

Introduction: Say The(ir) Name(s)

You can be shot and killed while in the presence of your child (as in the cases of Philando Castile and Korryn Gaines), while running or walking away from police (as with Walter Scott and Rekia Boyd), while playing with a toy gun in an open-carry state (as with Tamir Rice and John Crawford), or even while in police custody (as with Sandra Bland and Freddie Gray).¹

Candyman is a way to deal with the fact that these things happened to us. Are still happening!²

On 7 September 2017 Glynn Washington debuted his podcast series *Spooked* as a side project to the radio series *Snap Judgement*, a show addressing issues of social disenfranchisement. On the surface, *Spooked* is a collection of stories of ghostly encounters told by the people who experienced them. Washington begins each episode with a brief introduction alluding to the stories' focal events and/or terrors. In the second season, Washington's introductions began featuring real stories of racial horror. These introductions elide the usual sense of supernatural encounter, focusing instead on the mundane terrors and traumas of Black existence in America. For example, Washington begins the episode 'Dismal Falls' with the story of Detroit's Devil's Night provided in audio clip 1.

Audio 1 Introduction to 'Dismal Falls' by *Spooked* Audio file available at www.cambridge.org/Wester

Source: *Spooked*, Snap Judgement. Available online at <https://spookedpodcast.org/>

Unlike the central story, Devil's Night has nothing to do with spiritual, disembodied beings. Rather, the story recounts his grandfather's experience of anti-Black violence, told as he keeps watch on their porch with a shotgun in his lap.³ Washington begins another episode, 'The Intruders', by recounting his introduction to sexualized racist aggression. In audio clip 2, Washington recalls witnessing a white handyman sexually proposition his mother in exchange for reduced service fees.

Audio 2 Introduction to "The Intruders" by *Spooked* Audio file available at www.cambridge.org/Wester

Source: *Spooked*, Snap Judgment. Available online at <https://spookedpodcast.org/episode-214-the-intruders>

¹ Hitchens, 'Contextualizing Police', pp. 434–438.

² *Candyman*, directed by Nia DaCosta (Monkeypaw, 2021), film.

³ Washington, 'Dismal Falls'.

Little Washington steps out into the hallway, surprising the man, and walks past the two into the kitchen where he retrieves a butter-knife,

will[ing] it to be sharper . . . and I will stab this red-headed man with it. . . . I know I will kill this person. I'd just been drinking a glass of milk, watching *The Flintstones* but I know with utter certainty that I will kill him or perish in the process. Almost as if it has already happened, I know it. . . . Maybe he's already decided to take his leave. Or maybe he sees the cold rage in a nine-year old boy's eyes. He places his cap back on his head, nods to my mother, and backs out the front door.⁴

Even after the man left and Washington returned to watching cartoons, his rage refuses to subside but instead builds and he imagines various ways of killing the red-headed man. Washington concludes, wondering 'if in another world there's another me sitting in his room, not clenched, not furious, sitting in the same chair after washing the blood from a butter-knife'.⁵

As a series focusing on tales of the other-worldly, *Spooked* is part of a global trend. Unlike many other Horror and Haunting podcasts, Washington sporadically peppers his racial history introductions throughout the episodes; it is the one horror he returns to, unlike the central narratives of the featured storytellers. Like racial violence itself, these narratives appear without warning. *Spooked* is distinct in situating white supremacy and anti-Black violence as chief among its horrors. It shudders at the 'myriad minute decisions that constitute the practices of the world [which] are at every point informed by judgements about people's capacities and worth, judgements based on what they look like, where they come from, how they speak, even what they eat, that is, racial judgements'.⁶ This violent and violating anti-Blackness haunts because of its consistent return across different eras and generations. Furthermore, the irregularity of the introductions focusing on the history of violent anti-Blackness means that the series avoids the problem of reductionist and/or exploitative rhetoric; it evades being dismissed as 'Black Trauma Porn'. Washington's strategic deployment of the narratives essentially argues that while race is not the sole factor governing the horrors of the United States, 'it is never not a factor, never not in play'.⁷ Unlike the 'spooks' of the shows' storytellers, anti-Blackness horrifies because it is very much alive when it should have been long dead.

Though *Spooked* is exceptional as a podcast for its racial interventions into the narratives of haunting and terror which have become trendy, it is not exceptional in its place in Black Gothic and Horror Fiction. *Spooked* follows

⁴ Washington, 'The Intruders'.

