

“RIDING WHILE WHITE”:
TRANSPORTING RACE AND THE PRODUCTION OF BLACKNESS

Armond R. Towns

A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Communication Studies.

Chapel Hill
2015

Approved by:

Sarah Sharma

Renee Alexander Craft

Jeremy Packer

Alvaro Reyes

Kumarini Silva

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ABSTRACT

Armond R. Towns: “Riding While White”: Transporting Race and the Production of Blackness
(Under the Direction of Sarah Sharma)

In 2010, LA Gang Tours went on its inaugural ride through the streets of Los Angeles. The tour drives a busload of 30-40 mostly white tourists through South Central. The tour guides are four to eight black and brown men from the geographic focus of the tours; they are also all former gang members. They provide the main voices on the tours, sharing personal narratives of life in South Central with the tourists. In the popular media, the gang tour is positioned as exploitative or revolutionary. But neither of these positions addresses the material implications of a tour bus driving through the ghetto. I argue the bus’s physical movement through South Central reproduces racial relations for Los Angeles, and these relations are always connected to mobility.

On the tour, whiteness is reproduced through the tour’s ceasefire, which allows the tourists to move through the community unharmed for three hours. This replicates racial relations, because South Central has always been viewed as a black space that whites can move through for play or even to abuse black residents in the mid-20th century. Relatedly, as the tour bus moves, the demographically brown South Central area of today becomes imagined as black, as was the case demographically roughly 40 years ago. There is no essential blackness here, but the tourists—with their privileged movement, questions, and the tour’s catering to them—are allotted a classificatory power that lets them redefine South Central based on their imaginations via rap music, sensationalized news, movies, and the area’s history of antiblack racism. In spite

of this, the tour guides and residents remake themselves in the face of white classificatory power. For the tour guides, mobility is central to questioning the normalized relation of violence in their community. They articulate the gang violence they face daily with the systematic violence that white supremacy implemented on them. Ultimately, this project articulates LA Gang Tours to a history of race relations, revealing that mobility is not secondary to subjectivity, but central to the way in which people are raced in society.

To my dead homies, Ricardo “Chino” Alleyne, Damon “D-Bo” Jackson, and Jelena Stojakovic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Despite years of feeling like a lone, isolated hermit, I realize that writing a dissertation is a completely collaborative project. Many friends, colleagues, and mentors have helped along the way. None has been more important than Sarah Sharma. Thank you for your patience and your belief in me throughout this process, even as I often did not believe in myself. You took me on in the middle of my program without hesitation and did not look back. For that, I cannot thank you enough. Special thanks to my committee, Renee Alexander Craft, Jeremy Packer, Alvaro Reyes, and Kumi Silva, for our productive discussions over food and beer. These were all necessary and memorable things for a poor grad student. I also could not have done this without the productive discussions and debates I have had with amazing faculty members: Eric Watts, Chris Lundberg, Mike Palm, Carole Blair, Ken Hillis, Larry Grossberg, Pat Parker, Della Pollock, Chris Poulos, Spoma Jovanovic, Torin Monahan, Dennis Mumby, Dana Cloud, and Cerise Glenn, to name a few. Thank you for your belief in me and for pushing me to be the scholar I am today.

But some of the most important conversations I have had since arriving in Chapel Hill occurred over a beer, whiskey, and/or cigarette with friends and colleagues. Thank yous to Dana Desoto, Alex Ingersoll, Kashif Powell, Alfred Lomas, Ali Brown, J. Beckham, Love Crossling, Daniel B. Chavez, Jamie Keliikoa, Amanda Ingersoll, Megan Morrissey, Jenn Aglio, Christie Poteet, Chris Dahlie, Lauren Du Graf, Menaka Mohan, Adam Rottinghaus, Naimah Goethe, Haley Jude, Jade Davis, Carey Hardin, Ted Hardin, Amy Fallah, Marie Garlock, Ali Na, Grover Wehman-Brown, Kurt Zemlica, Freya Thimsen, Julia O'Grady, Robin Boylorn, Seth Mulliken,

Rory Parker, Rashmi Iyer, Alia Wegner, Jes Speed Wiley, Tsang Chung Kin, Laura Lazarus, Houda Abadi, Pavithra Abhirami, Liz Mason-Deese, and Pavithra Prasad. Special thanks (and sincere apologies) to Atiya Husain, who put up with multiple late nights of edits, swearing, fried foods, masculinist posturing, Sour Patch Kids, Coca Cola, contradictory critiques of capitalism, sports, tickle fights, Kevin Hart, and “Breaking Bad” and “Sons of Anarchy,” both necessary writing tools for any ABD’er. You know I couldn’t have done this without you.

Lastly, thank you to my family for their years of support during, before, and surely after this process. Thank you to my mom, the most important person in my life, for reminding me that writing a dissertation is not the toughest thing that I have ever done. Thank you also to my dad, my brother Andre, sisters Kawon, Monesha, and Jaz, my aunt Yvonne, my uncle Al, my nieces and nephews, Mike, Malika, TT, Octavia, Da'Morris, Junior, and De'Andre, my aunt Dee, my multiple cousins, my grandparents, and numerous other aunts, uncles, and play cousins. Thank you for your help with completing this project. Any faults within are solely my own.

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INTRODUCTION

TRANSPORTING RACE

The greatest testimony to the success of what's going on is the fact that you can visit this area which is considered one of the most violent areas in the USA and have a bus go through, with white tourists completely uninterrupted, and unchallenged...It's down to the work that has been done on the streets.

—Alfred Lomas, founder of LA Gang Tours, as quoted in *7 Days* (2010)

In 2010, LA Gang Tours went on its inaugural ride through the streets of Los Angeles.

The tours drive a busload of 30-50 mostly white tourists, all seeking to understand what the LA gangster lifestyle is “really like.” The guides for the gang tours are four to eight black and brown men from the geographic focus of the tours, South Central. The tour guides are also all former gang members from the community. They provide the main voices on the tours, sharing personal narratives of gang life in South Central with the mostly white tourists. The tourists often note that hip-hop music, gangster movies, and the criminality associated with South Central through the news media are the reasons they find LA Gang Tours attractive. The tour guides, however, think about LA Gang Tours as a way to end these mediated “stereotypes” of their home.

From the start, LA Gang Tours have received both praise and criticism. The tour guides refer to the tour as “revolutionary” because it creates a ceasefire called “Safe Passage” between four major rival gangs in South Central (LA Gang Tours, 2014). On the tour's website, it is noted that South Central has experienced a 27 percent decrease in criminal activity since the gang tours were first started (LA Gang Tours, 2014). But the tour guides and website are not the only ones to praise the tour's efforts. Kevin Malone, a former general manager of the LA Dodgers baseball team, is quoted as saying in response to questions of the tour's exploitative nature, ““But I know

[the founder's of the gang tour's] heart,' he said. 'He is not taking anything out. All he is doing is serving and giving. If that is exploitation, I hope somebody does that to me'" (*The Irish Times*, 2009, p. 15). And during my first tour, at one of the few stops where the tourists are allowed to meet residents, people in South Central also noted how "rare" it was that their children could play outside during the gang tour without the fear of gang violence.

The criticism of LA Gang Tours is equally loud and from prominent voices in Los Angeles. Gang specialist Jorga Leap, for example, is one of the many people who publically admire the tour guides' "motivation, but says the tour is disrespectful and irresponsible" (NBC, 2010). Leap further argues, "We can't treat it like it's Disneyland, like it's another amusement for tourists to come and visit and see when they come to Los Angeles" (NBC, 2010). Similarly, Francisco Ortega, of the LA Commission of Human Relations, asks "You're going to have what? Bring someone to look at us? To look at people who live on the ground, who live under these conditions?" (CBN, 2010) Ana Parra of Homeboy Industries states plainly that, "I honestly think that [the tour is] a bunch of BS, because we're not a zoo, we're not...we're human beings, and people cannot understand what really being in a gang is by getting a tour" (NBC, 2010). And in her article "Crime and Tourism," Konstantina Zerva (2013) notes that LA Gang Tours are an "economic endeavor" led by black and brown tour guides who place the tourists in "danger," a danger that tourists are increasingly becoming more comfortable with and find pleasurable.

The popular, critical, and scholarly discourses of LA Gang Tours often situate the tours as if they exist in a bubble. In these discussions, black and brown tour guides and residents are, on the one hand, the true "exploiters" of South Central (*The Timaru Herald*, 2010), and, on the other, they are participating in a "new" form of political activism, never seen before (LA Gang Tours, 2014). According to the arguments of exploitation (*The Timaru Herald*, 2010), poverty

tourism (Textor, 2014), and “ghettotainment,” (*7 Days*, 2010), the tour guides’ actions are what *really* damage the community, whether by violence or their attempt to profit off of the misery of others. In the “revolutionary” argument (*The Irish Times*, 2009; LA Gang Tours, 2014), the gang tour is a radical act because it creates a ceasefire between local gangs that have been warring for decades, which is situated as unheard of in the area. However, LA Gang Tours is not an isolated instance, where exploitation *initially* comes from or where radicalism is *first* expressed. Instead, the gang tours are a moment that outlines the contradictory relations of racial violence in LA, a moment that I argue reveals the importance of mobility for racialization processes in the city but also in the US as a whole. A more complex look at LA Gang Tours and the material implications of it for Los Angeles allows me to move beyond the exploitative/revolutionary binary to instead illustrate the persistence of mobility for race throughout the country.

This dissertation is motivated by one main argument: Mobility is central to the political ontologies of race in the US. This argument is explicated by the three sub-claims of the coming chapters. First, institutions like slavery, Jim Crow, ghettoization, and mass incarceration reveal the ways that (claim one) whites have largely controlled the means and practices of mobility and transportation in the US. Whether by slave ships, or city planning and freeway construction, or the transport of black bodies out of the ghetto into the privatized prison system, these institutions hold within them the assumption that white people move differentially than black people, and the control of these relations structure white privilege. Thus, whiteness is made based on a privileged autonomous right to move, as well as the assumed right to move the “Other.” Here, the murder of Trayvon Martin is not out of the ordinary nor a suspension of law, but an expression of the right George Zimmerman had to control when, where, and how an unarmed black teen could move. On LA Gang Tours, similarly, the privileged relation of the mostly white tourists structures the

three-hour-long Safe Passage ceasefire, which allows for the tourists to experience a different South Central because of their whiteness. Their whiteness necessitates that their movements in South Central alters the pace and scale of life for the South Central resident. Thus, the mostly white tourists hold control over the bodies, movements, and space of South Central.

Second (claim two), the white control of mobility and transportation mentioned above plays a role in racializing people and spaces. Under this framework, the forceful movements of black and brown bodies, whether through segregation or mass incarceration, are not neutral, but rather practices that define their blackness and brownness. Alvaro Reyes (2012) similarly argues the spatial construction of colonies does not so much separate colonized from colonizer. Instead, these spatial relations *define* the colonized and colonizer. Similarly, the mobile relations involved in freeway construction in the mid-20th century opened the way for “white flight” (Avila, 1998), while reinforcing the physical and metaphorical domains of blackness, brownness, and whiteness in Los Angeles. Thus, the white privilege to move from the inner city racially classified both the city and the suburbs. Similarly, on LA Gang Tours, white tourists’ privileged movement through South Central allots them a classificatory power to define the ghetto as a black space, despite the fact that it is 55 percent Latino/a today (Medina, 2012). The normalization of white movement plays a role in racially categorizing the spaces and assumedly fixed identities of the Other.

Lastly (claim three), people of color move in ways that challenge white controls of movement and challenge white classificatory power. This contradicts a popular view in critical race studies that argues blackness is conditioned on an inability to move through physical space (Johnson, 2013; Wilderson, 2010).¹ Both black and brown people continue to move in ways that

¹ Critical race studies is not critical race theory, which has roots in critical law studies. Instead, I use the term critical race studies to speak to various studies of race, with particular emphasis on black studies and African American studies because of South Central’s history as the black ghetto of Los Angeles. In addition, the discussion

challenge any associations of them as “immobile,” or as having no mobility outside the domains of white classificatory power. The Underground Railroad, for example, challenged white control of slave mobility. It, thus, relied on white assumptions of black geographical ignorance to move black slaves in alternative ways than what white slave catchers assumed possible. On LA Gang Tours, similarly, black and brown tour guides use movement to remake South Central and to call out the normality of racial violence in their community. The white assumption that the city and the police have its all residents’ best interests at heart is disrupted on the tour. The importance of moving in and out of South Central becomes obvious as the tour critiques mass incarceration and wealth Downtown, police brutality at the Rampart, and segregation and self-destruction in South Central. Alternative narratives of LA are made possible via the tour’s traversal of space.

Through the above claims, I show the importance of mobility and transportation to blackness, whiteness, and brownness extends beyond LA Gang Tours. Doing so is necessary to illustrate that race in the US is reliant on mobility and transportation. My central argument about mobility’s importance to the political ontology of blackness calls for a redefinition of mobility as it is used in mobility studies. Mobility and transportation, for this dissertation, are black political ontological processes, or they produce conceptions of US blackness. Despite Frank Wilderson’s (2010) discussion of “absurd mobility” as a condition of blackness, or Loïc Wacquant’s (2002) analysis that blackness is experienced as an immobile relation of imprisonment, or Gaye Theresa Johnson’s (2013) position that blackness is conditioned on “spatial immobilization,” each scholar begins with the (mobile) premise that African subjects entered the Middle Passage and exited as black objects. Likewise, based on the political corralling of increasing black migrant populations

of blackness in black studies assumes other races beyond black and white that will be given importance here. As such, critical race studies speaks to those within and outside of black studies that critically examine racial constructs.

into New York and LA in the 20th century, mobility accounts for the racial categorization of a space like Harlem or South Central as a “black space.” For this project, both physical and metaphorical traversals of space make racialized subjects and objects.

This introduction will proceed by reviewing my experience on a tour. It will then consider the implications of my argument within and beyond LA Gang Tours. Next, it will outline the methods used to gather evidence to back my research claims. Finally, I will layout the upcoming chapters. Throughout this project, the following questions guide my research: How are mobility and transportation productive of race in the US, both on and off LA Gang Tours? How are conceptions and fantasies of whiteness, blackness, and brownness formulated within the material practices of transportation and mobility? What racialized effect does the movement of whites, and the control of movement and transportation largely by whites, have on spaces? How does black and Latino/a movement challenge whiteness and white constructs of space? What does it mean when people of color, described as “immobile” in critical race studies, create a practice based largely on their political, economic, and geographic mobility? This project considers these questions in relation to LA Gang Tours, but also racial slavery, Jim Crow, Reform, ghettoization, prisons, the Underground Railroad, and “illegal immigration.”

My First LA Gang Tour

I stood on the corner of Kent Street and Waterloo Avenue in Echo Park. It was a hot summer day in 2012, and, after reading much of the hype on the Internet I stood finally awaiting my first experience of LA Gang Tours. After waiting alone for nearly five minutes, on the corner of a Los Angeles community known for Latino/a gangs, two heavily tattooed Latino men began walking up the block toward me. I assumed they were either going to approach me, or they were headed toward the large building behind me. As they got closer, both men frowned at me a bit

awkwardly, as if asking themselves “What’s he doing here?” “What up, homie,” one said to me, before both men walked past. I responded, “What up.” Both men eventually made their way to the large building behind me. I know because I watched them until they disappeared inside it. Their consternated glances at me were not out of the ordinary for Echo Park. My noticeable gang-related tattoos, my black skin, and the Echo Park community I stood in—home to well-known Latino/a gangs like the Big Top Locos, Diamond Street Locos, and Frogtown (*The Eastsider LA*, 2013)—made me stand out.

The looks I received from the two men were similar to stares I receive from other LA natives—and even tour guides on later tours. The founder of the tour has even asked me about the noticeable shotgun tattoo on my wrist, thinking it a weird choice for a college student. The gun tattoos, and the large majority of my visible tattoos, show my gang affiliation; this is what drew me to LA Gang Tours in the first place. In 1993, I joined the Bloods street gang in New Jersey, and immediately began showing my allegiance through the tattoos that the tour guides and others ask me about on a regular basis. Joining the Bloods was a moment that changed my life forever. On the one hand, I had found a group of friends who taught me the importance of dedication and loyalty. My best friend, for example, once shot another unaffiliated friend in the buttocks because he was talking down about the gang. My best friend then called an ambulance and waited for them to come to explain his actions. Although I explained that he should probably leave the scene, he assured me he needed to explain why it would not be tolerated to talk down about the Bloods, “even if the rollers come.” The police did not show. On the other hand, and related to this dedication, I learned a skewed form of masculinity that involved violence as a cure-all for any confrontation I might find myself in. The process of “debating” that I would learn as normal in college did not make sense to me at 17 years old. Physical fights were my

debates as early as 12 years old; this quickly escalated into shootouts and knife fights, knife fights that I still have war scars from. Due to my understanding of masculinity, I have spent roughly two years of my life living in juvenile detention centers and prisons, a comparatively short time in relation to friends who brag of being “state raised.” The jail time, the murdered friends, and the fatigue eventually led to me to leave the gang lifestyle behind. Not surprisingly, finding myself in graduate school years later, gangs became my topic of inquiry. Reflecting on my past in LA, known as the “gang capital of the world,” the Bloods seem a world away, yet really close. In fact, soon I would be touring the spot where my gang was founded.

Behind me stands the Dream Center, the starting location of LA Gang Tours. It is a church that looks more like a hotel than a place of worship. But the Dream Center was once a hospital before being taken over by a Christian-based organization known throughout the city for hosting charity events, such as toy drives and food drives in some of the most impoverished Los Angeles areas (Dream Center, 2014). This is the building the two Latino men walked into, as well as the organization that sparked the idea of a gang tour in the first place.

“Yo, Armond!” I heard from behind me. I turned to see a heavily tattooed, mid-40s Latino man with a large smile on his face. It was Alfred Lomas, the founder of the gang tour. We first met about six months ago at a coffee shop not far away from the Dream Center. Alfred is an extremely charismatic person, one who is needed on a tour like this. “This is where it all started, homie,” he told me. By “it” he was referring to the gang tour. Alfred came up with the idea for LA Gang Tours upon his release from prison in the early 1990s and through his involvement with the Dream Center. While working on food and toy truck deliveries set up by the Dream Center, he realized that he was helping his former rivals in ways he wanted to continue. He figured that if he could move safely, particularly without being shot at, through rival gang

neighborhoods based on a toy truck or a food drive, why could he not set up a tourism opportunity that would allow mostly white tourists the same movement for profit.

In addition to intervention strategies like toy and food trucks, Alfred's work with the Dream Center involves conflict mediation, or attempts to prevent retaliation for gang violence between two warring gangs. In short, if a gang member is shot in South Central, Alfred is part of a group that has a "license to operate,"² or approach the gangs involved in the shooting to see if there is an alternative that can be reached that does not involve retaliatory shootings. Aside from the toy and food drives, these strategies of conflict mediation allowed Alfred to form bonds with rival gang members, many of whom would become tour guides. Today they all share an interest in ending the gang violence South Central is stereotypically known for. According to Alfred, this tour is another strategy for him and the other tour guides to reach such an end.

According to newspapers as far away as New Zealand, the gang tour averages 30 tourists per tour (*The New Zealand Herald*, 2010), and the tour bus can fit around 50 people. On the first tour, *The Daily News of Los Angeles* notes "The maiden voyage into the turfs of some of L.A.'s most notorious gangs—the Crips and Florencia 13—on Saturday had more than 50 customers" (2010b, p. A10). With advertisements for the tour as far away as Australia (*Melton/Moorabool Leader*, 2011), commercials, Internet public service announcements (Ryan, 2010a, 2010b), and the rap music video performed by tour guides and residents (LA Gang Tours, 2014), word of the tour travels fast. Relatedly, the rap music video, "LA Gang Tours," is produced by and features lyrics from tour guide Melvin Johnson. Johnson also runs a music company called West Coast Getcha Gotcha Entertainment (realinthefield.com, 2012). The video is posted on the gang tour's

² There has been a documentary film made about this called *License to Operate* (LTO, 2013), which examines the metaphorical "license" the tour guides and other gang members have to try to settle street gang problems before the violence escalates.

website and YouTube to draw people in, comforting potential tourists by rapping about the safety of the tour, while assuring them that the tour is full of actual former gang members.

“There’s a family from Norway on the way to pick us up,” Alfred told me. Today he would be giving me a “private” tour. Though the tour still costs \$65, down from the original marketed price of \$100, the private tours are very different from the public tour I would take later, a tour that would have approximately 30 white tourists on an air-conditioned tour bus. The private tour involves only Alfred driving tourists through LA, which has its pluses and minuses. On the one hand, it is easier to engage with Alfred in a far more personal manner, so the tourists actually get a lot more information about gangs and South Central. On the other, on private tours tourists miss out on hearing about the experiences of the four to eight other the tour guides, who have their own engaging stories about street gang life in South Central.

After a 15-minute conversation between Alfred and me about prisons, street gangs, movies, and the Bloods in New Jersey, a white SUV with dark tinted windows slowly pulled up in front of us. Alfred and I both cautiously squinted at the car, unsure what the intentions of the driver were. The passenger-side window rolled down to two white faces in the front seat smiling at us. Alfred and I both let out a bit of a sigh of relief. “Yooooooo!” Alfred yelled, before running to the driver’s side. These were the Norwegian tourists we were waiting for. Alfred and I hopped in the car, him driving in the front seat, me in the back. The tourists were named Eric and Carol. Eric sat in the passenger seat, Carol got in the back with me. In between Carol and I was their infant son who I spent time playing with, especially when he began crying on the freeway.

Our tour began by Alfred driving us closer to the Dream Center. Outside were people who worked for the Center, most of whom were former gang members, according to Alfred. Alfred is one of those types of people who know everyone by name. If he does not remember a

person's name, he calls them a word that is meant with love to be non-gender specific: "fool." As we slowly drive by the Dream Center he says hello to all the black and brown men and women and fools outside, introducing us as tourists in the process. It is obvious that the people really like Alfred. They smile at the sight of him, some making jokes about why he gets to drive in an air-conditioned SUV on such a hot day while they are stuck outside.

As we turn onto Sunset Boulevard away from the Dream Center, Alfred shifts his tone, from jovial to more serious. This is where he does not hesitate to explain his goals for the tours. The tours are an extension of the interventionist goals of the tour guides to end the violence of the South Central community that they consider themselves wholly implicated in. As Alfred told me during our first interview a few months prior to my gang tour, "The tour is just a tour, but it's really a chance to continue our three-pronged effort." On my first tour, he repeated that the three efforts include 1) public safety, where the tour guides create a ceasefire, called Safe Passage, that is designed to impact not only the tour bus but also South Central. The ceasefire is an agreement between four local gangs that have all decided not to be involved in illegal activities as the tour bus travels through the community. In short, Safe Passage allows the mostly white tourists protection as they move through the ghetto, as long as they are with the tour guides.

Another important effort of the tour is 2) job creation, specifically for former gang members who struggle to find legal employment. The importance of doing this is inseparable from the private prison industry that each of the tour guides critiques regularly. Their history as ex-convicted felons makes it increasingly difficult for them to find legal forms of employment, and LA Gang Tours hopes to be a remedy for this problem. In particular, Alfred hopes the tours "will create 10 part-time jobs, mainly for ex-gang members working as guides and talking about their own struggles and efforts to reduce violence" (*The Timaru Herald*, 2010, p. 9). According

to my interviews with Alfred, the number of part-time jobs available for tour guides fluctuates between approximately four and eight. Like Alfred, each of the tour guides are involved in well-known gangs like the Bloods and Crips (traditionally black) and Alfred's street gang, Florencia 13 (Latino/a)—three gangs all founded in South Central and its surrounding areas. And whether by drug dealing, bank robbery, or other illegal activities, the tour guides' affiliation with these gangs has often been the central source of income for them.

The final effort of the tour involves 3) the hope of creating awareness, or breaking stereotypes about South Central. South Central has a long history of being largely romanticized or demonized in the media, particularly for its relations to gang violence, drug dealing, and other forms of criminality (Lee, 2010). Alfred argues that the people he meets who are not from South Central cannot think about the community outside of what they have seen in movies like *Boyz 'n the Hood* or from rappers like Dr. Dre and Snoop Dogg. Even worse, according to tour guides, are the images of South Central that are repeated in nightly television news reports. Alfred notes that the news media shows nothing but black and brown criminals in South Central, ignoring the work of “community activists who work on the ground to end the violence the news highlights.” Alfred tells us as we begin to head toward Downtown that the tour allows for the tour guides to “bring clarity through our own stories,” stories that are often told through the eyes and narratives of white people not from South Central. Thus, according to the tour guides, South Central suffers because it is a space that is classified by the opinions of people who do not live there, or from people who tell only biased reports about the community that highlight criminality.

Finally arriving Downtown, Alfred answered a question that I asked him, which also happens to be one of the main critiques the tour receives in the media: “What do you have to say to those who think you're exploiting the South Central area?” Almost immediately, Alfred states,

“Well, all the money from the gang tour goes back into the community,” whether by employing former gang members or creating food drives and toy drives. This, for Alfred, makes the claims of exploitation unfounded. Relatedly, as we draw near Skid Row, Alfred decides against driving us down the infamous streets for fear of “too much exploitation,” meaning there was “too much” of a feeling of looking at people’s misery. Skid Row is home to the largest homeless population in the US, or, as LA Magazine reporter Ed Leibowitz (2014) calls it, “the homeless capital of the United States.” Thus, preventing “exploitation” is a constant consideration of the tour guides.

In addition to Skid Row, the gang tours include 12 scheduled locations between Echo Park and South Central. Some locations include the LA County Jail, which has housed stars like Paris Hilton and O.J. Simpson. In addition, all the tour guides note they have spent some time “in county.” After Skid Row and pretty impressive and massive graffiti murals Downtown, Alfred drives us to the Rampart police station—a station that was shut down for its history of police brutality that disproportionately impacted LA’s communities of color. As we parked in front of the station, Alfred began to discuss something largely viewed as unfounded, though probable: the Rampart’s connections to the murder of the rap star the Notorious BIG in 1997. This happens before the tour finally arrives in South Central, Watts, and Compton. And although we did not get to experience it on my private tour, the larger tours typically end at the “Pico Union Graf Lab, where street artists display their work” (O’Sullivan, 2010).



Figure 1.1: A picture of the Downtown graffiti mural painted by the tattoo and graffiti artist Mr. Cartoon. It is one of the few graffiti murals sanctioned by the city. Source: Photo courtesy of the author.

When we arrived in South Central, my excitement came through. As a former gang member, we were riding by the spaces where my gang was started. Therefore, I had multiple questions about the gangs and the community's history. I asked about Central Avenue's history as the "Black Wall Street" on the West Coast in the early 20th century. I asked about the founder of the Crips, Raymond Washington. My questions and knowledge about the area (and tattoos) made Carol ask me if I was a tour guide or a tourist, although Alfred already explained I was a "student from North Carolina" when we first met. One of our first stops in South Central was the scene of the 1974 Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) shoot-out with the LA police department. The SLA was a black militant group that is best known for abducting the heiress Patty Hearst in the 1970s. According to Alfred, after a failed robbery in Inglewood, members of SLA returned to their home base in South Central. When police arrived, they fired tear gas into the house, which ignited a shoot-out between six SLA members and the police. During the shoot-out, over 9,000

rounds were fired, and all six members of SLA were killed. In fact, so many rounds were fired that there are still bullet holes in the home base that we tour by.

Another stop in South Central was the Pueblo del Rio housing projects, located near Alfred's gang, Florencia 13, but also Blood territory. As we pulled up in Pueblo del Rio near a playground, more people ran up to the car at the sight of Alfred, all smiling and happy to see him. And the majority of these people were women and children, all black and Latino/a. We began to hear from these residents of Pueblo del Rio about one of the most important aspects of LA Gang Tours for them: Safe Passage. It is a clause that protects the tourists based on an agreed upon three-hour-long ceasefire between four local gangs; likewise, the Safe Passage also protects the Pueblo residents. Many residents described how nice it was for them to simply walk outside during the ceasefires, without fear of violence, particularly as many of their children played in a nearby park. Importantly, since the start of the tour, there has been a 27 percent decrease in gang violence, which the tour guides posit is a direct result of Safe Passage (LA Gang Tours, 2014).

The ceasefire involves not only rules for the residents, but rules for the tourists: the tourists must sign a waiver that acknowledges the potential danger of taking the tour. The waiver makes journalist Kate O'Sullivan (2010) argue the gang tours afford "travellers the chance to go where wise men have feared to tread—albeit in the safety of a bus." The waiver has been viewed as one of the more controversial aspects of the tour, drawing scorn from politicians, who argue it is safer to "just watch a movie" (Brand, 2010). Although the *danger* that politicians warn of has yet to happen, the tour guides remind the tourists to fulfill their end of the contract and not take pictures during the tour bus's movement throughout LA. The spaces where photos are allowed, however, are the Downtown graffiti murals, the Pico Union Graffiti Lab, and the Watts Towers.



Figure 1.2: Photo of the Watts Towers, made by Sabato Rodia in 1954. Source: Photo courtesy of the author.

One of the places we were allowed to step out and stretch our legs is the Watts Tower Arts Center. This center, according to historian Paul Von Blum (2010), was supported by the city after 1965 for political reasons, rather than aesthetic purposes. Specifically, the city hoped to tide the frustration of black rebellion that started with the Watts Riots and spread to other major cities throughout the US during the 1960s. Today the Arts Center is home to local artists like Jessica Guidel and Carlos Spivey (Department of Cultural Affairs, 2012). Still, the most famous artistic draw of Watts is the Watts Towers, built by Italian-American artist Sabato Rodia, who finished them in 1954 (Hooks, 2012). The Towers are in the heart of rival gang territory, which speaks to the graffiti often painted on them. Today the Towers are clean, part of the city's losing effort to clean up gang graffiti throughout the city.

After making a final stop in front of the "Welcome to Compton" sign on Rosecrans Avenue, my first tour is over, nearly three hours after first meeting Alfred, Carol, and Eric in Echo Park. Alfred drives us to the freeway, and we head north back to Echo Park. On the larger,

public tours the freeway time plays a bigger role, particularly because the tour guides often show a documentary, *Crips and Bloods: Made in America*, on the bus's DVD player during the traffic jams. The documentary highlights the Bloods and the Crips in South Central, by articulating the gangs to the larger history of antiblack violence in the community, including segregation, police brutality, F.B.I. COINTELPRO infiltration of the Black Panther Party, and the Watts Riots. One journalist and tourist noted the documentary "traces gang development over the past five decades to neglect, deprivation and police antagonism in forgotten corners of the city" (Archibold, 2010a, p. 1). Although I did not know it at the time, this focus on the Bloods and the Crips would be one of the many interesting characteristics that would catch my attention in my project. But after this first tour, LA Gang Tours is amazing to me. Even with just one tour guide, the tour was fun and informational. While reading the newspaper articles and blogs about exploitation, I had difficulty seeing where such exploitation lie. I also questioned the "novelty" of the tour championed by the tour guides. What both the tour guides and those who despised the tour never talked about was what the physical traversal of space by the tour meant for South Central and Los Angeles.

Black Mobility on LA Gang Tours and Beyond

The main argument of this dissertation (mobility is a central component of the political ontology of blackness) aligns with my experience as a tourist on LA Gang Tours. I connect the gang tour's ceasefire to my first claim that whiteness is structured by the autonomous control of mobility and transportation for whites and, just importantly, for the "Other." I also think about the importance of white movement for the remaking of blackness, which also occurs on the gang tour. In particular (claim two), the movement of the white tourists through South Central allows for them to classify the space as "black." And lastly LA Gang Tours reveals the ways that both black and brown tour guides challenge white classificatory power (claim three).

But these relations that I articulate to LA Gang Tours are far from a new. Instead, they stretch through historical examples, such as slavery, Jim Crow, Reform, and ghettoization. For this reason, each of the above claims articulates mobility as central to the political ontologies of race in the US. Mobility, for this project, is a structuring relation of race beyond the gang tour. The following section connects the claims that comprise the coming chapters, but in ways that are concerned with articulating race and mobility in slavery, Jim Crow, ghettoization, Reform of Mexican Los Angeles, the Underground Railroad, and “illegal immigration.” Doing so is important to illustrate the prevalence of mobility and transportation to US racialization.

The Privileged Burden of White Mobility: Claim One

White people—through their ability to be autonomous subjects and control their own movement while directing the movement of others—inhabit a privileged relationship to mobility. This privileged mobile relationship is quite often tied up with a rhetoric of mobility that assumes civilizing effects, where white mobility is deemed as *saving* the other, *protecting* the self, and/or neutralizing a *threat* (often these effects cannot be separated). For this project, it is important to think of whiteness as a powerful racial category and subject position that does not involve biology, but a political monopolization of physical and metaphorical mobility.

During US racial slavery, movement was similarly established as a central privilege of citizenship—a privilege that physically and metaphorically distinguished the slave from the free, but, more specifically, black from white. Euan Hague (2010) examines the relationship between the black slave and the citizen when he argues “While absent from the Constitution, mobility and the right to travel have become *de facto* benefits of U.S. citizenship, sustained and underpinned by the Supreme Court” (2010, p. 335). For Hague, in citizenship is an assumption: citizenship is a white privilege that involves autonomous movement. One case study Hague uses to think about

the racial implications of mobility is the Dred Scott decision. Scott was a slave in the mid-19th century who sued his former masters on the grounds that he and his family were enslaved in free territories. Scott and his lawyers argued every time he and his family were moved from slave states to free territories, the law was broken, and, as such, they should all go free. After over 10 years of litigation, the trial went to the Supreme Court, where Chief Justice Roger Taney argued that if blacks, free or slave, had to “right to enter every other state” they would be no different from whites, and even the suggestion of this was a threat to the US Constitution. Thus,

The right to move...was central to U.S. citizenship, but that right was to be reserved for a white population and Justice Taney maintained that European and colonial precedents made it clear that for over a century, African Americans had been considered to be inferior, traded as merchandise and thus ‘had no rights which the white man was bound to respect’...As Scott was not white, he was not a U.S. citizen and thus his freedom to move was revoked. (Hague, 2010, p. 338)

The ultimate outcome of this case was that all black people, free or slave, were not US citizens, or not white. This meant two things: on the one hand, black people had no grounds to legally sue white people in court; and, on the other, and importantly for my first and second claims, blacks could not move like white people. They could be moved to free states (traded, sold) *by* white people, but such movement had to always be at the discretion of white people.

While Hague’s article is concerned with the implications of the Dred Scott case for black people, it equally reveals the assumption of autonomous movement for whites. This is shown in Taney’s opinion, which he delivers in the Supreme Court in 1857. Taney positions slavery as a “moral” right upheld by the white race through worldwide enslavement of black people. Taney connects US slavery to the British colonies, which he argues was a necessary act, one that “was at the time fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race” (PBS, 2014). Thus, the colonization of Africa, the transatlantic slave trade, and the right to “enter every other state” is maintained in the United States “as an axiom in morals as well as politics” (PBS, 2014). Taney

suggests the US and Great Britain, though warring factions, are connected in white movement, from Europe to Africa to the New World, as civilizing presences for an uncivil world. Scott and his family were not part of civilized society, per se, but their objecthood based on white rights to move them structured US civilization. In particular, the Scotts' enslavement and objecthood in civil society—rather than membership in it—was for their own benefit, according to Taney. Thus, being white meant controlling one's own movement and the movement of the Other.

Interestingly, ghettoization also holds similar elements to US slavery (Wacquant, 2002), where white people controlled the movement of black people into specific zones of the city. In a similar vein of saving black slaves from their lack of civilization, poverty is often positioned as the fault of black people, who whites have given up on trying to *save*. Rather than the politics of control of transportation and mobility held by whites—particularly with the exit of industry and white flight of the mid-20th century—the ghetto has been painted as a sign that blacks are just not working hard enough. The ghetto is imagined by whites as the product of black people's laziness in a post-Civil-Rights era, and is in no way connected to the attempts to keep wealth in the hands of a small white few (Angry White Dude, 2011). Instead, people of color actually deserve less help, as they are their own problem. One extreme blogger makes this claim:

Because of the corruption of government, ghetto blacks have been allowed to live off of American taxpayers without producing anything for generations. Welfare, social programs affirmative action, Section 8 housing, etc have turned you into violent, worthless moochers who are a tremendous weight upon productive Americans. The reward we receive for feeding, clothing and housing you is ignorance, violence, hatred and crime. We, the responsible, law-abiding Americans have had enough. From this day on, we are calling you out and informing you we are going to change your world! (Angry White Dude, 2011)

Interestingly, although the Angry White Dude blog is a popular representation, Robin Kelley (2008) notes that the trend to blame black people for the ghetto is also common in academia (the Moynihan Report, for instance), causing him to write *Yo' Mama's Disfunktional!* in defense of

his mama and other families who live in the ghetto. For Kelley (2008), the assumption that black people are the cause of the ghetto has allowed both the Left and the Right to discursively paint the urban ghetto as a space of “too many handouts,” as a space that whites have tried to *save*, but now give up on. Thus, the Reagan and Clinton administrations had similar politico-economic outcomes for impoverished black people that were not ironic based on their supposed political differences, but part of a racial assumption that poverty is the fault of black people.

Rather than a sign of black depravity, Kelley’s (1996, 2008) research illustrates ghettoization is a product of white political decisions. Importantly, I articulate this to the white politically privileged relationship to transportation and mobility. In particular for the ghetto, the exit of industry from city centers left populations of color dependent on the fleeing industries with little financial opportunity. A related lack of automobile ownership meant inner city black residents could not travel for work outside the city, but remained largely unemployed in the ghetto. This lack of transportation is disproportionately a nonwhite relationship in the US.

Similarly, as Robert Self notes of the ghettoes in Oakland, the mobility of the white driver, the production of white suburbs, and the exit of industrialism from city centers produces physical and metaphorical “nooses” on black urban spaces that were originally mapped through Jim Crow. Thus, governmental policies, increased automobile ownership, white suburbia, and deindustrialization essentially re-policed the movement of blacks as wholly belonging within the ghetto in ways that were reminiscent of Jim-Crowism: “The suburban “white noose” surrounding the urban black community stood metaphorically for metropolitan inequality and segregation. Unwelcome in the South County (Southern Alameda County) suburbs, African Americans in Oakland were denied access to the region’s fastest growing employment and housing markets” (Self, 2003, p. 256). The physical and metaphorical noose is not new, according to Self, but a

retightening of antiblackness, a reproduction of chopped up Jim-Crow space in a new context. Self's noose continues to move black bodies to spaces mapped out by Jim Crow, but in ways solidified no longer via racist policy, but the white monopoly of private transportation. Ignoring the relations to transportation and mobility means the urban ghetto is popularly figured within a narrative of handouts, or Reaganomics depictions of "black welfare queens" driving Cadillacs, somehow purchased with government-issued checks (Packer, 2008). In this framework, the white burdened attempt to civilize black people is considered something that black people are not taking seriously enough. Here, black people are not trying hard enough to be saved.

The connection I am making between slavery and the ghetto is that control of mobility and transportation are central to the production of US whiteness. Whiteness requires a privileged, autonomous relationship to movement and transportation that is not shared by all, but racially structures US spaces and subjects. Central to the production of whiteness is the relation to fictive narratives of white saviors, which reemerge in new, contemporary contexts. And this is what I have my eye to. This project recognizes the emergence of whiteness in seemingly innocuous cultural practices and in the debates and discussions that arise around black bodies moving through white spaces and vice versa.

