Decolonizing the Look: Viewing Photographic Images of the Civil Rights Movement

by

Victoria Littman

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of PhD
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

Copyright by Victoria Littman, November 2000
The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author’s permission.

L’auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L’auteur conserve la propriété du droit d’auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-53708-0
Decolonizing the look: viewing civil rights movement photographs
PhD, 2001, Victoria Littman
Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, OISE, University of Toronto

Abstract

Documentary photography of the Civil Rights movement is currently being re-circulated in films, books, museums, gallery exhibits, the popular media and commercial advertising. These photographs commemorate a time of struggle over race, rights and significant moments in the African American struggle for freedom. This thesis examines how it might be possible to view these photographs through a pedagogy of respect and solidarity.

The thesis uses a case study approach to viewing three images of the Civil Rights movement. Using principles of anti-racist and feminist theory, I ask how to engage with these images. The first chapter situates the look within the social history of photography in order to explore some of the structures which influence engagements with photographic images. Each of the subsequent viewing chapters is organised as a series of looks. Through these progressive looks, my viewing practices are exposed as they engage with historical material related to the struggle for liberation that the photograph commemorates.

The process of decolonizing the look addresses complex and interrelated forms of meaning making because the look is situated within the psychic dynamic between the gaze and the screen and within the field of social relations. I use a theory of witnessing to direct certain choices regarding the kinds of histories that engage my look. I use autobiography to uncover the ways my look resists the learning that these testimonies and histories provide?

One important aspect of building toward a pedagogy of respect and solidarity is the turning of my research look onto images closely related to my own social identity before
viewing across racial boundaries. The purpose is to shift the grounds of psychic and social understanding that shape my socially located look. I view first an image of Ms. Rita Schwerner who struggled against white supremacy and segregation, and second an image of a KKK woman. The third image is of Ms. Elizabeth Eckford one of the nine African American students who desegregated a high school in Little Rock Arkansas. The three case studies together form a theory and praxis for a pedagogy of solidarity and respect.
Acknowledgements

PhD dissertations are lonely journeys, although they are usually not undertaken entirely in solitude. I wish to thank my colleagues at OISE who challenged me in many ways and who helped shape this project. I wish to thank my supervisor, Roger Simon, whose patience, wisdom and scholarly rigour has guided me through much of this endeavour. I wish also to thank Kari Dehli whose keen insights and criticisms improved this project. Sandra Moffat’s friendship and collaborative questioning buoyed me through the writing process. Ruth Groff’s friendship also supported me throughout this journey. Janice Hladki and Marnina Gonick also inspired and assisted me. Last, but most importantly, I wish to thank Anton Marcu, whose patience, brilliance, love and friendship sustained and nourished me through out this difficult undertaking.
Table of Contents

ii  Abstract
iv  Acknowledgments
v   Table of Contents
vi  Preface

1  Chapter One  Introduction

29  Chapter Two  Photography and the Look
29   The First Look—What Is a Photograph?
36   The Second Look—Who Is the Photographer?
40   The Third Look—Social Movement Photography
43   The Fourth Look—Resistance

51  Chapter Three  Looking for Rita
51   The Image
52   The First Look—Seeing the Image and Wrestling with Liberal Aestheticism
61   The Second Look—The Conundrums of Art Documentary and Bourgeois History
84   The Third Look—Exposing Femininity’s Position
97   The Fourth Look—Bringing Lynching into the Frame
104  Conclusion

106  Chapter Four  Forcing the Look to See the Women’s Klan
107   The Image
107   The First Look
110   The Second Look—Remembering the Whiteness of Childhood
127   The Third Look—Seeing the Klan in Historical Perspective
152   The Fourth Look—Seeing the Unbearable
157   An After Look

158  Chapter Five  Looking Toward Witnessing Ms. Eckford
158   The Image
160   The First Look—Seeing Through Emotions, Working Toward Witnessing
165   The Second Look—Uncovering Anxieties
179   The Third Look—Attending to Testimony
195   One Last Look

197  Chapter Six  Looking Toward a Conclusion

207  References
Preface

This dissertation explores a pedagogy of the look as it views photographic images. The research methodology follows a case study approach, using three photographs which serve to focus the look. Unfortunately, these three photographs cannot accompany this text due to copyright restrictions by Charles Moore, the photographer of two of these pictures. Mr. Moore refuses to grant permission for the use of his photographs for non-profit purposes. Consequently the photographs cannot be included in this text. The reader may note the irony in this circumstance as you engage with a strain of the argument running through this dissertation, namely that these photographs have become commodified in complicated and problematic ways. This commodification has implications for an ethics of engagement and for a look that seeks to see in solidarity with the movement represented by the photographs. Mr. Moore’s interdiction thus ironically supports this vein of the argument. The reader may wish to view the photographs before, during or after reading this dissertation. The photos are readily available in the public sphere. The pictures of Rita Schwerner and the KKK can be found in Charles Moore’s Powerful Days. The picture of Ms. Eckford can be found in Kashers’ The Civil Rights Movement: A photographic history, 1954-68. Another version of the Ms. Eckford picture can be found in the Beals’ Memoire Warriors Don’t Cry: A searing memoir of the battle to integrate Little Rock’s Central High. (See the reference section for complete bibliographic information on all of these books).
Chapter One

Introduction

In her 1986 photographic exhibition entitled "Accused/Blowtorch/Padlock," Pat Ward Williams engages with a picture of the burned and tortured body of an African-American man. Using text to create a dialogue between picture and word, she engages with framed photographs taken from the book, *The Best of "Life" Magazine*. Her image/text deals with the image, the image-making process and the neutralizing effect of the rhetoric of documentary. One of the questions her exhibit asks, "'WHO took this picture? Oh, God, Life answers- page 141-no credit'" (Ward Williams in Rony, 1996, p. 216). Her irony subverts the objectivity of documentary practice, the complicity of the photographic witness, and the alignment of the white look (as well as white supremacy's discourses) with the Logos of God (Silverman, 1996).

In her discussion of Ward Williams' work, Rony draws attention to the ways in which historical documents "exploit the pain of one's own people" (Rony, 1996, p. 216). Ward Williams' and Rony's compelling questions turn the tables on liberal discourses that reinstate hierarchies through representation. Ward Williams' photographic exhibition makes use of text and photography to provoke, to theorize, to document and to photograph a resistant form of looking and "talking back" (hooks, 1988, p.12) to images of violence against the black body. Her art interrogates the complex ways that representations of violence against the black male body reside within the public sphere, veiled by discourses of liberalism and white male supremacy; she deals simultaneously with the way those discourses effect black subjectivity, and the way representation can reinstate white supremacy; her exhibit engages with a particular
photograph of such violence in order to expose, resist and witness such complex and ordinary systems of domination.

In concert with Pat Ward Williams’ photographic exhibit, in “Can You Be Black and Look at This? Reading the Rodney King Video(s),” Elizabeth Alexander (1995) argues for a “collective memory” constructed through an interplay between the experiences of living with state-sanctioned violence against African Americans, and the use of storytelling to bear witness to surviving, remembering and resisting (p.84). Utilizing different mediums, both Ward Williams and Alexander theorize the impact and implications of bearing witness to the recursive inscription of domination through violent attacks on the black male body. Both cultural workers engage with popular representations of racialized violence while theorizing the possibilities of transforming the material practices of domination embedded within representational modes of address (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 22). Their work articulates various positions within a collective black resistance while also challenging representational structures.

In contrast to this black consciousness work, both cultural workers acknowledge the ways in which white subjectivities may distance themselves from this violence while simultaneously producing and/or consuming it. The point of their dialogue with white and black collective readings is not to reify or essentialize an existing binary; on the contrary, it is to work through the implications of the ways in which representations may both reinforce and challenge the social relations of domination. These works purposefully add to a legacy of collective black resistance and art. Additionally, through “analytical dialogue” with representations, both works make explicit particular modes of white privilege and white racist violence embedded in the public circulation of images of racist violence (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 135).
In her study of anthropological films, F.T. Rony (1996) also takes up Ward Williams’ challenge, questioning the relationship between social identities and knowledge productions. She asks, “What is the task of the postcolonial scholar examining the history of media representation of native peoples and people of colour” (p. 216)? Rony argues that the identity of the viewer, rather than being inconsequential to the engagement with the image, is, on the contrary, a significant and crucial aspect of a person’s encounter with an image. She states:

The identity of the viewer is crucial to the reception of photography and film: the Observer/Observed dichotomy implodes when the Observer realizes that he or she is the Observed. Moreover, the arrogance of Western culture which looks at a *Life* magazine photograph of a lynched man as merely an objective document of historical brutality is emphatically called into question by the Observer who knows that this is somebody’s loved one, this could be my loved one, this could be me. How could this photo have been taken? (p. 216)

Rony explores what others have also argued, namely that black viewers engage with film and photography differently: from different social positions, for divergent purposes, with disparate memories and with distinct affective responses (Collins 1991; Davis, 1990; hooks, 1992; Mayne in Ellsworth, 1997; Rony 1996). However, in these three examples from Rony, Alexander and Ward Williams, the dissonance between the viewer’s subjectivity and the mode of address of the image opens a space for a critical examination of the implications of such a mode of address and the articulation of different forms of looking. Both the Rodney King video and the lynching photograph’s modes of address depend in part on a subject’s ability to distance themselves from that violated body. This distance is something more than simply understanding the fact that the picture is not the event itself. It may be a separation both dependent on and productive of a racialized social position. In the cases of Alexander, Rony and Ward Williams, the documentary
photograph depends on black viewing subjects distancing themselves from the memory of the legacy of that violence and the everyday potential of its unfurling (Collins, 1991; Essed, 1991; Morrison, 1990). Furthermore, it requires a distancing from the everyday practices used to avoid and diffuse the potential erupting of that violence (Alexander, 1995; Essed, 1991). Ward Williams, Alexander and Rony build on Fanon's observation of the clash between the bodily schema of the black man and the collective white representations of blackness (Silverman, 1996; Fanon, 1963). They ask, how is it possible to resist the double or triple subjugation of the social subject within the image? They refuse the positions structured through the representational mode of address. Their work simultaneously makes the case for a collective resistance while focussing attention on the problematic and racist mode of address embedded within the images.

As Ellsworth (1997) notes, a mode of address:

invites...[a viewer] into the construction of knowledge from a particular social and political point of view. This makes “viewing experience” and the senses that we make of films not simply voluntary and idiosyncratic, but relational—a projection of particular kinds of relations of self to self, and between self, others, knowledge, and power (p. 25).

Thus, in Rony's example, the viewer may accept the mode of address. If the viewer happens to be white that acceptance may prevent an understanding of the implosion of observer/observed boundaries which she unearths from her different social location. Hence, the arrogance of Western culture may go unsuspected and the white observer may not reflect on the fact that this was somebody's loved one. In another scenario the white viewer may reflect on the fact that this was someone's beloved but not question either the culture that produces the violence or the arrogance of the document. In other words, the link between Western culture, the mode of address and racist violence, may elide the viewer's act of making meaning. The look itself, as a
psychic structure that includes one’s self-concept and one’s relationship to others, circumscribes that meaning-making process. For the post-colonial scholar positioned as white, these shifts in viewing raise important issues for the relationship of social position to research, representation and pedagogy. Ellsworth discusses the retelling of a near lynching from two different viewing positions: from that of the survivor and from that of a white woman whose family was present for the event. In that discussion, she articulates a position on subjectivity and social positions that applies to this dissertation.

To specify a locatable, decidable, particular who that we should be as we read and respond to these stories is to take up an “orientation toward autonomy, an assertion that knowledge involves the abandonment of a network of ethical obligation, to have knowledge is to gain self-sufficiency” (Readings, 1996, p.156 in Ellsworth, 1997, pp.154-155). No individual can be just, Readings argues. Justice is not something you are, it is something you do within a specific historical and cultural network of social obligation. “To do justice is to recognize that the question of justice exceeds individual consciousness, cannot be answered by an individual moral stance” (Readings, 1996, p.162 in Ellsworth, 1997, pp.154-155).

This research project explores a methodology that might open the possibility for using the white look for such a purpose.

George Dei and others suggest that “conventional ‘identity politics’ prioritized an essentialized, ahistorical and nonmaterialist identity” (Dei, 1996, p. 59). This occurred “by focussing an overemphasis on the personal” (p. 59). Dei argues for “politicizing identity” (p. 59). Toward that end he suggests that “it is important for a discussion to be made between ‘who am I?’ and ‘what is to be done’” (p. 59)? In other words, identity questions can become mired in “who am I?” discussions. The question of identity should instead be linked to the implications, consequences and ethics of identity. Throughout this research project, these two
questions are bound together: Who am I, and what is to be done? Personally, the way I was able to make meaning of my bi-cultural relationship to Ashkenazi and Anglo-American cultures was to explore the interrelationship between these two questions. As an educator in multi-cultural schools in California and Toronto, the importance of working through these questions so that they inform pedagogy has been made clear.

Ward Williams (in Rony 1996), Rony (1996) and Alexander (1995) use their identities to think through what is to be done with images of racist violence. Their arguments address the pain of knowing from their own social locations. Their work takes on the difficult tasks of both articulating resistant strategies and of realizing the trauma of their knowledge. In this way they politicize looking. Sandra Butler contends, “It isn’t so much a question of not knowing as how to bear what you know” (in McKenna, 1996, p.129). Because some knowledge comes from experience within the social relations of domination, bearing what you know may actually radically disrupt the modes of address buried within the image and expose covert relations between Western forms of domination and representation (Alexander, 1995; Rony, 1996; Russo, 1991). Decolonizing the look, that process through which my white subjectivity envisions itself and its others, may have a two-fold significance. Interrogating the look may shift stagnating identity debates toward integrating political choices with questions of subjectivity. Simultaneously, interrogating the look may open a discussion concerning subjectivity and its relationship to forms of social mediation such as photography. However, simply imitating the work of these women and hoping that good intentions will smooth over the differences of our subject locations will provide merely for another layer of domination embedded in the research relations of my own project.

If, as McKenna reminds us, Butler’s work is concerned with “helping women (and
herself) tolerate the consequences of consciousness we already have” (McKenna, 1996, p.129), this project concerns itself more with bringing to consciousness certain unconscious knowledge that subjects develop in relation to visual representations, and within that conscious state, working through issues of witnessing, respect, solidarity and accountability. This research asks, what are the consequences of those desires, investments and relational positions that map lived identity relations and how are they activated through material viewing practices? In order to accomplish this politicizing of identity in relation to visual representation, I will work with Kaja Silverman’s (1996) concepts of the look, the screen and the gaze.

In *The Threshold of the Visible World*, Kaja Silverman (1996) rereads critical theories of the visual to revision particular films and the sociality of the visible. Presenting a method of viewing while simultaneously demarcating theoretical strands that influence her reading, she also articulates the points at which she selects different stances because of their political implications. Silverman makes clear that the look is both interminably tied to historicized social orders and paradoxically is a potential site of resistance to the dominating relations of those social structures. Rereading Lacan in the context of film theory and theories of the visual, Silverman takes pains to address the paradox of the distinctions between representational forces and viewing practices and their imbrication both with each other and with the social relations of domination.

Within her version of the Lacanian symbolic system, the look is related to subjectivity but is also distinct from it. Silverman explicates the difference between the look, the gaze and the screen in order to articulate the psychic processes whereby subjects engage with, and become part of, the socially constructed visible world. Silverman draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis to elucidate these terms while also critiquing particular aspects of Lacanian theory in order to propose her own theory of the productive power of the look. She carefully conceptualizes Lacanian universals with Crary’s history of vision.

Lacan’s concepts of the gaze, the look and the screen are metaphors for psychic relations. The gaze represents “sociality itself” (in Silverman, 1996, p.132) and “the presence of others” (in Silverman, 1996, p. 133). In Silverman’s (1996) reading of Lacanian theory, significantly, the gaze is “independent of an individual look, and exterior to the subject” (p. 134). In other words, the gaze cannot be embodied; it is a power that can be perceived and manipulated, but it is inherently different than the look. The look, on the other hand, is both embodied and situated within spectacle. In a sense, it is experienced by an individual while it is also one’s connection to and construction within the social world. The screen, as the third figure in this metaphoric system, mediates between the look and the gaze. Lacan emphasizes “the determining role it plays in the visual articulation of the subject” (in Silverman, 1996, p. 134).

The screen represents the site at which the gaze is defined for a particular society, and is consequently responsible both for the way in which the inhabitants of that society experience the gaze’s effects, and for much of the seeming particularity of that society’s visual regime. (Silverman, 1996, p.135)

In a sense, the look accesses the gaze through the screen while the gaze also activates the
look through the screen. Subjects constructed within this triangular, relational and psychic system, then, encounter representations which, in turn, have their own histories and structures.

Silverman (1996) links these psychic structures to representational systems in order to delineate her understanding of the possibility of the productive or resistant look. Her theory integrates current understanding of the relationality of identity and psychoanalytic approaches to representation. She clarifies her position on this potent look through her analysis of Harun Farocki’s 1988 film *Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges (Images of the World and the Inscription of War).* Arguing that Lacan emphasizes the relationality of subjectivity, she claims: “We depend upon the other not only for our meaning and our desires but also for our very confirmation of self. To ‘be’ is in effect ‘to be seen’.... [E]ven as we look, we are in the ‘picture,’ and, so a ‘subject of representation’” (p. 133). While she faults Lacan for the ahistoricism and universalization of his metaphorical system, which describes the ego’s development through relations to the visible, she faults Crary for confining his argument purely to the historical. In her own argument, she weaves the two together in order to situate both the representational image of photography and film within the history of the Western visual world and within the psychic structures of Western subjectivity.

Silverman (1996) traces Crary and Comolli’s argument that photography, rather than being simply a sequential outgrowth of the ever more accurate human use of technology as systems of vision, represents a shift which emphasized the difference between the camera and the eye and discredited the “privileged position” the eye held in earlier technologies such as the camera obscura (p.129). Crary calls this rupture a shift from “‘geometrical’ to ‘physiological’ optics” (Crary in Silverman,1996, p.128). “Photography and later cinema
prevailed” according to Crary, not because of their resemblance to human vision or their synchronicity with then current research on the eye, but rather, “because [they] maintained earlier pictorial codes, particularly those of perspective, making [them] an apparent extension of human vision, and resecuring the viewer in a position of visual authority” (Silverman, 1996, p.129). Silverman goes on to argue “that due to its association with a ‘true’ and ‘objective vision,’ the camera has been installed ever since the early nineteenth century as the primary trope through which the Western subject apprehends the gaze” (Silverman, 1996, p.135). Thus, the camera as a network of relations symbolizes the Western subject’s meeting with sociality.

While Lacan omits the material and historical specificity of the camera, Crary “omits...the gaze” (Silverman, 1996, p.131). In her own argument, Silverman (1996) makes present these omissions. Her ultimate point, however, is not to correct the theory but to consider the sociality of the visible field and to consider both the errant vulnerability of the look and its potential (p. 155). The look errs, according to Silverman, because of “its susceptibility to méconnaissance...[and] its resistance to absolute tyranny by the material practices that work to determine how and what it sees” (p. 155). The look gives rise to agency either through its vulnerability to misrecognition or through its desire to resist domination. Paradoxically, according to Silverman, these desires and vulnerabilities give the look its potential power within social systems of domination:

The look has all along possessed the capacity to see otherwise from and even in contradiction to the gaze. The eye is always to some degree resistant to the discourses which seek to master and regulate it, and can even, on occasion, dramatically oppose the representational logic and material practices which specify exemplary vision at a given moment in time. (p. 156)
Whereas the gaze structures difference through the screen and delimits not only hierarchical social relations but embodied and social forms of ideality, the look can “intervene within the field of vision” (Silverman, 1996, pp. 160-161). Farocki’s film demonstrates that the look can “see what is inapprehensible to the camera/gaze” and it can “alter what that apparatus photographs” (Silverman, 1996, p.161). The look, then, is the site for potential disruption of social forms of difference, of subjectivities formed through relations of domination, and of visual images.

The camera/gaze takes an image out of time. By freezing the moment within a frame, it memorializes that event. The camera makes eternal one moment but the look is constantly in flux, changing and integrating what it perceives with what it has known. Silverman stresses that the transformative power of the look depends in part on this temporal disjunction between it and the camera. “Allied to... memory... the look is located within desire, temporality and the body, it can reanimate and open to change what the camera/gaze would both mortify and memorialize” (Silverman, 1996, p.157, 160).

This study uses Silverman’s (1996) revisioning of the visible to work in parallel with the projects of Ward Williams (in Rony, 1996), Alexander (1995) and Rony (1996). I ask, from my differently located social positions, how can I look in such a way as to disrupt and expose structures of domination? How can my look see what the camera/gaze does not and transform the photograph? And, relatedly, how can I use the look to transform my relation of self and other? This process will involve exposing certain unacknowledged processes of the look, and engaging, through autobiography, with certain “proprioceptive body” (Silverman, 1996, p.29) relations linked to the look. Since much of the work of the look takes place on an
unconscious level, the work of unpacking it must, as Silverman (1996) argues, take place repeatedly (pp. 158, 161). Thus, this project involves and initiates a method of looking and re-looking repeatedly to engage and disengage certain unconscious processes. Historical writings will be used to confront the look from angles not immediately available through the image. The study attempts to use “a white woman’s look” to expose systems of domination embedded in the screen. The project aims, also, to transform the white look from a normalizing look to what Silverman terms “the resistant look” (pp. 154-161). In other words, this project uses the white look to resist and challenge white privilege, as well as white racist violence. Without essentializing, making timeless or nonmaterial, either whiteness or the look, this research studies whether and how it might be possible to look from (my own) heterogenous and complex constellations of social locations. The research will expose the problematic modes of address which construct and address my subjectivity (the gaze mediated through the screen and taken up by my look) so as to coerce a complicity with systems of domination. This study will also expose the forms of denial and transference that the look adopts in its acts of complicity and the process of forgetting what it cannot bear to know (McKenna, 1996; Alexander, 1995). The purpose of focussing this research on the look is not to reify either a reading/looking methodology or the subjectivity of the critic. Rather it is to use research as a means of engagement with the complex negotiations that comprise relations between self and other, image and meaning, agency and subjectivity (Probyn, 1993).

Because the look itself symbolizes a meeting between interiority and exteriority, subjectivity and sociality, this project focusses its research here. Again, the aim is to break down the rigid boundaries constructed between notions of interiority/exteriority, text/reading, image/text, self/other, representation/reality, and memory/history. The aim of this
interrogation is to produce the potential for a resistant look, which I am arguing is the foundation necessary for developing resistant agency from within social systems. The project engages with representations of confrontations over race. Civil rights movement photographs comprise those representations. I have chosen photographs of these confrontations because of that era’s pivotal relationship to race relations within the U.S. and because of the privileged place that era holds within the current era’s social memory (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.97). On a practical level this project will employ the researcher’s own look as it engages with three photographs. Each looking and re-visioning session will constitute a case study. Each case study will involve multiple looks in order to bring to consciousness and to elucidate, the relational struggles between the gaze, the screen and the look within the engagement between subjectivity and representation (Silverman, 1996; Rony 1996; Ellsworth, 1997).

Omi and Winant (1994), in their extensive sociological examination of racial construction in the United States from the 1960’s to the 1990’s, suggests that social struggles in the 1960’s transformed racial relations and subjectivities fundamentally and irrevocably, notwithstanding a concerted and powerful backlash. Placing the epoch of the sixties initially as a challenge and transition of the ethnicity paradigm and situating that paradigm as a counter to the previous paradigm of biological determinism, they argue that civil rights movement struggles radically transformed the social and political geography of racialized meanings in the U.S.

Taken together, these two interrelated dimensions — the eclipse of the ethnicity paradigm and the emergence of new social movement politics — constitute an alternative framework by which to assess the racial politics of the period. Our account suggests that racial identity, the racial state, and the very nature of racial politics as a whole were radically transformed during the 1960’s — transformed so profoundly that the racial
meanings established during this period continue to shape politics, even in the current period of reaction. (p.97)

This thesis focusses an interrogation of the white look on pictures of the civil rights movement struggles because of the very profound and endemic transformation that the movement represents. Current struggles over race and public policy have been discussed through re-interpretations of this epoch (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.146). Representations of the civil rights movement matter today, for the past is inevitably filtered through anxieties and hopes for the present. I have also focussed my look on this epoch in order to interrogate the nostalgia embedded in the longing to see. Decolonizing my white look as it revisions episodes of the civil rights movement is intended to open a space for looking differently in the present and shifting the relationship of white subjectivity to racial construction in the U.S. Precisely because of its watershed position within the story of race in the U.S., I have chosen to focus my research lens on this volatile era. This research acknowledges that identity, forms of knowledge production, social agency and political transformations depend on each other; consequently, they must be considered in relationship.

Trauma and racialized violence produce complex forms of knowledge production. Alexander (1995) describes a conundrum that constricts African-American experience:

The conundrum of being unable to 'bear to think about' something which is 'always present to my mind' is precisely the legacy wrought by state-sanctioned violence against African Americans such as the Rodney King beating. To see is unbearable, both unto itself as well as for what is [sic] means about one's own likely fate. But knowledge of this pervasive violence provides necessary information of the very real forces threatening African Americans. In the absence of first-person witnessing, stories are passed along so that everyone knows the
parameters in which their bodies move. (p. 89)

Alexander articulates the paradoxical and conflicting relationship between seeing, knowing, witnessing, remembering, and forgetting. As Alexander describes it, the look cannot bear to witness visually and yet the consciousness must know if the self is to survive. What the look cannot bear to visualize, story must narrate for the survival of the people. Her theory reverberates with other theories of trauma. As Caruth (1996) argues in Unclaimed Experience:

Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event — which remain unavailable to consciousness but intrude repeatedly on sight — thus suggest a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of this repetitive seeing. (pp. 91-92)

The paradox for African Americans is that their survival depends on the knowledge that comes from and through the “belatedness and incomprehensibility” of which Caruth speaks. And, in a further paradox, dominant white society depends on a forgetting. That repetitive process of forgetting will be exposed throughout the thesis. In each of three chapters, the look will engage with a photograph of racial contest. These series of looks and attempts to remember constitute the three case studies.

Alexander (1995) explores the way the repetition of forgetting is imbricated in the look and the narrative of Stacey Koon, one of the officers who beat Rodney King. He looks over and over at the video to create a “narrative to justify his authority”(p. 95). Seeing, for him, becomes a moment of disavowal so as to preserve privilege and maintain and justify relations of
domination. He uses his look and repeats the process of looking to re-enforce those relations. After the event, narrative and memory reinstate the relations of domination that violence enacted. His narrative serves a distinctly different purpose than those African-American stories that Alexander describes. The officer's story articulates a colonial trope and his viewing makes clear that American state-sanctioned violence, as a refashioning of imperial violence, emerged not just from lust and greed but also from "the implacable rage of paranoia" (McClintock, 1995, p. 28). The defence attorneys and Mr. Koon slowed the tape down and repeatedly reviewed it, so as to read it through familiar tropes of "black bestiality" (Alexander, 1995, p. 96). Characteristically, this white subject conflates a paranoid fantasy of black masculine bestiality with a disavowal. Whereas McClintock (1995) articulates a doubling of the imperial male psyche through the displacement of gender, here we see a doubling through the displacement of race. The officer's own "dread of a catastrophic boundary loss (implosion) associated with fears of impotence," (p. 26) are here symbolized by King's breaking a traffic law and then out-speeding the cops. This dread is accompanied by "an excess of boundary order and fantasies of unlimited power" (p. 26), which are symbolized by the arrest and brutal beating. Viewing through these psychic structures also depends on a mode of address embedded in a Western tradition of police evidence and documentary visual images which enables a distancing, in this case, from the brutalized body of a black man (Sekula 1984; Solomon-Godeau, 1991). Through these psychic structures of boundary loss, Koon and the video construct the "truth" of his innocence and the "innocence" of state-sanctioned violence against the black body.

Looking from this white subject position clearly involves more than mere reading; rather it involves psychic structures that draw on social discourses. Narratives of race, civilization, whiteness, masculinity, and the justification of violence are just a few of the influences that
narrate this particular white self. Furthermore, the uses of this reading can hardly be considered either neutral, innocent, or somehow outside the purview of socially constructed black/white binary relations. It is a reading that uses an image of brutality to justify and normalize that very brutality. How is this possible, we might ask? It is easy to dismiss this reading as that of a paranoid lunatic; however, it is precisely this type of reading that recurs like a feedback loop over and over again across the U.S. To see blackness as criminal and to view white police and paramilitary forces as necessary to maintain order is precisely the legacy of the ideology of slavery, segregation and imperialism (Davis 1983; Omi & Winant, 1994). These very images parade past us daily on our television screens as news and drama. Even though Koon’s look may represent an extreme form of forgetting, less obvious forms of forgetting occur as subjects view these images of racial contest.

Because whiteness and blackness are heterogenous ideological constellations under constant contestation, through which individuals and groups struggle over meaning and access to power and material resources, there may be many variations of the polarized looks that Alexander presents (Omi & Winant, 1994, p.55). For example, my white, Jewish, middle-class, heterosexual, and ablest social locations may produce yet another set of struggles with unbearability and disavowal, different both from Alexander’s and from the white officer’s. The white self looks through and is shaped by such complex and layered struggles. The unbearability of Alexander’s look may emanate from her identifications as an African-American woman subjected to forms of racist violence, from her complex kin and communal relations within and across communities of colour, and from her shared memory with the symbolic body that receives the violent blows, the unbearability of my own look emanates from different sources. Similarly though, a confluence of forces — each of which inscribe and vie for my subjectivity — shape the
unbearability and disavowal of my look. One tributary flowing toward that confluence consists of social relations that conscript my complicity with the state apparatus that enables those violent blows; another tributary stems from my identificatory relations with the symbolic body that receives the violence; another issues from my complex kin relations with the symbolic subjectivity of white western masculine power that yields and justifies those blows; yet another tributary comes from my friendship and intimate relations with the symbolic body that receives those blows; another tributary flows from my relationship with traditions of knowledge production such as documentary visual images, and on the other hand, African-American cultural forms. As I look, these tributaries structure my conscious, unconscious and affective responses through a dynamic interplay across desires, investments and readings of the image. These structures are at work prior to the actual looking as well as during it.

Thus, looking may involve a complex struggle between a seeing and a disavowal of seeing (Bhabha, 1992). Alexander’s conundrum, Rony’s critique of identification and Ward Williams’ exhibit, all expose the ways in which one’s social and racialized identity makes a difference in terms of what is seen and what is disavowed (Bhabha, 1992). Particular strands of cultural theory argue for a working through of the many identities that research selves inherit, experience and produce through their research (Patai, 1991; Probyn, 1993; Russo, 1991). This study adds to that research by working through the struggles over meaning and politicized identity that emerge in re-viewing photographs of three different moments in the American struggle over race.

This project asks how might it be possible to look from a socially located heterogeneous white subjectivity, but look from an anti-racist and feminist perspective? On what grounds might an anti-racist look be forged? How might a white look initiate and promote a process of
decolonization? Can the white look be used to resist and dismantle white supremacy? If so, how might one develop a methodology that initiates such looking? What might constitute such a look? How might a researcher navigate the disavowals of the white look, the unbearable of seeing, and the responsibility to know as well as the unbearable of knowing? How might these investigations initiate and contribute to the discussion of the kinds of engagement that would promote or detract from such a decolonized look?

The purpose of this inquiry is not to transform white subjectivity into something blameless, neutral, or outside the purview of everyday hierarchical social relations, nor is it to position myself as researcher somehow outside white subjectivity and articulating its various discursive practices. Rather I want to actively take responsibility for the white look as it manifests itself from within this research project.

This project aims to build solidarity across racialized subjectivities. It expressly works to expose cultural forms of methodological and popular dominating structures such as nostalgia, cultural appropriation, disavowal, exoticizing the other, and commodity consumerism (Bhabha, 1992; Davis 1996; hooks, 1992; Said, 1993). These interpretive structures wind their way through the complex nexus of social relations, representations, audiences, readers and readings of the public sphere. I don’t ask how we can read outside these dominating relations or how we can produce representations outside these hierarchical forces. Rather, I ask what aspects of the matrix built between representation, the public sphere, private and public subjectivities, readings, and disavowals coalesce through the look? Through an interrogation of the look, can we politicize identity and investigate what is to be done? Given the modes of address that call forth particular relations between self and other (Ellsworth, 1997), how might a subject engage with an image differently? In Silverman’s (1996) terms, might a “resistant look” (pp. 154-161) open a space for
both the re-inscription of subjectivity and the transformation of an image? Might this work decolonize the look, and in so doing open a space and a possibility for the pedagogy of solidarity?

The issue of my white, middle-class, social location has complex implications for both the methodological and political implications of this research project. The fact of my racial/ethnic construction as white and Jewish poses a primary arena of difficulty and urgency. This difficulty does not arise because there is an essential white look that I possess or automatically engage. Rather, the difficulty arises from the conjunction of the complex, hybrid and contested white Jewish social locations through which I attempt to look, and from my desire for more ethical social relations.

A large and growing body of literature from a number of disciplines, including the humanities, the social sciences and the life sciences, has interrogated the research produced by white academics whose work examines black culture and life. Sterling Brown’s 1933 essay, “Negro Character as Seen by White Authors,” raised issues important to literary representation and argued persuasively that the observation of black life by white Southerners “cannot escape being influenced by current folk-beliefs” (Brown, 1996, p.150). Brown clearly articulated the important principle that these observations “remain a far better analysis of a white man than of the Negro” (p.150). This is but one prescient example of numerous and significant critiques mounted against white cultural workers signifying black life through their representations. Brown’s argument deftly unveils the crux of the problem embedded in cross-cultural representation and (I would argue) cross-cultural research. The cultural worker invariably brings his or her unconscious and social understandings to the research project. In the arena of social science or cultural studies research, complex social negotiations such as investments in self and
desires for the "other" shadow studies that purport to be neutral (Patai, 1991; Trinh, 1989). I would argue they also influence those studies in which white researchers deconstruct and interrogate whiteness. The lived social materiality — repressed, confessed, disguised covertly in the project, and/or partially unveiled — shapes the question under study, the methodology, and the subject of study in a variety of ways (Lather, 1986, 1993). Given the historical and current inequitable matrix of social relations, research conducted by white middle-class female researchers on the subject of visual images of black experience must be called into question.

The stakes and implications of neglecting such questioning are serious. In fact, hooks (1992) argues that white researchers who do not interrogate their own social locations replicate systems of domination through their research. Trinh (1989) argues, through her own re-appropriation of language, images and image texts, that research methodologies, whole disciplines, and representational codes are implicated in systems of domination. Looking, speaking and representing her complex negotiation of self, constructed in opposition to domination and colonial discourses, necessarily involves unmasking the dominating practices that constitute Western forms of knowledge production (Trinh, 1989; Razack, 1998).

