“Together” participations in the collectivity of liberation again in its multicultural, politically correct solution for violence. Although the credibility that its racially integrative project has gained is affective and not factual, a closer reading of the collectivist narrative is its signification of blacks as bodies and not flesh. The mechanism by which this happens is the technology of gender which is signification that assists in the classification of the living but obscures more than it reveals when it comes to dealing with the dead. This claim is controversial even amongst Afro-pessimists but a structural reading that attunes itself to death itself should clarify that gender runs the ship to dry land in the very moments that we should be remaining dedicated to the auto-dislocation of the sea (Moten, 2013). The claim to gendered or (un)gendered differences rests in the rape and sexual violation of Slaves (Spillers, 1987). Specifically, the focus on rape as an

intimate event that is often obscured by what are de facto masculinized forms of anti-black violence like lynchings or beatings obscure the moments of violation against female Slaves not just for the pleasure of the master but as economical expansions of the slave estate through creation of chattel rather than through their purchase (McKittrik ,2006; James, 2013; Wun, 2016; Douglass, 2016). In a patriarchal society that does not acknowledge rape against women, these intimate moments of violence were recorded in the unacknowledged journals or art of black women are folded into the larger narrative of racial violence without specific attention (James, 2013). The problem with this claim is that is a defense of signification without an understanding of the recognition politics that undergird the claim to specificity. The work of Hortense Spillers explains in great detail the shift to black matrilineality and the inability for black “men” to be represented as such under patriarchy. (Spillers, 1987). This historical reading would show that black men have a fundamentally differing relationship to Oedipus, given the removal of Father Law. If the problem is that the violence that is recognized is somehow understood as male even though it happened to blacks regardless of gender, the solution to such a recognition is not to continue the humanist turn of academia but to abandon claims of signification altogether. But that claim might be too hastily made to satisfy opposition.

The stronger response to the claim is one that assumes that patriarchy is the reason that black women suffer. If the power of patriarchy is ceded, momentarily, it must also be assumed that black men’s mimetic relationship to Maleness would share the imposed social pressure to not record, disclose, or in any other way archive these violations since that same society does not believe in the rape of men, but especially the rape of black men and boys (Thomas, 2007; Foster, 2007). However, a lack of evidence

or attention to those details does not mean that those events did not did take place but according to the logic of recognition politics, we should then be focusing our attention on black men and boys that were raped given that those moments of intimate violence, under the system of patriarchy, are folded into the masculine narrative of external violence when we heterosexual rape in the case of the enslaved (Foster, 2007) . This logic however, takes us until a tailspin that cannot be corrected because blacks are, again, off the map and off the record of history which no amount of theorizing can correct. We are left with the question of “how intimate?” must violence be to come to make the claim to exceptionalism within our analysis? Does a stolen kiss, a beating, or a stolen glance from across a room informing a Slave that that evening they would be serving the sexual needs of the Master count? What of the blood-soaked valleys between the ridges of flesh left from the sting of the lash? Is that moment of forced opening not erotic and intimate enough to count as sexual violence? The focus on “intimacy” turns the violation into an internal process that further crowds out the libidinal structures that make all violence against blacks sexual.

According to Spillers, on the planation, “one is neither female, nor male, as both subjects are taken into account as quantities” (Spillers,1987). Blacks maintained and continue to exist beyond the wall of language, beyond signification, because they exist in a paradoxical place of living in death, even if an encounter of rape brings about life. Spillers continues to explain that under the arrangement of Slavery, “the customary lexis of sexuality, including “reproduction, “motherhood,” “pleasure”, and “desire” are thrown into unrelieved crisis” which no amount of exceptional recognition will relieve. Structurally, we would be remiss to assume that any intimate moments of violation

themselves could or should be recognized without returning to the Humanist modalities of recognition and incorporation (Wilderson, 2010). Hartman finds in the instance of Harriet Jacobs attempting to tell her story of violence to the world that she had to ,” efface her very condition in order to make that story intelligible ...[S]he has to deny the very violence, ... defines her position as a slave: her status as a thing and the negation of her will. ( Hartman and Wilderson, 2003). Under the rubric of the demand for black female exceptionalism we would have to assume, instead, that there were many moments of consent on the plantation. But this continues to structurally adjust blackness through an attempt to bring violence to our understandings of intimacy rather than to bring intimacy to our understanding of violence.

My reading of rape is an exterior, existential one that finds all moments on the plantation prefigured by death in a libidinal fashion. Here, violation is a grammar of black male and female suffering, not as a contingent sexual act that happened under economic or social pressures or just because the Master was in the mood. The claim to exceptionalism that focuses on how and why racial rape happens ratchets down the level of abstraction necessary to understand violence on the plantation into a reportable, recordable, contingent event. Where this will be read as a ‘flattening’ out of gender or a crowding out of the intimate moments that instigated the disagreement between pessimists in the first place, it should instead be understood of an expansion of our reading of violence. It is an unfolding of rape that sees every interaction with the Master as such that still allows us to attune ourselves to the biological effects of violence without assuming the black female has the coherence of a body. If we must attend to biology, it would be better to do so at the level of the flesh of multiracial children just as Jared

