Media-N | The Journal of the New Media Caucus
Spring 2022: Volume 18, Issue 1, Pages 6–30
ISSN: 1942-017X

Runaway Slave Portraiture, Aesthetic Culture, and the Emergence of Racial Sense

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ABSTRACT

Runaway slave newspaper advertisements constitute some of the earliest visual formulations of supposedly legible racial meaning in the Americas. Numbering in the thousands, these missing persons reports contain rare pre-photographic portrayals of self-emancipated individuals "seen" by a public. By reading the advertisements with and against the grain, this essay explores the logic of seeing in these early forms of racial profiling and speculates about how descriptive language makes race feel as if it is and ought to be visible and transparent to the beholder. Racial visibility was and is produced by the layers of abstraction undertaken to represent what could already be recognized as "racial" in public culture and affirms a perceptual experience I call racial sense. A theory of racial sense is developed in this essay by reading Immanuel Kant's aesthetic philosophy alongside Sylvia Wynter's critique of the human. This theory of racial sense challenges the distinction between aesthetics and science as staged by the modern project of the human.

INTRODUCTION

The murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis Police on May 25, 2020 ushered in the presently ongoing global mass movements demanding justice for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many others whose murders surfaced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Abolitionist activity entered mainstream political discourse with calls for the abolition of police, prisons, and carceral society. People around the world ordered to stay home to control the spread of COVID-19 exploded into action, enraged and empowered by the recording of Floyd's death on video. The ongoing unrest and uprisings reinvigorate questions about the potentialities and limits of video recording in the quest for justice. After the grand jury decided on September 23, 2020 that no one would be held responsible for Breonna Taylor's murder, the outraged public wondered about the impact of the newly leaked Louisville Metro Police body-worn camera footage displaying police violation of department policies after the fatal home raid. As one journalist reflects, confidence in video recordings conveys public desires to "prove something no one, not even Taylor's right-wing detractors, can refute."[1] Popular support for body cameras demonstrates the presumption that the camera's neutral eye could speak for victims, reinforces the view that technology is a neutral tool capable of transparent presentation of truth, and elides the cooperation of race and technology.[2]

This essay challenges the idea of transparency and how it affirms seeing, with and without technological aids, as an objective and racially unbiased practice. Rather than presuming blackness,

race, or Black people as subjects of vision, I query how public interest in visual transparency has primarily been constructed as, and through, racial discourse. To do so, this essay goes back to the earliest visual formulations of supposedly legible racial meaning in the Americas: the contexts of transatlantic slavery. I turn to the runaway slave advertisement, which was the most widespread and common visual form of representing racially coded people prior to the development of photography. A precursor to the suspect description report, the runaway slave advertisement operated under the assumption that the public would be able to use the offered description to identify the so-called fugitive. The advertisements contained brief but detailed information about the runaway's physical appearance, including facial features, skin color, attractiveness, unusual bodily marks (including signs of neglect and punishment), and style of dress and hair as well as age, demeanor, way of speaking, intellectual qualities, and special skills. Numbering in the thousands, these advertisements are just about the only individualized portrayals of unfree masses that predate photography. The ads share precious information that has allowed historians to cobble together stories about the identities and personalities of individual slaves, why they ran away, where they were going, who they were meeting, how they had resisted slavery before, and whether or not they remained hidden and safe. Historians have also acknowledged the limitations of the advertisement archive and the kind of knowledge it provides about unfree lives. After all, the ads served slavery; runaway "portraiture" was created to reclaim human property.

Even as the archive can only represent absences or unspoken violences of Black bondage, it also cannot contain Black life in flight. The advertisements literally record self-emancipation. I embrace Katherine McKittrick's directive to read the archive's "truthful lies and bloodshed … not as a measure of what happened, but as indicators of what else happened."[3] This essay questions the truthful lies informing runaway portraiture and speculates on how and why visual description and descriptive writing was supposed to recover fleeing slaves. Approaching the advertisement as form, genre, and medium, that is, *through* the problem of representation, provides me with the opportunity to creatively examine the modern construction of visual transparency and the legacy of this construction reflected in hopes for unbiased technology in the contemporary moment. I read in between the lines and against the grain of runaway slave ads for the materialization of visual practices. I deconstruct the creative, that is, racializing work of description. My investigation breaks down how vision became the most suitable mode for making racial blackness (and finally "race") coherent.

Precisely because the advertisements did not intend to say anything meaningful about race and blackness beyond the description of the missing slave, and precisely because the ads were meant for a public and mass readership, I take these descriptions as cultural demonstrations and practices that speak to the racial project of visual hegemony. The logic of seeing, reading, and writing about race that the ads take for granted positions the visual experience as a self-evident, physiological process—as common sense. It may seem counterproductive to critique the construction of race with common sense, as common sense refers to timeless, universal, innate ways of knowing. My investigation is less interested in presenting proof of common sense and instead thinks with the racial logic of intuition and transcendence formative of the very idea of common sense. In thinking with common sense, I demonstrate how racial visibility creates dehistoricizing, decontextualizing, universalizing effects. Common sense provides a structure through which to analyze culture, its conditions, and its work: aesthetic culture.

This essay returns to one of the best-known deliberations on common sense in Immanuel Kant's magnum opus, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Kantian aesthetic philosophy may seem like an unexpected place to go in view of the racism of Kantian philosophy and humanist thought in general.[4] For this reason, I approach Enlightenment philosophy as a form and genre of writing produced in violent contexts of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. My attention to Kant and my effort to racialize aesthetics are guided by the project Sylvia Wynter limned as "unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom"[5] and her groundbreaking essay by this title, in which she outlines the conditions of thinkability for the Western conceptualization of the human being. It is well established that the human—a fundamentally racial project—became intelligible primarily through scientific discourses that established and reinforced European white supremacist universal liberal humanist ideals. As a result, much scholarly, creative, and activist attention has been placed on the role scientific racism plays in the visual coding of race. But as Michele Wallace has argued, "There has not been nearly the focus on reconceptualizing aesthetic criteria that there has been on refuting scientific rationalizations of racism. Basically, this means what we've tried to do is tie down one of the two fists (science and aesthetics) in a combination punch. It should come as no surprise that racism succeeds again and again in freeing the other fist."[6] My engagement with Wynter's critical narrative of the human brings new focus to the ways in which aesthetics contributed and contributes to the technicity of race and vision and the production of the aesthetics/science oppositional binary. The focus on the aesthetic field exposes aesthetic philosophy as the optimization of the liberal humanist project, that is, as race theory.

REMARKABLE BODIES

> Five Pounds Reward, FOR apprehending and delivering to me, or securing in jail so that I get him again, CHARLES, a remarkable black fellow, about 6 feet 2 or three inches high, proportionably made. Had on when he went off a blue sailor's jacket, oznaburg shirt and overhauls, carried with him a suit of black, also a pale blue coat which is much too small for him; he is a sensible fellow, is very complaisant and submissive when spoken to, and speaks slow. The best description I can give is to say he is as black as jet, generously made and as handsome a black man as any in the state weighs I guess 185 lb. is 33 years old, though looks younger. I expect he has procured a forged pass as he went off without provocation, and will endeavour to get to some of the northern states. All masters of vessels, and others are forewarned harbouring or carrying him out of the State. CHARLES has a variety of clothes, but those mentioned are his best. He will, I expect, change his name.
>
> Braxton Harrison. Charles City County, Virginia, Oct. 2, 1799[7]

Advertisements seeking runaway slaves and servants emerged in the early 1700s, at the same time that newspapers as well as broadsides, almanacs, and other print materials started getting published regularly. By the nineteenth century, the ads were commonplace. It was a rare occurrence not to find at least one of these runaway notices in each newspaper printing across the U.S. Developing alongside this early American print culture was a burgeoning visual culture. Widespread and cheap printing, stylistic innovations of the novel, and the printing of text with images shaped and were shaped by the descriptive language of visual observation. Jonathan Prude reminds us that the ads were published in a culture with "a deep belief in knowing by seeing and an enriched depictional vocabulary."[8] Through the power of print, a vivid vocabulary of the visual merged with the social

ordering of people and things in the new world. It was in the context of a co-emergent print and visual culture that the runaway ads were written, printed, and read.