⁵ Washington, 'The Intruders'. In many ways this narrative recalls Frederick Douglass's experience in seeing his Aunt Hester whipped.

⁶ Dyer, *White*, p. 1. ⁷ Dyer, *White*, p. 1.

the trend set by films such as *Two Distant Strangers* (2020) and *Candyman* (2021), series like *Lovecraft Country* (2020) and *Them* (2021), and fiction such as *Ghost Boys* by Jewell Parker Rhodes and *Victor LaValle's Destroyer* by Victor LaValle in a new mode of African American Gothic which reiterates the impetus, hope, and despair of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.⁸ Black Lives Matter (BLM) Gothic, as I term this latest vein of African American Gothic, centres upon a racially targeted violence that defies rational explanation. The fictions build upon ideas of haunting begun in canonical African American Gothic texts like *Beloved* in which the ghost is the least of the terrors witnessed throughout the story. Yet unlike Toni Morrison's text, BLM Gothic offers no remedy or even partial solution and denies the certainty of progress. The horror does not wait in the distance to return in the wake of forgetfulness. Rather, in BLM Gothic racist violence remains an ever-present, vile poltergeist that defies immediate remedy.

Founded by three black women, BLM as a movement gained momentum as extrajudicial murders of Black people became increasingly visible, and as an explicitly anti-Black, anti-immigrant misogynist won the Republican presidential nomination. Invested in social justice, BLM fights for a liberated Black future by recording and protesting the racial horrors of the present. Yet as Gothic texts such as Childish Gambino's 'This is America' suggests, the methods of BLM resistance may prove ultimately ineffective. Thus the same brutal shifts of the early twenty-first century which necessitated BLM also impacted the trajectory of African American literature towards Afropessimism, a theory which contends that Black people have never accessed the status of 'Human' but remain Slaves, perpetual (social) corpses buried beneath (and thus bolstering) white societies. The theory argues anti-Blackness is essential to the psychic health of all non-Blacks; consequently, Black people remain non-subjects in relation to the world. In insisting that civil society – indeed the very notion of the 'Human' – is structured upon the violent exclusion of Blacks to the place of commodified nonbeings, Afropessimism is an inherently Gothic project. And BLM Gothic and Horror is intrinsically Afropessimistic.

As I have noted elsewhere, using the Gothic and Horror genres to express the nightmarish reality and consequences of racism in US sociopolitics is a difficult project. Gothic fiction and Horror film have long played host to problematic racial ideologies, have provided oppressive political discourses with a plethora of tropes to dehumanize African Americans, and have proven integral in 'set[ting] the standards of humanity by which they [white people] are bound to

⁸ The BLM movement began in July 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted for the shooting death of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin. The BLM started as the hashtag BlackLivesMatter.

succeed and others bound to fail’.⁹ Frantz Fanon, in clarifying the European image of Black people, explains that ‘In this imaginary economy, the Negro is not a human but an object. More exactly, the Negro is a phobic object that, as such, arouses fear and terror’.¹⁰ In other words, the project of racial construction is itself inherently a Gothic/Horror project. Unsurprisingly, assailants often turn to the language of monstrosity to recount their encounters with their Black victims. Darren Wilson, the officer who shot Michael Brown, described his victim as having ‘the most aggressive face. . . it looks like a demon, that’s how angry he looked’.¹¹ Similarly ‘[Eleanor] Bumpurs was depicted as a “mad black woman” and “looming monstrosity” whose race, overweight appearance, and history of mental illness were used as rationale for police use of excessive force – even while nude and in the privacy of her home’.¹² As the shooting of twelve-year-old Tamir Rice¹³ and attempted arrests of other Black pre-teens show, even children are targets of a racial ideology and system that sees Blacks as monstrous.