Racializing Space and People: Claim Two

Categorizing race in the United States has been a white privilege. For example, Steve Martinot (2010) argues that the brown subject comes into existence via the categorization of "illegal immigration." Similarly, the runaway slave was once medically categorized as suffering from "drapetomania," an illness created to classify, and justify, why any slave would dare flee their master for freedom in the North. Not surprisingly, drapetomania contradicts white autonomous movement addressed in the above section. More specifically,

The black man, it was repeatedly claimed, was uniquely fitted for bondage by his primitive psychological organization. For him, mental health was contentment with his subservient lot, while protest was an infallible symptom of derangement. Thus, a well-known physician of the antebellum South, Dr. Samuel Cartwright of Louisiana, had a psychiatric explanation for runaway slaves. He diagnosed their malady as drapetomania, literally flight-from-home madness. (Thomas & Sillen, 1972, pp. 16-17)

Drapetomania situated the black “penchant to wonder,” feared by whites during slavery, as a biological disease, suffered only by the slave, bringing together movement, blackness, and white classificatory power. In both illegal immigration and drapetomania, white people classified the movement, and race, of people of color as abnormal and/or a symptom of mental illness.

The underacknowledged element of illegal immigration and drapetomania is the importance of mobility to both of these categorizations. The capacity of whites to control the movement of themselves and people of color structures their white privilege. But this control of movement equally plays a role in racially classifying people and spaces. Not only is brown space in Mexico or black space on the plantations, but also the racial implications of segregation and ghettoization of today involve whites drawing and redrawing the boundaries of where black and brown people can move. Thus, I argue that racially fixed places, and racial fixity as a whole, are imagined when people move, especially when whites move and control movement. For example, whether it is forcing all potential black homeowners to purchase property in Harlem or the white patrons moving through Harlem to experience the Cotton Club, white monopolies of movement contribute to the current imagination that Harlem is a black space. This is further revealed in two examples: Reform in Mexican Los Angeles and Jim Crow. First, Reform involved the racialized transformation of Southern California. Reform assumed a politics of belonging/nonbelonging, critiqued by George Sanchez (1993), Ernesto Chavez (2002), and Stephanie Lewthwaite (2009). It was a US-based nationalistic spatial claim to the small agricultural town of Los Angeles by the

white occupiers at the exclusion of the ethnic Mexican population. Put differently, the white occupiers' in-movement made Los Angeles a white space.

According to Lewthwaite (2009), Reform occurred from 1890 to 1940. The reason for Reform mentioned most often by the white migrant was to “improve” ethnic Mexicans, who were pseudo-citizens now, and thus white, based on the 1848 signing of the Treaty of Gaudalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War (Pulido & Pastor, 2013). Part of the terms of the treaty ensured that ethnic Mexicans living in territories in the US were automatically citizens. With the implementation of Reform in 1890, it was now the burden of the white migrant to bring the native population “up to speed,” which was often manifested through the implementation of English-only education, segregatory policies, political and economic disenfranchisements, and state-sanctioned racism. In particular, Reform picks up most in the 1890s as US white migrants moved from the Southern and Midwestern territories into LA by foot, wagon, horse, and later car. This is repeated in Martinot’s argument that white migration (in-movement) to Southern California facilitated the racialization of “the land...in order to deracialize the territory as an emptiness” (Martinon, 2010, p. 109). This deracialization of the area, facilitated by white migration, was central to reconstructing, and classifying, LA as a white space.

Of course, the 40 years in between the Unionization of California in 1850 and the beginning of Reform in 1890 is interesting, because during this time the treaty appears to have been relatively upheld (Robinson, 2010). The ethnic Mexican native largely enjoyed the benefits of citizenship, including the right to vote, hold office, and to reside wherever they wanted in Los Angeles. The ethnic Mexican native was pseudo-white in Southern California, and the historic racial mixture of this ethnic Mexican native to Los Angeles—a small town whose founders were what the United States government would classify as “blacks” had they been in Southern states

(Flamming, 2005)—made W.E.B. Du Bois proclaim in 1913 that Los Angeles is “something of a housing mecca for blacks,” although admittedly still “no racial paradise” (Hunt, 2010, p. 12).

The late implementation of Reform saw a significant increase in racial discrimination, and was related to the increase of US white migrants who were moving into Southern California based on the realization of potential economic value of the area. Robinson argues white people were a minority in the 1860s, with the Mexican American “still the dominant population” (2010, p. 31), but in the late 19th and early 20th century, a growth in white people, as well as an overall population boom, was sparked by the “rapid transition [of Los Angeles] into an industrial city” (Robinson, 2010, p. 35). With growing US politico-economic power in Southern California came an increased need to further transform the region into a white space—specifically a space for US whiteness—in order to limit the benefits of the remaining newly white, ethnic-Mexican natives in favor of the increasing migratory white population.

Relatedly, Jim Crow in Los Angeles was the peculiar institution that most readily describes the discrimination of the black-English-speaking migrants and darker-skinned-Spanish-speaking natives, who were increasingly moved into similar residential neighborhoods based on their racial rather than cultural associations. One of the earliest characteristics of Jim Crow in LA in the mid-20th century were racially restrictive housing covenants and freeway construction, all of which assumed white controls of mobility. In the process, these tactics spatially produced the race of Los Angeles populations. Similar policies structured the construction of bridges in New York City. In one of the most-quoted sections of “Do Artifacts Have Politics,” Langdon Winner (1980) speaks to Jim Crow’s role in city planning and highway construction. Although Winner does not call it Jim Crow, he addresses the political purpose of low-hanging bridges in NYC,

designed by the racist architect Robert Moses, whose career spans from the 1920s to the 1970.

Moses's road were designed to limit mobility for specific people in the city:

Automobile-owning whites of "upper" and "comfortable middle" classes, as he [Robert Moses] called them, would be free to use the parkways for recreation and commuting. Poor people and blacks, who normally used public transit, were kept off the roads because the twelve-foot tall buses could not get through the overpass. (Winner, 1980, pp. 123-124)

Winner further addresses these politics when he states while Moses is physically dead,

...the most important and enduring results of [Moses's] work are his technologies, the vast engineering projects that gave New York much of its present form. For generations after Moses has gone and the alliances he forged have fallen apart, his public works, especially the highways and bridges he built to favor the automobile over the development of mass transit, will continue to shape the city. Many of his monumental structure of concrete and steel embody a systematic social inequality, a way of engineering relationships among people that, after a time, becomes just another part of the landscape. (Winner, 1980, p. 124)

Winner's analysis points to the fact that Jim Crowism influenced places outside the US South, such as the North and, for this project, LA. In addition, and just as important, the bridges Moses constructed in New York City reified the racist assumption that there were certain spaces for white people's movement that were not open for others to move in. In the process, Moses's control of mobility helped to define race and racialized space in New York City.

In the construction of freeways, highways, and city planning there is an assumption of white political control over the means and practices of transportation and mobility. Further, this control plays a role in racializing space as white, black, or brown based on increased difficulties of certain people to venture into said spaces. In LA, for example, the construction of the freeway similarly held racist implications (Avila, 1998; Chapple, 2010), which structured the domains of where black and brown Angelenos belonged in the 1940s and 1950s through the disproportionate destruction of their homes. With destruction of black and brown homes, a long-held privilege of white movement, via freeway and highway construction, reemerged, facilitating the later white

and business flight of the mid-20th century. It is not shocking that the spaces most impacted by freeway construction in LA (Watts and East Los Angeles) continue to be spaces inhabited by people of color. Both freeway and highway construction during the Jim Crow era reproduced blackness (spaces and subjects) as destroyable, moveable, and classifiable of whites.

Mobile Challenges to Objecthood: Claim Three

Despite the white reliance on controlling transportation and mobility, people of color consistently fought against their objecthood by the use of movement. I do not mean movement so much in terms of activism (the Civil Rights Movement, for example), but the metaphorical and physical traversal of space. However, it is not shocking that even some of the most important and memorable events of the Civil Rights Movement placed physical mobility and transportation at the forefront: the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the March to Washington, and the Freedom Riders are just a few examples. I argue mobilities enacted by people of color are central to undermining objecthood, practices that necessarily challenge white controls over mobility, and, specifically, the white capability to classify what constitutes movement, transportation, and subjectivity.

Black and brown people throughout US history have challenged white control of movement and transportation. For example, black people often challenged racial slavery with movement: escape plans, flight, work stoppages, and the production of space. Black movement and transportation never has to *mean* what whites classify it as. As Katherine McKittrick posits of the Underground Railroad, “black geographies” are expressions of humanity that necessarily contradict (white) geographies and assumptions of correct ways to move. Further, McKittrick (2008) calls the Underground Railroad a black geography because of white misunderstandings of it as an example of “geographic ignorance.” This was because black slaves did not use maps or

writing. But this assumption of ignorance was a necessary component for the Underground Railroad's success, as mapping and writing could reveal the routes traveled by slaves.

Saidiya Hartman similarly posits that slaves challenged objecthood in two ways often redefined by whites as proof of their inferiority: first, through making communities, such as in the creation of the black church. According to Hartman, such "belonging together endeavors to redress and nurture the broken body; it is a becoming together dedicated to establishing other terms of sociality, however transient, that offer a small measure of relief from the debasements constitutive of one's condition" (1997, p. 61). The black church spaces, while viewed as spaces of excess emotion by white people, established the slaves' humanity, so often assumed inhuman by white people. A second challenge is expressed through geographic mobility. Particularly, for the slaves who "steal themselves away," or runaway slaves of the Underground Railroad, or even the slaves who run to other plantations to visit family and friends. Like communality, stealing oneself away was a misunderstood reconstitution of black humanity in inhuman conditions:

Stealing away was the *vehicle* for the redemptive figuration of dispossessed individual and community, reconstituting kin relations, contravening the object status of chattel, transforming pleasure, and investing in the body as a site of sensual activity, sociality, and possibility, and, last, redressing the pained body. (Hartman, 1997, p. 66; emphasis added)

Whereas the slave views this "stealing" of themselves away as central to the establishment of their humanity, the white slave catcher rewrites this same action as definitive proof of a lack of intelligence, an example of the slave trying to "show their master up," or even as an attempt to prevent the master from making as much profit as possible; thus, the metaphor of "stealing," which speaks to the owners loss of property or profit. For the runaway, humanity and subjectivity were at stake; for the master, economic gain.

Similarly, the ethnic Mexican population during and after Reform often toyed with movement and space to challenge white assumptions that Los Angeles was a “white space.” Brown mobility was viewed as threatening to whiteness in the US, because it revealed the social constructedness of the border, America, and citizenship, and, by extension, the frailness of the black/white binary. Whiteness in LA is, thus, challenged by the brown body’s movement over the border, brown mobility challenges the racial/cultural purity of Americanness. In fact, if one follows the history of brown movement in and around Los Angeles, the argument can be made that the white attempt to convince the brown native population that Los Angeles was now “white American space” never had the desired effect whites hoped for. This is because the movement of the ethnic Mexican across the border, during Reform and arguably well after it, was also based less on an inherent “illegal” breaking of the law by crossing the border, and more on the fact that many ethnic Mexicans saw little difference between Mexico and the Southwest US states.

George Sanchez (1993), for example, posits that the railways in the 19th and 20th centuries connected the brown laborers not to an “occupied” American territory, but to various sections of what some of them still considered as their home: Mexico. This is why in the late 19th century many ethnic Mexicans, who the US encouraged to come into the country for agricultural and railroad labor purposes at the time, saw little distinction between their work in Mexico or “across the border.” On the contrary, these were subjects moving between homelands, disputing the Reformic understanding of their lack of belonging:

Lax enforcement of immigration restrictions at the border, the concentration of Mexican workers in seasonal employment, and the liberal policies of railroad companies toward transporting workers back and forth combined to make it easy for individuals to see United States employment as an extension of their work experience in Mexico. (Sanchez, 1993, p. 49)

This early lack of distinction between Mexico and Los Angeles for some people anticipates the much more radical instances with the Brown Berets and the Chicano/a movement of the mid-20th century. These political statements relied on the narrative that Los Angeles was *their home*, taken through colonial occupation and violence. Movement between Mexico and Los Angeles, whether on foot or railcar, was not “illegal,” but part of their right to resist the objecthood of colonialism, disrupting current white nationalistic narratives of “brown invasion.”

When brown and black Angelenos (or brown and black people as a whole) challenge the border, exit the ghetto, fight deportation, move into white spaces, and dispute nonbelongingness, they engage in alternative mobilities that importantly and necessarily contradict the presumed ontological security of race in the US. Brown and black mobility provide uniquely different, yet similar, challenges to race and space in the US and Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, brown bodies, whether crossing the border or forced into the barrio, whether citizens or dodging immigration or driving tour buses through the ghetto, contest their nonbelonging and objecthood. Black mobility relatedly can extend beyond a critique of hurting a white master’s pockets to an expression of humanity in inhuman situations. Subjectivity is a social and material trajectory that necessarily disrupts the assumed racial fixity of whiteness and the ontological security of the “border.”

Methods

Due to the different ways that mobility connects to the political ontology of race, I employ an interpretive, mixed methodological approach to LA Gang Tours. The preceding section will outline the importance of participant observation, ethnographic interviews, and textual analysis for the collection of data. This project does not privilege participant observation over interviews, or newspaper reports over television reports, or the tour routes over historic case studies. Instead, each of these are placed at the center of this project to examine how residents,

tour guides, tourists, community activists, reporters, bloggers, politicians, city planners, and government officials reveal mobility is productive of racial relations.

Participant Observation

One important way I examine how meaning is produced during LA Gang Tours comes from participant observation. For John Lofland, David Snow, Leon Anderson, and Lyn Lofland (2006), “*Participant observation* refers to the process in which an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and situationally appropriate relationship with a human association” (p. 17; emphasis in original). I accomplished this through taking the tour twice—once on a private tour with two white tourists and another time on a public tour with approximately 30 tourists, all white. These two experiences on the tour allow me to have a fuller range of how the gang tour is experienced by myself and others who write and video blog about the tour, because I was able to see the differences and overlaps between the two different types of tours that are available.

During the two tours, I recorded my experiences with tour guides, tourists, and residents by journaling about my experiences during the tours. I also wrote about the look and feel of the areas we drove through, and the comments from tourists and tour guides during the tours that I thought might prove useful later. I even documented the thoughts about the tour that came from people who I interacted with both on and off the tour, such as while explaining to friends and family from Los Angeles, and often random people I met in the city, that there is a gang tour, many of whom had no idea such a tour existed beforehand.

Relatedly, my understanding of participant observation assumes what Bryant Keith Alexander (2006) calls a “critically reflexive” approach to the gang tours, meaning that I do not “reflect solely on my life,” but I do engage in the act “of knowing the self-knowing the self and how that process of self-knowing and the results of such a process is always implicated by our

relationship to others” (2006, p. XVIII). Similar to Alexander’s descriptions of his experiences in the black barbershop, my personal experiences on and off tour are central to my understanding of LA Gang Tours and the city as a whole, but those personal experiences are intertwined with my interactions with others, rather than solely a discussion with me at the center. For this project, I immerse myself as an observer, participant, researcher, tourist, former gang member, student, and vacationer on the tour and in Los Angeles as a whole.

In addition to taking the tour twice and journaling, one way I think about critical reflexivity is through my experiences staying in different spaces throughout the city, like Los Feliz and Compton. I also conducted interviews in coffee shops, parks, and on the University of Southern California’s campus. I dined with friends in restaurants in Echo Park and watched an LA Dodgers baseball game across the street. I got tattooed in Mid-City, partied on Hollywood and Sunset, and, despite being warned not to, I walked the Downtown streets until 3am. I sat stuck in traffic on the 110 Freeway, and smoked cigarettes with gang members who graffiti tagged the bridges I was stuck on.

Critical reflexivity also requires situating my interests in LA Gang Tours in my own life. My fascination with LA Gang Tours cannot be separated from my experiences as a Blood street gang member, a street gang I joined at 13 years old and did not break ties with officially until 28 years old. The street gang lifestyle provided me with an outlet to examine my blackness within postindustrial inner city America, where few job opportunities existed and fewer people of color were going to college. Looking back, more than 20 years after first I joined the gang, it is strange for me to think that I spent nearly half of my life in a gang. Even though I no longer associate with the gang, it will always be a part of who I am as a scholar. Today, I cannot separate my

thinking about the gang tour through a community, responsible for the formation of the Blood gang I joined, from my experiences within that gang as a full-fledged, active member.

My personal experiences structure the way I approach the tour in two ways. First, my own experiences provide me with a vast amount of knowledge about the gangs in South Central, as well as the racial history of the community. Second, this connection to the street gangs and to the community also structures the way I found myself getting lost on tour in my own excitement. For example, as we drove through some of the communities where the Bloods were founded, I found myself even giddier than my fellow tourists. This illustrates the impossibility of separating “the field” from my personal life (Clifford, 1997). Therefore, it makes little sense to consider the tour and its navigation of South Central as “the field” in the old anthropology sense. Instead, the tour is an extension of my experiences that intertwine with the experiences of others.

Ethnographic Interviews

Another way I examine how meaning is created via the tour’s movement is through “intensive interviewing,” again through a critically reflexive engagement with the experiences of others. This involves a mixture of one-on-one interviews, group interviews, talking to people on the tour as it was happening, and taking notes that document the key discussions that occurred between tour guides, tourists, and community members during my private and public tour experiences. More specifically, intensive interviewing is described as encompassing

...both ordinary conversation and listening as it occurs naturally during the course of social interaction and semi-structured interviewing involving the use of an interview guide consisting of a list of open-ended questions that direct conversation without forcing the interviewee...to select preestablished responses. (Lofland, et. al, 2006, p. 17)

This includes my one-on-one interviews with people, but also my recorded notes from comments and events that I noticed during the gang tour. Therefore, it is worth noting that some interviews are more in-depth than others. For example, I had one-on-one interviews that averaged about two

hours with the tour's founder, community activists Nathan and Eduardo, and tourists Sam, Carol, and Eric. But my interviews with some of the tour guides are more based on our interactions and conversations during my second tour. The inability to set up one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with other tour guides is a reflection of both the financial and time limitations I had (to make up for this lack of interaction, I rely on newspaper, website, and television interviews with other tour guides, tourists, and other community members).

Many of my interlocutors had no issue with using their names (such as the tourists). But some, such as some tour guides, argued the gang tour was not about them and preferred to not be named. For them, the gang tour is about South Central, and their attempt to end the violence that is associated with the community. Therefore, I have changed the names of most of the people I have interviewed in order to protect those who preferred not to be named. The names that I have not changed are the public figures such as Alfred Lomas—whose face is on the official ad and who is the only tour guide named on the tour's website—but also people I did not interview but are mentioned by name in newspaper articles or videos that I analyzed, such as tour guides Clarence Stewart and Melvin Johnson and activists like Ana Parra and Jorga Leap.

Between 2011 and 2012, I conducted 13 interviews with eight different people. Many of these interviews are recorded via tape recorder, unless the interviewee expressed discomfort with being recorded. In that one instance, with Compton resident “Reggie,” I wrote extensive notes and transcribed his comments that I imagined would be important.

- *Alfred Lomas*

The first person I interviewed is Alfred Lomas, the founder of the gang tours. Alfred is Mexican American, in his mid-40s, and he joined the gang Florencia 13 at a young age. He has lived in South Central for most of his life. Alfred is well respected by his gang and other gangs

throughout South Central. This allows him to move freely through some of the toughest areas in the city in ways the average person cannot without permissions. Alfred has the necessary street credibility to pull off a tour like this, as he has brokered ceasefires with some of the most-well-known gangs in the South Central area. I interviewed Alfred because he is the face of the gang tour. I conducted two interviews with Alfred, both lasting approximately two hours. They both took place in two coffee shops in Los Angeles, the first in the neighborhood of Silver Lake and the second in Downtown Los Angeles.

- *“Jimmy”*

Jimmy, a black member of the Crips—which is probably the most popularly recognized black gang of South Central—is likely the tour guide who tourists remember most, because, as one tourist I sat next to during the second gang tour told me, Jimmy’s story is the “most graphic” of all tour guides in terms of his experiences with violence, death, and incarceration. Similar to Alfred, Jimmy is charismatic and easy to like. As Jimmy told me, he hopes to “right some of my wrongs” through the gang tours. I conducted one hour-long interview with Jimmy. This occurred at the Dream Center, immediately following my second gang tour experience. As a tour guide, an OG,³ and current South Central resident, Jimmy was an ideal interviewee for this project.

- *“Reggie”*

Another resident I interviewed is Reggie, who has lived in Compton his entire life. Reggie and I met through my cousin, and he lives in Crip territory near Centennial High School. He is a black man in his mid-40s, married with two children, and he works in South Los Angeles in construction. Reggie is also one of many local black residents who have noticed the shift of

³ OGs are “Original Gangsters.” These are the most senior level of gang members, not necessarily the members who started the gang but the ones who have survived for long enough to gain the respect of their gangs. The OGs are the ones who have allowed the gang tours to travel through their communities unhindered for three hours.

the area from a largely black neighborhood to a brown, or Latino/a, one. This recent shift, Reggie posits, has led to a lot of the “interracial beefing” that South Central is now popularly known for. Reggie, like Alfred and Jimmy, thinks that the tour can break this cycle of violence in the area. Reggie is a good interviewee because he is not a part of the tours, but they impact him because his home is literally on the tour’s route. One of the final territories toured rides right by Reggie’s home, and he expresses no issues with this. I conducted one two-hour long interview with him on the front porch of his home in Compton. Reggie is the one interviewee who expressed discomfort with being recorded on tape, so my comments from him are from transcribed notes that I wrote while he was talking to me.

- *“Nathan”*

Nathan was once referred to by the media as the “czar of Los Angeles gangs,” a title he states he hated in our interview. More officially, Nathan once held the title of Deputy Mayor of Gang Reduction and Youth Development for the city. Nathan is a mid-50s white male who is a protestant minister in LA. He was one of many nonprofit workers hired by the city to address the “gang problem” of South Central. After seeing the harmful effects of incarceration, his way of addressing the gangs was to go into places like South Central not with police, but footballs and basketballs. Nathan played sports with many of the residents, and even held athletic tournaments with rival gangs to lessen tensions in the area. Nathan considers the gang tour an interesting, but misguided, attempt to end the violence of the community. He calls the tour a “legal hustle.” I met Nathan through a friend, and conducted my interview with him at a Starbucks Coffee in Downtown Los Angeles. The interview lasted approximately two-and-a-half hours.

- “Eduardo”

Eduardo is a mid-20s, Latino male who engages in the Los Angeles community directly as an activist. Eduardo was born and raised in Echo Park, where the tour begins. He works for the Advancement Project, a non-profit organization that addresses poverty and gang issues head on (Advancement Project 2014). According to the organization’s website, the Advancement Project is an organization created by civil rights activists and lawyers to address “systematic racism” in LA and beyond, and it includes notable board members, like Harry Belafonte, and the founding co-director Connie Rice, as public faces of the organization. The importance of Connie Rice and the Advancement Project to the ghetto made Eduardo an important interviewee. Alfred even told me in our first interview that Rice is a supporter of the tour, although according to *The Timaru Herald* (2010), she does not go so far as to endorse the tour. Instead, she states, “If done right, the tour could highlight the decades-long struggle to solve the gang problem” (*The Timaru Herald*, 2010, p. 9). Eduardo is not only from the place where the tour begins but his work also takes him into lower-income LA communities. In particular, his work involves organizing food truck and toy truck drives in impoverished sections of the city, similar to the Dream Center. Like Nathan, Eduardo is a good interviewee because he expresses concern about the benefits of the tour. I met Eduardo through a friend and interviewed him at his office at the Advancement Project. The interview lasted approximately an hour.

- “Carol” and “Eric”

I interviewed three tourists. The first two were Carol and Eric, a white, late-30s married couple who travelled from Norway to LA just to take the gang tour. Foreign travelers are pretty common on the gang tour (on my first tour, Alfred told me that a group from Sweden had just called to cancel their tour for the following weekend). Carol and Eric attempted to take the tour

the year before, while they were on vacation in LA, but they could not get tickets because the tour sold out. Therefore, this time around they purchased tickets ahead of their vacation to make sure they could take the tour. All three of us experienced the gang tour together for the first time on a private tour. And Carol and Eric were also the only people I interviewed together due to their time restraints (they were leaving the day after our interview).

Carol is a journalist in Norway, and she planned to write about her experience on tour when she returned home, possibly to spark interest for fellow Norwegians. Eric is a businessman who was the main person interested in taking the tour. Both Carol and Eric provided necessary perspectives because their positions matched the tour guides: that LA Gang Tours would end the gang violence in South Central. But they also provided me with a self-described “foreigner” perspective on LA Gang Tours. The dual interview of Carol and Eric occurred in their rented beach house in Malibu, just a block away from the ocean. It lasted three hours.

- “*Sam*”

The final tourist I interviewed was Sam, a late-20s, Latino graduate student at the University of Southern California. Sam and I did not take the tour together. Instead, we met at an academic conference. He attended my presentation about the tour, because he had just taken it and wanted to hear my perspective. We exchanged numbers at the conference. I conducted my interview with Sam after taking my first tour. Sam’s was an interesting perspective, because he was the only local tourist (a North Hollywood native) that I interviewed, and he did not take the tour because he was interested in the gangs, but because he was a teaching assistant in a class on the rhetoric of LA. The professor he was assisting required the students and assistants to take the tour. Sam is a necessary position because he is the one person I interviewed who does not view the tours as *good* for what they provide South Central or *bad* for its supposedly “exploitative”

consequences. On the contrary, like me, Sam rejects this uncomplicated dualism, and thinks about the tour as an interesting and important moment in the city. We met for our interview on the campus of USC at his department's building. The interview lasted an hour and a half.

Textual Analysis

Beyond interviews and participant observation, I performed a close reading of television news station reports, video blogs, newspaper articles, magazine articles, short stories, opinion pieces, advertisements, commercials, and public service announcements ranging between the years of 2009 to 2014. In particular, I examined 17 video and audio pieces, including television news reports from the LA Gang Tours' website (2014), but also television reports from Fox News (2010), NBC (2010), and ABC (2010), and PSAs (Ryan, 2010a) and radio advertisements (Ryan 2010b). In addition, I was able to find a video blog from someone giving their opinion of the tour and one video blog from an actual tour guide himself, Melvin Johnson. I also examined 33 texts, including newspaper articles (*7 Days*, 2010; Dean, 2012), newspaper opinion pieces (Textor, 2014; Thomasson, 2010), the LA Gang Tour's website, and advertisements for the tour (LA Gang Tours, 2014). Following Michel Foucault (1986), I view these texts not as revealing a predetermined, given meaning, but as implicated within power relations that structure narratives about LA Gang Tours. Through this mixed methodological approach to the gang tours, I produce a project that does not pretend to be the only possible viewpoint, but part of a larger potentiality of narratives about race and LA Gang Tours.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter one: The assumed overlap of transportation and race in this project calls for a review of two overlapping areas of study: critical race studies and mobility studies. This literature review is necessary to illustrate the ways in which combining these two areas of study

further the understanding of political ontologies of race in the US. In this chapter, I show that critical race studies takes too uncritical of an approach to im/mobility, where mobility is viewed as a practice of white people and immobility is viewed as essential to the racial discrimination of blacks; thus, segregation, prison, and slavery are deemed “immobilities” forced onto black people. Mobility studies critiques the uncritical binary of mobility versus immobility, illustrating that it is more productive to consider immobility as another form of mobility (Massey, 2000). The assumption that mobility is a white privilege loses weight. For example, Mexicans crossing the border from Mexico into the United States calls into question the critical race assumption of mobility as a largely white domain, as this brown mobility is far from protected or privileged. Where mobility studies falls short is in its reductiveness of different forms of subjectivity produced by mobility. Mobility studies has little comprehension of objecthood, or those not considered subjects in the West. For example, black and white people traversed the Middle Passage together, but they were not the same types of mobile subjects when they got off the ship in the Americas. The black subject was black because she experienced mobility drastically differently from white people. That mobility was a necessary component of her blackness, well after slavery was deemed unconstitutional. I end chapter one by showing that mobility relates to not only subjects as defined in the West, but also objecthood and black subjects analyzed in critical race studies.

Chapter two: I consider how whiteness, and the privilege that comes with being white, rely significantly on a political control of transportation and mobility. Here, in keeping with my argument that whiteness is structured by a political control of mobility, the gang tour introduces Safe Passage, an agreed-upon ceasefire for local gangs. This ceasefire structures the movements of the tourists as protected from the threats of South Central. Similarly, within this discussion of

Safe Passage is a different narrative: the mostly white tourists not only require protection, but also are viewed as central to “saving” South Central from violence by simply moving on the tour. White mobility is positioned as in need of safety but also creating safety for others.

Chapter three: I argue if whiteness is materialized in mobility, then a central characteristic of white mobility involves the privileged right to move nonwhite people. Specifically, conceptions of blackness are produced in white capabilities to move people and space to the furtherance of whiteness. This means whiteness and blackness are not biological or given, but they emerge from the differential mobilities that are allotted to very specific people in the US. LA Gang Tours relies on a privileged capability of the tourists to move through space, and to move populations in that space, in ways that produce imaginaries that make South Central very black and very masculine. In the process, the tours also ignore brown men, and women and children of color. Based on the movement of the tourists, the residents of South Central must change their activities, for three hours, to better allow for the tourists’ comforts and desires. In short, South Central *becomes* black to match the tour’s privileged white movement.

Chapter four: I examine the potential radicalism implied in the movement of the tour guides. Here, whereas whiteness relies on mobility and transportation and the often-forceful movement of people of color, black and brown people equally challenge whiteness through their movements. LA Gang Tours produces a space of black and brown solidarity, one less concerned with fighting against capitalism and more with fighting the historical objecthood of black and brown Angelenos in Los Angeles. On the one hand, this occurs through the disruption of gang members as an idle, unproductive group. Instead, on LA Gang Tours, the former gang members attempt to create their own means of production in a society that has historically denied them this possibility in a “legal” fashion. Relatedly, the gang tour allows for the tour guides to recreate the

conception of “gang member” in ways that challenge dominant white definitions that reduce the gang member to inherent black depravity (Wilderson, 2010). Instead, through the gang tour, the tour guides recreate themselves as gang members that seek peace and spiritual development.

Lastly, chapter five: I provide a recap of the chapters and arguments made. In particular, I highlight the importance of mobility to critical race studies, and vice versa. I offer potential areas to examine black mobility, in ways that go beyond LA Gang Tours. Thus, cases such as Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown are examined to consider how the largely white privilege to control the bodies and movements of people color connect to the murders of Martin and Brown (claim one). Relatedly, I examine how this white control of movement plays a role in racializing those bodies. Thus, Martin and Brown’s blackness is *identified* in the controls assumedly allotted to people like George Zimmerman and Darren Wilson, respectively (claim two). Lastly, I consider forms of resistance that people of color use to challenge white controls mobilities (claim three). The Huey P. Newton Gun Club and the National Immigrant Youth Alliance are two examples that come to mind. In particular, both have moments where people of color use mobility to redefine themselves and challenge whiteness in similar yet different ways.

CHAPTER ONE

LITERATURE REVIEW: BLACK BODIES, WHITE SPACES

Technologies of transportation, in this case the ship, while materially and ideologically enclosing black subjects—economic objects inside and often bound to the ship’s walls—also contribute to the formation of an oppositional geography: the ship as a location of black subjectivity and human terror, black resistance, and in some cases, black possession.

—Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and Cartographies of Struggle* (2006, p. XI)

I provide a new read of blackness and mobility to outline the central claims of this dissertation. Because I argue that mobility is central to the political ontologies of blackness in the US, reading mobility studies with critical race studies can lead to richer understandings of race in the US and, more specifically, Los Angeles for this dissertation. I proceed with a brief discussion of what I mean by “critical race studies” and “mobility studies.” I, then, outline the long history in critical race studies of addressing questions concerned with mobility/immobility. Although I critique the critical race studies that address both mobility and those concerned with immobility, I turn the majority of my critique to the studies that use immobility, because of the too uncritical treatment of mobility. Next, I examine mobility studies to distinguish between its approach to immobility and the critical race studies approach to immobility. Lastly, I combine and critique both critical race studies and mobility studies to show the importance of mobility for blackness in the US, and to provide a basis for how this reading connects my claims to LA Gang Tours.

When I use the terms critical race and mobility studies, I am referring to two interconnected large bodies of literature. First, critical race studies speaks to literature that deals with the multiple productions of blackness in the US, whether this production is related to space and place, capitalism, racial formation, media representations, identity politics, or black political

ontology. Critical race studies is not meant to be critical race theory. Instead critical race studies as used here is more centrally in conversation with black studies and African American studies. Still, while much of the literature dealt with for this dissertation is concerned with US blackness, particularly in Los Angeles, I argue that based on the racial history of the city, what I am calling critical race studies must also examine whiteness and brownness as well. Thus, critical race studies includes African American or black studies and critical whiteness studies (Johnson, 2013; Neal, 2004; Sexton, 2008; Wilderson, 2003, 2010), Black British cultural studies (Carby, 2009, Hall, 1993, 1997; Gilroy, 1993, 2000; Mercer, 1994), Chicano/a, Latino/a, and ethnic studies (Chavez, 2002; Winant, 2003; Lewthwaite, 2009), critical law studies (Alexander, 2012), and media and communication studies (Gray, 2013; Molina Guzman, 2006; Orbe, 2008).

A large portion of the discussions of US blackness in critical race studies have been considered within an “immobility” framework, by which blacks are deemed *stuck* in certain spaces, whether geographical, cultural, social, political, or economic. This work uses conceptual frameworks of fixity, immobility, and absurd mobility to analyze how black people have been historically prevented from geographical, social, economic, and political movement in the United States (Alexander, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Wilderson, 2003, 2010). Under this framework, black people are unable to move, but whiteness is always structured on being mobile. In some studies, then, a problematic binary is assumed that I critique: black people and conceptions of blackness are positioned as immobile and white people and conceptions of whiteness are mobile. Relatedly, whether it is the critical race studies approach to mobility or immobility, both areas of study are largely unconcerned with the interconnection between black political ontology and the physical traversal of space. Instead, mobility and immobility are most often considered in terms of the

circulation of music, literature, film, or dance. This project extends critical race studies by showing the importance of the materiality of movement to racialization processes.

Second, mobility studies is an area not reducible solely to mobilities scholarship. For this dissertation, mobility studies refers to mobility and transportation studies (Kaplan, 2006; Sheller, 2009; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2007), tourism studies (Clifford, 1997; Pezzullo, 2009; Pratt, 2008; Urry, 2005a), philosophy (Agamben, 1998), anthropology (Augé, 1995), cultural, feminist geography (Massey, 1994; McKittrick, 2006; Soja, 1989; Thrift, 2008), and media studies and communication studies (Berland, 2009; Innis, 2008; McLuhan, 2003; Packer, 2008; Sharma, 2010; Sterne, 2006; Williams, 2003). What constitutes “mobility” for these scholars are mobile technologies, such as cars, buses, and ships, but also media technologies, discipline, biopower, colonialism, city planning, tourism, transit spaces, asylum seekers, and circulation and exchange.

Mobility studies, by and large, situates its discussion of blackness in far more material examples of discipline and regulation than critical race studies (Packer, 2008; Sheller, 2009). Here, there are various forms of mobility that disproportionately impact individual raced people, populations, and spaces. In short, for mobility studies scholars like Stephen Greenblatt (2010), mobility and immobility are not two separate spheres, but to study mobility is to always study immobility. This leads Doreen Massey (2000) to argue that immobility should be considered another form of mobility. The black immobility versus white mobility binary of critical race studies does not hold in mobility studies. Still, mobility studies often situates its discussion of mobility within the framework of Western (i.e. white) subjectivity that potentially flattens the black mobile subject as attempting to reach Western ideals. The black mobile subject cannot be simply reduced to another form of the Western mobile subject, which assumes whiteness as the universal. In fact, black mobility can act as a critique of the universality of the mobile subject,

largely because black mobility and subjectivity begins with objecthood, particularly the traversal of the Middle Passage. The relationship of black people to chattel slavery means that enactments of black subjectivity necessarily differ from subjectivity typically theorized in mobility studies.

Using the black political ontology position of critical race studies can illustrate how mobility structures not solely how people traverse space and time, but what that traversal means for racialization processes, what racial assumptions are made in the movement of populations. In other words, more work can be done to examine the ways that “social death,” or the continuation of chattel slavery as an “afterlife” for blacks (Hartman, 1997, 2008), is a usefulness framework for mobility studies. This means blackness is not solely a discussion of mobile subjectivity, but also mobile objecthood that receive little to no theorization in mobility studies scholarship.

Black Im/mobility and Political Ontology

In much of critical race studies, blackness is considered as structured by an inability to move, whether through physical space or from fixed identities. However, there are critical race studies scholars who examine the importance of mobility for blackness, but they stop short of making a political ontological argument. Stuart Hall (1993), for example, calls for blackness to be considered “diasporically,” by which he means that conceptions of blackness are connected to the movements of people between Europe, the Americas, and Africa. This of course speaks to diaspora studies and its long history of discussing mobility and race together. Sukanya Banerjee (2012) suggests diaspora scholars have taken up Stuart Hall’s call, arguing that “The emergence of the African diaspora as a subject of inquiry has enabled the building of bridges among scholars working on both sides of the Atlantic as well as the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, and beyond” (p. 7). Jenny Sharpe takes a similar approach in her discussion of the Middle Passage as productive of a new transatlantic black diaspora culture. In particular, she states:

For Afro-Caribbean intellectuals such as C.L.R. James, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Edouard Glissant, and Derek Walcott, the transatlantic passage of enslaved Africans did not signify the absence of black creativity, as it did for European colonizers. Rather it signaled the beginning of a new creolized and hybridized culture. (Sharpe, 2012, p. 25)

The transatlantic slave trade created a new “creolized” culture, a black culture, in the New World, which for Sharpe’s interests means the Caribbean and South America.

Hazel Carby (2009) engages in a similar analysis in what she calls the “becoming” of blackness. She examines the disputed birthplace of Olaudah Equiano, the black slave who states he is born in Africa before being forcefully enslaved and taken to the New World in the first two chapters of his autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*. But a birth certificate for Equiano has surfaced that states he was actually born in South Carolina. The truthfulness of Equiano or the reliability of his birth certificate is irrelevant for Carby. Instead, she states either way Equiano engages in practices of making his blackness (or “becoming” black), based on his political movement between the Americas and Africa:

Perhaps we will never know, for sure, on which side of the Atlantic Equiano was born but would the information definitely determine how the narrative is to be read? Even if he was born on the African continent is not Equiano still turning to ‘invention’ to create an African identity? And, if he was born in the New World, cannot we also argue that Equiano is ‘reclaiming’ an African identity? (Carby, 2009, p. 630)

Similarly to Carby, Jared Sexton’s work also allows for a discussion of mobility as a central component of blackness in ways that differ from much of critical race studies. Sexton (2008) considers immobility not in stark binary terms of black and white, suggesting instead that mobility and immobility are discursively constituted. In particular, he posits that the conception of black mobility is a tool of antiblackness, in that it moves black bodies as objects of capital:

the economy of mobility is dependent upon, indeed intensifies, an economy of constraint wherein disposable populations are systematically warehoused, eliminated, or exploited in their raw state, without the mediation of variable capital. In this despotic milieu, the black body *moves* primarily, in some cases only, as spectacle, an image of capital, or

what [Paul] Gilroy (2000) calls “the planetary traffic in blackness.” (Sexton, 2008, p. 41; emphasis added)

Sexton’s black body is mobile in its immobilization; the black body is not a mobile subject, here, but a mobile object. Specifically, its immobility is positioned within the lens of globalization, as the black object furthers upward mobility for whiteness, or is positioned as a hindrance (“white man’s burden”) to worldwide white mobility.