These debates about research, race and representation can become mired in either/or dichotomies relating to the authenticity of a researcher’s relationship to researched subjects and concomitant questions concerning the textual location of the researcher’s social subjectivities (Dei, 1996; Probyn, 1993). Complex critiques of research methodologies and their relationship to the production of domination, as well as nuanced critiques of disciplinary discourse, may become distilled into this binary logic. A troubling problem arises when traditional models of supposed neutral research are applied to current models of social construction and exposed research relations (Probyn, 1993). There are many versions of this problematic binary and other related
debates. One double-bind version involves the following set up: On the one hand, anti-racists from oppressed and dominated social locations have been arguing that women from multiple subject positions must take responsibility for our complicity with systems of domination (hooks, 1988, 1992; Jordan, 1989; Razack, 1998; Russo, 1991). On the other hand, some folks within cultural studies and critical pedagogy attack the unmasking of selves within the research project or argue that the unmasking leads to an essentialized presentation of self (Probyn, 1993). These attacks come from different poles and relate to very distinct politics within and without the academy. When under attack by either “camp,” however, the discourse of guilt, blame and shame can take over and interfere with the strategic implications of these divergent theoretical points (Probyn 1993; Russo, 1991; Thomson, 1996). This research project does not attempt to hide that reactive discourse either; rather, it exposes how those discourses of individualized responsibility interact awkwardly at times with the work of forging a pedagogy of respect, solidarity and accountability (Ellsworth, 1989; Jordan, 1989; Razack 1998).

There are many ways into the debate over who should be conducting research and writing about which group. For the moment, I wish to return to Sterling Brown. While exposing and critiquing the stereotypical representation of African-American characters in literature, Brown (1996) argued for the notion that “the exploration of Negro life and character rather than its exploitation must come from Negro authors themselves” (Brown 1996, p.182). This is not authenticity for authenticity’s sake nor is it strictly identity politics. Rather it is a position that acknowledges the connection between whiteness and multiple cultural systems of domination. Furthermore, Brown’s position links representational questions to embodied and material positions, as well as to forms of knowledge construction.

Making use of forms of analysis emanating from a number of disciplines, this project
attempts to use alternative methodologies in order to produce alternative knowledge. Drawing on work from cultural studies and critical pedagogy, this study places photography within disciplinary parameters of modernity and its legacy of dominating social relations. Using feminist film studies and some psychoanalytic criticism, I trace the manifestations of my socially constructed desires, disavowals, fetishes, loves and hates as they engage, through the look, with the modes of address and subjects of particular photographs. The point is not to expose a reified self, to confess, or to glorify an egoistic state. On the contrary, the purpose of this engagement is to take seriously significant challenges to research and cultural work by intellectuals of colour and in so doing to forge a possibility of using the pedagogy of witnessing to develop both a pedagogy of respect and a pedagogy of solidarity.

The work of this project raises questions concerning the boundaries of insider and outsider positions. I am arguing, however, that it is not enough to simply propose that in a postmodern context insider/outsider positions are always already in flux or are floating signifiers. In fact, I will theorize that given the history of colonial and dominating relations constructed through these very signifiers that particular postmodern position is unbearably irresponsible. I will argue for a process of taking responsibility for the positions we find ourselves in within floating chains of signifiers that are used to create hierarchies, to dominate and to violate in the material and symbolic realms. The difference between these two positions may seem inconsequential, but I think the possibility of building solidarity rests precisely on this difference. Razack (1998) and others have argued eloquently regarding the imperative that white women take responsibility for their complicity in oppressive racialized social relations. This project argues that one instance of taking responsibility is to explore one's position as if insider/outsider boundaries were more fixed than theory tells us they are. In so doing, one may open a possibility
for exposing the subtle, unconscious and unacknowledged ways one's subjectivity is constructed through complicit relations. The result of this work may lead to a breaking down of the boundaries between insider/outsider positions. The possibilities for building solidarity and for responsible cross-cultural relations may depend on the method of coming to understand that permeability. I wish to assert that a purely theoretical understanding of the limits of insider/outsider boundaries and of their signifying practices will not address the psychic process of the paradoxical struggle between forgetting and remembering that subjects experience from within social relations constructed through these signifiers. It is precisely the struggle with forgetting and remembering that socially constructs subjectivities and that enables acts of betrayal, violence, complicity and, alternatively, responsibility and solidarity. I do not wish to set up another binary between complicity/responsibility. To clarify, it is my position, arguing from Silverman (1996), that the look struggles with these issues as it works to construct the social subject through Lacan's tri-partate relations— the gaze, the screen, and the look (pp.132-133). I am arguing for using theories of witnessing to reveal that struggle and for using methods of witnessing to create the possibilities of a productive look, which in turn may open possibilities for building solidarity.

Other scholars have argued for the importance of considering the use of signifiers within systems of domination through distinct yet related methods. Nobel laureate Toni Morrison (1990) has elaborated the concept of American Africanist writing in American literature: “a term for the denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings, and misreadings that accompany Eurocentric learning about these people” (pp. 6-7). American Africanism is distinctly severed from the material conditions of the lives of African Americans. It is on the contrary a symbolic discourse,
[a] way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual licence, and repression, formations and exercises of power, meditations on ethics and accountability...a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom. (Morrison, 1990, pp.6-7)

Morrison does not call here for an authentic writing of African American life nor does she seek simply to “move the gaze of African-American Studies”(p. 8). She argues, instead, for an examination of the white imagination’s construction of blackness through literature. She is concerned also with the masking of critical agendas:

What Africanism became for, and how it functioned in, the literary imagination is of paramount interest because it may be possible to discover, through a close look at literary “blackness,” the nature — even the cause — of literary “whiteness.” What is it for? What parts do the invention and development of whiteness play in the construction of what is loosely described as “American? (p.9)

Focussing a literary critique on those constructions of blackness that Brown argues are manufactured from white mythology more clearly articulates both the construction of whiteness and its place in the consolidation of the nation. Rather than focussing on the ways in which racism affects its targets, Morrison focusses on how it shapes its proponents. In so doing, she examines “what makes intellectual domination possible; how knowledge is transformed from invasion and conquest to revelation and choice; what ignites and informs the literary imagination, and what forces help establish the parameters of criticism” (p. 8). Arguing that there is no linguistic space outside racialized struggles, Morrison seeks to examine how writers use their literary imaginations to engage those struggles.

Morrison (1990) and Brown’s (1996) arguments from within literary criticism address the
multi-layered issue of white writers using figments of the white imagination to construct the other within their literary representations. This project deals with a related but different dynamic of racial relations working in and through visual representation. The primary difference arises from the distinctions in representational form; i.e., these signifiers use different sign systems. Literary representation and photography bear their messages through different but related sign systems. To assert the obvious, the former uses language to convey meaning, while the latter uses images.

Rather than engage with literary representations, this project works with photographic images. Nonetheless, the debate over the layered structures of domination and identity set in play when white cultural workers deploy imperialist or white supremacist tropes pertains. This dissertation employs a methodology quite different from the kind of literary excavation which Morrison (1990) and Brown (1996) undertake, because, as Adrian Piper (in Kester, 1999), Patricia Ward Williams (in Rony, 1996) and Kaja Silverman (1996) argue, photographic representation involves psychic processes that mediate relations between those social signifiers and subject positions.

Issues of translation arise when grafting onto the photographic plain the debate concerning responsibility and the "playing in the dark" tendency of the white literary imagination. This project is less concerned with exposing the tropes that the white imagination has employed through representation than it is with opening possibilities for responsible engagement with those very insidious tropes that bombard social subjects from within representation. The photographs that make up the three case studies of this project use those tropes in their own documentary project. They attempt to address social justice issues by subverting particular tropes. This project will interrogate some of the problems inherent in the
documentary challenge, but the more paramount work of this dissertation is theorizing and employing that interrogation in order to theorize alternative forms of engagement. Within a project of decolonizing the look, I must consider the issues Morrison raises concerning dominant signifiers.

Working with photographic images also brings into focus the conundrum of what I call the reality effect of photography. Whereas writing is always already a sign system needing deciphering and interpretation, photography can appear to be simply a copy of the real or a codeless sign system (Barthes, 1981; Solomon-Godeau, 1991). Neither the critical community, nor common sense, nor popular notions of literature generally posit fiction with the power of direct correspondence with reality. Photography, on the other hand, has been an ambiguous sign system from its inception, both within the critical community and from common sense or popular perspectives (Barthes, 1981). Broadly speaking, some have argued for a direct correspondence between sign and signifier or between photography and reality (Chaplin, 1992). Others have argued that photography has emerged from a complex history of vision, representation, and knowledge production, which (through the apparatus and its nexus of relations) endows it with the power to accurately and directly represent the real (Chaplin, 1992; Crary, 1990; Lalvani, 1996; Silverman, 1996; Solomon-Godeau, 1991). This debate has implications for the construction of photographic representation, for the reception of photography and for the relationship negotiated between subjectivities and their experience of material social relations as they make meaning with photography.

Within this research project, Alexander's conundrum, the inability to bear certain kinds of knowledge and the necessity of that knowledge for survival, reverberates against photography's conundrum. A photograph's paradoxical position as both real artifact and
constructed representation of the real adds another layer of paradox. In the context of photography, my question: “how can I be white and look at this?” raises the companion question: “what exactly is this?” This question, in turn, opens yet another Pandora’s box of competing debates concerning representation, research relations, ethics and the possibility of resisting and/or exposing systems of domination. The methodology of this research project deliberately addresses these questions.

Chapter two will interrogate the medium itself, raising the issue of the problematic position of photography as visual witness, constructed image, and participant in the psychic processes that construct social subjectivity through the look. In this chapter, I briefly discuss the history of the photographic apparatus and its relationship to the Western imperial project, as well as the production of white modernist subjectivity in order to historically locate the look. Furthermore, the argument relates significant aspects of competing debates over how the look reads and makes meaning from photography. Finally, I examine the ways in which the photographic moment itself structures responses to it. The chapter analyzes covert, historical, and imperial relations embedded in the photographic moment. In subsequent chapters, by looking at three pictures and entering into an analytical dialogue with them (using autobiography, historical traces, social analysis and critiques of representation), I will raise these themes through the process of decolonizing the look.
Chapter Two

Photography and the Look

The First Look – What Is a Photograph?

What do you see? How do you see? What is the relationship between seeing and perception? How do you make meaning from what you see? All these questions raise significant issues pertaining to this project. An important principle undergirds these questions. Namely, that what you see, how you see and the meaning you make of what you see is always historically and culturally specific. Practically and mechanically speaking this results directly from a complex technology, philosophy and the psychics of seeing. The concept of vision, Lalvani (1996) has noted, has had an overarching power and significance in Western philosophy. Each epoch, however, has renegotiated its relationship to vision. Through a complex strata of historical relations, eras realign particular truth claims and philosophical concepts with specific visual devices. For example, in the late nineteenth century the camera was aligned with police identification photography, whereas in the mid-fifteenth century, single-point Renaissance perspective was aligned with spiritual truth in Europe. Just as technologies that visualize the physical world for humans are aligned with particular concepts of truth and knowledge production, so too does this nexus of relations shape and influence the concept of the observer, and the looking subject. Crary (1990) has thoroughly excavated the Western observer in *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, his exhaustive analysis of the relationship between vision and the observer. In the West, the concept of the
observer represents a confluence where vision, truth, knowledge production, the individual, power and society meet to negotiate relational domains and influences. Crary’s book argues that a paradigmatic transformation of vision occurred during the early nineteenth century, a shift in which a classical concept of vision was usurped by a modernist concept of vision. Crary’s revisionist history significantly recasts the observer in a new light. This project examines not the observer, but the look as it is manifested today. For the purpose of this project, the look is the nexus wherein an individual apprehends and engages with an image. The look involves many other concepts and truth claims in addition to that of the observer, for it is a person’s attempt to make sense of an image. That sense making or knowledge production will involve a number of interrelated histories and concepts. Certainly, paramount among them are notions of the truth of the image and photography as well as the truth of the observer. Thus this project is concerned with these historical concepts in relation to their influence on the look.

Photography has a complicated historical relationship to truth. In the thirties, for example, Walter Benjamin (1980) argued that theories of photography pigeonholed the apparatus and its representations while simultaneously missing the point. Photographic theory was then, he believed, inextricably caught in an internecine battle between high art claims and popular culture; between representations of the “real” and representations of individual artistic “genius.” As the quintessential magician who simultaneously exposed his own trick, photography irrevocably disrupted the “aura” of the work of art, according to Benjamin. For him, photography’s ability to quickly reproduce an image of the world and the ability to reproduce copies from a negative challenged the bourgeois concept and value of original art. Photographic images have a long history as ambivalent images, part artifact of the real and part constructed image. Benjamin took
a particular position within a larger debate and argued for the constructed nature of photography. He also used photographic theory to further his critique of bourgeois ideology and bourgeois art theory. Simultaneously, he used photographic theory to promote Marxist cultural criticism.

Since Benjamin, other photography critics have added to his argument, making it clear how photography played a significant role in the rise to power of the bourgeois class. In the late nineteenth century, as photographic techniques developed, a whole class of businessmen made their wealth and entered into capitalist relations with the assistance of photography (Tagg, 1988). Middle-class families suddenly could afford a representation of themselves and they trekked by the thousands to the photography studio to pay for that likeness, which served to enhance their social mobility and social dominance. The photographer and an entire class of people used photography and these family portraits to legitimize their ascendancy to power while simultaneously giving themselves a new form of market value in the new bourgeois economy (Crary, 1990; Solomon-Godeau, 1991; Tagg, 1988). As the market economy grew, so too did photography’s place within it. The photograph not only established a class of people, but it became an integral part of the very commodity economy that supported the bourgeois elite. And as such, the photograph came to have cultural and economic value. The studio portrait of a family at once legitimized the bourgeois class and took on value within the new economy. Photographic likenesses thus took on particular meanings in this commodity exchange.

Photography, however, is more than an economic value or a mere likeness. It is, in actuality, a set of complex relations. These interconnections and meanings are embedded like a chiaroscuro image in the photographic print. They are found also within the apparatus of the lens itself. For the image-making process of photography emanates from systems of knowledge
production and truth claims within Western culture that predate its invention in the early
nineteenth century and its material contribution to the rise of the bourgeois class in Europe
(Crary, 1990; Lalvani, 1996; Tagg, 1988). Concepts of seeing and the value of particular kinds of
seeing are always historically specific (Crary, 1990; Lalvani, 1996; Solomon-Godeau, 1991).
The age that produced photography did not innocently stumble upon the invention; rather,
individuals experimented with and sought an apparatus that could meet particular requirements
for truth claims and social relations (Crary, 1990; Tagg, 1988). As Crary (1990) points out,
individuals were constantly adjusting visual apparatuses as their concepts of truth shifted. For
example, since the Renaissance, seeing in single-point perspective had been considered true;
technology in the nineteenth century added both credibility and the truth of industrial production
to the truth of single-point perspective (Crary, 1990; Lalvani, 1996; Solomon-Godeau, 1991;
Tagg, 1988). Thus, the photograph became true because it was laden with sets of relations
inherent to that era and historically constituted. Photography made visible certain foundational
assumptions and hierarchical relations of an epoch.

The curious thing about photography though, for all its pretence of truth across so many
fields, is that the actual meaning of any photograph is always up for grabs. Photography is
always paradoxical in this sense. The apparatus that purports to reproduce reality, in effect,
reproduces a puzzle that can be pieced together in a multitude of ways. This fundamental
paradox of photography occurs on many levels. Ironically, the increased technological diffusion
of information expands the means of hiding the constructed meaning by the apparent meaning
(Barthes, 1980, p. 279). In other words, the ability to mass produce an image produces not only
images but the means of construction behind the image. As Barthes (1980) noted, with
photography, "the relations between signified and signifier are quasi-tautological" (p. 272). The signified seems to actually be the signifier. Nonetheless, Barthes examined the rhetoric of the photographic image and suggested that the photograph represents, "the absence of code" (p.279) The rhetoric of the image for Barthes included levels of messages such as the linguistic iconic as well as the denotative and the connotative. He also analyzed the reality image seemingly inherent in a photograph. That is, each image seems to represent a piece of reality in addition to the connotative images it might suggest. According to Barthes, "The denoted image naturalizes the symbolic message, it innocents the semantic artifice of connotation, which is extremely dense, especially in advertising" (p.279). Thus, in the case of advertising, certain symbols function symbolically, and covertly seem to present a natural correspondence of meanings. Photographic images and the use of photography, however, are thoroughly grounded in culture and historical moments. Nonetheless, "The absence of code dis-intellectualizes the message because it seems to found in nature the signs of culture" (p.279). The appearance of a code-less image connotes both an innocent image and a natural one. This study argues, however, that photography and looking at photographs is neither natural nor innocent. In fact, looking at photography and interrogating the look can become a site for exposing multiple forms of social domination. The sets of relations imbricated by the photograph can become exposed and unravelled by interrogating the look.

The photographic image itself, however, is always polysemous, contrary to its popular reputation. This polysemy implies a "'floating chain' of signifieds" (Barthes, 1980, p. 274) from which readers may choose and ignore a vast series of meanings. "Each sign corresponds to a body of 'attitudes'" (Barthes, 1980, p. 280), particularly with respect to advertising images. "The
meanings and effects of any single image are always adjacent to this overload and plural sensory environment as well as the observer who inhabited it” (Crary, 1990, p.23). Thus, when we speak of photographic meaning, we are always referring to plural meanings. Furthermore, meanings are always embedded within larger cultural signs, and looking itself has a cultural history of its own.

A language of photography has developed to compensate for and to accentuate the polysemy of meanings. Nonetheless, “polysemy poses a question of meaning ...as a dysfunction.... [I]n every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs....” (Barthes, 1980, p. 274). Part of the terror of uncertainty that arises from the polysemy of the images emanates from the fact that photography is an image or a representation of an event taken out of context. As Metz argued in his seminal essay, “Photography and Fetishism,” photography “cuts off a piece,” and, in so doing, it becomes a “devitalizing sublation, by lifting that moment out of life into the frame of representation” (Metz in Silverman, 1996, p.149). This break gives the image the power to immortalize the moment. Barthes (1980) reaches a similar conclusion taking a different route (pp. 282-283). This separation, about which both these critics write, calls attention to the absence surrounding the image. “A photograph, whilst recording what has been seen, always and by its nature refers to what is not seen. It isolates, preserves and presents a moment taken from a continuum” (Berger, 1980 p. 293). Ironically, what it shows invokes what is not. This is another level of paradox; the photograph contains both what is in the frame and what is outside the frame. According to Berger (1980), “The degree to which I believe this is worth looking at can be judged by all that I am willingly not showing because it is contained within it” (p. 294).

Intrinsically, a photograph carries a tension between this presence and absence. Berger also
contends that what distinguishes objects in a photograph "is the intensity with which we are made aware of the poles of absence and presence" (p. 293). A photograph itself bears witness both to a set of presences and a set of absences.

Amidst these absences and presences, difference manifests itself through the visual: "The eye is nothing but desire" (Bryson in Silverman, 1996, p.155). As such, desire in the West is intimately entwined with difference. The camera, in fact, can be said to enforce or articulate particular kinds of difference. Silverman distinguishes her argument from Lacan's and suggests the screen be considered "as the conduit through which social and historical variability is introduced" (Silverman, 1996, p. 135). In the tradition of psychoanalysis, individuals in the West depend on the other for meaning, desires and confirmation of self. According to Lacan, "To 'be' is in effect to 'be seen'" (in Silverman, 1996, p. 133). Some of us are seen more frequently than others through representation. Within representation subjects are displayed according to social values of difference and "seen" proportionally both by the camera/gaze and within the social world of viewing subjects. Some subjects "live" in representation more than others, hence "Woman is often obliged to 'live' hers much more fully than her male counterpart (Silverman, 1996, pp. 146-147). Furthermore, "The screen of 'femininity' is always more available to certain female subjects than to others" (Silverman, 1996, p. 154). Race and sexuality interact with femininity not through addition but transformatively; femininity disadvantages and privileges depending on its racial and sexual signifiers. One must remember that vision in the West foundationally depends on the "other." More than the visual woman, however, according to Rony, "At the centre of the story, is the body of the Native, the essential index of authenticity, and thus visual media, capable of capturing the body and holding it for the viewer have long
played a lead role in transmitting the narrative of race and evolution” (Rony, 1996, p.195). In complex, imaginative and oppressive ways images provide schema through which societies create and enforce difference.

The Second Look - Who Is the Photographer?

In the West, the photographer is intrinsically linked to the concept of the observer. The photographer as practitioner becomes an observing subject by taking a picture. Concepts of the observer inscribe the camera and its functions. Vision as a means of producing truth also produces the observer. The story of vision in the West, as a historical construction, takes an important and distinctive twist with the invention of the camera obscura (Crary, 1990). This technology developed not only vision, but the observer, who – as Crary argues – takes on greater and greater meaning in the West. The camera obscura marks the point when monocular perspective is seen as a form of knowing that transcends human fallibility (Lalvani, 1996, p. 14). At the same time the camera obscura gives the human observer access to a new kind of knowledge and thus the individual is transformed: “What the camera obscura represents is the obtaining of the world visually by a sovereign subject, who, enclosed and isolated in an observation space separate from the exterior world, simultaneously becomes a privatized subject” (Lalvani, 1996, p.14).

Just as Modernity’s discourses, disciplines, and technologies contribute to the invention of photography, medicine and the visibility of the body, they also shape the observer, who is, in a sense, one of the many consequences of the bourgeois revolution of the 1700’s (Crary, 1990; Lalvani, 1996; Tagg, 1988). Crary (1996) argues, in fact, that Modernity constitutes the
"remaking of the observer" (p. 11): The observer "is made adequate to a constellation of new events, forces, and institutions that together are loosely and perhaps tautologically definable as 'modernity'" (Crary, 1990, p. 9). The reorganization of the observer occurs prior to the invention of photography, however (Crary, 1990, p. 14). The observer becomes the locus for the production of knowledge through vision. The bourgeois revolution simultaneously initiates a "proliferation of circulating signs and objects whose effects coincide with their visuality" (Crary, 1990, p. 11). As Silverman (1996) claims, this refashioned observer is, "a viewer whose unreliable and corporeally circumscribed vision locates him or her within the field of vision and knowledge" (p.129). The observing subject becomes both the product and a foundational element of modernity (Crary, 1990, p. 10). Thus modernity not only fashions photography but also the photographer. Modernist values impart a search for a truth; the observer and the photographer are created from those same principles to reveal that truth.

Realism and truth are connected at many levels. In popular discourse the concept of the observer gives photography its seeming realism. Modernity's pervasive traditions make covert the relationship between photography and the real in today's popular cultural expressions of photography. The photograph is seemingly real: "The maintenance of perspectival illusion is assumed to depend upon a smooth meshing of the spectator with that apparatus" (Silverman, 1996, p.125). This meshing is actually a complex reading that is imbricated in the inherited traditions of modernity. Benjamin conceived of this reality effect as a form of magic paradox inherent in photography. More recently, Bazin's notion of "retroactive access" re-articulates the connection Benjamin noted between photography's access to a time now gone and its seeming reality (in Silverman, 1996, p. 130). The distinction between the camera and the individual look
could be accepted if the photograph seemed real (Bazin in Silverman, 1996, pp.129-130). Our present access to an image from the past magically gives the representation the quality of reality. What we have captured in photography seems not to be an image but a lost time. But, there is an additional element of realism from photography that emanates from the mechanical process. Technology seems to do the work of accessing this lost time, and therefore, the work becomes hidden. Technology after all, can appear objective or somehow free from human flaws, or so it is imagined. “The objective nature of photography confers upon it a quality of credibility absent from other picture making...we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced” (Bazin in Silverman, 1996, p. 130). Photography’s twin systems—one providing access to a lost time and the other mechanically providing that access—converge in its seeming reality effect.

This reality effect of photography, however, may uniquely be the lure inherent in the image that calls one to use photography as testimony. The spectator is seduced not by the seeming objectivity of the camera but by the magic effect of which Benjamin spoke. The capturing of a lost time may form the seductive bait. A photograph’s seeming connection to a real event or moment can lure its viewer into a desire to witness and remember. Because the photographer was there at a pivotal moment in time, the photograph can demand that we witness an event or moment, not the image nor the photographic construction, but rather the lost moment itself, or so we may imagine. As Berger argues, “The True content of photography is invisible, for it derives from a play not with form, but with time” (Berger, 1980, p. 293). And as such, the “spectator is... a ‘made-to-order-witness’” (Silverman, 1996, p.126). The photograph literally lures the viewer who “feels an irresistible compulsion to seek the tiny spark of accident, the here
and now” (Benjamin, 1980, p. 202). It is that connection to the past through memory that seems to contain the essential truth of the photograph and also its essential reality. Ironically, that reality effect also lays the foundation for the future, for we see the past and in seeing our memories as true and real we begin to imagine the future through them. As Benjamin so aptly put it, “In such a picture that spark has, as it were, burned through the person in the image with reality, finding the indiscernible place in the condition of that long past minute where the future is nesting, even today, so eloquently that we looking back, can discover it” (Benjamin, 1980, p. 202).

If photography can mediate the witnessing of an event, there are political implications then for how we photograph, how a viewer looks at the photograph and whether or not that looking can constitute witnessing. To Crary’s historical account of the observer, one could extrapolate and suggest that “our apprehension of the world is always mediated by representation” (Lacan in Silverman, 1996, p.155). While the desire may be to remember a lost time through the mediation of a photograph, photography as an apparatus is intimately linked to the tradition of the observer, which according to Crary unfolds in two different directions: “the multiple affirmations of the sovereignty and autonomy of vision...[and alternatively toward] the increasing standardization and regulation of the observer...toward forms of power that depended on the abstraction and formalization of vision” (Crary, 1990, p.150). The camera inherits both these trajectories of the concept of the observer. While these concepts are part of the sets of relations that make up photography, there is another set of relations that influences the viewer’s reception of photography. “Whereas photography performs its memorial function by lifting an object out of time and immortalizing it forever in a particular form, memory is all about
temporality and change” (Silverman, 1996, p.157). There is thus a kind of tension created between the image and the desire of the viewer. The look searches for memory but the photograph serves up memorial.

The Third Look – Social Movement Photography

This memorial device masquerading as memory also serves to construct difference. Identity photographs are extreme examples of the sets of images and values that are called up through the photograph of a person. Davis (1996) argues persuasively for the deconstructing of such identity photographs in the context of hierarchical race relations in North America. By telling the story of how her image, an FBI identity photograph, came to represent all that is “anti-American” (p.88), the threat of black “criminality” (p.87), and on the other hand, the potential of a “charismatic and raucus revolutionary” (p. 88). Davis exposes the way identity photographs can be used to discipline bodies. Social movement photographs, which transform both looking and the subject of the camera/gaze, have developed in contrast to these identity photographs. Since the nineteenth century, in a parallel development with police identification photography, social movement photography has also flourished. This type of photography attempts to document injustice in order to fight for justice. Activist photographers attempt to reconstitute the subject and transform oppressive structures through the photograph and the viewing public. Whereas the identity photograph of police technologies serves to discipline bodies within concepts of normalcy and deviance, by associating a particular identity with a particular deviance and
criminality, the social justice photograph attempts to work against such disciplining forces. By documenting oppression through photography, these images attempt to re-imagine the persecuted as fully human. The identity of the individual is not so important as the individual’s association with a particular class, race, gender or larger social group and the lived oppression of that group. The photographs attempt to make visible the oppressive forces acting upon a class of people. Riis’ photographs of poor people are archetypal examples of this type of photography (Solomon-Godeau, 1991, pp.175-176). Recently, photographic historians and critics have articulated the oppressive aspects of this type of photography. Solomon-Godeau (1991) in Photography at the Dock: Essays on Photographic History, Institutions and Practices argues convincingly that this tradition of photographic documentary has to its own detriment neglected to consider the historical connections between oppressive systems and photography. This neglect has lead to the complicated situation wherein social justice photography re-inscribes, through a different medium, a set of dominating systems similar to the very oppressive forces its producers wish to resist (p. 176). Solomon-Godeau’s argument about the trap set by the apparatus of the camera pertains to the politics of the look. She warns against being sure that, “the documentary act doesn’t involve a double act of subjugation – first, in the social world that has produced its victims; and second, in the regime of the image produced within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it then represents” (p.176). Concerned practitioners inadvertently reproduce the very systems they wish to transform. Notwithstanding the complicated history of social justice photography, this project concerns itself with such a set of photographs precisely because they are a locus for contested forms of the look and as such intertwine both an old way of looking with a new way of looking.
Solomon-Godeau's (1991) concerns about the underlying relationship between the camera as apparatus and ideological systems of domination relates to Silverman's discussion of ideologies and their relationship to the resistant look mediated through film images. Particular ideologies work in concert with the apparatus to mediate representation (Silverman, 1996, p. 148). For example, Rabinowitz (1994) details the class looking of the 1890's, when the apparatus is transformed through the invention of the mercury flash, allowing Riis to photograph tenements in his social justice project. Rabinowitz uncovers the ways in which the 1930's radical critique of capitalism used a lens that was implicated in middle-class women's surveying and disciplining their poorer sisters. The technological apparatus of the camera actually enabled a particular kind of class disciplining that shaped both class and gender. The normalization of middle-class domesticity through which middle-class women were circumscribed and through which they dominated their working-class sisters was represented through the apparatus of the camera flash, which brought the documentary photograph into the domain of the home (Rabinowitz, 1994). Thus during the same epoch, the camera flash was used as a mechanism to assist in the disciplining and oppression of working-class bodies while it simultaneously was used to expose other forms of the oppressive disciplining of those very bodies.

Silverman (1996) argues that the look has the potential to see what the camera cannot depict. She does this by analyzing the 1988 film Bilder der Welt und Inschrift des Krieges (Images of the World and the Inscriptions of War), and making two interrelated points: First, contrary to common sense notions, the film presents photography as an "antirealist representational system" (p.149); second, the look has the potential to resist the camera/gaze. One example of the inadequacy of the camera and the resistant look involves the scenes
concerning the factual information that concentration camp survivors took with them. These testimonials, “communicate a ‘truth’ which the camera gaze could never capture precisely because it ‘sees’ with a mechanical and de-corporealized lens – a truth inseparable from the subjective and embodied experience of being a Jewish inmate in a Nazi concentration camp” (p. 158). Bilder, through which Silverman outlines her theory of the resistant look, shows numerical keys to escape plans for Jewish inmates of concentration camps. The plan looks simply like numbers but the narrative and surrounding shots tell the viewer what the numbers mean. The camera sees numbers, but the viewer sees the keys to escape. This sequence “underscores the capacity of the look not merely to see what is inapprehensible to the camera/gaze, but also to alter what that apparatus ‘photographs’” (p.161). Bilder, thus, for Silverman, presents an example where the look manages to resist ideologies imbricated in the gaze through the apparatus of the camera.

The Fourth Look – Resistance

Activating a resistant look is linked to the project of testimony and its corresponding witnessing. Photography’s ambivalent position with respect to testimony because of its apparatic association with forms of domination and its equally ambivalent language of images may seem an unlikely site for a project of testimony and witnessing. Nonetheless, photographs are a form of testament. Given that what we know, we know, at least partially through our subjective and collective positions in inequitable social structure (Dei, 1996; Razack, 1998; Russo, 1991; Thompson, 1996), the proposal to assume the perspective of a “witness” to a photographic image, rather than
that of a spectator, might involve more than reading the story of injustice in an image. Although reading the story of injustice by looking at a picture of injustice might be a particularly important step in the process of becoming a witness – if it were all that were necessary – surely many issues of social justice would have been eradicated through the mass circulation of images.

Angela Davis’ (1996) examination of the problems arising from the mass circulation of images clearly articulates the need for an examination of the look in the context of testimony and the ongoing struggle to respond to injustice in solidarity with oppressed peoples. Davis has written about the fragile and promising position of photography in the context of African American cultural memory. In her autobiographical essay, “Afro images: politics, fashion, and nostalgia,” Davis analyzes the matrix of ideological webs through which her photographic image has been used. Davis’ essay traces the uses and discourses attached to the FBI wanted poster of her, from the sixties to the present. Her essay analyzes both the stimulating and troubling aspects of the “recycling” and “recontextualizing” of her image (p. 88). In the present, that FBI poster has become a fashion symbol co-opted by the “docufashion” (p. 90) genre to erase both the politics of liberation and the politics of state repression that constructed and used the image.

Davis states,

I am remembered as a hairdo. It is humiliating because it reduces a politics of liberation to a politics of fashion, it is humbling because such encounters with the younger generation demonstrate the fragility and mutability of historical images, particularly those associated with African American history. (p. 87)

Multifarious forces have acted upon the image eliciting particular meanings within material conflicts over power. “The segregation of those photographic images” (p. 87) in the U.S.,
combined with an “economy of journalistic images” (p. 87), worked in concert with the stereotype of the “criminality” (p. 87) of blackness to give the state exceptional power. The circulation of that image assisted police and FBI in harassing, detaining and repressing young black women wearing an Afro (p. 88). Police used the wanted picture as a symbol of photographic identification and as a symbol of criminality to simultaneously search for Dr. Davis and to associate her with deviance. The image’s association with police identification technology and truth claims disguised, or made covert, its efficacy as testament to criminality and a demonizing of blackness. In the wake of that repression and brutality, her image is now used to commodify nostalgia by selling the fashions of sixties and seventies black revolutionaries like herself. For Davis, the erasure effected through this commodification has implications for what is to be done in the present. She calls for both an alternative photography and an alternative engagement with photography. Her argument bears directly on this project for I, too, am proposing an alternative engagement with photography, that is, an engagement that attempts to interrogate the look not as an individual process but more as Silverman conceives the look, as a collective endeavour. Such an interrogation seeks to make covert the look’s understanding of an image’s truth claims, and the look’s apprehension of difference through the image.

Because of the paradoxically “invasive and transformative power of the camera” (Davis, 1996, p. 88) the anti-racist question that Dei (1996) raises, “what is to be done,” involves issues of representation and African-American cultural memory. During the seventies, Davis’ image rocked between two poles of meaning, both of which enlisted that “arrested moment” into a politics that silenced the struggle her actions defined. On the one hand, she was seen as a “conspiratorial and monstrous communist, i.e. anti-American” (Davis, 1996, p.88). On the other
hand, she was interpreted as a "charismatic and raucous revolutionary ready to lead the masses into battle" (Davis, 1996, p. 88). Now, during the nineties, the commodification of blackness effects a second erasure: "the hidden historical content which lurks behind the continued association of my name with the ‘Afro’" (p. 90). And, in companion with this erasure, is yet another one: For, as Davis (1996) points out, the history of the epoch has been written in such a way as to erase and diminish "the activist involvement of vast numbers of black women in movements that are now represented with even greater masculinist contours than they actually exhibited at the time" (p. 90). In interrogating the look as it apprehends images of the civil rights movement, this project works to expose the ways the look is seduced by the image and to renegotiate a form of resistant looking that will eventually allow it to see that erased activist involvement of black women. The point is not to make the photograph more true, rather, it is to engage in an act of solidarity, to demonstrate the structuring power of the photograph, and to activate the resistant look.

In elucidating the seduction and the problem of seeking to know the past through popular representations, Davis (1996) joins the now growing chorus of voices calling for an alternative photography. Simultaneously, and more importantly for this project, she calls for a change in the process of negotiating meaning – with, through and in contrast to these popular images and stereotypes.