Yet the Gothic’s insistence that we are far from the civilized, enlightened societies that we imagine ourselves to be render it highly effective as a vehicle for BLM Gothic and Horror. Although the language of monstrosity has traditionally been turned against people of colour, such populations do successfully mobilize the tropes to point back at the originators. The Gothic trope of haunting is indispensable to BLM Gothic and Horror, as previously noted. However, the form of haunting in BLM Gothic differs from that in earlier Black Gothic literature, as Sheri-Marie Harrison explains in her definition of the New Black Gothic, in which BLM Gothic participates:

unlike in, say, Morrison’s *Beloved*, the spectral reappearance of America’s violent history in recent fiction is neither about recovery nor representation. . . . Instead, racial violence has never gone away. It is indeed, as the ghosts are, at home with us. . . . ghosts speak to an ever-present and visible lineage of violence that accumulates rather than dissipates with the passage of time. Gothic violence remains a part of everyday black life.¹⁴

Notably, Harrison’s definition of the New Black Gothic also situates it within Afropessimism given the accumulative nature of the violence. Such works eschew ‘liberatory *telos*. . . in favor of a much less programmatic relationship to the meaning of history and to the potentiality of black futurity’ [*italic in the original*] and ‘bear the marks of what Erica Edwards has called “the new black novel as . . . devastated form”’.¹⁵

⁹ Dyer, *White*, p. 9. ¹⁰ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 138.

¹¹ Bouie, ‘Michael Brown Wasn’t a Superhuman Demon’.

¹² Hitchens, ‘Contextualizing Police’, p. 436.

¹³ Rice’s murder haunts BLM Gothic texts as a number of Black children are aged twelve-years old.

¹⁴ Harrison, ‘New Black Gothic’. ¹⁵ Jenkins, ‘Afro-Futurism/Afro-Pessimism’, p. 129.

BLM Gothic texts, in refuting the notion of racial violence as a distant phenomenon that ripples into the present, rely upon reproducing scenes from recent events and history to produce Real Horror rather than imagined terrors. As Robert C Solomon notes, unlike Art Horror, Real Horror denies us satisfaction and pleasure. Real Horror is that which is truly horrible and ‘renders the subject/victim helpless and violates his or her most rudimentary expectations about the world’.¹⁶ Real Horror arises unbidden and haunts in the seeming randomness of its occurrence. BLM Gothic, through its reliance upon real-life events and encounters, pushes readers and audiences to acknowledge ‘that things are not as they ought to be or not as one thought they were’¹⁷ in a post-Civil Rights era, twenty-first-century nation. In doing so, BLM Gothic ‘paralyze[s] and dumbfound[s] as people struggle to understand how something so unthinkable, so beyond any expectations, could come to pass’.¹⁸

One of the consequences of this paralyzing awareness of the horrific state of affairs is a refusal to provide anything like a happy-ending. Rather, the fictions iterate ‘a sense of inescapability and the eschewal of hope for the future. These contemporary black Gothic texts bring into sharp focus the near-constant vulnerability of black life’.¹⁹ Yet, as a social justice movement, BLM is inherently hopeful. Black Lives Matter envisions a liberated future ‘where Black people across the diaspora thrive, experience joy, and are not defined by their struggles. . . . a future fully divested from police, prisons, and all punishment paradigms and which invests in justice, joy, and culture’. However as much as the movement is hopeful in its goals, Black witnessing and activism is not without consequence. BLM Gothic is in part a testament to the casualties of BLM activism: young activists and organizers like Edward Crawford, Erica Garner, and Cheslie Kryst who have died from heart failure and suicide. As BLM organizer and activist Ashley Yates explains, ‘I have to make clear just how invisible some of the most heinous violence we experience is How we are often left alone on the front lines grown cold because media and figureheads move on to the next hot story’.²⁰ Deaths like Marshawn McCarrel’s suggest that the terrible sociopolitical reality may outweigh the activists’ hope.²¹

Thus BLM Gothic is rooted in a racial pessimism arising from confronting ‘white America’s deep belief and conviction that the freedom and security of the white race can be guaranteed only at the expense of the life of nonwhites, even if

¹⁶ Solomon, *In Defense*, p. 119. ¹⁷ Solomon, *In Defense*, p. 60.

¹⁸ Benson-Allott, ‘Learning from Horror’, p. 61. ¹⁹ Harrison, ‘New Black Gothic’.

²⁰ Eligon, ‘The Quiet Casualties of the Movement for Black Lives’.