As Sexton alludes, one of the most well-known and most-cited discussions of black mobility comes from Paul Gilroy (1993), who positions slave ships and their traversal of the Middle Passage as productive of the “Black Atlantic,” his argument that black culture (music, art, and politics) is articulated to the movements of people between Africa, the Americas, and Europe. In this framework, the slave ship is essential to the production of blackness in the US:

It should be emphasised that ships were the living means by which the points within the Atlantic world were joined. They were mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected. Accordingly they need to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade. They were something more—a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of *cultural production*. (Gilroy, 1993, pp. 16-17, emphasis added)

Importantly, according to Gilroy, the slave ships are just as mobile as the spaces they moved in between. Blackness is created via the ships movements across the Middle Passage, but also via the continuing effects those movements have on Europe, Africa, and the Americas. This leads him to posit that there are multiple modernities, or “countercultures” to Western modernity.

For these scholars, while movement across the Atlantic is productive of blackness, this productiveness is often situated in relation to cultural production—in a novel about post 9/11 smuggling of African immigrants to Europe for Sharpe (2010), or in the chapters of Equiano’s autobiography for Carby (2009), or in the music of Jimi Hendrix for Gilroy (1993). These are not unimportant for me, but I am also interested in the material implications of black movements, the

ways that physical movement *makes* blackness and/or whiteness—hinted at in the above studies, but probably best exemplified in Sexton’s (2008) work. Relatedly, much of diaspora studies is largely unconcerned with US blackness, at least in its contemporary manifestations. Much of the diaspora studies that focus on blackness examine it within non-US contexts, like the Caribbean and/or South America (Banerjee, 2012; Sharpe, 2012). In this light, the omission of blackness in the US from diaspora studies could potentially be read as suggesting an immobility for black people in the US, by which the descendants of US slaves—unlike their ancestors—*stopped* moving at some point, becoming a population no longer central to diasporic analysis.

While diaspora studies scholars can argue against my claim that they imply black immobility in the US, other theorizations in critical race studies go beyond implications of immobility by explicitly positioning immobility as central to political ontologies of race in the United States (Alexander, 2012; Johnson, 2013; Moten, 2002; Wilderson, 2010; Wood, 2011). Under this framework, black people are *stuck* in Jim Crow neighborhoods or prisons, or black people are *frozen* in “unfair” media depictions. This means, as Hortense Spillers (1987) posits, blackness is constituted by a “powerful stillness” that re-fixes bodies in relation to slavery.

W.E.B. Du Bois can be considered one of the earliest scholars to position blackness within a discussion of immobility, especially as this relates to thinking of oneself as immobile. He posits slavery and the practice of segregation inherent in Jim Crow-era politics maintained a “psychological wage,” in which white people were not only given more access to resources, but began to internalize this access as the natural, racial order (Du Bois, 1998). For Du Bois, the material structuring of society influenced how differently raced people saw themselves and others. Thus, whites were granted an access to political, economic, and geographic mobility that black people were racially incapable of attaining. The psychological wage, for Du Bois (1998),

created a veil that extended past the psychological realm, to immobilize black people socially, politically, economically, and spatially. Maybe one of the most popular contemporary voices in the United States to discuss immobility is Cornel West and his theorization of black nihilism. West connects nihilism to black political ontology, as he posits nihilism is “lived experience,” a condition of black life in the US. In short, black life is fighting against itself, yet it is doomed to self-destruction, as nihilism is a condition that attempts to prevent black movement from social and physical spaces structured by white supremacy:

Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophic doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness. The frightening result is numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition toward the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a coldhearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others. (West, 2001, pp. 22-23; emphasis in original)

For West (2001), nihilism keeps black people immobile in two ways: first, stuck in impoverished communities that they cannot move from, causing them to lash out on each other as can be seen in the “black-on-black” crime he examines. But, second, blacks are also immobile because of the current “post-race” discourse that considers antiblackness as a thing of the past. In short, West echoes the critiques of color-blind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2006), to argue that in the white mind (whether in governmental policy or media depictions) black cries of racism are what really prevent black people from moving socially and physically.

A more explicit examination of immobility can be found in Gaye Theresa Johnson’s (2013) work, which refers to black and brown Angelenos as immobile in ways that extend past the psychological and enter the material domains of police brutality, city planning, segregation, antiblack racism, and white flight. Johnson (2013) calls “spatial immobilization” the *condition* of nonwhite life in Los Angeles. Racism ensures that the only way that black and brown Angelenos

are mobilized is through music and art (what Johnson calls “audiomobility”), which has radical potential to break racial regimes in Los Angeles. In particular, Johnson (2013) states that spatial immobilization relies on a politics of containment that matches Loïc Wacquant’s (2002) analysis of the ghetto as nothing more than new form of incarceration. According to Johnson, for the black and Latino/a American youth throughout the City of Los Angeles, “urban renewal and freeway building, residential segregation, the repression and demise of interracial coalitions, the growth of white suburbia, and Red Scare politics shaped their experience as one of artificial *containment and immobility* at the same historical moment” (Johnson, 2013, p. 51, emphasis added). While Johnson situates containment and immobility as “artificial,” she also continues to juxtapose this as intertwined with, but also radically different from, the movements of white flight and the “growth of white suburbia.” While the artificial immobilities are for black and brown people, the physical and material practices of mobility are white privileges.

For Frank Wilderson, the politics of immobility similarly speaks to conditions of black life in the US. Wilderson argues his conception of *absolute* social death for “Black” people and *contextual* social death for “Red” people allows for both to live with what he calls an “absurd mobility.” For him, whiteness is mobile, and all other forms of mobility are kidding themselves, which suggests a sort of false consciousness underlies the mobilities that people of color engage in. Wilderson’s (2010) absurd mobility comes to life (or death) in a scene from the movie *Smoke Signals*, where two Native American women drive a car *backwards*—a trope for the absurd mobility of social death that underlies the entire film. This Wilderson contrasts to the movie *Thelma & Louise*, where two white women find their life on the highway driving *forward*:

...the automobile can be imagined as what allows Thelma and Louise to struggle with and negotiate their symbolic value in the libidinal economy of civil society, despite their characters’ physical death at the end of the film. But a genocided “Savage” cannot negotiate her symbolic value in White civil society precisely because her death was and is

one of the preconditions from which value can be contested, negotiated, or hierarchized in the first ontological instance. In *Smoke Signals*, the automobile cannot assist the Native women in negotiating life as it does White women...because the automobile would have to first bring the two Native women back *to* life, before it could assist them in their negotiation *of* life. This, as I have just indicated, is impossible because the automobile's symbolic capacity in civil society is, a priori, dependent on these two Native women's death. (Wilderson, 2010, p.155)

Mobility and absurd mobility are not separate spheres here. Mobility is positioned as life and absurd mobility is social death. Thus, Wilderson situates the black/white binary in a different binary: good/mobile/human versus bad/absurd/inhuman. The Native American mobility, like black mobility, is an absurdity because this is a necessity for humanity (or white mobility). Most important for Wilderson, absurd mobility is not contingent, but a condition of blackness in the US, which to say that it is a gratuitous violence not reliant on black people driving too fast or breaking a traffic law, for example. Instead, absurd mobility is a condition of being black in the US, it is what it means to wake up black on a daily basis whether or not a law is broken. Absurd mobility is a necessary violence against black bodies designed to maintain US civil society.

In the vast majority of immobility arguments, there is a consistent theme: black people, in particular, but people of color, in general, are categorized by the inability to move, whether from physical spaces or fixed identities. While these discussions add complexity to understanding race in the US, they limit discussions of black political ontology, because they take for granted what mobility and immobility mean. This project treats mobility and immobility in less static terms.

Challenging the Universal Meaning of Mobility

Unlike much of critical race studies and its focus on white mobility versus black immobility, mobility studies rereads immobility as a different form of mobility, challenging the binary opposites, while calling for an examination of materiality rather than representations. The discussion in mobility studies that mobility and immobility are discursively constituted has been

influenced by discourses of “time-space compression” (Harvey, 1990) and “globalization” (Soja, 1989). These discussions are most often centered around assumptions that the world is constantly getting faster and on the move, a move that is overdetermined by the transformations in global capitalism. The concern with the mobile implications of global capitalism is similarly addressed in Zygmunt Bauman’s (1998) “tourists and vagabonds,” where tourists are wanderers “because they want it” (p. 92) and vagabonds are wanderers who are *not* “on the move because they prefer being on the move to staying put and because they want to go where they are going” (Bauman, 1998, p. 92). Instead, “vagabonds are the waste of the world which has dedicated itself to tourist services” (Bauman, 1998, p. 92.). While Bauman’s tourists/vagabond says little about those in the “First World” who *cannot* be tourists (since the “First World” is “the world of the globally mobile” [p. 88]), and feels a bit Hegelian (“There are no tourists without the vagabonds, and the tourists cannot be let free without tying down the vagabonds” [p. 93]), Doreen Massey provides a complex analysis of mobility that challenges the taken-for-granted Westernism, whiteness, and maleness implied in terms like time-space compression and tourists/vagabond. Massey suggests that the terms that often accompany Harvey’s time-space compression, like “dislocation,” illustrate the white male assumptions they hold. Thus, she questions

...to what extent its [time-space compression] current characterization represents very much a Western, colonizer’ view. The sense of dislocation which so many writers on the subject apparently feel at the sight of a once well-know local street now lined with a succession of cultural imports—the pizzeria, the kebab house, the branch of the middle-eastern bank—must have been felt for centuries, though from a very different point of view, by colonized peoples all over the world as they watched the importation of, maybe even used, the products of, first, European colonization, maybe British (from new forms of transport to liver salts and custard powder); later US products, as they learned to eat wheat instead of rice or corn, to drink Coca-Cola, just as today we try out enchiladas. (Massey, 1993, p. 59)

Importantly, Massey’s (1993, 1994, 2000, 2005) work provides a challenge to the notion that there can be a universal experience of time-space compression, or more specifically, that the

experience of time-space compression is determined *solely* by global capitalism. Alternatively, Massey suggests that there are “power geometries” at work that *differentiate* the mobility of people in ways that include and extend beyond capitalism. Power geometries explain why

...different social groups and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn’t, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation *to* the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway-differentiated mobility: some are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movements, others don’t; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. (Massey, 1993, p. 61)

Massey (2000) later suggests that even immobility is a “trajectory,” full of mobility rather than fixity. She ultimately posits that immobility should be considered another form of mobility.

Massey’s work speaks to a long list of mobility scholarship that critiques assumptions of a universal meaning for mobility. Tim Cresswell (2006), for example, argues there is a serious problem in social science research: a taken-for-granted meaning of mobility and transportation. Just as Massey critiques the white male assumption that time-space compression is universal, according to Cresswell, too many studies assume the meaning of mobility as given and, thus, applicable in the same way for *all* people. Instead, mobility’s meaning, like immobility’s meaning, is discursively constituted in Cresswell’s work. While the meaning of mobility in the US is largely connected to notions of freedom and human rights, Cresswell shows that these meanings are not universally applicable throughout history. This is why he argues:

The idea of mobility as liberty and freedom would have made little sense in feudal society. In the early modern period, as cities grew and people were displaced from the land, the practice and ideology of mobility was transformed. New mobile figures began to inhabit the landscapes of Europe. Mobility as a right accompanied the rise of the figure of the modern citizen state. (Cresswell, 2006, p. 15)

For Cresswell, the Eurocentric equation of freedom-as-mobility is a problematic assumption, because it assumes a universal understanding of mobility and immobility that may not speak to

everyone. In addition, Eurocentric understandings of mobility disregard the contextual meanings ascribed to mobilities depending on the different times, spaces, and subjects enacting them.

Similarly, according to Ann Laura Stoler (2002), in the 18th and 19th centuries, white European women were often prevented from travel in the colonies because their mobility was dually threatening to white men. First, if white women could move where they wanted like white men, then white female mobility threatened white masculinity. Second, and related, too much white female mobility threatened conceptions of racial purity, especially in European colonies. Therefore, Stoler (2002) notes that white men circulated discourses of “colored male rapists” in the colonies to justify the fear of white female mobility and equally stunt potential sexual contact between white women and men of color, something that did not apply to white men and women of color. As such, white women needed protection, often in the form of colonial centers being physically fortified to keep out men of color. Stoler argues that:

If the gender-specific requirements for colonial living imposed specific restrictions on women, they were also racialized assessments of danger that assigned a heightened sexuality to colonized men. Although novels and memoirs position European women as categorically absent from the sexual fantasies of European men, these very men imagined their women to be desired and seductive figures to others. Within this frame, European women needed protection from the “primitive” sexual urges aroused by the sight of them. In some colonies that sexual threat remained an unlabeled potential. In others, it was given a specific name. The “Black Peril” referred throughout Africa and much of the British empire to the professed dangers of sexual assault on white women by black men. (Stoler, 2002, p. 58)

Within the discursive production of freedom-as-mobility, then, we find the simultaneous, inseparable discursive production of immobility. White, European male freedom of movement was structured around the restrictions to mobility of white women and people of color. Rather than immobile, white women and people of color were moved at the behest of white men.

For Stoler, to move is the privilege of a chosen few in Western societies: white men. This similar speaks to James Clifford's (1997) argument when he addresses the racism that defined who could and who could not be considered a *traveler*:

Victorian bourgeois travelers, men and women, were usually accompanied by servants, many of whom were people of color. *These individuals have never achieved the status of "travelers."* Their experiences, the cross-cultural links they made, their different access to the societies visited—such encounters seldom find serious representation in the literature of travel. Racism certainly has a great deal to do with this. For in the dominant discourses of travel, a *nonwhite person cannot figure as a heroic explorer, aesthetic interpreter, or scientific authority.* (Clifford, 1997, p. 33, emphasis added)

In colonial travel narratives, the experiences of people of color were rarely, if ever, documented. More often than not, they were “absent-presences,” such as in photos performing duties for white travelers (Stoler, 2002). Although people of color moved *with* whites, they were prevented from ever moving *like* whites. This is less an immobility and more a mobility that must be and is always controlled by white people.

Similarly, Enda Duffy (2009) argues that the fascination with speed is a Western construct celebrated as colonial occupation began to fall out of favor. Duffy argues that with the end of spaces to colonize, Westernism to begin to seek “endocolonization” or an internal form of colonization, which switched the focus of Westernism from conquering spaces to the emergence of what he calls a “speed culture,” specifically a shift from the attempt to conquer space to concerns with bodily sensations of movement. This speed culture, for Duffy, is connected to politics, and is far from neutral. In particular,

Speed...is not just the friction and the inconvenience of going faster, or of “killing time”; it is the idea that movement, instead of being a plotted leap from the pleasures of one identifiable place to the potential pleasures of another, would be a pleasure in itself, a pleasure that represents an escape from the horrific stasis of place and instead gets to be a physical sensation, a new kind of arousal experiences not as emotion but more viscerally, as an incitement imprinted on one's body. The old, emotional ties of place were lost to speed, to the thrill of a rush of adrenaline. The moderns, speeding, could experience modernity in their bones. (Duffy, 2009, p. 267)

Duffy illustrates that the “moderns” are a very specific group of people, particular male and white. Even still, speed and movement are not limited to these groups, but structured by a Western crisis that colonization is no longer a viable option for Empires.

In yet another attempt to challenge the taken-for-granted meaning of mobility in the West, Mimi Sheller’s and John Urry’s (2006) “new mobilities paradigm” posits that mobility is not neutral or universally given, but a contemporary power relation of the 21st century. Of course the novelty of the paradigm does not mean that people were unconcerned with mobility before; instead, a long line of work is reread within the paradigm today. Scholars who fit into the new mobilities paradigm think about immobility as a different form of mobility in two ways: first, the spaces assumed to be immobile in the social sciences are rethought as mobile for scholars in the new mobility paradigm (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2000; Sharma, 2014). And second, individual mobilities are structured on the assumed immobile labor of others (Massey, 1994; Sheller, 2009).

First, spaces are deemed mobile based on the circulation of people, communication and media technologies, cultures, and goods that produce assumptions of fixity. In short, terms in critical race studies, such as “spatial immobilization” (Johnson, 2013), are reliant on multiple trajectories that create “sensations of rootedness” in spaces (Greenblatt, 2010). Thus, Stephen Greenblatt (2010) posits that spatial sensations of rootedness are structured by mobility, they are affective and less about true fixity and more about the *feelings* associated with fixity. According to Greenblatt, although immobility may carry essentialist assumptions, it is not something that mobility scholars should ignore. He states,

The paradox here is only apparent: it is impossible to understand mobility without also understanding the glacial weight of what *appears* bounded and static. Mobility often is perceived as a threat—a force by which traditions, rituals, expressions, beliefs are decentered, thinned out, decontextualized, lost. In response to this perceived threat, many groups and individuals have attempted to wall themselves off from the world or, alternatively, they have resorted to violence. (Greenblatt, 2010, p. 252; emphasis added)

Greenblatt's discussion of rootedness shows that the meanings of mobility and immobility are contextually specific. In some cases, immobility and rootedness are championed, and mobility is considered threatening. But, again, mobility and immobility cannot be thought about as separate. Instead, mobility creates the sensation of rootedness to begin with, and there is no guarantee that mobility will be considered "free," while immobility is viewed as "constraining." For example, as Todd Presner (2007) argues, the movement of Jewish people into and out of Germany in the early 20th century creates the sensation that the Jews were not "real Germans," that the space of Germany was being infected by the movement of Jewish people. Rather than mobility being championed, according to Presner (2007), Jewish mobility foreshadows the violence of the Holocaust as an attempt to protect German space from non-Aryan impurity.

An early proponent of mobile space is Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre argues that traditional spaces viewed as immobile can be considered in mobile terms. For him, the concept of immobility is called into question in his discussion of a house. He asks us to

Consider a house, and a street, for example. The house has six storeys and an air of stability about it. One might almost see it as the epitome of immovability, with its concrete and its stark, cold and rigid outlines. (Built around 1950: no metal or plate glass yet.) Now, a critical analysis would doubtless destroy the appearance of solidity of this house, stripping it, as it were, of its concrete slabs and its thin non-load-bearing walls, which are really glorified screens, and uncovering a very different picture. In the light of this imaginary analysis, our house would emerge as permeated from every direction by streams of energy which run in and out of it by every imaginable route: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines, radio and television signals, and so on. Its image of immobility would then be replaced by an image of a complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits. By depicting this convergence of waves and currents, this new image, much more accurately than any drawing or photograph, would at the same time disclose the fact that this piece of 'immovable property' is actually a two-faceted machine analogous to an active body... (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 92-93)

Second, in terms of individual mobility, mobility scholars argue the mobility of some people always assumes the fixity of others. In her discussion of Caribbean tourism, Mimi Sheller argues that white tourists are allowed to move through certain spaces based on restrictions placed

on the mostly black natives in ways that match Massey's discussion of power geometries. But rather than situate this as immobility, Mimi Sheller argues that Caribbean natives have a different form of mobility based on "the *complex* character of mobility systems [that] stems from the multiple fixities or moorings often on a substantial physical scale that enable other things to be fluid" (Sheller, 2009, p. 193). The Caribbean native *moves* in places that are unknown by the average tourists, sometimes as laborers or as locals at hangout spots only they know about. This is not immobility, but a mobile relation that reproduces native space.

Similarly, in his essay "Disciplined Mobility," Jeremy Packer (2003) points out the difference between what he calls disciplined mobility and Larry Grossberg's (1992) "disciplined mobilization." Using Lefebvre's "everyday life" to discuss the production of homogeneity among populations, Grossberg (1992) argues that disciplined mobilization is concerned with the mobilization of populations into territorializing machines that may potentially erase the other. While Packer is concerned with population mobilization, his disciplined mobility is also concerned with the individuated mobility of subjects *within* those larger social formations, such as for people who use CB radios. This is why Foucault's (2000) understanding of power, particularly disciplinary power, is important for Packer. For Foucault, discipline gives "rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space" and "to an entire micro-power concerned with the body" (1990, pp. 145-146). This "micro-power" points to the fact that power is never *owned* by the state. Instead, individual subjects play a role in producing, disciplining, regulating, and distributing power. Thus, Packer (2003, 2008) argues disciplined mobility provides a framework to analyze the way subject mobilities are governed by themselves and others for the safety and health of civil society. And this governing is not equally applied, but politically situated to the benefit of certain groups.

Mobility studies is importantly concerned with critiquing the overly simplistic meanings of mobility as good or immobility as bad, often assumed in critical race studies. One way this happens in the dominant theorization of mobility is through rereading immobility as an alternative form of mobility, in terms of space and individuals. The different forms of mobility, here, may position oppression and violence as reductive in ways that may cover the complexity and uniqueness of antiblack violence. Still, mobility studies provides a theorization of subjects, space, and populations that opens further space to move beyond representations and enter the material and experiential domains of black life.

The Meaningfulness of Racialized Mobility

The rest of this dissertation relies on a combination of critical race studies and mobility studies to consider the importance of mobility and transportation for the racialized subject, racialized object, and racialized space. This combination is necessary because neither mobility studies nor critical race studies allows for as full of an analysis on its own. The race of a person, here, is produced out of differential mobilities. This means that race is not something that *exists*, and then some people are moved—or not moved—based on that given race. Instead, mobility and transportation provide a new political ontological framework to analyze race in the US.

I take central pieces from critical race studies and mobility studies to further my claims throughout the upcoming chapters. First, there is one important element that I take from critical race studies and apply to mobility studies: according to critical race studies scholars, racism for nonblack people in the US is contingent, which means that a racist act happens to a person who might break a rule or a law. But for black people, racism is *not* contingent. Antiblack racism is a condition of their becoming black (Hartman, 1997; Sexton, 2008; Wilderson, 2003, 2010), it is a gratuitous violence that is central to the structuring of society. Second, mobility studies provides

me with a critique of critical race as well: the binary of white-as-mobile/black-as-immobile that some critical race studies situates itself in is challenged in mobility studies. Mobility studies allows for an analysis that considers blackness in wholly mobile terms, while also extending the discussion of materiality in critical race studies. Mobility exceeds circulation here; blackness is also made in the physical traversal of space.

First, Barnor Hesse makes distinctions between the Eurocentric analysis of racism and the critical race studies analysis of racism. This is important for my approach to mobility studies, because I argue mobility studies largely starts with the Eurocentric view of racism. Hesse (2004) argues that understandings of racism in Western society largely begin with the Jewish Holocaust. Because of this, racism is theorized as an extreme instance that happens to subjects rather than an institutional framing of Western culture; this allows for white scholars to think of racism within a Western framework that silences acts of colonial occupation, apartheid, and Jim Crow as racist. In short, racism enters the Western lexicon *only* once whites realize they, too, can be colonized and destroyed, as was the final solution for Nazism's approach to the Holocaust. This has led to problematic analyses of racism as defined in the social sciences, because racism is something viewed as contingent upon decisions and ideologies of crazy people, not definitive of society.

Since Arendt, writers within a critical yet Eurocentric tradition, from George L. Mosse to Etienne Balibar to Zygmunt Bauman, have left the account of racism as 'race' thinking largely uncontested. Currently, the staunchest defenders of this position are undoubtedly Robert Miles, for whom racism is mystifying ideology, and Paul Gilroy, who describes it as the pseudoscientific lure of 'raciology' (see Miles and Brown, 1989/2003, and Gilroy, 2000). This, however, is a tradition of thought that is primarily located within the critique of a history of ideas and their contemporary manifestation. *In this tradition there are no racist politics in the political conventions of western culture, only ideological exceptions, and 'overtly racist regimes'*. (Hesse, 2004, p. 23; emphasis added)

According to Hesse's (2004) critique, the Eurocentric concept of racism is viewed as an anomaly or an "exception" for one of the main people Hesse critiques, Giorgio Agamben, which allows

for a flattening of experiences between differently raced people. In other words, racism is a way of thinking, rather than an institutional logic, and all one has to do to end racism is stop thinking that way. Specifically, Agamben (1998) argues the “state of exception” involves the suspension of law, where the sovereign includes a certain group of people solely that they may be excluded. In the process, this becomes an individual who may be killed but not sacrificed. His central example of this is obviously the concentration camp:

One of the theses of the present inquiry is that in our age, the state of exception comes more and more to the foreground as the fundamental political structure and ultimately begins to become the rule. When our age tried to grant the unlocalizable a permanent and visible localization, the result was the concentration camp. The camp—and not the prison—is the space that corresponds to this originary structure of the *nomos*. This is shown, among other things, by the fact that while prison law only constitutes a particular sphere of penal law and is not outside the normal order, the juridical constellation that guides the camp is (as we shall see) martial law and the state of siege. (Agamben, 1998, p. 20)

The concentration camp is where law is suspended, it is where law is undermined in order to create the other as a radically different being. But Hesse (2004) critiques this as a dismissal of the role of racial slavery and colonialism in the production of whiteness. For Agamben, while the camp is *out of the ordinary*, the prison is the *every day*. However, there may be too quick of a distinction between the two. For example, critical race studies situates the prison as an extension of slavery (Wacquant, 2002) and Jim Crow (Alexander, 2012) for black people. While Agamben notes that prisons are normal, the camp and the Middle Passage are equally *normal* violences that continue to structure racial subjectivity and, ultimately, Western institutionality. As Agamben’s state of exception is a Western construct, based on the notion that the Holocaust is the most “exemplary places of modern biopolitics” (1998 , p. 4), he takes the Western (white) subject’s social death as the first and central moment when racialization is realized, blinding him to the lived experience of blackness and the normality of antiblack violence to the West (Hesse, 2004).

Specifically, Hesse notes that Agamben's European-based critique of racism is "motivated and universalized by racism's conceived proximity to the dehumanization of European/Western life, which is seen as antithetical to, even though generated from the Sovereign's claims of western culture" (Hesse, 2004, p. 26). The problem of Agamben, for Hesse, is not so much that the Holocaust should not be studied, but it must be studied as another institutional example of racial violence, as not a temporary suspension of law, but *the law* that has always structured the lives of black and brown people throughout the European colonies. Agamben, however, like much of mobility studies as a whole, begins with Westernism as a means to begin with the concept of the subject, excluding those lives lived as objects.

Antiblack violence in Los Angeles is not a suspension of the law, but it is *the law*, it is the rule of racialization that made a space like South Central possible to begin with. In the state of exception, then, the ability to be included via exclusion assumes a level of similarity between, say, the Germans and the Jews (whiteness), after which differences may be made. Agamben's approach to race and racism (or mobility studies' approach to race and racism), then, assumes black people were *once* viewed within a narrative of similarity, through which difference was then created, it assumes that black people were privy to what Fanon (2008) calls the "family squabble" of anti-Semitism in Europe. But whiteness is structured *on* blackness as its antagonism (Wilderson, 2010). This is not a relationship of inclusive exclusion, but ultimate and originary exclusion. This is not based on a decision to "destroy or let live," but destruction as the immediate first instance. Black death structures white life.

The word that critical race scholarship develops to challenge the flattening of racism is "gratuitous violence" (Hartman, 1997; Moten, 2002; Sexton, 2008), meaning violence that may occur to a person for little to no reason other than the color of one's skin. This is not a violence

that is contingent on breaking laws, but violence that is the condition of civil society, particularly for black people in the US. In short, this is a violence through which black subjectivity emerges. While there are many analyses of violence in mobility studies, there is very little comprehension of the concept of gratuitous violence as outlined in the work of Hesse, although Hague (2010) is a notable exception.⁴ In fact, in my review of the mobility studies literature above that does not shy away from race entirely (Bullard, 2004; Kaplan, 2006; Massey, 1994; Packer, 2008; Sheller, 2009; Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2005b), there is no reference to violence that occurs for no reason, although there are definite discussions of violence, racism, and sexism.

Maybe the most in-depth discussion that addresses racial violence, movement, and transportation comes from Robert Bullard and his conception of “transportation racism.” In his *Highway Robbery* and *Just Transportation*, Bullard situates transportation racism as productive of “residential apartheid,” where it “really boils down to ‘no transportation, no job,’ and, more often than not, public transportation does not connect urban residents to jobs” (Bullard, 2004, p. 19). Bullard articulates transportation and mobility as central to Jim Crowism and ghettoization as a new form of segregation and apartheid, in ways that I find productive for this dissertation. But transportation racism, as it stands now, is a *contingent* violence for Bullard. This is to say he views transportation as a right of *all* citizens within civil society. The fight for “transportation equity” in civil society is a battle that will be “won” by black people at some point. Specifically, Bullard (2004) posits “Passionate, committed, broad-based grassroots organizing based on the principles of environmental justice and civil rights for all is the foundation of the transportation equity movement” (p. 28). Before I am read as too much of a pessimist, I should note that I am far from against grassroots organizing. I do, however, write against an assumption of Bullard’s

⁴ Hague (2010) discusses mobility and the Dred Scott case. My work differs from Hague’s, however, in that he is not concerned with the political ontology of blackness.

(2004) work and mobility studies as a whole: the black subject is one who exists as part of civil society, one who is being politically excluded. As it stand, transportation racism is, for Bullard, a product of “bad race thinking” and ideology, and organizing is part of the process needed to get citizens to think differently about other citizens, and, thus, create transportation equity for all.

I rely on critical race studies to argue Agamben and Bullard (and mobility studies as a whole) presupposes Eurocentric notions of the civil subject, without realizing that that subject exists because of Western relations to black people as objects of civil society. Critical race studies posits that the black is *neither* a part of civil society, *nor* moves freely in civil society. Instead, black people are the grounds on which civil society and Western subjectivity is built in the first instance. Violence against black bodies, such as slavery and lynching, is central to the production of (white) citizenship and, by extension, the Westernized mobile subject. Put into a critique of Bullard’s analysis, transportation racism is not a deformation of civil society; *it is civil society*. Transportation racism, like mobility studies, presupposes civil society views blacks as subjects, who can be included within it. But critical race studies (Hesse, 2004; Hartman, 1997; Mbembe, 2001; Spillers, 1987) suggests that black people are not so much subjects, but the limit by which mobile subjectivities in civil society are defined.

In its theorization of social death, critical race studies effectively points out the limits of considering black people within, rather than constitutive of, civil society. It assesses the ways in which blackness is reduced to a necessary object of civil society through the gratuitous violence of slavery, the Middle Passage, colonialism, Jim Crow, ghettos, and private prisons (Alexander, 2012; Sexton, 2011; Wacquant, 2002). But, as noted, some critical race studies largely take for granted the meanings of mobility and immobility. There is too simplistic a binary, here, where blackness is equated with immobility/inhumanity and whiteness equals mobility/humanity.

Contradictorily, even those critical race scholars who consider blackness as absurd mobility must acknowledge the importance of mobility. For example, Wilderson (2010) states, “Africans went *into* the ships and *came* out as Blacks” (p. 38, emphasis added). If the movement of the slave ship facilitated the transformation of subjects into objects, then Wilderson’s concept of absurd mobility (along with spatial immobilization for Johnson) falls short for theorizations of US blackness. The absurdity of mobility for Wilderson is ironically structured on an originary movement—the gratuitous violence of the transatlantic slave trade, the circulation and movement of black bodies, the violent traversal of the Atlantic Ocean during the Middle Passage. In order for absurd mobility to be materialized, a violent mobility is of political ontological import.

Those critical race studies that do not ignore mobility reduce it to a discussion of circulation. Paul Gilroy (1993), for example, considers black subjectivity as structured by mobility, in particular the Middle Passage traversal of the Atlantic Ocean, which he calls the “Black Atlantic.” The movement of slave ships between Europe, Africa, and the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade creates a new form of subjectivity. One example that Gilroy examines to consider this mobile relationship to subjectivity includes the music of Jimi Hendrix. Hendrix was critiqued for music that did not sound “African American” enough, largely because gained his biggest following in Great Britain. But, for Gilroy, Hendrix was engaging in the long-held processes of black subjectivity, which have always relied on the cultural overlaps of Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Others, building off the work of Gilroy, make similar claims. Race is made in the circulation of a novel about post-9/11 smuggling of African immigrants into Europe (Sharpe, 2010), or the circulation of slave autobiographies throughout the world (Carby, 2009).

With both the mobility studies approach to im/mobility and the critical race studies assumption of the importance of race to structuring civil society, a different understanding of

mobility can be reached for this project, or at least further clarification of how the term is used by me. When I say “mobility” or “transportation” in this project, I do not mean it as it is typically used in mobility studies in terms like non-place (Augé, 1995), globalization (Bauman, 1998), time-space compression (Harvey, 1990), or automobility (Seiler, 2008), although I do not ignore any of these and some will be used throughout the project. Instead, mobility or transportation is a black political ontological process, or something that produces blackness. This occurs through movement on a slave ship, according to Wilderson (2010) and Gilroy (1993), or through city planning of ghetto spaces, including housing and job discrimination and freeway construction (Avila, 1998; Wacquant, 2002; Zukin, 2011), or on LA Gang Tours for me. When I say mobility or transportation, I assume the physical and metaphorical traversals of space produce racialized conceptions. This means that a car or tour bus or communication technologies are important for me only in that these processes tell me something about what they do to or for producing conceptions of blackness, whiteness, and brownness in the US.

Communication and media theory are uniquely equipped to forward my argument that mobility is a black political ontological process, because this theory assumes that communication and mobility are inseparable. Put differently, mobility is a highly meaningful process for much of communication theory. The communication and transportation work of James Carey (2009) and Jonathan Sterne (2006) provide a lens through which to further understand my usage of mobility. Following Carey, Sterne posits that throughout much of Western history, communication and transportation have been considered the same thing, but in the 19th century Carey argues they were separated via the telegraph. Where Sterne deviates from Carey is when he illustrates that even with this supposed separation, “*transportation and communication seem to be doing the same thing*” (2006, p. 126; emphasis in the original). Thus, transportation for Sterne is a highly

meaningful process that includes the physical infrastructures that allow for the telegraph's message to travel. Sterne ultimately calls for communication and transportation to be reconsidered as co-constitutive, rather than separate entities:

In the process of rethinking the relationship between trains and telegraphs in communication history, I have argued for a social theory of communication that is truly social, that does not take the individual or dyad as its normative base, and that does not automatically privilege symbolic over nonsymbolic action. Perhaps this chapter will be read as simply a defense of that American predilection for all things big. But communication is an undeniably large matter. Like a building, like a system, or even like language, communication exists on a scale much larger than a single person: it has existed before us and with some care and maintenance it will outlive us. It feels intimate and personal, but it is bigger than all of us together. (Sterne, 2006, p. 132)

According to Sterne, communication and transportation are “intensely meaningful and intensely constitutive” (Sterne, 2006, p. 125). Many scholars whose work is influential to my own have taken up Carey's approach (Grossberg, 1992; Packer, 2008; Peters, 2006). However, my work applies this approach to consider what the intensely meaningfulness of transportation and mobility can provide for a discussion of race in the US.

Following Carey (2009) and Sterne (2006), for me, movement and transportation are about the lived experience of blackness in the US, they concern *who can move* or *who can be moved* assumed in everything from time-space compression to racial apartheid to segregation to tourism. Mobility and transportation are the discursive and physical processes that differentially make someone, or something, “black.” There is a necessary circularity assumed throughout my discussion of mobility. The black subject/object does not exist as a given, or in a rooted sense, but is produced out of conditions of its mobility and the mobilities of others. Similarly, Alvaro Reyes (2012) has discussed a “circular logic” to racialization processes in colonial spaces. Rather than existing as a given, the race of a subject is produced more so in the spaces they inhabit:

...one's social position within society is directly correlated to which of these “species,” which of these “races,” one belongs, which in turn determines what physical location one

inhabits in the colony. A circular logic should be noted here between the classificatory schemas of the zoological terms and the physical manifestation of apartheid. That is, there is a relay between the creation of the colonized as an epistemologically “knowable” object and the spatial segregation, or locational “fixing” of that object within the colony. (Reyes, 2012, p. 14)

Whereas Reyes positions circular logic in a discussion of spatiality, I think of (colonial) spaces within a discussion of mobility. Mobility studies argues that spaces are produced based on the trajectories that normalize the movement of certain people to and from them. Thus, for my work, a space like South Central is *blackened* based on the history of movements of Africans into the New World, the black codes post-slavery, the continued movements of black people into Jim-Crowed spaces, and yet another movement, or corralling, of the descendants of this population into the spaces designed to keep suburbia white, what we know as ghettoization. In contradiction to critical race studies, these relations seem far more mobile than immobile.

Relatedly, I associate mobility and transportation as productive of race and blackness in the US, in particular, with Foucauldian power. This is because there is much evidence to suggest that white people do not *own* mobility and transportation; instead, mobility and transportation are processes that flow through particular individuals, although in ways never evenly distributed. In a similar manner, Foucault (2003) argues that “power does—at least to some extent—pass or migrate through our bodies” but even still this does not mean “that power is the best-distributed thing, the most widely distributed thing” (p. 30). For Foucault, power *functions*, it has a productive capacity that shapes subjectivity and relations of the state. This speaks to Colin Gordon’s argument that Foucault’s investigation of power was twofold:

...the productivity of power (power relations are integral to the modern social productive apparatus, and linked to active programs for the fabricated part of the collective substance of society itself) and the constitution of subjectivity through power relations (the individual impact of power relations does not limit itself to pure repression but also comprises the intention to teach, to mold conduct, to instill forms of self-awareness and identities). (Gordon, 2000, p. XIX)

More specifically, Foucault notes that

...power is not something that is divided between those who have it and hold it exclusively, and those who do not have it and are subject to it. Power must, I think, be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something that functions only when it is part of a chain. It is never localized here or there, it is never in the hands of some, and it is never appropriated in the way that wealth or a commodity can be appropriated. Power functions. Power is exercised through networks, and individuals do not simply circulate in those networks; they are in a position to both submit to and exercise this power. (Foucault, 2003, p. 29)

For Foucault, power is productive of subjectivity, a point that is central to this project.

However, I equally concern myself with the production of black subjectivity *and* objecthood and the various ways black people “resist the object” for this dissertation. It follows that people of color use transportation in ways that challenge white monopolizations. Thus, the black object/subject of this project is not solely in waiting to be produced by whiteness. Cedric Robinson similarly argues the violence of slavery and the Middle Passage did not only create objects, but subjects. Robinson (2000) posits that the “black” is not so much a nonbeing as an “altered being.” This is not the mobile subject of mobility studies who faces contingent violence, but a black mobile subject who also emerges from gratuitous violence. For Robinson (2000), the slave is no passive object, but a radicalized, altered being that continually fought against her own objecthood. According to Robinson, the disappointment of black activists like W.E.B. Du Bois, Richard Wright, and C.L.R. James is directly related to the inability of Marxism to think of the object as a relational being. Black objects *and* subjects are born from the violence(s) of racialized slavery and Middle Passage, often ignored in Western discussions of subjectivity. Ultimately, the combination of critical race studies and mobility studies allows for me to articulate theories of subjectivity and objecthood, transportation and communication to LA Gang Tours and beyond.

Transporting the Object

On their own, critical race studies and mobility studies limit discussions of blackness in the US. Critical race studies, for example, considers blackness within a limited binary of black-as-immobile, white-as-mobile. Whether these considerations of black immobility are material or metaphorical, they still begin with an assumption that the black subject is frozen or stuck, and this is the initial formative relationship of their blackness in critical race: chains, incarceration, imprisonment, and spatial isolation become the chief descriptors of black life, whether discussing metaphorical or physical relations. This assumption ignores the movement necessary to structure blackness—transatlantic slavery and the Black Atlantic as specific examples.

Likewise, mobility studies begins with the subject, one read within considerations of Western subjectivity. This is a subject who violence may happen to and *not* a subject whose formative relationship to the world is violence. While mobility studies is importantly cognizant of the importance of violence and mobility to producing Western subjects, it has less to say about violent mobility as *formative* of objecthood and alternatives subjectivities. Transatlantic slavery, while consisting of white mobile subjects, was equally of political ontological import for black objecthood. A lack of complex understanding of this relationship positions mobility studies as incapable of comprehending the death (and life) of someone like Trayvon Martin.

The importance of critical race studies and mobility studies to this project, then, cannot be understated. The combination of both areas of study structures what mobility and transportation mean for this dissertation. While movement informs understandings of subjectivities, it is also not a neutral, value-free process that everyone engages in in the same manner. Instead, movement is a black political ontological process in the US as well.