Advertisements in the colonial period typically draw more detailed visual attention to the clothing the runaway "had on" or "took with" than other parts of the individual.[9] As seen in the ad for Charles above, the most specific visual details about him regard his wardrobe, from work clothes ("oznaburg shirt and overhauls") to the ill-fitting tailored garments ("suit of black" and the "pale blue coat … much too small for him") to other clothing (he "has a variety of clothes, but those mentioned are his best"). While everyone, and especially the unfree, had a very limited, homemade wardrobe, the free made their gentility visible through their clothing.[10] Furthermore, Black slaves specifically were prohibited from dressing above their station. The South Carolina Slave Acts of 1735 and 1740 and the New Orleans Slave Act of 1786 imposed a strict dress code on slaves. No wonder runaways frequently took "fashionable" clothing with them, as it could be sold, used for bribes, and most importantly, worn to make the wearer appear as free.

By the nineteenth century, clothing descriptions in runaway ads become much less detailed, and by the 1850s, almost obsolete. This change suggests that clothing no longer commanded the same kind of visual attention. People had started dressing with far less variation as ready-made, mass-produced clothing became widely available due to transformations in textile and garment manufacture, deregulations of strict technological patents in the textile industry, and the shift to machine production. The textile industry, and industrialization broadly, were not causes but effects of the reciprocal rise of cotton crops and slave labor. As W. E. B. Du Bois argued, as a result of the simultaneous "increase in American cotton and Negro slaves, came both by chance and ingenuity new miracles of manufacturing, and particularly for the spinning and weaving of cloth."[11] Industrial capitalism redirected labor across racial lines; white labor became free wage as/because Black labor was reduced into slavery. As Du Bois assessed this reduction, "slavery was a matter of both race and social condition, but the condition was limited and determined by race."[12] The runaway ad archive reflects these changes in the demography of unfree labor and its racial encoding as "Black." By 1800, nearly all ads were for Black slaves in the North and the South. White servitude ended by the 1830s, and the only runaways were Black slaves according to newspapers. It is within this thirty-year period that the ad form began to include descriptions of skin color.

Prior to the industrial revolution, complexion seemed important to notice across all unfree populations, including African and Indigenous slaves and servants and foreign-born white servants. But colonial era discourses on complexion do not translate directly to contemporary understandings of race, as shown in Sharon Block's comparative research on descriptions of European-descended versus African-descended runaways. Block determines that European-descended runaways were generally described with more information and detail than African-descended runaways, most likely because the advertiser connected unfree white bodies to familiar European nations.[13] Moreover the term "Negro" primarily referred to slave status and not race up to the early nineteenth century. The Runaway Slave Database, compiled by John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, reflects vague usages of "Negro" or "black" between 1790 and 1816; many ads simply described the runaway as "negro" or "black" with little to no additional information.[14] But ads published after 1822 tended to denote skin color (brown, yellow, red; bright, dark, light), pseudo-scientific definitions of race (negro, mulatto, griff), and other interpretations of color such as "ginger," "copper," "pumpkin," "chestnut," and "bacon." Across the archive the description of clothing fades out and is replaced by a concentrated focus on bodily appearances now typically understood as

racial difference. As the visual meaning of dress and the demography of unfreedom transformed concurrently, visual signs of unfreedom slip away from clothing and seem to rematerialize on the surface—the skin—of a body.

Since Orlando Patterson's groundbreaking comparative study of the institution of slavery, scholars have carefully examined the imbrication of blackness and slavery. More recently Jasmine Cobb, Matthew Fox-Amato, Simone Browne, Janet Neary, Anna Arabindan-Kesson, and Taja-Nia Henderson have explored visual culture's part in the racialization of enslaved Africans and people of African descent.[15] Slavery was a visual culture, Jasmine Cobb reminds us; the practices of observation, evaluation, surveillance, and overseeing in the "peculiarly ocular institution" created and reinforced white supremacist vision. Matthew Fox-Amato argues that the antebellum spread of photography sparked national discussion of innovating techniques of slave sale, surveillance, and capture. While they were uncommon, photographic portraits of slaves—originally commissioned by slaveholders as keepsakes that displayed the benevolence of slavery, according to Fox-Amato's research—were repurposed when available to police slave movement. Simone Browne attends to slavery as the original model for racialized surveillance. According to Browne, the one-drop rule, insofar as it guaranteed the condition of blackness, branded enslaved bodies and served as a tracking device that detected Black bodies moving towards freedom. Janet Neary also explores blackness as condition in her reading of the case of Solomon Northup, a free Black man kidnapped and sold into slavery. Neary breaks down how Northup's enslavement was enabled by a logic that places blackness as a visual pretext for enslavement. Anna Arabindan-Kesson focuses on the construction of blackness as a visual pretext for profitability; she examines how the visual aesthetic cultures of slavery contributed to the commodification, commercialization, and consumption of blackness and ways of seeing that speculated the value of blackness as capital. Taja-Nia Henderson argues that blackness supplied criminal pretext to the eyes of the law. According to her analysis of the antebellum public law enforcement system, blackness itself marked the Black subject as a suspected runaway slave; blackness predicted the fugitive status and therefore qualified incarceration. All of these scholars seek to understand how slavery's visual cultures and envisioning practices made conceptually available the idea of blackness as racial difference.

White supremacist capitalist carceral vision informed and enforced emergent formations of racist knowledge production concerning supposed racial difference. Enlightenment philosophers, including Immanuel Kant, wrote extensively on racial difference to answer questions of human diversity, history, and civilization (proffered as questions of universality and transcendence), with ideas about white superiority and racial hierarchy that served European imperialism and the enslavement of Africans. Anti-racist, postcolonial, and feminist scholarship on the visibility of racial difference have pointed to the ways in which imperial and colonial contact invented race and difference. According to Cornel West, the scientific revolution followed classical scripts on visual meaningfulness to structure and authorize the use of vision for conceptualizing, classifying, and evaluating the perception of racial difference.[16] Ocularcentric ideals and ideas about scientific evidence and observation and classical aesthetics fused with modern philosophical discourse on "truth" and "knowledge." West's argument demonstrates how aesthetic culture and modern science share the same roots: racist knowledge and white supremacy structures and reinforces aesthetic and scientific visual practices, and aesthetic and scientific racial knowledges were formed in reciprocity. David Theo Goldberg and Colette Guillaumin detail how modern practices of seeing race developed through empiricist aims to quantify, rationalize, and ultimately naturalize social relations.[17] Goldberg argues that Lockean-informed obsession with color as a property subject to empirical observation proposed a correlation between skin color and rational capacity and made

meaning out of visual differentiation. Guillaumin argues that the linking of physical with social categories invents and naturalizes physical or somatic characteristics, which, as symbols, are misrecognized as self-evident ontology of race, gender, and other power relations.