"[W]e seem condemned to seek the historical past," Jameson writes, "through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach." Perhaps by also taking up John Berger’s call for an ‘alternative photography’ we might develop strategies for engaging with photographic images like the ones I have evoked, by actively seeking to
transform their interpretive contexts in education, popular culture, the media, community organizing, and so on. Particularly in relation to African American historical images, we need to find ways of incorporating them into ‘social and political memory, instead of using [them] as a substitute which encourages the atrophy of such memory.’ (Davis, 1996, p. 91)

Davis’ exhortation to reinterpret these images through African-American memory cannot simply be imitated by a well intentioned white researcher like myself. White memory must unveil the erasures of the history of domination that run through the official histories and more personal subjectivities in order to work in solidarity with collective black memory. This process of decolonizing my look and renegotiating my identificatory desires and investments will necessarily involve a transfer of my look onto images of the self (i.e. the white subject). This refocussing of the look forces it to come to terms with those systems of domination embedded within my own subjectivity. The purpose of the shift of focus is not to re-centre whiteness but is to dismantle the covert forms of domination inherent in whiteness before attempting to look in solidarity with African-American memory. Reckoning with those systems is a necessary component of the apprenticeship about which Simon & Eppert write, and may make it possible then to look at an image such as the Angela Davis image in solidarity with African-American memory.

Simon & Eppert (1997) articulate a process of apprenticeship to testimony as an aspect of “witnessing.” This project works within historical studies attempting to expose the kind of erasures Davis (1996) illuminates as one aspect of apprenticing the look to witnessing.

Throughout this inquiry of looking at civil rights movement photographs, I ask, what does this
arrested moment of the image erase? Because my white privilege and subjectivities may collude with that erasure, I seek out historical writings that explore the experiences, strategies and politics of the oppressed and the subaltern. The point here is to acknowledge how a picture that becomes an “arrested moment” gathers and frames particular meanings from circulating within social systems of domination (Davis, 1996). Because of the ambiguity of the photographic image as a sign system and its inculcation within the historical construction of vision and Western traditions, photographs are themselves imbricated in forms of imperialism and white supremacism. Thus an interrogation of the look within this project must include, among other measures, an engagement not just with the appearances of an image but with particular absences that the image constructs. The project uses memoir and histories to enable the look to engage with those erasures and absences. In a sense, I will use African-American histories to give presence to the material existence of the lives erased by photography’s gaze, and making those absences present is both a step of interrogating the look and of apprenticing the look to the project of witnessing. Davis’ analysis brings into view alternative histories, politics, and visions. This project will use other forms of narrative to bring erasures and absences into the purview of the look.

Even though it seems an unreliable source for resistance, the look enables what Silverman (1996) terms the “resistant look”: “Finally, the look has all along possessed the capacity to see otherwise from and even in contradiction to the gaze. The eye is always to some degree resistant to the discourses which seek to master and regulate it” (p.156). The resistant look makes evident the connection between the look and recollection (Silverman, 1996, p. 157). The look is linked to memory, it sees what the camera cannot, and thus transforms what the camera photographs: “It
underscores the capacity of the look not merely to see what is inapprehensible to the camera/gaze, but also to alter what that apparatus “photographs” (Silverman, 1996, pp.160-161). Because the look is embedded within desire and the body, it can “reanimate...and open to change what the camera/gaze would both mortify and memorialize. It can consequently provide the locus for a resistant and even transformative vision” (Silverman, 1996, p. 160). The look’s connection to memory facilitates its resistant power.

Transforming the look may potentially realign the relationship between the present and the past that the photograph represents; it may also adjust the relationship between self and other, and, in so doing, it may shift an understanding of the relationship between the look, the gaze and inherited traditions of Western culture. It may be possible to change the meaning of difference by changing the meaning of the visible. Again revisiting certain histories can help articulate this point. As Benjamin (1980) argued, “It is a different nature which speaks to the eye, so different that in place of a space consciously woven together by a man on the spot there enters a space held together unconsciously” (p. 202). This unconscious space of the photograph adds yet another paradox to the look, for it is within this unconscious space that the resistant look lies. The look sees not just what it wants or what it unconsciously perceives. The resistant look may come to a respectful relation in solidarity with the other. This relation is not found by chance. As Barthes (1980) argued, “The variation in readings is not anarchic; it depends on the different kinds of knowledge – practical, national, cultural, aesthetic – invested in the image” (Barthes, 1980, p. 280).

In the next chapter, I will engage the look with an image of Rita Scwherner, a civil rights activist who worked for CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality and whose husband was
murdered along with two other civil rights activists. In this chapter I will move through a series of looks. In each look, I will use autobiographical writing and historical traces to open the look to seeing what is not in the photograph and to seeing from a perspective that acknowledges my own position and desires within social roles as well as the history of the oppression of African Americans in the U.S.
Chapter Three
Looking for Rita

In this chapter I explore my desire to find agency in this image of a white woman. I use historical accounts to corroborate the agency that my look longs for. I question the ways white femininity is positioned within the context of the photographic essay where the image is found and within the struggle that the image depicts. My look attempts to bring into view some of the absences that the photographic moment creates. Those absences concern white middle-class women's anti-racist agency. A focus on this absence allows for the forgetting of another absence that relates to violence against African Americans resisting white supremacism. In repeated looks I attempt to revision the image in light of these absences.

The Image

A slim woman in a paisley sleeveless dress sits against a wall next to a small table. She is wearing sunglasses and a watch. Her right fist is held up to her mouth and her right elbow rests on her left hand which crosses her abdomen, holding herself. A pack of cigarettes lies on the table and several butts rest in the ashtray. A bottle and glass sit on the far corner of the table. The woman's hair is gathered up behind her. Her legs are crossed and tucked away from the viewer. She does not look at the camera, but looks out of the image. The woman’s body borders shadows. Her left side is illuminated and part of her face and right side is in shadow. The text next to the image reads: “Left: Rita Schwerner anxiously awaits news after her husband’s
disappearance" (Moore & Durham, 1991, p. 140).

The First Look – Seeing the Image and Wrestling with Liberal Aestheticism

First glance.

I don’t remember now what initially struck me about this photograph, but I remember pausing to look, returning to look, and ruminating on the image. It may be that I see some kind of dignity in her pose. No doubt, also her dress, her sunglasses, her general style engaged my nostalgia for the sixties. I do know that I saw something that appeared to me as contained rage and that attracted my attention. My look perceived that she had a particular ability to control both her fear and her rage. It seemed to me this control gave her both power and lucidity. I saw, while waiting for news about her “husband’s disappearance,” she was both frightened of the violence white supremacists may have done to her husband’s body and frightened by what they may subsequently do to her or other civil rights workers. My look perceived that she is enragéd by the threat of that violence, the fear of it, and the injustice of it. I also saw that she has better control than I have had when the threat, the fear and the injustice of white male violence have enraged me. I saw her as much more than the anxious widow, as more than her connection to men, which may have been one part of her life but never the entirety as the image/text represents. I hoped she was capable of transforming her rage into articulate speech and effective political action. And, that hope is what propelled me to begin researching Rita’s tracks and interrogating my look.

In terms of the larger image and textual narrative where I have found Rita’s picture, her representation serves as a pause in action and as such also a contrast to both patriarchal violence and justice. The most immediate story is the disappearance and murder of Michael Schwerner,
James Chaney and Andrew Goodman, three civil rights workers in Mississippi during the summer of 1964. Surrounding pictures tell the story of their disappearance, and the discovery of their mutilated and burned bodies. This story is embedded within the larger story of the civil rights movement as told through Charles Moore’s (1991) documentary pictures and Michael Durham’s textual descriptions in Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore. Rita’s representation invites the viewer’s empathy and establishes connections between the murdered boys and the larger human community. Rita’s image witnesses the violence visited on the three dead men as she literally looks toward the pages that depict the search for their missing bodies. Simultaneously the emotions of the scene and my emotions as a viewer are directed at and fixated on the image of Rita’s body.

White women’s bodies and the bodies of women of colour have figured as home to emotions consistently throughout the Western tradition of patriarchal thought and ideology (Walkerdine, 1990). As I am drawn to contemplate Rita’s emotions, I want to resist conceiving of her as a body of emotions absent of the will to act and unable to reason. For these are conceptions of the female body constructed through patriarchy and white suprematism in the West. Moore’s documentary narrative taps into those concepts of the female body in order to use Rita’s image to tell his version of this particular episode of the civil rights movement.

This patriarchal fantasy has conscripted my body countless times as a character in its drama about white male power and privilege. Because of my history, because of my lived memories of the shackled, trapped, enraged, hopeless feelings that have accompanied this ritualized erasure of my will to act and my ability to reason; because men’s projected emotions have become the one aspect of me that makes me visible and potentially desirable, I want to
throw their emotions back onto their representations. I want to both dismantle them and let them fester in the forms of terror that patriarchy has enabled. I want, also, to disempower the forms of juridical supports for that terror. And yet, there seems to be no opening for such a gesture. Instead, I search for Rita’s actions and reason in order to rupture the frame that Moore’s representation posits. In this way, I theoretically throw a brick into the frame that inscribes her, a frame drawn out of an imagined femininity that is positioned for victimization, which draws in the viewer’s empathy, compassion and emotions. You and I are supposed to feel for her; we are not supposed to think about how she came to be constructed or engage with her politics.

**Questioning my compassionate look.**

The picture about which I write rests in the top left hand corner of a two-page spread. There, from within a small window, a woman looks out of the frame and off the page into the distance. Her body twists about itself: Her chin leans against her right fist, which bends in response, down through the elbow that crosses her abdomen; beneath the table, her legs curl together. She wears sunglasses, a sleeveless, paisley-print dress and her hair is tied up in a bun. Her picture represents a stillness in contrast to the activity of the men. Looking at her picture, I wonder what she must have been thinking and feeling. While pondering this image of Rita Schwerner, my look sees her holding in a rage for the system that empowers, and the ideology that inspires the men in the adjacent images. In these other images, Philadelphia Sheriff Lawrence Rainey and Deputy Cecil Price are shown being brought into court for questioning in connection to the murders. The text states, “Price and six other defendants were eventually convicted for conspiring to deprive the victims of their civil rights” (Moore & Durham, 1991, p.
I see that she is trying to juggle hope and profound pessimism. My look perceives that she is in a state of shock as she looks out of the frame, away from the action on the adjoining pages. I wonder who or what she trusts. And as I wonder these things about the representations of a woman who has been constructed by the photographer Charles Moore and I, my mind revisits some moments from my own life when I felt a profound rage, an isolation, a distrust.

The pause Moore has created through juxtaposition and portraiture opens a space for my musing and that ruminating leads to experiential memories as it simultaneously propels me to investigate the woman represented. In fact, searching for evidence of Rita’s power becomes one of the methods I use to separate myself from the power of my own experiential memories. I know that Moore has inserted this portrait in order to use Rita’s image, her femininity, her glance away from the action, her bounded body, in order to lead me to question the institutional and legal powers represented in contrast to her image. I know that this photograph represents one in a series of photographs that uses the concepts of a colour and power evasive discourse to counter essentialized racism (Frankenberg, 1993), but still I want to fill the space the photograph opens with the qualities of a woman I can trust and admire. So, I look for clues of that other Rita, hoping to find evidence that she is more than a man’s device. This search becomes part of my own healing from having been violated into being simply a man’s device.

And I am still unsure of my affective reactions, for the structures that position and frame this representation of Rita comprise one small aspect of the problems across race, class, gender, ability and sexuality that we have inherited and live through today. In fact, Moore’s extensive photographic work was credited in the sixties with having helped sway Congress to enact legislation that would assist in the dismantling of the prevalent juridical supports to the system of
white suprematism (Goldberg, 1991 p. 208). To deny the efficacy or power of these images at the
time of their publication would be a-historical and naive. Rather, I would ask how do these
photographs work? To whom do they speak and what do they say? The lure of these images
depends in no small part on a liberal aesthetic that compliments a discourse of colour and power
evasion (Frankenberg, 1993; Solomon-Godeau, 1991). Within this framework, art transcends
social and power relations, art is the romanticized expression of a unique vision, and art conveys
a higher truth (Chaplin, 1994; Solomon-Godeau, 1991). These liberal aesthetic concepts help to
mask the colour and power evasive discourse that erases material and power relations. Even as
the photographs depict those material and power inequalities, the documentary as a whole
contradicts its own evidence (in a sense) and asks me to believe in a universal humanity in which
rights are guaranteed, people are treated equally, and Christian tolerance prevails.

Many social and art historians have critiqued and excavated the concepts and power
relations that a liberal aesthetics generates (Chaplin, 1994; Solomon-Godeau, 1991; Tagg, 1988).
In this instance, the deployment of compassion by the look is tied to what Solomon-Godeau
(1991) calls “a double act of subjugation” (p.176). In this conceptual frame, the subjects are
victimized in the social and economic material relations and then again within the “regime of the
image” (p.176). From this perspective the image is the product of a relation between the
photographer and the subject photographed, not simply a product of an artist-photographer.
Documentary photography has naively conceived or ignored that relationship and the imbalances
of power it represents. The documentary image also becomes a vehicle for a bourgeois audience
to engage with its own fears rather than with the systemic issues that have created the social
oppression. A documentary photograph in this way, while used to work against oppression, can
inadvertently serve up an image that speaks to the powerful about their own fears of disempowerment in the guise of the "other." In this way the documentary image does not work for social justice because it reinstates the power imbalances that create that injustice in the first place: Rita’s whiteness attracted the press core and a national audience, reinforcing the notion that her white emotions and familial attachments were more important than those of a black woman, such as Mrs. Chaney, for example – who lost a son. According to Solomon-Godeau (1991):

We must ask whether the place of the documentary subject as it is constructed for the more powerful spectator is not always, in some sense, given in advance. We must ask, in other words, whether the documentary act does not involve a double act of subjugation: first, in the social world that has produced its victims; and second, in the regime of the image produced within and for the same system that engenders the conditions it then re-presents. (p. 176)

Moore’s documentary asks me as a viewer to feel compassion for civil rights movement workers. This compassion may displace or add to compassion for the African Americans whose rights have been denied by segregation and whose liberation movement prompted these photographs. Through that compassionate look and the alignment of my look with the camera/gaze, my power as a viewer of another subject’s victimization positions me with privilege and allows my look to envisage not the systems that create the victimization, but my own fears of victimization, thus re-inscribing the power imbalance. Because of this act of double oppression initiated through the "regime of the image" this research initially focusses this interrogation on images of white women.
In no way does this project claim to privilege whiteness or usurp and rewrite the civil rights movement from a white point of view. On the contrary, this research asks, how might I engage with representations of the civil rights movement through the look so as to disrupt and resist forms of reading and structures of representational politics, which doubly subjugate African Americans. This project attempts to avoid the erasure of the power of resistance and authority that African Americans asserted through this movement, and that the white bourgeois look can inadvertently or purposefully instantiate as it envisages documentary images. The project alternatively asks how can an engagement with this representation, which is supported by a liberal aesthetic, expressed through the codes of colour and power evasion, composed in and through the conceptual history of documentary, and conceived of through the lens of a Southern white male, politicize my lived experience? The study asks what kinds of engagement will promote anti-racist strategies and disrupt representational politics which re-inscribe material forms of oppression.

On the one hand, in lieu of the multiple structures and ideologies imbricated in these documentary pictures, my desire to break open frames that position the image and my viewing of it seems to bear a complex relationship to the contradictions inherent in the power dynamics of documentary photography. Breaking open these frames by critically examining the historical influences, the ideological underpinnings and the power relations embedded in the structures may be an intellectual exercise; whereas breaking open the frames through an interrogation of the look where they imbricate my identity, desires and self concepts, potentially opens possibilities for politicizing my lived experience and the look. In other words, what I am attempting to do
here is analyze the look and ideological practices which constitute particular media
representations in conjunction with autobiographical and affective writing in order to politicize
everyday lived experience and in order to theorize the grounds for looking in solidarity.

Affect enables my viewing to slip toward problematic structures of power. My affective
reactions to Rita’s representation lead me to feelings that seem to resonate with her experience
even though my privilege as a white, middle-class, Protestant/Jewish woman has protected me to
a great extent from the dramatic forms of white supremacist male violence depicted within this
documentary. Nonetheless, I feel solidarity with her fear and rage. My Jewishness, which is not
particularly visibly marked, has occasionally brought me under threat of mild forms of
anti-Semitic violence. I have occasionally been the brunt of white supremacist taunting. My
gender has made me the target of molestation and rape. But, I have never been faced with the
kind of extreme threats of bodily mutilation and torture that Rita Schwerner is facing in this
represented moment. In terms of feminist knowledge production then, I cannot draw on direct
experience to understand this moment; I either have to draw from other fearful moments for
experiential understanding or question the efficacy of experiential understanding (Scott, 1992).

I am exploring the limits and circumscriptions of experiential, sympathetic and
empathetic negotiations with cultural representations, searching for methods of rupturing the
experiential negotiation so as to enable the politicization of the lived experience. If experiential
understanding in this case obstructs my consideration of the political and social implications of
these photographs, the research asks what other forms of feminist, post-colonial, or post-
structural reading might complement a reading that questions the viewpoint of my socially
constructed look?

Exploring another affective slip in the mud of representational engagement, some thirty years after the event, I am seduced by both the woman’s poise and her control. My look seems partly taken over by the feminizations of the image and in so doing it evades other social implications of the documentary image. I see an elegant, poised young woman, full of potential agency as her body is wrapt in thought. Even as I know that white supremacism authorizes and is inscribed through both violence and sexuality, my look is temporarily mesmerized by the promise of white femininity’s demure agency. In that temporary moment, my look forgets the particular historical and material form of white supremacism manifested in Southern segregated social relations and in the Ku Klux Klan, which authorized a brutal murder of three individuals in order to symbolically set an example.

The example, far from unique, given the evidence of lynching since Reconstruction, comprised one aspect of a continuing exercise of power and domination. Rita worked as a member of a coalition of community groups that formed a larger network of organizations and fought steadily to transform the systemic oppressions of white supremacism. Despite the use of the discourse of colour and power evasion within and through the lexicon of the documentary project, Rita used a discourse of race cognizance as a strategic tool in her efforts to disrupt and dismantle the forms of white supremacist culture that she faced in the early sixties (in the Through Our Eyes Video and History Project at Satellite Academy High School, 1991). Rita’s political interventions into the racist ideology of her time, her own cognizance of media frames and her struggles to disrupt those frames are not evident in the Moore & Durham image text.
Analyzing those frames that encircle her representation and my engagement therein may disrupt their influence. Struggling to politicize the representational ground and the ground where my look meets the ideological practices of that representation may further disrupt more entrenched ideological systems (Hall, 1990; Smith, 1990).

My look still sees a woman holding in fear. She sits in a curled-up body waiting to know what she hopes will not be true; the shadows around her are closing in. Her arm across her body supports her. Her chin rests against her fist as if to say, “This unjust violence cannot be happening still.” She waits unwillingly, her fist signalling her resistance. I see her wondering how she came to be in the middle of this race war.

The Second Look – The Conundrums of Art Documentary and Bourgeois History

The image in context.

I am viewing this picture in a glossy coffee table documentary art book published in 1991. The book is a collection of Charles Moore’s documentary photographs taken of civil rights demonstrations throughout the South in the fifties and sixties. The pictures are accompanied by short narrative stories that give context by telling a broad and stereotypical story of the civil rights movement. Captions name individuals and add details to the context of pictures.

In the 1991 Moore & Durham version of the events, grass-roots organizing and local community activists’ work, such as voter registration, voter education, community building, testimonials, and marching to the poll offices, surround and give context to two violent and dramatic events. These two brutal events serve to contain, like bookends, the chapter entitled
“Voter Registration Mississippi 1963-64.” Two introductory pages, which include a summary of events and two pictures of local community workers, precede the four pages depicting the funeral of civil rights leader Medgar Evers. Ten pages of more community organizing, more police harassment, marches, educational meetings, and moments of spreading the word, follow the funeral procession section. The chapter ends with four pages devoted to the Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner disappearance and murder investigation. Two of the pages devoted to Medgar Evers’ funeral bear witness to Martin Luther King Jr.’s presence in a leadership role. This chapter is quite literally framed by violent incidents, for the Medgar Evers incident borders the beginning section and the Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner incident borders the end.

I will focus my comments on the latter incident as it relates to the representation of white womanhood articulated in the photograph of Rita Schwerner. However, the Medgar Evers murder should not be summarily pushed aside. Bearing witness to that moment of white supremacy’s violence, and material as well as symbolic attack on black leadership and manhood, concerns many cultural workers. Negotiating through terrain that pits these two acts of violence into hierarchical frames becomes deeply problematic and political. Clearly public space should be carved out to remember the heroism of Mr. Evers. Also the significance of that event to the African-American community must be honoured and respected. This current argument has a different focus, however. This research seeks to examine and interrogate structural forces that compose a white look, and thus the Chaney, Goodman, Schwerner episode becomes pivotal.

In the Moore & Durham representation of the violence against Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner, no mention is made of race. The three young men are identified as “civil rights
workers.” This erasing of racial difference among the victims belongs to a strategy used to combat essentialized racism. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) names it “colour- and power-evasiveness” (p. 142). Within this discourse, race difference is erased in order to counter the claims put forth by the biological determinist discourse that race is a biological and essential difference among peoples occurring in nature that must be supported by social structures that separate the races. The colour and power evasive discourse counters the claims embedded in biological and racist essential discourse by establishing that human beings are members of one race and that the differences between races are fabricated (Frankenberg, 1993; Goldberg, 1993).

A familiar chorus from this discourse makes use of the notion that we have the same blood if not the same skin (Frankenberg, 1993). This “sameness” united black and white against bigots and segregationists and proved false the truth claims of those same groups. Or so went the strategy. Race scholars such as Frankenberg (1993) and Goldberg (1993), among a growing number of others, have pointed out the failures and traps left in the wake of the colour evasive and power evasive strategy. Problems arising from this strategy include a framing of racism in terms of individual prejudices, a concentration on individual consciousness as a site for social justice work, an eliding of structural and systemic forms of racialized hierarchies, and a focus away from social change strategies that target and dismantle hierarchical systems, structures and discourses (Frankenberg, 1993). Some of the implications of the Moore & Durham erasure of racial difference among the three victims include an evasion of the questions concerning press interest in the case, and an erasure of the history and specificity of white supremacy’s use of lynching against predominantly black male bodies. Rita Schwener coincidentally attempted to
bring those problems to light during the period when Moore captured her profile on camera.

According to eyewitnesses giving testimony to a high school film crew from the Bronx, Rita Schwerner spoke out to the press precisely about the issue of race politics. According to an eyewitness in the Paper Tiger film *The Road to Mississippi: Reclaiming Our History* (1991) produced by the Through Our Eyes Video and History Project at Satellite Academy High School, Rita Schwerner drew attention to the fact that race made a difference in press coverage. According to Dorothy Zellner, a contemporary activist, Rita pointed out to the press that had James Chaney been the only missing person, they wouldn’t have been interested in the story. She knew that the whiteness and privilege of her husband and Goodman had made this incident of racial terror a story for the press. According to Zellner, Rita’s speaking out and her demands that the FBI come down to Mississippi transformed her from activist to hero.

In the Paper Tiger film, Rita is remembered as not having spoken from a colour and power evasive repertoire, but from what Frankenberg (1993) terms “race-cognizant reassertions and reorientations of race difference” (p. 140). Rita, according to these accounts, played a significant role in bringing the FBI and media attention to the event by holding press conferences, and unremittingly petitioning officials of the state (Belfrage, 1965). At one such press conference, Rita said, “You wouldn’t be here if only James Chaney had been murdered” (Through Our Eyes Video and History Project at Satellite Academy High School, 1991). Rita drew attention to the fact that the press was clamouring to cover the event because two white youths had been murdered. She also alluded to the history of mainstream and national silence in the cases of the lynchings of thousands of black men in the South during the period following
Reconstruction up until the Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman murders. Her comment deftly
focusses attention on race, on the politics of press representation and on the history of white
supremacist systemic violence. It is no coincidence that the press, looking for violent incidents
and actions of national male leaders, would have cut Rita’s actions from their version of the
story.

Given the fact that Rita was speaking at rallies, holding numerous press conferences, and
petitioning those in power, this portrait of her waiting passively seems a radical and outlandish
fantasy. Moore must have found her during one short break. The sheer activity of this woman
during this so-called waiting period draws my attention. The passivity of her image now appears
to me as a staged frame that becomes a prison through which Rita’s and my own actions will be
filtered by discourses constructed to disempower us. I want her to be seen as a hero for her
courage, for her strategic and deliberate petitions to the powerful on behalf of justice, even
though I understand the link between that need to make her into a hero and the privilege of her
whiteness. Although my desire implicates narcissism in my gaze, because Rita was a first hand
witness and because her actions constitute testimony, her representation and the erasure of her
anti-racist politics is more than a matter of narcissistic identification. It is a matter of justice.
Precisely because markers of race, sexuality, gender, class, and ability are linked and depend on
each other, this is a matter of justice that relates to other forms of erasure and de-politicization.
The erasure of a white woman’s anti-racist politics is linked to the erasure of African-American
women’s organizing strategies and leadership (Davis, 1996; Hall, 1983), through the system of
white male supremacy. My look feels it is now ethical and important that I see Rita addressing
the powerful and inspiring a group to continue fighting oppression.

The politics of art photography.

The photographs in Moore’s book depict a variety of scenes portraying racialized struggles over rights and access to institutions as well as power. These pictures represent African Americans coming together in churches, in mourning, in marches, in protest, in demonstrations, in sit-ins and in educational circles at home. The pictures display proficient photographic technical and artistic skill. Each one is meticulously crafted to exploit the contrast of light and to heighten compositional features. This attention to detail enhances the moods, messages and semiotics of each photograph. Some photographs dramatically expose to view the potential violence of racial struggles, others build the suspense of that exposure, legitimate and witness African-American leaders, witness civil rights workers’ day to day work, witness African American individual and group resistance to white supremacist social and legal codes and finally, other photographs witness acts of violence committed by white men and crowds of white men and women against African Americans.

Moore’s photographs demonstrate a tendency, as Payne notes, to record violence as story, to aggrandize outside leaders and hierarchical forms of leading, to condescend to and minimize local leadership. The 1991 replaying of this framing of the story is detrimental because the presentation of the story in coffee table art form commodifies it in the capitalist system of knowledge production and art commodification. Moore’s photographs become not just real; they also exercise effects of truth as they become art. In becoming art, they become a valuable
commodity in bourgeois ideology. The middle-class uses art to demonstrate their leisure and value, as Chaplin (1994) points out in her book, *Sociology and Visual Representation*. Thus, a movement created for and by poor and Southern African Americans, after several cycles through the public domain of image production, becomes appropriated by the middle-class, liberal elite.

A curious thing happens when documentary is officially recognized as art. Suddenly the hermeneutic pendulum careens from the objectivist end. Positivism yields to a subjective metaphysics, technologies give way to auteurism. Documentary is thought to be art when it transcends its reference to the world, when the work can be regarded, first and foremost, as an act of self-expression on the part of the artist....A cult of authorship, an auteurism, takes hold of the image, separating it from the social conditions of its making and elevating it above the multitude of lowly and mundane uses to which photography is commonly put. (Sekula, 1984, p. 58)

A tendency toward rendering these images artifacts both of the era and of an “auteur” runs through the book. Although Moore’s craft is magnificent, there is something profoundly disturbing about promoting and consuming these images as Art for the bourgeoisie. This movement from radical emancipation of marginalized peoples to liberal commodification of the mainstream is not unique, however. Many photographers now include devices in their work to fight this tendency.

**Rita’s image in the landscape of documentary.**

The artistic aspects of Moore’s pictures add power and drama to the journalist narrative they portray. As Charles Payne (1995) notes, journalists have frequently claimed that their representations and narratives are the rough draft of history. This claim arises throughout the
negotiations between academic historians and active journalists, both professionals who each have investments in making claims as to the veracity of their stories, particularly since their stories often radically differ from one another. Within a Modernist framework, however, there is a hierarchical matrix of relationships of narratives to truth (Goldberg, 1993; Trinh, 1989; Said, 1993). Thus the professional journalist’s claim is at once a disclaimer and a bid for power. Anyone who has spent time writing knows that a rough draft influences, in complex ways, the direction of the final version. Thus, at the same time that journalists eschew a responsibility for conveying the truth, the profession claims to influence the direction of truth simply by naming their version a rough draft. The ambiguous play for narrative power that the rough-draft thesis propounds helps to sidestep the issue of examining the structures that frame the so-called truth that the rough draft disseminates.

The media industry, through its disciplining forces, structures that rough draft in multiple and conflicting ways (Foucault, 1979; Hall, 1990; Trend 1995). Rough drafts of history concerning organizational politics like the “SNCC Position Paper (Women in the Movement)” (1964) or the female leadership within the grassroots movements did not reach the airwaves, nor were they permitted to penetrate the space of mainstream media (Evans, 1979; Stoper, 1989). These stories about the movement were actively edited out of the mainstream press as the institution produced its own version of events. Payne tells the story of one journalist losing his job in his attempt to write against this structuring grain. The media’s shaping of the events included exclusionary practices:

Their collective tendency to frame the story in terms of Big Events, in terms
of what white people did, in terms of national leaders and organizations, in
terms of what happened after 1955, in terms of southern backwardness, in
terms of violence-nonviolence, replicated biases of race, gender and class, and
relegated to secondary importance the themes that would have been important
from a community-organizing perspective. (Payne, 1995, pp. 403-404)

In fact, this structure has limited the rough draft so much that Payne’s job and the job of other
historians has been to unearth the stories that were censored and erased from the rough draft
which the media produced. More than simply unearthing, however, part of the historian’s job has
been to shift the conceptual framework of events away from this media frame and onto such
themes as organizing, women’s networks and grass roots leadership—themes that arise from the
black communities themselves.

It is clear that these pictures represent the kind of press framing that Todd Gitlin defines
and Payne uses to explain the proclivities of the press in covering civil rights movement
activities (Payne, 1995, p. 392). Editors, publishers and media institutions used violence and
male leadership as focal points around which all civil rights stories had to revolve in order, no
doubt, to sell their products and get the “truth” out. This has implications for current attempts at
witnessing. The evidence that these journalistic frames leave detracts from testimony and can
lead my look away from its job of apprenticing to testimony. One aspect of the apprenticeship is
to see beyond the journalistic frame in order to initiate the “double attentiveness” that Simon &
Eppert (1997, p. 182) argue is foundational to witnessing. These foci shape the social imaginary,
which holds the public memory of the civil rights movement. In other words, current anti-racist
historians must engage in revisionist history because of the truth claims that automatically
engage when the media frame a story for the market. Payne points out that many white reporters simply did not have the life experience to enable them either to challenge the frames of the institutions that employed them or to recognize historical activist roots and themes:

With few exceptions, white journalists, southerners included, did not come from backgrounds that would have allowed them to know much about political activity in Black communities since World War II. They would have known little about the activist generation symbolized by Amzie Moore and Steptoe and Gus Courts and Shuttlesworth. Unfamiliar with that history, the 1960’s movement itself and King in particular seemed more a qualitative break with the past than was in fact the case. (Payne, 1995, p. 401)

The social location of individual white male journalists, combined with the larger structures of media framing, has thus grafted a particular version of the civil rights movement onto the cultural sphere. This media version separates the epoch from earlier eras and subordinates grassroots organizing to violent events and national leaders. Anti-racist scholars work diligently to unearth the evidence from oral histories, organizational archives, journals and eyewitness accounts that break open this limiting frame. And still, these frames, these focal points, remain in circulation echoing their stories, seducing new audiences, influencing negotiations through complex relations, and luring my look away from the apprenticeship process of witnessing.

Hall’s discussion of the ideological construction of race through the media and strategies of anti-racist interventions is relevant here:

How we ‘see’ ourselves and our social relations matters, because it enters into and informs our actions and practices. Ideologies are therefore a site of a distinct type of social struggle....Nevertheless, ideology is a practice. It has its own specific way of working. And it is generated, produced and reproduced in specific settings (sites) –
especially, in the apparatus of ideological production which ‘produce’ social meanings and distribute them throughout society, like the media. (Hall, 1990, p. 10)

Hall argues for addressing two related issues: the media’s constructions of race and the strategic questions related to intervening in those ideological constructions. He also argues for collective and strategic interventions with media representations. For Hall, these interventions constitute an important material struggle: they involve transforming the racist “common sense” of the media’s representations to an anti-racist “common sense.” This change involves intervening with “traces” or historical and ideological configurations (Gramsci in Hall, 1990, p. 8). Much of the work of this study consists of engaging the look as it envisions media representations in such a way as to intervene with the “common sense” racist ideologies. The look must apprehend these traces and then search for alternative traces of testimony.

How can I intervene with the ideological struggles that representations articulate, given the fact that those negotiations construct my own identity, politics and consciousness? Given that there is no outside to ideology and no outside to representation, I place myself firmly inside this study and attempt to formulate anti-racist engagements from this site. In this case, how can my look engage with a representation of a subjectivity close to its own and do so in a way that does not collide in the erasure of Rita’s political work nor the erasure of the political work of African Americans. As Hall argues, “We have to ‘speak through’ the ideologies which are active in our society and which provide us with the means of ‘making sense’ of social relations and our place in them” (Hall, 1990, p. 9).

Throughout this section, I have been discussing a particular structural context from which
a media representation was produced. I am arguing that this structuring context is linked to a colonial ideology that locates violence within black culture rather than within its own systems of regulation. Civil rights movement photographs focus the photographer’s gaze on a particular type of colonial system, namely Southern segregation. Simultaneously, photography as apparatus and epistemological system emanates from an imperial system of knowledge. Thus, the ideologies of various forms of colonial relations course through this photography even as it exposes the injustice of relations under white supremacy.

**Sentimentality and bourgeois history.**

The structuring of the civil rights story around violent incidents and national male leadership has other implications as well. Significantly, these two focal points facilitate both a Modernist and a bourgeois conception of history. Within these two notions of history, great men change the world through great battles. Feminist and Marxist theorists have thoroughly debunked and critiqued this narrow vision and its claims to truth as well as to power (Chaplin, 1994; Evans, 1979; Ware, 1996). Nonetheless, it is precisely through this narrative framing structure of bourgeois, white, male ideology that Rita Schwerner’s picture has landed in the book *Powerful Days* (1991). *Life* magazine sent Charles Moore to Mississippi during the summer of 1964 because violence seemed inevitable. The state of Mississippi had passed laws to assist in riot control and the state police force had been doubled and plentifully armed (McAdam, 1988, p.22). After much planning and recruiting, movement organizers drew from college recruits in the North, Mid-west and West to bring nearly a thousand student volunteers to rural Mississippi in one of the more organized, more co-operative, more democratically run voter registration drives
and popular educational programs the U.S. had ever seen (McAdam, 1988). But, “they [SNCC staff members] found themselves in the distasteful position of having to exploit the very racism that they had been victims of” (McAdam, 1988, p. 33).