The rest of this dissertation situates my rereadings of critical race studies and mobility studies within the empirical data I have gathered from the gang tours and their relation to larger discussions of race in the US, such as slavery, Jim Crow, ghettoization, privatized prisons, and immigration. On the gang tour, this means that the white tourists hold a privileged relationship to moving through South Central based on the history of race in the US. The tourists are allotted a movement not held by the residents of South Central, and this movement is far from neutral, but structures what whiteness is on the tour (claim one). Relatedly, this white movement structures the domains, behaviors, and conduct of the South Central area's population. The white control of mobility and transportation holds categorizing effects that recreate racialized understandings of South Central as *the* black space of LA, in spite of its overwhelming Latino/a population (claim two). And, lastly, the gang tours are a political reformation of what the racialized space of South Central is by both the black and brown residents. In their movement through the ghetto, and the entire city, black and brown tour guides both reify and challenge whiteness (claim three). This is less a contradiction in the actions of the tour guides and more an inherent contradiction of racial formation, where whiteness relies on fictive narratives that neither white people nor people of color fully live up to. LA Gang Tours, and its movement throughout the city, challenges the assumption of black and brown inherent criminality, while disrupting the notion that the city and police have the best interests of all residents at heart. These are all potentialities on tour.

CHAPTER TWO

BECOMING WHITE: SAFETY AND SAVING SOUTH CENTRAL

...despite the historical reality that people of all racial classifications moved around the United States, iconic examples of American mobility are typically associated with whiteness.

—Euan Hague, ‘The Right to Enter Every Other State’ (2010, p. 335)

To be white means an unspoken political right to move through physical space is essential to one’s privilege. From colonialism to transatlantic slavery to tourist culture, white people have accumulated privilege based on this differential mobility and the assumed, related right to produce space. This differential mobility and the right to produce space has created a world in which white people imagine they are civilizing and safe presences that aid others by implementing their cultural, political, and economic ways on them. In short, white people’s physical and metaphorical traversal of space and control of mobility is one way they imagine that they make the world a “safer,” and thus whiter, place. And, just as importantly, whether through manifest destiny of Southwestern US states or preemptive strikes of Iraq (Martinot, 2010), white control of transportation and mobility is largely fear-based, assuming that people of color require US control, spatial segregation, and limited movement. This need to control people of color is in direct contrast to the increases in white movements through spaces like the Southwest and Iraq via politico-economic relations (military bases, white settlement, “democracy,” capitalism, etc.).

Assumed in my argument that white privilege is structured by a political control over movement and physical spaces are three interrelated terms: safety, fear or threat, and mobility. First, I find Jeremy Packer’s discussion of “safety” and mobility important here. I consider his use of Michel Foucault’s power as central to addressing the fluidity of whiteness and his analysis

of “safe” movement as productive of subjectivity is also of central importance to my analysis of LA Gang Tours. In his *Mobility Without Mayhem*, Packer (2008) posits that mobility is central to subjectivity in the US. He argues that the fascination with driving is structured along lines of becoming a good citizen or safe subject, which assumes tensions between the automobile as a technology of freedom and/or a dangerous threat to society. As such, drivers require discipline and regulation to ensure the protection of themselves and civil society. Interestingly, the good citizen/safe subject has racial implications. In his rereading of Albert Whitney’s driver’s manual, *Man and the Motorcar*, Packer shows that Whitney’s claim that the automobile would create a “new race” assumed a level of raced, classed, and gendered exclusion. Whitney imagined this new race to be dedicated to safety, and those who do not fit this mode were threats to society:

Such a mandate has at its core a racial logic of exclusion, according to which the impurities of those who don’t share the unifying and indentifying trait, in this instance a devotion to safety, mark one as an outsider and a threat. For Whitney, the future of American society depended upon weeding out or reprogramming the unsafe. Those who remained would constitute a new race; a society of safe subjects. (Packer, 2008, p. 6)

Packer illustrates throughout his book that this new race is not really new at all. Instead, it is largely white, middle-classed, and male. According to Packer (2008), it is this largely white male power structure that views all other bodies as threats to be feared, and, as such, “disciplines the mobility” of white women, hitchhikers, and black people to create a “safer” mobile world.

Whiteness, Packer implies, is structured around a fearful need to safen mobility.

Second, Steve Martinot (2010) goes one step further than Packer with connecting whiteness to fear, claiming that fear is a central assumption of one’s whiteness. In other words, safety is not solely a product of a driver’s willingness to follow the rules and regulations of the road. Instead, safety is an assumption, which is affectively connected to specific bodies, whether one breaks the rules or not. Racially, Martinot notes, there are some bodies that are automatically

considered to be safer than others and some bodies already feared, specifically without any white controls. With or without rules and regulations, it is fear of the “Other” that structures whiteness for Martinot. He posits whiteness is a “political identity” structured by an imagined threat, or a “cultural paranoia,” to whiteness. And, although not explicitly noted by Martinot, he implies that the way to defend one’s whiteness against the imagined threat is to move more white people into fearful spaces. Martinot demonstrates this is in the history of US interventionist strategies. He connects US occupation of Mexican territory in the mid-19th century with the 1991 invasion of Iraq, both of which connect to similar, yet different, fears created by whites. On the one hand, the US annexation of Mexico was structured around a fear of a surrounding uncivilized world that required white assistance through the spread of the Union to the Pacific Ocean; on the other, the 1991 invasion of Iraq was touted as an attempt to “bring democracy” to a scary and uncivilized portion of the world, or, for Martinot, an attempt to maintain US politico-economic dominance over the entire planet. Thus, 1850 and 1991 were structured by similar fears that created enemies for US whiteness where few existed. While fear is most important for annexation and invasion for Martinot, mobility is the unspoken element in his analysis of whiteness. In his discussion of Mexico and Iraq, the initial strategy of the US was to *move* white people into these spaces:

“Bringing civilization” or “democracy” to the land would then primarily involve *settlement* by whites, their mission being the implanting (or *importing*) of a white society (which for many, meant importing slavery as well) rather than the enabling of a form of “democratic” civil society to flourish among its present populations. (Martinot, 2010, p. 109; emphasis added)

The “annexation” of California transformed Mexican territory into United States space. The invasion of Iraq was a similar attempt at instituting a largely white politico-economic structure where “the real participants in that ‘democracy’ were the corporations implanted on the ‘cleared land’” (Martinot, 2010, p. 109). While these productions of whiteness and space, for Martinot,

are more centrally reliant on fear and threat than mobility, they still illustrate the importance of controlling mobility to productions of whiteness in the US.

Lastly, the productivity of safety and fear for whiteness, as per the work of Packer and Martinot, is central to the affect theory of Sara Ahmed (2004, 2010). In particular, she posits that while white people fear the movement of people of color, their fear does not necessarily prevent their movement; being “afraid” of people of color does *not* make white people stop moving. On the contrary, Ahmed argues that the fear of people of color actually facilitates increases in white mobility. In their assumptions that people of color, and the spaces they inhabit should be feared, whites do not stay away, but purposefully move through those spaces, geographically, politically, and economically. White movement, according to Ahmed, is inspired by fear, which equally is central to creating a narrative of “saving,” where white movement is imagined as protective of space, as a civilizing presence for people of color from the ghettos to the colonies.

Fear, safety, and movement and their importance to becoming white equally emerge on LA Gang Tours. The fear of people of color who must have their movements controlled—and of South Central’s history as the “black space” of Los Angeles—is equally attractive to the mostly white tourists. Similar to Saidiya Hartman’s (1997) argument that the pain of the black slave is central to the pleasure of the white master, the fear and threat of South Central and its residents is part of the popularity of the tour’s traversal of South Central for its largely white tourists. This is why LA Gang Tours is reported and marketed as a tour of the “gang capital of world” (Brand, 2010; Gold, 2009b; Watkins, 2010), or as a tour of an inherently dangerous space. Konstantina Zerva similarly views the tour as undermining the traditional tourism assumption of prioritizing the protection of tourists. For Zerva, LA Gang Tours stands as an example that tourists (i.e. white people) are becoming more “attracted by destinations that have a significant history or fame in

crime and violence” (2013, p. 92). For Zerva (2013) and the popular press, crime and violence, as perpetrated by black and brown gang members, are the organizing narratives of South Central. These images of South Central, typically feared by white people well before the Watts Riots, are now what structures the white interest in moving through the community.

Rather than being concerned with LA Gang Tours as prioritizing the safety of white tourists, I am interested in how the tour’s movement reproduces white privilege. I apply the concepts of Packer, Martinot, and Ahmed to LA Gang Tours and beyond to argue that political fears, protections, safety, and movement structure whiteness. What is referred to as “whiteness,” here, is less an individual identity or body on tour and more the tour bus’s physical traversal of space itself, which I argue is allotted by Safe Passage, a ceasefire that last for three hours as the tour bus moves through the city. The ceasefire transforms South Central into a “transit space” or “non-place,” meaning the ghetto becomes a space of transaction that facilitates the safe, efficient movement of the mostly white tourists. This means the black and brown tour guides (and even a black researcher) can reproduce white privilege on the gang tour by their/our related facilitation of the mobility of specific people to see the area known as the “gang capital of the world.” Thus, South Central is “turned over to the tourists,” it becomes a space re-made for their safe, protected movement—a movement that, in turn, supposedly saves South Central. In this chapter whiteness is produced by the privileged, safe, civilizing movements of some people. In addition, whiteness is produced by securing political control over mobility and transportation under the assumption that this control is responsible for making the world a safer and less fearful place.

Safe Passage and Transit Space

Whiteness is produced through a politics of fear and mobility. In the case of LA Gang Tours this fear is made possible by efficient movement of tourists through the ghetto, a space

where danger is lurking but never actually present. This nearness of threat allows for tourists to experience and confront their fear and to, ultimately, engage in processes of becoming white. An essential component of the efficient movement of the mostly white tourists involves the Safe Passage ceasefire. According to the gang tour's website (LA Gang Tours, 2014), Safe Passage is a clause created by the tour guides, which involves a three-hour-long ceasefire agreed upon by four local gangs in South Central. Essentially, the Safe Passage clause allows for the tour bus to move through South Central unharmed and without the fear of being shot at or being exposed to other illegal activities. The tour guides, who still live in these South Central communities, talk to their respective gangs prior to the gang tour to give them a heads up of the times during which to not engage in illegal activities. The Safe Passage clause specifically states:

5-10% of the gang population is responsible for 65-70% of all gang violence. LA GANG TOURS has access to the "5%," those who have their fingers on the triggers. The participating gangs in the established gun fire free safety zones have agreed to allow LA GANG TOURS to operate in their areas, given our goals to hire their youth for employment opportunities and offer job and entrepreneurship training programs. LA GANG TOURS has predetermined routes and times that are honored by each of the participating and opposing gangs. Every effort has been made, from the time of day to departure locations, to ensure a safe, pleasant and enjoyable tour experience. (LA Gang Tours, 2014)

Safe Passage is a promise from the tour guides to the tourists that there will be no violence against them, or anyone, as the tour bus travels through South Central. It also includes a waiver signed by the tourists that requires them to refrain from taking photos as the tour bus moves, to not throw up hand signs during the tour, and to not exit the bus unless given specific permission by the tour guides. In effect, Safe Passage (and its waiver) is an agreed-upon contract between the tourists and the South Central community.

While Safe Passage is obviously created by the actions of the black and brown tour guides and residents of South Central, my analysis of LA Gang Tours actually illustrates the

fluidity of whiteness, because the tours and Safe Passage illustrate that multiple people (tourists, tour guides, reporters, city officials, researchers) can reinforce structural advantages for white people. The black and brown tour guides and mostly white tourists all play a role in remaking whiteness on the tour through their equal allotment of privileged differential movement through South Central. On LA Gang Tours, tour guides engage in “technologies of the self,” where they both reify and challenge whiteness. Michel Foucault theorizes technologies of the self as always constituted by power rather than separate from it. This is addressed in Mark Kelley’s (2013) discussion of subjectivity, in which he states Foucault’s subject “constitutes itself in different forms at different times through the use of varied practices, but always by distinguishing itself from the physical body that engages in those practices” (p. 513). The subject is produced within power relations that can be accepted or challenged. Thus, technologies of the self

...permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault, 1988, p. 18)

I situate LA Gang Tours within Foucault’s discussion of power, because the tour guides rely on their movement via the tour bus to re-create themselves and their South Central community in ways that privilege the movement of white tourists over that of the black and brown residents of South Central. Again, white privilege can be maintained by white people and people of color as well. Thus, LA Gang Tours is not separate from power relations, but exists within them in ways that make the production of whiteness a fluid and collaborative effort.

A central component of the tour guide’s technologies involves the act of transforming South Central into a “transit space” or a “non-place.” The tour bus and the Safe Passage—as a technology of the self implemented by the tour guides—imaginatively remake South Central into a non-place through the privileged, fear-induced transit of the tourists. To say that South Central

is non-placed by Safe Passage is to say that South Central transforms into a theme park for the mostly white tourists, it is “Disneyfied” for three hours in ways that remake the daily *places* of South Central residents as consumable *spaces* for the mostly white tourists, who know South Central only through a bus window. This situates “place” and “non-place” for the tourists as drastically different domains. Similarly, according to Marc Augé, anthropological place

...is formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how; non-place creates the shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers. No doubt the relative anonymity that goes with this temporary identity can even be felt as a liberation, by people who, for a time, have only to keep in line, go where they are told, check their appearance. As soon as his passport or identity card has been checked, the passenger for the next flight, freed from the weight of his luggage and everyday responsibilities, rushes into the ‘duty-free’ space; not so much, perhaps, in order to buy at the best prices as to experience the reality of his momentary availability, his unchallengeable position as a passenger in the process of departing” (Augé, 2006, p. 101).

Transit space is an apt metaphor for understanding the racially productive capacity of movement and transportation on LA Gang Tour for two reasons. First, as Augé notes above, transit spaces create a “temporal identity,” a shared identity, particularly for the passengers who move through them for a specified time period. Second, transit space takes passengers, assumedly for Augé, “out of reality,” out of “everyday responsibilities,” for a particular time period. As such, transit space creates a sort of fantasy world, one that structures a passenger’s world outside of transit space as in suspended animation. Thus, the lives of those in transit space play a role in moving passengers and patrons to their place. The transit space is a kind of non-place, an in-between area, or a theme park, very different from the spaces where the mostly white tourists live.

As Sarah Sharma (2009) critiques of non-places, both residents and laborers of non-places are relegated to a secondary, almost invisible space, one designed to help passengers and patrons move unhindered. In other words, the tourist, consumer, or driver through the non-place assumes a privileged, often white subject. Similarly, South Central, its residents, and laborers are

assistants in the tourists' movement through the ghetto. The residents and their agreement to "no violence" during the gang tours, then, has mobile and racial implications: it means that antiblack violence and objecthood are *not* for this mobile population who are just passing through, and the fact that these tourists are protected from such violence *identifies* them, as they move through South Central, with whiteness. This means that on LA Gang Tours, Safe Passage creates less an identity, as per Augé, a more a temporal "process of identification" between these tourists who experience the South Central area together, and, thus, identify with one another. Applying the work of Kumarini Silva (2010) to LA Gang Tours, identification assumes race is "re-mapped, re-made, and re-marked both in the United States and globally," in ways that contradict the fixity assumed in identity studies (p. 174). Identification is not about a stable, fixed core self, but the specific processes that contextually identify people racially. For Silva, identification is far from a neutral process as implied by Augé, where all one requires is a credit card. Instead, identification assumes the political necessity of protecting white tourists from the fearful objecthood of South Central. Thus, Safe Passage has affective implications, because the tourists identify with one another based on the creation of fear on LA Gang Tours and in South Central. In order for tourists to identify with whiteness, the processes of fear and transit unite on tour.

Relatedly, Safe Passage creates a space away from "everyday reality" for the tourists. Thus, with the help of Safe Passage, South Central also opens itself to a "gentrified mobility." By gentrified mobility, I mean that South Central is imagined—via Safe Passage, as a space turned over to the consumer—as a space that becomes better and safer with the movements of white people, whose bodies cannot be open to antiblack violence. Thus, the violence associated with South Central is suspended in order to allow for the movement of a very privileged group of people. This is another way of saying that, similar to the protections allotted white people who

gentrify inner city communities, the antiblack violence of South Central does not *end*, but is not relegated as *for* the white tourist body. On the tour, the Safe Passage clause produces whiteness through the assumption that the tourist's presence is both "protected" and "saves" South Central.

The transformative processes, like making South Central a transit space, have long been important to the production of race in the United States. For example, although not referred to as a transit space, the "Black Atlantic" is one of the most theorized, and critiqued, transit spaces in diaspora studies (Banerjee, 2012; Gilroy, 1993; Sharpe, 2012). Because it involves the cultural, political, economic, and most importantly geographic routes between the Americas, Africa, and Europe, the Black Atlantic is central to the production of black objecthood and subjectivity. Less a concern of Black Atlantic theorizations is the production of whiteness, something that Sukanya Banerjee (2012) posits deserves further attention. For example, a typical discussion of the Black Atlantic is found in Hazel Carby's analysis of "becoming modern racialized subjects," which she situates within geographical encounters, specifically for the formation of blackness. For Carby, the former slave Oluadah Equiano was not black, or African, where he grew up. Instead, in his interactions with whites on the Atlantic Ocean and the slave ship, he becomes black:

In the *Interesting Narrative* Equiano was not black in the place in which he grew up. Nor did he see himself as African. Although enslaved, Equiano was not black or African at any point on his journey toward the Atlantic coast, but he is represented as becoming black in the encounter with the crew of the slave ship who, simultaneously with their refusal to recognize a shared humanity with Equiano, *become white*. The African, or black subject, and the European, or white subject, are produced in mutual relations of affiliation/disaffiliation and, at this moment, Equiano turns to those he gauges as being like himself for knowledge and assurance. (Carby, 2009, p. 633; emphasis added)

Becoming white is less important for Carby than Equiano's becoming black, but it is an inherent result of the interaction between Equiano and European slavers. By controlling transportation and mobility, particularly slave ships and their traversal of the Atlantic, the Europeans engaged

in their own processes of racialization, their own technologies of the self. Thus, the Atlantic, the ship, and European control over it and its “cargo,” are central routes to becoming white.

Like the slave ship and the Middle Passage, the tour bus and the ceasefire are central to reproducing white privilege in Los Angeles. While Safe Passage is largely read as an attempt to calm the nerves of hesitant white tourists, I argue the clause reinstitutes the “threat” to whiteness that is associated with South Central, while also allowing white people to move through the area based on an assumed threat. Safe Passage, the tour bus, and the bus’s presence in South Central are highly meaningful processes that recreate the ghetto as a transit space. Of course, there are tour buses that drive through residential neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles, like Beverly Hills or Malibu to look at celebrity houses, but these tours do not require a Safe Passage, or suspension of the activities of a large portion of the population of Malibu or Beverly Hills. If anything, Denzel Washington or Angelina Jolie walking outside to pick up a newspaper would draw even more tourists. LA Gang Tours stands alone in its transit spacing, since it requires a three-hour-long suspension of the activities of the residents, who the tourists fear and are there to see in the first place. These tourists want to be close, but not close enough that they do not reach the end of the tour. LA Gang Tours is responsible for the protected, and protecting, movement of tourists, illustrating that the control of mobility plays a central role in the recreation of whiteness.

Fear and Affective White Identifications

While at Carol’s and Eric’s Malibu beach home, miles away from anything that resembles South Central, I could see the Pacific Ocean out the floor-to-ceiling window. It was a rare rainy-looking day, and about a week after we took our first tour together. With Carol in the bedroom changing their son, Eric offered me a glass of water, before he said to me, “It wasn’t like the rap songs, was it?” I assumed he meant the gang tours, because the Malibu beach house

was very much like the rap songs. “How so?” I pressed him. His immediate reaction: “Safer than I expected.” Eric’s acknowledgement to me that South Central was not what he expected is, in part, the point of LA Gang Tours. The founder of the tour, Alfred, wants the gang tours to “break stereotypes” of South Central. And relatedly, the tours rely on Safe Passage to stunt the violence in ways that are typically unavailable for the residents. LA Gang Tours creates a space in which tourists experience a highly controlled environment. The black and brown tour guides show one type of South Central, which may look very different outside the three-hour ceasefire window. When the tour stops, for example, the amount of people on the streets in South Central increases. Residents leave their homes, more stares come a drivers way, and drug dealing becomes far less hidden of a practice. What is expereinced on LA Gang Tours is a controlled space, one structured around the respect shown to the tour guides and the privileged movement of the tourists.

Despite this assurance that South Central is “safe” on tour, the overwhelming discourse of LA Gang Tours is still one of white fear, a fear that is promoted on the tour bus as it traverses South Central. This is a discourse that is both a selling point of the tours today and a justification for the segregatory policies of the black South Central of the early-20th century. This fear did not begin with the tours, although it is necessary for the tour’s existence. Reporter Richard Jinman, for example, acknowledges the city’s fear of South Central in his discussion of the surveillance technologies he noticed during his private tour. When writing about his first experience on LA Gang Tours Jinman (2011) says “Suspended above several intersections are listening devices that alert police to gunfire and help them pinpoint its location” (p. 10). Similarly, in the documentary *Made in America*, one Blood gang member called a helicopter that flew above his South Central community a “ghetto bird”—a term that speaks to the normalized police helicopter surveillance in South Central. The ghetto bird and the listening devices assume a necessary surveillance of

South Los Angeles, a space deemed worthy of fear, well before LA Gang Tours. Thus, these tours act, for profit, on the preexisting racialized fears associated with South Central.

Relatedly, fear again extends beyond the gang tours and structures white responses to black mobility in LA and the US as a whole. In *Policing the Crisis*, for example, Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Roberts (1982) argue that the fear of crime in the inner-city US was really a fear of black people moving into white communities. In part, the movement of black people into white spaces justified this fear, and facilitated white flight in the 1960s and 1970s. It did not matter if a crime was actually committed against whites, just fear of potential crimes: “even if not actual victims, more people came to see themselves as potential victims, and undoubtedly a sense of ‘trust’ and security had been undermined” (Hall, et. al., 1982, p. 20). Within this framework, the inner city, or any space that black people moved to, was a fearful space for white residents, who needed to control this black movement or move out.

An imaginary fear is central to the creation of white and black identifications on LA Gang Tours. Here, the tourists identify with whiteness based on the importance of produced fear of South Central and their allotted movement through the community. Fear is not the catalyst for immobility for white people, or tourists, but it is that which they move against. Their movement, in spite of supposed threats and created fear, is what makes their whiteness. In a similar manner, Sara Ahmed (2004) articulates this discussion of fear as it relates to whiteness and blackness in her rereading of Frantz Fanon’s mobile black body. In chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (2008) shows that the fear the small white child feels at the sight of his body is productive of both the child’s whiteness and his own blackness, in that the white gaze “rips” him, limb from limb, from experiencing Western subjectivity as defined by Hegel. For Ahmed, it is Fanon’s

movement in this moment that is central to inciting the fear of the white child, a fear of the object's approach to whiteness as well what she calls the "passing by" of the object:

Fanon's encounter allows us to explore the links between the displacement of objects of fear and the passing by of the object. In this encounter, fear does become contained in an object: the black body. And yet the containment of fear in an object remains provisional: insofar as the black man is the object of fear, then he may pass by. Indeed, the physicality of this 'passing by' can be associated with the passing of fear between signs: *it is the movement that intensifies the affect*. The black man becomes even more threatening if he passes by: his proximity is imagined then as the possibility of future injury. As such, the economy of fear works to contain the bodies of others, *a containment whose 'success' relies on its failure, as it must keep open the very grounds of fear*. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 67; emphasis in the original)

In effect, to be white relies on the fear of the *approaching* black body and the related potential loss of blackness as the antagonism of whiteness. Martinot (2010) similarly posits that whiteness assumes the black object, even if black people are not physically present. Whiteness both fears approaching blackness and simultaneously fears it moving too far away (the end of whiteness).

Within this framework, Ahmed implies, and I argue, that fear is *not* about the "immobilization" of whiteness, frozen in terror, but the increased mobility of white bodies; and this movement, in the face of a created threat, is central to the establishment, or identification, of whiteness. Aside from Fanon and the white child, the post-9/11 events and President Bush's call to not be afraid of terrorism provides another space for Ahmed to consider this relation between whiteness, fear, and mobility. Ahmed (2004) posits that in her analysis of one of Bush's speeches, fear does not cause containment, but facilitates mobility:

...the nation is constructed as having prevailed through refusal to transform its vulnerability and wounds (terrorism did hurt the nation and there are dangers ahead) into an affective response of fear, a response narrativised as 'determination by terror', rather than self-determination. Bush, then, in an act of self-determination, turns the act of terror into an act of war, which would seek to eliminate the source of fear and transform the world into a place where the mobility of some capital and some bodies becomes the sign of freedom and civilisation. *The effect of terror is not containment, but provides the very grounds for mobilization*. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 73; emphasis added)

Of course, as Ahmed notes, this is not an equal engagement in mobility shared by all, but a highly racialized mobility that requires the “terrorist,” suspicious, unsafe, brown body.

LA Gang Tours does similar work in that it objectifies South Central via the privileged movement of a specific population of people. The threat of gangsterism and criminality is not the impetus of containment for tourists (who would stay away if that were the case). Instead, crime, or assumptions of criminality, is the grounds for movement. It is fear, and its relation to mobility, that constructs white identifications for three hours on LA Gang Tours. Similarly, according to Ahmed (2004, 2010), fear and mobility coproduce whiteness in her analysis of the small white child’s response to Fanon’s black body: “fear does not simply come from within and then move outwards towards objects and others (the white child who feels afraid of the black man); rather, fear works to secure the relationship between those bodies” (Ahmed, 2004, p. 62). On tour, the association of white fear with South Central is similarly important to the temporal construction of the shared white identifications. For three hours, at the least, the tourists stand in for the small white child on the train and South Central and the gang members (both black and brown) stands in for Fanon’s black body. As the tour bus moves closer to the fearful, objectified area of South Los Angeles, the tourist move closer to their shared, and created, whiteness.

There is a circularity to this fear on LA Gang Tours: the fear of South Central is what draws the tourists in to be scared on the tour. Instead of keeping the tourists away, the white production of South Central as a fearful place informs the tourists’ movements. This means that the tourists find pleasure in their fear and movement. After our first tour, Carol tells me how “happy” she is that South Central is “such a safe place” because of the tours:

And people, they look healthy, they look like happy. You know, it’s not all like we expected. I think so. And I was happy to see like kids play around there, and they didn’t have to be like under adult supervision and have to stay inside because they’re afraid they might get killed or something. So I was really happy because I was scared that, oh.

Because I don't like to see like children not happy, that disgusts me, so I was scared that we'd see a lot of that. But I was happy.

Carol articulates pleasure ("I was happy") and fear ("I was scared") in her movement through the community, a movement initiated by initial fear of the community. Although she acknowledges things may not be the "same at night," that matters little in her three-hour traversal of the space. For that time, at least, South Central is a far nicer, safer, happier, and healthier place than she initially expected, rather, hoped she would find. This "happiness," as acknowledged by Carol, should not be disconnected from fear. Similar discussions of happiness are addressed by Ahmed (2004, 2010), who connects happiness not to an internal feeling, but a political structure that defines the limits of what constitutes happiness. In particular, Ahmed positions happiness in relation to the object, through which the self emerges. In fact, in her above discussion of fear, Ahmed argues the small white child also turns to an object of love (the [m]other) to negate the fear created by Fanon's body. Happiness, then, is also productive of white subjectivity in its object-making capacity, still structured by an initial fear of the object. South Central, in the bus's movement, is an object in the sought-after fear/pleasure of tourists. Through their experience of the supposedly dangerous space—a ride through an objectified space of transaction—tourists recreate themselves in contrast to the ghetto that they move through.

The created fear/pleasure on LA Gang Tours is never solely a creation of the white tourists alone. Instead, the tour guides play an equal role in the production of fear on tour. During one television news report on LA Gang Tours, for example, the camera person sat in the middle of the bus, surrounded by white tourists, some from as far away as Toronto (ABC, 2010). They all chattered nervously before the gang tour began. When Alfred finally slowly stepped onto the front of the bus, all the chattering slowed. He grabbed the microphone and said: "Ok, if nobody moves, nobody gets hurt" (ABC, 2010). A round of nervous laughter slowly moved through the

bus at this classic example of Alfred's humor. The creation of fear is demonstrated in other ways during the tours, specifically through the questioning of the tourists by the tour guides, questions designed to further situate fear and threat as an understandable feeling for the white tourists of South Central. Australian journalist Richard Jinman notes one of the first questions Alfred asks when they met for Jinman's private tour is "are you nervous?" to which Jinman thinks,

It's a fair question. South Central, an area of about 2.4 square kilometres bordered by Slauson Avenue to the south and Washington Boulevard to the north, is synonymous with violent gangs—the Crips and Bloods in particular. Beaten down by recession in the 1970s and ravaged by crack cocaine in the '80s, the area has been immortalised in rap songs and movies as an urban battleground. "Rule No.1: get yourself a gun," Ice Cube advised on the track *How to Survive in South Central*. So yes, I'm a little nervous. Lomas nods. "LA is the gang capital of the world," he concedes. "And the bank robbery capital of the world. Although that number went down when I retired." (Jinman, 2011, p. 10)

Thus, the facilitation of fear occurs on multiple levels: it is instituted by the assumptions that the tourists bring into the community, the same fear that led the city to first segregate and surveil the black South Central population so aggressively in the early 20th century (Robinson, 2010). That fear is also a creation of the tour guides, a technology of the self, whose actions and questions promote fear as an understandable reaction to South Central. Both are necessary for the processes of white identification to occur on the gang tour.

The dynamic between fear and safety is further produced in everything from newspaper reports to rap songs. For example, reporter Kate O'Sullivan (2010) notes the gang tour "allows travellers the chance to go where wise men have feared to tread – albeit in the safety of a bus" (p. 4). Relatedly, fear and safety are highlighted in the gang tour's official rap song, "LA Gang Tours," where tour guide Melvin Johnson (2014) raps, "That black and brown got you safe and sound." Reporter Nick Allen (2010) addresses fear in relation to the waivers signed by each tourist prior to the gang tour starting: "Passengers embarking on the LA Gang Tours sign release forms acknowledging they could be crime victims and put their fate in the hands of a group of

former gangsters who act as guides and protection” (Allen, 2010, p. 22). As mentioned earlier, the waivers are an important part of Safe Passage, they are agreements between tourists and South Central residents that tourist will follow the instructions of the tour guides. For at least one tourist during an early tour, signing the waiver felt like “signing my life away” (ABC, 2010). A similar concern is noted by a Fox Business (2010) reporter who asks Alfred during an interview: “Alright, and everybody has to sign a waiver, I mean, are you finding that when people get on the bus that they seem kinda frightened to you a little bit? They’ve got to sign their life away and you’re telling them, look something could happen to you on this tour.”

Inherent in these discussions of fear is the political differentiation between tourists and toured, black and white. The fear discourse of LA Gang Tours positions the tourist population as drastically different from South Central residents, which also comes out in the responses of tourists and reporters. For example, in one interview with tourists, *7 Days* (2010) states that “John and Shannon Hill, from the exclusive enclave of Bel Air, said they wanted to be able to see another side of the city. ‘It’s amazing. You can live in a place like LA and be so close to areas that are just so different,’ John Hill said.” But the “other side” draws distinctions between South Central and the upper class, largely white wealth of Bel Air. Relatedly, a different tourist, a Beverly Hills native, Mary Lou Richt, notes that: “I’ve lived in LA my entire life and never really realized how bad the violence really is” (ABC, 2010), after her first gang tour, where she met one tour guide who was, “arrested at 14,” and who had spent “the next 22 years in and out of prison” (ABC, 2010). And reporter Will Dean (2012) notes that these gang tours allow “tourists to gawp at the settings where more people—as novelist Leslie Jamison, who took the tour for a recent piece in the *LA Review of Books* points out—have died than in Northern Ireland’s Troubles” (p. 22). Acknowledged in each of these reviews of the tour is the importance of

affectively produced distinctions between South Central and its tourists. Fear and threat—as creations by tour guides, tourists, and the city—are productive of identifications with whiteness on LA Gang Tour. And importantly, fear does not cause the tourists to stop moving, but inspires their movement through South Central.

It is fear that distinguishes the tourists from the toured, the safe from the unsafe on LA Gang Tours. Fear is what facilitates the affective, white identification that occurs between the tourists as the tour bus moves through South Central. It is something that the tourists share, for three hours, as their common movement and Safe Passage work to turn South Central into a transit space. And, interestingly, this fear is not viewed as a cause for the tourists to stay away from South Central, but to move through the ghetto. Fear is a central component of why they *must* move through South Central, it is how they come to identify with whiteness. As Ahmed (2004) points out, fear is that which mobilizes white people. On tour, fear equally reproduces whiteness, or at least allows for processes that make people identify with whiteness. As such, there is a pleasure that is assumed in the fear associated with white movement. Through the allotted movement of specific people provided by Safe Passage, the tourists identify as white.

Gentrified Mobility and Safe Passage(s)

Once Carol joined Eric and me in the living room, we officially begun our interview from Malibu. I sat on the couch with the Pacific Ocean behind me, Carol and Eric in front of me, able to see the beach whenever they pleased. During our interview, the Norwegian couple spoke to something that I did not initially expect. One thing they hoped for was for South Central to be “open” for the movement of people like them, or for white people. Eric, for example, urged me to tell Alfred he should “extend” his work from solely tourism to allowing “more businesses” to invest in the economic endeavors of LA Gang Tours and South Central as a whole. It is this

investment, for Eric and Carol, that has “radical” potentiality, in that it supposedly transforms South Central forever and for the benefit of multiple people. In fact, investment and physical mobility are conflated for Eric. To allow large businesses into South Central is to make the ’hood safer and open for white people who do not live there to move into and through the area, whether a gang tour exists or not. In our interview, Eric urged me tell Alfred he should

...not be afraid to *commercialize* this [gang tour]. Because I think, and this is my personal thought, to experience things firsthand, don’t be afraid sort of that people will challenge your motivation or what’s behind it, because I think what’s most scary are the things we can talk about. Things we can experience, we can see, we can talk about, that’s so much better. (emphasis added)

When I asked Eric to expand on what he meant by “commercialize this,” he stated:

I mean, the more you’re able to open up these communities and allowing sort of outsiders to walk in and out, that’s probably the way to develop these communities, to make them safer, make them sort of more part of the...instead of the more isolated areas people talk about but never visit. And I think that’s what I mean by commercialization.

In addition to the “outsiders” who can walk in and out of South Central, it is not hard to imagine that this “commercialized” movement through South Central that will benefit the community is an overwhelmingly white movement, one that is positioned as “saving” the community. After all, two of the businesses Eric mentions Alfred could get sponsorships from are the white-owned businesses Walmart and Kmart. Importantly, the role these big businesses can play in saving South Central is a dual one: on the one hand, Walmart and Kmart save South Central by providing legal economic ventures for residents; on the other, the increase in businesses like these can bring in different (i.e. white) people, businesses, and, police protections, and, thus, stunt the public potential of gang violence in these areas.

In his discussion of businesses and “outside” residents moving into South Central, what Eric speaks to, without fully calling it such, are the processes of gentrification already occurring in many Los Angeles communities of color. In both Eric’s and Carol’s comments, and in the

ideals of gentrification proponents (Zukin, 2008), it is most often corporate businesses that lay the groundwork for the “redevelopment” of the inner city, which is then followed by the in-movement of white residents and white patrons, which Eric hopes is the ultimate outcome of these tours. Similarly, Jason Hackworth defines gentrification as a process whereby

...small-scale owner-occupiers entered disinvested neighborhoods to rehabilitate individual homes for personal consumption. If enough individual investors came to the neighborhood, the process sometimes became more corporate, with development firms entering the “tamed” market to sell condominiums, brownstones, and townhouses to less adventurous buyers. (Hackworth, 2007, pp. 125-126)

The dual investment from businesses and individuals in “disinvested neighborhoods” speaks to Eric’s point of allowing the movement of white people through South Central, which involves businesses like Walmart moving into the community as a complement to the movement of the tour bus. More individual movements are already happening as students from the University of Southern California are moving into South Central, something that Alfred posits is “beneficial” to the community. In our second interview, Alfred notes that he is happy to see many “groups of college students, people from middle-class America moving into these communities,” like South Central, because they “are serving and are doing all the things that a community needs, and it’s been phenomenal.” Within this framework, the in-movement of white people (as tourists, or residents, or businesses) is central to “redeveloping” South Central and making it a safer and better community.

With the hints of gentrification as helping to “save” South Central, it is assumed that there is not only a shared white identification that occurs through Safe Passage (as discussed in the previous section), but equally a radical transformation of the entire space of South Central through white mobility. Thus, the Safe Passage clause is an extension of what white movement has traditionally and imaginatively meant for nonwhite spaces: the movement of white people is

imagined as the only way to create safety, civilization, and peace in nonwhite spaces. On the gang tours, this makes the white tourists the heroes of South Central. The movement of the tour bus through the South Central area remakes the community for the white consumer—South Central is helped, only in its capacity to facilitate safe, white transportation.

Much of the gentrification literature critiques the assumption that white movement “helps” the inner city, “saves” it even (Hackworth, 2007; Hanhardt, 2013; Zukin, 2008). In a similar manner, I apply the conception of saving the ghetto in gentrification studies to the Safe Passage clause’s ability to turn South Central into a transit space, which assumes a gentrified mobility for the bus. In gentrified mobility, the movement of certain populations is deemed as necessary for the protection of all people. I use this term because, like gentrification, LA Gang Tours “turn the community over” for the movement of white people. Safe Passage *tames* the ’hood for the three-hour mobility of the white tourists. The gang tour, to an extent, is promoted as a gentrification tryout, it is situated as a white examination of a space that is “not as bad” as it is portrayed in the media. Importantly, South Central is not as bad, because the movement of white people saves it. In this light, for three hours, the ghetto becomes what LA Gang Tours makes of it. It is a once dangerous space remade safe by white people’s movement.

Despite the necessary work of the tour guides to institute Safe Passage (their brokering of a peace treaty between four notorious rival gangs), the tourists note that there is a level of “authenticity” in South Central that they experience on tour, which exceeds what is possible in music or movies. One tourist, Tony, posted on the tour’s website: “Nice to hear the behind the scheme [sic] of Hollywood. To see the real event” (LA Gang Tours, 2014). Another tourist posted: “There are so many places I’ve only read about. It was fascinating seeing them in person – and for real” (LA Gang Tours, 2014). And a tourist that I interviewed, Sam, notes: “I think [the

tour] definitely has some sort of legitimacy, and legitimacy about actually talking about the issues, some would say ‘authenticity.’” This is an assumed authenticity of South Central on the tour that is ironically connected *not* to the residential population, but to the safe movement of the tourists. Sharon Zukin (2008) similarly notes that the in-movement of new white gentrifiers is important to the production of “authentic,” yet safe, spaces. These spaces are authentic less in the sense of the longtime inhabitation by black or brown residents and more based on gentrifiers:

We can only see spaces as authentic from outside them. Mobility gives us the distance to see a neighborhood in terms of the way it looks, enables us to hold it to an absolute standard of urbanity or cosmopolitanism, and encourages us to judge its character apart from any personal history or intimate social relationships we have there. The more connected we are to its social life, especially if we grew up there, the less likely we are to call a neighborhood authentic. (Zukin, 2008, p. 728)

Gentrification holds similar mobile implications to LA Gang Tours: in both, the communities are ironically produced as racially authentic by the movement of white people. This is why Christina Hanhardt (2013) argues that “historic preservation” is “a classic tool of gentrification” (2013, p. 193), used to maintain racial imaginations of the space, in contradiction to the demographics of space. The processes of safety, movement, and authenticity come together here: the authenticity of the racialized inner city space is produced *by* white, safe movement. Like the tour, another characteristic of Martinot’s (2010) whiteness reemerges in gentrification: classificatory power. The new gentrifier classifies the authentic, the safe, and the raced via their mobility. The gentrification proponents view these classifications as necessary to *tame* the inner city.