By the nineteenth century, empiricist and naturalist tools further imposed categorical and hierarchical theories of race that would provide fertile ground for pro-slavery and pro-colonization arguments. Comparative anatomy such as physiognomy, ethnology, phrenology, pelviometry, and craniology exploited and perpetuated popular ideas about race. As Britt Rusert explains, the "transition from natural history to comparative anatomy had a dramatic influence on the classification and ordering of the races, making fungible, yet highly problematic, racial categories increasingly rigid and hierarchical."[18] By the time racial science takes off in popular discourses of monogenesis and polygenesis, visual observation is standard practice in scientific research. Racial science practitioners Samuel George Morton and Louis Agassiz "bragged about their skills as observers, their ability to spot what others missed, to see beneath a surface that would distract ordinary men."[19] The nineteenth- and twentieth-century institutionalization of scientific knowledge production would further establish the power of trained visual observation to produce scientific subjects, scientific objects, and objective knowledge.[20]

Such rigorous historical material accounts have tracked how scientifically perceived differences became culturally knowable as "blackness" and "race," seemingly autonomous from the very history that produced them. In slavery, race, as structure, was produced in and through the conceptualization of blackness. Even as blackness gets racialized, blackness and race remain non-interchangeable while also codependent. Once blackness is racialized, the seeing of racial difference "makes accidental characteristics essential, prescriptors rather than descriptors," Wendy Hui Kyong Chun elucidates.[21] I speculate that the autonomy of race that is presumed in racial description in the runaway slave advertisements demonstrates a new sense of blackness as a self-evident, visual, and transparent fact developed and reinforced by what seemed apparent on the surface of a racialized body. I take a step back and ask how and why Black visibility calls for an investigation on the matter of Black seeability. Because the discourse concerning Black visibility puts visual status onto enslavement and renders slave status onto the skin, I redirect attention towards the problem of viewership and the problem of communication about seeing people who emancipated themselves. For whom and for what reason does blackness hold visual status? What makes blackness seem like a visible and thus transparent condition in the first place? Critiques of popular racial science and modern science broadly track racial visibility as racist outcome and subjection. It is just as important to track how racial visibility indicates shared cultural knowledge about vision and seeing: how racial visibility is a matter of common sense and sensing of racialized difference. As Linda Martín Alcoff explains, common sense works not as ideology, and not through domination, but instead, as a backdrop of practical consciousness.[22] Racial visibility points us to a form of modern consciousness produced through everyday practices and participation in culture and society.

I return to the advertisement above for Charles's capture to outline racial visibility as it gestures to visual common sense and the heightened consciousness of racial difference. The ad warned readers that his clothing and name may have been changed (as the writer cautions, "[h]e will, I expect, change his name") and the writer has only "guessed" weight and age. The writer also acknowledged that even such basic information is unreliable, but claimed that Charles's "remarkable" characteristics could potentially distinguish the particular Black subject. This ad, like countless

others in the archive, noted the "remarkable," "extraordinary," or "uncommon" aspects of the runaway. Suggested between the lines of the text are characteristics considered unremarkable, ordinary, or common by slaveholding writers and their deputy readers. Though some ads called out mannerisms, behaviors, personality traits, hobbies, and talents, by the nineteenth century almost all remarked on the surface of the body as clothing description begins to take up little to no space. Advertisement writing imposed unique facial features, hairstyles, limbs, body shapes, and scars "on" the body such that visual examination was all that was required for identifying the runaway. For example, because Bob ran away in the "common dress of slaves," the slaveowner suggested that Bob's "remarkable round head and face" should set him apart.[23] An advertisement for Jim pointed out "remarkable long feet, with considerable long great toes."[24] Yancey apparently had "a very thick head of hair, a remarkable wide mouth."[25] In fact, the written practice of "remarking" already implied individual character. One of the most famous slaveowners, George Washington, presumed that the public knew that advertisements already stated the remarkable. His advertisement for four runaway slaves stated that Peres's speech was "something slow and broken" but qualified this description by adding, "not in so great a Degree as to render him remarkable." Washington described Cupid's age, height, shape of teeth and face, and skin texture but concluded that Cupid "has no other distinguishable Mark that can be recollected."[26]

Daniel Meaders has hypothesized that slaveowners name the runaway's "most identifiable characteristic" that would be difficult to "change at will."[27] Franklin and Schweninger have interpreted the standard practice as "accurate," "factual," and "free of racial stereotypes" because "it would not have benefited owners to include false information."[28] Such "objective" writing included evaluation of appearance. Slaves were described as "handsome," "very good looking," and "fine looking," and these judgments seem to heed descriptive conventions for the sake of successful identification.[29] Rocco, a "likely negro man slave," was "about five feet ten inches high, very well made, about 25 years old, of a brown complexion, with a handsome face, all except a Roman nose."[30] Ten-year-old Jess was "a trim active cunning lad, and remarkably handsome for one of his colour."[31] Lens, described as "a handsome Wench," "may pass for a free person, as she is very well featured all but her nose, and lips, which are thick and flat."[32]

These descriptions, and countless others like them, follow a specific syntactical pattern: the individual is compared to a presumed, unwritten standard. What that standard was becomes evident in descriptions such as these: Polly had a "genteel appearance, (for a negro)."[33] Bob was "very freckle for a Negro."[34] Sancho's hair was "straight for his colour."[35] Jim had a "very yellow complexion for a negro."[36] Virgil was "of ordinary complection for a negro."[37] As Sharon Block has argued, while the categories of "Negro" and "mulatto" referred to slave status, further remarks on skin color in particular would highlight the subject's complexion "in terms of its deviation from an (unstated) expectation."[38] Remarks were legible and descriptions were written through, with, and for common knowledge about enslaved people. The practice of description literally visualized the individuated subject in relation to expectations about enslaved people.

Furthermore, when Charles was said to have "remarkable white skin for a negro," and Jen "very white for a slave," it was a warning about skin color and appearance in general: their appearance obscures their slave status, meaning, slave status was supposed to be transparent and visible.[39] The syntactical construction of these descriptions about skin color, handsomeness, mannerisms, skills, and talents expresses the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century visual ideology: the appearance of a person typically would testify to character and station. During this period, portraiture as a representational field and practice was understood to bring inner truths about the envisioned subject

onto the external surface in depiction.[40] At the same time, the subject who sees was supposed to make civic use of their sharp eyesight. Because public culture accepted and valued astute sensory perception, which was thought to indicate a rational mind, sensory discipline and training—including the empirical study of optics and the senses—was believed to develop "panoptic prescience" and the ability to "spy out the deceptions of the wiliest tricksters."[41] Tricksters like runaway slaves, for example.

Advertisement writing warned the public that appearance is not only opaque but deceptive. Runaway portraiture aspired to recruit savvy surveyors. Portraying self-emancipated people as visually deceitful persuaded the public to interpret Black movement towards freedom "as the sly cultivation of tropes that tricked the eye."[42] Spectacles of enslavement in visual and print cultures, including blackface minstrelsy and anti-Black masquerade, also circulated ideas about blackness as a crisis in visual legibility for the public to both enjoy and fear.[43] This disparity between appearance and freedom prompted fundamentally discursive envisioning and visualizing practices. My point is that writing positioned physical features of the body, personality, intelligence, and habits as pure appearance, façade, and deception *because* enslavement was not transparent and visible. Blackness does not exist "prior to the discourses and practices that produce it as such," Saidiya Hartman says, but "what is particular to the discursive constitution of blackness is the inescapable prison house of the flesh or the indelible drop of blood—that is, the purportedly intractable and obdurate materiality of physiological difference."[44] The material flesh of human livingness was brutally corporealized as "indexes of truth and racial meaning" and finally fixed in bodily appearance as blackness.[45] In that vein I theorize that verbal qualification on remarkability in runaway portraiture affixed as "racial" all the qualities that could present as "person." Such remarks served to place blackness into view before anything else. The rhetoric of visual remarkability intended to disclaim the ambiguity of the runaway's appearance by equating blackness with enslavement and vice versa. The remarkability of the human property in flight—the blackness "on" their bodies—was supposed to re-mark them and literally bring them into the visual field as slave. Racial blackness emerged in the discursive effort to constrain and reinscribe the "fugitive slave" to the absolute status of property.