The press covered the “Freedom Summer” because violence seemed inevitable and predicted (Belfrage, 1965). The Summer had been organized by the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, SNCC – a student-run, radical, democratic organization. SNCC provided 95% of staff at state headquarters and 90% of the funds (McAdam, 1988). James Forman of SNCC proposed the idea of bringing a deluge of community workers into Mississippi as a culmination of the voter registration drive that Amzie Moore had been orchestrating for the last decade. Amzie Moore opposed the idea. He had worked for the NAACP through the forties, the fifties and the early sixties. He was part of the generation whose community organizing within the segregated black communities had generated the ideological goals and strategies that would, in the younger generation’s hands, become the civil rights movement (Payne, 1995). For Amzie Moore, the Freedom Summer idea was an idea not quite ready. Forman planned around him; he went to the women in SNCC and convinced the committees that made up SNCC of the potency of Freedom Summer (Payne, 1995). SNCC planned a year ahead of its target date for the event. They built a coalition that brought together under COFO, the Council of Federated Organizations, a coalition of civil rights groups formed in 1962, CORE (the Congress of Racial Equality), SCLC (The Southern Christian Leadership Council) and SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Co-ordinating Committee) for this final thrust of activity. The decision to bring Northern white volunteers down to help with this campaign was contested heavily. Many felt
they would change the movement for the worse. SNCC staff had worked in Mississippi organizing for three years. The staff had faced the intransigence of Mississippi-style racism and violence. In addition to their growing disillusionment with Mississippi, "Just as important was their growing awareness of the depths of federal complicity in Mississippi's system of racism" (McAdam, 1988, p. 31). With misgivings and conflict-ridden discussions, SNCC staff decided to use national racist sensibilities to draw attention to the Mississippi situation. Because of the need for bodies and because of the pull those bodies would have on the press, Amzie Moore and Forman decided, in spite of their reservations, to mobilize white students from college campuses in the North (McAdam, 1988; Payne, 1995). Activists volunteered, and when they signed up they entered a training program in non-violence, voter registration, Freedom Schools and Mississippi race relations through role play (Belfrage, 1965).

Rita Schwerner had been in Mississippi for a year working with CORE. SNCC would be responsible for four congressional districts and CORE for one. When the students were trained in Ohio prior to coming down to Mississippi, Rita was one of the leaders the organizations called upon to train and support the massive number of volunteers. Michael and Rita Schwerner had worked in Mississippi building a community centre under threats of violence and other forms of coercion. The night Michael, James and Andrew disappeared, they were investigating an incident of racial terror. In some ways it was a routine investigation (McAdam, 1988). Amzie Moore had conducted them for twenty years, on his own, as a field secretary for the NAACP in Mississippi. Gathering information on his off hours from his day job as an insurance man, Amzie Moore collected evidence, eyewitness testimony, oral history, and archival material, documenting the
regimes of white supremacy’s oppressive tactics in the state of Mississippi. He did this even though the NAACP had become outlawed in the state in the early sixties (Payne, 1995). The work that younger activists accomplished had been supported and influenced philosophically, strategically and practically by the work that older activists had carried out throughout previous decades (Payne, 1995).

Documenting violence and coercive tactics made up part of the civil rights worker’s job. This gathering of evidence composed an aspect of a multilayered approach to dismantling white supremacy (Payne, 1995). And so, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney and Andrew Goodman went out on a routine mission collecting evidence. What set that night apart was not anything they did but rather the organizational infrastructure that had descended on the state. A legion of non-violent, committed, organized, democratic youths had arrived (Belfrage, 1965; McAdam 1988). Over the years, white supremacy had developed a vocabulary of violent acts with which to maintain its power, ranging from branding, to rape, to whipping, beating, lynching, burning alive, sexual torture, and bodily mutilation to name just a sample (Davis, 1983). On the evening of June 21, 1964, a group of white men drew on that vocabulary to send a symbolic warning statement to the brigade of social change activists who had descended into their midst. And Charles Moore was there to capture the violence of the statement; he recorded the aftermath of the event on film.

Moore’s picture (and Rita’s representation), however, is framed by the media, by the apparatus of the camera, by Western conceptualizations of photography, by the ontological relationship of photography with truth and vision, and by masculinist, white, male notions of
femininity and womanhood. Moore, a Southern white “moderate,” goes looking for the story and finds Rita to play the part of a woman waiting. According to Payne (1995):

> Despite enormous coverage of the Schwerner-Chaney-Goodman killings, Rita Schwerner, Mickey’s widow, felt that ‘the news media had, in general, not used her numerous statements and the tapes she had made because she refused to be maudlin, sentimental, or tearful and had instead tried to discuss the [political] issues involved.’ (p. 395)

Despite her efforts to the contrary, Moore’s camera and Durham’s text enlist her into this “maudlin, sentimental” storyline. It’s as if, given no maudlin or sentimental moment from Rita, Moore took a picture of her after finishing a cigarette and tried to invest it with that sentimentality through the caption and the juxtaposition to other photographs within the documentary. Rita’s work, her actions, her political choices, the multiple forms of resistance she used to attack the status quo of racialized hierarchies, of social reality, are left on the cutting room floor. More profound than Rita’s erasure, however, is the erasure of the community organizing structures and networks that brought Rita, Michael, Andrew and James together to work for social change and that would continue to bring people together working for change throughout the decade (Belfrage 1965; Evans, 1979; McAdam, 1988; Payne, 1995; Stoper, 1989). My possibilities of remembering with her representation as a means of fostering political engagement thus become a complex negotiation. Negotiating that mine field constitutes one of the obligations to witness. I will use critical and autobiographical engagement to both counter the structures set in place through masculinist and racialized histories and to explore alternate uses for this photograph and for the look.

> Now looking at this picture of Rita, I see her stepping outside the forms of press coverage
that attempted to conscript her in a sentimental story. She stands speaking out, leading students, petitioning powerful officials. And all around the periphery of this activism, I see a press corps seeking her out but blind to her actions and words. They have their backs turned to her as she struggles against systemic forms of injustice. They report and photograph with their backs turned toward her.

**What uses does this image serve?**

Another way of engaging with the photograph is to ask what purpose does it serve and how is the image made to serve that purpose? In what context is Rita’s image used? Toward what end? Earlier discussions have touched on some of the points I wish to make in this section. In the broadest or most basic sense the documentary pictures together serve the purpose of proving what photography constantly reiterates, “somebody or something...was somewhere and took a picture. Everything else, everything beyond the imprinting of a trace, is up for grabs” (Sekula, 1984, p. 57). Charles Moore took some pictures in the South during the 1960’s. End of story. The images themselves merely exist as traces. A photograph, a clue, an image must be invested with meaning. It carries no inherent meaning. Those investments emanate from hermeneutical and semiotic traditions which themselves are complex sites of ideological, historical and cultural endowments. Photographs are, nonetheless, used to tell stories, prove truths, sell commodities, and send messages.

The photographs in this book have had several public viewing moments or contexts. Originally they circulated in *Life* magazine. They have also circulated as part of a slide show sponsored by Eastman Kodak and delivered by Charles Moore. Additionally, they have been
used in documentary films and advertisements. Finally, they have circulated as part of a book. Each context has generated multiple uses for the photographs. During their incarnation in *Life* magazine they were used to sell magazines and bring a mass audience to the advertisements for commodities and services that the magazine promoted. They were also used to sell Congress on the Civil Rights Bill. Pictures were selected both for their supposed mass appeal, for their ability to illustrate events or concepts in the accompanying magazine text, and for their proximity to the official storyline propagated through the media (Payne, 1995).

In the early 1990’s, the Eastman Kodak tour presented the photographs accompanied by Moore as a seminar on documentary photography. The tour travelled to universities across the United States. Eastman Kodak presumably saw this as a promotional opportunity to sell film, the ideological potential of photography and the practice of documentary. Moore discussed techniques and annotated the slides, which he presented at major photography schools. The book sold in art book shops and in photography sections of book stores. Occasionally it was used in window displays to attract shoppers. Again the pictures were used to sell commodities. The three public contexts for viewing become three gradual but insidious forms of commodification of the civil rights movement pictures.

The history of photography is saturated with the production and circulation of images as commodities (Solomon-Godeau, 1991; Tagg, 1988). Indeed the practice of photography has been popularized via this commodifying process. Every era since the daguerreotype has developed a new form of technology for producing a photographic image. That technique has then served to feed the cultural obsession with types of imagery. Consistently, women and
non-European “others” have been the subject of the Western photographers’ commodifying lens (Chaplin, 1994; Rony, 1996; Solomon-Godeau, 1991; Tagg, 1988).

There are material, hermeneutic and pedagogical implications for the commodifying of the civil rights movement. The fact that black labour, even the labour the community generates to liberate itself from oppressive forces, can be almost seamlessly commodified attests to the power of capitalist economic structures combined with liberal democratic social and political structures to appropriate and co-opt the very movements marshalled against them. The economic activity generated through the segregated advertising structures of Life magazine in the sixties could hardly be said to benefit African-American communities. In fact, Moore (1991) himself acknowledges that at the time he took the pictures there existed a “negro press.” Life magazine’s advertisements were directed at a white middle-class audience. The economic activity that Moore’s Eastman Kodak tour and companion book generated also went into the pocket of a Southern white man, Moore, and a predominantly white Northern corporation, Eastman Kodak. Economically speaking, the white middle-class has leached images of African-American struggle to line their pockets.

This commodification, though it may have the aura of invisibility, is by no means a neutral process. Ideological and narrative structures frame, shape and mold the image so that the commodity will sell. Those structuring forces become more apparent if we compare Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore (1991) to other photographic essays. The book, The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality (1964) (produced by SNCC, The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, text by Lorraine Hansberry) is one such example.
A comparison of these two different versions of the movement points to the constructed nature of the representations and the importance of their use as a framing system. The SNCC book was used as an educational tool to make clear some of the issues involved in the civil rights movement and was created with the assistance of the communications collective of the organization. Differences abound in *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality*, which includes collective viewpoints, photographs taken by different photographers with access to particular aspects of the movement; images of lynching which are connected through textual and other images to the maintenance of the material economic relations of white supremacy (with roots in a slave economy), the masking of violence and of social and economic inequities inherent in certain representations of Southern society; the interrelations of many different forms of African-American resistance and liberation movements; as well as the grass-roots component of these organizations and the leadership potential of each member. The text and documentary photographs make connections between narrative romantic versions of the South, economic structures that have oppressed African Americans in the South, the state penal system, which serves also to facilitate that economic system, African Americans’ creative endurance, lynching, segregated signs, as well as the flight to Northern ghettoes. For example, in a series of photographs early on, I see images of a plantation and pastoral scene with a horse, an image of white people cavorting around the lynched body of a black man, signs depicting “coloured” and “white” at two drinking fountains, a chain gang, people in Northern ghettoes, the Southern countryside as represented by an industrial factory and a tenant farmer’s shack, an African-American woman laughing, and a cotton picker (the text details his wage at $2.50 a day) (p.22).
The text and juxtaposition of images link these representations of the implications of a state-supported white supremacist system of capitalism to the material lives of black African Americans and white European Americans.

The national press corps’ framing of violent incidents and focus on national leaders contrasts most strikingly with these themes. Also, the absences beg for visibility and deserve scrutiny: Lynching for example is absent from national press coverage as are its links to a form of terrorism working in concert both with a judicial system of penal labour and a social system of segregation. Endurance as a route to liberation and cultural forms of community building also are absent as are their links to protests and organized inter-community group struggle for liberation. The photographer’s social locations combined with the viewing context and its uses determine those absences. As a white Southern middle-class male, Moore would have had to make concerted efforts over long periods of time to witness the community organizing behind the camera-ready protest. As a white Southern male, he would have to engage in profound psychoanalytic journeys to see the imbrication of his sexuality and identity formation in the lynching trope.

Looking at the images in terms of Ruth Frankenberg’s (1993) social geographies of white women’s discourse on race in the late twentieth century, a number of themes emerge. The title and particular images that represent obvious brutality perpetrated by white men reinforce the discourse that Frankenberg terms “colour and power evasiveness.” The guilt of those who perpetrate overt racist acts of violence and the innocence of the victims of that violence resonates through the subject positions of the colour and power evasive discourse (Frankenberg, 1993).
This discourse constructs the individual according to liberal humanist conceptions. Human beings possess essential qualities that are the same across races. The goodness or badness of the individual determines his or her racism. Political and social structures do not come under scrutiny within the discourse of colour and power evasion. The rhetoric of innocence and guilt permeates this position.

Moore’s pictures effectively capture violence. In addition to selling commodities, these pictures construct a liberal vehicle for empathetically understanding the plight of the victims of segregation. In other words, these pictures construct a vehicle for white viewers to project their feelings of guilt concerning white privilege onto the bodies of the “others” that their privilege has created. Thus the commodification of the civil rights movement has resulted in the marketing of white commodities to white consumers and the marketing of white guilt to white consumers. Simultaneously the passage of laws helps to assuage that guilt and to erase both the history of white supremacist codes of violence and the critique of systemic forms of white supremacist material culture.

Moore’s pictures catapulted him to national fame. He was given an award for these pictures and during that ceremony was recognized for having convinced Congress of the necessity for the Civil Rights Bill. Popular white culture endlessly transforms into heroes figures of the white press corps who cover movements of emancipation of “othered” peoples. As a consumer of this journalism, I may cross segregated cultural boundaries by following the reporter’s coverage at the same time that my privilege and hierarchical relation to those represented others is confirmed through the lionizing of the reporter’s work. Moore’s aura as a
documentary artist reifies the images as it de-contextualizes them and commodifies them in the market of high culture as opposed to popular culture (Benjamin, 1980). What has become art, what is used to form a pedagogy for documentary, as in the Eastman Kodak tour, has been molded out of the alchemy of white male privilege, commodity culture and liberal guilt. Surely a re-circulation of these images mandates a scrutiny of the politics of representation and an interrogation of my viewing subjectivities.

My look, now, sees a multitude of superimposed exposures on one frame. In one exposure a camera conjures Rita’s seated body through its lens. She stands addressing a SNCC crowd, one among other activists—white and of colour. The camera lens envisions her individual parts and reassembles them, producing the picture of a seated woman. In a second exposure Rita actively implores powerful men to fight for justice. The press hold up effigies of violent events, male leaders and white activists. The effigies fill the view of the cameras and cast shadows over the crowds of activists holding a meeting so that I can only guess at their activities. In another exposure, I see only her glance looking out from behind the effigies. She looks out without her sunglasses on and seems to lead my look toward the shadows where I see silhouettes still hidden by the effigies. My look sees also a set of images standing beside these: In one, Rita’s image has become a vessel for the paternalism of my look, and in the other she has become a magnet shifting my vision away from the violence and onto her predicament.
The Third Look – Exposing Femininity’s Position

Rita’s position in Moore’s project.

The media’s quest for national leaders and violent incidents comprises one aspect of a structuring frame that situates Rita’s representation and my engagement therein. In a sense these media structures form the outline for the story. Rita’s representation is chosen and speaks in relation to this larger, supposedly more significant, national story. The story that Moore tells as a cultural worker practising photo journalism for the mass media articulates its message through the discourse of colour and power evasion and through the guiding systems of media structures. Moore’s photographic practice marshals this discursive practice to counter the discourse of essentialized racism, which supports the social and legal system of segregation. His ethical project aims towards “tolerance” as his introduction claims (Moore & Durham, 1991).

Moore’s picture of Rita constitutes one element of his evidence supporting the need for tolerance. His pictures must counter particular overt and covert tenets of essentialized racism such as the following: There are innate and biologically essential differences between peoples of different races; because of those differences social institutions must separate people according to race groups; a hierarchical relationship occurs in nature, which finds European and white men at the pinnacle of culture; because of nature, women are always subordinate to men; peoples of African descent and all peoples considered peoples of colour are less human and less civilized than white Europeans; black Africans are the least human and least civilized of all groups.

Moore’s pictures engage with the ideologies of the era to refute the claims of
essentialized racism and to promote notions of tolerance. He uses the supposed universal codes of Christianity to structure the whole book and then within Christianity’s moral framework invites the viewer to visit the Southern United States during the civil rights movement era. His pictures show white Southern men acting in the most inhuman and brutal manner in a way that allows the white Northern men and women viewing these photographs to distance themselves from those depicted and their “Southern” institutions. His pictures show the institutions of European and white culture attacking and punishing people of colour and civil rights workers. He shows these same institutions making a mockery of justice. Moore’s photographic viewpoint relies on the Christian concepts of innocence, sin and moral conduct to articulate its counter argument to essentialized racism. Meanwhile, the media assigns Moore to “cover” violent incidents and national leaders. Moore’s project of countering essentialized racism through the discourses of colour and power evasion and tolerance becomes enmeshed in the media’s narrative. Moore’s project, in turn, works against and with that media structure.

In the context of violent media events, Rita becomes part of the story of its implications. If one is searching for the truth of violence or the so-called “reality” of violence one might ask: what are the implications of the violence? Rita’s image tells the story of one of the implications of the event rather than of “what happened.” Because Moore’s documentary project aims to counter essentialized racism, he uses Rita’s image to tell his story. I would argue that Moore uses Rita’s femininity and her status as heterosexual wife to further his goal. In a sense the image speaks through the ideology of segregationist white, middle-class, family values. In defence of family and white womanhood, segregationists destroyed one of the very families they claim to
defend, says Rita’s waiting image. Rita’s image itself resting on the page that also contains images of the accused murderers, counters the racist claim that black men and integrationists are less than human and uncivilized. In a sense her image serves as moral avatar. Rita’s social standing as married partner and heterosexual loved one inscribes the victims into the human civilized family as prescribed by norms of heterosexuality and white middle-class propriety. while it simultaneously ostracizes the Sheriff and Deputy (on the adjacent pages) from that civilized family. In defence of some fantasy of white femininity and white male supremacism, the accused have hurt this one looking away. Her relationship to the victims also reminds us of them. Her image, in effect, witnesses their passing. Rita’s sexuality and social standing becomes a tool for Moore to use in his fight against essentialized racism.

Rita’s image itself imbricates diverse structuring forces. It serves to place her at the scene literally and to place white womanhood figuratively at the scene. Her image documents her historical presence at the same time that her image becomes a feminine “other” to maleness in Moore’s pictorial discourse. Rita is the only female figure represented in the section dealing with the Chaney, Schwerner, Goodman murders. Gender, sexuality, and race structure Rita’s representation in complex ways. Two important discourses that her image articulates are those of femininity and domesticity. By representing her as a function of her relationship to her husband, by rendering her political work invisible and by presenting her in a passive role, the image constructs a kind of white femininity. By erasing her politics and her worldly connections so that she is seen in that moment only as a waiting wife, her image is also relegated to the domestic sphere. Furthermore, the visual and textual narrative employs the femininity of Rita’s image as a
device through which to create and convey meaning. As a viewer of the image and documentary narrative, I must engage with these on a critical and affective level in order to disrupt them. Rita’s gender becomes a narrative device within the documentary, one which shapes the story in particular ways. The structures that articulate Rita’s gender also determine the possibilities for engagement and identification, although they don’t ensure the outcome of that engagement. Rupturing the structures that frame Rita’s representation involves making them visible and unravelling the ways in which my own identity negotiations struggle with representations of white womanhood as it is constructed through those structures.

Contrast bolsters the articulation of Rita’s visual femininity. In the context of the surrounding images the “otherness” of her image becomes accentuated. Rita’s image takes on feminine currency through a juxtaposition to males and masculine society. The elements of difference accentuate her femininity. Her diminutive physical frame, a classically feminine feature, is accentuated by the size of the photograph and its contrast to the size of the photographs of the men. Rita’s image fills a two and one quarter by three and one quarter inch rectangle; whereas, the other photographs on the page and the two photographs on the adjacent page fill four and three quarter inch by seven and one quarter inch rectangles. Rita’s image is thus roughly one-fifth the size of the adjacent images.

The white woman in colour and power evasive discourses.

More than size, however, the contrasts in action and setting activate the male/ female binary when I view the two-page spread on which Rita’s image rests. She sits in an interior with
her fist leaning up against her chin, gazing away from the lens and my viewing angle, while the three other images depict men walking toward the camera outside along the courthouse steps. The three men accused of the murders all walk towards the camera lens and my viewing position. And not coincidentally, my position is that of the courthouse. Moore has placed my angle of view in the seat of judgement. Unidentified officials escort these men toward the camera and toward the justice system. Simply put, men act while the woman waits. Men circulate in the public sphere and women wait in the private sphere. Rita’s image cannot help but be viewed literally in relation to contrasting male images. The denotative construction of her otherness mobilizes a multitude of connotative meanings for that same feminine otherness.

Through these connotative possibilities I make meaning. I read the contrasting of action and stasis as serving to pause the action and to ask the viewer to think about the implications of these murders and these racialized forms of justice. The photographer focusses my gaze onto her image. Her image during that moment becomes a site for my own identification and empathy in and through the representation of her white womanhood. For other viewers her image may not invite either identification or empathy. For different viewers her image may simply contrast one form of whiteness to another. Also, during that moment, her image becomes a site for furthering the discourse of colour and power evasive justice which Moore’s camera envisions. Because of my negotiations with the structures that support the colour and power evasive discourse, her image also becomes a site for negotiating other meanings, for reinserting race-cognizant discourses and for enlisting a feminist angle of view.

As I look at Rita sitting and gazing off the page, I ask questions about the actions
depicted in the surrounding images such as: What has happened? Why has it happened?

Simultaneously, I resist and resent this construction of white womanhood as a narrative foil to white Southern masculinity. Furthermore, I resist and resent Moore’s conscripting Rita’s image to serve his goals within a colour and power evasive discursive attack on essentialized racism. The problem resides with the erasure of a race-cognizant political attack on essentialized racism with the codes of colour and power evasion. Moore’s representation does exactly that. Rita symbolically becomes the signifier of the innocence of the victims and the signifier of their inclusion in universal humanity.

I do not mean to suggest that the colour and power evasive discourse of tolerance purloins from Rita’s image its signification as white womanhood. The representation still works as an image of white femininity even as it works to evade issues of power and race cognizant struggles for justice. The discourse of integration reinforces this downplaying of colour. Rita’s image questions the binary logic of essentialized racism. Her representation poses the following questions: “What is justice? Whose justice? Whose families matter? Why is violence tolerated?”

Her position as Northerner may also situate racist discourse in Southern bodies and reinforces a notion that the North is somehow separate from systemic forms of racism and racist violence. The subject matter of this documentary helps to contain this lynching and its implications within the Southern region of the 1950’s. Photography, because of its mechanical apparatus, is complicit with that containment. For photography registers not meaning but a time and a place. Moore’s book might have opened possibilities of engagement that could check that containment. After all, racism is not and was not ever contained within the perimeters of the South.
I should note here that just as the colour and power evasive discourse maintains that all humans are equal, so, too, does it attribute guilt to racist discourses and actions and, on the other hand, innocence to the victims of those discourses or actions, as well as innocence to bystanders and viewers. The construction of femininity through contrast to masculinity is one binary that binds my identity negotiations and my struggles. The erasure of women’s political struggles comprises another force with which I negotiate. Moore’s representation of Rita, from my viewpoint, erases her politics as it subordinates them to the politics of his image-making project and re-circulates clichés of masculine versions of a femininity whose only power is to be the object of male desire.

Moore’s representation signifies a kind of femininity that repulses, seduces and threatens me. Femininity as diminutive force repulses me; femininity as removed from the world of action and as moral check to masculine behaviour seduces me; and femininity as passivity has and continues to threaten my lived experience. These obvious clichés continually circulate throughout the culture, letting me know that individual men desire these attributes in women and that the culture will reward women who allow men to see these attributes in and through them. These attributes become norms against which I struggle, and in defining myself I struggle to come up with other definitions of femininity. Nonetheless, my actions and social interactions are read through these constricting lenses.

While I am struggling to articulate a power relation or a dynamic that unjustly involves domination and exploitation, I am simultaneously measured by how diminutive I seemed, how passively I performed, and how my actions threatened or soothed the males and the male-
dominated group. The physical lens that erases Rita’s politics and enlists her in a politics of male fantasies endlessly reproduces itself in a social context. I long for a different struggle, for a struggle beyond the binaries set in a male construction of femininity. And I wonder if my life might have been easier had I conformed. The desire for ease opens the door to the seduction of this male fantasy even as my experience dismantles the ideologies that reinforce the phantasm. Furthermore, an integrative analysis links this male fantasy to white supremacy and the violent exploitation of women’s bodies and bodies of colour.

The “real” power of the camera.

The myth of documentary as evidence of the real helps to naturalize the choices that the photographer makes. Thus I could read the image of Rita as a truthful documentary photograph depicting the reality of Rita. In that case, her diminution is real, her position inside, too, is real; her presence becomes simply a reminder that one of these men was loved by a woman. The myth of the real forces me away from examining the politics and constructed nature of the representation and into the discursive codes of colour and power evasion. As a viewer, if I accept the reality of the representation, then the meaning that I make of the representation is bound by the discursive vocabulary of the photographer. If I accept the authority of the photographer’s power to produce reality, then I accept particular structures of meaning. Thus the real Rita connotes the innocence of the murdered men, the need for tolerance among men, the higher moral virtue of women, and the struggle waged between men on behalf of women. The real Rita takes her place in the colour and power evasive discourse as a universal woman promoting tolerance and Christian love. Questioning the efficacy of the colour and power evasive discourse
demands questioning the reality of the images through which the documentary tells its story. The politics of the image become a site for negotiating meaning and opening discursive possibilities.

The body that questions violence.

It is almost possible to imagine a photographic technique that would have aggrandized Rita's stature. Moore uses this technique on numerous occasions while he documents Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. for the press. Camera angles that place Dr. King in the centre of a wide-angle lens that engulfs a congregation and low camera angles that position him high above the camera grant him a majestic and heroic status. Moore might have given such a view of Rita. She might have been photographed addressing the SNCC volunteers, for example. She might have been photographed at a press conference. She might have been photographed petitioning the governor or the President. However, had Moore photographed Rita in action, her representation could not have been used to carry the emotional bathos of the scene of the waiting innocent woman. For, in addition to the numerous meanings that I have already articulated, Rita's image becomes a site for the viewers' emotions. The pause that her representation signifies becomes an opening amid the action for emotions of loss, longing, mourning, among other feelings. Rita's representation becomes the cathexis for the photographer's anxiety regarding the murder of the civil rights workers and for the photographer's anxiety regarding the symbolic threat to white male privilege and social codes that the civil rights movement symbolized. The search for bodies precedes the pages I have described. Images of navy recruits, bodies not marked as Southern, scouring the Mississippi countryside lead into the images that represent bringing three men into court. Rita's image, which looks back in the direction of the previous pages, links the loss to justice. Her
image connects these two elements of the story and opens a place for emotional projection.

In this moment, white womanhood becomes the site for the convergence of the two discourses of essentialized racism and colour and power evasion. Both these discourses conceptualize white womanhood in distinctly different ways. Rita’s position as a white woman on the page can connote a whole range of meanings attributed to white women from the essentialized racist ideology: vulnerability of the race, purity of the race, carrier of the race, victim for whom racial violence is committed, carrier of honour for which those same atrocities are committed. Much of the violence inspired through the ideology of essentialized racist discourse is carried out in the name of preserving and protecting white womanhood. Segregationists do not admit to upholding segregation because it lines their pocket books, nor do the men who benefit from the capitalist exploitation that segregation enables necessarily need to murder to maintain their power. Essentialized racist discourse ideologically constructs the concept of a pure white race propagated by the union of pure white men and pure white women.

The notion of pure white womanhood bolsters the myth of cultural supremacy, warrants the legal separation of races and justifies the use of violence. Rita’s representation as emblem of white womanhood potentially becomes a site for recalling this ideological construction of white womanhood as it simultaneously can become a site for recalling a construction of universal woman’s love and belonging to the human family. Rita’s image representing white womanhood thus becomes a site for the intersection of the essentialized racist construction of femininity and the colour and power evasive construction of femininity.

Moore’s representation isolates Rita from the masculine world of work and politics. I do
not see a woman struggling to be heard, struggling to bring about political and social change. Instead I see a woman worrying about her husband. I am arguing that Moore’s picture sets up a frame that entices me to identify with precisely the aspects of womanhood that I find abhorrent and repressive. My resistance to the structures of that process of identification in turn opens possibilities for witnessing. My argument has attempted to map out the complex struggle over identity, racialized discourse and representation that Moore’s picture can put into place. In so doing, I am arguing for attention to the politics of representation and attention to the relations between media representations and audiences; a particular attention that may impact on the restructuring of one’s look.

In this instance, Moore’s camera focusses on this seated white woman. I am invited to contemplate, through the representation of her body, the implications of ritual lynching and law in a segregated society. It is precisely Moore’s juxtaposing of her contemplative body with photographs of the search on the earlier pages and photographs of the capture of the perpetrators on the subsequent pages that invites my contemplation. And as I contemplate this I also feel a sense of immense irony and loathing for the masculinist gaze which focuses a camera on the white woman’s body in order to comment on social structures that a white male patriarchal society maintains through the ritual violating of white women’s bodies and the bodies of men and women of colour. It is within this loathing that I recognize my look is shifting.

Herstory.

In the early stages of my cathetic relationship to this image of Rita, I felt that she wasn’t just “anxiously waiting,” as Durham’s caption would have us believe. After a cursory look
through the library and several histories on the subject, I found Sara Evans’ (1979) book, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left*. Evans’s book links the work women did in the civil rights movement to the movement for woman’s liberation. Her text documents much of the undocumented and a-historical work that women contributed to the civil rights movement and places that work in the context of other subsequent and contemporaneous movements for social change. She uses archival research and interviews to understand and then represent through her own historical narrative the complex struggles these women negotiated during the course of their work. In Evans’ book, Rita becomes something other than a widow. I am thrilled to find evidence of this fact. I want Rita to have some power. I want this for myself. I want her to transform her rage into a transformative energy. I want her politics to matter and to have some effect.

As I read the few words that Sara Evans writes about Rita during the time of Moore’s photograph, I begin to let go of Moore’s trap, loosening the parameters of interpretation. After interviewing women and analyzing those interviews, Evans writes:

Rita Schwerner’s youth and small stature seemed to magnify her heroism...Standing on the stage [in Greenwood, Mississippi], alone and frail, she said, ‘I know what fear is, and I know it makes you think, ‘I’m not going to do this, I’m not going to do that,’ because the risk is too great. But I know that you can risk much more by doing nothing. It’s not unnatural to be afraid, but you’re cheating your children if your being afraid stops them from having something.’ (Evans, 1979, p. 74).

These words form an alternative representation to Moore’s image. I have some evidence, more
than a hunch or my woman’s intuition. I have found a representation that serves as a trace or clue to gather my desire for a transformative anti-racist feminist politics, and that representation propels me forward with hope that I may find more evidence of Rita circulating in the world and acting on a race-cognizant liberation politics. Contrary to Moore’s depiction of her as a woman overcome by her emotional connection to her husband, Evans documents how Rita worked not to show that domestic connection in order to continue the political work they both had been engaged in. Even though I haven’t words to name Moore’s trap, I know that this image of the anxious widow waiting is a chimera, a fantasy. That same rage and fear captured into passivity by Moore’s representation becomes an active progressive politics in Evans’ “herstorical” account. This difference in representation cannot solely be attributed to the different media and/or discourses of the documentarist and the historian. Rita’s voice as an active agent of leadership rippled through the audience, according to women witnesses. Even though I may question Evans’ myth-making of female heroines, still I may use her archival material to rupture Moore’s frame. That rupture may allow for a moment of inspiration, a necessary inhaling before I attempt to speak politically. The deconstructive rupture of the male heterosexual gaze can begin a process of politicization and thus become an ethical research tool. My deconstructive rupture will be quite a different kind of rupture than that produced by my sisters of colour. This dissertation argues that both of these ruptures are necessary in order to dismantle white supremacist male patriarchy.

My look sees Rita, now, gathering strength in this moment. She sits in order to plan an approach. Cognizant of her own small contribution to the civil rights movement and of the forces
that try to make white life and death more culturally important than that of others. Cognizant also
of being pulled into the picture to serve those ends. I see her fist against her chin as a symbol of
her planning a strategy. I see her in a second image hiding from the camera. Her sunglasses
conceal her from the lens. Her body is twisted and she looks away from the lens because she
doesn’t want to be seen. This pose, which hides her self, emanates from her knowledge of how
the picture will be used as a cypher for racist sentimentality.

The Fourth Look – Bringing Lynching into the Frame

Lynching.

The history of policing and institutionalized racist terror in Mississippi complicates the
representations of the Chaney, Schwerner, Goodman 1964 “incident.” There is a long history of
violent tactics to which these images, and these murders are linked. At the funeral services,
James Farmer, the national director of CORE, called it “a triple lynching.” Lynching has a long
cruel history in Mississippi (Payne, 1995). The ideology of lynching gives meaning to the picture
of Rita. I will excavate that ideology as yet one final act of resistant engagement with this image.
Lynching, a method of social control, particularly vicious and pernicious, took root in white
culture subsequent to the Civil War (Davis, 1983; Ware, 1992). Evidence reveals the ebbs and
flows of this method of terror. According to Ware, “lynching was certainly ‘the ultimate of
historical white justice and black death’ – and it was carried out in the name of defending the
honour of white women” (p.172). Lynching was also used to police and control insurgent black
communities. The honour of white women becomes the rationale for violence that maintains the
privilege and power of white male supremacy.

Charles Payne (1995) makes it clear that the activism of the 1960's grew out of hard won, strategic resistance and long-standing roots in the black communities of the South. In his discussion on the roots of activism in the 1960s, he traces the practice of lynching as a form of racial terror the white community used to control black labour. In the case of lynching, Payne states: “They sent a more powerful message than straightforward killing would have sent, graphically reinforcing the idea that Negroes were so far outside the human family that the most inhuman actions could be visited upon them” (p.15). He notes that lynching was often publicized in advance in local papers and frequently a mob of white people watched the murder and mutilation. Furthermore, the defiled body or parts thereof were frequently paraded through the black community as symbols. Finally, the supposed crime, often a supposed assault on white women but also an assault on white men or their property, usually had little to do with the suspect. More frequently, the suspect had been an activist or a person who refused to participate in the codes of deference to which Negroes were forced to submit (Davis, 1983; Payne, 1995).

Against this backdrop of racial terror the discourse of power and colour evasion makes a kind of sense and nonsense; the desire to bring blacks and whites together seems to demand a radical erasure of material and social relations developed to separate us. Significantly, the desire erases the memory of trauma, of police- and state-sponsored violence, and it envisions legal institutions as somehow separate from racist terror. Within the discourse of colour and power evasion, racist groups act out against people of colour and in so doing, sin and defy. The rhetoric of equality embedded in the liberal state becomes the ideal toward which the discourse leads.
Thus an analysis of the historical implication of the liberal state with forms of racist control and terror is successfully avoided.

Payne argues convincingly that black Mississippians worked communally over generations to build the movement that erupted in the 1960’s. He points out that throughout the Delta the value of black and white life differed. The cotton economy depended on agrarian black workers who could be controlled through lynching and other forms of racial terror. In fact, outbreaks in lynchings correlate to drops in the price of cotton (Payne, 1995). Payne argues that blacks in the Mississippi Delta knew the kinds of risks that they took by engaging in social change activism. They understood that they were resisting a system that would murder them on a whim. The activism that grew out of the black community was shaped both by the forms of white supremacist terror that they faced daily and by the social networks, practices and organizations they created to resist and survive the effects of the trauma of that violence.