Similarly, inherent in Safe Passage is that fact that in order for South Central to become safer, an increase in white movement into and through the area is a necessary requirement. This is not new, but part of a long a narrative of gentrification proponents of a white reclamation and redefinition of inner-city spaces through violence (Hackworth, 2007; Smith, 2002; Zukin, 2008). In a similar manner, Neil Smith articulates the safety required by new gentrifiers to what he calls

“revanchism,” or the white attempts to *take back* the inner city from people of color by the use of systematic and physical violence. Here, “revanchism was explicitly justified in terms of making the city safe for gentrification. The new authoritarianism both quashes opposition and makes the streets safe for gentrification” (Smith, 2002, p. 442). White movement of gentrifiers is central to making safety, mostly for the new residents through the usage of racialized violence.

Thus, safety is not neutral, but has political implications (Packer, 2008). It is a requirement for specific, raced bodies. Safety similarly plays itself out via tour bus movement. The arm of protection for the gentrifiers (the police force) make unexpected—and unwanted for the tour guides—appearances throughout the gang tour, as tour guides like Jimmy claim the tour bus has been followed by police squad cars “way more than they do other tours.” To an extent, like the gentrifiers, the tourists have multiple *safe passages*. Safe Passage is a redundancy, it is an extension of the assumed protection that follows white bodies to begin with—a safety that essentially remakes spaces to allow for white mobility. When it comes to the tourists, Safe Passage is an extension of their protected right to move.

During my first tour, the privilege of safe movement for the tourists was evident during one of the most popular stops of the tour. Alfred and I noticed two police squad cars outside our stop near the Watts Towers. As we got out of the SUV, he put his arm around my shoulder and assured me, “Don’t worry, homie, they won’t bother us with white people around.” We both laughed, but he was serious. One tourist, Carol, even noted this interaction between Alfred and me when she told me after our first tour:

You know like when we met the cops and [Alfred] was like, “yeah, we’re [Alfred and me] ok because we have two white people, and they would never shoot at us.” He’s joking but he also means it on some level. And I know he’s just being honest about like how he feels he’s being portrayed by like the government, media, the cops or whatever.

Carol states that, although she cannot fully understand this, Alfred is conscious that the police will treat him and me differently than they will treat her. Carol, as a white tourist, is allowed a safe passage through South Central, of which the tour's Safe Passage is an extension. In fact, Carol's movement is so safe it protects Alfred and me from the police. During the three-hour-time period, the violence of the police state does not effect Alfred or me, because Carol's movement requires, or rather assumes, protection and safety.

The sign of the assumed safe passages for the tourists is prevalent in another important way. In Carol's above comments, there is the sign of something I understood previously, and both tour guides and tourists confirmed: my black body, even as a tourist, can be reduced to the blackness associated with South Central. As a tourist, participating in the maintenance of whiteness, my safety is not secured through Carol's whiteness *off* the bus. It is Carol and her husband Eric who need protection, and, by extension, they protect Alfred and me through their gentrified mobility. In the turning over of South Central for tourist movement, Carol's and Eric's bodies assume protections my black body is not privy to. The tours and Safe Passage reveal an institutional racial structure of LA—and the US—long upheld by the police and the city, one where white bodies are allotted special protections that do not extend to all people.

Inside the tour bus, however, the movement of *all* tourists, like Carol, Eric, Sam, and me, are positioned as essential to the necessary protection of South Los Angeles, which speaks to our contextually specific identifications with whiteness. In short, while all tourists may not be white (like Sam and me), depending on the the situation we are all identified with whiteness. Without our movement, the ghetto has no ceasefire, and we can help simply by taking the gang tour. In a radio commercial spot, a female voiceover, with Bob Marley's "One Love" in the background, notes that tourist movement is a protective force *for* the ghetto. Specifically, the ad states:

Your participation [tourists on LA Gang Tours] will allow the success of gunfire-free safety zones, an agreement between three of the largest and most notorious gangs in LA history [Alfred has told me four gangs in our interviews]. Together we can make a difference, create a lasting change, and bring hope back to the streets of Los Angeles. You no longer need to imagine. Saving lives, creating jobs, and rebuilding communities: LA Gang Tours. (Ryan, 2010b)

Similarly, during the 2010 inaugural tour, one videographer recorded Alfred as stating to a bus full of all white tourists just before the gang tour started: “We are actually thankful that you’re here. Your participation, uh, allows the succession of an agreement between many people in the community of various levels, whether it’s clergy, uh, business, even gang members have agreed to this” (Schroeder, 2010). It is the tourists, then, who protect South Central. Like gentrification, tourists movement is the protective force of this space.

There is a problematic assumption central to the movement of the gang tour and gentrification through South Central: white movement—via the tour bus, and Safe Passage, or white gentrifying dollars—assumes that white people are saving South Central simply by being on tour, simply by moving through the community. Like gentrification, the tour becomes another mode of saving South Central, one in debt to the movement of white people, whether physically or financially. The in-movement of white dollars and white tourists further creates safety for South Central, a safety concerned more with the protection of whites than the black and brown residents. Specifically, the black and brown residents are the “problem,” and their violence must be “tamed.” Assumed in Safe Passage is the differential mobility the tourists are allotted from the population and space they are touring, one that transforms the entire South Central area.

Saving South Central

No one would deny that Safe Passage has benefits for South Central. In chapter four I will return to the complexity of this situation and discuss the radical potentiality of the tour. It creates a window of opportunity for the residents to move through the ’hood. Compton resident

Reggie, for example, told me during our interview that “the streets are as quiet and peaceful as I have ever seen” during the gang tour. Alfred is also proud of Safe Passage, because it allows residents to come outside of their homes during the three-hour-long ceasefire as the tour moves through the community: “I can’t tell you,” Alfred told me in our second interview, “during my years of working humanitarian efforts the amount of complaints I’ve got about being held hostage through violence. You know they’re held hostage.” This capability of the residents to move around the ghetto unhindered is not the norm.

But assumed in the promotion of Safe Passage is the production of a South Central in which the mostly white tourists hold a privileged form of mobility from the residents, one that makes South Central an object for their consumption. Safe Passage, and the mobility of the mostly white tourists specifically is imagined as the only way to create safety and peace in South Central. Rather than the efforts of rivals who prove they have the capacity to end the violence of the community, the white tourists are the heroes of South Central. The movement of the tour through South Central remakes the community for the consumer—South Central becomes a space of transaction.

Safe Passage, though protective of the black and brown residents of South Central, helps to reproduce whiteness in relation to fear and protection. In the process, Safe Passage assumes a suspended space, where mostly white tourists are more valuable than the assumedly inherently dangerous residents of South Los Angeles. Their control of transportation and mobility is a fear-based control that maintains the fantasies of whiteness. The white control of mobility and transportation is reactionary, it holds with it the tourists’ and/or the new gentrifiers hope that whiteness will not be undone. Challenging whiteness is that which is feared, and controlling the movement of the self and Others quiets those fears. A related side effect of the white control of

movement and transportation is the assumption in Safe Passage, for example, that this white tourist population protects South Central—their control of movement is central to radical transformation of the area. But this control of mobility and transportation does not have to be held specifically by white people in order to maintain whiteness. Foucault's (2003) technology of power shows this clearly. Here, people are “never the inert or consenting targets of power; they are always its relays” (Foucault, 2003, p. 29). Thus, tour guides equally play a role in remaking whiteness on the tour. This is not to say that a white person is “pulling the strings” behind the tour guides in hopes of undermining their efforts. Instead, Foucault allows us to see that the tour guides are subjects of power, it “flows” through their actions in ways that allow for the potential to reify and undermine those relations. Both can and do happen on the gang tour.

Thus, Safe Passage speaks to something that may have far more racial implications than assumed in tour guide narratives, songs, and newspaper reports. The Safe Passage clause implies that rather than the preservation of black and brown people's lives the presence of white people is what necessitates protection, or at least the imagined need for the ceasefire. The Safe Passage clause, like the safe passages allotted to white people as whole, holds an assumption that the lives of mostly white tourists are more valuable than South Central residents. With Safe Passage, white movement through the ghetto is protected and protective, it is civilizing and transformative of the community. Safety and movement again come together to produce whiteness. One of the problems with this production of whiteness is the passivity it assumes as necessary to transform space. LA Gang Tours allows for a space in which the mostly white tourists imagine that they can change South Central *simply by taking a tour*. The difficult, radical work of questioning the role of one's whiteness in the production of South Central's gangs, and South Central as a whole, is skirted in the consumption of an imagination of the ghetto. Thus, to change South Central one

does not have to get their hands dirty by questioning the role of their privileged transportation through the ghetto, which is non-placed for three hours, as maintaining power relations backed by police protections and political discrimination. Instead, one only has to *move*.

White movement is a process that distances South Central from tourists, rather than showing their mutual constitution. But if South Central is to transform in ways that tour guides hope, then whiteness cannot be an unquestioned element of LA Gang Tours. It must be front and center, particularly examinations of what the gang tour itself does to reproduce whiteness. The privilege of the white tourist movement through South Central is a largely unconsidered element of the gang tours but it should be given more consideration. Otherwise, white mobility remains a privileged relation in Los Angeles and the US as a whole. Here, South Central is a problem that can only be fixed by white mobility, rather than a dynamic space that is produced by it.

CHAPTER THREE

MEDIATING GANGSTERISM

An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist, an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that...

—Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place* (2000, p. 17)

Despite South Central's history of Jim Crowism, antiblack racism, and the current popular imagination of the area in hip-hop, movies, and television as a space of "black poverty" (Lee, 2010), Jennifer Medina (2012) notes South Central is today a largely Latino/a space. Yet, this does not change the fact that on LA Gang Tours, South Central is depicted as a space largely consisting of black male gang members. In this chapter, I analyze the importance of forefronting blackness in South Central on and off LA Gang Tours. I argue that the white political control of transportation and mobility addressed in the previous chapter as productive of whiteness leads to the classification of South Central as a "black space," which is endemic of the larger political mobilization and determination of white privilege that spatializes race throughout the US. More specifically, I am interested in revealing how race is spatialized as white, brown, and particularly black in the political geographies of Los Angeles and how LA Gang Tours functions as an active participant in these fictive fixings of space. While the tour depends on racial categorizations of particular spaces as white, brown, and black for its popular existence, significantly this racialized classification on tour is actually more dynamic than fixed, moving *with* the tour bus through the city. Black space, for me, is not racially isolated, emerging in a bubble solely created by black people. It is produced from a history of white political decisions, antiblack violence, racist policing, white flight, monopolies of media, housing and job discrimination, and tourism.

The materiality of transportation on LA Gang Tours recreates racialized subjectivities and space in Los Angeles. More accurately, the tour bus creates a sensation of “identification” as it moves through the city that sets up the tourists as white (chapter two). In the process, the gang tour’s reliance on whiteness also means the tour guides and South Central residents identify with blackness, the antagonism to whiteness (Martinot, 2010; Wilderson, 2010). Here, the blackness of the tour guides is less a racial categorization, and more a temporal association similar to the whiteness of the tourists as discussed in the previous chapter. This is to say that, rather than an essential blackness in South Central, the community is “blackened” and “identified” as black for three hours by LA Gang Tours. I apply John Jackson’s (2003) work on blackening and Harlem to South Central. Jackson calls Harlem a black space more in people’s minds and imaginaries than reality. In his book, he offers an ethnohistorical “rendering of Harlem as not just a black space but a *blackened* one, examining Harlem’s axiomatic blackness as a contextually contingent racialization of place” (pp. 18-19; emphasis added). I approach LA Gang Tours similarly, as a practice that blackens South Central, or a practice that identifies blackness with South Central.

Relatedly, in his speech, “Ethnicity: Identity and Difference,” Stuart Hall (1991) outlines a similar process to blackening in his critique of identity studies. In the speech, Hall argues that identity is largely considered, both inside and outside academia, as a stable, fixed entity that is known and understood by the individual. But Hall posits identity should be reconsidered as a “process of identification.” Identification considers context, where the self is not an inherent truth but it is reformed in temporal and spatial relations. In a critique of identity, Hall notes,

The story of identity is a cover story. A cover story for making you think you stayed in the same place, though with another bit of your mind you do know that you’ve moved on. What we’ve learned about the structure of the way in which we identify suggests that identification is not one thing, one moment. We have now to reconceptualize identity as a process of identification, and that is a different matter. It is something that happens over

time, that is never absolutely stable, that is subject to the play of history and the play of difference. (Hall, 1991, p. 15)

Building off Hall's work, Kumarini Silva (2010) provides an update to identification, particularly for South Asian people in the US post-9/11. While Hall considers identification as potentially liberating, Silva posits identification can also be a tool of the state:

While I agree with Hall on the strategic use of identification, I feel at this juncture that Hall's critical, non-essentialist, meaning of identification has butted heads with the current use of the word and its circulatory practices in cultural and political contexts. In the post 9/11 context, identification has been reinscribed by the state as a tool of national security, devaluing the use of 'identification' as a tool to rethink identity in more complex and exegetic ways. Indeed, as the ongoing debates on immigration and border control in North America and Europe highlight, identification has been used to separate those who belong from those who do not. (Silva, 2010, pp. 16-17)

Thus, Silva shows identification has no liberatory guarantees.

The different processes of identification and blackening outlined by Hall, Silva, and Jackson are political formations, which is to say they are not solely an individual's doing, but structured by networks of power that one is born into; this meshes well with the individuated discussion of representation studies versus the more structural analysis in media theory. On the one hand, blackness is reproduced in the political decisions of media content (representations); but, on the other, the form of media can have very specific impacts on racialization processes as well. Thus, my use of identification and blackening suggests that the tour is a revealing instance of mediation, where blackness is constructed on the tour bus not based on intentionality, but via the tour's navigation of South Central, which includes the narratives of the tour guides, questions of the tourists, and reports from the news media. On the tour, the bus's window is similar to the television screen, representing a politically formed "black" South Central. The bus's physical movement also promotes the privatized right to traverse space for a very specific elite population (whites), including that population's right to racially categorize themselves and the Other as they

move. The demographically Latino/a South Central community is not immune to this, but rather live within networks that were set up for them by white supremacy and its lust for antiblackness. LA Gang Tours *re-present* South Central within the black/white framework because that is what South Central's history provides for them. In short, the tours market blackness *not* because the Latino/a population is trying to show that black people are most violent, or because black people want to claim ownership of the ghetto. The tours market blackness because of the institutional and individual decisions that first structured the area within a black/white binary to begin with.

I apply theories of identification and blackening with discussions of media representations and media form to show blackness on the gang tour relies on state and individual decisions, practices, and acts. Doing so furthers my claim that mobility structures understandings of race in South Central and the US at large. Indeed, Jackson, Silva, and Hall all provide similar arguments: Jackson situates the white tourist's movement through Harlem, on walking or driving tours, as a practice that furthers blackens the ghetto; Silva speaks of identification in relation to the spatiality of border crossing; and Hall, himself, has a similar anecdote on identification in relation to his immigration (or movement) into the UK. It was through this immigration during the 1960s that he was first referred to as, and referred to himself as, black:

...at the end of the 60s and the early 70s, somebody said to me "These things are going on in the political world—I suppose you're really Black." Well, I'd never thought of myself as Black, either! And I'll tell you something, nobody in Jamaica ever did. Until the 1970s, that entire population experienced themselves as all sorts of other things, but they never called themselves Black. And in that sense, Black has a history as an identity that is partly *politically* formed. It is not the color of your skin. It's not given in nature. (Hall, 1991, p. 15; emphasis in original)

What Hall addresses in this section of the speech is something that I pick up on for the rest of this chapter: the political formation of blackness is not linked to the physical body for Hall, "not the color of your skin," but to the physical traversal of space. Hall notes that the circulation of

literature, music, and activism from around the world to Jamaica begins to make Jamaicans identify as black; he, likewise, travels from Jamaica to London before he considers himself black. Each of these racial identifications is reliant on movement and transportation.

The tour bus, as a form of white mobility in the last chapter, *mediates* the experience of South Central as a black space for white tourists this chapter. This situates blackness not solely in a discussion of identity politics or representation studies, but also in the dynamic controls of mobility and the material production of space. On LA Gang Tours, then, there is less a black identity and more black identifications. Likewise, there are representations of blackness on the gang tour, but they cannot be separated from the material movements of populations that have always constituted racial relations for South Central. This chapter aims to use *and* show the limits of the “screen” view of race in much of critical race studies that often leave analyses of race at a textual level. The focus on mobility provides me with an examination of both representations and the materiality of blackness in Los Angeles.

In Los Angeles, where the city’s white power structure first forcibly moved the black migrant into the space just south of Downtown (referred to as Watts) in the early 20th century, the changing demographics of the area (now a largely Latino/a population) in the late 20th and early 21st centuries do not end the white identifications of the area with blackness. The area’s history of housing and job discrimination against black people, police brutality against black people, and black rage in response to these actions continue to remake the community as black today because of the related political, physical, and metaphorical movements of white people.

Identifying the Gangster

During most of the 20th century, South Central was a space with an overwhelmingly black population, and as recent as two decades ago, it “became a national symbol of rage in a

poor black neighborhood” (Medina, 2012) because of the 1992 LA Riots. The LA Riots, referred to as the “LA Rebellion” in South Los Angeles, have been linked to a similar form of black rage in 1965, the Watts Riots (“Watts Rebellion”). Almost 30 years apart, these two rebellions—both sparked by excessive violence against black Angeleno men—occurred in the same community just a few blocks away from one another. These events continue to play a role in the identification of blackness with/in South Central to this day.

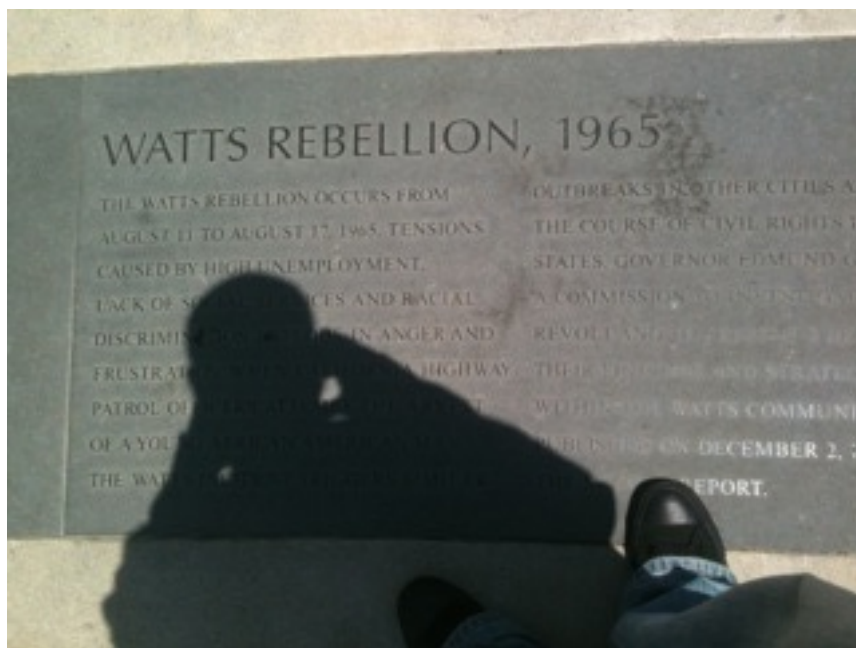


Figure 3.1: This is a photo of a plaque at the Watts Tower Arts Center. It is a commemoration of the Watts Rebellion, referred to as the Watts Riots by the city. Specifically, the plaque details the causes of the Rebellion from the perspective of the residents of the community. Part of that perspective involves the renaming of the event as a “Rebellion” instead of a “Riot.”

Source: Photo courtesy of the author

Still, today South Central is a largely Latino/a space in terms of the demographic who dominantly resides there. The shift from demographically black to brown involves many factors: white flight, Civil Rights gains, the white fear of “riots,” and the exit of the black middle class in the late 20th century are just a few of those factors. As geographer Paul Robinson (2010) notes, the transformation from black to brown space reached its zenith in the early 1990s:

Black out-migration opened the way for Latino in-migration into formerly black-dominated areas in South Los Angeles. Population pressures emanating out of Mexico and Central America led to rapid in-movement of Latinos into the Los Angeles area, with many Latino families choosing to live in areas that were dominated by African Americans. (Robinson, 2010, p. 52)

Similarly, journalist Jennifer Medina (2012) notes that, “In the 1990s, black residents made up roughly half the population in South Central. Today, Latinos account for about two-thirds of the residents.” Residents like Reggie have noted similar demographic shifts. Reggie told me in our interview at his home, “It was crazy,” he said of his youth, pointing west while we were seated on his front porch in Compton, “you had to learn Spanish to walk through the ’hood unharmed.” Knowing just a few Spanish words, according to Reggie, allowed him to walk peacefully by the Latino/a gangs “right down the street” from his house. In spite of the largely Latino/a population, the overwhelming focus of the gang tour is on the black gangs of South Central. In this chapter I pose the question: What accounts for the emphasis on black gangs in a demographically Latino/a space like South Central? Identification, I show, provides the best answer to this question.

On LA Gang Tours, the blackness of South Central is produced through processes of identification in two ways. First, black space is identified on the gang tour with South Central by the performances of the tour guides and the tourists, or, more specifically the conduct of South Central and its tourists. Second, black space is equally identified via the privilege of whites to move through space and their related ability to classify space in the process (sharing much with the previous chapter’s discussion of gentrified mobility). In short, white mobility is a political ontological right, one that is backed by the state, and sets the domains of where, when, why, and how the Other can move—in the process, this white mobility racially classifies that Other.

First, the tour guides engage in political practices that highlight the black gangs of South Central, they engage in Foucauldian “technologies of the self” where they *make* blackness, never

in a pure sense, or one solely of their own making; instead, on the gang tour, this is a blackness constructed through various networks that impacted South Central life well before the gang tour was ever started. On the gang tour, “black space” is created via the white tourist questioning of the tour guides *and* the tour guides’ narratives and performances on tour. And these questions, narratives, and performances disproportionately rely on the histories of the black male gang member, specifically historically black, male dominated gangs like the Bloods and the Crips.

This situates the production of blackness on tour within a similar lens as representation studies, where the conception of blackness is related to the images and narratives of blackness that are circulated on tour. Rather than blackness being an essential element in the community, the “blackness” of South Central is produced *inside* the confines of the tour bus, via the tourists’ questions and the tour guide narratives. The bus is the overwhelming medium through which the mostly white tourists experience the ghetto as black. Thus, the tour bus’s window is similar to a television screen: representations of race are produced on the tour in that tourists see a highly mediated space structured by the narratives of tour guides and specially selected routes. The critical race studies that rely on representations are similar to the tour bus window, where narratives of the tour guides and routes of the gang tours focus (both visually and story wise) on black gangs of South Central. Similarly, Robert Entman and Andrew Rojecki (2001) show that, even though crimes are committed evenly between white and black Chicagoans, television reports of crime in Chicago recreate an image of black criminal versus white victims.

Representations of the criminal in Chicago, then, remain politically black:

Representing Blacks far more often in criminal roles than Whites effectively makes them into symbols of threat. A related signal arises from the portrayal of victims. By a 1.5:1 (241 to 160) ratio, White victims outnumbered Blacks in news reports—even though Blacks in Chicago and most core cities are more likely to be victimized. Another way of comparing news of victimization is length of time devoted to the story: the average story featuring Black victims was 106 seconds long; those featuring White victim, 185 seconds

long. Using total story time as a measure, the ration of time spent on White victims to that on Blacks exceed 3:1. (Entman and Rojecki, 2001, p. 81)

Entman and Rojecki provide an analysis that has similarities to my own, in that the gang tour focuses on black crime and black gangs in a demographically Latino/a space. This, critical race scholars would argue, recreates racialized understandings of gangsterism in South Central that are most compatible with larger white fears of black criminality. The image of the gang member, as Frank Wilderson (2010) argues, is overdertermined by blackness, but a very specific form of blackness. On the gang tour, for example, the blackness of South Central is equally structured by the populations who are disproportionately left out of the tour: women and children of South Central. South Central's blackness is overwhelmingly masculine and adult.

But the analysis of black representations on the tour is possible only if we leave the production of race at a purely textual analysis, as many critical race studies scholars often do. Instead, and second, taking what Sarah Sharma (2008) reveals about taxis as media-technologies provides me with a way to consider the importance of the tour bus to the material production of blackness in South Central. Applying Sharma's (2008) discussion of the taxi, this means the tour bus is a "medium" that speaks beyond representations and the narratives of tour guides or wishes of the tourists. The tour bus's movement is a highly meaningful process that structures the pace and pattern of South Central life, in ways that privilege the mostly white tourists. South Central is identified as a black space by the racial implications of "taming" its residents to allow for the three-hour movement of the white tourist. In this light, representations are secondary to the allotment of physical mobility for white tourists through South Central as a whole.

The representations that focus on blackness on the gang tour combine with the fact that South Central is also a highly controlled, mediated environment on tour. This is why I argue that everyone from tourists and activists I interviewed, to reporters (NBC, 2010) and video bloggers

(Lion420, 2010) seem to think about the gang tour as a documentary, or movie, or even television show through which one gets to experience “real” gangsterism, i.e. blackness. And this blackness is less based on the plot of a television show or a movie and more on the right that tourists have to identify South Central with images of blackness to start with. The discussion of television and mobility, here, draws to mind the work of Raymond Williams (2003) and his concept of “mobile privatization.” For Williams (2003), the form of television, rather than solely content, has a very specific effect: for the viewer, being at “home” is the realm of security, while “mobility” is the imaginary realm that occurs on a metaphorical level through the television screen. This created a mobile privatization, in which the television viewers were in the home, or private, while also far from home, at least imaginatively, or mobile. Home is the realm of security and privacy and the television screen is the realm of imagination and mobility.

Williams’s mobile privatization is flipped on LA Gang Tours: South Central is the *imaginary* for the mostly white tourists while the geographical *movement* of the tour bus through South Central reifies notions of home and security for white tourists. For my discussion, home is the realm of whiteness, it is the safe and secure *right* that the white tourists have to move through the South Central area; that safe, secure movement for the mostly white tourists through South Central furthers the assumption that this is a black space begin with, despite the current dominant demographic of the area. This means that South Central is *made* black not solely by tour guide narratives, but also privileged movements for a very specific population through the area, a movement that equally maintains, protects, and secures the whiteness of that population. This is a movement that did not begin with LA Gang Tours, but certainly continues with it.

I situate race as a highly dynamic, constantly mediated process on LA Gang Tours. At times, Latino tour guides are blackened; and at other times, the black tourist is whitened. All of

this is possible within the confines of the tour bus and within the three-hour tour. Therefore, this chapter deemphasizes the tour guides', tourists', or reporters' intentions or attitudes in order to foreground the demands on subjects (black, white, and brown) to racially constitute their selves within practices of spatiality and mobility.

The Question Concerning Blackness

During my first gang tour, as we drove down Central Avenue, no other tourists thought it was weird, except for me. But it happened. I was asked a question because of my blackness. As we drove down Central Avenue, Alfred noted that we were driving through what used to be the “Black Wall Street” of the West Coast. According to Alfred, Central Avenue was once one of the “coolest places” to be in the 1940s and 1950s on the entire West Coast, as black businesses and music halls lined the street. During the early 20th century, Central Avenue was frequented by white patrons from the West Coast who hoped to experience Jazz music culture, similar to the white patrons of the Cotton Club in Harlem (Robinson, 2010). Today, driving down Central Avenue, there is little evidence of this once bustling Black Wall Street area, as graffiti-tagged buildings and abandoned lots are the most visible characteristics, but “back in the day,” Alfred argues, it was the liveliest section of Los Angeles, for both black and white people.

During this same time period, because of the popularity of black culture, there was an increase in white gangs that harassed black residents and warned whites not to come to South Central. I hastily jotted down Alfred's words, as he detailed the white gangs who used to patrol Central Avenue, like the Spook Hunters, and the black gangs that started to combat the racism from these white gangs like the Slausons and the Businessmen. When he shifted his discussion to the formation of the Bloods and the Crips out of the older black gangs like the Slausons, Alfred turned to me and asked, “Right?” in relation to the fact that the Slausons were a precursor to the

Crips. It felt as if he were seeking confirmation of this knowledge about black South Central life from the one black tourist on the tour. White faces turned to me, awaiting me, the black tourist, to confirm that the knowledge of the founder of the tour, a Latino resident from South Central, was correct. I slowly nodded my head, yes, before Alfred smiled and continued the tour. This example speaks to something that is importantly never blatantly articulated on tour or on the tour's website: most of the narratives during the gang tour focus on the black gangs and black history of South Central. However, they do so in ways that suggest this black history is neutral, or not really about race as much as just "the history" of South Central. Put differently, the tour guides argue that the history of South Central is less about black and white relations and more about the community and the gangs, particularly. In our second interview, for example, when I asked Alfred if he felt that there was a particular racial group highlighted during the gang tours, he stated: "Yeah [the tour] does [highlight a specific group], it highlights the gangs." This was Alfred's way of saying that the gang tours were almost larger than blackness, brownness, or whiteness and more about the problem of gang violence and the history of South Central.

Despite the tour guides claims to not speak about race, however, seeking confirmation about the black gangs from a black tourist suggests blackness is an important component of LA Gang Tours. Although it may at first seem unrelated, there is a discourse that relates to blackness that permeates the discussion of the gang tours: it is a "lack of gang members" to gaze at during the tours. This discourse emerges in the discussions of tourists and reporters, often in terms of one question: "Where are all the gang members?" In one article, journalist Randal Archibold complains that, "The odds of seeing an actual gang member on the street at the appointed hour—Saturday morning—are low, though Mr. Lomas said four or five members will be on the bus to keep watch and offer their stories" (Archibold, 2010b, p. 2). Similarly, one tourist, Carol, notes

during our interview that she is “shocked that LA is the gang capital of the world,” because she “saw no gang members” during the gang tour at all. Carol’s husband, Eric, equally acknowledges that he “needed to see more,” in response to Carol’s discussion of the lack of gang members on the tour. Another tourist, Sam, told me, “I don’t think I saw any gang members off the bus.” The unacknowledged element of Carol’s or Archibold’s or Eric’s or Sam’s comments about where the gang members are, of course, is the assumption that each person already *knows* a gang member when they see one.

There are two assumptions revealed in the lack of gang members’ discourse, which further reproduce South Central as a black space. First, the “gang member,” it is assumed in the lack of gang members’ discourse, equates to a black male body. I make this claim because there are people outside in South Central during the tours, but mostly brown male labors, women, and children of color. And second, the black male gang member should be made available for white tourists, and the fact that the gang member should be available is a testament to their blackness. Thus, the privileged gaze of whiteness assumes black bodies, whether or not these black bodies are physically there to begin with. Just as white patrons of the Cotton Club in the 1920s did not go to Harlem to see Puerto Ricans, the tourists on the gang tour similarly have a blackened image of South Central’s gangsters, and that is what they are paying to see. In associating South Central with black masculinity, the tour works to create the community as a “black space.” Similarly, in her discussion of taxis, Sarah Sharma (2010) argues that Brown Space “is identified and created simultaneously. In the same moment it is elicited, its contents and inhabitants are sorted, ordered, and managed” (p. 189). I apply this to my discussion of “black space” in South Central: on tour, South Central is sorted, ordered, and managed for three hours by the tourists, tour guides, city officials, and media. In the process, the blackness of the community encompasses the Latino/a

population for three hours in ways that maintain the antiblack relations that structured South Central since the early 20th century.

First, the questioning of where the gang members are during and after the gang tour assumes the blackness of the gang members. This seems to be implied in the tourist inability to see the racial demographics that are outside during the gang tour as gang members: brown male laborers, women of color, and children of color. Even though photos are currently not allowed from the tour bus, on one of the early tours, a videographer was allowed to record his gang tour experience, which often included video footage from the tour bus as it drove throughout South Central. Richard Schroeder's (2010) video captures a population I noticed outside during my two tour experiences: an overwhelming brown male population walks the streets of South Central during the tour. Many of the brown males are laborers working for the city. But others, according to Alfred, are "undocumented laborers," waiting to be picked up to do "illegal" work just outside the city. Still, these brown men are assumed to *not* be gang members, for Archibold (2010b), Carol, Eric, and Sam, or at least they are not the population expected by these tourists and reporters when they say they see no gang members.

The question of where the gang members are assumes the tourists and reporters already know what the gang member looks like. Had these been black men outside during the gang tours, I imagine the question would be different. This is because the race of the missing gang member is one produced as black on and off the gang tour. This should not be surprising as, according to Wilderson (2010), the term "gang member" connotes blackness in the US and Los Angeles, in particular. For example, in his discussion of the 1988 California gang law, Street Terrorism Enforcement and Prevention Act (STEP), Wilderson argues STEP is an extension of mass incarceration that maintains black objecthood, or a "carceral continuum," in South Central:

...an anti-Black tautology is already at work in such terminology as “gang member” or “gang-related” offense, because the “need” for the legislation cannot be disaggregated from prior “knowledge” of the depravity of Black urban spaces or from a private and quotidian construction and interpretation of images of young Black men. A “zeal to obliterate” is elaborated out of these knowledge and image formations. The fact that the textual heat of the legislation, as it is written, seems to register not this zeal to obliterate, but a wish to protect, should not fool the reader. For if gangness was not overdetermined by Blackness, a long-standing definitional hole in the terms “gang member” and “gang-related offenses” would have been filled in an effort to have the terms pass muster with respect to due process and at levels acceptable to the legislators and their kin. (Wilderson, 2010, pp. 106-107)

The “blackness” of the gang member is an assumed racial characteristic in contemporary South Central, one that necessarily *blackens* the brown gang members during the three-hour-long gang tour as well. To be a brown gang member—which many of the residents walking the streets of South Central during my first and second tours and Schroeder’s (2010) tour may have been—almost takes a back seat on a gang tour of South Central, because this is considered a space of black poverty, rage, and history. The brown residents are identified with blackness for three hours, their history is reduced to representations of black poverty and disenfranchisement.

Second, and relatedly, the questioning of where the gang members are equally assumes that a specific gang member *should* be waiting there for white tourists to see. Of course, there is nothing on the gang tour’s website or in the narratives of tour guides that suggests black gang members will line up outside to be seen by the tour bus as it drives through South Central. But this appears to be an assumption held by some tourists. The gang tour’s movement speaks to an interrelated history of white surveillance and the “white gaze” on and in South Central. This is a gaze that makes South Central into a threatening space to be feared, a gaze that imagines South Central as a space for white people to “fear,” and that fear is most materialized, and tamed, in the presence of the visible black male body. Sara Ahmed (2004) analyzes a similar relation in her discussion of Frantz Fanon’s fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, where she situates the

“white gaze” of the small boy who Fanon encounters on the train as affectively fragmenting, destructive, and explosive for Fanon’s body, but also re-productive of Fanon’s blackness as dangerous, animalistic, and cannibalistic for whiteness. During this interaction, Fanon argues that he has little choice but to “give” himself up as “an object for whiteness.” The gaze transforms him *for* whiteness via the created threat of his antagonistic blackness:

My body was returned to me spread-eagled, disjointed, redone, draped in mourning on this white winter’s day. The Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is wicked, the Negro is ugly; look, a Negro; the Negro is trembling, the Negro is trembling because he’s cold, the small boy is trembling because he’s afraid of the Negro, the Negro is trembling with cold, the cold that chills the bones, the lovely little boys is trembling because he thinks the Negro is trembling with rage, the little white boy runs to his mother’s arms: “*Maman*, the Negro’s going to eat me.” (Fanon, 2008, p. 93)

The small boy’s fear is constructed by a whiteness that remakes Fanon as the absolute object. This is a fear that is never too far from fascination, a threat tied to exoticization. The terror that inspires the small white child on the train and the fascination with touring the “gang capital of the world” are part of the same association of seeing *and* creating a threatening blackness which is to be feared. In other words, South Central does not necessarily need physical black bodies on the street during the gang tour to become a black space, only white mobility, gazes, and imaginations. Whiteness, as Martinot (2010) argues, always assumes blackness.

On LA Gang Tours, the white gaze creates blackness, even when there are no physical black bodies to be seen outside the tour bus. In a physical space where black people were once the dominant population, they are re-made as that dominant population for three hours to fulfill the needs of white tourists. Thus, the blackness *not* outside the tour bus is made available *on* the bus, through an overwhelming emphasis on the historically black gangs of South Central. This production of blackness is multifaceted, occurring in the questions of the tourists, narratives of the tour guides, and the media selected for the gang tour. For example, the documentary shown

on the tour, *Bloods and Crips: Made in America*, is a 93-minute-long film that *only* highlights the black gangs of South Central, the Bloods and the Crips, and many of the older black gangs that predated Bloods and Crips, like the Slausons and the Businessmen. Although too long to show in its entirety on the tour, from what is shown, the film articulates something repeated in the narratives of the tour guides: systematic racism creates the black gangs of South Central, particularly the FBI's COINTELPRO program, which dismantled the Black Panther Party for Self Defense's influence in South Central. For example, the Crips idolized the Black Panther Party and were founded to be a younger version of them less than a year after the F.B.I. dismantled the Black Panther Party.

Relatedly, on the tours, Watts resident Raymond Washington is acknowledged as the founder of the Crips, and being "too young to participate in the Black Power movement during the 1960s," he instead "absorbed much of the rhetoric of community control of neighborhoods" (Alonso, 2010, p. 150) for his new organization, the Crips. The name, the "Crips," has disputed origins and meanings (Alonso, 2010), but it has often been considered, and repeated to me by friends who are Crips, to stand for "*Community Revolution In Progress*," a sign of Raymond Washington's original intent of mimicking the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. But "as the group grew, the revolutionary ideology and spirit of organizing for change that were present in the group's formative years were quickly replaced by more destructive activities" (Alonso, 2010, p. 151). Interestingly, a similar level of attention to the foundation of Alfred's gang, Florencia 13, is not provided on the tour, although Florencia 13 is a Mexican-American super gang also started in South Central and it is the gang of the founder and other tour guides.

The creation of the black gang member happens in the narratives of the tour guides and tourists, as well as in media depictions of the gang tour on television. For example, out of the 17

videos I analyzed, four tour guides are interviewed. Alfred Lomas is the tour guide interviewed the most, which makes sense because he is the founder of the tour. But, interestingly, the other three tour guides who are interviewed are *all* black men: Jimmy (NBC, 2010), Clarence Stewart (MidNightRider2001, 2010), and Melvin Johnson (NBC, 2010). This is striking, because, as one tourist, Sam, notes of his tour in 2011, “almost all the tour guides are brown.” I noticed a similar occurrence during my tour experiences. Still, from each of the videos that I watched about the tour, there are *no* Latino tour guides interviewed aside from Alfred. This suggests that media depictions are crafting a very specific image of the tour guide and gang member for LA Gang Tours, one that continues to identify blackness with South Central.

The focus on black gangs is not limited to DVDs or television news. The questioning of the tour guides about South Central by tourists as the bus moves through LA also produces the community as “black.” On my first tour, for example, which was a private tour with only Alfred and two other tourists, all questions from the other two tourists I experienced the gang tour with focused on the black gangs of South Central. This was interesting being that Alfred is not black, and the only black gang member on the tour (me) was not a tour guide. More specifically, the questions from Eric and Carol were: “Where were the Bloods and Crips started?” “Why are the Bloods so violent?” “Can there really be a truce between Bloods and Crips?” These were just a few questions that Carol and Eric asked of Alfred, who is a member of neither the Bloods nor the Crips. This overemphasis on the black gangs is also implied by Carol who states that Alfred did not really mention the gang he belonged to during our tour. She states

I kind of expected a personal bit, but I don’t know if that was intentional or not. Like maybe [Alfred] didn’t want the focus to be on him or whatever he did wrong, that he wanted to be on change and moving forward, not like telling tourists I guess about the exotic, like for us the life he had. That’s the only part I really missed I guess.