Cooperative discursivities including slave law, especially the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, enforced blackness as the paradigmatic condition of enslavement. Jared Sexton's work on blackness stresses that the value of human property was established in blackness rather than labor capacity.[46] In slave law, property value settled in racial blackness, as blackness would apply across space and time. The temporal and spatial adaptability of blackness compounded the value of slave property and proliferated what Hartman theorized as "the metaphorical aptitude" of blackness, "whether literally understood as the fungibility of the commodity or understood as the imaginative surface upon which the master and the nation came to understand themselves."[47] Tiffany Lethabo King expands on the concept of fungibility as "the treatment of the Black enslaved body as an open sign that can be arranged and rearranged for infinite kinds of use."[48] Fungibility applies "on" the body and conceptualizes blackness as open visual terrain.

Following my reading of runaway slave advertisements as visual discourse of racialized enslavement, I suggest that the visual effects of discursivity made it possible for blackness to stand alone as transparent fungible surface. Blackness was built as a feedback loop: blackness was the condition that both proved and affirmed slave status because enslavement both proved and affirmed the visibility of blackness. Advertisement writing was a practice expected to close the loop.

Discursive remarks/re-marks materialized on the body as objectively "visible" and indicated fungibility.

Furthermore, the medium of print, the very printedness of ad writing, legitimized the supervisory role of public culture in the early U.S.[49] Print was a representation and legitimation of abstracted, depersonalized, impersonal views, views represented as public and universal. Of course, representation was available only to those able to abstract themselves and be recognized publicly as part of that abstract body: those defined by whiteness, masculinity, and capital. The materiality of printed writing normed practices of public representation as a politics based on the promise of universal readability and recognition. If public culture is fundamentally normative and regulatory, the printedness of Black visibility must have legitimized the assumption that there was an already-visual and already-racial status of blackness, thereby inviting public participation in the supervision and surveillance of that blackness. Print media framed Black bodies as texts to be read.[50] Visibility, in turn, retrofitted the idea of racial blackness. "Race" henceforth reproduced blackness by representing blackness as a priori visual fact and racial fact and also as visuality. As Nicholas Mirzoeff reminds us, visuality is constituted by the practice of visually organizing a cohesive version of history that sees, reinstates, and aestheticizes already-existing modalities of power through the language of people, spaces, and culture.[51] Visuality then takes on an aesthetic, perceptual definition: visuality is made to feel right.

Scholars have missed the point I am trying to make when they take for granted that the legibility of description speaks to the subjectivity, objectivity, accuracy, or transparency of writing. I find it most significant how the visuality of fungible surface ("handsome"; "black") required both "subjective" and "objective" sight in order to come off as a visually transparent description. The subject's (subjective) evaluation of a runaway's appearance was supposed to be taken as an objective description wherein blackness is taken as object and is inherently observable by the subject (effectively erasing all relationality to the subject). The subjective evaluation of blackness is paradoxically constituted by the capacity for the public to experience blackness as characteristic of the seen, envisioned object. This conceptual process subverts the subjectivity of the slaveowner's perspective for the sake of transparently representing the surface that affirms Black fungibility. Moreover, the comparison of the individual to enslaved people in general renders a public knowledge about blackness and racial visuality.

Perhaps these contradictions ask us to shift our attention away from the visibility of the body and towards the power of visual perception. Standard writing practice singles out the runaway such that focused vision was all that was necessary to confirm the individual. Here vision is necessarily implicated for individualizing, describing, examining, and identifying the runaway in accordance with the logic of advertisement writing, where merely "seeing" them as they are (objectively) would be enough to know it's them. Vision obscures the power relation between seeing subject and seen object. Vision is understood as a sensory system and process that is unmediated, transparent, and unbiased. Vision's "immediacy" optimizes the preservation and perpetuation of Black fungibility, racial visuality, and a public consciousness of blackness that norms and regulates the objectivity of vision and visibility.

AESTHETIC CULTURE AND THE EMERGENCE OF RACIAL SENSE

Writing on remarkable bodies constructed and naturalized the visuality of slave property, collapsing racial blackness into "objective" visibility and vice versa insofar as it corresponded to a public's racialized understanding of blackness. The seeing of race depends on a model of the public sphere where all individuals see in the same way or share a visual common sense. This section explores Kant's third Critique for insights about the possibility of common human perception indicative of the universal human being. We know the Enlightenment's commitments to vision and visibility as insight and truth invigorated racial humanist thinking and racist discourse. Critical scholarship on race in Kant's writings and in the Enlightenment intervenes in Western visual epistemologies by historicizing and formally deconstructing the privileging of vision in the production of, and distinction between, aesthetic and scientific knowledge about bodies and human difference that continue to justify white supremacy, racial hierarchy, and Black inferiority.[52]

I engage with the philosophy of Sylvia Wynter to situate the power of Kantian humanist inquiry on aesthetics and vision. Wynter's essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument" provides a historiographical overview of Western versions of the story of the human; she carefully outlines how the human, as narrated by thinkers such as Kant, appears as "ontologically absolute self-description."[53] This stage of generic human definition reciprocated the conceptualization of a world order accepted as "natural law" adapted from the universalizing capacity of the Christian evangelical perspective, which, too, was an adaptation. A secularized version of the evangelical imperative cooperated with a new discourse on sovereign power that legitimated the theft of lives and land. From the secular perspective emerged the "new identity of the 'political subject' (one defined by a 'reasons-of-state ethic,' which instead used the Church for its own this-worldly purpose)."[54] Subsequently humanist intellectualism confirmed the narrowed idea of the human as political subject of the modern state. The politicized human being "became the new 'common sense' of the pre-Enlightenment, pre-Darwinian era. It was therefore within the terms of this new 'common sense'—and in the context of [European conquistador] defense of the settlers' rights to the lands and enserfed labor of the indigenous peoples, as well as of the Crown's right to wage just war against the latter if they resisted its sovereignty—that [Europeans] further elaborated … differential degrees of rationality, but also as being human, of humanity."[55] A European conquest-settlement story of the human positioned Western intellectualism as the language through which to interpret the appearance of those projected into a space of Otherness (e.g. "black skin and somatotype"), into differential degrees of lack and self-evidence of human difference. In this lack, Western intellectualism projected "their own somatotype norm" as "Man."[56] The figure of Man then stands in for and overrepresents itself as human being in totality.

Wynter takes us step by step through the co-development of Man and sovereign power in the conflation of politically subject Man with human being. I focus on Wynter's brief but important comment on a condition of possibility for Man: a common sense of human being. This common sense emerged in conquest settlement, i.e., in formative state violence against Indigenous and Black people. Here Wynter posits common sense as the condition for the Christian-Western settler-conquistador human being, to be redescribed, adapted, and reproduced as Man. Common sense provided expression for, or mediated, the representability and knowability of human difference and thus of the concept of humanity. This kind of common sense indicates the problem Kant offered as aesthetic judgment.