The civil rights movement mobilized communities for an organized, risk filled, strategic dismantling of the institutional, ideological, material and violent system of white supremacism. The movement connected police brutality to mob lynching, to segregated school systems, to poll taxes, to unjust voter registration, the plantation economy, and so forth (Belfage, 1965; McAdam, 1988; Payne, 1995; Stoper, 1989). The movement imbricated many forms of resistance into its attack on white supremacism in its multiple and institutionalized forms.

In this context, who cares about my affective relationship to this image of a white woman? When I consider feminist post-colonial theory, which links that relational positioning of social subjects to a struggle for social power and control, the importance of this unpacking
becomes clear. White, heterosexual men need access to the ownership of white women as bodies, as objects of desire, as producers of bodies to perform their identities as white supremacist men and, as Ware (1992) points out, to justify those acts. My rupturing of the connection where it affects my subjectivity has implications for anti-racist pedagogy. My investment in an anti-racist pedagogy that begins here has initiated the unpacking of the complex forces that structure parts of my social locations.

**Contesting myths about black violence.**

White male supremacy's semiotics run through the image of Rita Schwerner in complex ways. White supremacism lingers beyond the frame of this picture as a dreaded power. White supremacist discourses motivated both the violence against the three men and the secrecy of the violence. Murder and torture have been consistent methods of enforcing racial hierarchies and social behaviours since the category of race was first conceived in the nineteenth century and prior to that, since Western Europeans began their imperial adventures. In "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist," Davis (1983) argues that lynching has been used as a political tool to enforce white supremacism. She also maintains that mythological discourse about the black rapist was used to justify the use of this political tool.

But lynchings, reserved during slavery for the white abolitionists, were proving to be a valuable political weapon. Before lynching could be consolidated as a popularly accepted institution, however, its savagery and its horrors had to be convincingly justified. These were the circumstances which spawned the myth of the Black rapist -- for the rape charge turned out to be the most powerful of several attempts to justify the lynching of Black people. The institution of lynching, in turn, complemented by the continued rape of
Black women, became an essential ingredient of the postwar strategy of racist terror. In this way the brutal exploitation of Black labor was guaranteed, and after the betrayal of Reconstruction, the political domination of the Black people as a whole was assured. (p.185)

Rita’s image contests the myth of the black rapist and calls into question any justification of the political tool of lynching. Moore’s representation presents an image of white femininity that counters the image of white femininity wronged by the so-called “black rapist.” In Moore’s representation her femininity serves to expose the shocking brutality of the act of lynching which has attacked this woman indirectly by murdering her husband. That femininity opposes the cliched image of vulnerable white femininity wronged by the so-called “black rapist” and “protected” by white vigilante actions. Moore’s image resonates with this other image of white femininity as it also twists it on its head and exposes it as a ruse used to protect the barbarity of white male violence.

Davis (1983) argues convincingly that the anti-rape campaign must be aware of the history of lynching and the myth of the black rapist in both supporting that form of terror and ensuring the exploitation of black labour. She demonstrates that the myth of the black rapist combined with the myth of pure white womanhood justified this means of political terrorism. The purity of the white woman’s body and the rapacious black man’s will are figments of white male supremacism concocted to make palatable methods of social control necessary to sustain the economic and political material privilege of white male supremacism. That same white woman’s body (which has been used in representation and ideologically to justify terrorism in order to maintain white male privilege and white supremacism) becomes the
body, in the documentary form, which is used to question the terrorism of white male supremacism. And this is the conundrum of white womanhood. One moment our bodies are conscripted in the fight to uphold white male supremacy, the next minute our bodies are conscripted to question the power of that supremacy. Moore conscripts Rita's body for his own discursive battle. Although I acknowledge his motive, I distrust his methods. Furthermore, I wonder what Rita had to say about her work and her anti-racist struggle.

I argue along with others, namely Hall (1983), that any representation of white women must be aware of the history of white supremacism and uncover the uses that the "father tongue" has designed for those representations. White womanhood and white femininity have played a crucial role in the ideology of white male supremacism.

Moore's photograph of Rita Schwerner facilitates the erasure of the history Davis (1996) uncovers. Most commonly it has been African American women, Native American women, Hispanic American women, and women "other" than white who have waited for news about missing male relatives threatened by white supremacists. Given this fact, this photograph commits an historical erasure and appropriation at the same time that it is used in a battle to further liberal goals and institutions. Using Rita in the present as the image to draw public concern for this 1964 lynching enables eliciting the sympathies of the white public. I wonder how an image of Mrs. Chaney waiting for news of her son might have been used? To whom would it have spoken? Toward what end? I imagine it would have spoken to the non-white audiences and drawn on their collective memory of the constant refrain of mourning and waiting for news of violence throughout the history of the U.S. In order to
counter essentialized racist discourse, however, the colour and power evasive discourse must engage the white populace in mourning the brutality of white supremacism. Simultaneously, the discourse of violence must be distinguished from the rhetoric of liberal equality. In short, my white subjectivity must see itself attacked by racial terror such as lynching so that I may see at once the humanity of the black subjects under similar attack and so that my white subjectivity may separate its identity formation from the apparatus of white supremacy’s violence. The psychic process of the look shapes this narcissistic and problematic conundrum. What is seen is determined not by an apparatus or a reality but rather by a socially and psychically constructed loop.

My look sees Rita’s image haunted by the burned and charred remains of a car in which the bodies of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney huddle against each other with bullet holes opening their flesh. The car rises out of the river just where Rita’s glance falls. And following these men, I see the body of Medgar Evers rising up out of the river carrying Emmett Till’s beaten, bullet-ridden body, entwined in barbed wire. Behind them walk Herbert Lee, Clifton Walker, Lewis Allen, Jimmie Lee Jackson, James Reeb, Viola Gregg Liuzzo, Samuel Younge, Jonathan Daniels, Freddie Lee Thomas, Vernon Dahmer. Thousands of bodies of coloured people and those of a few whites rise up out of the river standing to be seen, to be counted, to provide testament. Rita looks towards them but the camera lens cannot see them, it only sees this looking, seated woman, waiting.
Conclusion.

This chapter has traced the complex discourses that converge in and through the representation of white womanhood embodied in the Charles Moore documentary photograph of Rita Schwerner during the aftermath of the Chaney, Schwerner and Goodman lynching. The photograph becomes both evidence of a white supremacist vision and evidence against a white supremacist vision. The latter counter argument erases and neglects the history of racialized material relations in the U.S. at the same time that it supports liberal notions of social institutions. The critical history of photography and documentary makes clear the gendered angle of view of this representation of femininity. Other representations and histories of the period uncover different angles of this view. I have traced my anger with the structures that imbricate white womanhood both to justify white supremacy and to support liberal notions of equality. I have traced my desire for a powerful form of white womanhood that has the potential to resist both complicity and violence. Finally, I have engaged with this photograph in an attempt to engage with the very discursive structures that represent and construct my social relations on a daily basis. For the same angle of vision that has distilled Rita’s political efforts, words and actions works to distill my own in my everyday relations in the social and material world. In the end I agree with Ware (1992) when she argues:

There would not be much point in understanding how the category of white femininity was constructed through history if this information was not used to
engage with contemporary ideologies of domination. It is largely by looking at the histories of racism and male dominance that we find keys to understanding the specific complexities of our societies, unearthing connections which might otherwise remain unclear or even unpalatable. (Ware, p. 43)

This project engages with the look and representations of white womanhood in the civil rights movement not as an exercise in discovering historical truth but as a search for understanding the very complexities of social relations and looking that Ware describes. While Ware’s search examines histories, this study examines the look as it views those histories. How do I/we see our past and how is my/our viewing shaped through socially constructed hierarchies of domination. Is it possible to look again and to reshape the look?
Chapter Four

Forcing the Look to See the Women’s Klan

If the task of postcolonial criticism is to activate the uncertainties and in-betweens of discourse, well and good, but this could remain a formalist exercise unless one also undertakes the more demanding historical task of interrogating the social practices, economic conditions and psychoanalytical dynamics that motivate and constrain human desire, action and power. (McClintock, 1995, p. 73)

In this chapter, my look engages with a picture of Ku Klux Klan women. I use autobiographical writing to engage with childhood experiences of racial construction as I re-vision the look. I examine white femininity as a symbolic discourse for the Ku Klux Klan. And, I force the look to see the agency of these women by examining the history of the Women’s Klan in the 1920’s. Using Collins’ (1991) work on black feminist knowledge construction and Hale’s (1998) work on the construction of whiteness, I expose the racialized construction of some of my longings and desires that emanate from those childhood experiences referred to in the autobiographical section. I use Frankenberg’s (1993) categories to situate the form of racial discourse that my family articulated. In this chapter, I extend the work of the previous chapter. Here, I force my look to engage with a form of whiteness that it abjests and compel it to see my own subjectivity in relation to the construction of whiteness.
A cluster composed of one man and two women pose in shimmering Ku Klux Klan (KKK) cloaks. The male, a leader, is surrounded by the two women, one of whom is located slightly behind him and looks off into the distance; the other is more prominent and stands slightly beside and in front of him. Two of these cloaked and hooded figures stare toward me as a viewer. A light coming from the left illuminates and shadows these faces as they intently focus on the camera lens. The prominent woman’s arms cross her chest and seem to cradle both her bosom and a white iron-cross symbol containing, in its centre, a drop of blood, outlined by a diamond shape. The man’s chest is open and bears, like a shield, an image of what appears to be a dragon and an eagle in combat. The man’s cloak is a dark grey while the women’s are white. The man’s hood resembles a knight’s helmet while the women’s resemble the tall points of witches’ hats. As with military personnel, only the faces protrude from the uniforms. In the background, just over the man’s shoulder, shadows of other hoods linger.

Assumptions.

My first assumption when initially looking at the photograph is that a kind of kidnapping has occurred. In other words, I find it impossible to attribute agency to the women in KKK costume. My look focusses on the woman who faces the camera directly. Her confrontational
stance draws me in, even as my look wants to refuse her gesture. The woman who looks off in the distance elides my look entirely. Certainly she is present, but my look erases her depiction in its confrontation with the woman who faces the camera. This glaring woman seems dangerously duped to me. I cannot imagine how she could have found a place for herself in an organization that I know to be so far to the political right and so deeply misogynist. And, then, I begin to wonder under what illusions this woman operates. This must exemplify false consciousness, I think. A research question emerges: How is it possible to join in a movement which is based, in fact swathed, in violence against the female body and psyche? I wonder what kind of a toll joining the KKK takes on her and what she does other than pose for pictures? What is her place in the organization? And, with these misgivings I begin a search. The point of the search is to challenge the look, and in so doing to take responsibility for its possible complicity. The challenge builds toward accountability and the enactment of a responsible look (Razack, 1998; Silverman, 1996). I have chosen to focus on an emblematic representation of white supremacy as another stage in the process of reconsidering research, given the epistemic privilege of the oppressed, in bearing witness to African-American experience, and in interrogating the “white look.” The search includes an autobiographical examination of my social locations as implicated in the look, and a historical analysis of women in the second incarnation of the Klan, which is generally considered to have occurred between 1915 – 1928. I focus on this period in the Klan’s history because it best demonstrates the women’s agency within the Klan.
Glancing at history.

Not surprisingly, Kathleen Blee’s (1991) book, Women of the Klan begins by noting the dearth of information about women in the Klan. There exists a paltry amount of information about such women, a veritable absence, in fact. As Blee notes, women’s involvement was erased or “overlooked” in the histories, yet women comprised a “significant portion” of Klan membership in its second incarnation (p. 2). As I look and also erase this woman’s agency, I wonder how and why it is so easy to not see her position in this violent pageantry. Women were active participants and sometimes leaders of the Klan. Blee writes that “not only were women a significant portion of the Klan’s membership, but their activities and ideologies differed sufficiently from those of Klansmen that an examination of the women’s Klan changes our interpretation of the Klan as a whole” (p. 2). In fact, my notions of the Klan did shift with the shifting of my look, as I examined the complex ways in which women participated in this form of racist violence, and collective racialized subjectivity.

While reading Blee, I was able to begin to see the woman in the picture in relationship to her historical predecessors. Seeing her in parallel with the man beside her was more difficult. But gradually, although my look constantly refused to see and had to be forced to look, this woman’s image came into view. As my understanding of the Klan shifted, so, too, did my look transform. In my initial conceptual framework for the Klan, women were at once its avatars and its victims. Looking at the historical record, a slightly different picture emerges. Whereas the original Klan
was a wholly male fraternal organization, one could not say that women, or certainly
to say that women, or certainly
womanhood, was ever entirely absent from it. Womanhood and femininity were always a
significant rallying point and important symbolic propaganda tool for each incarnation of the
Klan.

This study involves making transparent the social construction of my own raced, classed,
sexualized look. This involves excavating the relationship of my own liberal subject position of
whiteness to other forms of whiteness. In this case study, I have chosen to focus on the Klan to
expose its relationship to the construction of whiteness and to force my look to see a form of
white subjectivity that it abjacts. Keeping in mind this process of interrogating the look addresses
the fundamental questions of this research: How can the look be made to change? How can the
look take responsibility for its part in the social imaginary? How can the look be transformed in
order to bear witness to African-American experiences of racism and white supremacy? And,
how can the research look work against structures that reinforce and replicate systems of
domination and knowledge production closely aligned to racism and white supremacy?

The Second Look – Remembering the Whiteness of Childhood

Early lessons.

Looking at this image of the KKK (and of what I perceive to be a “Southern custom”) my
look remembers the conflicting ways in which my understanding of the South and black/white
relations were constructed in my own life. I learned particular and long-lasting lessons about race
and my privilege in the spectrum of social relations against a backdrop of constructions of the South. The following exploration includes an excavation of my understandings about the South and how they shaped my understanding of my subjectivity and my look. This early set of relations certainly shaped what Silverman (1996) calls the proprioceptive ego, or that self-construction most closely related to the look. The reason for this discussion about the ways in which the South figured into my early life is precisely due to the way my family constructed our Northern and Western, liberal and palatable forms of whiteness in opposition to our understanding of Southern whiteness. As Grace Hale (1998) argues, however, in her book *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South 1890-1940*, American whiteness is indelibly bound up with Southern whiteness. Coming to terms with the construction of whiteness demands excavating that territory of Southern whiteness that has produced national whiteness (and other regional forms) in addition to individual white subject positions (p. 295). Forcing my look to engage with a representation of the Klan is an attempt to come to terms with the ways in which Klan whiteness is bound up within my own whiteness, whether I find that bearable or not:

All of us, white and black, northern and Southern, would have to think of “the South,” the “race problem,” and the “burden of history,” not as the weight of some other, of a dark and distant place and time, but as a burden that we still carry and as a history that we have not agreed to face or acknowledge as a source of our subjectivities. (Hale, 1998, p. 295)

Growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area, the South had a remoteness, a distance framed by difference. The west coast was forever temporary and contemporary, and the South seemed
caught in the past. We were moving on with the sixties in all of its manifestations, including the civil rights movement, while they were caught looking backward, trapped by a poisoned romantic version of history and a system of white supremacy called segregation, or so it seemed.

I don’t remember when I first heard about or started to understand the South, but I do remember my mother’s relationship to Southern women. Her attitudes might be typical of some middle-class Northern white women raised during the Depression. My mother frequently refers to herself as a “damn Yankee”: In fact, she uses the description to explain herself, sometimes reminding me of what it is she feels I haven’t quite understood; she uses it to accentuate how her position was shaped by the landscape of her childhood and background, or to bring her era into juxtaposition with mine. Despite the fact that she has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area for forty-five years, despite the often radical changes this social geographic transplantation has brought on my mother, in some profound ways she still imagines herself to be a Yankee.

My mother’s Northern femininity depends on an imaginary form of Southern femininity as its other. For as long as I can remember, my mother had a clear notion of Southern white women, in fact she had a kind of anger toward them, as if they were responsible somehow for a sort of femininity that threatened her, that lurked about ready to entrap her. The word that comes to mind, laced with venom as a clear pejorative, which she used to describe these women was “manipulative.” She never really discussed what she felt was so wrong with their manipulative behaviour or who or what they manipulated, but it was clear to me that manipulative meant
dishonest, calculating, passive, covertly racist, not feminist. In my mother’s social geography, Southern women constituted an “other”; they acquired all the attributes she aspired against. In her mind, “good” women were honest, open, direct, active, tolerant and liberal feminists. In a way, Southern women became the catch-all for negative stereotypes, which the white masculine patriarchal culture hurled at white women in general. In my mother’s social geography, these stereotypes slipped off some “good” Northern women who, in her mind, had a long history of resistance. These same stereotypes stuck to Southern white women, though, who, in her mind, acquiesced, and worse still, actively manipulated them to their own advantage. Characteristically, my mother had in mind upper-class or middle-class white women when she conjured her image of Southern white women. She did not imagine Southern, white, working-class women, for example. And, she imagined Southern women of colour as heroes who have survived and resisted not only the racism of the male dominated culture but also the racism of these white women and the machinations of their malevolent employment.

I can remember early on feeling my mother’s anger towards Southern white women and wondering about it. And then, as the media paraded civil rights movement representations before my youthful eyes, I made some meaning of her seemingly inexplicable disdain. Southern white women are in fact the only group of people that I have ever heard my mother openly denigrate. Her discourse clings to the colour and power evasive dictum that one should not use negative stereotypes; according to her creed, one must not verbally malign disadvantaged groups. In fact,
although she grilled into me the notion that sticks and stones can hurt my bones but names can never hurt me, paradoxically she also taught me that words, that names in particular, can and do wound. Of course my mother would have known that from her own experience in a heavily classed, raced, gendered, and sexualized, rural Massachusetts town and by virtue of her marriage to my Jewish father. Indeed she may have feared a particular kind of name-calling for her children.

My mother’s “othering” of Southern, white women in the construction of her northern identity was my first introduction to the South. In a sense, this introduction has shaped my look. I am unable to see the white woman working beside her Klan man, rather I see a kind of Southern belle forever removed from the dirty work of white supremacy. But there were other influences on my understanding of the South. My second introduction came from listening to Denise as we made beds, cleaned bathrooms or ironed clothes.

From the time that I was eight until the mid-1980s, my mother employed a woman named Ms. Denise Jackson1 as her housekeeper. I remember coming home from school one day and finding Ms. Jackson wielding an iron on the ironing board in a kind of a hallway that we called the laundry room. She had the door open and I must have looked in with some kind of fearful expression because I remember her saying, “I won’t bite.” I also remember knowing that this was a black woman and feeling shocked when she reached out in a gentle way to touch me, which she

---

1 The name has been changed out of respect for Ms. Jackson’s privacy.
did in that first encounter. In retrospect, Ms. Jackson, who was in her mid-twenties at the time and who had been working as a housekeeper in our neighbourhood or in nearby “white neighbourhoods” for several years, must have been through the messy task of introducing her black body to white children repeatedly. In retrospect, I think she had developed a strategy both for sensing difficult children, for diffusing the situation and for initiating a resistant pedagogy. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins (1991) delimits the conceptual and material practices of survival and resistance which African-American feminists cultivate. Ms. Jackson’s relationship towards me, seen through Collins’ terms, demonstrates her commitment both to the power of self-definition in spite of and in contradiction to the objectifying images of the Mammy and domestic worker, as well as her commitment to the African-American tradition of “other mothering” (Collins, 1991, p. 119), even when it entails crossing racialized and classed boundaries. In a complex way, Ms. Jackson used her position to define herself in her own terms, to resist the oppressive forces of her employment and to practice principles of other mothering. As Collins notes:

> Black women’s work and family experiences create the conditions whereby the contradictions between everyday experiences and the controlling images of Black womanhood become visible. Seeing the contradictions in the ideologies opens them up for demystification. Just as Sojourner Truth deconstructed the term *woman* by using her own concrete experiences to challenge it, so in a variety of ways do everyday African-American women do the same thing. (p. 93)
Ms. Jackson, by touching me in that first encounter, actively demystified images of black womanhood and began to inscribe the terms under which she would permit our relationship to proceed. Through her own self-respect, she commanded my respect. I remember her also saying, “Now, if you hear me talking to myself don’t pay no mind, except if I start answering back, then you can start to worry.” As a talkative child who was also the third of four children and who was frequently asked to “put a lid on it” (i.e. keep quiet), I instantly liked this woman who seemed to flaunt her talkative side. Ms. Jackson came to our house two and sometimes three days a week for nearly seventeen years. She is as much a part of my family in my social geography as are my brothers. This is probably not the case for other members of my family, or for her. Ms. Jackson and I had certain things in common, or so I thought, or so she led me to believe. She let me know that she too had been a “tom boy”; she indulged and encouraged this aspect of my personality, and she was the only one in my life who did so. This in itself would have bound me to her instantly with affection and respect, but we also shared a love for talk, and I remember many an afternoon when I would follow her around the house helping her with the cleaning of my family’s many belongings and listening as she talked.

I wish to make it explicitly clear that in writing about my relationship with Ms. Jackson and in writing about the many lessons she taught me, I do not wish to represent a nostalgic version of the Mammy myth. Ms. Jackson’s socially conscripted form of employment hoisted the stereotypes and material structures of the Mammy role on her back. She resisted and transformed
the burden of those roles through her work, her creative intelligence and deep faith in the potential of the human spirit in spite of structural and material inequities. She was and is a complex, wise, insightful, contradictory, and generous person navigating her way through the minefields of class, race, gender, and sexuality. Just as I do not want to paint a nostalgic version of her work with my family that would erase the race and class oppression that she suffered through the system of household labor at the hands of my family, I also do not want to erase the work she did on other levels. Rather, in representing our relationship, my goal is to remember and to interrogate the conditions and discourses which constructed our relationship across which we formed bonds while resisting and acquiescing to these forces. In remembering this relationship, I am both refining my look and making certain aspects of it visible. I cannot see the version of white supremacist femininity for particular reasons, reasons that I wish to expose and interrogate.

**Remembering inequity and seeing resistance.**

It must be said that Ms. Jackson was underpaid, had little job security, had little possibility of advancement, had minimal status in the mainstream culture and received some benefits only as a result of my mother’s “good will.” It must equally be said that the work Ms. Jackson performed was repetitive, physically demanding and dull; Ms. Jackson was and is an intelligent, wise individual, far superior to the job she performed for seventeen years. Society deeply failed her by not making it possible for her to become the social worker she had aspired to
be, and by not making it possible for her to develop her talents and find employment that suited her many gifts. It is also true that Ms. Jackson, like so many others, brought her considerable gifts to her job in spite of the horrific social structures that had forced her into it. She negotiated with her employers. In fact in some ways she chose her employers; there were numerous families for whom she chose not to work. In many ways she ran and managed her own small business successfully. She also performed her job with a diligence that must have taken discipline and fortitude. Where I was concerned, she brought her social work skills and theories to bear on the job at hand. For complex reasons relating to my own family dynamics, I began looking for alternative parents at an early age. Ms. Jackson was an early model for a kind of mothering that I would search out repeatedly throughout my life. Her differences from my own mother were indeed part of the attraction.

While my youthful, white, privileged desire may have attempted to enlist Ms. Jackson in the role of surrogate mother and Mammy figure, it is imperative that I acknowledge the ways in which she resisted and subverted both the powerful social image of those symbolic, ideological and material relations. Furthermore, she set limits around my desire and used it to transform our relationship for her own purpose and pedagogy. It is equally imperative that I recognize that my desire for her nurturing is both linked to the controlling Mammy image and her economic exploitation by my family and by others. My youth does not render my desire innocent.

Accountability in the present demands at the minimum, an accounting of the difficult position
foisted on Ms. Jackson through the white race, middle-class privilege and performed through the material relations of domestic labour. Accountability equally insists upon a refusal of the erasure that my desire for solidarity in the present may enlist to write a narrative of memory that minimizes the complex ways in which Ms. Jackson challenged the oppressive structures she faced.

First, it is important to situate my desire for nurturing within the ideology of the Mammy. Patricia Hill Collins (1991) thoroughly excavates four controlling images enlisted by elite white male power to control black women: The Mammy, the Matriarch, the Welfare mother, and Jezebel. Collins argues that the last image of the “sexually denigrated Black woman” buttresses the other three. Furthermore, “Each image transmits clear messages about the proper links among female sexuality, fertility, and Black women’s roles in the political economy” (Collins, 1991, p. 78). Collins analyzes each of the images separately and argues for the nexus of oppressive forces they create through their integration with a social, political and economic infrastructure established to maintain the power and privilege of elite white males, like my father. Collins clearly demonstrates the ways in which these social images are enmeshed with public policy and constrictive access to material resources.

As a social image, the Mammy figure serves specific purposes. According to Collins (1991), “The mammy represents the clearest example of the split between sexuality and motherhood present in Eurocentric masculinist thought” (p. 78). This split, created to contain
white male anxieties about female sexuality, while simultaneously controlling and subordinating black and white women, undergirds both the image of the mammy and the cult of true womanhood:

Juxtaposed against the image of white women promulgated through the cult of true womanhood, the mammy image as the other symbolizes the oppositional difference of mind/body and culture/nature thought to distinguish black women from everyone else...The mammy image buttresses the ideology of the cult of true womanhood, one in which sexuality and fertility are severed. "Good" white mothers are expected to deny their female sexuality and devote their attention to the moral development of their offspring. In contrast, the mammy image is one of an asexual woman, a surrogate mother in blackface devoted to the development of a white family. (Collins, 1991, p. 72)

The cult of true womanhood that delimited my own mother’s situation also conscripted Ms. Jackson into the role of surrogate mother. Free of the physical labour of cleaning the house and other domestic duties, my mother could devote her time and attention to the “moral education” of her children and to volunteer work within her community. The cult of true womanhood positioned her as moral conduit for both her family and community. Employing Ms. Jackson enabled her to fulfill that role at home and in her community without challenging my father’s abstinence from domestic labour and parenting. My mother found ways to challenge the system that constricted her choices while maintaining codes of deference and femininity so as to seem to be the white wife my father desired in order to assuage his own fears about female sexuality and to subordinate herself to his needs. One of those methods included the economic exploitation of
Ms. Jackson and her labour.

For her part, Ms. Jackson managed to navigate her way through the myriad of traps awaiting her. She refused the Mammy image and subverted it to her own pedagogical purposes while maintaining a mask of deference to keep her position. Collins (1991) argues that “For reasons of economic survival, African-American women play the mammy role in paid work settings. But within African-American communities, these same women often teach their own children something quite different” (p. 73). In this instance, I would argue further that some African-American women seem to play the Mammy role at work while managing to transform their relationships with the white children of their employers. Ms Jackson’s actions demonstrate such an act of resistance. In particular, Ms. Jackson refused the Mammy image by setting limits to my access to her time and attention. She made it explicitly clear that she was in our home to work and that I did not have unlimited access to her. By controlling my access to her, she refused the Mammy role. Additionally she made it clear when she did give me access to her that I was subordinate to her work. In this way, she limited the Mammy role and maintained control over the relationship. More deeply, once we had established connections, while respecting these limits, she used her time with me to teach me lessons that would make me conscious of my privilege and that would make me respectful of the African-American traditions that shaped her life. One of the lessons Ms. Jackson stressed was linked to her own ethos of “self reliance and independence” (Collins 1991, p. 109). She frequently insisted on my understanding that hard
work, self-respect and "nobody owes you nothing" were foundations that I would have to internalize in order to approach adulthood. Given the privilege of my middle-class background, her emphasis on attacking the complacency of such privilege points to her resistance in regard to the larger society’s values that supported my privilege and her own subordination to it; simultaneously, her emphasis successfully exposed that camouflaged privilege (to my eyes) making it subsequently difficult for me to claim entitlement. Like many other African American women positioned through oppressive systems in this form of work, Ms. Jackson took the moment of the Mammy and turned it upon its head, using it as a moment to expose the white child to the injustice of her raced and classed privilege.

Ms. Jackson also made use of the tradition of African-American storytelling to introduce me to important aspects of her tradition. Rather than submitting to the relational structures of the Mammy image that would have had Ms. Jackson serve my needs, and provide me with stories that exoticised her, she allowed me to serve her needs by occasionally allowing me to help her with her work and by using story to initiate me into a respectful association with her tradition. Many of Ms. Jackson’s stories about her family and their Southern roots contained themes both about white male abuse of power and her people’s strategic negotiations through those systems of oppression. Through storytelling, Ms. Jackson challenged powerful scripts and critically approached cross-cultural relations. While acknowledging Razack’s (1998) skepticism about
storytelling as a panacea or, more perfidiously, as a conduit to avoid addressing imbalances of power, I want to agree with Alexander that African-Americans use storytelling in a sophisticated way to both address power imbalances and promote cross-cultural alliances. Alexander (1995) uses Brent’s slave narrative description of violence as an example of this strategic form of storytelling. While Razack (1998) culls together critiques from Steedman, Ellsworth, Lugones, and Trinh to stress that, “our different subject positions, borne out in how we know, tell and hear stories, are ignored at our peril” (p. 51). Those differences can be overemphasized also. I am not contradicting Razack’s argument or suggesting a naive use of storytelling. On the contrary, I agree with Razack. In concert with Alexander, my point is that while we need to be vigilantly wary of the limits of storytelling and the oppressive uses to which it may be put, we must not do this at the expense or erasure of resistant traditions of storytelling. A skepticism born out of a faith in rational argument may set its own trap. Razack uses Trinh’s work to support her point concerning the reception of stories: “Denied any other role but the role of exotic Other, the woman of colour is condemned to representing herself as she is seen by the dominant group” (p. 52). However, as Razack herself notes, Trinh brilliantly entwines her own critique of storytelling with storytelling, thereby exploring – I would argue – the paradoxical power of storytelling and the ways it can be adapted for diametrically oppositional purposes. Thus, while Razack rightly urges us toward “realizing that storytelling serves various groups differently and that it should never be employed uncritically in mixed-race groups” (p.52), an overemphasis on this critical
approach may commit another form of folly. In the case of Ms. Jackson, my point is that she did not give me an exotic other to cannibalize. Instead, combined with her related work to expose my privilege, she unmasked historical and larger social injustices to me through her storytelling. Simultaneously, through her storytelling about her extended kin and racialized cultural practices, she extended the respect I cultivated for her as a person, for her traditions, her people and her race.

Remembering Ms. Jackson and my family’s relationship with her makes it difficult again to see these white Klan women in the photograph before me. How close are my mother and I to this kind of woman in Ms. Jackson’s eyes? How much does my own need to be something else shape my look? How much did my relationship with Ms. Jackson enable me to become someone other than the woman in this picture? How much does my social location make me similar to the woman in this picture, regardless of my actions or views or relationships? Still, I feel that I am not seeing this woman in the image. Rather, I see only her threat to my self-image, and my desire for innocence, which clouds the image.

I do not want to suggest that our subject positions did not constrict or problematically inscribe the talking and listening that I shared with Ms. Jackson. On the contrary, I want to argue with Razack (1998), Trinh (1989), Anzaldua (1990) and Spivak (1988), who make the case for the arduous task of “radically calling into question the knowledge and being of both the teller and the listener, and struggling for ways to take this knowledge and being out of the realm of
abstraction and into political action" (Razack, 1998, p. 53). In this case, a radical questioning uncovers how Ms. Jackson used the Mammy image to resist its oppressive features and then enlisted the use of story to transform the unequal power relations that confronted her by demanding respect from the white child, by exposing the white child to her own privilege, and by enlisting respect of African-American traditions of resistance by presenting glimpses of an Afrocentric tradition to the white child. Ms. Jackson’s inherent self-respect and her demand that I respect her self, her work and her communal history demonstrate Jordan’s claim that “respect is tied to a distinctive Black feminist politic” (Jordan in Collins, 1991, p.108). In writing this narrative, I am struck now by Ms. Jackson’s commitment to an adage Jordan describes: “I cannot be expected to respect what somebody else calls self-love if that concept of self-love requires my suicide to any degree” (Jordan in Collins, 1991, p.108). Now, the glaring contradiction between these lessons and the hypocrisy of my mother’s and family’s exploitation of Ms. Jackson’s labour and my mother’s own complex nexus of complicity and resistance tell a different story than my own personal memory had initially suspected. These memories and understandings lurk in the background of my viewing of this image of the Klan woman. I see this cloaked woman with these relations as shadows lurking in the picture. I see through these narratives making meaning of the picture through the narratives.

I don’t remember how Ms. Jackson and I started talking about the South and her visits with her Southern relatives. I do remember following her around, as I used to, helping when
she’d let me and listening to her as she worked and talked. I remember her saying, “oh it’s different there, hmmhm” and her body leaning into the truth and irony of the phrase and the work. I don’t remember much of what I asked or said, but I remember her telling me that her father used to give her stern instructions about how to act before she went to visit her grandparents in Louisiana. She talked of learning not to speak directly to adult whites, of the need to look down when they spoke to her and the need to only speak when spoken to. She also talked about her grandfather’s home and the summer heat that she loved. Then there was the genealogy, as well, the strange fact to my youthful ears that the plantation owner had been her great-grandfather, a fact that everyone in this small Louisiana town knew and that led to her grandfather receiving land that had been kept in the family. When telling me this story, I don’t recall her using the word rape, but I do recall her making it clear, somehow, through nonverbal gesture and a kind of emphasis of particular words that characterized her speech that this was rape, something different than an affair. She also made it clear somehow that this mixed lineage was the norm, that many U. S. slave owners had fathered many children through rape. She told me these things gradually over several talks we had and always ended with the phrase that now seems laced with irony, given the structural conditions of her employment, “Yup, it’s sure different down there, Hmmhm!”
The Third Look – Seeing the Klan in Historical Perspective

Where are the women in the Klan?

My look, which projects an otherness onto the KKK woman, as it separates this extreme form of white supremacy from middle-class liberal whiteness, may be both a-historical and a manifestation of an unconscious ego project to transform whiteness into something it has never been but something that my own complex nexus of identities can tolerate. As I have shown in the chapter that focusses on a representation of Rita, this self-constituting look becomes a significant problematic for anti-racist work. The white subject’s inability to see or perceive her own dominating practices surely compounds the struggle of anti-racist education in multiple and confusing ways (Narayan, 1988; Razack, 1998). The look’s inability to see becomes a near survival tactic reminiscent of what Kristeva terms the necessary abjection (in McClintock, 1995, p.71). My white subjectivity and perhaps the white subjectivity of the woman represented in the photograph depend on my projecting onto an “other” the very machinations that construct that whiteness. In fact, my own attachment to the relationship between Ms. Jackson and myself may be part of that inability to see my own complicity with racist structures. The more I disavow the implications of structural relations the easier it is for my white self to avoid seeing complicity. The stories I tell to understand, in fact, also may constitute the stories I tell to deny responsibility, unwittingly. An anti-racist research project must unravel this conundrum, not in
order to restore my look and ego to health, on the contrary, to open a space for the social and communal project of witnessing African-American experience, of understanding and learning with the epistemic privilege of the oppressed, of learning to look and address the testimony that pictures of the civil rights movement articulate, in other words a decolonizing of the white look. These pedagogies may give rise to anti-racist agency, respect and solidarity in the present.