But to be fair Carol and Eric also *did not ask* Alfred about his gang at all. My knowledge about the ghetto during the gang tour even led Carol to ask if I was from South Central. And, relatedly, during my interview with Carol and Eric, Eric asked if I was a Blood or a Crip because he still had “so many unanswered questions” about “how bad is it [in South Central] really?” Although Eric had asked Alfred this question during the gang tour, and Alfred answered, “It’s never as bad as the media portrays it,” Eric shifting the question to me implies that this is a question that I, as a black former gang member, can answer better than Alfred, a current South Central resident and the tour’s founder.

During my second tour experience, similar questions were asked about black gangs like the Bloods and Crips, such as the locations of where they were started and the reasons for their formation. These questions equally brush over the violence that existed, and continues to exist, between Alfred’s gang, Florencia 13, and the East Coast Crips, which Alfred does admittedly mention during the public tours (Schroeder, 2010). Still, as someone who has taken the public and private tours, there appears a largely black focus during both gang tours, no matter the racial population of the tour guides who are on the tour. Even one tourist I interviewed, Sam, who took a public tour a year before me, states:

I think they [the tour guides] highlighted a lot of South Los Angeles gangs and a lot of traditional African American gangs. I personally, as I remember, I didn’t really, even though most of the people on the tour giving the tour they were mainly Latino and maybe a couple African Americans joined in, but I didn’t really feel a sense of like the huge Latino gangs like 18th Street and MS [13] and stuff. I got the sense that more...like they possibly joined up with the traditional South Los Angeles gangs which have been traditionally African American. So it was interesting to me because I thought I would have felt a more Latino presence. But I didn’t personally feel that as much with the gangs they highlighted...It was interesting.

Sam’s example points to the fact that the mostly white tourists are not the only one’s producing black space via the discussions on the tour bus. The black and brown tour guide narratives, the

pictures they paint for the tourists equally *make* blackness for South Central. Thus, blackness is produced from multiple angles on the tour bus for three hours. The tour guide stories, the media depictions and videos provided on tour, and tourist questions come together to make “blackness” on the tour bus, a blackness largely missing, according to the tourists, outside the bus.

The assumption of no gang members outside further creates South Central as a very black, masculine, dangerous world during the gang tour, which may not match the other 21 hours that are not seen by the tour. This equally suggests that the neutrality of South Central history, implied by Alfred, is more an imagination than a reality. The tour narratives, routes, and histories are political decisions that do political work. For three hours, this is a black space that is largely created on the tour bus via the questions of the tourists, the narratives of the tour guides, and the exclusivity assumed in these narratives. The question of where are the gang members reveals the privilege assumed in the gang tour itself. It is implied that “they” should be available for the tourists, and if they are not, then the gang tour must create “them”—to the exclusion of brown men, women of color, or children of color—for three hours. This is not solely the fault of the tour guides, but a collective reproduction of blackness on the bus, a blackness that is less a racial identity and more identified from multiple perspectives.

“Gangster Is...Gangster Ain’t”

It was a warm day. The sun in Echo Park flashed a sharp glare off the Dream Center, where people were standing outside preparing to begin volunteer work. A woman volunteering at the Dream Center joined Alfred and me as we stood on the corner waiting for others to arrive for the gang tour. This woman, a volunteer in town from Arizona, is why Alfred reminds me that he loves the Dream Center. It attracts people from all over the country who come into Los Angeles to serve impoverished Los Angeles communities like South Central. This volunteer had recently

met Alfred and first learned of the gang tour through him, so she asked more questions about the tour and the gangs than I did.

One of her questions was interestingly not based around the tours, per se, but based around the “authenticity” of the movie *American Me*. *American Me* is loosely based around the foundation of La Eme, or the Mexican Mafia, which means the movie has close ties to Alfred’s gang, Florencia 13. Florencia shows its allegiance to La Eme through the addition of the number 13 to their name—the letter M (for Mafia) being the 13th letter in the alphabet. La Eme is a prison gang, meaning that gang members who may fight outside of prison become allies in prison based on their alliances with La Eme. Therefore, well-known gangs in different parts of the city, like Florencia 13 and MS-13, can unite in prison based on their alliance with La Eme and their race. In a similar manner, the large presence of Latino gangs in California prisons makes black rival gangs like the Bloods and Crips form temporary alliances in prison for protective measures.

“I loved *most* of *American Me*,” Alfred notes. The movie, directed by and starring Edward James Olmos, is one of the few to document the rise of La Eme through Olmos’s actual research with the gang. But, as Alfred notes, Olmos did the one thing that La Eme asked him not to do in the movie: he depicted a rape scene. Olmos wanted a scene where members of La Eme raped an enemy in prison, and the gang did not want this scene. And despite Olmos’s assurance that the scene would not make it into the movie, this scene did in fact make the final cut. According to Alfred, the inclusion of the rape into *American Me* led to the murder of consultants for the film, creating a fear in Hollywood with making gangster movies in the future. La Eme even reportedly marked Olmos, as a target, but “In exchange for his life and protection for his family, lawyers say Olmos might have paid off the gang” (Errico, 1996). There are many reasons that La Eme

did not want this scene in the movie. The first being that this gang, in particular, has written out rules that do *not* allow prison rape. In fact, not only rape but homosexual acts and femininity as a whole are forbidden in La Eme. For Alfred, this is one of the central reasons he wanted to start the gang tours: the sensationalism of Hollywood overpowered the gang's rules, established well before *American Me* was ever a consideration. LA Gang Tours is one method for gang members to tell their own stories, rather than have the film industry tell their stories for them. In addition, Alfred suggests of homosexual rape, "*that's not what gangster is.*" He tells the volunteer from Arizona and me, "I'm not homophobic, but that's not how we [La Eme and Florencia 13] get down." In his comment, Alfred polices the boundaries of gangsterism in LA.

In addition to the emphasis on blackness of the previous section, South Central equally becomes a non-homosexual, non-female, and non-juvenile space on LA Gang Tours. In particular, in the question of where the gang members are in the previous section, it is also implied that gang members *are not* certain residents, many of whom are visibly present during the tour. In his book *Appropriating Blackness*, E. Patrick Johnson (2003) details a somewhat similar policing of blackness in his discussion of Marlon Riggs' classic documentary, *Black Is...Black Ain't*. In this movie, Riggs challenges associations of authentic blackness, particularly those that assume masculinity and heterosexuality and exclude women and homosexuals, calling for us to "move beyond these categories and hierarchies that define and confine" (Johnson, 2003, p. 40). Riggs, then, challenges the narrative of someone like George Jackson, who considered black feminists and black homosexuals as "infected" by whiteness, and, thus, threats to black authenticity. In particular, Jackson suggests that black women need to be in "the home" for the sake of the black family, during a time when black women were gaining rights and were active figures in national social movements like Jackson's own Black Panther Party for Self Defense.

Riggs's documentary examines Angela Davis as one example of someone who addressed white supremacy and misogynistic black male leadership in ways that continue to challenge constructs of "authentic" blackness. In the process, Riggs opens up a conversation of not exclusionary practices, but black potentiality.

LA Gang Tours plays a similar game to that critiqued by Riggs, constantly redrawing lines of what *gangsterism is* and *ain't*. Women and children of South Central are a largely absent presence on LA Gang Tours. They are the two most visible populations during the tours, but also the two populations who do not have much involvement in the gang tour, proper. For example, while there are women who are involved with the gang tour, such as the women who work at the Watts Arts Center and at the Graff Lab—and these women play centrally important roles in the maintenance and function of LA Gang Tours—there are no female tour guides. When I asked Alfred about the potential for female tour guides during our first interview, he notes he would "welcome the idea," but there are "not a lot of female gang members" to hire. Ana Parra, of Homeboy Industries, would probably beg to differ. In one television interview, Parra argues the tour is "a bunch of BS" because it makes the ghetto, and gang members like her, into "animals," like visiting a "zoo" for the white tourists (NBC, 2010). Parra suggests that she is a part of the community of gang members who are "exploited" by LA Gang Tours. This is because Parra is one of the 14 percent of female gang members in Los Angeles (Arbai, 1999). This is a large, historically ignored population by both male gang members and law enforcement:

In Los Angeles, known as the gang capital, law enforcement agencies have identified nearly 1,200 gangs within the four thousand square miles that make up Los Angeles. In addition, of the 100,000 members found among police files, roughly 7,000 are females. If these figures are correct, how is it that other law enforcement agencies do not find it necessary to have female gang members as part of their ever-increasing number of gang members? One can speculate that females are simply not seen as gang members because according to society's definitions, it is difficult for society to view females as "violent criminals". This possible answer for why statistics of female in gangs simply do not exist

may be true in theory, but not in practice as statistics from Los Angeles clearly illustrate. (Arbai, 1999)

This is equally an ignored population on the gang tour in the questioning of where the gang members are and the narratives of the tour guides. For Carol, Eric, Sam, and Archibold, the women outside during the tour are not gang members because they are not men.

Other ways women are absent presences on LA Gang Tours include some women who I got to meet during my first tour who were walking around in the Pueblo del Rio housing projects with their children. One black woman on my first tour in Pueblo del Rio told Carol, Eric, and me how excited she was about LA Gang Tours, because it allowed her son to play outside in a park typically occupied by gang members. Because of Safe Passage, this woman and her son were free to go outside to the park in ways they are not typically allotted in their community. Our SUV was parked to the right of the park her son was playing in.



Figure 3.2: Photo of park in the Pueblo del Rio housing projects from LA Gang Tour's website. Source: LA Gang Tours, 2014: <http://lagangtours.com>

As we started to drive away from the Pueblo, I could tell Eric and Carol were confused. Appearing somewhat disappointed at the sight of women and children in a park that Alfred stated was typically occupied by gang members, Eric asked Alfred where was “everyone,” by which he meant where were all the (black male) gang members. Alfred answered that many, though not

all, of the gang members “do not want to feel exploited” so they remain inside during the gang tours. Implied in both the question of Eric and the response of Alfred is that these women are *not* gang members. South Central, then, is a largely masculine space, which is not to say that women are not there or are not gang members, but that on LA Gang Tours women are allotted a secondary position at best.

The gangster is further distanced from women by examining those whose conduct is welcomed by the tour guides and tourists versus those whose conduct is presented as abnormal. In the media, the few women who are emphasized are viewed as either privileged, based on the actions of the male tour guides (such as the woman in the Pueblo del Rio projects who told us how “thankful” she was for the tour), or as out of place, abnormal, crazy, and thus capable of being dismissed as anomalies. For example, journalist Randal Archibold notes:

Mr. Lomas said that he had taken pains to be sensitive and that although he had considered driving through two housing projects considered home to large gangs, he had changed plans and now only included a “snippet” of one. The few people who were outside that project when the bus passed paid it no mind, *except for one woman who stared, agape*. (Archibold, 2010a, p. 1; emphasis added)

Archibold sets up the staring woman with little context to the similar agape stares of the mostly white tourists he rides through South Central with. Instead, the woman’s stares are what make the tourists “uncomfortable,” while the level of comfort for women of color who are a large majority of the population outside during the tour is ignorable for him.

In addition to women, there is the equal dismissal of children of color on tour. This is another group that is highly visible outside during the tours. In the assumption that there are no gang members outside, the children of South Central are also deemed as “not gang members.” This, again, is a mistake. Gang historian Alex Alonso (2010) notes that it is not uncommon for gang members of South Central to join as preteenagers, some younger than 10. Alfred, himself,

got “his start in gang life early, crewing up as a 12-year-old drug addict with the city’s largest Latino gang in 1976 [Flores 13], a process that involved him being beaten by the other members of his new fraternity for 13 seconds” (DeLuca, 2012), this short-timed beating being another nod to La Eme and the number 13. I, likewise, joined the Bloods at 13. Thus, it is probable that some children outside during the gang tour have affiliation.

On my first tour, one of the few people Carol remembered seeing was a young black child who was a resident of the Pueblo del Rio housing projects, a residency known for Blood gang activity. When our SUV drove through Pueblo del Rio, this child was just “chilling” in the neighborhood going for a walk, as he told us. Eric, Carol, and I briefly met him, as he timidly walked over to our vehicle and said hello after being hailed a few times by Alfred. During my interview with Carol and Eric in Malibu a few days after the tour, Carol noted:

I was kind of heart broken, I don’t know, the little kid on the scooter. I don’t know, I felt kinda bad for him, his clothes like all scruffy, and his mom was sitting in the house. I don’t know, but probably because I have a son I get emotional about little boys in particular. I don’t know, that was kind of hard for me to see, I don’t know, because he was like putting on a face, like a *tough face* and, I don’t know, like he might have been happy but he just didn’t seem like it. And he was so small, like eight or nine, and like putting up a front.

As a former Blood gang member, I can say there were gang members outside during our tour: this eight- or nine-year-old boy was one of them. Implied in her question to Alfred and me of where the gang members are, what Carol did not seem to notice were the red pants this young child wore, his R.I.P. T-shirt of a dead friend, not much older than him, and the fact that Alfred called him his “little homie” in one of the highest gang activity areas we pass during the gang tour. These were not coincidences, but confirmations of this child’s affiliation.

In this moment of meeting a young child, the claim that there are no gang members outside during the tour speaks to the white tourists’ capability to classify who and what is a gang

member. On tour, the creation of the gang member happens in the narratives of the tour guides and the tourists' imaginations. The combination of both recastes South Central's population in ways that highlight the activities and lives of black men.

On the gang tour, South Central is not solely painted as black space, but also as masculine and adult. Therefore, on the tour bus, as it moves through the city, the things unsaid are equally revealing as those that are said. The tour provides a representation of South Central that is purposefully exclusive, redrawing the boundaries of who and what South Central is allowed to be. In this light, the tours are similar to the movie *American Me*. They provide a particular narrative of South Los Angeles, one structured less by the intentions of "authentic" speakers and/or spaces, and more by the historical of categorization of South Central. I posit the particular discussions, or lack thereof, around women and children as not gang members may, again, connect to white desires on the tour. It is easier for the white tourists to imagine violence happening to black men, rather than to women and children, because this group is positioned as the absolute antagonism for whiteness (again Carol notes she is happy children are not hurt). The systematic murder, incarceration, and abuse of black men in the US is welcomed in society, or more accurately, it is a characteristic of civil society (Wilderson, 2003). And this same violence, which equally effects the lives of South Central's women and children on a daily basis, is easier to accept if it is *only* identified with black men. Thus, for white tourists if women and children are not gang members, or rather not *represented* as gang members on tour, they do not suffer antiblack violence. This is, again, a central component of white creations of blackness.

The Mobile Television Screen

One of the repeated conversations I have with people every time I am in Los Angeles involves me trying to explain to them what LA Gang Tours is. Interestingly, many people who

live in the city and visit the city have never heard of LA Gang Tours, even though it is one of the more popular tours of the city. This could be due to the lack of promotion the city gives the tour. For example, influential people like the former deputy of gang reduction, Nathan, tell me that LA Gang Tours will “never receive the backing of the city” because it is too “exploitative” of a tour for the city to ever promote. Like many city officials and community activists, Nathan notes the tour is exploitative, admittedly, without taking it. It is this negative press and/or lack of press that may contribute to me repeatedly describing what LA Gang Tours is to people when I am in Los Angeles. During one conversation at a Hollywood bar, for example, a woman who struck up a conversation with me asked, “Uh, so whaddya mean, LA Gang Tour?” It is a question that I have grown really used to answering. “So it’s this gang tour where black and brown gangsters drive a busload of white people through the ’hood, giving them a history of the gangs in the area,” I said in my fairly nonchalant manner. She smiled that awkward half-smile I am pretty used to when people do not know what to say about the tour.

“Sounds like some movie shit,” she responded. I did not know it at the time, but the articulation of the gang tours to movies is a fairly consistent discourse of the tour. The tourists, travelling from as far away as Norway and Australia, experience South Central through a glass window. Although there are 12 scheduled stops for the tourists to see on the gang tours (*7 Days*, 2010), they are only allowed off the bus at three or four of them, such as the Watts Arts Center, or Downtown, or the “Welcome to Compton” sign, or the Pico Union Graff Lab. The rest of the time is spent moving on the tour bus; South Central is mediated for tourists by bus movement.

The comparison of the South Central community to a movie is really about the privileged right of tourists, or rather tourism culture as a whole, to remake spaces as they see fit. Assumed in LA Gang Tours is a privileged capacity to alter the pace and scale of South Central. In South

Central, the tourist movement confirms white control of mobility and transportation, because it reduces the community to a televised, representation, on the one hand. But, on the other hand, the impact of the tour bus as a mobile technology on the community is equally important. On tour, the mostly white tourists find security in their movement through an imaginary “black space” via the tour bus. South Los Angeles is produced as black through the assumed universality of white control of geographic transportation and mobility.



Figure 3.3: This is the advertisement for the tour bus on the LA Gang Tours website. It is also representative of the type of tour bus used during the tours. The tour buses are rented from American Transportation Systems. This company also similarly rents their buses to the LA Sparks WBNA team. Source: LA Gang Tours, 2014<http://lagangtours.com/contact-us/>

The tour guide narratives and tourist questions in the last sections combine with the movement of the tour bus to further black imaginaries of South Central. This occurs through a discourse that situates the gang tours as similar to a televised event, making references to reality TV, documentaries, movies, and music. According to the descriptions of the tourists, tour guides, activists, politicians, and reporters, taking the gang tour is just like “watching television”; the tour bus, as it moves through the ghetto, provides tourists with a televised image. According to the newspaper *7 Days* (2010), for example, LA Gang Tours is “billed as The Ultimate Urban Experience,” and it “offers an insight into a world that is mythologised by the movies,” “rarely seen by the millions of tourists who flock [to LA] every year.” Relatedly, tourists are inspired to take the tour by TV and movies. Nicholas Bello, a tourist from Toronto, says he found the tour through the Internet, and wanted to see what it was “really” like, being that the majority of “his

knowledge of Los Angeles' neighborhoods came from TV and movies" (*7 Days*, 2010). Eric similarly connects his interests in the gang tour to rap music, since the commercialization of gangsta rap and its reach to Norway is how he first heard of South Central. Also in an opinion piece, Dan Thomasson makes a different media reference:

Americans are always fascinated by organized crime, and the gangs of L.A. clearly fit that description, whether it is the Mafia, Italian or Russian or Asian. The popularity of "The Godfather" trilogy and the unbridled enthusiasm for Tony Soprano and his supporting cast of violent thugs are cases in point. But they are fictitious portrayals of a society that in some part at least no longer exists, having been brought to its knees by diligent law enforcement. (Thomasson, 2010)

Thomasson's analysis implies the gang tour is a discussion of "reality" that exceeds what can be found on television or in the movies. The rawness of *The Godfather* or *The Sopranos* only takes the viewer so far, but LA Gang Tours takes the "viewer" to the next level, it takes them *through* the screen and into a "new reality." Similarly, in very much a ramble that both champions and critiques LA Gang Tours, one YouTube video blog from a self-proclaimed "stoner" states:

Yeah, why not just open up an active prison, and let people tour and gawk at the prisoners? You know, we've already got MSNBC's fucking *Lock Up*. We've got National Geographic's, uh, whatever they fuck they do. Um, I mean we can already sit and home in the pleasure of our own seats and gawk at people in prison on TV, you know, it's [the tour] the next step. (lionn420, 2009)

For this video blogger, the tour extends the television screen to the physical geography of South Central. It is, thus, the "next step," one move beyond television.

Interestingly, community activists who despise the gang tour equally refer to it in relations to television, film, and movies. For example, one community activist I interviewed, Nathan, states that he is against the tours because it sounded like they were "going to be this approach of more of the sensationalism, you know, we have like warring parties here, just more of the sort of *Gangland* on *National Geographic* or whatever that channel is." Later on during

our interview, Nathan attempted to channel Alfred's voice in his suggestion of why LA Gang Tours were started in the first place:

“They’re doing *Gangland* sessions for television, people are making money on that stuff. There’s lots of ways people are commercializing, rappers, why shouldn’t some of us, who are actually guys in the neighborhood, why shouldn’t we get a cut of that?” And so I think that initially my sense was [the gang tour] was partly to say, “hey, other people are commercializing it, why shouldn’t we at the grassroots make some money of it?”

Thus, LA Gang Tours are similar to an episode of *Gangland*, watched from the bus, rather than from the television in the comfort of one’s own home. But maybe the most consistent reference to television, music, and movies comes for Carol, who states it was “nice to see all the areas we heard about through movies and you know like the rappers.” Carol makes another reference to TV when I asked her if anything contradicted what she thought she might find on the tour. Carol paused for a bit, staring up at the ceiling, before stating “well, nothing is as bad as it seems.” Specifically, she states the “conditions don’t look *that* bad from the outside. I don’t know what it looks like on the inside, but you see all this dramatic, like *The Wire*, like all five seasons. Like, I don’t know, more like old beaten up couches sitting on the side walk, you know, things like that.” This comment is interesting for multiple reasons: first, Carol connects South Central to a fictional TV show that takes place in Baltimore, a city with a very different history and culture than South Central. Second, *The Wire* is a show that focuses on black gangs and drug dealers, which does not fit the racial makeup of South Central, a largely Latino/a neighborhood that continually becomes black in the white tourists’ imaginations. Third, this comment has personal implications for me, because as a former gang member and drug dealer, I have been asked more times than I can remember, “So, how *real* is *The Wire*?” This is an interesting question in that it assumes that *all* ghettos are reducible to a fictional, televised narrative. In addition, it assumes *The Wire* is the measuring rod of all ghetto experience.

The important characteristic about the above comments is *not* the plot of *The Wire*, *The Godfather*, *The Sopranos*, or *Gangland*. Instead, through these comments, LA Gang Tours is distanced (televised) from the daily experiences of the average tourist. Contrary to Thomasson's (2010) assessment that the gang tours bring people closer to the ghetto, the tour allows tourists to move through a space that is far outside of what they consider "home," or their reality. In fact, the only thing they are sure about is their right to move through this space as promised by LA Gang Tours and Safe Passage, and as they have paid for.

Raymond Williams's (2003) conception of mobile privatization in relation to the television may be of use here. Williams was less concerned with the content of television and more interested in the way in which the form of television transformed conceptions of home. For Williams (2003), the television essentially transported its viewers into new environments while in the home. Williams also extends his mobile privatization from television to mobile devices as a whole, like cars. Thus, he states:

Looked at from right outside, the traffic flows and their regulation are clearly a social order of a determined kind, yet what is experienced inside them—in the conditioned atmosphere and internal music of this windowed shell—is movement, choice of direction, the pursuit of self-determined private purposes. All the other shells are moving, in comparable ways but for their own different private ends. They are not so much other people, in any full sense, but other units that signal and are signaled to, so that private mobilities can proceed safely and relatively unhindered. And if all this is seen from the outside as in deep ways determined, or in some sweeping glance as dehumanised, that is not at all how it feels inside the shell, with people you want to be with, going where you want to go. (Williams, 1983, pp. 188-189)

Cars, for Williams, provide the space in which to go outside, but remain private, to remain inside. The private relations of the home follow the drivers and passengers, despite the mobile shell's existence in a public realm. David Morley (2003), speaking more to television, argues that Williams's mobile privatization seems to offer "the dual satisfactions of allowing people to simultaneously 'stay home'—safe within the realm of their *familiar ontological security*—and to

travel (*imaginatively* or ‘virtually’) to ‘places that previous generations could never imagine visiting’” (Morley, 2003, p. 438). Thus, both Williams and Morley may argue that mobile privatization involves “staying home” (secure) while “going out” (imaginary).

While for Williams mobile privatization is a process, which imaginatively moves a population of people while in the security of the home, for Carol, her safe, secure mobility produces an imaginary community, a black space, created for three hours on the bus. Noel Salazar (2010) refers to this as the tourist imaginary, where the space toured is created in the mind of the tourist and in the actions of the tour guides who cater to the wishes of those tourists. South Central *should* be like *The Wire*, not because South Central is Baltimore or the show is an authentic depiction of life in the ghetto, but because this is what Carol, as a mobile subject who can classify things, imagines black space to be like as she moves through it, this is the privilege she is allotted as a tourists who is controlling the pace and scale of South Central life for three hours. This has less to do with the geography of South Central or the dominant demographic of the area today, and more to do with what Carol assumes a ghetto in the United States will look like as she rides through it: “run down” and full of black people. As our SUV, or tour bus, drives through South Central—a movement equally moving the residents to accommodate our tourist mobility—the space is remade for three hours. Carol’s movement, and my own, “chops up” South Central in ways that highlight a very specific depiction of the community, while also continuing the assumption that white movement through the area is not an anomaly, but important to the blackness identified with South Central.

The physical allotment of white people through black space is not new, but part of a historical privilege of whiteness that creates meanings for spaces. This is a central tenant of Euan Hague’s argument when he states “whites were allowed to pass in and out of African American

spaces; the experiences of white Americans enjoying the nightlife in Harlem, or Kerouac's Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty visiting jazz clubs *On The Road*, contrasted sharply with those of African Americans threatened with violence for their mere presence in 'sundown towns'" (2010, p. 341). In Harlem and its white's only Cotton Club, for example, white patrons moved through the community to see a specific image of blackness; as a byproduct of their movement, they also played a central role in *producing* that blackness. In other words, that blackness is not essential to Harlem (or to South Central for this project), but made with the in-movement of white patrons, tourists, and capital. Despite the perceived controversy of the gang tour, it continues to function on such a popular level because it is an extension of a structural element of LA since the 1850 annexation of California: the articulation of white mobility and classificatory power. Through tourists' movement on LA Gang Tours—rather than solely the narratives of the tour guides, or questions of the tourists—South Central is remade as a black space.

The tour bus flips Williams's conception that the television watcher is secure in the home, while mobility is the imaginary realm. Instead, tourists like Carol are secure in their mobility, while South Central becomes a black space, a tourist imaginary that feeds Western understandings of what the ghetto is supposed to look like in the US. The three-hour movement through black space, which South Central becomes, fixes Carol's white right to move through that space and move the bodies of those in the way. This is less Williams's mobile privatization, and more similar to Lynn Spigel's "privatized mobility." For Spigel, "rather than experiencing the domicile as a window on the world that brought public life indoors, the resident experienced the home as a vehicular form, a mode of transport in and of itself that allowed people to take private life outdoors" (Spigel, 2001, p. 72). In repositioning Spigel's vehicularized home and Williams's mobile privatization within a discussion of blackness, the white mobile tourists can

be seen as secure based on their movements. Carol's mobility, as "ontologically secure," on the tour bus positions her as both judge and jury of what constitutes South Central. Therefore, *The Wire* as her measuring rod says less about the television show's depiction of blackness and more about the taken-for-granted right that Carol has to move through spaces that she can imaginatively classify as similar to *The Wire*.

On the tour bus, a black home is produced out of the white political control of transportation. The gang tour bus provides private, safe, "ontologically secure" tourist mobility (mostly white patrons in cushy seats, behind tinted windows, air conditioning, with "colored" help, and South Central's approval and regulation of itself), while also physically traversing the circulateable, unsafe, made-up "black space" (though not made up from thin air). This space is imagined as black via the bus's movement and tourist's classificatory rights. The tour bus puts Williams in conversation with Spigel: it physically moves white people safely through a fantasy, taboo, space that is produced as black. The tour's movement creates the blackness and black space it is circulating. On tour, black space is materialized through white mobility.

Brown Space/Black Place

The production of South Central as "black" in 2014 takes much effort, just like it did in 1944. It is not a universally given blackness, but one that has a history of trajectories that move through it to recreate a blackness that may not fully represent the entire population and is not intended to. On LA Gang Tours, the emphasis on black gangs is neither a black oppression of Latino/a South Central residents, nor is it a brown attempt to portray black people as the "real" enactors of South Central's gang violence. Instead, the focus on black gangs during LA Gang Tours is central to the white political control of transportation and mobility that has structured

race relations in the US from the start. As argued throughout this chapter, this white political control blackens bodies and spaces or identifies South Central with blackness.

Despite a white control over mobility, the processes of racialization through mobility occur on multiple levels, never from a top-down perspective. Thus, the policing of blackness—including the decisions to portray South Central as black and the classificatory capacity assumed in white mobility—occurs from tour guides, South Central residents, the city, tourists, and reporters. The gang tours reveal the processes whereby representation and form continue to reproduce blackness, including its meanings, images, and imaginations.

On LA Gang Tours, the tour bus becomes a medium in multiple ways. First, it is the space in which a particular representation of South Central is produced. On the tour, blackness is both the spoken and unspoken representation of South Central. The tourists, thus, go on the gang tour to create an image of gangsters that matches what they already assume the gangster to be well before they get to South Central. Put differently, their movement allows for a creation of what they imagine they will discover in South Central in the first place. Rather than expanding what the gangster can be many tourists reproduce the gang member as “black” based on the combination of imagination, tour guide stories, city policy and policing, racism, and movement. Since a particular form of blackness is not readily available for consumption *outside* the tour bus, it is created through the decisions, questions, narratives, and routes *on* the tour bus. This is a blackness that is not related to a discussion of the corporeal body or melanin, but to political processes of creation, inseparable from the community’s history as a poor black neighborhood, black objecthood, and the popular images of black gangs like the Bloods and the Crips. Thus, the Latino/a tour guides are blackened for three hours, they become identified within Los Angeles’s attempt to reduce all blackness to one specific location: South Central. This is not something that

is easily forgotten by the residents or the city. Blackness, then, becomes a political, rather than biological, designation on the gang tour, one that identifies the gangster not with femininity, homosexuality, or adolescence, but with masculinity and heterosexuality, in particular.

Second, the tour bus also reveals the limits of representation studies, as its material movement through South Central mediates the blackness of the 'hood, a space that is made open for white movement. This white movement, and its need for protection, necessitates blackness as the absolute threat to whiteness. The tour bus is a “medium” in that it alters the pace and scale of life in South Central because of the tourist population. On tour, Williams’s mobile privatization is flipped, as the mostly white tourists find comfort in both their seeing of the blackness that they play a role in reproducing, but also through their privileged physical movement through a space imagined as black. Thus, the plot of *The Wire*, while important for Carol, is secondary to the right of her, as a tourist, to relate South Central to *The Wire* to begin with. The comfort and security of the white control of movement and transportation equally holds classificatory implications for the spaces that white people move through.

If South Central is a black space for at least three hours, this cannot be disarticulated from the importance of blackness *for* whiteness. In the process, the brown tour guides become black and the black tourists become white, for three hours based on the history of white control of movement and transportation. To some extent, the mostly white demographic of the tourists matters little, just like the largely Latino/a South Los Angeles demographic becomes irrelevant on LA Gang Tours. The tour bus’s movement is itself a “whiteness” that flows in and through the community, meaning the security of the mostly white tourist mobility—via the Safe Passage clause and the association of the gang tour as a televised event, distinct from the experiences of the tourists—redraws South Central as black space for three hours in ways that purposefully, and

politically, ignore the other 21 hours of the day. This is a necessary movement in order to re-solidify whiteness as the ultimate definer of blackness and race in the United States and Los Angeles. The gang tour is just one method through which this occurs.

Ultimately, if blackness is produced by the political control of mobility and transportation, it cannot be natural or neutral. Instead, the production of blackness, and the continued importance of it in the United States, is reliant on white investments (Du Bois, 1998). LA Gang Tours, and its classificatory implications, is one example of this, as it continues to remake South LA as a black space *for* white tourists. Through the tour bus's movement and the various stories told about the area, South Central becomes black.

As I will show next chapter, the production of race and gangsterism in the tour bus's movement is never guaranteed. People of color challenge white supremacy and racial violence through their use mobility and transportation, never fully monopolized by whiteness. Thus, the white investment in race holds contradictions within it that can be used in ways never intended. Whereas the classification of South Central as a black space may reify racist stereotypes, these stereotypes may equally be important for feeding and clothing a community, they may be central to saving a life during a three-hour ceasefire time span. Still, this does not change the fact that the gang tour bus is also a technology that continues to identify South Central with representations of and materializations of blackness that can benefit whiteness.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOBILE CHALLENGES TO WHITE LOS ANGELES

The wash and rush of [the Great Migration] on the beach line of the northern city centers is to be explained primarily in terms of a new vision of opportunity, of social and economic freedom, of a spirit to seize, even in the face of an extortionate and heavy toll, a chance for the improvement of conditions. With each successive wave of it, the movement of the Negro becomes more and more a mass movement toward the larger and more democratic chance—in the Negro's case a deliberate flight not only from countryside to city, but from medieval America to modern.

—Alain Locke, *The New Negro* (1992, p. 7)

The previous two chapters delineate the way whites have historically held political control of transportation and mobility as evident in everything from colonialism, to transatlantic slavery, to tourism culture, to war. In this chapter I argue that white control over transportation gives rise to alternative and challenging physical movements from people of color. This means that despite control of transportation overwhelmingly held by white people, whites cannot fully immobilize people of color, as some critical race scholars have argued. LA Gang Tours stand as an example of black and brown movement and solidarity in the South Central area that works to challenge objecthood, fight self-destruction, and allow for remappings of South Central. This is the central reason the tour guides refer to LA Gang Tours as “revolutionary”: the tour allows them to reinvent themselves and their community in ways that contradict white definitions.

The city, reporters, community activists, and some residents, however, often misunderstand the challenges provided by LA Gang Tours. In the critique of the gang tours, these groups most often reduce discussions of subjectivity to Western binaries like self/other, black/white, and, most specifically, for here, exploited/exploiters. The consistent critique of LA Gang Tours, for example, is based on the argument that the tour guides are financially exploiting

South Central, and, thus, are not enacting the revolutionary subjectivity that they imagine their work to be doing. For example, some of the descriptions of the tour include “ghettotainment” (*The Daily News of Los Angeles*, 2010; *The New Zealand Herald*, 2010; *The Timaru Herald*, 2010), “poverty tourism” (Textor, 2014), and, as one interviewee calls the tours, a “legal hustle.” These descriptors continue in opinion pieces that call LA Gang Tours a business that “is clearly exploitation at the lowest form” (*The Daily News of Los Angeles*, 2010, A15) because of the tour guides’ potential financial profits. The emphasis on financial exploitation is the most consistent critique of the gang tour in media discourses (Archibold, 2010a; *The Daily New of Los Angeles*, 2010; Gold, 2009a). These critiques contradict the tour guides’ claim that LA Gang Tours is “revolutionary”; instead, they situate the tours within a discussion where the tour guides are represented as exploiting their own community, because they are making money off the area’s reputation. From this perspective, the tour guides are the *real* enactors of exploitation, an exploitation that presumably would not happen were it not for the tour.

But rather than dealing with the discussion of financial exploitation, through the tour’s traversal of space the tour guides challenge the classification of them as “exploiters” because it is a too simplistic a definition of revolution. On LA Gang Tours, I argue that the tour guides enact a Fanonian (2008) politics of “actionality” by remapping South Central to reveal the productivity of communicative processes for space (Carey, 2009). Applying the theories of Frantz Fanon and James Carey to LA Gang Tours, this means that the tour guides seek to destroy South Central as South Central, to kill the gang member as gang member. LA Gang Tours relies on movement to challenge white classificatory power in the city. A theoretical understanding of the tour framed around Fanonian politics and Carey’s conception of communication allows for a more complex

look at the tour guides' inspirations for starting LA Gang Tours, inspirations that are largely critiqued by those not involved as "economic exploitation."

From Karl Marx to David Harvey, the understanding of financial exploitation is that it stands in contrast to revolution. From the view described above where the gang tour is painted as financial exploitation, it follows that for the tour guides to be revolutionary, their resistance must also be financial in nature as well. But the tour has a different concern that is extra-economic: the tour calls for the end to black and brown objecthood throughout Los Angeles by remapping the city, by the tour guides' reclassification of South Los Angeles. Rather than exploitation, the gang tours seek to challenge the social death and antiblack violence that structures South Central. The homicide rate, the police brutality, and the normalized murder of black residents like Latasha Harlins by a Korean shopkeeper over 20 years ago (Butler, 1993) or Ezell Ford by the police today (Pamer & Knight, 2014) are acts that exceed economic exploitation. The tour bus and its movement through Los Angeles, then, can be seen as a fight against these acts, its movement functions as an attempted expression of Fanon's (2008) "new man," as the tour challenges the Hegelian binary that typically reduces the South Central resident to stereotypes of racialized, criminality and inhumanity.

Compared to the previous chapters, then, there may at first appear a contradiction in this chapter's argument. For example, one could argue that if whites have control over mobility and transportation, then people of color cannot move, or move only at the behest of white people, and it is thus contradictory to suggest that people of color have their own mobilities. However, this assumes that the tour guides and tourists view South Central and mobility in the same manner. For the tourists, South Central is Disneyfied; for the tour guides, South Central is home, it is their life. Relatedly, in his discussion of the creation of maps, James Carey (2009) argues that

communication both represents reality and simultaneously produces that same reality for people. Thus, “Our models of communication, consequently, create what we disingenuously pretend they merely describe” (Carey, 2009, p. 25). According to Carey, understandings of space and reality, and thus models of communication, differ based on the different ways that people engage in the world. Likewise, the productivity of communication, I argue, is central to tour guide experiences of South Central as home, which they try to express on the tour. Indeed, Carey makes a similar argument that different populations can view the same space in radically different ways. When referring to a child’s walk to school, Carey posits that teaching that child how to get to school can involve different forms of mapping, such as paper maps, but also song and dance:

Space can be mapped, then, in different modes—utilizing lines on a page, sounds in air, movements in a dance. All three are symbolic forms, though the symbols differ; visual, oral, and kinesthetic... different maps bring the same environment alive in different ways; they produce quite different realities. *Therefore, to live within the purview of different maps is to live within different realities.* Consequently, maps not only constitute the activity known as mapmaking; they constitute nature itself. (Carey, 2009, p. 22; emphasis added)

Likewise, the gang tour is a unique form of mapping for the tour guides, one that provides a radically different understanding of space and mobility than that of white understandings of the South Central area. The intentions of the tour guides never match what white tourists experience, and vice versa, largely because both experience the space of South Central differently. Through the institution of LA Gang Tours, the tour guides create a map of Los Angeles that necessarily overlaps with *and* contradicts the city and tourist understanding of the ghetto.

The immobility claims of Frank Wilderson (2010) and Gaye Theresa Johnson (2013) are incomplete theorizations for LA Gang Tours, here. Whereas these scholars posit that both black and brown lives are structured by an inability to move through certain spaces in a city like Los Angeles, LA Gang Tours shows that people of color move in ways that are disruptive to the

restrictions and classifications the city places on them. When the tour guides move mostly white tourists through South Central, while stopping to look at the Watts Towers, instead of a street gang fight, or the Los Angeles Financial District, instead of a shootout, the tour guides enact communicative practices of remapping dominant spatializations of Los Angeles.

This chapter extends the frameworks of previous chapters to illustrate that mobility, transportation, and space are never guaranteed to be under the universal control of white people. Instead, people of color move in ways that purposefully challenge the control of mobility and transportation held by white people—challenges enacted in everything from runaway slaves, to border crossing and “illegal immigrants,” to the gang tours. In the process, their blackness and brownness are re-formed by their alternative approaches to mobility. Whether in Los Angeles’s history of Reform with its segregatory and deportation politics, or in the city’s planning of Jim Crow and ghettoization that disproportionately structured the places where black people could live in the city, white people have controlled the movements of people of color in Los Angeles. This control of movement ultimately institutes whiteness as the ultimate form of being in the city, as well as the US. But LA Gang Tours destroys the fixity of these racialized borders by using the very thing that has historically been controlled by whiteness: movement. The tour guides challenge whiteness as the ultimate form of being in Los Angeles by using LA Gang Tours to show the simplicity of the financial exploitation critique. Subjectivity on LA Gang Tours does not come in binarized arguments of exploitation versus non-exploitation, but by showing the interconnections between racism and economics.