Kant writes about such common sense as transparent "descriptive statements," to use Wynter's articulation. According to Kant, common sense emerges in the aesthetic structuring of culture. His work on aesthetic judgment can be traced back to *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), where he developed the idea of the "objective" as a transcendental universal principle, in opposition to the "subjective," an inner sense. In his *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), Kant reconceptualized the relation between the objective and the subjective and what this relationship says about the universal. To get there, he looked to the faculty of judgment as a mediating principle between that which appears as the nature of knowledge, a priori, and that which appears as the practice of imagination. Kant aimed to disentangle how the subject who judges can distinguish their particular, subjective experiences as part of a general system of empirical laws and also understand that the particular experiences, in "aggregate," comprise that very system.[57] Such a system makes it possible for the subject to categorize the particular under the general. Additionally, the subject is able to understand their experience as both particular and constitutive of human being. Via judgment, then, subjective experience is cognizable and is a universal "sense," an objectively valid category of human being. Kant concludes that judgment is a faculty of human cognition that walks the line between the particulars of subjectivity and the universals of objectivity; judgment is not an autonomous, individual experience but a social one.

Sociality becomes the focus for Kant's examination of the formation of judgment. He takes up the beautiful (and the sublime) as tools for examining how knowledge about what could count as "beautiful" anticipates the subject's existence in society. According to Kant, identifying the beautiful is a process in which a private, subjective satisfaction is expressed objectively for the sake of social interaction and communicability: "For one cannot judge that about which he is aware that the satisfaction in it is without any interest in his own case in any way except that it must contain a ground of satisfaction for everyone.… Hence he will speak of the beautiful as if beauty were a property of the object and the judgment logical."[58] Kant's point is that sociality requires the abstraction of private feeling. The ability to call an object beautiful requires self-abstraction to think "in accord" with others' judgment of the "beautiful" object.

Kant's purpose is to demonstrate how "beauty" is an always-communicable social concept. Objectivity is best understood as the universal communicability of the object's representation in a larger cultural context. From this point forward Kant's task is to figure out how communication represents—deflects onto—the object, which is a cultural practice in the human being. This question of representation is taken up only to segue to the question of sense as a condition of the power of judgment. For Kant, sense is a raw, "not yet cultivated" condition of human being: "the least that can be expected from anyone who lays claim to the name of a human being … has the unfortunate honor of being endowed with the name of common sense (*sensus communis*)."[59] Kant accepts common sense as the minimum for claiming a stake in human being (and admits that questioning someone's common sense insults their humanity). Common sense enables judgment without implicating subjectivity, because subjectivity would disqualify the judgment. Common sense allows the judging subject to communicate by "abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our judging; which is in turn accomplished by leaving out as far as is possible everything in one's representational state that is matter, i.e., sensation, and attending solely to the formal peculiarities of his representation or his representational state."[60] Sensation has to be obscured for judgment to take place, and this formalizing move is what constitutes common sense. Sensation must be redirected into the objective representation of the senses made possible by and because of common sense. Presumably, for Kant the capacity of humans to sense makes possible

the "subjectively universal (an idea necessary for everyone)," an objective knowledge that there is universality at all.[61]

Kantian aesthetic philosophy establishes common sense as a form of perceptual and public knowledge that makes culture, and humanism, possible. "Everybody" has, or should have, common sense; hypothetically, everybody experiences sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch and intuitively processes such sensory inputs to engage publicly and productively in society. The judging subject, which could now be called the political subject—a.k.a. Wynter's "Man"—mediates subjective, private feelings via common sense. For Kant, the preexisting status of common sense in everybody affirms their "destiny" as social beings in the ranks of humanity. As Kant famously explained, the "charms, e.g., colors" valued in "Carib" and "Iroquois" perception demonstrate specific societal tastes and thus situatedness in a society indicative of human membership.[62] For Kant, differing societal tastes and societal membership explain how "a Negro," a "Chinese person," and "a European" can conceptualize and judge beauty differently from one another.[63] And yet such particularized differences also demonstrate their membership in the "human race."

The idea of humanity structures inclusion, and therefore contrast, of unrefined and refined human being. According to Kant, Europeans value not just colors but the abstraction of visual and other perception. Beth Coleman has outlined how Kant's reference to racialized perceptual capacity embeds racial hierarchy within judgment, which "produces a contortionist subject, one taken outside of itself and away from the 'native' instinct of the atemporal and the subjective. Kant uses a native to point us toward the denatured creatures we must become."[64] This problem of racial particularity and contortionist moves towards self-abstraction is fundamentally a problem of humanist thinking. The universalizing schema of Kantian aesthetic discourse and Western aesthetics in general formally includes all human beings "despite" differences in civilization. As David Lloyd has argued, aesthetic judgement presumes a universal timeline of human being in which racial human development can be compared: "Indeed the very emergence of the subject that sees, or, more properly, the Subject that judges, is already predicated on a prior development of the senses that is ethically structured. The racist vision sees an underdeveloped human animal whose underdevelopment becomes the index of the judging subject's own superior stage of development."[65] The idea of "human race" enables the genericization and comparativity of human being, creating the genres of "Carib," "Iroquois," "Negro," "Chinese" that affirm the "European" representation of Man and the overrepresentation of Man as human. The portraits of "remarkable" runaways from the previous section rehearse the generic and comparative thinking that creates blackness. The portrayal of Sancho with hair "straight for his colour" takes for granted "colour" as genre and demonstrates common sense: straight hair diverges from the genres of blackness.

I take common sense as the constitutive principle of the possibility of human being that serves the narrative development of Man. Common sense provides conceptual structure for including "Other" human beings by the production of their difference (from Man). Common sense as structure allows me to reevaluate the paradoxical composition of subjective judgment and objective communication. The communicability that is the basis for the representation of Black bodies—which can be described as remarkable in contrast to a perceived enslaved mass—necessarily assumes a common sense of vision. This politicized form of vision is positioned a priori to represent human difference and yet is also positioned to demonstrate universal humanity, because such a visual capacity is a common sense to human being.

Common sense consequently makes that which appears as difference (e.g., racial blackness) feel immediate and thus finally visually transparent, projecting blackness and racial visuality onto the same spot. Common sense is conceptually positioned as the ahistorical and acontextual demonstration, affirmation, and power of racial visuality; racial visuality is conceptually positioned as a priori, intuitive knowledge. Vision, I argue, regulates in accord with the common sense of racial visuality, thereby positioning race, too, as sense and as an aesthetic condition of public culture. This reciprocal empowerment made and continues to make racial sense. Blackness and its characterization as "race," culminated in the common sense of racial visuality, says just as much if not more about sense-making in modernity than it does about the visual technē of subjection.