In returning to look at this picture of a Southern white woman dressed in Klan garb surrounded by Klansmen, I will add to this autobiographical account of my looking an examination of a social and historical analysis of the position of white women in the Klan. The history serves to give context to the image, to ground it within a set of material practices that may enunciate meanings. This history forces my look to see the normalcy of the Klan, the imbrication of it in white Protestant life, which in turn makes the look accountable. Even as womanhood acts as a significant player in the ideological pageant of the Klan, women themselves also significantly participate. According to Blee (1991), “the complementary actions of Klanswomen added potency and power to Klan activities” (p. 3). Women’s involvement, contrary to the way in which the press and historical documents traditionally report things, corroborates and gives evidence for the fact that in some eras and areas Klan membership and ideology was endemic and “well integrated into the normal everyday life of white Protestants” (Blee, 1991, p. 3). Klan ideology, although extreme, was related to national policy and politics (Blee, 1991; MacLean 1994). “Women of the Klan drew on familial exposes and community
ties, traditions of church suppers, kin reunions, and social celebrations” (Blee, 1991, p. 3). It is through these ordinary material social practices that this ideology of race, gender violence and white male supremacy became normalized. Contrary to my look, which positions the Klan as radically other, the history of the group attests to its enduring place in American socio-politics and its place within the everyday normalcy of American life:

The true story of the 1920s Klan movement, and the political lesson of Klan history for those working toward a more just and egalitarian society, is the ease with which racism and intolerance appealed to ordinary people in ordinary places. The Klan perhaps exaggerated, but certainly did not create, ambitions for white Protestants for social and political supremacy. These citizens, comfortable in daily lives in which racial, ethnic, and religious privilege were so omnipresent as to be invisible to their possessors, found in the Klan a collective means to perpetuate their advantages. (Blee, 1991, p.7)

The history of the Klan makes clear its formidable ability to tap into an already existing ideology within Protestant communities. The ideology of the Klan shifts from era to era, placing emphasis differently, conjuring multiple shades of a looming menace embodied in “others.” The ideology aligns itself or garners allies with discourses that more subtly or covertly represent white supremacy. Women and womanhood, like other ideological concepts such as family and masculinity, served the purpose of struggling to maintain white supremacy through Klan activities, even as the Klan shifted the meaning of these concepts from era to era or local battle to battle. The active engagement of women in the Klan is neither aberrant nor, as I had believed in my initial look, contrary to Klan ideology. Rather, women’s involvement has taken many forms
and has understandably changed the Klan itself (Blee, 1991). White women and womanhood have both volunteered and been conscripted into the ideological and violent struggle to maintain white supremacy by the Ku Klux Klan (Hall 1983; Blee, 1991). Blee (1991) argues that analyzing women’s involvement in the Klan and other right wing movements sheds light on “the multiple, even contradictory, levels on which reactionary movements seek to attract ordinary people into extremist politics” (p. 4). Furthermore, Blee claims that such a study can also reveal “the reactionary elements within the political discourse of racial and religious majorities” (p. 4).

The ordinariness of Klan ideology turns out to be both a strategy and a revelation of particularities about the white middle-class majority that the Klan itself serves to keep covert. Klan activity in particular epochs such as the 1920’s clearly demonstrates this connection. This research focuses on that era in order to bring that connection into view and in order to interrogate my look, which disconnects this link.

**Masculinity and femininity in the Klan.**

Although individual persons comprised the actors of the Klan, masculinity and femininity, as ideologies, played a significant and powerful role in the actions and concepts that have comprised the Klan throughout its three major incarnations (Blee, 1991, p. 12; MacLean, 1994, p. xii). “Masculinity and femininity were not simply abstractions of individual persons; rather, they summarized and masked a complex system of privilege and subordination of which gender relations were only one aspect” (Blee, 1991, p. 12). Though masculinity and femininity
served as cyphers for Klan ideological attention, they were, as Blee’s study makes clear, lynchnpins in a larger ideological system that included race, class, sexuality, imperialism and nation. Klan ideology arose from and interacted with broader political, social and historical developments in each era. Symbols of womanhood were used and received in multiple ways in the three distinct eras. During the second Klan incarnation (roughly from 1915-1928) woman’s suffrage, for example, played a significant role in the shifting construction and reception of the Klan’s ideological and material concepts of masculinity and femininity (Blee, 1991, pp. 11-12, 42). Precisely because of the shifting use of the concept of womanhood between women’s roles and actual women, gender cannot be extracted from class and race struggles for domination in this history (Blee 1991, Davis 1983; Hall 1983; MacLean, 1994). Other arguments making the case for integrative analysis back up this point. However, it is particularly true in this present instance because the signifier “white womanhood,” which the Klan manipulates, is relational and not essential. In other words, its meaning depends on a series of relational “either/or dichotomies” a foundational epistemology of Western systems of domination (Collins, 1991, p. 68). Blee’s (1991) research exposes the ways in which the Klan’s systems of ideology and domination depend on such a relational and dichotomous epistemology.

Either/or dichotomous thinking categorizes people, things, and ideas in terms of their difference from one another. For example, the terms in the dichotomies black/white, male/female, reason/emotion, culture/nature, fact/opinion, mind/body, and subject/object gain meaning only in relation to their counterparts...In either/or dichotomous thinking,
difference is defined in oppositional terms. One part is not simply different from its counterpart; it is inherently opposed to its ‘other.’ (Collins, 1991, pp.68-69)

It is both relevant and significant to note that either/or dichotomous epistemology depends, as Collins clarifies, on an essentialized and relational opposition. It is equally imperative to place the Klan’s systemic use of masculinity and femininity within this broader either/or epistemological framework from which it emerges and through which it plays with meaning.

Simultaneously, it is important to remember that the Klan is imbricated in normalcy, so while its ideology is binary, it is situated on a continuum with “normal” social relations that condone and depend upon racist violence.

Many scholars, particularly women of colour, have argued similarly to McClintock (1995) in *Imperial Leather* that race, class and gender are always part of a complex and shifting struggle for material resources, power, domination, and liberation (Davis, 1983; hooks, 1988 and 1992). It is impossible and an act of misrepresentation to extract any one of these shifting constellations, such as gender, or race, for solitary examination. Rather, the challenge is to see how each shapes and shades the other in complex and contradictory ways. This is certainly true in the case of the Klan. For the white masculinity that the Klan so militarily defends and defines depends on the subdued object of victimized white womanhood, on the power to deny and destroy black manhood, and on unlimited sexual access to black womanhood. White masculinity garners its privileged status through the ideological and material domination of these “either/or”
others, from which it establishes its own "difference" (Collins, 1991). The Klan engages with these dichotomies and differences and, contrary to popular opinion, shapes and influences the majority (Blee, 1991).

Those others constructed in opposition to the white masculinity of the Klan and its more liberal colleagues were interwoven with long standing conceptual and discursive practices. White womanhood was conceptually constrained by an ideology of chivalric femininity, known as the cult of true womanhood (Hall, 1983), and materially constricted through disenfranchisement, as well as through laws and practices prohibiting the involvement of women in the capitalist economic sphere. On the other hand, black manhood served to define or articulate the power of white manhood in related but distinctly different ways. Disempowered through disenfranchisement, through the exploitation of black labour within a capitalist economy, through impoverishment and terrorism (which included sexual torture), through lynching and various forms of mob brutality, and through the mass rape of black women, black masculinity was circumscribed by white masculine privilege (Davis, 1983; MacLean 1994). Unlimited access to black female sexuality or, rather, the unremitting subordination of black female sexuality to the economic and privileged interests of elite white male culture, through rape and the exploitation of their labour, was a means of further emasculating black manhood while reinforcing white male sexuality as an instrument of power over women (Collins, 1991). Thus, here as well, conflicts between men are acted out through women’s bodies.
From a psychoanalytic perspective, the masculine Klan constructed a nexus of ideology, including propaganda, vigilantism, group identity, family values and roles that comprised white masculinity, which in turn served to promote white supremacist "reactionary populism" (MacLean, 1994). This ideology also maintained the structures of capital and labour that had comprised the slave state (Davis, 1983). In separating itself from other constellations of white and black femininity as well as black masculinity, the Klan version of masculinity constitutes itself through abjection. Kristeva (in McClintock, 1995) argues that a social being is constituted through the force of expulsion. "In order to become social the self has to expunge certain elements that society deems impure: excrement, menstrual blood, urine, semen, tears, vomit, food, masturbation, incest and so on" (p. 71). For Kristeva, however, these expelled elements can never be fully obliterated; they haunt the edges of the subject's identity with the threat of disruption or even dissolution. Kristeva (in McClintock, 1995), calls this process abjection. "The abject is everything that the subject seeks to expunge in order to become social; it is also a symptom of the failure of this ambition.....abjection marks the borders of the self; at the same time, it threatens the self with perpetual danger" (p. 71). The abject thus constitutes the subject and solidifies the limits and borders of the subject. But as if from the world of nightmare, the abject also interminably threatens the very limits and borders it defines. According to Kristeva, "the expelled abject haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary; that which is repudiated forms the self's internal limit. The abject is 'something rejected from which one does not part'"
This nightmare, which the subject approaches and flees interminably and perhaps simultaneously, in the case of the masculine Klan, would appear to be white femininity and both male and female blackness. (Of course, all abjected others are not in the same relation to the Klan self). In other words, maintaining a Klan white masculine subjectivity depends on constructing the sexuality of “others” as abjected forms of sexuality, which the Klan masculine identity rejects. The masculine Klan, in constructing its privilege and power, which was inextricably linked to its sexuality, imagined – through acts of violence, propaganda, and its own spin on popular stereotypes – the abject forms of sexuality with which it battled. White women, black men and black women as social groups received, resisted and, in the case of white women, actively engaged, the conjuring of the white masculine Klan identity (Blee, 1991; Davis, 1983; Hall, 1983). It is important to note that this deep psychological imbrication does not alter the fact that Klan white male sexuality was always linked to struggles for material economic privilege.

Complex relations of race, gender and class are enmeshed within the relations of Klan subjectivity. As I gaze at this cloaked woman, shadows of this white cultural abjection begin to emerge in the background. Ironically, the Klan itself abjects white femininity even as it enlists white women in the movement. And, in a further twist of irony, my white feminine self abjects the Klan woman. My look cannot see this woman, but is simultaneously haunted by her as antithetical to my own understanding of self in order to outline a liberal or anti-racist self. The defining of my self thus depends on not seeing this Klan woman.
I almost see this hooded woman, now actively engaging with racist and sexist codes of white supremacy to establish her power along with the men standing beside her in this picture. Conversely, my own childhood experience with my mother’s colour and power evasive rhetoric of tolerance, combined with Ms. Jackson’s working-class black feminism, and my father’s assimilation into white Protestant upper-middle-class culture (complicated by his denial of his Jewish identity) shaped the constellation of white middle-class femininity through which my own subjectivity was produced and delimited. These racialized and classed influences on my childhood experiences lead me to abject white masculinity. Thus the masculine Klan of my look becomes a representation of that which my identity abjacts for its own survival. In order to construct an identity who does not betray those people whom she loves as parents – the Jewish father, the white Protestant mother, the black domestic worker – she constructs a form of white subjectivity that abjacts white supremacy (particularly in its violent form) and views it as exclusively masculine. My look cannot see the cloaked woman because of how she threatens to unravel my own precarious white femininity.

McClintock (1995) makes a case not merely for a generic use of integrative analysis but for its use within historical and material contexts that locate the specific ways in which race class, gender, sexuality and ability shape each other and work through the cultural and material relations of particular societies and epochs. Distinguishing her use of integrative analysis from earlier white feminist theoretical positions and from anti-racist positions that hierarchically locate
differences, she notes:

Race and class difference cannot, I believe, be understood as sequentially derivative of sexual difference, or vice a versa. Rather, the formative categories of imperial modernity are articulated categories in the sense that they come into being in historical relation to each other and emerge only in dynamic, shifting and intimate interdependence...[Kobena] Mercer urges us to be alert to the shifting and unsteady antinomies of social difference “in a way that speaks to the messy, ambivalent, and incomplete character of the identities” we actually inhabit in our lived experiences. (pp. 61-2)

Forcing my look to see this Klan woman and her relationship to the “antimonies of social difference” exposes certain aspects of my own subjectivity that are outlined by related discourses. My look persistently attempts to refuse to see this woman’s agency. But as my readings map out the discourses that construct her “messy” whiteness, and the agency that other Klan women forged through the contours of white middle-class femininity, I find untidy commonalities that deeply unsettle my sense of self. As the prominent woman in the picture loses her demonic tones, I begin to see the woman behind her whom my look has evaded for most of this chapter. The strident woman staring down the camera lens engulfed my look. There seemed something fittingly sinister about her visage that enabled my refusal to see the woman behind her and the discourses through which they both forged their agency. Envisioning the woman in the rear who looks off into the distance, somewhat dreamily, has uncannily coincided with an opening of my look’s ability to begin to take in the traces of common discourses that
compose all three of us in our differently located subjectivities.

Looking at women’s involvement in the KKK demonstrates the untidy relations between gender, race, class and the rise of capital and imperial economies as they took shape in the US during the late 19th and 20th centuries. In *Imperial Culture*, Edward Said (1993), argues that notwithstanding the U.S. rhetoric of liberatory aims, there exists a “direct” link between imperial politics, culture and the United States. Said maintains, “The American experience as Richard Van Alstyne makes clear in the Rising American Empire, was from the beginning founded upon the idea of ‘an imperium – a dominion, state or sovereignty that would expand in population and territory, and increase in strength and power’” (p. 8). Klan ideology draws emphatically upon this inherited discourse and mission of empire. Furthermore, examining the Klan’s use of this tradition may shed light on the ways in which mainstream liberal discourses of American nationhood attempt to erase and distance themselves from the link between empire and U.S. policy at home and abroad. It may also shed light on the way my look does this also through a de-historicizing process. Blee’s point that an examination of women in the Klan may reveal covert aspects about the majority culture may pertain equally to aspects of empire. In other words, examining the ways the Klan takes up the culture of empire may have implications for understanding the way the majority culture does so, as well. This principle bears particular significance in the case of the Klan’s view of its own place in history and history in general. As Said (1993) argues:
Appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions --about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities. (p. 3)

The Klan, in each of its distinct incarnations, makes use of such appeals and negotiates with divergent and contesting appeals within each epoch. In a material sense the Klan serves as the underbelly beneath America’s great imperial “altruistic” mission.

It is easy to look at this white woman as “other” from my own liberal, Northern/Western white social subjectivity, more difficult to examine how she is complicit with racist, sexist and imperial forms of domination, and more difficult still to become accountable for the ways in which my own complicity resonates with hers. It is yet more difficult to examine the internal conceptual framework that allows my look to separate its own subjectivity from white privilege. It is a struggle to bring into view the means through which the construction of that self discursively and materially is drawn into complicity with white privilege (and its cousin, white supremacy) through the inherited culture of empire (McClintock, 1995; Said, 1993; Silverman, 1996). Three research questions now arise: How does this woman actively participate in and shape white supremacy? In what ways does the Klan use white women and white womanhood to enact and maintain white male supremacy? How does my look interact with this figure of white femininity? The first question necessitates some excavation of the history of women’s
involvement in the Klan as well as the Klan’s historical use of womanhood.

**Disturbing metaphors and symbols.**

Prior to the Civil War and afterwards a white supremacist patriarchy was supported by a "racialist state": “It kept white women within a role that was exalted in prose but sharply divided from and inferior to the privileged social role of white men. White men monopolized the rights to property and the franchise....Social privileges were formed along overlapping hierarchies of race, gender, and social class “ (Blee, 1991, pp. 15-16). The Klan emerged after the Civil War. Klan culture used a white, masculine, patriarchal fear over the loss of Southern white male power and the accompanied loss of sexual power. Klan ideology focussed this anxiety over new limits and boundaries that eventually became the codes of segregation. (Blee, 1991; Hale, 1998).

Developing an ideology that attempted to make those fears covert, coded and justified became a significant strategy of Klan campaigns. The fantasy of the rape of white women by freed black slaves as retaliatory acts against the injustice of slavery discursively expressed a group anxiety over the loss of power Southern white males had experienced as a result of losing the Civil War, and through the policies of Reconstruction, which included a military occupation. Hale (1998) maps out the contours of the multiple discourses that threaded their way through popular culture and then current historical narratives, transferring the sense of loss from the violence of the Civil War to a loss and longed for pre-war “civilization.” That lost civilization appeared in fiction and historical writings as an imagined integrated time prior to the war (Hale, 1998). In these white
cultural narratives, emancipation was not envisaged and black subjectivity was merely a figure which shaped whiteness. The embodiment of that figure was the ex-slave who "brought together in white memory the past, present, and futures as an imagined and exaggerated loyalty spanned the war's divide" (Hale, 1998, p.70). This ex-slave figure was the "bearer of white antebellum memory" (Hale, 1998, p. 74). Unable to imagine black emancipation, or subjecthood, post war Southern narratives imagined American Africanisms, as Morrison (1990) would call them, to contain their own sense of loss because of the Civil War violence. Those American Africanisms persisted in burgeoning into related forms: "In the twentieth century, the ex-slave as a bearer of white antebellum memory lived on in the modernized figures of a Pullman porter or, even more commonly, a mammy" (Hale, 1998, p. 74).

In parallel with these figures popular and then historical narratives cleared the ground for white reconciliation between Northern and Southern whites by creating plantation romances whose characters literally wedded together Northern and Southern whites (Hale, 1998, p.70), and by imagining Reconstruction as a "race war," where "Black mobility is transformed from a vague threat to an apocalyptic force" (Hale, 1998, p.79). In these narratives emancipation meant nothing more than a "transference of responsibility" for black subjects to the North (Hale, 1998, p.78). Their own sense of loss for all of the privilege that that "responsibility" had meant created an imagined pre-war integration embodied by the ex-slave, the porter, and the Mammy. Simultaneously, the "hell’ of Reconstruction” and the North’s failure of “responsibility” was
narrated as the justification for segregation (Hale, 1998, p. 79, p. 81).

During Reconstruction, the Klan linked the metaphor of the perceived rape of the Southern state by a Northern Reconstruction army and politics to an imagined threat of the rape of white women (Blee, 1991, p. 14; Davis, 1983; Hall 1983). This is but one example of the complex ways in which race, class and gender converge through the Klan’s symbolic construction of masculinity and femininity. This phantom form of threatened Southern femininity is more familiar to my look than this cloaked woman. The phantom in fact seems more real than the image of the material woman. It is easy for my look to see Klansmen as agents of white supremacy and easy for my look to see how masculine fantasies created phantom women, but it is much more difficult for me to see the ways in white middle-class Southern women drew their own agency as partners in those white supremacist discourses.

From its inception, the symbols of the Klan were based on “symbols of violent white masculinity and vulnerable white femininity” (Blee, 1991, p.12). Within these narratives, the politics of state played themselves out across the landscape of subjectivities. Thus carpetbaggers, Scalawags and black freed men and women, and white womanhood received particular yet related symbolic roles that defined the power of white male sexuality in relation to these “others” (Blee, 1991; Hale 1998, p. 76; Stoler, 1997). Each in turn posed an imaginary threat to white masculinity and the codes of behaviour that had supported the slave economy and society (Hall, 1983). Thus, carpetbaggers threatened the plantation economy through industrialization and
education. White Southerners who assisted in the reconstruction, called Scalawags, presented a threat to the brotherhood of white masculinity through their betrayal to the Southern state. Black men and women as working people threatened the job security of the white labouring classes of unskilled and skilled workers, and of the shop-owning class of petit bourgeoisie (Davis, 1983). The Klan frequently targeted black entrepreneurs who set up stores and small businesses to serve the black community and thus took potential business from the white petit bourgeoisie (Davis, 1983). The Klan's vigilante and mob acts of violence, sexual torture and bodily mutilation attempted to enforce the power of a complex nexus of white male sexuality while also giving public release to anxieties over the loss of that very power. White males such as the planter class -- who may not have ridden with the Klan -- benefited from it both symbolically and materially (MacLean, 1994). White male Southerners, defenceless against the military and economic occupation of their territory by Northerners, could ride at night and imagine themselves the protectors of their honour as they terrorized their imaginary enemy, black sexuality.

Simultaneously, these same Southerners could conjure white womanhood as a subordinate partner for whose purity they rode and for whose own good they constrained, pacified and erased her sexuality. _

Blee (1991) and others outline three major incarnations of the Klan, from Reconstruction to the sixties. The first incarnation coincides with Reconstruction and emerges simultaneously with the popular narratives that constructed the plantation pastoral, and the imagined loss of an
integrated past, held together by the "civilization" of the slave state (Hale, 1998). The Klan's terrorist rides "re-civilized" the space of the Reconstruction South, which white narrative portrayed as decimated by blackness (Hale, 1998). With the institutionalizing of segregation, which "restored" order to the South in the minds of the white populace, the need for Klan vigilantism waned. The second incarnation of the Klan occurred after the turn of the century and came toward the end of a period of "reconciliation" between Northern and Southern whites (Hale, 1998, pp. 67-68). That movement toward white reconciliation reached its height after the Spanish-American war, when Northerners and Southerners reunited in a battle for the imperial U.S. nation (Hale, 1998, p.67). Also, turn of the century immigration opened a space for Northern and Mid-western fears of otherness to coincide with Southern fears of blackness. Giving in to their own desires for white reconciliation allowed the regions to also reconcile their fears of otherness by folding themselves into the culture of whiteness and segregation (Hale, 1998, pp.75-76). According to Hale (1998), "an increasingly, problematically, and therefore self-consciously 'Anglo-Saxon' nation did not want more new states full of nonwhites demanding citizenship rights. National and sectional desires merged" (p.76). The second Klan rose up out of this period after the turn of the century, amid economic pressures as well. The third Klan rose in response to the civil rights movement. The Klan never entirely disappeared, nonetheless historians have noted its rising and falling in these three major waves (Blee, 1991; MacLean, 1994).
Reading this reinforces my look’s desire to erase this cloaked woman from the ranks of the Klan. For I know that symbolically white femininity is a pawn in an ideological battle waged in order to subjugate her. Because of my connection to white femininity, I assume this woman is not a willing partner in the symbolic and material construction of her own oppression. I begin, now, to see the woman and the ideological constructions as parallel but separate figures. Initially, I could not distinguish symbolic white femininity as symbol from the woman represented in the image. I attributed my own resistance to the powers that have constricted my white femininity to this represented woman, even as every thing about her representation confirms her willing complicity and, more than that, her active participation in the system of white male supremacy. Reading this history and mapping out the interstices of discourse and power has made me question the reliability of my look. The look’s unreliability promotes a feeling of boundary loss. I wonder how different my subjectivity is from this woman’s, and I seem to be pulled unwittingly into the picture, even as my look desires to remain outside, safely – other – from this form of white femininity. I am caught in the folds of these women’s robes, which cover the landscape, growing, spreading out beyond the picture across pastoral landscapes and urban decay. These two women tower over me. The one who looks directly at the lens catches me outside the picture. The one who looks off into the distance catches me inside the picture tumbling beneath her in the fabric of her costume. Feeling unable to contain this boundary loss that effects my look and my subjectivity, I search for more knowledge and understanding in the histories to steady the unease
of my momentarily boundary-less look. Even though I know the history will not bring me closer to a truth, searching there eases the profound unease of the provisional look.

**Agency in the second Klan.**

My look now sees this woman’s cloak as an undergarment for legions of white middle-class women. Buried underneath our clothes these robes seem to cling to our constructed bodies. As we pull off the garments that constrict us, these white supremacist underclothes reveal themselves, awkwardly, constricting our movements, tainting our resistance. I see myself and my white middle-class colleagues struggling to take off the cloaks of white femininity only to reveal, underneath, the garments of Klan robes. We pull off layer after layer of outer and inner garments only to reveal another set of outer garments and inner Klan robes.

Unable to remain in those undergarments, my look begins to search for familiar boundaries. I see the pageantry of white masculine Klan violence parading behind these women standing in the picture before me. I look, almost without realizing it, for more evidence that will corroborate my look’s desire to “other” these women. I look for the ways in which white femininity is manipulated for the purposes of white male empire building and postpone the work of allowing my look to see the implications of the history that I have already read. In a sense the history reading is allowing for a space where this new look can construct a different time for itself and the photograph. If a photograph is a time and this work is witnessing, my look needs a space to renegotiate its subjectivity in relation to this moment where the screen and the gaze have
converged through the image of these two Klan women.

Women's agency in the Klan accrued gradually, step by step. The women's suffrage amendment and women's involvement with the temperance movement made clear women's interest in politics (Blee, 1991). Initially, women in the second Klan were involved in auxiliaries (Blee, 1991). Other white supremacist organizations existed, as well, though. Fearing a behind-the-scenes assault to their power through these other organizations, the Klan initiated a women's auxiliary. Before actual women became members of the organization's women's groups, women as wives to Klan members actively negotiated with Klan discourses and shaped the direction of the Klan movement (Blee, 1991). It seems strange to me, now, that I would be able to make this woman in the photograph passive. Clearly, there is a long and complicated history that involves a struggle over power and relational hierarchies of which this woman, or her forebears, or women like her were deeply involved. How women worked beside Klansmen seemed to occupy many creative energies. And this woman proudly displaying her allegiance is one manifestation of that on-going negotiation.

Simmons, a Klan leader, hired Elizabeth Tyler and Edward Clarke, who had started the Southern Publicity Association which advocated for the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Anti-Saloon League. These two organized a "Propagation department" for the Klan and led a massive membership drive and publicity machine. In less than a year they had initiated nearly 100,000 new members. Their publicity enlarged the targets of Klan animosity to include
nonwhites, Bolsheviks, and immigrants (MacLean, 1994, pp.5-6; Blee, 1991, p.20). Thus, as the face of masculinity and femininity had changed in this second incarnation of the Klan, so had the faces of its enemies. True to Klan history, some insurrection against Tyler and her role emerged. Klansmen were against such a strong influence from a woman (Blee, 1991, p.22). To maintain his power, Simmons appointed Tyler to lead a women’s group. Tyler, perhaps in her own bid for political control, then announced that the new organization would not be a dependant organization to the male Klan. Later, Tyler and Clarke manoeuvred Simmons out of power and Hiram Evans took over as Imperial Wizard (Blee, 1991; MacLean, 1994).

Amidst that protracted leadership battle for the KKK, the Women of the KKK became a formal organization in Little Rock, Arkansas on June 10, 1923 (Blee, 1991, p. 28). The words “by women, for women, and of women [that] no man is exploiting for his individual gain” were used to initiate the organization (Blee, 1991, p. 28). The irony of that public statement resounds, given the backroom manipulations by men in pursuit of their own personal male domination over both the male and female arms of the Klan. The WKKK constructed their role as “helpmates to Klansmen” knowing that they might pose a threat to the men and conscious of walking a line between agency and subordination to the Klan agenda: “Klansmen were unsure, however, about what Klan membership would mean for women. Women might be convenient symbols for mobilizing men into the Klan, but women’s actual political participation was another matter” (Blee, 1991, p. 31). Throughout Klan history, the actuality of women seems, to have been part
mystifying and part a return of the repressed for the male Klan.

The women’s Klan focussed their political efforts on “Americanism, education, public amusements, legislation, child welfare and delinquency, citizenship, civics, law enforcement, disarmament, peace, and politics” (Blee, 1991, p.28). The WKKK enveloped other rival right wing women’s societies. The WKKK initial membership of over one hundred thousand, contrary to what I would have imagined, were predominantly from the Midwest, Northwest, and the Ozarks (Blee, 1991, p. 29). They were often related to Klan members. The growth of the women’s Klan was phenomenal; in less than half a year after its inception, the membership had doubled to over 200,000. By November 1923 thirty-six states had chapters of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan. To understand the momentum of this group, one should note that the 1920’s Klan, male and female enrolled an estimated 3-5 million members (Blee, 1991; MacLean, 1994). My version of the South seems to be absurdly constructed through my own narcissistic version of a self and a place. Ms. Jackson’s words about the difference between the South and the West seem to me, now, to be laced with double entendre. Difference, and no difference at all. How convenient to imagine a particular kind of racism is a Southern export. How does my national identity my citizenship change if I see the pervasiveness of Klan ideology and Klansmen and women?

On the one hand, the tenets of the WKKK complement those of the KKK. The WKKK mission was to fight the same principles as the KKK but to emphasize social welfare and
children. However, women and men interpreted the so-called dangers to society differently (Blee, 1991, p. 34). For example, for women, miscegenation meant "the destruction of white marriages" (Blee, 1991, p. 34); whereas the KKK denounced it because they wanted sexual access to white women's bodies through the purity of marriage, and sexual access to the debased Jezebel through the purity of their own acts of violence, rape and torture (Collins, 1991; Davis, 1983; MacLean, 1994). If sexual liaisons between white men and black women were tolerated, the purity and superiority of their white marriages would be challenged. Also, if mixed-race sexual relations were tolerated, the violence of their historical, present and future possible sexual attacks on black women might be exposed to their own consciousness as well as to that of the nation as a whole (Hale, 1998). Somehow this woman's cloak does more than simply uniform her. It seems to hide that consciousness from herself. And, cloaked, she seems to hide an ideology from our mainstream national identity. In a sense she becomes a cypher for a complex and competing set of "racial antinomies" that disallow reflection. I cannot see myself or my privilege in this woman's garb and a nation of women disavows her and neatly sets aside her ideology because of her costume. My look cloisters a kind of femininity it refuses to understand.

Through an examination of the construction of the Women's Klan and the use of masculinity and femininity by the Klan, one sees how these identity symbols transform even as they are used as messages. "The difference between the women's and men's Klan grew from an underlying message in the symbol of white womanhood" (Blee, 1991, p. 41). The Klan based its
violence and privilege on a presumed vulnerability of white womanhood; whereas women embraced the privilege and worked for women's rights and the erosion of male domination (Blee, 1991, p. 41). In my conceptual framework, the political symbol of white womanhood propagated by the Klan negates the battle for equality. My look needs to separate these two in order to consolidate my own proprioceptive ego (Silverman, 1996). Yet, for a significant number of women that was not the case. As Blee's interviews attest, time and again, women spoke of their fight for women's equality and their belief in the Klan ideology of the 1920's. I have been unable to see the connection between this Southern white femininity and that form of white middle-class Northern and western femininity that was the landscape of my childhood. Hale's sentence now echoes uncomfortably and shifts my look: "In their creation of the white home as a central symbolic site in the New South, women of a rising white Southern middle-class were key creators of the new racial order, segregation as culture" (Hale, 1998, p. 93).

As I look at this woman, now, I see her agency and its imbrication in white male supremacist systems of domination. I see her struggling for her own power within a labyrinthian system of codes and discourses vying over her sexuality, her gender, her race and class. Her willing complicity with systems of domination, and her negotiation of those systems to increase her own privilege illuminate the folds of her costume. The neat boundary between white supremacy and feminist fights for equality has been eroded for me. I now wonder whether some of my own fights for equality have been imbricated in white supremacist discourses. This
wondering shifts the grounds of my look. Taking responsibility for the possibility that some of my struggles for equality may not be as far from these women’s as I would like to think shifts the boundaries that have substantiated my proprioceptive ego. This shift not only threatens that ego, but it transforms my ego negotiations with others. My look struggles to regain the comfort of familiar boundaries, boundaries which condemn this Klan woman, so as to take the gaze off my own problematically white self. My look equally and paradoxically struggles toward a productive stance toward accountability for my position within the realm of gaze, screen and look (Razack 1998, Silverman 1996). But, there remains one more look to surface, which has to do with my relationship to Ms. Jackson.

The Fourth Look – Seeing the Unbearable

The complicity of colour and power evasion.

Hale (1998) describes white women’s writing, which details the way white children learned the intricate codes of behaviour that supported segregation in the home. They watched their parents interact with domestic workers and thus apprehended their own privilege. They learned how to use language to subordinate, belittle and demean. Or, they saw their fathers use violence to brutalize domestic workers. In these scenes from the Post Reconstruction era which Hale describes, segregation was paradoxically created through the integrated interactions within the home:
The crucial exception [to segregation], however, was the black female domestic worker. Thus even as segregation increasingly became policy in the late nineteenth-century South, the white home continued as a site of racial mixing through the employment of African American domestic labor. The white home became a central site for the production and reproduction of racial identity precisely because it remained a space of integration within an increasingly segregated world. (Hale, 1998, p. 94)

In my own experience, I also learned lessons within that strange paradoxical context. My lessons were those of colour and power evasion, rather than segregation. I didn’t learn the codes of subordination; rather, I learned the codes of equality, despite economic oppression. My mother treated Ms. Jackson with respect and taught all of her children to do so, but that respect did not give Ms. Jackson unionization, a reliable pension, or any of the other important forms of security that other workers have earned. I learned to believe that a humanistic treatment of others would help assuage the systemic and economic inequalities that existed. In that learning I came to see my family’s form of whiteness as better than Southern whiteness, and as better than the whiteness of some of our neighbours, whose domestic workers were invisible to them. This form of privilege seemed less harmful because it was more humane. Now, as I remember Ms. Jackson working to make our home a privileged home, I see that those codes of equality helped erase the exploitation before us, and helped ease the guilt of our own privilege. It also allowed us to imagine that we weren’t part of a segregated culture, because of course we didn’t treat Ms. Jackson differently the way our neighbours did, or the way women throughout history had. Now,
as I look at this picture, I see two women in these robes. I see myself gazing off dreamily in the distance, and I see my mother staring at the camera beside my father. We are all clad in the garments of white supremacy. Ms. Jackson also is in the picture. She stands behind my mother fixing the folds in her robe and, as she does so, she talks to me. This picture disturbs me terribly. I have found myself lost in the history, attempting not to see this even as I have been working to force myself to understand it. Waking from a dream in the last stages of writing this chapter, I understood that focussing on the history was preventing me from interrogating the look. And, this is a project about transforming the look. The writing of this chapter and this dissertation has been a difficult journey and this look has been particularly difficult to write.

The complicity of longing.

But more difficult than this look is the next. My longing for Ms. Jackson’s love and for her approval now seems uncomfortably linked to the tradition of the Mammy. My writing of her agency and her work through Collins’ important work on black feminist intellectuals earlier in this chapter has allowed me to forget the connections that my desire has to these uncomfortable and oppressive tropes in the history of whiteness in the U.S. As Hale argues: “All Mammies were in an important sense white fictions of black womanhood....Beyond her race and class functions, however, mammy played an essential role in the reconstruction of white Southern gender relations as well” (Hale, 1998, p. 105). The work Ms. Jackson did enabled white women to leave the home and become community workers, using their gender to bring morality to the public
Clearly Ms. Jackson’s work liberated my mother in this way. Her work also allowed me to see my mother’s agency. “Mammy was the key to the paradox of white women empowered by an image of weakness” (p.105). Ms. Jackson did the physical work in the home while my mother provided the nurturing work inside and outside of the home.