²¹ McCarrel, another BLM activist and organizer, committed suicide on the steps of the Ohio State House in February of 2016.

this prospect might lead to catastrophe'.²² The fiction articulates the notion implicit in the anti-Black violence which necessitated the BLM movement; that

for white America to exist at all, it must continuously produce a complex of bodies in chains (Niggers). "Niggers" are not only the condition of possibility of America; they are also a class of people America cannot live with, people America doesn't want to share anything with, although without them America means nothing or not much. America, in this sense, means the impossibility of sharing freedom with others.²³

Such racial pessimism results in endings which are mere pauses in the nightmare, not actual escapes. Significantly, this denial of hope reflects back to the unhappy unendings which predominated early Gothic texts such as *Frankenstein* (1818). It is also part of an aesthetic which 'represent[s] black life on its own terrorized terms',²⁴ refuting ideologies of inherent Black monstrosity even as the envisioned solutions to anti-Black violence are themselves problematic stopgaps. History is horrible, BLM Gothic notes, but the present is as bad if not worse.

BLM Gothic's tropes reproduce traditional Gothic tropes with some important variations. As in traditional texts, the hero(in)es are often isolated (see e.g. *Two Distant Strangers*, *Victor LaValle's Destroyer*, *Ghost Boys*, and 'Haint in the Window') or are part of a small, isolated group (see e.g. *Them*, *Lovecraft Country*, and *The First Purge*). The hero(in)es are isolated only in a metaphorical sense, as they often find themselves amidst a sea of alienating white Americans. Thus Carter, the hero of *Two Distant Strangers*, is repeatedly attacked and murdered on one of New York City's bustling sidewalks. Police harass Tommy in the middle of Harlem and Red Hook in *The Ballad of Black Tom*. The opening sequence of *Get Out* exemplifies this trope as Andre wanders through a well-lit and white-populated suburb; the whiteness of the locale, emphasized in the streets lined with white houses, is the source of Andre's terror in which he is isolated as a lone Black man walking, he notes, through a hedge maze. Chris explicitly defines this sense of isolation amongst a sea of people, declaring 'sometimes, when there's too many white people, I get nervous'.

In terms of settings, the texts are largely based in real, recognizable locations across the United States. *Them* takes place in Oakland, California; *The First Purge* occurs in Staten Island; and *Destroyer* occurs in various locations across the United States, from Maryland to South Dakota. The choice to set these narratives in actual locales stresses the uncanniness of the US landscape for Blacks. Furthermore, in refusing to limit the violence to imagined and/or southern spaces, the fictions emphasize that the blood tide of racial oppression and violence mars the entire

²² Mmembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 162. ²³ Mmembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 162.

²⁴ Harrison, 'New Black Gothic'.

nation. Consequently, while the film short ‘Everybody Dies!’ (2016)²⁵ is set in the underworld, the Grim Reaper frequently refers to a map of the United States with lights across the country.

The villains of BLM Gothic are, unsurprisingly, white Americans. These monstrous antagonists are always part of a larger system of racial oppression and violence. Rhodes’s novel *Ghost Boys* best exemplifies this trend. Taking place in the aftermath of the police-shooting twelve-year-old Jerome, the child-ghost witnesses not only the officer’s trial and acquittal, but sees for the first time the relative luxury that is the white Chicago suburbs and school system. In contrast, a lack of resources and excessive violence disfigure Jerome’s predominantly Black school district and neighbourhood. The juxtaposition of the officer’s trial with Jerome’s exploration of the suburban library, parks, and resplendent homes signifies the white officer’s violence as part of a larger system of oppression that dooms Blacks. Similarly, the violent assailants in *The First Purge* are all white men, with the exception of Skeletor who is effectively weaponized by a white scientist. Yet both Skeletor and the militia serve the agenda of the leading political group, The Founding Fathers, which organized the Purge and targeted the Black location.

The villains in these films typically assume a degree of obscene, but very human, monstrosity. The texts repeatedly render white antagonists grotesque figures through their rejection of basic ‘human’ principles. As such BLM Gothic participates in that ‘cultural shift [which] aligns monstrosity not with physical difference, but with antithetical moral values’.²⁶ The climax of *Two Distant Strangers*, for instance, is the revelation of Officer Merks’ monstrosity as he applauds Carter’s attempt to enlighten Merk in negotiating for his life. The film slows down in the moment before Merk shoots Carter yet again, focusing on the single, shining gold tooth in Merks’ twisted mouth. Other scenes see Merks’ face contorted as he variously strangles and kills Carter with his bare hands. Similarly, *Them* relies on the increasingly terrifying violence of the white neighbours for its monstrosity. Yet the fictions also render white villains physically monstrous; the perpetrators in *The First Purge* sometimes blend their historical attire, such as KKK robes and SS-officer uniforms, with terrifying masks. Similarly, though Christina Braithwhite largely retains her spotless fashion throughout *Lovecraft Country*,²⁷ her male counterpart – Officer Seamus Lancaster – is literally a patchwork of parts stolen from the bodies of his Black victims. Lastly, any other monstrous supernatural creatures that appear in the

²⁵ ‘Everybody Dies!’, directed by Nuotama Bodomo, in *Collective: Unconscious* (Flies Collective and EAMS, 2016), film.