Stories told by former slaves corroborate how public practices of seeing regulate and refine racial sense. Their stories about runaway portraits in newspaper advertisements affirm how the public sees via the common sense of vision that prompted the descriptions in the first place. One of the most famous runaway slaves, Harriet Jacobs, shared the story of her brother's escape by ship early in her own narrative under the pseudonym of Linda Brent. When the ship is forced to dock before reaching the destination "[t]his alarmed Benjamin, who was aware that he would be advertised in every port near his own town.… There the advertisement met the captain's eye. Benjamin so exactly answered its description, that the captain laid hold on him, and bound him in chains."[66] When Jacobs herself escaped, Dr. James Norcom placed an advertisement that warned the public that she has "black hair that curls naturally, but which can be easily combed straight. She speaks easily and fluently, and has an agreeable carriage and address. Being a good seamstress, she has been accustomed to dress well … and will probably appear, if abroad, tricked out in gay and fashionable finery."[67] Jacobs must have known how Norcom would describe her appearance as passable, and she therefore ran away in a "disguise": "a suit of sailor's clothes—jacket, trousers, and tarpaulin hat."[68] As a Black male sailor, no one saw her, not even the father of her children, who "came so near that I brushed against his arm; but he had no idea who it was."[69]

Runaways knew that if they were "caught on the wrong side of the law with the wrong color or accent, then it may be curtains, lights out," to use Coleman's incisive words on the policing power of racial blackness. Coleman continues, "race as technology also grasps a prosthetic logic in which local agency … depends on what we make of the tools at hand."[70] Because the sense of vision was understood to be publicly shared, it made sense for runaway slaves to apprehend the prosthetic capabilities of racial visuality. As Harriet Jacobs's escape tells us, runaways knew how to envision blackness in ways that their own bodies would be perceived as free by the public. Such envisioning of blackness demonstrates Kara Keeling's point on blackness: "prosthesis tethered to the specific historical conjunctures that forged it underscores how it has functioned as a vehicle for creativity, fugitivity, and flight, as well as for capture, control and exploitation."[71] Indeed Harriet Jacobs styled herself not with common sense, which should dictate that she embody visibility as a white woman by passing "upwards."[72] The advertisement for her capture certainly warned the public that she would present herself as free (white) to them. But Jacobs styled herself to recede from visibility in the embodiment of a free Black worker. Jacobs claimed racialized blackness as a technological aid for opaque and undetected movement toward freedom, a practice that Simone Browne theorizes as dark sousveillance.

For blackness to be grasped as technology, it must also be situated as the condition of and for thinking both in accord with and against racial visuality. Race as technological practice requires seeing from the position of "everyone else" and in discord with that viewpoint, which demonstrates the "peculiar sensation" of "second sight" that Du Bois would theorize in the twentieth century as

double consciousness.[73] Perhaps it is useful to locate an early version of this sense in runaway practices of opaque, non-public, un-commonsense literacies. Runaways knew how to hack technology so that they did not "meet" the "eye," to use Jacobs's words. Such non-public representations remind us that what is perceived as exact, accurate, objective—as transparently visible—is produced by racial sense.

Black movement opens up ways to think about vision beyond visual subject/object relations and queries how discourses on visual transparency and vision in general (even corrective vision) have primarily been constructed as, and through, racial sense. Vision and race are not just technologies of cultural exclusion; they work as common sense. While Coleman's groundbreaking examination of race as technology enables us to see how the racial colonial aesthetic subject moves with agency, my examination of race not only as technology but also as technological condition and consciousness asks us to challenge the idea and (re)production of the aesthetic subject, i.e. human. Denying the sensory conjuncture of vision and race reifies the subject/object limit of visual study inherited from aesthetic humanism. That denial proliferates the ahistorical and humanist conceptualization of vision and aesthetic culture that continually obscures its racial constitution. Colorblind racism thrives off this denial.

"Progressive" discourses on race, too, remain centered around stabilizing, qualifying, or challenging race's relation to skin color and other visible characteristics, thereby obscuring the problem of sense. Even when sense is politicized, sense is oversimplified into a matter of the visual subject's perspective or bias. The debate on body cameras offered in the essay's introduction reveals how public culture automatically misvalues visual transparency and objectivity (and the subversion of subjectivity). This misvaluation upholds and reinforces the racial sense that structures culture. As long as video recordings are valued for visual transparency, we should be careful about assuming they would counter racial sense. In fact, the transparency of video recording holds the power to optimize racial sense and biopolitical control. From Rodney King to Eric Garner, video recordings have proliferated techniques for im-mediating (distorting) vision and consolidating state power.

If we acknowledge vision as racial distortion, constructed to appear transparent, then we have to take into account the normative violence of commonsense vision. We have to take into account the biopower of the public eye in a moment in which more surveillance might be proposed in response to the mass policing of Black, Indigenous, Latine, and Muslim people in contemporary society. The sharedness of racialized carcerality among these groups in the contemporary moment also raises questions about whether or not racial sense was predicated solely through anti-blackness. It is important to remember that even if held in common by Black, Indigenous, Latine, and Muslim people, expressions of racism, including racist surveillance, do not necessarily prove a shared or single structure or origin. It is also important to remember how and why anti-blackness structures racist social orders and processes of non-Black co-racialization. Christine Yao accentuates how anti-slavery Black abolitionist claims recognized the distinctiveness of blackness while also anticipating how anti-blackness would inform the structuring of multiracial convergence and order.[74] Plantation logics as explored by Katherine McKittrick and Rinaldo Walcott suggest that multiracial convergence and order could be approached as refractions of slavery and Black terror that organize all life and death after 1492.[75] Walcott's critical definition of multiculture and multiculturalism foregrounds the work of culture in the ongoing proliferation of genres of the human.[76] From this angle, the processes and productions of multi- and co-racialization, which are

intimately related to dispossession, migration, borders, and genocide during and after slavery, provide insights into the continuations and derivatives of plantation logics and the ways in which racial sense literally matters as multiculture. My examination of aesthetic judgment and the construction of the human race and its genres has shown that multi-/co-racialization is made conceptually possible by and in aesthetic culture and theorization. Aesthetic culture is multiculture. Multiculture is aesthetic culture. Aesthetic theory is and has always been race theory.

Critical race studies of aesthetics enables a theory of vision, race, and power beyond the hermeneutics of subjects and objects, transparency and opacity, and inclusion and exclusion, and towards new understandings of hegemonic power. Artworks and art practices may be exceptionally well positioned to expose, model, and guide a "critical race aesthetics" approach to visual culture. Angela Davis reflected on the capitalist mode of perception as it individuates and individualizes the aesthetic experience in the recent pandemic-era Visualizing Abolition online event series designed as a companion to the *Barring Freedom* exhibition at San Jose Museum of Art. Historically, art discourses and spaces have functioned to control and norm perceptual experiences within individual bodies. Davis wonders,

> [A]rt is so much more powerful when we perceive it as a collective. It's not necessary for huge numbers of people to be in the presence of the artwork, but in my imagination I think of myself as inhabiting a community that is encountering and being transformed by … the work of art. I suppose that certainly an exhibition like this requires us to think collectively. It's not about the individual encountering this work of beauty by this renowned master. It's about a desire to create new worlds… how one might be able to subvert that notion that the aesthetic experience involves the individual who is encountering the work of art and the object itself.[77]

Davis turns to a Benjaminian question of not only restoring but creating human perception, made possible in racial capitalism through collectivized experience with the work of art. The theory of racial sense reframes the field of aesthetics as emergent race theory, which lays bare the aestheticization of visual perception and the technological reproducibility of racial sense. My reading of runaway slave ads has deconstructed the technicity of race and vision. The public regulated/regulates vision as racial sense and race as a visuality. Collective experiences of art could produce modes of perception that politicize aesthetics precisely because aesthetic (multi)culture is a public culture that can be normed. A critical race aesthetics approach to visual culture would yield uncommon senses that counter the racial sense.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Sam Anderson, Balbir K. Singh, Elizabeth C. Brown, Katherine Lennard, Alys Weinbaum, and Stephanie Smallwood for the conversations that helped shape the line of inquiry pursued in this essay.