LA Gang Tours as (Black) Radicalism

The relation between movement and alternative definitions of race did not start with LA Gang Tours, but is a consist trend throughout racial histories in the US: the Civil Rights Freedom

Riders, the call by activists like Ida B. Wells for black Memphis residents to move westward and northward to avoid lynching, the Underground Railroad, and even the current concept of “illegal immigration” are not ignorant or aimless forms of mobility by people of color, as Robin Kelley (1996) notes white people often assumed. These are mobile challenges to the white monopoly of mobility and space making. And many of these mobile challenges are not concerned with capitalist exploitation, or black or brown people proving anything to white people (Hegelian recognition), but expressions of humanity, being, belonging, and even happiness.

On the Underground Railroad, for example, Katherine McKittrick (2008) notes that slave mobility was not necessarily concerned with destroying capitalism. Instead, the concern was with ending the inherent objecthood of racial slavery. In a similar manner, as Saidiya Hartman (1997) notes, the black slave who “stole herself away” from her master by running to another plantation at night to see her children did not have a concern with destroying capitalism, but with *seeing her children*, with establishing a sense of humanity denied in her enslavement. Her mobility, then, is centrally tied to her humanity. Illegal immigration is a similar, yet different, current challenge to the stability of place, particularly the assumed whiteness of the United States. The concept of an “illegal immigrant” is a white political construct that assumes a spatial erasure of all that came before US annexation. Similarly, as Martinot (2010) argues, the notion of illegal immigration is that which brings the brown population “into existence as a group” (p. 130). Brown movement, via border crossing, calls for a redefinition of what racial subjectivity and space in Los Angeles, and the Southwest as a whole, is constituted by. Brown mobility provides a radical challenge to white classificatory power. Importantly, both black and brown mobility illustrate that movement and transportation is never “owned” by white people.

This is not an argument that brown and black mobility, or black and brown subjectivity,

are the same thing. Instead, black and brown mobility provide different, yet similar, challenges to white controls of transportation, mobility, and, by extension, subjectivity. At the heart of both is a challenge to whiteness as the absolute framework of Western being, but also a related critique of nationalism and belonging, particularly in a city whose full name is El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles de Porciúncula (The River of Our Lady, the Queen of the Angels of Porciúncula),⁵ founded by ethnic Mexicans of Native, Spanish, and African descent. Brown mobility challenges the solidity of white geographic classificatory power, while black mobility challenges not the experience of a loss of a self that experiences, “but rather the loss of any self that could experience such loss” (Sexton, 2014, p. 9). Therefore, black and brown mobility pose similar, although uniquely different, challenges to whiteness in Los Angeles.

Fred Moten’s (2002) research speaks to something inherent in these challenges to whiteness: a black “resistance of the object,” where the black body is considered a “speaking commodity.” This means that rather than a passive object, produced and consumed, Moten’s speaking commodity contradicts the commodity as theorized by Marx. For Moten, this implies that the black slaves were commodities, and, thus, redefined their blackness not in relation to equal pay, or the prevention of exploitation, as the Western subject is most often theorized for Marxism. Instead, the slave called for the stoppage of the entire system of production that was based on her objecthood to begin with. Thus, for Moten, following Cedric Robinson (2000), certain commodities have an undertheorized relation to challenging commodification. The movement of black and brown people, from slavery to border crossing to LA Gang Tours, more so fits within Robinson’s (2000) “black radicalism,” which is not solely based on a critique of Westernism but a rejection of racial violence. As Robin Kelley states:

⁵ For more information on the racial background of the founders of Los Angeles and the full name of Los Angeles, see Douglas Flamming’s (2005) *Bound for Freedom*.

...the first waves of African New World revolts were governed not by a critique of Western society but rather a total rejection of the experience of enslavement and racism. More intent on preserving a past than transforming Western society or overthrowing capitalism, they created maroon settlements, ran away, became outliers, and tried to find a way home, even if it meant death. However, with the advent of formal colonialism and the incorporation of Black labor into a more fully governed social structure, a more direct critique of the West and colonialism emerged—a revolt set on transforming social relations and revolutionizing Western society rather than [sic] reproducing African social life. (Kelley, 2000, p. XIV)

Black radicalism is a challenge of African subjects who are made into black objects. Within this framework, we can see the importance of radicalism for black and brown Angelenos is different from the usage of this word in Marxism. Instead, Moten's black radicalism situates the financial exploitation narrative of capitalist revolution to a secondary position. This means the concern with financial exploitation on LA Gang Tours potentially misses the importance of racial violence for the tour guides and South Central residents.

Reporter Romain Raynaldy (2010), for example, voices skepticism of the tour's revolutionary capacity with his acknowledgement that Alfred "and his colleagues deny that the tour is a simple attempt to exploit the city's [sic] dark side for mere financial gain" (p. 43). The consistent question leveled at Alfred and the tour guides from television to newspaper reporters to video bloggers is whether or not the tour is just their way to profiting off misery (Archibold, 2010a; *The Daily New of Los Angeles*, 2010; Gold, 2009a; lion420, 2010). Similarly, the concern with moneymaking makes local community activists like Eduardo skeptical about the gang tour. In our interview, Eduardo questions the revolutionary goals of the tour guides, because they seek monetary gain for their labor. Specifically he states, "I'm just suspect of what value is [LA Gang Tours] providing other than, you know, some sort of economic gain, a for-profit venture, and perhaps a few jobs for those in the community." According to Eduardo, LA Gang Tours cannot be revolutionary, because they only help line the pockets of the tour guides—although this is

debatable, since the proceeds for the tour go not solely into tour guide wages, but food and toy drives for South Central. Like many, Eduardo feels the tour is “getting over” on the ’hood, especially economically.

The concerns with financial exploitation speak to Westernized assumptions of “revolution” that make little sense for black and brown people living in the ghetto. From this perspective, in order to be revolutionary, capitalism must be at the center of critique. However, it is problematic to view capitalism as the sole focus of revolution because doing so assumes that capitalism impacts people in equal fashion. For certain people resisting racial violence is a far more necessary and pressing critique. More specifically, they have to survive to the next day to even begin to think about a critique of capitalism. And just as importantly, surviving to the next day (via challenging racial violence) can be a critique of capitalism, because as Moten (2002) posits black subjectivity, in the face of objecthood, assumes a critique of commodification.

I apply Moten’s theory of black radicalism to LA Gang Tours, but not in a racial sense *owned* by black people or black tour guides. Instead, I assume that black and brown mobility are not concerned with financial exploitation, but with providing a unique avenue of critique for the violence that structures South Central. The mobility of black and brown tour guides is concerned with revolutionizing Western society in ways that challenge the control of mobility that I have shown in chapters two and three to be an assumption of whiteness. The movement of the tour guides recreates subjectivity, transforms the ghetto, and is misinterpreted by the mostly white tourists, reporters, and city officials in LA. In addition, the differential mobilities of black and brown people converge on LA Gang Tours to provide a multifaceted critique of whiteness, far more complex than the tour guides are given credit for. Through the tour, black and brown solidarities are a threat to the supremacy of whiteness in Los Angeles.

On the LA Gang Tours, Moten's resistance occurs in two interrelated ways. First, as the tour moves through the city, the tour guides also call for a redefinition of the "gang member." The tour guides seek to challenge white classificatory power over the gang member and Los Angeles spaces. In the process, the gang tours allow for a "new gang member" to emerge, the tour's movement recreates the gang member to disrupt white constructs of the gangster. But the tour redefines the gang member in a far more inclusive way. On tour, the new gang member becomes black, brown, white, the city, violent, peaceful, and artistic to name a few descriptions. In a similar manner, brown mobility, over the border constantly disrupted the racial fixity of white space, it was/is a reclassification of the US in ways that remain uncomfortable for white people. Today, the need for minutemen who voluntarily watch the border are expressions of this discomfort with brown mobility, particularly as something that is not under the thumb of whiteness. In brown movement, Americanness is proven to be a social construct, one that James Carey's (2009) communication studies research suggests is drawn more so on maps than on or in bodies. On tour, the gang member is similarly less represented in the racialized bodies of black and brown people and more shown to be a dynamic, social process, constantly reproduced to challenge white definitions. The tour identifies the gang member with bodies and entities traditionally left out of this classification by white people in the city.

Second, the tour bus also allows for a group largely viewed as idle and unproductive to become productive. The black and brown tour guides engage in consumerist economies in ways they have traditionally been denied, and this creates a semblance of "redemption" for them—a religious inspired hope to make up for their past transgressions. But while this production does benefit capitalism, this is not all that is sought by the tour guides. Instead, the conception of redemption exceeds the demand of economic individualism to challenge the self-destructiveness

and white racist violence of the community. Therefore, through the tour bus's movement, tour guides recreate South Central in ways they posit promotes revolutionary change. As noted in opinion pieces, newspaper articles, and interviews, this change is critiqued, because the tour guides are not shy about their interests in capitalist endeavors. According to these critiques, the tour guides should feel ashamed that they are profiting off the labor they do in making LA Gang Tours a possibility. The tour guides/former gang members are critiqued for reframing the illegal activities of their past, and associated with their community, for profit. The real issue, I argue, is that LA Gang Tours provides a space for challenging the tenets of Marx's lumpenproletariat, as an unproductive group considered outside of Westernized understandings of revolution. But the gang tours illustrate a complex critique of liberatory struggle as something that cannot be viewed as solely within a Western economic structure. Instead, the change promoted on the gang tour is designed to challenge social death and racial violence, not *end* capitalism. Like the slave running away from the white master, destroying capitalism, if a consideration at all, was secondary to the resistance to the object. For Moten, this is the unthought position of the West.

Ultimately, the gang tours reveal South Central is far more complex and fluid than initially assumed. The assumption that South Central is a space of immobilization (for Johnson) or inherent violence (for the city) is challenged on a tour that allows black and brown people, and many rival gang members, to move through Los Angeles together. The tour guides disrupt white mappings of South Central and white classifications of the people of that area. Alternatively, in their traversal of space, these tours reveal what gangsterism, racial violence, and discrimination mean for residents, gang members, and tour guides from South Central.

Actionality and the New Gangster

During my first tour, as we drove through Downtown and near the Financial District, the founder of the tour, Alfred Lomas, pointed out the disproportionate distinction between wealth and poverty in Los Angeles. In the Financial District, we drive by Wells Fargo and the Bank of America Center I interviewed Nathan in a few days prior to this tour. But just a few blocks away from some of these well-known banks is Skid Row, where large populations of people literally sleep on the street. This drastic difference between rich and poor, for Alfred, led him, and many other gang members in the city, into robbing banks like Wells Fargo and Bank of America in the Los Angeles area. Alfred notes that he and his fellow gang members would scout out a bank for weeks, checking to see how many guards worked there, when police patrols drive by, and when there would be the most money in the bank. He even notes that he “hit” some of these banks we pass by in the Financial District. Driving by these banks, Alfred reminds us tourists that LA is the “bank robbing capital of the world,” he states, pausing slightly for effect, “although that number went down when I retired,” he ends with a smile.

Both on and off the tour, Alfred often jokes about his retirement from the illegalities he used to be involved with in the past. But there is something serious implied in Alfred’s political decision. For the tour guides their past acts may be considered by themselves as “reactional,” by which they posit they were participants in their own self-destruction. In our first interview, for example, Alfred posits he “did damage to [his] community.” And another tour guide, Jimmy, also told me in our interview that he feels “shame about what [he] did, and [he’s] paid for it” with jail time, bullet scares, and mental fatigue. This is another way of saying that these tour guides fulfilled the same stereotypes they now seek to destroy.

Based on their participation in violence, the tour guides at one point considered themselves as participants in their own social death—or the objecthood that continues to encompass those descendants of slavery in our contemporary world (Hartman, 2008). Today, the tour guides show the capacity to enact “social life” via the gang tours, what Jared Sexton (2011) calls the “freedom” of subjectivity that emerges out of objecthood. In fact, in Sexton’s critique of the pessimism/optimism binary of critical race studies, he posits there is an inability to separate social life from social death; and inherent in their inseparability is Moten’s black radicalism, as a potentiality that emerges out of objecthood. Relatedly, I argue the articulation of social death and social life for residents of South Central is essential to the radical potentiality of LA Gang Tours. In a question largely critiquing the binarism of Moten’s (2008) optimism and Wilderson’s (2003) pessimism, Sexton (2011) asks, “Rather than approaching (the theorization of) social death and (the theorization of) social life as an ‘either/or’ proposition, then, why not attempt to think them as a matter of ‘both/and’” (p. 22)? Likewise, on the gang tour, subjectivity and radicalism lie in the tour guides’ expression of humanity and potentiality in a space of historical objecthood.

Although obviously not talking about gang members, Frantz Fanon (2008) similarly provides a lens to think about social life, what he calls the “new,” that must emerge for the tour guides to break stereotypes. This is central to his discussion of the “new man.” In contrast to the new man, for Fanon, is the reactional subject, one that exists particularly when the “black man” stops behaving as an “actional” subject and, instead, “His actions are destined for ‘the Other’ (in the guise of the white man), since only ‘the Other’ can enhance his status and give him self-esteem at the ethical level” (Fanon, 2008, p. 132). In reactionality, the self emerges only in its attempts to seek recognition from whiteness. This is *no longer* the goal of the tour guides. Instead, LA Gang Tours seeks to be a new and actional challenge to the reduction of gangsterism

to the biological. This is why in each of my interviews with Alfred, and in his interviews elsewhere (ABC, 2010; NBC, 2010), one of the central statements he makes about the gang tours is that he wants to use them as a tool to “break stereotypes” about South Central. During my first interview with Alfred, for example, he notes: “The whole purpose of this tour is to show mobility within the community and to break stereotypes and humanize our efforts of who we are and what we do.” Similarly, during our second interview, Alfred tells me he has “always said the tours are just a tool. The tour is an ends to a means, it’s a tool that has allowed us to further this effort to break stereotypes, I guess, provide opportunity and all the solutions and strategies to help a community.” Within the gang tour’s attempt to break stereotypes there is an implication that something “new” must come afterward. There is a notion that the gang tour will bring about a fundamentally different subjectivity for South Los Angeles, one that, I argue, is designed to transform what a gang member in the city is.

There are two redefinitions of the gang member that occur on LA Gang Tours: First, through the tours, gang member becomes inclusive of the city, particularly the police state. Mass incarceration and police violence are attributed as central to black and brown gangsterism in Los Angeles. As such, the police are one of many groups reconsidered as gang members on the tour. Second, on tour, the gang member also becomes an advocate for change, peace, and creativity in the ghetto. The new gang member is one who *creates*, not *destroys*.

First, the gang tours transform the narratives of what constitutes a gang in LA, shifting the discussion of gangs from being one solely about black (and brown) people to being an issue of the entire city. It is not a coincidence, for example, that two of the stops on the tour are police related, the LA County Jail and the old Rampart police station. The tour guides view the prison system as central to *making* them gang members. During our first interview, Alfred told me

“prison only made me a better gangster.” Similarly, in one television interview, he states, when talking about the tour guides he has hired: “Between the four people that are working right now, they probably have about 120 years in jails” (NBC, 2010). Later, during the same television broadcast, while standing at the front of a tour bus, one tour guide, Melvin Johnson, tells the tourists: “Every jail we went by today, I, uh [laughs to himself], I was there” (NBC, 2010).

Relatedly, police violence in the ghetto is a constant theme of the gang tour, especially during my first tour, when Alfred noted that police consistently abuse and harass South Central residents, often for little to no reason. As a former gang member who has been physically abused by the police on more than one occasion, this was not a shocking statement to me. But tourists like Carol and Eric expressed doubt about Alfred’s abuse, because as Eric stated during our tour, “in Norway police don’t even carry firearms.” Alfred and I even attempting to envision a police force without guns was laughable in ways that Eric and Carol told me, after our tour, they could not understand. Further, Alfred’s consistent expression of displeasure with police led Carol to note during our interview that Alfred “was like bashing on the cops like every second minute.” Carol’s comment leads Eric to argue that maybe the police should play a larger role in on the tours. Eric stated that hearing the police’s perspective might make the tours better:

Maybe even the police officer to say, you know this is the story from sort of Alfred’s point of view, this is how we see it. To say, what are the problems? What are the root causes from a police officer’s point of view? What is it like for a police officer working in these areas? *Why do they behave like they do?*

For clarification, I asked Eric who he was referring to when he asked, “Why do they behave like they do?” and his response was the gang members from South Central.

What Carol’s and Eric’s responses point to are different understandings of the police from tour guides, like Alfred and Jimmy. The tour guides and Eric and Carol live in completely different worlds. Whereas police protect Carol and Eric, they are part of the problem for tour

guides like Alfred. The police are not classified as violent for the white tourists, like Eric and Carol; South Central is always the violent one. This is a narrative the tour guides challenge by reclassifying police violence as a form of gangsterism, and LA Gang Tours is the first place that many white tourists to even consider such a reclassification. In effect, LA Gang Tours remaps the gangster, making this a concept that no longer is reducible to the borders of South Central, but stretches to the badges and patrol cars of those who are purported to “protect and serve.”

In our first interview, Alfred states, “the police are the biggest gang in the city.” The tours highlight this by articulating the South Central gangs to a long history of police violence, as well as the white gang members of the 1950s that had the protections of the LAPD, so were just an extension of police violence. During one video recorded tour, for example, Alfred discusses the goals of one of the first black gangs in South Central, the Slausons: “Ladies and gentleman,” he states from the front of the tour bus to a large group of all white tourists, “we’re making a right on historic Slauson Avenue. Slauson Avenue is actually the name of one of the original gangs in South Central, the Slausons. They defended South Central from marauding white gangs of the neighboring area” (Schroeder, 2010). According to tour guides, rather than inherently bad, the Slausons—who were precursors to the Crips—were a protective force of Watts (NBC, 2010). Specifically, the Slausons were formed to combat the white gangs who were often given an hour-long window by the police to drive through South Central and harass the black residents during the mid-20th century (Alonso, 2010). Thus, the Slausons were formed to protect the community from the violent gang known as the LAPD. It only seems fitting, then, that one of the Slauson’s most notable leaders, Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter, transitioned from a gang member into being the leader of the Southern California chapter of the Black Panther Party

for Self Defense (Bloom & Martin, Jr., 2013). Whether as a Slauson or a Panther, Carter understood that the enemy did not change.

Interestingly, community activist and city official Nathan must admit something similar to Alfred's and Bunchy's feelings about the police as the largest gang in LA. In our interview when discussing police and governmental officials in Los Angeles, Nathan states: "Once you start working with gang members, you see the whole world as, there's gangs everywhere. Just the ones that get attention and labeled as gangsters are the one's run by young African American and Latino males, and a few white bikers... There's gangs in every strata of society." Nathan suggests something the tours attempt to highlight: the gang member is a product of white racism and violence. In this light, for Nathan and Alfred, who disagree on pretty much everything else, the police are one of the central gangs of Los Angeles. This is promoted on tour in hopes of expanding who and what constitutes gangsterism.

Second, the tours equally attempt to remake the gang member through challenging the gang violence of the community. One of the central ways this is accomplished is through the establishment of Safe Passage, a three-hour-long ceasefire followed by four local gangs that allows for the tour bus to move through the community unharmed (LA Gang Tours, 2014). The ceasefire mirrors the gang violence intervention goals of the tour guides, who broker temporary truces between major rivals. Safe Passage is itself a challenge to the traditional narrative of wanton violence in the ghetto and the politics of reactionality.

Of course, from city politicians, to reporters, to bloggers, the ceasefire is considered one of the things about the tour that will not hold up. For example, journalist Thomas Watkins (2010) recorded City Councilman Dennis Zine as stating these tours are "a terrible idea," and, he asks, "Is it worth that thrill for 65 bucks? You can go to a [gang] movie for a lot less and not put

yourself at risk” (Watkins, 2010). Dan Thomasson (2010) reports to his readers, “Visit Tombstone” instead of LA Gang Tours, because “It is much safer and more interesting.”

Likewise, a video blogger notes of the gang tour’s ceasefire:

Here’s another thing, [Alfred] claims that he’s got the gangs in these areas to, um, promise not to shoot each other or do anything like that between the hours of 10am and 1pm. Um, there’s a gang war expect in the middle of the day? [laughs at self] Uh, yeah. Suuuurrrre, they’re gonna obey that promise. These people are gang members. They’ll promise you something and then shoot you in the back to not have to do it. (lionn420, 2010)

Interestingly, the above comments all come from people who, admittedly, have never taken the tour. Still, for these three, the tours are a dangerous endeavor for tourists, because the mostly white tourists are putting themselves in a zone of reactivity.

The tour guides do not miss the prevalence of such criticism. During our second interview, Alfred addresses it by noting, “The tour has, overall, been extremely rewarding—the fact that the ceasefire has continued shows our efforts work. Some have thought the ceasefire was a joke, that it could never work, but it has.” Contrary to the claims of Thomasson, Zine, and lion420, Alfred speaks to the fact that the gang tour has run for four years without incident. Likewise, the many residents I met during my first tour in the Pueblo del Rio housing projects expressed how “monumental” the ceasefire is for allowing them the opportunity to simply walk outside. The ability to walk across the street in a community that, according to Alfred, is “held hostage by gunfire” is of highest import for tour guides. In addition, it speaks to a redefinition of what a gang member is, because it challenges the narrative of wanton, uncontrollable violence. For the tour guides, the gang member is not irrational, but a natural *reaction* to systematic racism. But the gang tour’s redefinition positions gang members as *actional*, it challenges white imaginations of the South Central area as supposedly violent gang members have created their own peace.

Rather than a violent group who cannot be controlled, the ceasefire opens room for the discussion of what could be, without the gang tour. In this light, the tour calls for a discussion of LA gangs that is not solely violent, but capable of peace and the disruption of violence. It is this narrative of peace and disruption of violence in the “gang capital of the world” that is largely excluded from the popular depictions of LA Gang Tours. Thus, Alfred notes that “it’s important to nail down, we are a conflict mediation group of guys fighting violence in LA, and we bring awareness to the gang capital of the world, LA.” In a similar manner, another tour guide Melvin Johnson, “said the tour brings attention to the work of former gang members who try to steer people away from crime. ‘It is important because what we are trying to do is positive, and it highlights the gang-interventionist workers,’ Johnson said” (*7 Days*, 2010). Gang member, for these tour guides, is a discussion of conflict mediation.

Similarly, in one interview with Lisa Sprinkles, co-manger of the Pico Union Graff Lab—the final stop on the tour—she states that LA Gang Tours is important because they “don’t like look at gangs like it’s inherently negative. They’re like seeking support and family and all of that, and some of them you know do things that are violent, but it’s a small percentage” (Vandermeeran, 2010). As such, the gang tours extend the efforts of the Graff Lab, set out by Rick Guerrero, the Pico Union Graff Lab founder, who states that the lab is “for everyone,” as long as they are interested in art and not violence: “If you’re a gangster, that’s fine. Just leave it at the door. Everybody here, it’s all about peace, love, and love for the arts” (NBC, 2010). In addition to intervention, the emphasis on artwork is a narrative of LA Gang Tours that challenges the traditional domains of gang member as well. Three of the 12 stops are art related: the Downtown graffiti murals, the Watts Arts Center, and Pico Union.



Figure 4.1: This is an image is a work of artists at the Pico Union Graff Lab. The lab promotes street art for artists who used to do tag art for local street gangs. It provides a safe space to make art for local artists. Source: Pico Union Graff Lab, 2014: <http://www.thegrafflab.com/index.php/galleries/photo-gallery>

Thus, LA Gang Tours provides one challenge to the white construct of the “gang member” in ways that hint at Fanon’s new man, a disruption of the Hegelian master/slave binary. This involves a challenge to the reactional violence of self-destruction enacted by black and brown gang members on each other. But it is also about a new gang member that the tour tries to make, one that redefines who and what constitutes a gang member to breaks the stereotypical boxes the tour guides are reduced to. This pushes the gang member beyond a racial to a societal categorization. Through the narratives, routes, and solidarity of the tour guides, LA Gang Tours reclassifies the LA gang member and, thus, challenges white classificatory power as a whole. Similarly, Alvaro Reyes’s discussion of the zone of action is a nod to Fanon, structured on the capability of the “colonized” to challenge the “colonizer’s” classifications of them, ending in the ultimate destruction of the colonized/colonizer binary:

...the “zone of action” comes into being in the point of scission, the point of decision of the colonized to destroy themselves as colonized, and “the new,” or as Fanon had previously put it, “the unforeseeable.” In other words, the Wretched have called the bluff of the colonizer, and to the colonizer’s frequent exclamations, “you are not like us!” they have set out, through an unparalleled collective organization of the will (a careful process of organization, selection, and discipline detailed in chapters two and three of *Wretched*), to make this statement an unqualified truth, answering, “We will make ourselves far more different than you can imagine!” They have set out to achieve the alteration of being, to bring into existence another element, in but not of, the colonial situation—themselves as an independent subjective force. (Reyes, 2012, p. 19)

Although speaking of Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, Reyes’s (2012) zone of action is applicable to South Central. Specifically, the bus’s movement through LA is an attempt by the gang member to destroy themselves as they are classified by whiteness. This must happen in strict contradiction to what they are popularly and racially purported to be.

The gang tours redefine the gang member in ways that include people, entities, and institutions that are not traditionally considered gang members. For the tour guides, this is a necessary redefinition of the gang member in order for them to break the stereotypes of South Central and to transform their community, in order for them to enact an actionality to contradict the former reactionality they are ashamed of today. In the process, white people, police, artists, peacekeepers remake what a gang member can be. On tour, a new gang member is possible.

The “Lumpenproletariat’s Redemption”

I arrived slightly late for my interview with Nathan, but I have been telling myself that it was not my fault. It was Los Angeles’s fault. We were meeting at Starbucks Coffee Company on Hope Street in Downtown LA’s Financial District. But there are two Starbucks on Hope Street, at least. One is in the Bank of America Center and the other is in the Wells Fargo Bank across the street from the Bank of America Center. I sat for 15 minutes in Wells Fargo before Nathan called me from the Starbucks across the street to make sure we were still on. He was a busy man,

who at the time was working for the city in the Financial District. So I packed up my coffee and hurried across the street.

When I finally made it, Nathan was not upset, but delighted to see me. He did not have the chance to discuss his feelings about the gang tours publically because when he was the city's officially titled "deputy of gang reduction," and when he would probably have been interviewed the most, the gang tour was only in its initial planning stages. Now that the gang tour was fully operational, Nathan did not hesitate to tell me that LA Gang Tours was a "legal hustle." I quickly pulled out my tape recorder, figuring this would be an interesting interview. Nathan continued by giving credit to the tour guides because he felt, despite the tour being a legal hustle, it was a less exploitative hustle than the hustle of gang life. But even still, Nathan stated specifically that, LA Gang Tours "is a different *hustle*. At least it's *legal*. It may be exploitive. The other hustle was exploitive, too, but in a different way. So there's part of me on that front, I say, 'Well, you know, you gotta make it somehow. At least he's not slinging anymore,' you know" (emphasis added). The tour is exploitative, or a hustle for Nathan, in a manner that is not quite illegal, as was the case with drug dealing, bank robbing, and gang banging. Instead, the gang tour is problematic largely because it financially profits off of South Central's histories of criminality and misery. Thus, exploitation for Nathan is economic, so much so that he states before the city could ever accept LA Gang Tours, like it accepts a bus tour that drives by celebrities' homes, they have to "see the financial books." The city needs to know how all the tour's funds are allocated.

Needless to say, the tour guides have a problem with the legal hustle description of them for multiple reasons. Nathan's position implies that the labor of some residents of South Central is inherently suspect from the perspective of activists and the city, ignoring the history that the city has with limiting the economic possibilities of Angelenos of color (Bonacich, et. al, 2010).

Relatedly, the discussion of a legal hustle around the gang tour is unmistakably attached to an assumption that there is a “correct, legal way” to tour South Central, a position even implied by Los Angeles politicians. Los Angeles Councilwoman Jan Perry, for instance, has been one of the main voices against the tour. She “represents a large area covered by the tour and conducts her own tours” (Archibold, 2010a). But unlike LA Gang Tours, Perry’s tours focus on bringing in outside businesses and real estate opportunity into the South Central area:

City Councilwoman Jan Perry said she has offered bus tours of South Los Angeles herself — but those were for real estate leaders she was trying to persuade to invest in the neighborhood. She said South Los Angeles could benefit from an effort to demonstrate “the potential of the community.” But she said some aspects of this type of [gang] tourism could go too far. (Gold, 2009b)

One article quoting Perry argues that the gang tour guides facilitate *ghettotainment*, while they “should focus on deliverables, and I [Perry] consider a deliverable a grocery store” (Archibold, 2010a, p. 1). The correct form of tourism, or the legal form of tourism, for Perry, is concerned with bringing certain businesses into South Central, and not doing so is exploitative in her eyes. This situates exploitation as something that South Central does to itself, while ignoring the City of Los Angeles’s termination of social programs in the area and the city’s promotion of the exit of businesses and white residents from the city (Alonso, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1993). From Perry’s perspective, while the tour guides should not gain financially, it is perfectly fine for Wal-Mart to.

Overlooked in the critiques of financial exploitation from Nathan and Perry is the careful judgment that Alfred uses when deciding which businesses he thinks should be involved with the tour financially. He argues that the majority of these business are “looking at it more from an end of just profit, so you know we have to have...it’s just important to have the right groups of people on board.” It is important to note that Alfred’s discussion, here, speaks to a very complex

understanding by the black and brown tour guides, and South Central residents as a whole, of the ways that capitalism has displaced their community. Those without “the heartbeat” of the ghetto, as Alfred argues, often attempt to capitalize off the area by making money off locals rather than reinvesting that money back into the community. This is why the tour is so concerned with food drives, toy giveaways, and, importantly, employing the unemployable, because, while for Alfred, “the gang problem is really an economic problem,” he also notes something that gang historian Alex Alonso (2010) argues: the gang member is a product of antiblack approaches to the ghetto.



Figure 4.2: This image comes from the LA Gang Tour’s website. It is an image of Alfred and tour guide involved in a toy drive, something not often shown in the media’s depictions of the tour. Source: LA Gang Tours, 2014: <http://lagangtours.com>

Since exploitation exceeds the economic for the tour guides, rather than the legal hustle metaphor, the tour guides characterize their labor through what I call the “lumpenproletariat’s redemption,” which uses *and* despises capitalism. My usage of this term is one part my own (lumpenproletariat) and one part from the tour guide self-descriptions of their actions on the tour (redemption). The lumpenproletariat, for me, is read more in line with the work of Frantz Fanon than Karl Marx, as a group that Fanon shows may potentially be one of the most revolutionary of all, particularly for attacking racial violence. Relatedly, redemption, for the tour guides, is a term that they use with purposefully Christian implications (saving “souls”), but it also has a physical

component (as in saving people from the harms of gang violence). Thus, a lumpenproletariat's redemption, for the gang tour guides, is a merger of revolution and spirituality, it allows for an analysis of the ways that the tour guides use the tours to transform their community. Also, it does not assume the economic to be an isolated domain; instead, the economic is articulated to racial discrimination, to social death, which for the tour guides deserves even more criticism.

First, my usage of lumpenproletariat contradicts Marx's discussion of it as a largely idle group. For Marx, the lumpen feed off the proletariat and are a hindrance, rather than support, to class revolution. Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Robert (1982) mention this in *Policing the Crisis*, when they discuss Marx's argument that, "through theft, extortion, begging, prostitution and gambling, the lumpenproletariat tends to live parasitically off the working class" (1982, p. 364). For Marx, the lumpenproletariat is an unproductive population, whose concern with economic mobility is so often tied to:

... 'unproductive' rather than 'productive' labour and though it may be 'illegal' with respect to the norms which govern normal capitalist relations, it is often 'capitalistic' in form (e.g. organised criminal enterprises)—i.e. adapted to the system on which it is parasitic. (Hall, et. al, 1982, p. 364)

This is a very different position from Frantz Fanon (2004) and Huey P. Newton (1980), who viewed the lumpenproletariat as potentially one of the more revolutionary forces in capitalist, racist, and nationalist societies. This is why Newton (1980), following Fanon, heavily recruited "brothers from the block" for the Black Panther Party for Self Defense like South Central's own Bunchy Carter. Fanon argues that not only capitalism, but nation, race, and colonization are central to understanding the radical potentiality of the lumpenproletariat:

The lumpenproletariat constitutes a serious threat to the "security" of the town and signifies the irreversible rot and the gangrene eating into the heart of colonial domination. So the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, and the petty criminals, when approached, give the liberation struggle all they have got, devoting themselves to the cause like

valiant workers. These vagrants, these second-class citizens, find their way back to the nation thanks to their decisive militant action. (Fanon, 2004, pp. 81-82).

The lumpenproletariat is not a useless population for Fanon or Newton. Instead, they have the potential to play a key role in liberation struggles from Algeria to Oakland.

In analyzing both Marx's and Fanon's lumpen, the tour guides fall somewhere between both of their positions. On the one hand, they are far from unproductive, they are laborers who promote a product that is wholly a part of a global market, evidenced by the tourists who travel from as far away as Australia for LA Gang Tours. On the other, they provide little challenge to capitalism, since it is their hope of entering capitalist relations in a legal fashion—largely denied them due to their criminal records—that sparks the gang tour in the first instance. As noted in one newspaper article, the tour is “not just about gangs, it’s about the economic problems in the city” (*7 Days*, 2010), which, since white flight of the 1960s, have disproportionately harmed the opportunities of black and brown residents of the South Central community (Robinson, 2010). Thus, racial discrimination is a central factor of South Central's economic disenfranchisement, producing necessary illegal ventures of which gangs play an essential role. Racial violence, for the tour guides, cannot be disarticulated from economic disenfranchisement. To say that the tour is not “revolutionary” assumes that capitalism and racism are two distinct spheres, which makes little sense for people of color in the ghetto. Revolution, for the tour guides, though importantly economic, is also centrally a process of ending antiblack violence and self-destruction.

For this forgotten lumpenproletariat, the complex problem of violence takes precedent on LA Gang Tours, because it structures the inability of people to cross the street in South Central, something that is taken for granted in most white communities throughout the US. But in South Central, as Alfred states, people are “held hostage” in their homes by gang violence and racial violence from police. In other words, the normative violence of South Central makes some

residents “prisoners in their own homes,” according to Jimmy, whose Watts community is notorious for violence. Interestingly, despite his vocal lack of support for the tour, Nathan acknowledges a similar relation of residents being held hostage in Watts. Near the end of our interview, and despite having major problems with the tour, Nathan states that the city has no answer for the “isolation” of many South Los Angeles residents:

The biggest challenge some of these communities have is they are isolated, they're isolated from the rest of the world. I mean I know people, there's a woman in Watts, 49 years old. She's my age. She has never lived anywhere in her life other than the Imperial Courts [Watts housing project], that's it. She's lost two children, you know, and she's a little nuts. And people would say she was. And I'm like, yeah if you had lived your entire life, 49 years, in the Imperial Courts with the kind of violence that she's exposed to, that's like living in Mogadishu, or, I mean pick your spot, hot spot around the world. I mean look what it's doing to our soldiers who just go over there for 12 months at a time, they come back drug addicts, they can't sleep, they go off on shooting sprees, there's all kinds of crazy things. And this woman lived there for 49 years of her life and lost two of her babies, you know. And nobody knows that. There's thousands of people like that. They're isolated. And that isolation is one of the biggest things you have to overcome.

This concern with isolation is resolved, if only temporarily, by the Safe Passage clause, a three-hour-long ceasefire that tour guides created with four South Central gangs. As the tour bus moves through South Central it allows for the movement of some residents to walk outside their homes, for three hours at least, in ways that are not typically allowed without the tour and the ceasefire. In the process, the bus's movement challenges the social and physical death of the ghetto.

There is a fundamentally different concern between the meaning of the bus's movement according to tour guides and the meaning of the bus's movement for the city, reporters, and community activists. Whereas activist and local officials like Nathan and Eduardo doubt the revolutionary goals of the tour because of the financial gains made by a few, the tour guides view capitalism as their way to transform the ghetto's history of objecthood in ways that are constantly misunderstood. Similarly, Huey Newton (1980) argues that he *used* capitalism, the

Black Panther Party was concerned with making sure money stayed within the black ghetto. Of course, there are extreme differences between the Black Panther Party and the gang tour. For Newton, capitalism provided *some* means of producing change in black ghettos, but he also realized that antiblack violence would make the black business owner submissive to white capitalism as a whole. For this reason, Newton wanted black business owners to economically and socially give back to the community because only this consciousness, not solely class-consciousness, would effectively destroy multiple forms of oppression (Bloom & Martin, Jr., 2013). Newton hoped to use capitalism as a means of overthrowing systematic oppression as a whole, including racism, nationalism, and eventually capitalism.

This important critique is completely missing from LA Gang Tours. The gang tour is a business endeavor that does not seek to critique capitalism at some point in the future, and it is also far from shy about increasing the private profits of specific people. Alfred is involved in a few business ventures, including Inner City Visions, a nonprofit group whose mission is “To strategically break the inter-generational cycles of poverty, addiction and gang violence by using a holistic approach that meets the unique needs of vulnerable families and children” (Inner City Visions, 2014). Relatedly, during his home video recording of tourists after a gang tour, tour guide Melvin Johnson promoted his new hip-hop company, West Coast Getcha Gotcha Entertainment (realintheafield.com, 2012). Some of his rappers created the tour’s official music video, “LA Gang Tours” (LA Gang Tours, 2014). In his home video, Johnson says “My idea synchronizes with the tours, that’s why I’m here to support them” (Johnson, 2012). More specifically, while speaking to two white tourists, Johnson states his company and the tours are both concerned with ending violence on the streets and in the music industry:

We’re reconstructing hip-hop like we reconstructed America. We about to reconstruct hip-hop, meaning no more verbal disputes, no more dissing, no more talking crazy. We

about to unify and come together as one through community projects and all types of other things, man. I'm glad you came, I'm glad to meet you [shake hands], and, uh, looking forward to seeing you again. (Johnson, 2012)

And there are, of course, the rarely addressed prices of the tour buses they rent. In order for the tour to fulfill its revolutionary goals, it must continue to make wealthy those from outside the ghetto, like the bus company American Transportation Systems, which also rents to the Women's National Basketball Association team the Los Angeles Sparks.

But there is still something importantly similar between the tour and the Party: they both are concerned with the end of normalized violence in the ghetto. This occurs, for the tour guides, in ways that do not critique capitalism, like the Party, but by providing a rare opportunity for this lower-income, criminalized section of the ghetto to control the means of their own production. The tour is about the making of a legal economic venture in the 'hood, which tour guides feel do not exist in other capacities because of a history of antiblack racism in South Los Angeles. The tours are less so a legal hustle, and more so an attempt by tour guides to capitalize off the hustle of gangsterism in a legal fashion.

Second, redemption equally defines the goals of the tour guides and their movement through Los Angeles. LA Gang Tours is a Christian-influenced organization, and this influence is one of the more prominent elements promoted on the tour's website. Under the biography for Alfred, for example, it is acknowledged that "After a radical and life changing experience, receiving the Lord as his personal Savior, he has dedicated his life to serving the Los Angeles community through humanitarian aid and violence reduction/prevention" (LA Gang Tours, 2014). In a similar manner, the gang tour's official slogan is "LA Gang Tours – '*saving* lives, creating jobs, rebuilding communities' – One LA Tour at a time..." (LA Gang Tours, 2014; emphasis added). Alfred positions this "saving" as relating to both saving people physically but

also spiritually. The Christian influence is so prominent for one tourist, Sam, that it reaches uncomfortable levels for him during his tour:

In terms of some of the negative stuff, I felt a little bit like there was some selling of Christianity, not to say that, because you know I'm Catholic, I just felt there was some, I mean, it felt like some of the gang members when they even introduced themselves kind of pointed to being saved, which I think could kind of be a little bit, it seemed to be very shaped and tainted by it...I mean I have no problems with that. I just don't think that is something that you should publically be giving on the tours.