But this I have said before. What has not been said is that my own desire to construct Ms. Jackson in this narrative as the woman who shaped my own alternative consciousness is itself deeply linked to the same Mammy trope. My own repeating of my mother’s choices enables an avoidance of an examination of the ambivalent and problematic form of my desires. In this narrative, I have described the ways that Ms. Jackson’s agency transformed my relationship to whiteness. Hale uncovers this trope in the writings of Southern white women in the past: “But even self-consciously ‘new women’ often praised their mammies as their liberators” (Hale, 1998, p. 110). So, again my description of Ms. Jackson’s anti-racist work, even that, may be connected to the Mammy trope. For the women Hale describes, this longing for Mammy’s love relates to a longing for the lost integration of childhood, the time before they learned the difficult and constricting lessons of segregation. “To be a mature white Southerner meant to leave a love for and intimacy with African Americans behind. And this individual development reenacted the larger regional drama as well” (Hale, 1998, 118). It has been terrifying to see that my own desire to honour Ms. Jackson relates to the legacy of the Mammy trope. Somewhere in some strange riddle, I had believed that my reading of Collins, my understanding of the importance of race-
cognizance had liberated me from the lessons of my childhood. But buried within the longing to get things right, to do a better job of living through the social world than my mother, is the longing produced from a segregated culture. “Within the culture of segregation, then, the reunion of self and other merged with the reunion of white and black and nostalgia for the lost oneness of childhood merged with nostalgia for the racial innocence of the white child’s love for her black mammy” (Hale, 1998, p.119). This longing to honour Ms. Jackson has strands of complicity with segregated culture and strands of taking responsibility for my place within it. Seeing Ms. Jackson’s agency, seeing her through the work of Collins (1991) and Davis (1983) begins to pull out the longing from its place within the colour and power evasive narrative and segregated culture. But there still remains a child within who wants desperately to unite these two mothers of mine, to bring together the wise, working-class, black feminist and the middle-class white feminist. And these longings emanate from the white identity of loss, longing for the unity of integration.

I see in this picture the couple in the foreground wearing middle-class clothes, not Klan robes, and I see the woman behind longing for a lost past of integration. I see also in the darkness behind them to the left, a younger version of myself sitting on the ground in front of my mother and Ms. Jackson. In a third image off to the right, I see the three of us walking up a hill, and the hill is covered in the robes of the Klan. We walk in parallel but up different paths. The ground covered in these robes is slippery and we lose our balance, struggling over our separate paths.
Each of us is trying to find ground not covered by the robes.

An After Look

The reason for putting myself in this picture pertains to the psychic processes of the look, or more specifically to the process of abjection. Unless I put myself in this picture, my liberal white subjectivity will always see itself as outside segregated white culture and white supremacy by abjecting extreme forms of whiteness. Putting myself inside this picture forces my look to see the way my own liberal white subjectivity is implicated in the culture of whiteness and its forms of domination. I do not mean to equate liberal and extreme positions of whiteness through this move of decolonizing my look. Rather, this look temporarily halts the process of abjection, which opens the possibility for seeing a greater portion of the construction of whiteness. This look also opens the possibility of viewing the “other” outside the process of abjection (the work of the next chapter). Refashioning the look in this way compels my subjectivity to see itself within a broad continuum of whiteness, which is an important step in the process of building solidarity, respect and responsible cross-cultural looks.
Chapter Five

Looking Toward Witnessing Ms. Eckford

Mutual recognition of racism, its impact both on those who are dominated and those who dominate, is the only standpoint that makes possible an encounter between races that is not based on denial and fantasy. For it is the ever present reality of racist domination, of white supremacy, that renders problematic the desire of white people to have contact with the Other. (hooks, 1992, p. 28)

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which my emotional and affective responses to viewing the image of Ms. Eckford being attacked by a mob inadvertently participate in relations of domination. I also stress the importance of working through these emotions rather than denying them. In the second half of the chapter, I use Melba Beals’ (1995) memoir to engage with the image and look again at the image in a series of looks that attempt a form of witnessing through a re-visioning of the look.

The Image

The camera lens appears to place the photographer close to his subject. The lens captures an eye level shot of one person walking away from a crowd. This ostracized person’s standing image fills the centre left portion of the image. The crowd fans out around this woman, covering much of the rest of the image. Behind the crowd in the background, I can see trees and houses. Several soldiers’ helmets jut out from the back of the crowd. Women make up the largest group of individuals in the crowd although several men’s hats dot the scene. Five women encroach on
the central figure. A woman directly behind, with her mouth wide open, shouts something at her. Two women in the right forefront of the image, who appear to be walking arm in arm, stare intently and jeeringly at the central woman. On the left side of the image a woman holding books appears to be laughing or calling something out toward the central figure. Beside her, a woman’s figure is turned back toward the crowd and cut off by the image of Elizabeth Eckford, the central figure in this image.

Behind this first row of women whose bodies seem to drive forward toward Ms. Eckford, rows of people seem to trail off in the distance. A young man’s laughing profile is seen off to the right, a woman’s head is turned and she is talking in the centre back portion of the image. The crowd is animated and clearly targeting this central figure of the young woman. The soldiers stand off to the left looking on, although in the back, soldier’s helmets can be seen looking away.

The woman positioned in the centre of the photograph on whom the crowd’s attention is focussed is African American. She has darker skin than the others, although, because it is a black and white photograph, her skin tones like the others are composed of varying degrees of grey. She wears sunglasses, a white and gingham dress and carries a binder in her left arm, holding it close to her body. The sun illuminates the right side of her face and her right shoulder. She is poised and dignified in comparison to the menacing crowd. She is clearly the focus of the crowd’s attention. They are hounding her, following her, shouting at her, laughing at her, attempting to humiliate her. But she looks straight ahead and walks forward holding herself in a way that exudes strength amidst fear.

The caption found in the Melba Beals (1995) autobiography, entitled *Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock’s Central High*, reads as follows:

“On the day I watched Elizabeth Eckford being brave in the face of the mob, I felt both helpless
and vulnerable” (p. iv).

On a strictly denotative level, this image appears to represent a crowd of men and women chasing and jeering at a woman. The woman is clearly other than the group. Even though she is never identified as such, I know that she is an African American and that the crowd is white.

The First Look – Seeing through Emotions, Working toward Witnessing

Flooding.

When I look at this picture of a moment of torturous harassment, I am stunned and overwhelmed by both the courage of Ms. Eckford and the horror of the scene. In viewing this picture my emotions return to what feels to me to be similar experiences of harassment even though I know that my experiences bear little resemblance to the level of fury and violence that swoops threateningly down on Ms. Eckford in this image. As I look at this picture, I remember consciously and unconsciously incidents of gender violence, sexual violence and anti-Semitism that I have been subjected to.

The residue of this familiar shame from my actual experiences mixes with a new shame concerning relations across racialized boundaries. It feels as if my emotions offend the testimony of the image (Simon & Eppert, 1997). The testimony that this image presents crisscrosses with systems of representational oppression such as the segregation of images. In her essay, “underexposed,” Davis (1990) traces the socio-historical segregation of black photographic work and asks both how black photographers represented their people and how racism affected their photography practice. She discusses the consolidation of racist stereotypes through popular imagery. She acknowledges black photographers’ interminable obligation for representing the
humanity and the multiple forms of resistance to oppression and struggles for freedom of the African-American community. Her essay raises many questions concerning the ways in which racist aesthetic traditions erase and segregate the work of African-American photography. This picture was taken by a white photographer and, in complicated ways, it may bear the residue of discourses of an "Africanist other" imagined by white American cultural workers (Morrison, 1990, p. 16). Still, it addresses a moment of resistance in the long struggle for freedom of which Davis writes. A black photographer could not have taken this photograph because the mob would have attacked her. And in the context of Beals' book the picture functions differently than do American Africanisms. In Beals' book those discourses which make up American Africanisms are muted.

Even though this picture was produced and continues to circulate through the economy of segregated images, the picture provides testimony. The picture attests to the attacks endured by African-American women who enter the educational system dominated by white male supremacy, and the dignity of their responses. It serves as artifact for cultural memory for the African American community and the plurality of the American community. The image marks a turning point in national policy, a culmination in a long tradition of strategic resistance within the African American community and a moment of resistance to violation. The representation resonates with other stories of survival in the African-American experience.

In her essay that critically examines the Rodney King video in relation to slave narratives and cultural memory, Elizabeth Alexander (1995) asks: "What do the scenes of communally witnessed violence in slave narratives tell us about the way that text is inscribed in African American flesh? Witnessing can be aural as well as ocular. Furthermore, those who receive stories become witnesses once removed, but witnesses nonetheless" (p.85). Alexander argues for
understanding that stories about slavery's violence to African-American bodies create witnesses who learn survival tactics, strategies of resistance and the contours of identity through witnessing. She also argues that present-day images of state-sanctioned violence against African-American bodies resonate through the tradition of slave narratives and witnessing. My anxiety resides in the dual desire to respect the differences in the markings of flesh that witnessing across difference provokes while at the same time desiring a method of witnessing that leads to solidarity. This chapter attempts to develop a respect for African-American witnessing while simultaneously theorizing a pedagogy of witnessing across and through constructions of binary identities. The goal is to set the ground for solidarity through respect and witnessing.

Transference.

The transference process, whereby one's reactions and affective responses hijack this scene and use it to witness another trauma from early experience, can lead just as easily to disrespect as to respect (McKenna, 1996). I am arguing that the following working-through of the different levels and implications for violence is one important aspect of transforming a transferential look into a respectful look. This work attempts to expose the researcher's responses, not to reify them, but to conceptualize the look. This study also argues for the pedagogical significance of acknowledging affective responses and using them to develop respect and witnessing across difference. One stage in witnessing this image may be making overt and taking responsibility for the transferential hijacking that occurs when my affective response takes an image that belongs both to African-American resistance to white supremacy and to the social and systemic institutionalizing of hierarchically racialized boundaries and uses it to witness scenes of other forms of violence. This chapter will strategically problematized this
emotional response in order to theorize alternative modes of engagement.

Because the relation is built from the old dynamics of previous relations, as a transference relation, learning is defined ambivalently, as a new edition of old conflicts between wanting to have the love and knowledge of another and wanting to be the knowledge and love for the other. (Britzman, 1998, 35)

Britzman's words describing the ambivalent desires and conflicts embedded in learning may pertain to this situation. Accompanying this problematic emotional response is an equally problematic fantasy. As a way out of the present and past shame resulting from the residue of traumatic experiences, I hold myself in a healing kind of embrace where I appreciate my own survival, my own attempts to act responsibly and my own healing journey. From there, I imagine myself walking along with Ms. Eckford. In this affective engagement with her I am no longer looking at her but imagining that we are walking together toward justice and an inner healing.

As I write these words, the researcher in me asks what's problematic about my viewing of this picture. At this point I am flooded with an avalanche of feminist and anti-racist theory, history, and criticism that makes it nearly impossible to write. The problems are so numerous and complex that there is only enough space to focus on some of the issues involved. Because one's look emanates from one's standpoint (Smith 1990), as a researcher I must keep in mind the social location of my positions as white, middle-class, heterosexual, and able bodied (Smith, 1990). My standpoint from childhood experiences as a white child with one Jewish parent in an upper middle-class family and as a survivor of childhood abuse shape this affective response to the photograph. Furthermore, the affective response de-historicizes the image and in so doing commits a violence against African-American cultural memory and the ongoing work of witnessing the historical trauma of slavery and four hundred years of white supremacy. In "The
Pedagogy of Commemoration and Formation of Collective Memories,” Simon (1994) explores the complicated nexus of possibilities and dangers involved in witnessing the historical trauma of colonization. He elaborates four positions non-natives take when listening to First Nations’ testimony of colonization and resistance: “relative indifference,” “defensive skepticism,” “ethnographic curiosity” and “intense self-identification” (p. 12-13). My own flooding emotional reaction tends toward the fourth. Simon emphasizes the inadequacy of all four of these responses and explores alternate possibilities for witnessing historical trauma that may open a possibility for justice in the present by the way one engages with memories of the past. The problems with my emotional response, according to Simon, involve historical displacement and a constricted understanding of difference:

There is the position of intense self-identification with the persona of the story, which in the case of non-indigenous North Americans might result in a prideful arrogance, self-suffering guilt, or the displacement of one’s own historically and materially rooted identifications by the incorporation of that sense of Other which is defined by a specific, limited comprehension of difference. (p. 13)

In the flooding experience, while remembering, I certainly displaced my historically and materially rooted identifications. My affective response, guided by the story of the picture, constructed difference as other while simultaneously crossing the boundary of that constructed difference in an act of transferential identification. This chapter attempts the work of transforming those problematic identifications. Theorizing alternative forms of engagement may miss an important pedagogical opportunity. Given the “mistakes” of these four types of human engagements and their inadequacies, can critical pedagogy transform them into more productive and more ethical forms of engagement? This chapter will explore further the problems and
possibilities of this emotional engagement. The purpose of this exploration is to transform the grounds of my engagement and change my look from one of disrespectful identification to one of respectful witnessing and solidarity.

In this chapter, I will examine the unconscious racism imbricated in this emotional response in this context. I will explore also the ways in which these emotional reactions encourage relations of domination, such as “eating the other” and commodification of the other (hooks, 1992, p.21). Throughout this interrogation, I will explore the possibilities that these problematic emotions open or make possible. It is my contention that examining these emotions, combined with a working through of the structures of desire that they initiate, is a necessary step in the process of moving toward ethical forms of witnessing.

In the picture of Ms. Eckford, I see a woman steadying her course pursued by a hostile crowd. I see the men in the image making impossible demands on this woman. I see the women pushing her away and siding with the men. I see a crowd of people shaming a young woman. I see that woman holding her books and walking away from that shame. These are the images of my transference.

The Second Look – Uncovering Anxieties

The problem of analogy.

This research has been haunted by an anxiety that the project involves my own unconscious racism and/or forms of cultural appropriation. One of the problems with the identificatory and transferential emotional response of my initial affective engagement with the image is its unconscious racism. An aspect of that unconscious racism is its dependence on
analogy. Lorraine Code (1988), in her article “Feminist Theory,” points out that "women of colour have noted that an analogy commonly drawn by white feminists between the social position of women and of blacks reveals an unconscious racism both in its language and in its assumptions” (p. 45). This analogizing through an unconscious racism involves complex and coded discursive systems. The language used to equate the two different oppressions relates to a colour and power evasive understanding of race (Frankenberg, 1993), whereby the specific ways in which race affects women positioned differently on the black/white binary of the racialized hierarchy is erased by the desire for connection and gender solidarity. Furthermore, the constructed nature of the black/white binary and its link to other forms of exploitation and violence is also erased (Hale, 1998). Colour and power evasive racial understandings that counter claims of essentialized racial difference with the erasure of difference also tend to erase the historicity of oppression and the ways in which racist systems continue to structure and construct material oppression and privilege. This erasure violates African-American cultural memory of the particularities of their oppression and allows white women to avoid critiquing their own culturally constructed position and their own complicity with forms of violence and domination.

The history of feminism in the U.S. and Britain is riddled with this problematic analogizing. Hall (1983), for example, has pointed out the ways radical feminism “misconstrues the realities of racism in the effort to illuminate sexual subordination” (p. 331). One difference is thus transformed in an effort to create unity across difference. Others have noted this problem. In discussing the paradox of feminist theory, which demands an analysis of gender while simultaneously opening possibilities for breaking open gender roles, Code (1988) points out that the feminist call for unity, while accepting women’s diversity, may also be paradoxical (p. 45). Analogizing, then, would seem to cover over this paradox, and might lead to a lack of
understanding of the histories of domination and specifics of violence in social power relations, and thus become a covert form of racism: The analogy is inadvertently used to substitute and subsume the experience of the other and to disguise the machinations of the construction of whiteness. Learning in this mode becomes a process whereby analogizing from one's own experience allows one to refrain from learning about the particularities of the other's experience. As Britzman (1998) argues, “The paradox is that learning is provoked in the failure to learn” (p.31). The problem with analogizing is that it can lead to identification as opposed to learning. Britzman uses Balint to explain the difference between identification and learning: “The move to take in what is outside, however necessary, is insufficient and flawed, because identificatory thinking is the ego’s means to console itself, to defend itself against its own anxiety” (p.31). The basic problem with analogizing from this identificatory perspective is that it lets the constructed white ego off the hook, so to speak. The analogy substitutes for an understanding of the other’s experience and for the frightening and uneasy work of interrogating the relationship of the constructed white self to larger and systemic forms of social construction, oppression and hierarchy. The analogy also in a sense prevents learning, for it allows the self to avoid coming to terms with its own anxieties, which may themselves be projections of the other.

My identificatory look is both drawn through the image and from childhood lessons. One of the analogic foundations of that look was set in motion by my mother’s colour and power evasive lessons. Respecting Ms. Jackson’s dignity and humanity was a paramount concern for my mother. Ms. Jackson was “just the same as us,” she taught me in countless ways. And in learning from my mother’s example, I listened to Ms. Jackson’s stories about her life and the advice she gave me about how to “be good” and “stay sweet.” Through these talks and this relationship, Ms. Jackson gradually, over the years, claimed me as “her girl.” My look, unlike my
mother’s, could not avoid noticing the material and economic disparities in my mother’s and Ms. Jackson’s circumstances, nor the disparities between my opportunities and Ms. Jackson’s. My look was shaped by Ms. Jackson’s pedagogy, which came from a distinctly different tradition than my mother’s and had different aims. My desire to witness and form relations of respect and solidarity across difference emanates from many sources. One important source is the “Other mothering,” the storytelling, the anti-racist pedagogy, the inscribing of the call to witness that Ms. Jackson effected as she, through dialogue, claimed me as “her girl” (Collins, 1991). My historical and current relationship with Ms. Jackson adds another layer to the transferential process of looking. On one level it adds another layer of guilt and questioning. Ms. Jackson’s dialogues encourage me to question the ethics of my analogizing look. At another almost imperceptible level Ms. Jackson’s dialogues open the possibility of my enduring the unbearability of exposing and interrogating the constructed nature of my white look and its relationship to larger systems of oppression.

Productive possibilities for emotions.

While the significance of Code’s (1988) criticism of the danger and epistemological domination inherent in drawing analogies between women’s oppression and racial oppression is clear, I have also found that doing emotional work has produced important growth. This growth has significantly developed my understanding of the way my own survival of gender and sexual violence has affected my desire to liberate myself and to work toward social justice. This understanding has enabled me both to develop respect and solidarity with “other” people fighting oppression and to demarcate between the areas of privilege and oppression that make up my life. Furthermore, as a child of one Jewish parent working through my own relationship to Jewish
culture, politics, religion and identity, I have experienced a cultural outsider/insider, border existence. Thus, although I recognize the violence of analogizing, it seems important to clarify that experiential and affective analogizing has been part of my process of the "interminable experiment, a crafting of identification into understanding" (Britzman, 1998, p. 31).

Anne Russo’s (1991) discussion of her process of coming to terms with the oppressions in her own life as one means in a multi-layered process of formulating an anti-racist and inclusive feminist strategy speaks directly to the possibilities for affective understandings across differences. She says:

By facing the ways in which I have been oppressed-through sexual abuse and violence, male domination, and homophobia in my family, in the educational community, and in the larger society, I am more able to empathize with the oppression of women of colour, in both its similarities and differences. (p. 308)

Russo argues here for a kind of empathy as a possibility for opening up dialogue, potential solidarity and understanding across difference. Russo’s empathy, I would argue, contains identification and difference at once and may lead towards the kind of learning that Britzman (1998) articulates. Russo makes clear, however, that this empathy must be accompanied by analysis, work and commitment to ending structures of domination. Empathy here seems to mean a kind of limited form of analogizing where the psychic and emotional trauma of oppression is analogized across different forms of oppression. As one recognizes similarities through emotional experiences, one also recognizes, through an analysis of structural and material relations, the differences in experience. This empathy appears to be connected to critical inquiry, not isolated from it. For Russo, this empathy is one element in the process of transforming the relationship between white women and women of colour; it enables a shift out of the empathy
that leads one to believe one is the other and enables "work[ing] more effectively with women, not for women of colour" (p. 303). Russo here uses the prepositions to distinguish a learning of the other that would subsume the other and a learning that can differentiate the difference between the self and the other. In Britzman's terms, this is the learning of understanding that comes from working through the learning of identification (Britzman, 1998, p. 31). The paternalism of analogizing without an analysis of differences is checked. Thus, according to Russo, the affective response that I fear may actually be important grounds for opening dialogue, and in Britzman's terms a necessary step towards learning and loving. This shift from for to with is also necessary to Simon and Eppert's theory of the process of creating a "we" for public commemoration (Simon & Eppert, 1997, p. 187).

Alternatively, denying this affective response because of my own fear of its violating potential may not lead toward dialogue or solidarity. For Russo, empathy can be applied to "similarities" and "differences" paradoxically. Thus emotional responses and identifications don't necessarily erase socially constructed differences or the constructed nature of difference. In other words, my temptation to deny both my own relationship to experience and related emotions out of a desire not to dominate may lead toward another danger altogether. It may lead to a numbing between myself and my experience, which in turn may open the possibility simply for another level of epistemological violence, whereby neutrality sets the stage for an interpretive violence. In this case the violence erases my own relationship to experiential knowledge production. That denial allows for the possible objectification of other knowledges. The neutral stance disguises a particular standpoint and agenda. The injunction to examine my own privilege becomes the ethical mandate which disassociates me from my own experience and in that disassociative state a number of dangerous possibilities may arise. Censoring my own affective
response to this picture to avoid analogizing because of its violating potential may not provide an escape from the domination of my gaze. Intellectualizing as a way out of the trap of problematic affective responses may be just as messy. Intellectualization has complex traps, as Britzman (1998) points out in discussing the history of relations between education and psychoanalysis, "when analysts consider how individuals intellectualize their lives, their social, and their political commitments, they consider such actions as the ego’s attempt to defend itself. Something more than an idea is at stake in intellectualization" (p. 32). Although the experience of an affective and identificatory look may lead to a further corrupting of relations across constructed boundaries, intellectualising may simply add a further corruption rather than providing the desired exit.

For Russo (1991) the denial of the affective severs the possibility for connections across differences:

When I have denied the abuse I have suffered, primarily through men’s sexual violence in my family and interpersonal relationships, and when I’ve seen myself as only privileged, I have been less able to connect with women of colour because I see myself as too different, and as only an oppressor. (p.308)

The point at which she becomes overly absorbed by difference and is only able to see herself in positions of domination disengages Russo from possibilities of solidarity. From this place she cannot then reach out across difference and build engagement that leads toward solidarity. Her anxiety around learning from engaging with the other clearly points to the struggles of a defensive ego or self. Rather than taking apart the multiple and complex ways in which identification and difference intertwine themselves through the construction of her experience, Russo vacillates between an either/or acknowledgement or denial of emotions, and experience. I am arguing that affective connection cannot be seen as either innocent or safe from critical
examination, on the one hand or, on the other hand, as separate from learning. While Russo seems to argue for a critical empathy that necessarily leads to solidarity, I would argue that the relationship between a critical empathy and solidarity needs more steady encouragement than Russo’s article would suggest. Also, I would want to acknowledge that identification and guilt about privilege are merely two forms of reactions to difference. Solidarity differs from the empathetic because of its relationship to political activism and the recognition that empathy is a bridge toward something more, not an end in itself. Still Russo’s argument for the inclusion of one’s affective responses is significant, though limited.

**Fear and its traps.**

The initial fear of committing a racist act through my affective responses may paradoxically propel me away from solidarity with others oppressed through racist structures and towards a standpoint of domination. Erasing one’s own experience of oppression or intellectualizing it in an attempt to take responsibility for one’s privilege may then have the opposite of intended effects. Rather than enabling solidarity, dialogue and cross-boundary communication, it may reify boundaries, and reinstitute hierarchies by making difference impermeable. Suppression of empathy and affective responses may lead to a kind of dissociation that ensures complicity.

When I see only my own privilege and possible complicity in systems of domination, fear leads me backwards into a trapped space where I am filled with a shame that at once embodies and empties me. Inability to focus on a thought takes over, for each thought seems linked to my guilt. An intricate web of energetic self-chastisement and immobility takes hold of me. This chamber holds the internalized memories of traumatic experiences of gender and sexual violence
and anti-Semitism. These accusatory voices from the outside and their internalized mimics form a kind of alternate experience base. My experience of the oppression and my own resistance have constituted yet another level of experience. From this confusing and contradictory place, very little productive coalition building or border crossing of any kind can take place. From this place, however, I crave contact with “others” and am utterly aware of my own loneliness, isolation, fear, entrapment, sorrow, guilt and oppression. This place sets up the emotional structures for the problematic desire for the other of which bell hooks (1992) and Britzman (1998) write. Much of my emotional work has involved separating these strands of experience.

This blaming of the self for systemic hierarchical relations and domination is a pattern my early experiences set in motion. Paradoxically, an excessive sense of personal responsibility may have been a catalyst for working toward social justice. This self-critical perspective may also have cultivated a propensity toward analogizing, cultural appropriation, avoiding analysis of social structures, and withdrawal from social activism. Another part of me saw a psychic fragility in the dominant that supported the longing to dominate those around them by any means at their disposal. My own search for relations based in social justice was fuelled by desire to distinguish my behaviour from that of the dominating. The self-critical and shamed parts of myself combine with the knowledge gained through surviving oppression and together they set up a problematic desire. It’s as if in that moment when shame and self-indictment threaten to shatter the self, I abnegate responsibility and project myself across social boundaries onto the other (under the illusion that this will lead to social justice). In so doing, social justice aims are thwarted by the structures of projection and empathy.

When I view this picture of Ms. Eckford’s torture at the hands of a white supremacist mob, the positions held by actors in the drama may become a variety of positions I have
experienced and internalized. Thus my look, engages in transference; i.e., in interpreting present situations through the dynamics of old ones. As I look at her situation, I race across memories' fluid boundaries through my experiences and internalized restaging of these experiences. Seeing Eckford being taunted by a crowd, I remember being followed home by boys who used to whip my friend and I with razor-sharp pantha grass, taunting us for our gender differences. This memory, in turn, leads to countless memories of sexual assaults. Fleeing those memories, I return to looking at the picture. My look empathizes with Ms. Eckford and pushes aside voices of self-condemnation that are a mixture of the voices of my abusers and my own internalized versions of their voices. In struggling with these castigating inner voices, my disdain and hatred for the white mob grows; my desire to identify with Ms. Eckford also grows, for identifying with her allows me to forget my own trauma. This dual reaction sets up a problematic structure and has dire implications for potential work toward justice. Psychic structures propel me once again away from situating my understanding and desires within my own social and historical locations and toward a dominating relation with the other. This empathetic look, closely examined, becomes one more form of colonial exploitation.

Transference from another perspective.

Although transference may pose problems, it may also lead to new openings. Unable to face the trauma buried beneath the transference occurring when I look at this picture, but able to address the problems of that transference, I have pressed on with the work of this chapter and the previous ones. Attempting to expose my forgetting even as it eludes my knowledge, I have written this thesis in the hope that what I forget will be exposed through repeated looking and through your view, that of the reader. McKenna (1996) argues, however, for an understanding of
transference that sees the working through of it as important not only for understanding the past but also for understanding the present. Transference can form “the expression of structures and strictures of particular (previously formed) relational configurations” (p. 289). She suggests that transference may not be something to be gotten over, but rather that working through transference has possibilities for opening up communication across differences and for acting differently in the present. She argues for the cultivation of:

“capacities to attend to the workings of these unconscious (counter)transferenceal dynamics. For it is my contention that the process of working through (counter)transference provides one way to make ‘the invisible visible’ (Butler, 1993), and thus can be used as an intersubjective bridge for creating passageways between seen and unseen, between conscious and unconscious, between self and others, that is for working with difference differently. (p. 294-295)

McKenna suggests that counter transference is more than a problem. She argues for an attention to it that can open possibilities for transforming both the present and the past. The unseen trauma that has activated this transference of my own relates to a memory that I am afraid to remember and seems buried beneath my consciousness, being remembered all too frequently. When I look at this image of Ms. Eckford and feel caught in the paralysis and flooding emotions of transference, I am remembering those moments. Yet, I crave a way out of that past staging and search for different ways to come to understandings. This project is one such experiment.

Eating the other.
In her essay “Report From the Bahamas,” June Jordan (1989) analyzes the effects that
denial of difference had on her encounter with a white, middle-class female student. This student tells Jordan during a meeting, “You are so lucky! You have a cause. You have a purpose to your life”(p.141). The luck, as Jordan discovers, is “Poverty, Police violence, Discrimination” (p. 141). Jordan analyzes the implications of this woman’s denial of her own experience on the one hand, and her romanticization of Jordan’s experience on the other hand. Jordan further examines the effects these discursive moves had on the possibility of their dialogue. First, she explores a position that this student’s denial invites. Jordan asks:

If she believed me lucky to have regular hurdles of discrimination then why shouldn’t I insist that she’s lucky to be a middle-class white wasp female who lives in such well-sanctioned normative comfort that she even has the luxury to deny the power of the privileges that paralyse her life? (p. 141)

The student’s “understanding” of Jordan’s experience through a romanticized fantasy of oppression becomes a defence that performs a matrix of dominating discourses and a resistance to learning. Within my own desire to study the civil rights movement there is some resemblance to this white woman’s romanticization of the African-American resistance to white supremacy.

The white woman’s simultaneous denial of the forces that have shaped her life, oppressing and privileging, becomes the catalyst that enables her to violate Jordan. The student discursively cannibalizes by eating the other and, in so doing, her utterance becomes implicated in the “commodification of blackness,” “cultural appropriation” and “imperialist nostalgia” (hooks, 1992, p. 25), all complex forms of domination.

Overwhelmed with the guilt of privilege and trapped by the internalization of her own oppression, which tells her she is “a nobody,” she yearns for a way out (Jordan, 1989). Yearning twists her view of Jordan’s struggle against oppression dangerously near to a new flavour to
liven up her own life. The student views Jordan's struggle through her own form of imperialist nostalgia, whereby: "One desires 'a bit of the Other' to enhance the blank landscape of whiteness" (hooks, 1992, p. 29). Simultaneously, oppression as "cause" turns a history of oppression into a "life sustaining alternative" for her own causeless life (hooks, 1992, p. 25). Unable to find her own purpose or analytic out of the web of privilege and oppression which binds her, she turns oppression into an elixir. Thereby, once again viewing Jordan from the standpoint of imperial nostalgia: "contemporary longing for the 'primitive' is expressed by the projection onto the other of a sense of plenty, bounty, a field of dreams" (hooks, 1992, p.25). In this case that field of dreams is social activism. I too have looked on these pictures of the civil rights movement yearning for a romanticized version of social activism as a way out of my own messy work with the effects of privatized, familial violence and alcoholism, as well as racist, sexist, ablest, and homophobic structures.

Both Jordan (1989) and hooks (1992), nonetheless, argue for the possibility of solidarity in spite of the violence of these discursive practices. Jordan describes a number of anecdotes where difference prevents connection because of complex forms of denial and yearning. Her article ends with two women engaging effectively with each other and sharing knowledge about violence against women in the context of struggles to end colonization. Because of their joint commitment to end colonization in the public sphere and violence against women in the private sphere, differences do not become barriers. Their need for each other in their fight against colonial tyranny and violence against women make possible their affective connections (Jordan, 1989). hooks, in turn argues that a "mutual recognition of racism, its impact on both those who are dominated and those who dominate, is the only standpoint that makes possible an encounter between races that is not based on denial and fantasy" (hooks, 1992, p. 28).
Throughout this research journey, the viewing of civil rights movement films, testimonials, histories, and photographs sometimes awakens in me tremendous emotions of rage, loss, humiliation and sadness, which I experience all at once in waves of tears. The testimonial of African Americans resisting the violence of white supremacy opened a space for me to engage in the remembering of my own trauma as I witnessed the trauma of one phase in the African-American journey of resistance to white supremacy. As I have just argued, one way out of that space can lead to the kind of commodification that Jordan’s student commits: Romanticization of struggle intertwined with cultural appropriation, imperial nostalgia and an “eating of the other” (hooks, 1992, p. 21). The work of the previous two chapters, in which I interrogate my subject position as I look at images of whiteness, has opened a space for the reigning in of these tendencies of my look. Forcing my look to consider its subject positions and the ways in which the identifications, longings and abjections of those positions relate to the construction of whiteness and its others has made possible the exposing of these problematic forms of looking. Looking back at images of white women in the previous two chapters has opened the ground for this interrogation of these emotional relations.

Now, looking at the Eckford image, I see two images. I see an image of myself as a teenager walking to school hounded by my childhood oppressors. Directly across from that image, I see Ms. Eckford walking away from this crowd of screaming and heckling racists. My younger self stops in front of this image and struggles between a fear of the crowd that follows me and the image that stands before me. As I look at the crowd that follows Ms. Eckford I see not faces but mirror reflections of people from my past. In another image, I see my former self picking up a rock and hurling it at those mirror images. As the glass shatters, the faces of the crowd that follow Ms. Eckford appear. The shards of glass tumble about my feet. I see in them
the broken images of people from my own past.

The Third Look – Attending to Testimony

The paradox of the real.

Making alliances depends on taking steps toward social justice. In his article, “The Pedagogy of Commemoration and Formation of Collective Memories,” Simon (1994) articulates a number of curriculum questions that open the possibility for transforming history into memory (p.11). He also articulates outsider responses to testimony that can arise in the process of attempting to witness historical trauma (p.12-13). These responses inhibit the formation of collective memories. The emotional reactions that I have detailed here open several pathways for the possibility of such inhibiting responses. The process of interrogating them moves the viewing practice toward ethical relations. The problematic reactions include over-identification with the other and a complex form of “eating the other” (hooks, 1992, p. 21). I am arguing that interrogating the structure of that desire, as I have throughout this chapter, paradoxically opens the possibility for engagement structured by principles of justice. In a sense, my empathetic look has stopped seeing Ms. Eckford’s image. Looking at the image from an empathetic position, I notice the shadows of emotions that surround the image, and I see the representation through them still. The photograph has encouraged me to conjure a scene that I have peopled with emotional relations. Paradoxically, remembering that this is a photograph checks an aspect of the colonizing look, but it also checks the potential of the testimony for transforming the look. Indulging the fantasy of the real (or forgetting the constructed social history of the photographic apparatus) and taking the image at face value, while simultaneously interrogating psychic
structures that lead to dominating relations turns my look back toward both the possibility of looking at the representation and toward witnessing the testimony of the photograph.

Ironically, indulging the look’s desire to see the photograph as a trace of the real may enable the transformation of the look in ways that critical intellectual inquiry cannot. This indulging of the fantasy of the real, combined with attending to the obligations of testimony and an examination of the psychic acts involved in the process of looking, can open possibilities for looking in solidarity. Looking from this perspective may speak to the testimony of the photograph (Simon & Eppert, 1997).

The picture depicts African-American women’s resistance to white supremacist violence and commitment to freedom in the form of equal access to education. The palpableness of the picture, for me, emanates from the frozen dramatic action of the attack, the stoic resistance to the threat of violence, the proximity of the lens to the action, the viciousness of the white woman’s jeer, and the numbers of white bodies that support her. The picture asks me to examine the specifics of the historic integration of Arkansas Central High School in 1957, while it simultaneously allows me to wonder how much that integration cost Ms. Eckford and to think back through past to present experiences in school as a student and teacher and ask how much integration costs the students of colour who face multiple forms of white supremacist violence. I remember incidents in school when I witnessed attacks on people of colour. I remember witnessing the toll various forms of white supremacy took on students of colour when I taught in public school. I recall, too, seeing the effects of white supremacy on my colleagues who led tutorials for an Introduction to Women’s Studies course at the University of Toronto. The picture asks me to consider the ways in which curriculum has acted as that jeering white woman in the photo. The picture asks me to consider how my actions might lead toward a just remembering of
this historical trauma and an ethical pedagogy of the look. These are some of the questions this picture raises for me as it testifies to the trauma of school desegregation.