ENDNOTES

[1] Eddie Kim, "Body Cams Won't Save Us," MEL Magazine, last modified September 29, 2020, https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/body-cams-wont-save-us.
[2] The 2014 murder of Michael Brown prompted nationwide conversations on mandating policies regarding police body-worn cameras. Support for body cams has come from all sides, including sides often at odds with each other, such as police unions, the White House, the ACLU, and activists. Legal scholars have sought to complicate the possibility of body cams as an answer to police violence. See Michael D. White and Aili Malm, *Cops, Cameras, and Crisis: The Potential and the Perils of Police Body-Worn Cameras* (New York: New York University Press, 2020); Howard M. Wasserman, "Moral Panics and Body Cameras," *Washington University Law Review* 92, no. 3 (2015): 831–43; Julian R. Murphy, "Is it Recording? Body-Worn Camera Activation Policies of the Ten Largest U.S. Metropolitan Police Departments," *Columbia Journal of Race & Law* 9, no. 1 (2018): 141–89. Also see Ruha Benjamin on the notion of unintentional and unconscious bias in technology and the power of whiteness in tech design. Ruha Benjamin, *Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2019). Beth Coleman's argument on race as technology will be discussed later in the essay.
[3] Katherine McKittrick, "Mathematics Black Life," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 21–22.
[4] Recent philosophical confrontations with Kant's racism include David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019); Lucy Allais, "Kant's Racism," *Philosophical Papers* 45, no. 1–2 (2016): 1–36; John Hoffman, "Kant's Aesthetic Categories: Race in the *Critique of Judgment*," *Diacritics* 44, no. 2 (2016): 54–81; Charles Mills, "Kant and Race, *Redux*," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 35, no. 1–2 (2014): 125–57. For recent confrontations with liberal philosophy broadly, see Kandice Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes: On the Humanities "After Man"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Imani Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018); Ashon T. Crawley, *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).
[5] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.
[6] Michele Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 190.
[7] *Norfolk Herald* (Norfolk, VA), October 8, 1799. Taken from Tom Costa, The Geography of Slavery in Virginia, The University of Virginia, 2005, http://www2.vcdh.virginia.edu/gos/.
[8] Jonathan Prude, "To Look Upon the 'Lower Sort': Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750–1800," *Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (1991): 128.
[9] 76% of colonial period advertisements reported the clothing of the runaway. Prude, "To Look Upon," 143.
[10] As there was no industrial or technological development of textiles or tailoring, clothing in colonial America was sure to have been "made for somebody" and not just "anybody"; see Claudia B. Kidwell and Margaret C. Christman, *Suiting Everyone: The Democratization of Clothing in America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1974). Ready-made clothing by professionals was rare and imported from England and colonial India. For more on the early American politics of clothing, see Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina

University Press, 2011); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2004); Shane White and Graham White*, Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

[11] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (1935; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1998), 5. Sugar, rice, and tobacco crops of the colonial period were surpassed by the growth of "a fiber that clothed the masses of a ragged world. Cotton grew so swiftly that the 9,000 bales of cotton which the new nation scarcely noticed in 1791 became 79,000 in 1800. The cotton crop reached one-half million bales in 1822, a million bales in 1831, two million in 1840, three million in 1852, and in the year of secession, stood at the then enormous total of five million bales" (4). Du Bois emphasized it was slave labor that backed the industrialization of the North and of Great Britain. For calculations, see Robert Bailey, "The Other Side of Slavery: Black Labor, Cotton, and Textile Industrialization in Great Britain and the United States," *Agricultural History* 68, no. 2 (1994): 35–50. For calculations of overall economic value of slave labor, see Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Trade* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[12] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 5.

[13] Sharon Block, *Colonial Complexions: Race and Bodies in Eighteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University Pennsylvania Press, 2018). For more on white servant advertisements, see Billy G. Smith and Richard Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves: Advertisements for Runaways in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728–1790* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). For more on the racialization of servitude and slavery in print and visual culture, see Prude, "To Look Upon" and David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1999): 243–72.

[14] John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 214–16.

[15] See Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2015); Matthew Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Simone Browne, *Dark Matters: On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Janet Neary, *Fugitive Testimony: On the Visual Logic of Slavery* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Anna Arabindan-Kesson, *Black Bodies, White Gold: Art, Cotton, and Commerce* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021); Taja-Nia Henderson, "Property, Penalty, and (Racial) Profiling," *Stanford Journal of Civil Rights & Civil Liberties* 12, no. 1 (2016): 177–211.

[16] Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance!: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982). See also Stephanie Camp's historical overview of the physiological definition and aesthetic interpretation of the sight of blackness in "Making Racial Beauty in the United States," in *Connexions: Histories of Race and Sex in North America*, eds. Jennifer Brier, Jim Downs, and Jennifer Morgan (Urbana-Champagne: University of Illinois Press, 2016).

[17] David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1993); Colette Guillaumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[18] Britt Rusert, *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 9.

[19] Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 114.
[20] See Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Donna Haraway, *Modest_Witness@Second_Millenium.FemaleMan_Meets_OncoMouse: Feminism and Technoscience* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).
[21] Chun continues, "dark skin became the mark of the natural condition of slavery through which all kinds of external factors—and the violence perpetrated on African slaves—became naturalized and 'innate.'" Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Race and/as Technology; or, How to Do Things to Race" in *Race after the Internet*, eds. Lisa Nakamura, Peter Chow-White, and Alondra Nelson (New York: Routledge, 2012), 41.
[22] Linda Martín Alcoff, *Visible Identities: Race, Gender and the Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
[23] Published in *Virginia Herald and Fredericksburg Advertiser* (Fredericksburg, VA), June 2, 1795. Taken from Tom Costa, The Geography of Slavery in Virginia.
[24] *Newbern Gazette* (New Bern, NC), November 24, 1798. Taken from North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements, University of North Carolina at Greensboro and North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, 2020, http://libcdm1.uncg.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/RAS.
[25] Published in *Virginia Gazette* (Richmond, VA), June 20, 1792. Taken from Tom Costa, The Geography of Slavery in Virginia.
[26] Published in *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis, MD), August 20, 1761. Taken from Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, George Washington's Mount Vernon, 2020, https://www.mountvernon.org/education/primary-sources-2/article/maryland-gazette-runaway-slave-advertisement-august-20-1761/.
[27] Daniel Meaders, *Dead or Alive: Fugitive Slaves and White Indentured Servants Before 1830* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 180.
[28] Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 170-171. Franklin and Schweninger consider the inclusion of such information objective and thus strategic. (They hypothesize that runaways described this way may have been very valuable slaves.)
[29] In eighteenth-century newspapers, "handsome" was typically used to describe property, including houses, furniture, clothing, horses, and, in interesting yet limited ways, slaves and servants. "Handsome" generally referred to the ampleness, significance, and generosity of what was described. In continuity with the language of slave sales, this vocabulary evaluates the physical ability and strength of the slave. Towards the turn of the eighteenth century, the word handsome slowly starts to be used differently. It becomes possible for the runaway to be identified as handsome in the way we would understand it today: having a pleasing, attractive, dignified appearance. "Handsome," OED Online, Oxford University Press, 2020, https://www.oed.com/.
[30] Published in *Norfolk Herald* (Norfolk, VA), May 21, 1799, and *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser* (Richmond, VA), June 11, 1799. Taken from Tom Costa, The Geography of Slavery in Virginia.
[31] Published in *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), July 30, 1777. Taken from Smith and Wojtowicz, *Blacks Who Stole Themselves*, 133.
[32] Published in *Parker's New-York Gazette; or The Weekly Post-Boy* (New York, NY), June 18, 1761. Taken from Hodges and Brown, 88–89.