For Sam, and as I noticed from my two tours, the feeling of redemption, and its relation to spirituality, is a prevalent and well-acknowledged element of the tour. The tour guides see the tour as a way to spread peace in South Central, but also to atone for their previous transgressions, a way to, as one tourist, Carol, notes during our interview, “promote their spiritual change.” The tour guides posit that they *need* this: Alfred was a bank robber; Jimmy was a drug dealer and drug addict; and they both have physical war scars (knife and bullet wounds) that show at least one person wanted to make them pay for something at some point.

Thus, the tour guides focus on their criminal and illegal past in moral hopes of saving people, or showing others what not to do. Of course, this association of criminality with South Central is also why the mostly white tourists are there in the first place, as rap music, television, and films that focus on crime and violence are often quoted as sparking tourists' interests. The tour guides cater to this on tour by lifting their shirts to show tattoos and old bullet wounds as cautionary examples. For example, in one NBC (2010) television report of the tour, tour guide Melvin Johnson states, “Everything bad that could happen to you involving gangs happened to me, I've been shot, stabbed, incarcerated.” Relatedly, in a different television news interview (MidNightRider2001, 2010), tour guide Clarence Stewart, in conversation with a reporter, Michael Moore, details his war scars:

Clarence Stewart: “I've been shot four times, close range.”

Michael Moore: “Where about?”

Clarence Stewart: “Um, twice in the leg [pointing at his left leg], hit that main artery, almost bled to death. And twice underneath [pointing to his left underarm and lower left shoulder blade].” (MidNightRider2001, 2010)

During my first tour, Alfred lifts his shirt to reveal his bullet wounds and gang tattoos. One tourist, Carol, stated this was proof of “his [Alfred’s]...bad-ass experiences.”

While these flashes of war scars and tattoos can be viewed as attempts to show how “bad-ass” the tour guides are, they equally reveal the violence that structures the lives of South Central residents, violence that these tour guides once participated in and now seek to end. This is not violence recorded in a song, but recorded on the black and brown bodies of the tours—it is a violence inseparable from a history of antiblackness in Los Angeles that normalizes white and business flight, segregation, poverty, and brutality for people of color in the city. And part of the tour guides’ redemptive goal is to discuss this violence, to analyze it, to critique it, and to prevent its reoccurrence. For the tour guides, this is largely possible via the tour bus’s traversal of the city. It provides an avenue to challenge the normative processes of social and physical death in South Central. This is a change that the tour guides feel is essential to their Christian-influenced transformation of themselves and their home.

The tour guide focus on illegality, then, should not be read as if they are committing an illegal act by simply providing a tour (legal hustles), but as reminders of why they are there in the first place: to redeem themselves by changing the narratives that are capable of being told by and about South Central. The tour guides purposefully toy with illegality, they use their former relations to criminality and violence to, importantly, promote peace in communities they used to destroy. Thus, LA Gang Tours do two things. First, they create a legal economic opportunity for a population that is largely viewed as unproductive, as lazy, as immobile. The gang tours disrupt Marx’s assumptions about the lumpenproletariat, as production is a central element of the tours.

But, second, this concern with production does not mean there are no potential radical elements on the tour. Instead, the tour guides necessarily shift their discussion of radicalism from solely the economic to address the important and pressing measures of racial and social violence and self-destruction. The tours seek to transform South Central through the ceasefire and its concern with creating a more permanent fix to violence in the community, through the tour guides atonement of former transgressions, and through a reentry into capitalist relations that are not a part of private prison systems. This is a largely Christian transformation, and though their promotion of Christianity may make some tourists uncomfortable, such as myself, it is equally central to the tour guides' attempt to redeem themselves. The notion of a legal hustle is a very limited view of the gang tour that reduces the issue of South Central to a solely economic realm. Instead, the tours illustrate there is a deeper concern that articulates the economic to the social.

The Actional Challenges to Los Angeles

According to James Carey, “communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (2009, p. 19). In a sense, the South Central residents live in a different world than the mostly white tourists who ride through their homes. Their understanding of the police, of violence, of right and wrong is structured by the produced environment which they inhabit, a world that cannot be disarticulated from a history of antiblack violence, racism, and reactionality. The gang tour is a response (not reaction) to this world, one that tries to make the community anew through the challenge to objecthood the tour guides enact via LA Gang Tours. Rather than a reaction to white classificatory power that defines the South Central area as a space of inherent violence, LA Gang Tours provides an actional approach to black and brown life to illustrate that white classificatory power is far from universal.

Fanon and Carey allow me to think through the racial implications of economic exploitation. It is too uncomplicated to write off the tours as exploitative or as hustles or as dangerous. The gang tours are not solely defined by reporters, city officials, video bloggers, and community activist. If they are, then the community and its residents are easily reduced to white constructs of gangsterism. But LA Gang Tours also represents a moment of black and brown solidarity *and* the potential to remake oneself, and one's community in sharp contrast to white constructs. The reporters, city officials, and movie producers do not have the last word on South Central. Instead, the residents and the tour guides provide a discussion of South Central that is cognizant of these descriptions to show a community that is usually not seen by white people. There are no shootouts, no crap games going on, no crack-heads asking to borrow money. But there is poverty, there are people who are afraid to let their children play in a park without the gang tour, there are a disproportionate amount of police cars in the area, and there are teenagers who use art as a means of staying away from the violence that structures their community. On LA Gang Tours, a new South Central is created, if only for three hours.

The concern of the tour guides with transforming the ghetto via LA Gang Tours is demonstrated in at least two ways. First, the tour guides try to show that the concept of the gang member is a production that they are not the sole makers of. As such, they remake the concept of the gang member in ways that challenge the way the city has largely defined the gang member. On the tour, the gang member is the tour guide, for sure. But the gang member also is the city's militarized approach to South Central, the gang member is the police officer who patrols the area like a colonizing army. But, in the same breathe, the gang members are the artists who seek to recreate South Central as a community that has never been solely about destruction. The gang members are the people who patrol their community after a shooting in hopes of preventing

further retaliation. This is a very different gang member than what is described by the city, a “new” gang member that challenges the universality of white classificatory power. The tour guides show that they, too, can produce, create, and remap South Los Angeles. This is the potentiality connected to the tour bus’s movement.

Relatedly, the tour guides recreate themselves in ways that challenge dominant classifications of them as hustlers and/or as financially exploiting their communities. Instead, the tour guides situate themselves within a narrative of redemption that is importantly—and most significantly as I have been attempting to show—extra-economic. While providing economic benefits, the tours more importantly address the pressing question of social, systematic, and physical death in the South Los Angeles area, a question the city has largely addressed through militarized police force, privatized prison systems, and physical segregation. The critiques of the gang tour as only benefiting a specific population of South Central, then, situate *benefit* within a solely financial realm. But according to many residents who I heard from during both my first and second tours, South Central *benefits* whenever all of its residents are not afraid to step outside and play in a park.

Thus, the tours challenge the bleak narrative that South Central is a space in which the residents are immobile. The black and brown residents in the ghetto *move* in ways that the police, reporters, tourists, government officials, and even academics have difficulty categorizing outside of a narrative of illegality or exploitation. But, of course, anyone who has ever grown up in the ghetto knows that alley they can slip down to avoid surveillance; or that corner store clerk who does not mind hiding you for a few minutes while the police come in to buy coffee; or that crack house that has been fortified to be protected from the intrusion of both police and rivals; or those residents who enjoy following behind, watching, questioning, and surveilling police while they

attempt to arrest a teenager from the 'hood; or that area of the 'hood where police refuse to drive down, but residents move through freely. This *only* becomes “immobility” within the necessary categorization of scholars and activists, police and government officials. But for South Central residents, this is life. You have to walk to school, you have to drive to work, you have to dodge the police, you have to catch the bus home. Immobility is an absolutely incomplete and reductive theorization of their lives.

LA Gang Tours is but one more expression of black and brown life, subjectivity, movement, and solidarity in the ghetto. The gang tours are a resistance to the objecthood of residents, which calls into the question the classificatory power of the city. The black and brown solidarity that emerges from the tour bus's movement holds with it the potentiality of creation and production, one that invites a redefinition of the city's elite, the ghetto, and its residents.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: OBJECTHOOD, SUBJECTHOOD, AND MOBILITY TODAY

I left Eatonville, the town of the oleanders, a Zora. When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl. I found it out in certain ways. In my heart as well as in the mirror, I became a fast brown--warranted not to rub nor run.

—Zora Neale Hurston, “How it feels to be Colored Me” (2013)

LA Gang Tours facilitates movements in which people consider, reify, and critique the racial politics of Los Angeles and the US as a whole. It is a process that shows that differential relations to mobility effect racialization. But importantly, LA Gang Tours equally highlights the racial antagonisms that exist between people of color and the white power structure of LA. In the process, the gang tours illustrate that radicalism is central—rather than secondary—to black and brown life in Los Angeles. This is not to say that *all* people of color are “activists,” but that their being contradicts that of whiteness (Wilderson, 2003, 2010). And since whiteness is so reliant on mobility (chapter two and three), the mobility of people of color is a radical threat to the assumed fixity of whiteness (chapter four). If anything, the tours show that people of color in LA, and the United States as a whole, have and must continue to consider the importance of mobility for their radicalism. The “controversy” of the gang tours is not solely related to its supposed exploitation, but also the fact that it is a public declaration of black and brown people moving to, through, and beyond South Central, an act the city has historically devoted significant resources to prevent.

South Central is a socio-political construct, one founded on racism. The tour guides work within the confines of that racialized system to change their fortunes. They offer a tour to a group of mostly white people through the ghetto, in ways read as exploitative, racist, and zoological, all

in hopes that they will end racism, exploitation, and zoologicalism. Is the tour contradicting itself or are there cracks in the racist system that forced black and brown people into the South Central community in the first place, cracks that reveal race as less fixed in place or in set identities and more contextually identified with specific bodies and spaces? These cracks, of course, do not have to be realized as the goal or intention of the tour guides. Instead, I show the cracks reveal themselves through the movements of LA Gang Tours, which is inseparable from the racism of Los Angeles that has justified the privileged movement of white people through the city.

For this concluding chapter, I will summarize the previous chapters. I will then end by applying my three subclaims to contemporary situations rarely addressed within mobility studies, including, but not limited to, Mike Brown and the National Immigrant Youth Association. First, I approached LA Gang Tours through my rereading of mobility studies and critical race studies. In the first chapter, I examined both areas of study and uncovered the ways I would extend them for my research. Through combining the strengths and weaknesses of critical race studies and mobility studies, I developed a definition of mobility and transportation for this dissertation: mobility describes the physical and metaphorical traversal of space as an act tied to the political ontologies of race in the US. I arrived at this definition through a critique of critical race studies, and its too simplistic binary of white-as-mobile and black-as-immobile—or the condition of the black body as spatially immobile or absurdly mobile (Johnson, 2013; Wilderson, 2010). Using mobility studies, I argued that immobility is another form of mobility and, thus, I explicate that immobility limits the theorization of blackness in critical race studies. Likewise, mobility studies too quickly assumes subjectivity, in ways that privilege the West. The theories of blackness in critical race studies contribute to complicating the whiteness of the mobile subject for mobility

studies. In effect, I combine critical race studies and mobility studies to show mobility is central to not only the forms of subjectivity in the West, but also the objecthood of some populations.

In the second chapter, I situate my rereading of critical race studies and mobility studies on LA Gang Tours to make a central claim: whiteness is structured on a privileged capability to control the movement of the self and the movement of the Other. The privilege of autonomous movement emerges in multiple ways, such as in tourism culture, but also the slave catcher and white flight involved the privileged movement of white people to, respectively, control the body and movement of black slaves or to control their own movement capabilities. The gang tours are nothing more than a contemporary example of white, privileged movement, as a group of mostly white tourists control the pace and scale of South Central life, for three hours, by simply moving through the 'hood. The central way this occurs is through the implementation of the Safe Passage ceasefire, where the white tourists are guaranteed more protection in South Central than black and brown residents. In effect, Safe Passage ensures that the tourists move in ways that differ from black and brown South Central residents based on the race of the tourists. It relatedly assumes that the white tourists are saving South Central, even more so than the actions of residents and rivals who enact the ceasefire.

The third chapter builds off the claim of the second chapter, and forwards a second related claim: white privileged movement not only defines whiteness, but also racially classifies the Other, which in the case of LA Gang Tours means blackness is what comes to define South Central. Alvaro Reyes (2012) similarly locates the racial categorization of “colonized/colonizer” in spatial segregatory policies implemented at the behest of white Europeans. Likewise, I posit that the movement of the white tourists re-locates blackness in South Central based on political identifications of blackness with this community. In the white tourist movement, South Central

becomes black in multiple ways: first, the tourists demand an image, or even a representation, of blackness on the tour. This emerges in the questions, narratives, and routes of the tour, much of which focus on the black gangs and history of black racial strife in South Central. But second, and maybe more important, the physical movement of the tour bus through South Central itself locates the community as capable of dissection and classification by the tourists. In short, the gang tour turns South Central over as an object for the tourists, an object that in the US has historically assumed the black body.

The fourth chapter adds a final claim about the articulations of movement and race: people of color move in ways that challenge white classificatory power, they move in ways that enact an alternative classification of racialized spaces and subjectivities that do not always back white supremacy, but challenge it. This reclassification often relies on the misunderstandings of whites, such as the white slave catchers and historians who thought the Underground Railroad was doomed because black slaves did not use maps or writing (McKittrick, 2008). Similarly, LA Gang Tours is largely depicted as exploitative or zoological in the media in ways that ignore the material effects of the gang tour for South Central. Through the tour bus's movement, residents are able to walk outside without fear of being shot at, rival gang members agree to truces with gangs that they have been warring with for 40 years, residents receive food and toys that they could not afford on their own, and a population deemed as idle and unproductive show that they can control their own means of production. In the process, the narrative that South Central is a space of inherent black and brown violence is challenged, as the tour guides show their capacity for creativity and peace. This narrative is shown alongside the inherent violence of whiteness, materialized in policing, mapping, and limiting the opportunities of South Central.

For this final concluding chapter, I will resituate the three claims of this dissertation in more contemporary examples, to consider how mobility remakes race in ways that continue and challenge objecthood. Five examples will be highlighted: the case of Michael Brown, the case of Trayvon Martin, the Jennifer Cramblett case, the Huey P. Newton Gun Club, and the National Immigrant Youth Alliance. I chose these examples for their contradictions and overlaps, to show the different ways that mobility is central to the political ontologies of race in the United States. The importance of race and mobility does not not have to relate to spectatorship moments, like LA Gang Tours, but it also impacts the daily lives of people of color in the US.

M.Y.O.B.W.B., or Minding Your Own Business While Black

Who can walk down the middle of the street without being shot by the police? Who can walk home through a gated community without looking suspicious? Who can drive through a neighborhood like the Valley without being dragged from their car and beaten half to death? These questions have racial and mobile implications, largely because they provide a lens into what constitutes whiteness in the United States. Chapter two's claim of autonomous movement as productive of whiteness is not something that stays on LA Gang Tours, but impacts the lives of people throughout the US. The ability to control the mobility of oneself and of the Other is a testament to one's white privilege. Thus, violence can occur because black bodies are "out of place," or at least black bodies are in a place deemed as dangerous for white people.

On August 9th, an unarmed, black teenager named Michael Brown was murdered in Ferguson, MO by a white police officer, Darren Wilson. Brown had supposedly stolen cigars from a store,⁶ but Wilson admits that he did not know this when he pulled him over (Desmond-Harris, 2014), leading many to presume that Brown was shot and killed by Wilson for the crime

⁶ There are reports that Brown paid for the cigars (OllieGarkey, 2014) and others that he stole them (Desmond-Harris, 2014).

of being black. On that day, Wilson approached Brown and his friend Dorian Johnson from his patrol car as the two young black men walked in the middle of the street. At this time words were reportedly exchanged between Wilson and Brown. Conflicting reports exist about what happened next. Police officials report that Brown grabbed inside the police car for Wilson's gun and began punching the police officer, which caused Wilson to fire on Brown, shooting him six times, three times in the head (Horwitz & Kindy, 2014). But the eyewitness reports tell a very different story. Eye witnesses state that after the initial verbal exchange between Wilson and Brown, Wilson reached out from his police patrol car and grabbed Brown, which caused Brown to struggle to release himself from Wilson's grip:

At this point eyewitnesses report they heard the sound of an initial gunshot inside the police car. Despite this, it seems that Brown successfully freed himself from Wilson's hold and was able to turn away from the police car and start running. As he was running away a second shot rang out that hit Brown. Brown it seems then stopped, dropped to his knees, put his hands up, and (again, according to eyewitness accounts) in front of a number of people from the neighborhood pleaded with the police, "please don't shoot me!" Brown's pleas seem to have been to no avail, as at least five more shots are said to have hit Brown in both his torso and head, killing him instantly. (Reyes, 2014)

Despite prosecutor Robert McCulloch's dismissal of the eye witness reports that do not back Wilson's testimony (Nolan, 2014)—and his allowance of the reports that did back Wilson—of interests about these eyewitnesses that contradict Wilson's report is that many of them did not know each other. Still, multiple people recount similar stories about what happened to Brown. For at least five eyewitnesses (Emomosele, 2014), Michael Brown was running away from the police car when he was shot, turned around with his hands up and pleaded for the officer not to shoot, to which Wilson, who gotten out of his car now, continued firing until Brown was dead.

Police reports initially stated that Brown was approached by Wilson for "robbing" a convenience store—but during his testimony Wilson admitted to not knowing about an alleged robbery. Thus, hearing Johnson's account of the murder of his friend—who Johnson notes was

no perfect person—he and Brown were pulled over for the crime of “walking while black,” as Wilson, Johnson states, pulled up and told them to “get the fuck on the sidewalk” (Emomosele, 2014). Trying to explain that they were just minutes away from their destination caused officer Wilson to back up his car and ask “what did you say?” Thus, in the initial attempt to control the movement of Brown and Johnson, and the presumed audacity that they did not do what the white officer asks of them immediately, Michael Brown’s body was destroyed, justifiably by the law. Again, this is not Agamben’s “suspension of the law,” as by all accounts, the law is behind Wilson, justifying the rightful murder of the black teenager. Instead, Brown’s presumed defiance, his audacity to not move the way when he is told is all that is required to kill him.

Ultimately, Darren Wilson enacted his right to control the movement of Michael Brown, a control that maintains social order. In Wilson’s patrolling and his violence, he identifies with whiteness in the same way that the murderers of Latasha Harlins and Israel Hernandez do.⁷ The family of Brown and the protestors in Ferguson and nationwide, then, continue to fight an uphill battle in their calls for justice for Michael Brown, since they are fighting a racial and systematic right that allows some people to be destroyed for minding their own business. And the fact that Wilson is a police officer only furthers this right: “Federal law sets a high bar in bringing civil rights charges against a police officer because prosecutors must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the officer intended to violate someone’s constitutional rights” (Horwitz & Kindy, 2014). The difficulty of charges being brought against a police officer became more than evident on November 24th, when a grand jury did not indict Wilson of *any* charges, despite the fact that his own statements have changed at least three times since the incident (Shalz, 2014). Thus, federal law includes the white right to control the movement of black people.

⁷ For more information on Latasha Harlins, see Alex Alonso’s (2010) work. For more information on Israel Hernandez, see the recent article in the *The Huffington Post* (2014).

Similar issues plagued another case in 2012, when Trayvon Martin was murdered by George Zimmerman. Prosecutors tried unsuccessfully to show Zimmerman committed a hate crime in his murder of Martin, but “Under federal law for hate crimes, prosecutors have to show that someone has been victimized intentionally because of a racial or other bias” (Horwitz & Kindy, 2014). Similar to Brown, in 2012, the news media was flooded with the story of Trayvon Martin’s death. Martin, a 17-year-old black teenager, was walking through a gated community, returning to his father’s house, when he was approached by Zimmerman, a then-28-year-old neighborhood watchman, who called 911 to report that Martin “looked suspicious,” or looked as if he was trying to break into people’s houses, according to Zimmerman. After being repeatedly told by the 911 operator not to follow Martin, Zimmerman did the opposite, eventually ending up in a physical confrontation that left Martin, again unarmed, with a fatal bullet wound to his chest.

Initially once the police responded, Zimmerman claimed self-defense under Florida’s controversial “stand your ground” law, and was released by the responding officers after only five hours of interrogation (CNN Library, 2014). But, with building pressure from media, family, and grassroots organizations, Zimmerman eventually faced criminal charges of second-degree murder. During the summer of 2013, a six-woman jury found Zimmerman not guilty of second-degree murder or the lesser charge of manslaughter (CNN Library, 2014). Again, the crime that Martin committed appears to be walking while black, a crime that the jury seemed to agree that Zimmerman had the right to control. This is disproportionately a white right to control blacks, in Florida especially, as there are example of how “stand your ground” rights are unevenly applied depending on one’s race (Wallis, 2014). For example, a black woman from Jacksonville, FL named Marrisa Alexander fired warning shots to prevent a physical assault from her husband and

was sentenced to 20 years in prison; she was recently released after serving two years, but she is still required to be on house arrest for another two years (Sanders, 2014).

Although both the murders of Martin and Brown have gone unpunishment, there is a consistent theme in each murder: black people can be interrogated and destroyed for little to no cause, specifically when it comes to their movement. Walking in spaces that can be deemed as white, or as controlled by whites, then, is a dangerous practice for black people. These practices, I argue, say more about whiteness than blackness. For example, Zimmerman, a “white Latino,” *identifies* with whiteness via his murder of Trayvon Martin. This is not a phenotypical whiteness, it is not a fixed whiteness *inside* Zimmerman’s body. It is a political whiteness, structured on the fact that Zimmerman can control where he moves and control where Martin moves. Zimmerman becomes white in his capability to control the movement of Martin, who is not a subject, but an object capable of interrogation, dissection, and ultimately untimely physical death. The murder of black objects, then, does not require police to detain Zimmerman until there is a trial, it does not require investigation or excessive questioning, it does not even need the law to be suspended. Trayvon Martin’s death is a part of society’s law (Zimmerman faced charges *only* because of pressure), because black death is necessary for the maintenance of whiteness. In this light, black mobility is less something that civil society wants to stop. It *encourages* black movement, or at least allows it, in order to justify violence as a necessary reaction against the black body.

The black body is destroyable less because of immobility but mobility. This is a black mobility that must be at the behest of whiteness, it must be calculated, controlled, and measured, as doing so defines the limits, boundaries, and life of whiteness. Thus, the crime of walking while black works to redraw the privileges of whiteness, as something that is enjoyed by very specific people at very specific times. Wilson and Zimmerman are similar (or identify with

whiteness) in their right to tell Brown and Martin where they can and cannot move, and ultimately their right to kill unarmed black teenagers.

White Mobility and Becoming Black

Assumed in controlling the movement of Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown comes an inherent classification of them as black bodies, and thus, deserving of their social and physical death. This occurs in the teenagers' presumed suspiciousness that warrants their following by Darren Wilson and George Zimmerman in the first place, but also in the events that occurred after their deaths, events that continue to paint Brown and Martin as "thugs," and, thus, worthy of violent ends. One of the more ridiculous examples of this occurred as one Kansas City, MO police officer posted a picture he claimed to be of Michael Brown, holding guns with a wad of money in his mouth, to which the officer asked something to the effect of "how innocent could Michael Brown be?" The problem, of course, was that this picture was *not* of Michael Brown, but an Oregon murder suspect (KPTV, 2014). Relatedly, the constant assumption that Brown "robbed" a convenience store ignores the police's own definition of a robbery as a violent crime in which the victim fears for their life (a felony), downplaying the crime that Brown would be charged with, shoplifting (a misdemeanor). In fact, it was not the store clerk who called the police, but a customer (Desmond-Harris, 2014). Implied in both of these examples is the assumption that Brown, despite being an unarmed teenager, must have done *something* to cause his own death, he is always-already criminal. Judith Butler (1993) notes that similar arguments were made about Rodney King's beating by the LAPD: the jury, after reviewing the tape, felt that King was the aggressor, and he could have stopped the beating anytime that he wanted to. Thus, black bodies are assumed as inherently violent, and it takes white people to put them back in their place via violence and the related classification of that black body as the actual aggressor.

In chapter three, I argue that with the privilege of autonomous white movement comes a white right to classify the racial Other. It is in taken-for-granted movements of white people that they begin to say who is, and what is, black. Transatlantic slavery is, of course, the most extreme example of this, as those people abovedeck became white and those belowdeck would become black (Smallwood, 2009). In a more recent case, Jennifer Cramblett comes to mind. Cramblett is a white, lesbian from Uniontown, OH who is suing a Chicago-area sperm bank, because she was artificially impregnated with the wrong sperm: that of a black man. This interesting case has received much attention, because it takes on multiple issues, such as the control of women's bodies, the policing of lesbian sexuality, systematic rape, and white privilege. Each of these positions has merit, but I will focus on that of white privilege for argument's sake.

Although she does not state it as explicitly, the central claim of Cramblett's suit is that she and her partner are ill-equipped to address their daughter Payton's blackness. In moving through their hometown of Uniontown, Payton is starting to face racial discrimination from Cramblett's relatives and friends in what Cramblett argues is a "racially intolerant town." In addition, Payton is also in a space that does not openly welcome her blackness, according to Cramblett, who states she now has to travel into black, "unwelcoming" neighborhoods to get Payton's hair done (Clifton, 2014). According to the lawsuit, and in contrast to Cramblett's argument that this is "not about race," the couple is faced with an admittedly steep learning curve of how to address blackness, and seek financial compensation in order to relocate their daughter into a more "inclusive" neighborhood and away from the racial intolerance of Uniontown.

Of course, one of the problematic implications of Cramblett's lawsuit is that racism is perfectly fine to be exposed to had their baby been white. As has been argued (Clifton, 2014), the blackness of Payton is interfering with the whiteness of her parents. But, still, something more

interesting, and less acknowledged, can be argued. I suggest that Payton's blackness is less so interfering with the whiteness of her parents; rather, Payton's blackness is actively produced by her parents' *white movement*, Payton is *becoming* black in the instances of her parents' mobility. When Cramblett moves Payton through Uniontown or through the supposedly "unwelcoming" black space, she is moving the weight of blackness with her child as well, who is constantly racially classified by her parent's panic, by Uniontown, and by the black neighborhood and its unspecified inability to welcome Payton and her parents. This is not an inherent blackness inside Payton's body, but a blackness that she will *become*, no matter where her parents move her but because of that mobility.

To an extent, the claim that Payton should live in a "more inclusive neighborhood" is really a claim that Cramblett can hopefully keep Payton from recognizing her blackness too soon. This, of course, is a ridiculous aspiration. What is going to contribute to Payton's blackness is when she looks back and finds out about this court case, when she learns that she was moved into her racially inclusive neighborhood by her parents simply because of the color of her skin, when she and her parents return to Uniontown and she does not fully understand why her family members treat her differently from the other children. Rather than her blackness being inside of her body, waiting to be discovered, in the privileged movement of her parents, Payton will become black, no matter if they win or lose their lawsuit. Either way, at some point in time it will be difficult for Payton not to view this situation through a lens of race, as her parents now seek to receive relocation funds to deal with a "problem," what reporter Matthew McKnight (2014) argues amounts to reparations that the US refuses to give to black people. Payton will, thus, face W.E.B. Du Bois's (2009) still relevant question: "How does it feel to be a problem?"

I do not seek to diminish the gendered power implications of male doctors controlling women's bodies, or to downplay the policing of homosexuality, as extremely conservative blog posts have noted that Cramblett's lesbianism is at fault for her and her partner receiving a black child—a punishment from God, the arguments go (Goff, 2014). Instead, I seek to show that even these examples hold implications of racism, as it is hard to imagine a case like this receiving national attention had Cramblett and her partner been black and they received a “mixed” baby. Likewise, the argument of Cramblett's sexuality as punishable by God assumes that blackness is a punishment for white people, it is an undesirable problem that would not have been an issue had they just been heterosexual. Whether Cramblett and her partner want to admit it or not, they are dealing with a racial issue, one that they play a role in instigating. Their movement into a more inclusive neighborhood or into a black neighborhood to get their daughter's hair done, then, further the racialized assumptions of those spaces, while equally furthering the processes of racialization their child will undergo.

When Objects Move

The Twitter hashtag #IfTheyGunnedMeDown has received much attention as of late. In particular, the hashtag has included many young black people posting two images of themselves: one where they may be drinking or smoking or doing something that the media might label as “inappropriate” and another where they may be graduating from high school or helping someone (Chappell, 2014). These images, placed side by side, are designed to be a critique of the media's selection of particular images of people like Trayvon Martin or Michael Brown, particularly the images where they may be smoking or holding up peace signs. The more “inappropriate” images have largely been selected by media outlets to justify the usage of violence against these black teenagers, who are portrayed as thugs, violent, and deserving of their deaths, whether armed or

not. In effect, #IfTheyGunnedMeDown challenges the classificatory power of the largely white media industry and its portrayal of unarmed, black victims of state and individual violence.

In a similar manner, the final claim of this dissertation asserts that people of color can move in ways that challenge white control of mobility and classificatory power, challenges that are often difficult for white people to categorize or misidentified by white people. This, again, has led to many whites and historians labeling the Underground Railroad as “ungeographic” (McKittrick, 2008) because black people did not use maps or writing. But being ungeographic only increased the success of black escapism in ways that called into question the Westernized writing and mapping systems as the unquestioned tools of transportation. The challenge to white monopolies of mobility and technologies of transportation appears to be a consistent act of black radical politics. Relatedly, #BlackLivesMatter has focused much of its approach to radicalism at bridges, malls, and highways, disrupting the flows of traffic and ultimately bringing forward the normality of destroying black lives for white moderates (Mitropoulos, 2014). This mirrors early street talks of the Black Panther Party. With cofounder Bobby Seale as the orator, the Party often organized talks near major roadways in Oakland to cause traffic jams (Bloom & Martin, 2013).

The movement of people of color, as a challenge to whiteness or to challenge white movement, persists in ways that extend well beyond LA Gang Tours. For example, the National Immigrant Youth Alliance (NIYA) is an undocumented immigrant-led, youth organization that infiltrates detainment centers to report on the conditions of them. It is a grassroots movement that provides a necessary radical challenge to the notion of “illegal immigration” by calling for better conditions for all immigrants, whether documented or not. Another tactic of the organization has been purposefully “illegal” movements across the border. In 2013, NIYA organized a protest at the US/Mexico border. Specifically, 30 undocumented immigrants attempted to cross from

Mexico “into Laredo, Texas under the banner of the Dream 30, an effort meant to bring attention [to] the 1.7 million-plus people deported during President Barack Obama’s first term in office” (Hesson, 2014). In this case, the mobility of these activists not only disrupts the fixity of the border, but also calls into question the politics of a post-race society, as the nation’s first black president has been responsible for some of the most aggressive deportation politics—although the immigration executive is a major shift in Barack Obama’s approach to immigration (Liptak, 2014).⁸ The presidency has been the seat of white masculinity in the US (Shome, 2000), so a black president can maintain the same white supremacist goals of protecting the border that the position is structured by historically. NIYA is one of many organizations that challenge this supremacy by the usage of mobility.

Relatedly, a black organization in Dallas, TX, not receiving much attention in the national news, is providing a direct response to the murder of young people of color by marching through the streets carrying openly weapons. The organization, the Huey P. Newton Gun Club, is a direct protest aimed at police violence against black and brown people in Texas and the rest of the country. As noted by their name, the organization takes a page from the Black Panther Party, and calls for self-policing of their own communities and the end of militarized police violence in the US which disproportionately effects black and brown people in Texas (Chasmar, 2014).

More specifically, the organization’s website states:

In the past twelve years, the Dallas Police have shot and killed over seventy unarmed individuals. Those victims are primarily Black and Hispanic, as indicated by research released last week, with 2014 shootings on track to reach a record high. The Dallas Police who perpetrated these crimes against the people have sailed through a white-washed

⁸ Some aspects of the immigration executive order will allow undocumented parents of American citizens to stay and work in the US legally and an extension for deportation deferment. For more information on the immigration executive order, see Kevin Liptak’s (2014) article “5 Questions you should be Asking about Obama and Immigration.”

Internal Affairs and Grand Jury process, designed specifically to maintain the status quo: the murder of individuals based on race. (hueyp_newton, 2014)

One of the ways the Huey P. Newton Gun Club protests militarized police violence is through physical movement via marching through the streets of Dallas carrying shotguns and rifles, based on the open carry laws of Texas (Chasmar, 2014)—very similar to a strategy implemented by the Panthers in the 1970s. During one of the the club’s marches, the organization walked down MLK Boulevard in Dallas, as automobiles honked and people waved at them, before “They wound up at a restaurant where police officers were eating lunch” (Chasmar, 2014). In such instances, mobility has a different meaning: it is uncomfortably *not* under white controls and, as such, a challenge to the autonomous white movement that has largely structured the United States.

What do these moments mean for whiteness in Dallas, or at the border, or in the country as a whole? These are examples of multiple people, of many races, moving in ways that are not sanctioned by the social order, voluntarily giving themselves up for detainment at the borders, and walking through the streets with weapons drawn. These, of course, are moments that show the supremacy of whiteness is questioned through purposfully open, bold, and misunderstood material movements (such as walking, marching, or even entering a store). Here, crossing the border or crossing the street is not meaningless, but radical acts that undermine the fixity of whiteness and call for a redrawing of blackness and brownness.

The Persistence of Mobility

Hauntingly, the final walks of Trayvon Martin in 2012 and Michael Brown in 2014 are bookends to the 2013 release of the film *Fruitvale Station*. The film documents the 2009 murder of Oscar Grant, III by Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) police, a murder that was captured on cell phones, and shocked many, because Grant was shot in the back while in handcuffs on the ground at the BART station. *Fruitvale’s* story is rare in the Hollywood movie industry. The film

is important and interesting because it details black death not as an abnormality, but as a normal occurrence that structures the lives of people of color. The movie details the final day of Grant, III, as he attempts to transform his life for the better of himself, his girlfriend, his daughter, and his mother. He gives up selling drugs, he attempts to return to his legal job, and he vows to stop cheating on his girlfriend—and the audience is left to understand that *none* of these good deeds matters, because we already know the end, we know that Grant, III is going to die because he is a young black male. Thus, the film does not shy away from social death, rather death structures his life. The film details how social death *moves* with Grant, III until the very end. Importantly, this death does not end with Grant, III's body. It continues on with his mother, with his girlfriend, and with his daughter, the women of color who continue to live with the fact that their partner, son, father, and any black person, can be murdered for their race. Thus, social death continues with these women even as they navigate the world today.

At the heart of these cases is the importance of mobility to race in the US even today. Rather than something that existed in the past and no longer effects people today, movement continues to play a productive role in the way people identify and are identified racially. When walking across the street or through a specific gated community makes someone suspicious there are racial implications in that claim. Or when one's movement begins to define the boundaries of what their own child can be, it shows the importance of blackness and whiteness to society; thus, the whiteness of one's parents is not enough to stunt the blackness that will become. Likewise, as the protests that followed the deaths of Grant, III, Martin, and Brown show, the fixity of race as a whole is up for debate when people of color move in ways threatening to and not under the thumb of white control. #BlackLivesMatter is one expression of the lack of universality of white movement, as its challenges consistently disrupt who can move where and when.

The benefit of critical race studies for examining mobility studies involves a theorization of the implications of mobility for political ontological debate. Rather than race as beginning in the ontological instance of immobilization, mobility allows me to disrupt the fixity of space often associated with critical race studies. Yet, even in critical race studies, immobility constantly fails as an argument. For example, Gaye Theresa Johnson (2013) posits black and brown life in Los Angeles is structured by what she theorizes as “spatial immobilization.” Spatial immobilization takes into account the city’s political, economic, and geographic disenfranchisement of specific communities, whether through the history of racial segregation, the construction of freeways and highways, the taken-for-granted nature of police brutality, and racist and discriminatory housing policies. These relations structure the lives of people of color in Los Angeles today, meaning immobilization is “a form of spatial confinement...that would last generations” (Johnson, 2013, p. 97). But it does not take Johnson long to contradict her argument that immobility is nonwhite and mobility is white. Luisa Moreno, for example, was a Latina civil rights activist in the early- to mid-20th century, who challenged whiteness, citizenship, sexism, and capitalism. Because of her radical politics, Moreno was one of many brown people the US deemed “deportable”:

In 1950, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was thirteen years old, and averaged five—often highly publicized—trials per year in California. Its focus on un-American and subversive activities was based on the assumption that the Communist Party had infiltrated social programs such as those started by the New Deal and also influenced the strategies and intentions of social justice workers and organizations. The HUAC perceived the particular accumulation and deployment of Moreno’s experience, coupled with her sustained commitment to collective action among Black, Brown, and working-class white women, as sufficient justification for her deportation that year. (Johnson, 2013, p. 4)

Johnson says less about the negative implications of Moreno’s mobility, but her spatial immobilization does not account for deportation. And what is deportation but mobility?

Johnson uses David Harvey to make her argument of spatial immobilization.

Interestingly, Harvey's use of im/mobility has long been critiqued in mobility studies scholarship (Massey, 1994; Sheller & Urry, 2006). More specifically, Harvey's sense of placelessness, which he attributes to "*the* postmodern condition," is revealed to be a Western, white male fear. Harvey assumes that he loses his place in ways that speak little to the dispossession of the impoverished people and people of color, whose labor in airports, highways, and waterways allow for his sense of placelessness to begin with. Harvey's mobility cares little for the Other. In response, Doreen Massey (1994) has asked, "To what extent, for instance, is this [postmodern condition] a predominantly white/First World take on things?" (p. 165). Specifically, she argues:

The point...is that much, if not all, of what has been written has seen this new [postmodern] world from the point of view of a (relative) elite. Those who today worry about a sense of disorientation and a loss of control must once have felt they knew exactly where they were, and that they *had* control. (1994, p. 165)

To consider the politics of spatial immobilization for brown people in Reform and well after, or for black people during Jim Crow and after—especially when relying on Harvey's conception of placelessness (Johnson, 2013)—is not the most effective way to theorize race for Los Angeles. Yet immobility has been the dominant way in which critical race studies has considered race for people of color. Using mobility studies, however, can allow for a theorization of blackness and brownness that does not privilege the binaries of mobility versus immobility, but rather shows their mutual constitution. Doing so is important because there are various instances where black people, who are theorized as immobile, use mobility to challenge whiteness.

Mobility studies has a very different problem. The issue, here, is not whether or not people are mobile versus immobile, but whether or not the racializing effects of mobility are equally applicable. Implied in the argument of the mobility studies "subject" is a largely white, Western understanding of subjectivity, one that assumes a flattened discussion of race in the US.

But, following critical race studies, it has been argued that while violence can happen to Western subjects, violence is never what *defines* Western subjectivity (Hartman, 1997; Wilderson, 2003). However, in terms of blackness in the US, the black subject's originary condition is reliant on the dehumanization that occurs via *movement* across the Black Atlantic on the Middle Passage. Similarly, Europeans became white via their right to move autonomously, and move the Other, in the process. Thus, mobile subjectivity is never equally experienced.

This dissertation offers a black mobility study to address these different relationships to mobility. So it is not just that Martin is shot by police in a white space (gated community), but blackness *moves* with Martin's body, Brown's body, Payton's body, Grant, III's body, no matter where they are. This persistence of blackness to move with bodies shows the importance of movement for racialization processes. It also shows more work can be done to examine the multiple ways mobility can be considered as productive of race in less obvious ways and well beyond LA Gang Tours. This project is an opening to this discussion of black mobility studies.

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