

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-10995-6 - Blackness and Value: Seeing Double  
Lindon Barrett  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## *BLACKNESS AND VALUE*

### *Seeing Double*

*Blackness and Value* investigates the principles by which “value” operates and asks whether it is useful to imagine that the concepts of racial blackness and whiteness in the United States operate in terms of these principles. Testing these concepts by exploring various theoretical approaches and their shortcomings, Lindon Barrett finds that the gulf between “the street” (where race is acknowledged as a powerful enigma) and the literary academy (where until recently it has not been) can be understood as a symptom of racial violence.

The book traces several interrelations between value and race, such as literate/illiterate, the signing/singing voice, time/space, civic/criminal, and academy/street, and offers relevant and fresh readings of two novels by Ann Petry. Whereas commonly approaches to race and value are examined historically or sociologically, this intriguing study provides a new critical approach that speaks to theorists of race as well as gender and queer studies.

Lindon Barrett is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature and the Program in African-American Studies at the University of California, Irvine.

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-10995-6 - Blackness and Value: Seeing Double  
 Lindon Barrett  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN AMERICAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE

*Editor*

Eric Sundquist, University of California, Los Angeles

*Founding Editor*

Albert Gelpi, Stanford University

*Advisory Board*

Nina Baym, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Sacvan Bercovitch, Harvard University

Albert Gelpi, Stanford University

Myra Jehlen, Rutgers University

Carolyn Porter, University of California, Berkeley

Robert Stepto, Yale University

Tony Tanner, King's College, Cambridge University

*Books in the series*

115. Janet Casey, *Dos Passos and the Ideology of the Feminine*
114. Caroline Levander, *Voices of the Nation: Women and Public Speech in 19th-Century American Literature and Culture*
113. Harryette Mullen, *Freeing the Soul: Race, Subjectivity, and Difference in Slave Narratives*
112. Dennis A. Foster, *Sublime Enjoyment: On the Perverse Motive in American Literature*
111. Eileen Gregory, *H.D. and Hellenism: Classic Lines*
110. Beverly Haviland, *Henry James's Last Romance: Making Sense of the Past and the American Scene*
109. Alfred Arteaga, *Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities*
108. Richard Godden, *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution*
107. Mark W. Van Wienen, *Partisans and Poets: The Political Work of American Poetry in the Great War*
106. Robin Grey, *The Complicity of Imagination: The American Renaissance, Contexts of Authority, and 17th-Century English Culture*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10995-6 - Blackness and Value: Seeing Double

Lindon Barrett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# *BLACKNESS AND VALUE*

*Seeing Double*

Lindon Barrett



**CAMBRIDGE**  
**UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-10995-6 - Blackness and Value: Seeing Double  
 Lindon Barrett  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521109956](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521109956)

© Lindon Barrett 1999

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1999  
 This digitally printed version 2009

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*  
 Barrett, Lindon

Blackness and value : seeing double / Lindon Barrett.  
 p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in American literature and  
 culture)

Based on author's thesis (Ph. D.) — University of Pennsylvania.  
 Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-62103-8

1. American literature – Afro-American authors – History and  
 criticism – Theory, etc. 2. Literature and society – United States –  
 History – 20th century. 3. Petry, Ann Lane, 1911– – Political and  
 social views. 4. Violence – Social aspects – United States. 5. Race –  
 Social aspects – United States. 6. Afro-Americans in literature.  
 7. United States – Race relations. 8. Social values – United States.  
 9. Violence in literature. 10. Racism – United States. 11. Race in  
 literature. 12. Duality (Logic) I. Title. II. Series.

PS153.N5B296 1998

810.9'896073 – dc21

97-52757

CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-62103-8 hardback  
 ISBN 978-0-521-10995-6 paperback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10995-6 - Blackness and Value: Seeing Double

Lindon Barrett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

For Dorothy Barrett,  
with much love and respect

## CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page xi</i>
Introduction: “In the Dark”	1
 <b><i>Part One Violence and the Unsightly</i></b>	
1 Figures of Violence: Valuation, Authorization, Expenditures of the African American, and Other Ways of Telling	11
2 Figuring Others of Value: <i>Singing</i> Voices, <i>Signing</i> Voices, and African American Culture	55
3 (Further) Figures of Violence: <i>The Street</i> in the U. S. Landscape	94
 <b><i>Part Two Reasonings and Reasonablenesses</i></b>	
4 De-Marking Limits: Reading New Critical Bla(n)ckness	131
 <b><i>Part Three Phonic and Scopic Economies</i></b>	
5 Signs of Others: Circulations of a Purloined Letter Understood Otherwise	183
6 Signs of the Visible: (Re)Moving Pictures in <i>The Narrows</i>	214
<i>Notes</i>	243
<i>Bibliography</i>	255
<i>Index</i>	269