²⁶ Weinstock, ‘Invisible Monsters’, p. 276.

²⁷ The crisp, sharp lines of Christina’s attire serve to make her appear more mechanical than human. The series’ costume designer Pink explicitly noted that her goal was to convey a sharpness and edge to Christina: ‘I want you to not want to touch her’. ‘A Breakdown of Lovecraft Country’s Costumes’.

texts function as tools of white oppression and systemic violence. This is especially true of *Lovecraft Country* which sees white Cthulhus²⁸ attacking the heroes. In all of these cases, moral and physical monstrosity serve to destabilize an especially abhorrent aspect of white systemic dominance: the ‘assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else’.²⁹ BLM Gothic repeatedly reminds us that, through embracing such amoral dominance and violence, whites themselves become some ‘thing’ else and the humanity whiteness signifies inherently abhuman.

In response to horrifying encounters which are supported by systemic racism, the hero(in)es of these texts eventually defend themselves by embracing the violence they initially eschewed. In each fiction, non-violent protagonist weather repeated psychological violence and microaggressions with little more than an uncomfortable sigh. Confrontations with extreme physical violence forces each to access a degree of monstrosity in order to survive. Chris finally fights his way out of the house in *Get Out* after enduring a weekend of microaggressions, Nya the peaceful activist in *The First Purge* helps stage a siege on the militia, Akai must rip Frankenstein’s Creature – the only other being like Akai – apart in *Destroyer*, and Anthony becomes Candyman and kills several white officers to protect his former lover in *Candyman* (2022). This repeated pattern alludes both to the rationale for non-violence and its failures. More horrifying is the way this defence slips into the terrain of monstrosity. As such, BLM Gothic hero(in)es have something in common with the Final Girl figure defined in Carol J. Clover’s overview of Slasher films in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws*. For Clover, part of the horror of the Slasher film was this slippage into monstrosity by a figure that began as virtuous. This too is part of the horrified (un)endings of BLM Gothic. Such monstrous turns also reiterate the mode’s Afropessimist grounding, given Afropessimism’s inclination towards ‘destroying worlds’,³⁰ as well as the theory’s horror at its truths; as Wilderson explains: ‘I believe that the way out is a kind of violence so magnificent and so comprehensive that it scares the hell out of even radical revolutionaries’.³¹

As noted earlier, sociopolitical history and resistance methodologies inform BLM Gothic’s revision of traditional Gothic and Horror tropes. To that end, this Element will introduce you to three of the central tenants of the new trend. Section 1 provides an overview of racist necropolitics as they appear and function in reality and in the fiction. The section considers BLM Gothic’s depiction of Blacks as necropolitical objects and their consequent exile from citizenship; Blacks in the texts are metaphorical zombies, living but socio-politically dead. In each case, the texts reveal how

²⁸ Atticus manages to create a Cthulhu of his own but this creature is noticeably darker and appears only to protect the Black heroes. The creature never initiates violence, unlike the white Cthulhus.

²⁹ Dyer, *White*, p. 2. ³⁰ Jenkins, ‘Afro-Futurism/Afro-Pessimism’, p. 128.

³¹ Qtd in Jenkins, ‘Afro-Futurism/Afro-Pessimism’, p. 128.

Black existence in America is inherently Gothic as Blacks remain targeted for consumption and disposal in the service of whiteness.

Section 2 focuses on how the texts attempt to destabilize whiteness to ‘make it strange’. The section considers how BLM Gothic takes up Richard Dyer’s contention that the only way to end white supremacy is by de-normalizing it, thereby making whiteness and its power mechanisms visible. In doing so, BLM Gothic also reveals how whiteness corrupts and infects non-white spaces and populations, rendering intracommunal spaces and populations nightmarish. Yet even so, the texts insist that such created nightmares are still far less terrifying and alienating than predominantly white locations. As such, the texts destabilize the idea of white normativity, depicting it as a mask for cannibalistic grotesquery.