Yet, this image positioned within the rubric of testimony, as Simon & Eppert (1997) theorize it, is also an image of what cannot be represented or said. This picture, which gives visual representation to a vigilante mob of white people accosting and attacking a young African-American woman as she attempts to attend school, can only be insufficient given the traumatic and violent history that white supremacy has imposed on African-American women. What this evokes but leaves out of the frame are the laws against slaves learning to read and write, the lynching of African Americans by white vigilante mobs, and the rape of African-American women by slave masters, vigilante mobs, and white men (Davis, 1983, 1990; Hall, 1983). The picture denotes a specific instance or the resistance of African-American women to those multiple systemic and complex forms of violence, while simultaneously leaving out of the frame the continuity of that resistance. The picture connotes the commitment of African American women to self-improvement and community, their determination and courage in facing threats of violence, torture and humiliation, their willingness to demand their civil and human rights, their self-composure and dignity in the wake of brutality. The picture leaves out Elizabeth Eckford’s relationship to her community and their struggle for freedom precisely because the picture only captures this moment and neglects how she came to this place, and how she nurtures herself through this situation.

Given the photograph’s inability to represent the historical recursiveness of a variety of social systems that constrict African-American women’s access to conventional forms of education and the relationship of those restrictions to a matrix of recursive violence inflicted upon the bodies of African-American women, the potential for witnessing through looking at
photography depends on textual interference. This is particularly true for the look projected from a white middle-class subjectivity. Textual interference combined with repeated returns to the look and its understanding along with conscious attention paid to the ever-present possibilities for domination and denial through the psychic structures of the look may open a space for speaking to testimony.

For Simon & Eppert (1997), testimony carries with it obligations to a “double attentiveness.” An attention to a just judgement of the accuracy and historical significance of testimony comprises the first level of attentiveness (p. 178). The second level consists of an apprenticeship “to the provision of testimony” (p. 179). Witnesses participating in the first level of obligation must “establish their allegiance to structures of evidence and theorization that make possible just judgement” (p. 179). A witness participating in the second level of obligation opens him or herself to the possibility of collective memory. These two levels of obligation, judgement and apprenticeship, are intertwined in the process of witnessing historical trauma and establishing hope for transformation in the present (p. 180). According to Silverman (in Simon, 2000),

If to remember is to provide the disembodied ‘wound’ with a psychic residence, then to remember other people’s memories is to be wounded by their wounds. More precisely, to let the traces of other people’s struggles, passions, pasts, resonate within one’s own past and present, and destabilize them. (p. 10)

Opening to this wounding in the process of looking at photography means a working through of the colonizing structures of the look; indeed, it might be argued that this working through is precisely what is meant by being wounded by the wounds of others.
The grounds for respect.

In her article, "Working Together Across Difference: Some Considerations on Emotions and Political Practice," Narayan (1988) insists on the depth of effort that understanding across differences will entail. She cautions against the notion that outsiders should relinquish responsibility for their own learning by acceding to notions of epistemic privilege and demanding that the oppressed teach them. The responsibility for the outsider's acquiring knowledge of the effects of oppression on insiders must remain with the outsider. This project is just such an instance of taking this responsibility seriously and, in so doing, breaking down the boundaries between insiders and outsiders. This breaking down that I am pointing to is neither an erasure of differences nor a subsuming of the other by a desiring dominant subjectivity. The erosion of insider-outsider occurs through the process of working through differences, which includes situating one's own subjectivity within the historical and experiential structures that have shaped its fluctuating contours (the work of the previous two chapters). This boundary opening will also not produce an integrated wholeness or satisfy the yearning and longing of a subjectivity produced from binary social relations. Because that yearning is interminable, the work of looking at a picture of the other involves yet again clearing the ground by exploring the processes of transference and empathy. Having initiated that work, I have opened the possibility of attending to testimony.

This chapter has excavated a process of using engagements with photographic testimony of historical trauma to transform identificatory learning into respect and solidarity. Taking responsibility for my own learning has involved interrogating my look and opening to the testimony of historical trauma through the interplay of text and image. The grounds for respect are built on the process of working through the identificatory look and the empathetic look by
focussing on the viewer’s own subjectivity and its antipathy. Respect also involves working through the emotions that I bring to the viewing of an image of the other by acknowledging transference and separating my own experience of trauma from that which is referenced in the image.

**Attending to testimony and looking differently.**

My own apprenticeship has many levels. For the purpose of this dissertation I will focus on one text which has guided my recent apprenticeship to engagement with this image: Melba Beals’ (1995) memoir, *Warriors Don’t Cry: A Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock’s Central High*, which describes her experience as one of the nine African-American youths who integrated Little Rock’s Central High School. I have chosen to focus on this text because it supports the first and second levels of obligation to witnessing. That is, it demonstrates just forms of evidence and themes that support apprenticeship to the obligation of testimony. I do not offer this next section as an interpretation of this work in any definitive manner, rather I will discuss themes that have struck me as important for my misrecognition of the representation of Elizabeth Eckford’s walk, hence apprenticing myself to witnessing her testimony. This book is also not by any means the only appropriate source available. It is merely an example of a source that can be used to foster witnessing. The Beals memoir is a first-hand account of the integration of Central High School in 1957. She has used newspaper clippings from the era, journal entries and memory to weave together her testimony of the events of that year. Her book testifies to and amplifies what is shown in this photograph. The following includes a series of looks that demonstrate the ways in which this work has produced a productive and resistant look.

Beals makes it clear throughout her compelling memoir that the violence and harassment that menace Elizabeth in this photograph occurred continuously throughout that year on multiple
levels. The memoir is a powerful document that traces Beals’ experience as one of the nine African-American students who desegregated Little Rock Central High School. Upon reading the memoir I was drawn into a seemingly new understanding of Beals and the other eight students. The combination of narrative, journal entries and newspaper clippings that Beals uses provide powerful structures with which to represent the struggle she faced. Reading gave me the sense of going through the experience with her. I felt that she gave written testimony to something of what Ms. Eckford experienced in the photograph that has compelled my look throughout this chapter.

After working to interrogate my look, my reading practices have also changed, and those reading practices have transformed my look, yet again. Clearly, in my initial reading, I identified with the Beals character and, through narrative, visited her experiences not so much as a voyeur but as a guest of the narrative invitation and testimony. But, on second look and second reading, (after the work of interrogating my empathetic look) I read less for the experience and more for the constructed quality of experience. What strikes me the second time is the way in which the white community constructs Beals and the other eight African-American youths as the hunted “other” and simultaneously the threat to whiteness. In this reading, blackness, as imagined by the white community in this book, becomes the avatar for a threat that can destroy the culture of whiteness. I do not necessarily find in the reading any of the reasons for this imagined fear, but rather the process of incarnating it. For example, Beals (1995) describes the way in which the adult white community orchestrated the actions of the white schoolchildren. White community leaders held weekly meetings to which they brought young people and discussed action plans to harass and assault the African-American students. White community leaders called people out for mob actions and fuelled a rhetoric of fear whenever a demonstration occurred and particularly
when the National Guard was called into Little Rock. Through Beals’ narrative, I saw how she was constructed by the white community. But her narrative describes the effects of that construction on her material and spiritual existence in a way that illuminates the emotional toll racism takes on racialized others. On a day-to-day experiential level, Beals’ narrative recounts the egg throwing, the acid spraying, the jeering, the threats, the cornering, the beatings, the endlessly creative methods the white community used to hunt her down and torment her. I saw also in this hunting the bizarre and paradoxical way in which the white community imagines Beals and the other eight African-American youths as an indomitable threat. I’m not sure how this comes through, perhaps it is from the description of the intimidation of the white student, Link, who aids Beals and acts as a kind of spy against his white contemporaries. He always helps her undercover, aware of the threat to himself if his actions are revealed to other whites. Perhaps also, it is the interminableness of the assaults that reveals an underlying anxiety.

The narrative testifies to many traumas. It also testifies to the lack of threat that Beals actually posed to the white community. Yet, the white community responds as if it has been attacked on some monumental scale. As I write this, I wonder about the construction of this imaginary threat and see that it is a complex ruse. The narrative details an aggressive, violent assault by the white community on blackness. What the narrative makes clear is that the aggression supercedes and constructs the imagined threat. The aggression is so unrelenting, so violent that I, and others, perhaps, read a “threat” to excuse, to make understandable, to interpret the white aggression. But this threat mimics that of the black male rapist constructed to rationalize lynchings (Davis, 1983; Hall, 1983). In other words, this threat is conjured to rationalize the violence and aggression of a white community unable to see how its own history of privilege has made its subjectivity so dependent on the codes that determine both privilege and
oppression. But, if the narrative testifies to the lack of a threat, why am I writing it in? What makes me add it to the story? Is it the same fear that propels Link to hide his subversive behaviour? Is it related to the same fears that construct the white Klan women in the previous chapter? Is it the same pressure about which Blee’s subjects speak? Is it a way of rationalizing white violence? Whiteness is constructed on the grounds of imperial cultural aggression and white subjectivity is constructed through the complex narratives of difference that maintain the dominant position that is the space of whiteness. A convenient or available and ever-changing form of the other is always already a threat.

Symbolically, the integrated education that the nine African Americans sought in Little Rock attacked a system of segregation. In so doing, it attacked white memory of the slave era and white desires for possible futures, for as Hale argued, the black subjectivity constructed through white codes of segregation bore white memory (Hale, 1998, p. 70). Additionally, because segregation was the glue that held together white reconciliation after the Civil War, an attack on it threatened not just the South but the fabric of the nation (Hale, 1998, p.75). That symbolic attack was returned with material acts of aggression. In other words, if the symbolic structures that construct and support the whiteness are attacked, that community responds with a material attack on the actual persons and material circumstances of black subjects. In Beals’ narrative, the white community precipitates and permits this particular form of violence by making segregation an intricate and shifting set of codes. The power to defend against symbolic attacks to discursive codes through material acts of aggression is the power that makes whiteness dominant. My reading of the threat may express not just an insensitivity to the toll that racism takes on African Americans through my look’s humanizing and rationalizing tendencies, but the tendencies are linked to the threads of difference encoded in my look.
I see in this picture a crowd hounding a young woman. They are painting her black. Each person hurls black paint on her as they taunt or yell. The paint does not stick, however. It rolls into a puddle. Each puddle contains an image of the tropes of blackness that make up American Africanisms. A loyal ex-slave looks back out from the puddle. A Mammy shakes her head, a Jezebel looks coyly. Ms. Eckford walks, stepping over the puddles that the crowd’s jeers have created. The crowd walks through them, stepping into the images they have hurled. As they step into a puddle, the image becomes a phantom chasing the white body. Each member of the crowd gathers more momentum as they lurch from one puddle and its phantom to the next, pursuing their target.

The other side of blackness.

Beals’ (1995) narrative also details her own changing relationship to blackness. She herself sees the way white aggression has built parameters around the behaviour of the previous generation. She notes the way the deference and codes of segregation had constructed the behaviour and personalities of her older relatives:

With the passage of time, I became increasingly aware of how all of the adults around me behaved the same. They were living with constant fear and apprehension. It felt as though we always had a white foot pressed against the back of our necks. I was feeling more and more vulnerable as I watched them continually struggle to solve the mystery of what white folks expected of them. They behaved as though it were an awful sin to overlook even one of those unspoken rules and step out of “their place,” to cross some invisible line. And yet lots of discussions in my household were about how to cross that line, when to cross that line, and who could cross that invisible line without getting hurt. (pp.13-14)
Here segregation is not named but it is referred to as a set of boundaries linked to the vagaries of white authority. A set of codes that always need interpretation, and which lock her community into a behavioural negotiation that makes them vulnerable and that sets a framework for their resistance. The narrative connotes the omnipresence of segregation by not naming it. The codes of segregation become the symbolic discourse through which the black and white communities negotiate the limits of their subject positions. Beals sees this, and it frightens her. The entire book details the way a community struggled constantly with negotiating these codes, finding dignity in resistance and strategizing on the effects of resistance. Beals’ father, at different times, felt that the dangers that she was exposed to were too threatening. Others in the community blamed Beals for provoking the reactionary behaviour of the white community. Her mother and grandmother supported her through multiple forms of guidance, storytelling and modelling. The book shows the complex choices that segregation forced on the African-American community.

I see Ms. Eckford walking across a white line that moves each time she steps over it. As she attempts to walk across it, it darts out from beneath her to another spot. She approaches it again and again it scurries away. As she walks, she is pursued by this mob of white people. But she walks toward her parents, and the other eight students. A community of people beckon her from the shadows. These people cannot be seen by the mob. Her parents hold out their hands toward her. A neighbour points to the line and talks to another neighbour. The other eight students huddle around each other reaching back toward Ms. Eckford. Another white line dances in front of them and they watch Elizabeth as they begin to attempt to cross it.
The effects of violence.

As the violence escalates and continues, becoming a daily ritual, Beals describes its effect on her. She discusses the hopelessness that sets in and the sapping of her will that ensues. Finally, she confides her suicidal thoughts to her grandmother. But, her grandmother’s response shocks her. Grandmother India does not sympathize with her, rather, she cajoles her and encourages her by telling her that suicide would be giving the segregationists just what they want. She also tells her granddaughter to read Gandhi and to transform the grounds of engagement. Beals’ narrative then details the gradual shift of discourse that arises. She does read Gandhi and she does try to apply her grandmother’s advice, articulating the relationship of individual black subjects to the local community and the larger global liberation struggle.

When I look at this picture, I see two women walking in Ms. Eckford’s steps. One is terrified, the screams and jeers of the crowd cut through her, lashing her back as if they were the whips of overseers. Her back is exposed in this picture and I see the bruises and wounds that land. Each name, each angry yell leaves a mark. A half step in front of this version of Ms. Eckford walks another version. The rear body is just a half step behind. One of her legs is perfectly synchronized with the other. The forward body clutches her binder close to hold herself from the impact of the jeers and her own rear body, which jerks into her with each blow. Ms. Eckford walks steadfastly in order to receive this other self. She holds herself straight and tall so as to support this other body that yields and stumbles into her own. The weight of this other body and the sorrow rush toward her, but she walks, one foot at a time, steadying them both.

Solidarity in the moment.
Beals description of her relationship to Link, a white boy in her class who gives her the keys to his car when she is about to be physically attacked by a gang of boys and who then becomes her informant, warning her when attacks will come and how to avoid getting hurt, demonstrates the difficulty of forming bonds of trust across racial divides in a segregated and hierarchical society. Beals always has to be careful that Link is not setting her up for a more fiendish betrayal. In fact in one instance she loses faith in him completely because she sees him with her tormentors contributing to a mass heckling of her. He claims that he was there to see that things didn’t get out of hand; he couldn’t stop the attack but he could be there to calm it down and make sure that she got out of it alive. Beals doesn’t believe or trust him fully after that until he takes her to visit his former housekeeper. Beals watches him care for this sick and elderly woman whom his parents have abandoned, and she regains some of that trust. The relationship demonstrates the ways in which the politics of race affect our intimate relationships and our ability to develop trust across racial boundaries. The relationship also describes the kind of difficulties of which Narayan (1988) writes in her discussion of relationships across racial boundaries within political movements.

Looking in the crowd, I wonder where is Link? Is he the tall man in the centre rear of the picture with sunglasses? I search the heads for someone who might look ambivalent, who might be there only to keep from being discovered. All of the faces except this one seem to be willing participants. But Link also kept his cover, so how would I recognize him? Who will become Link in this crowd? And how can we use pedagogy to create more Links?

The community of resistance.

Beals is supported throughout her journey by her single and working mother, her
grandmother, a community activist, Daisy Bates, the eight other African-American students integrating the high school with her, and the larger civil rights movement. Beals’ narrative also describes the complex matrix of community relations that comprise her black culture as she journeys through this battle. Reading the narrative, I saw the richness of this community and the way in which (in comparison to white communities) it can appear, as Frankenberg (1993) and Jordan (1989) have pointed out, to be a rich contrast to the bland normativity of white culture. Jordan, for example describes a student who sees African-American culture as a spice to enrich her own life. Beals’ narrative, however, represents a complex set of conflicting relationships that comprise her community. Unlike white representations of black community culture that tend to homogenize the diversity into a mythical version of community support, Beals details the many conflicts that arose within her community around the subject of desegregation. Some people were against the project and made their positions clear to Beals and her mother. Others were threatened simply because of what was going on at the high school. Beals’ family members were harassed and had to deal with attacks from within and without the community. Her mother nearly lost her job. Others in the community lost their jobs because of the white backlash against the whole black community for the desegregation actions. Some of those people blamed Beals for the hardship they faced. This section that traces Beals’ transformation from victim to author of her own experience also embeds that journey within a complex set of community relations, supports and antagonisms. I did not ever have the sense in reading this book that Beals fought this battle alone. What was clear was that her journey was a part of many interrelated struggles. And, her journey involved making sense of the many conflicting discourses she and her community faced. She chose, after this tough talk with her grandmother, to interpret her world from a particular discourse and that choice reinvented her subjectivity, gave her what she terms
"a warrior" ethic, supported her in her struggle, and reconnected her to the global movement for black liberation.

The dramatic turn of the narrative comes after Beals has read Gandhi and after her grandmother has angrily exhorted her to "change the rules of the game." Up to this point we have seen the way in which the fight over desegregation has drawn Beals into an ocean of assaults on her person and material circumstances. But, after reading Gandhi, speaking to her grandmother, and thinking through the ways she may take the lessons of Gandhi and apply them to her own situation, she changes her tactics with her tormentors. The following is an excerpt of one of the significant conversations she has with her grandmother:

'I've never been so embarrassed.'

'Oh, I'll bet there've been other times and there'll be more. Embarrassment is not a life-threatening problem. It can be washed away with a prayer and a smile, just like this egg is washed away with a little water.'

'I know, but it's the same way I feel when they spit on me. I feel like they've taken away my dignity.'

'Dignity is a state of mind, just like freedom. These are both precious gifts from God that no one can take away unless you allow them to.... You could take charge of these mind games, you know.'

'How do you mean?'

'Take, for example, this egg in your hair. Suppose you'd have told the boys who did this, "Thank you," with a smile. Then you've changed the rules of the game. What they want is for you to be unhappy. That's how they get pleasure.'

'Yea, but that would be letting them win.'

'Not exactly. Maybe it would defeat their purpose. They win when you respond the way they expect you to. Change the rules of the game, girl, and they might not like it so much.'

'They'd think I was crazy.'
‘They’d think you were no longer their victim.’ (Beals, 1995, p. 242)

In this scene Beals’ grandmother distinguishes the symbolic and minor attacks from the life-threatening ones and encourages her granddaughter to transform the language of symbols. White privilege needs to wound blackness after the rules of segregation have been challenged. But, if blackness refuses the wound, a dynamic is broken, the language is changed. Beals remembers this conversation with her grandmother when she needs to use it to strengthen her warrior resolve and tries to “change the rules of the game” when she is harassed by her fellow students (p. 242). Indeed, she thanks them for what they’re doing and chats with them as if they were her friends. They are so startled by her behaviour that they stop. Beals continues to use this tactic and grow from watching the effect her words and her subversive challenge have on those who hunt her. She notes how one of her colleagues, Minnie Jean, unable to preserve her calm, was suspended. The constant struggle to remain inside the bounds of behaviour dictated by the school and the harassment from the white students puts an ever-increasing pressure on the nine African-American students. Beals, however, manages with much help to transform the way her attackers see her and in turn, find her own power, dignity and warrior subjectivity. She continues to thank her attackers. Unable to threaten her, unable to frighten her or to diminish her, they lose some of their power. The attacks do not stop, but we read how Beals gains control of her own subjectivity by “changing the rules of the game.” In one incident when she is cornered in study hall by a mob of hecklers, even when they throw a golf ball at her head, she confounds them by thanking them and pretending that they have complimented her. She writes:

I felt myself smiling inside. As Grandma India said, turning the other cheek could be difficult, but for me, it was also beginning to be a lot of fun. Somehow I had won a round
in a bizarre mental contest.

My heart slowed its rapid beating, and my hands stopped shaking. I felt safer, even comfortable, as something inside me settled to its center. I had a powerful feeling of being in charge. I was no longer allowing hecklers’ behaviour to frighten me into acting a certain way. For that moment, I was the one making decisions about how I would behave. A little choir of voices in my head was singing, ‘Hallelujah, hallelujah, halleluja!’ (Beals, 1995, pp. 260-261)

Looking again at this image of Ms. Eckford, I see her walking with a crowd of people. Gandhi stands next to her, barefoot and matching her stride. Daisy Bates, a community activist, walks on the other side of her, gently touching her arm. Thurgood Marshall walks beside Ms. Bates, his arm linked through hers. Melba Beals, Ernest Green, Gloria Karlmark, Carlotta Lanier, Minnie Jean Trickey, Terrence Roberts, Jefferson Thomas, Thelma Wair all walk together, arms linked just behind Ms. Eckford, between her and the crowd. Their parents walk in a line spreading out from Thurgood Marshall. And Beals’ grandmother walks next to Gandhi, dressed in her Sunday best, talking to Gandhi about strategy.

One Last Look

Looking at the image now, I see Ms. Eckford walking out from the constructed objectification and violence of the white crowd. I see her dignified stance supported by her family and community and its links to other global liberation movements. I see a kind of degradation that the crowd brings on itself through its emboldened violence of white supremacism. I see Ms. Eckford’s courage and spiritual fortitude as she negotiates the complex and shifting field of socially constructed identities before her. I see the multi-faceted resistance of movements for freedom from the resistance on slave ships through to today. I see also the
difficulty of differently positioned white subjects and their journey against the violence and degradation that is the white supremacist mob, their alternative journey toward resistance. I see Ms. Eckford’s work, her walk, the journey of constructing one’s self amidst and in resistance to the powerful social constructions of white supremacist codes as interminable work for us all. I see the work of transforming my own look and my own journey through subjectivity as equally interminable. I see the process of articulating one’s position within, through and in resistance to the social constructions of race as the work of living and looking.
Chapter Six
Looking Toward a Conclusion

In an age when we are inundated with images, a project that asks how might it be possible to look without doing violence is important for pedagogy. This dissertation has focussed on the look in order to research its use in shifting social relations within the field of representation and the social world. The research has engaged with the negotiations between self and other, image and meaning, agency and subjectivity through the look. The research investigated and pushed boundaries between interiority/exteriority, image/text, self/other, representation/reality, and memory/history. I focussed on images of the civil rights movement because of its pivotal position within the story of race in the U.S., and because of the current popular circulation of these images.

This research includes repetitions because of the ways in which forgetting, as Caruth (1996) uses the term, repeats itself paradoxically, emerging to protect the subject from knowing what it already knows but cannot bear to know. This writing testifies to this stuttering into articulation. Each chapter contains repeated looks that themselves present attempts at articulating what the subject can only tentatively articulate. The writing itself, thus, interweaves the failures to know with attempts at learning. In this way, my dissertation has contributed to the research that argues for a working through of research selves within the research projects.

The acts of interrogating my look as I engaged in forgetting, desiring agency, denying agency, being seduced by the structures of the image, transference, eating the other, disavowal and commodification comprised much of the work of this thesis. In so doing, I have argued that this work opens possibilities for solidarity, for witnessing and for shifting the subject’s
relationship to difference through the look. Interrogating those processes has set the ground for solidarity by taking responsibility for my subject position within social relations and working to unpack that position. Unravelling the subtle and unconscious ways subjectivity is constructed through the relations between the gaze, the look and the screen, has involved interrogating the look.

This dissertation has addressed Davis’ (1996) argument for a different kind of engagement with photography. My focus on the look has stemmed from working with Silverman’s (1996) concept for the potential of the resistant look to see differently from the gaze and the screen. The purpose of this has been to explore the possibility of using an interrogation into the look as a means of building solidarity across racially constructed boundaries by shifting the look and thereby shifting the meaning of difference. I sought to politicize the act of looking. I have used some psychoanalytic criticism in conjunction with Simon (1994, 2000) and Simon & Eppert’s (1997) theory of witnessing to work through different but related problems that confront the look as it sees the self and its others. I have also used feminist writings by African-American women which articulate their positions and the grounds they see as important for building solidarity (Collins, 1991; Davis 1983, 1990, 1996; Hall, 1983, hooks 1988, 1992; Jordan, 1989), both to shift the look, to guide my understandings of solidarity, and to question my own experiential understandings that emanate from, and engage with, my social subject position in relation to the visual field.

Decolonizing the look has a number of implications for pedagogy. I agree with McKenna (1996) that we must work through and understand our own (counter)transference in order to work differently within pedagogical relations. I also concur with Ellsworth (1997) when she
argues that teachers must be conscious not only of the modes of address of representations but also of the modes of address of curriculum. This dissertation has explored the complex ways in which the look can be made resistant to a number of dominating structures that engage subjectivities through the visual field (including but not limited to transference, mode of address, gender, race, and class). This work may be useful as a demonstration of an approach that educators might take in their own attempts to decolonize the look, either in preparation for working in community or in working with community. I have also tried to demonstrate the need to continue this work as an ongoing practice. The look is never static, nor is it necessarily receptive to the learning of rational intent. Thus pedagogy that addresses the look must consider the interminableness of this type of learning.

This dissertation has presented three case studies interrogating the look. I first presented a brief survey of the relationship of the look to the history of both photography and the observer, to conceptualize the look within the tradition of Western culture and thought. In the first case study, I examined the look as it focussed on a photographic image of Rita Schwerner. In this instance, the look attempted to identify with the image and sought to find meaning and contextual evidence that would support a positive ego-identification. In the second case study, which focussed on an image of a KKK woman, the look sought to distance itself from the image and sought meanings that would explain or reinforce that distance. In the third case study, the look focussed on an image of Elizabeth Eckford, an African-American woman defying school segregation. In this case, the look sought to empathize with the representation and to erase socially constructed differences between the ego, the look and the representational image. In each case, I unpacked the social construction of the look and its psychic underpinnings. My point was
to examine the relationship between the look, representational images, and socially constructed meanings of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. I attempted to expose particular points where the psychic nature of the look made meanings in order to support socially constructed hierarchical relations. From an anti-racist and anti-sexist perspective, I opened those moments to other possibilities by exposing them and making them overt.

The dissertation poses the question: is it possible to change the look? And, given the social construction of photography and documentary, is it possible for the look to act critically as a form of resistance? If so, how? One of the principle methods I proposed was to employ the look itself as a research tool, and to look again and again, or to re-examine the look and the meanings it imagines in the image. Autobiography has been enlisted to uncover the relationship of the look to socially constructed subjectivity. Historical traces, and in some cases, memory, have been employed to uncover context for images and as a method of interrogating and re-imagining the look. My purpose has been to discover the resistant potential of the look and a method of pedagogy that may address both that resistance and its counter-resistance.

Interestingly, the project has shown both how to transform the look and how the look resists that transformation. What became strikingly clear at moments was not the way in which the look could be made resistant, but the denial and disavowal embedded in the look. One might call these the blind spots of the look. These forms of resistance embedded in the look are closely connected to the socially constructed subjectivity. Adrian Piper (in Kester, 1999) has argued that racism is a “visual pathology that feeds on differences of perceived appearance rather than the actual genetic evidence of racial identity” (p. 41). She also argues that racism constitutes the everyday mundane experiences of consciousness concerning race with people we encounter. She
names this the "atomic, interpersonal level of individual transactions" (p. 40). This dissertation has examined and attempted to shift that mundane and atomistic level of consciousness through examining and re-examining the look. Thus, this research potentially contributes much to the work of critical pedagogy, history, social studies, cultural memory work, and anti-racist pedagogy. It is clear not only that the look can be made resistant, but also that it can resist and subvert that critical endeavour. This research sheds light on those areas of unconscious self-articulation that persist nonetheless, perhaps even as one has committed oneself to change. Ironically, this project has revealed the unconscious processes that it hoped to out-maneouvre.

In chapter three, the look was employed to imagine the image of Rita Schwerner. Here my research showed clearly the connection between a liberal construction of a white middle-class subjectivity and its inability to do the work of taking responsibility for the position of its image within the relationship between the screen and the gaze. The look sought to disavow its knowledge of the ways white womanhood has been positioned through the gaze and the screen to support white male supremacy. The look sought out an image that would represent the self's own desire for justice and for agency, despite the fact that the image refuted both those claims. In this chapter, the look confronts the gaze in a kind of naive pose, unaware of its own shadow. Intending to resist the sexist and racist constraints of the gaze, the look is unable to see the machinations of its own middle-class, white subjectivity working through its meaning-making journey. The desire to identify with the image of a white subjectivity courageously defying white supremacy unconsciously overcomes the critical intentions. This is where both looking again and the use of historical traces have made clear the tendency of the look to return to the comfort of denial and disavowal. Although the image may misrepresent the specifics of Rita Schwerner's
involvement with the civil rights movement and the Freedom Summer in particular, it may symbolically represent an accurate picture of white women’s place in the hierarchy of racialized and gendered social relations of the past and present. In other words, her passivity, which my look seeks to refute through historical evidence, is a cornerstone of her symbolic femininity, her domesticity, her objectification in the white male supremacist social world where she/we find herself/ourselves. My distaste for my own position forces me to look beyond it and not see it. This discomfort also encourages me to search for a public representation of an identity that I wish to exist rather than taking responsibility for the position within the gaze that is reflected back to me through the image. My look rejects the image that the gaze and the screen produced and in so doing avoids taking responsibility. While our sisters of colour have been frustrated by white women’s behaviour in some cross-cultural contexts, this project illuminates the very machinations that make for the frustration. The problem lies in the social construction of whiteness as much as in the look itself. The dynamics between the look, the gaze and the screen do not produce essential white subjectivities. This is important for pedagogy, for these dynamics produce contradictory, fluid, resistant and complicit subjectivities that are capable of wrestling with learning to look differently even as the gaze, screen and the look may lure the look in multiple directions, and even as the look itself may hide temporarily within denial and disavowal.

The fourth chapter demonstrated this point from a related but different angle. This chapter was perhaps the most difficult chapter to research. Not only was the material difficult to fathom, but the look nearly refused the image. I found that in the first draft, the look had completely diverged from the process of looking again. My look took in the image and then set about a kind
of dutiful task of anti-racist re-learning through historical review. But, the look itself could not return to the image. Here, the look found it nearly impossible to take in this image. Unlike the first image, this one is not a popular image of white femininity. Somehow white femininity is separated, made visually distant from the violent manifestations of white supremacy, despite the many connections that may actually exist in the material world. Thus my look refused to see these women. Whereas my look imagined agency in the first image, it imagined passivity in this image. In this case, the research intention did not have the anticipated effect. Historical traces were not able to disrupt the complacency of the look as it deflected the gaze and the screen in order to support a liberal denial of responsibility. Rather, the process of looking and looking again and forcing the look to see its subjects within the disavowed image enabled a shift in understanding and a more responsible engagement with the dynamics of screen, gaze and look. Historical traces, although crucial, cannot alone transform a complacent look into a resistant or responsible look. This point is critical for pedagogy. I have argued that an anti-racist pedagogy for decolonizing the look and building solidarity must integrate representation, historical traces, social analysis, autobiographical subjectivity, and theories of witnessing.

We have known for some time that subjectivities are implicated in the hierarchical relations of white supremacy. In asking questions about the ways in which social hierarchies have shaped white, middle-class subjectivities, recent research has shifted the focus of the research gaze. My thesis illustrates the complex contours of the dynamic relationship constructed through the gaze, the screen and the look. This project exposes the kinds of struggles that subjectivities work through in attempting to shift the look toward responsible and ethical engagements with social systems of domination. My research demonstrates that the exercise of
looking, then engaging with historical traces, and social analysis, and then looking again and re-imagining, is one crucial aspect of anti-racist praxis for decolonizing the look.

The third and final case study of the look clarified a related but different problem with the look and its relationship to the gaze and screen. In this case, the look was focussed not on the self, but on the other. Interestingly, a whole series of emotional attachments came pouring forth as the look imagined this image. Certainly, the image draws this out, but so do the previous pictures which did not seem to elicit a similar outpouring of emotions. The psychic property of transference appears to become vulnerable to the operations of the look, particularly when it is focussed on the other. This inclination is important for pedagogy. Britzman (1998), Ellsworth (1989, 1997) and McKenna (1996) have, from different perspectives, argued for the working through of these complex psychic relations as important to pedagogy. My research has shown that working through transference and empathy is part of the important task of opening up possibilities for shifting the look and hence shifting the grounds of social engagement.

In contrast to the previous case studies, in the third case, the look became myopic and almost obsessed with the image, as if the psychic structures activated were dependant on seeing the image and seeing it again in order to keep it intact. Here, seeing again is not enough to transform a complacent look into a resistant look. In fact, in this instance, historical traces, social analysis, and the memoir provided the necessary distance the look needed to unravel itself from the clutches of transference. Again, this point is particularly important to pedagogy. It does matter who receives curriculum and what their social locations are. As Ellsworth (1997) argues, it matters who the curriculum thinks you are. Concepts of solidarity and responsibility are particularly dependent on these insights. Perhaps, to overcome issues of spiralling conflict, an
understanding of the look and its relationship to the gaze and screen is imperative for cross-cultural relations.

In this third case, the look seemed to forget the first two looks, and see the image through the desires and losses of whiteness. In a sense, much of the work of the third case study involved working through a disavowal of the work of the first two case studies. And, importantly, the first two case studies make possible an ethical, if belated, look in the third case study. The sequence is important and enables a kind of responsible solidarity and a resistant looking. My look is able, in the end, to defy the gaze and look anew at the absences and presences of the image. In a sense this project has taken back memory from the gaze and returned it to the look. The memorializing of the image through the apparatus of the camera has been sidestepped through an interrogating of the look and imagining the image through memory. The third case study illuminated the way the psychic processes can be affected by that memorializing and the way transference can interfere with the anti-racist intentions of pedagogy. Given the emotionality of this transferential moment, making use of more personal forms of history such as testimony or memoir seemed particularly provocative. Interrogating the look has made possible an inquiry into the processes though which difference is constructed through relations between the gaze, the screen and the look. This case study clarified the importance of Jordan’s (1989) point that understanding difference is paramount to building solidarity. This research has argued that building solidarity is an ongoing process that involves taking responsibility for one’s social subjectivity within the field of the visual.

One of the ironies of this research has been the fact that the process that I am attempting to forge into a critical method is partially unconscious. This fact, that the look involves
unconscious processes, has necessitated much of the form of this research. It is the principal reason for using my own look as a focus of research inquiry, for using the looking again method, and for using autobiography. I would argue it is also why so much of current critical pedagogy deals with impasses created from cross-cultural work. Critical, analytical work alone may not unravel the complex subject positions through which people negotiate their experiences. Attending to the ways that pedagogues and students negotiate with the unconscious as well as the gaze, the screen and the look can open difficult and promising terrain for further anti-racist work.

This research has pointed to a number of important areas for further research. The two most obvious areas include cross-cultural critical pedagogy work with cultural workers, and community work with popular culture, social studies, cultural studies, history teachers, and literacy workers. Both areas may prove fruitful. If this project asked how can the look see in solidarity, future projects might ask how can the look see in solidarity within community? What would make possible the sorts of dangerous explorations that this project has entailed within a cross-cultural setting? Can this work be done in dialogue, and what sorts of pedagogies would make that dialogue possible?
References