Sexton does in his book *Amalgamation Schemes* which sees rape as visible in the flesh of the descendants of the Master and the Slave because of his insistence that there is no such thing as a sexual relationship between blacks and whites (Sexton, 2008). This understanding realizes that the technology of gender does not enhance our explanatory power but instead destroys the ethical range of the ensemble of questions that we are allowed to ask (Wilderson, 2010). We should not continue upon the path of signification in order to find a way to map our suffering, but we should continue to read the suffering of blackness as an unnavigable channel that would that must be destroyed rather than better understood.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis created an encounter between 2016 Presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and his supporters and the dead through a reading of the Advertisement *Together*. On the side of the Sanders collective we have the multicultural promise of inclusive change that was in fact exclusive of black interests and persons. Members of the Sanders collective were drawn to his platform, his policies, and his bravado because of how they felt much more than a logical reading of the evidence and Sanders' ability or willingness to make good on any of his promises. What they felt, how they enjoyed one another, and the outlet of their rage against the 1% was grounded in emotional and precognitive connections that are the foundation of affective communities where non-black people who register on the historical record as Human stand together on an equal existential playing field. Sanders' collective was tied together by those affective bonds between those that chose his promise of revolution. They wanted to stake their political futures on that candidate regardless of the reality of the future he promised. On the other side we have death, or at least bodies that are always tied to it, both in death and in life. The descendants of those who lost their identities, their kinship, and their relationship to time and space in the Middle Passage are today referred to as black people but show up on the historical record as Slaves. Unlike almost any other group in the world, they emerged solely out of violence. Because of the way that slavery removes those bodies from the historical record and our political and psychic structures were built on violence against them, the world we now inhabit stays on the rails by the strict adherence to a dedication to black death.

The ad *Together* served the role of historical documentation, evidence that could be used to see what the Sanders collective was promoting as well as those anti-black desires that fueled their fervor for revolution. This advertisement is unique and important to the future of political advertising because it reflects a merger between candidates and supporters made possible by the acceleration of politics by the digital age. Using O'Connor's theory of Moving Image Documents to direct the deconstruction of the advertisement in order to perform a close reading of it offered many points of departure from which to analyze *Together* through a structural Afropessimist lens. This lens removes from our purview the subtle changes that have fallen into place since the political "end" of slavery in America because those changes that make the aesthetics of civil society different don't also guarantee that it is any way different. It the forces to the front the reality of the afterlife of Slavery and the nonhumanity of blacks that determines the terrain upon which political conversations take place. Instead of evaluating the surface level of political differences, we must attune ourselves to the psychic forces that cohere Sanders' collective, Sanders' agenda, and the world itself.

This encounter with the cinematic universe of the Sanders collective revealed the impossibility of those political conversations bearing fruit. Not only do they obscure the possibility of understanding how civil society positions non-blacks to enjoy the gratuitous suffering of blacks, but they also prevent non-blacks from confronting the trauma that shapes their own subjectivity. This universe serves the ideological function of preserving the investment in the need to secure the future via a relationship to trauma that assumes that it can be avoided. The progressive narrative of Sanders' campaign assumes that there is a political revolution on the horizon and *Together* sediments that investment by

promising value in chasing change that makes political theorists ignore the reality and role in suffering that subtends all their analysis. Sanders represents an ethical requirement for us to stay the course of politics even if others engage in bad faith because with enough fighting, enough pushing, and a sufficiently revolutionary agenda we can escape the confines of violence and find peace. This is a part of a fantasy that keeps the world view of the subject in tact; even when events or information that disprove the fidelity of the object of identification (i.e., multiculturalism, the Democratic Party, etc) emerges, it becomes irrelevant. Put another way, when the world fails to uphold the narrative the subject is invested in, the narrative secures a future of investment in the world so a confrontation with trauma can be placed.

This fantastical framework that protects the minds of subjects from addressing trauma in their own lives then makes it apparent that political analysis cannot address the suffering of blacks. Blacks are synonymous with death in the imaginary of subjects of civil society and are the repository for negative thoughts, feelings, and emotions, the totality of which create an economy of desire which relieves subjects for participating in anti-black violence. This violence is not for a particular end other than pleasure subjects because it exceeds utility. Even if lynching was necessary to protect racial rule in the American South, raping, disemboweling, burning, and collecting ears, toes, or sex organs as keepsakes was not. The excessive amount of violence doesn't have to directly serve political ends to continue because it serves as the necessary end point of politics. The structural analysis demanded by Afropessimism allows one to break out of the narrative of progress to see the roots of civil society in the plantation system. It also demands that

we see this black suffering (from police brutality to the HIV epidemic to the prison industrial complex) as a rule of civil society rather than as a string of contingent events.

The truth of the political goals of the Sanders collective and the world at large can be understood through a structural analysis but this reading of blackness can be structurally adjusted to force reinvestment in civil society's narrative of progress. The cinematic discourse of *Together* attempts to make blacks appear as Human rather than Slaves but that would lead us in the wrong direction because it once again hides black suffering when we should confront it. It does this through multiple configurations of blacks as gendered, as part of a universal human community, and though an ahistorical tale of redemption that directly ignores the historical record and Sanders' part in perpetuating the violence in it. On the political level the multicultural project has and will empirically fail, but supporters such as Sanders continue to support it because of the psychic value that such violent forms of anti-black social organization produce for Humans.

This encounter makes possible future scholarship and political analysis that attends to the dead. Moreover, with an increased ability to know suffering, even if all that confront it cannot understand it in its totality, learning how to evaluate what political candidates desire in addition to better understanding what they say is valuable in and of itself. Afropessimism and its structural lens is important in understanding the multiple levels of the psychic life of civil society in order to continue this work. It may be an exhausting mode of analysis but it would not reveal to us the deeper truths of the world, the ones that we may not even be ready to confront, if it were easy to do. Continued work in the Afropessimist tradition should be done so that an extended confrontation with

the trauma undergirding politics may take place so that we can bring about the end of movements such as Sanders' that ensure our continued investment in a politics of suffering.

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

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