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project began as my dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania and received in those early stages of its development generous fellowship support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Mellon Foundation through its Program for Assessing and Revitalizing the Social Sciences (PARSS). Over the intervening years, the project has been supported by a Faculty Career Development Award and sabbatical leave from the University of California, Irvine, as well as a Resident Fellowship at the University of California Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI). Debra Massey and the staff at the UCHRI deserve mention for their extreme efficiency. Portions of Chapter 1 have appeared in *Callaloo* 13.4 (Fall 1990) and *SubStance* 67, 1992, and an earlier version of Chapter 3 has appeared in *Cultural Critique* 25 (Fall 1993).

While at the University of Pennsylvania, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to work with David DeLaura, Betsy Errkila, Marjorie Levinson, Sandra Pouchet Pacquet, and especially John Roberts. In addition to being perceptive, Sandra Pouchet Pacquet is one of the most gracious people I have ever met. John Roberts was an indefatigable reader and supporter of my work and the most invaluable intellectual resource and friend a graduate student could have. I also had the immense good fortune at this time to meet, work with, party with, and become lifelong friends with Elizabeth Alexander, Jennifer Brody, Kim Hall, Nicole King, Amy Robinson, Laura Tanner, and James Krasner. In the intervening years, I have been able to add to this list Dwight McBride, Saidiya Hartmann, Farah Griffin, Phillip Brian Harper, Kim Dillion, Arthur Little, Kobena Mercer,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-10995-6 - Blackness and Value: Seeing Double

Lindon Barrett

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Marceyliena Morgan, Valerie Smith, and Robyn Wiegman. Charles Rowell of *Callaloo* has been a longtime supporter of my work and a close friend. In southern California, I have found many talented and supportive colleagues: Rae Linda Brown, Rey Chow, Emory Elliot, Robert and Vivian Folkenflik, Abdul JanMohamed, Lillian Manzor-Coats, J. Hillis Miller, Harryette Mullen, Jane Newman, Leslie Rabbine, Gabriele Schwab, Patrick Sinclair, John Smith, and Richard Yarborough. I must single out three colleagues in particular: Thelma Foote, with whom I have an intellectual camaraderie; Steve Mailoux, who has probably read more of my work than any person on the planet; and John Carlos Rowe, who is a person of vast intellect and unimpeachable integrity. I have also learned much from the graduate students I have worked with at UC, Irvine; UCLA; and UC, San Diego; and I must recognize a series of undergraduate and graduate research assistants who have worked with me over a period of several years: Catherine Allan, Wilson Chen, Michael Miklos, Keta Miranda, Connie Razza, and Alonia Rose. Stuart Jay and Farid Matuk have enriched my time in southern California with their earnest interest in the life of the mind and their friendship. Eric Sundquist was instrumental in bringing this project to Cambridge University Press, and Wahneema Lubiano was a highly instructive reader of the manuscript. I am also grateful to Anna Sanow and the editorial staff at the Press. Certainly, for me, the intellectual example of Hortense Spillers has been immense; it seems to me that long ago she was already ten years ahead of the rest of us. Still, despite this abundant generosity and whatever examples I may have taken in the writing of this study, I am – needless to say – solely responsible for the weaknesses of the study, its faults of presentation and thought as well as scope and organization. I only hope they are not as overwhelming as I sometimes fear.

Beyond these forms of institutional and individual support, I have more personal debts to acknowledge. My family and my mother (to whom this book is dedicated) have been and are a constant source of reassurance and encouragement. Dorothy Barrett has taught me perseverance, laughter; to dance, to sometimes scream when you dance; and devotion. John Roberts, Elizabeth Alexander, Jennifer Brody, and Thelma Foote bear mention again. Last, but certainly and by no means least, I must express my love and gratitude to Harmon “Skip” Spruill, Lance Avington, Melvin White, and Barry Copilow, fabulous friends who sometimes make sitting down in front of a computer or a book an all too arduous task for me.