Section 3 considers the problem of self-defence and survival in BLM Gothic texts. The mode is marked by unhappy (un)endings in part because the protagonists must accede to a level of monstrosity in defending their lives. Hero(in)es in BLM Gothic grapple with the question of defying and embracing stereotypes in the midst of resisting anti-Black violence. The section meditates on the question BLM Gothic poses: what does it mean or matter if you’re called a monster by a horrifying society in the business of making people monstrous?

This is by no means a complete overview of BLM Gothic. There is much more to say about the numerous other issues at play in BLM Gothic texts, such as questions around the power of witnessing, the horror of intracommunal violence, and the nature of interracial allyship. Similarly, this Element limits the BLM Gothic texts covered in its overview. This study examines the novels and novellas *Ghost Boys* (Jewelle Parker Rhodes), *The Ballad of Black Tom* (Victor LaValle), and *Victor LaValle’s Destroyer*; the short story ‘Haint in the Window’ (Tananarive Due); the films ‘Everybody Dies!’ (2016), *Get Out* (2017), and *Candyman* (2021); and the television series *Lovecraft Country* (2020). While these texts are exemplary, there are many more which fall under the purview of this study. The texts under discussion here were chosen based on their popularity, their creators’ standing in Black Gothic, and the social debates they engendered. Lastly, while there are certainly BLM Gothic texts which appear outside of the US context, diasporic films like *His House* (2020), *Saloum* (2022) and novels like *The Girl With All the Gifts* (2014) – while similarly targeted in their ideological concern – do not abide by the same conventions as those deployed in the American context. This Element is merely an introduction to a rich and complex vein of US Black Gothic.

1 You Already Dead

Let me paint a picture of what’s waiting for you on the shore. You all get to be slaves. Split up, sold off and worked to death. The lucky ones get Sunday off to

sleep and fuck and make mo' slaves and all for what? For cotton? Indigo? For a Fucking purple shirt? A hundred year later, you're fucked. A hundred years after thatfucked. A hundred years after that, you get free, you still gettin' fucked outta' jobs and shot at by police. . . . You are staring down the barrel of 300 years of subjugation, racist bullshit, and heart disease.³²

Who do you think makes the hood? The city cuts off the community and waits for it to die. Then they invite developers in and say "Hey, you artists, you young people, you white, preferably or only, please come to the hood, its cheap. And if you stick it out for a couple for years, we'll bring you a Whole Foods."³³

He didn't see you. My father didn't really see you.³⁴

To behold a slave ship is to behold a floating cemetery. The belly of the slave ship reproduced the climate of the coffin, and the first lesson for the enslaved was to see themselves as 'already dead'. But, as Anansi's speech explains in the first epigraph, the end of slavery did not bring life and liberty for Black subjects. Rather the US sociopolitical system traps them within an invisible coffin. As *Candyman's* description of gentrification clarifies, Black populations are figuratively offered up as sacrifices to white consumption well before their actual demise. Caught in a seemingly endless cycle of subjugation, violence, and disenfranchisement, Black Americans confront the nightmare of their living deaths.

Anansi's speech appears as part of *American Gods*, a series devoted to exploring the creation of the United States, alongside its sociopolitics, beliefs, and desires – in short, its 'gods'. Anansi gives this speech in the second episode of the series; the first episode featured a failed Viking conquest. The juxtaposition implies that the United States would have proven a failed conquest were it not for its enslaved population. The series, devoted to re-imagining the ideals of a country that proclaims freedom for and equality among men in its founding document, reminds viewers of the unsettling truth of the United States: its democracy was and remains dependent upon the disenfranchisement and dehumanization of a portion of its people. US democracy is doomed to bifurcation, characterized by

a community of fellow creatures governed, at least in principle, by the law of equality, and a category of nonfellows, or even of those without part, that is also established by law. A priori, those without part have no right to have rights. They are governed by the law of inequality [thus] enabl[ing] a practically unbridgeable distance to be upheld between the community of fellow creatures and its others.³⁵

Consequently, emancipation merely brought a new form of slavery, in many states quite literally, as generations of Black people remain damned to 'a poisoned heritage' in which the state of baseness and ignominy hardly changed

³² *American Gods*, 'The Secret of Spoons', Amazon Prime, 7 May 2017, series.

³³ *Candyman* (2021). ³⁴ Rhodes, *Ghost Boys*, p. 190. ³⁵ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 17.