[33] Published in *Free Press* (Halifax, N.C.), March 12, 1826. Taken from North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements.
[34] Published in *Patriot* (Greensboro, N.C.), December 27, 1826. Taken from North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements.
[35] Published in *Virginia Journal and Alexandria Advertiser* (Alexandria, VA), June 23, 1785. Taken from Tom Costa, The Geography of Slavery in Virginia.
[36] Published in *Norfolk Herald* (Norfolk, VA), May 8, 1800. Taken from Tom Costa, The Geography of Slavery in Virginia.
[37] Published in *Star and North Carolina State Gazette* (Raleigh, NC), August 27, 1819. Taken from North Carolina Runaway Slave Advertisements.
[38] According to Block, "African-descended complexions apparently required little description once the term *Negro* was applied." "Mulatto" did refer to appearance of mixture, including skin color, which elided the often violent realities of interracial sexual relations. Block, *Colonial Complexions*, 91; 103–4.
[39] Ad for Charles in Antonio Bly, *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary History of Runaway Slaves in Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700–1789* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2012), 187; ad for Jen published in *Virginia Gazette* (Williamsburg, VA), July 9, 1785. Taken from Tom Costa, The Geography of Slavery in Virginia.
[40] Sarah Blackwood, *The Portrait's Subject: Inventing Inner Life in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2019). Blackwood argues that Black visual critics, some of them formerly enslaved, complicated the logics of race and representation, theorized the social constriction of seeing, and offered corrective visions of enslaved Black people. See especially the reading of Harriet Jacobs's fugitive notices in Chapter 2. As Blackwood argues, Jacobs's textual self-portrait as Linda Brent shows her as an intelligent, literate, self-emancipated subject moving towards free territory; in contrast, the slaveholder's portrait fixates on appearances that are believed to correlate to inner racial defect and inferiority.
[41] Wendy Bellion, *Citizen Spectator: Art, Illusion, and Visual Perception in Early National America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 30.
[42] Cobb, *Picture Freedom*, 43.
[43] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[44] Ibid., 58.
[45] Ibid., 57.
[46] Jared Sexton, "People-of-Color-Blindness: Notes on the Afterlife of Slavery," *Social Text* 28, no. 2 (2010): 31–56. This essay argues that comparative frameworks of racialization limit how we understand blackness. See also Sexton, "Unbearable Blackness," *Cultural Critique* 90 (2015): 159–78.
[47] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 7. See also Stephen Best, *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
[48] From the lens of fungibility, King is able to expose how white slaveholder-settler positionality developed "transcendental" points of view that dominated the scopic field. As she argues, highly stylized visual depictions of enslaved people in settler colonial visual cultural productions were supervisory attempts to reduce Black life-in-flux into fungible aesthetic forms. Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 104. King elaborates on the conceptualization of the body as landscape mapped onto terra nullius, 242n82.
[49] Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[50] Cobb analyzes how print media, including notices on capture, sale, and pickup, represent Black bodies as texts to be read. *Picture Freedom*, 41–50.
[51] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: A Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). See also Allesandra Raengo, *On the Sleeve of the Visual: Race as Face Value* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2013).
[52] On vision and looking as racial subjection, see Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*. On the Enlightenment's special obsession with the visibility of skin color, see Irene Tucker, *The Moment of Racial Sight* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). See also references in endnote 4 and Cornel West's critique of ocularcentrism discussed earlier in the essay.
[53] Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality," 282. Wynter also examines the discursive power of the aesthetic structuring of ontocentrist humanism in "Rethinking 'Aesthetics': Notes Toward a Deciphering Practice," in *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, ed. Mbye B. Cham (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1992).
[54] Ibid., 298.
[55] Ibid., 299.
[56] Ibid., 303.
[57] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 9.
[58] Ibid., 96–97.
[59] Ibid., 173.
[60] Ibid., 174
[61] Ibid., 124.
[62] Ibid., 177.
[63] Ibid., 119. John Hoffman breaks down the argumentative modes and moves employed by Kant that demonstrate the aesthetic structuring of racial ideology. Hoffman examines the arc of racial ideology in Kant's anthropological writings, where race is argued as physiological subdivision within the human species, and its culmination in *Critique of Judgment*, where race is converted into "natural" genre of the human species by the philosophical argumentation of aesthetics. Kant insists on racially specific aesthetic standards, which seems counterproductive for the goal of philosophizing the human universality of aesthetic judgment. Hoffman, "Kant's Aesthetic Categories."
[64] Beth Coleman, "Race as Technology," *Camera Obscura*, 24, no. 1 (May 1, 2009): 182.
[65] Lloyd, *Under Representation*, 80. Lloyd focuses on problematizing the temporality of racial humanism.
[66] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, ed. Jean Fagan Yellin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 21.
[67] Published in *American Beacon* (Norfolk, VA), July 4, 1835. The Yellin edition of *Incidents* contains the advertisement.
[68] Ibid., 170.
[69] Ibid., 172.
[70] Coleman, "Race as Technology," 183.
[71] Kara Keeling, *Queer Times, Black Futures* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 173. Matthew Fox-Amato expresses similar claims to photography as prosthesis; photographic portraits of enslaved people were exploited for pro-slavery politics but for abolitionists, including slaves and former slaves, these same portraits proved personhood, individuality, and critique of commodification.

[72] C. Riley Snorton argues that Jacobs's passing is not vertical (upward into privilege) but instead into fungibility. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 70–71. Also see Cobb's reading of Jacobs's escape and the performance of Blackness, where the "choice to be obscure is a central part of redacting concepts of performing Blackness organized through slavery." *Picture Freedom*, 47, 52.
[73] Black unfreedom managed under formal citizenship afforded "no true self-consciousness" for the Black citizen subject and gave way to a "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others." W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1904; repr., New York: Dover Press, 1994), 2.
[74] Yao's analysis of David Walker's famous abolitionist tract emphasizes the inter- and cross-racial kinship structures of the Black abolitionist critique of racial comparison, specifically, racial science. Christine Yao, "Black, Red, and Yellow: Cross-Racial Coalitions and Conflicts in the Early African American Scientific Imagination," *Occasion: Interdisciplinary Humanities Journal*, 11 (2018): 1–11.
[75] On plantation logics, see Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17, no. 3, November 2013 (No. 42):1–15; Rinaldo Walcott, *The Long Emancipation: Moving Toward Black Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021) and *On Property* (Windsor, ON: Biblioasis, 2021).
[76] Walcott's theory of multiculturism locates the Caribbean as an "utter unique and brutal place of … invention, as an extension of Europe, Africa, Asia, and beyond, as amputation and incubator of the modern, as overseas department, as site of import and export, as housing the enslaved, the free, the indentured, and all those situated in between, as the contemporary backyard of the United States and the playground of Europe.…" Walcott, "Genres of the Human: Multiculturalism, Cosmo-politics, and the Caribbean Basin" in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 186.
[77] From a video recorded conversation with Angela Davis and Gina Dent at the *Barring Freedom* exhibition at San Jose Museum of Art (October 30, 2020–April 25, 2021). The museum was closed for much of the duration of the exhibition due to COVID-19 gathering restrictions: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUzuzyQZsJo. The Visualizing Abolition online event series was part of a larger arts program and exhibition entitled *Barring Freedom*, which framed abolitionism as a vision that challenges present social, economic, and political worldviews that have created and justify carceral society.

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