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Jeremy Matthew Glick

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## Progress notes: *Scenes of Subjection's* “actualization” dialectic

Jeremy Matthew Glick\*

*Department of English, Hunter College, City University of New York, N.Y., N.Y., U.S.A.*

This essay explores Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjection's actualization dialectic*, its delicate balancing of identity and difference, as specifically mobilized through the study's expository presentation of the event/non-event of Emancipation. It also examines Hartman's relationship to Marx as it relates to the applicability of Marxian categories to think about New World slavery.

**Keywords:** Saidiya Hartman; *Scenes of Subjection*; Marx; slavery; actualization; dialectic of identity and difference

The slave is the object or the ground that makes possible the existence of the bourgeois subject and, by negation or contradistinction, defines liberty, citizenship, and the enclosures of the social body.

– Saidiya V. Hartman (1997), *Scenes of Subjection*

Historical materialism has good cause, here, to set itself off sharply from the bourgeois cast of mind; its basic principle is not progress, but *actualization*.

– Walter Benjamin (1989), “N [Re the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress], 1927–29”

What they didn't understand is that there was a legitimate humanity and humor that they wanted to ridicule that couldn't stand ridicule. They wouldn't understand it. For instance, when they had Stepin Fetchit come by and they ask, when one of these people was trying to get Stepin Fetchit to do work because Stepin Fetchit was trying to make conversation, and Stepin Fetchit wants to know “Is Franco still dead yet?” And that's a heavy question. See? And he's going to ask this man, is Franco still dead, if – Franco, of course, is the leader of the fascists. Now if the man is going to get off into a long dialogue about Franco being dead it might take five or ten minutes to get through that conversation, and Stepin Fetchit still hadn't done no work yet. He's just standing there. You know, so that's not lost on us.

– Amiri Baraka (1989), “Interview with Judy Richardson” from *Eyes on Prize II*

Apologists of societies structured in dominance laud *difference*: the radical break between the freedom time of the now and the domination time of yesterday. Their belief in *progress* functions as ideological cover masking their refusal to think and to confront continuities of slavery and freedom. Insurgent thought in an effort to disrupt such belief lauds continuity (identity), relinquishing the hard need for reality to discipline theory and practice. Among

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\*Email: Jglic@hunter.cuny.edu

other things, this is a problem of what used to be called right- and left-wing deviations. When asked which deviation was worse, one Joe from Georgia replied: “Both are worse.”

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Saidiya V. Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* actualizes a brilliant interpretive whole: its associations, its quick twists and turns of logic, and its theoretical provocations constitute a world. My essay explores Hartman’s *actualization dialectic*, its delicate balancing of identity and difference, as specifically mobilized through the study’s expository presentation of the event/non-event of Emancipation. *Scenes of Subjection* elaborates with exacting precision “the tragic continuities in antebellum and postbellum constitutions of blackness” (Hartman 1997, 7). Such an assertion of identity contains its immanent negation as difference. *Scenes of Subjection* registers and tracks a shift in the operative repressive *techne* corresponding to the shift from Enslavement to Emancipation: “Will and responsibility replaced the whip with the tethers of guilty conscience” (Hartman 1997, 9). The tools of the repressive state apparatus are internalized, modified, and preserved in psychic life. Hartman’s assertion of this replacement-modification process is both analytic and polemic, in the service of an excoriating critique of empathy’s “precariousness . . . the uncertain line between witness and spectator” (Hartman 1997, 4).<sup>1</sup> Such an assertion raises the question of how to think of Hartman’s deployment of Marx and Foucault’s supplementary problematic: the structural impetus of political economy as causal agent versus a *pouvoir/savoir* theory of the individual in terms of internalizing and reproducing oppressive social organization.<sup>2</sup> Hartman’s profound analytic whole thinks the individual and assumes political economy because the *actuality* of Black cultural practice, Black life, and Black resistance demand it. The complexity immanent to her sites (scenes) of analysis demand this toggling back and forth from the micro-political to the systemic of anti-systemic thought and practice.

*Scenes of Subjection* mines “the diffusion of terror and violence perpetrated under the rubric of pleasure, paternalism, and property” (Hartman 1997, 4). Such a triumvirate supplements Marx’s quartet of “Freedom, Equality, Property, and Bentham” (1887). It explicates the interconnections between reproduction and participation, demonstrating how capital’s fashioning of the bourgeois individual – what Hartman aptly calls “burdened individuality” (1997, 121) – constitutes a continuity of domination that links emancipation with bondage.<sup>3</sup> This continuity is demonstrated in Hartman’s complication of the distinction between event and nonevent.<sup>4</sup> The event-transition from the terror of enslavement to the liberated futurity of emancipation is negated by the disciplinary technologies of capital and its main structuring ideological fiction: the bourgeois (self-possessed) individual.

What follows is my attempt to theorize what I’m calling *Scenes of Subjection’s* actualization dialectic as it appears by way of the book’s critical unfolding. Towards this end, my essay is organized into three complementary parts: first, a quick immersion in and unfolding of the text’s organizational logic; second, a preliminary examination of Hartman’s use of Marx (and Foucault not necessarily *contra* Marx but rather supplementing Marxian thought); and third, a discussion of a cinema anecdote by way of Amiri Baraka in order to consider Hartman’s *Afterlife* as a concept that functions to blur the boundary between the event of Emancipation and the non-event of the continued repression of Black life – in that sense it is a continuation of the critical project inaugurated by *Scenes of Subjection*.

Hartman poses the book's central question boldly: "Does the momentousness of emancipation as an event ultimately efface the continuities between slavery and freedom and the dispossession inseparable from becoming a 'propertied person'?" (Hartman 1997, 13) It tracks the transformations in Black life and labor by way of analyzing the oppressive subjection and actuality of such Black life and labor. These traces are explicated via "look[ing] elsewhere" (Hartman 1997, 4) within performance, law, the auction block, freedom instruction manuals, and literary texts. An anti-capitalist critical dialectic undergirds this work. In Hartman's analytic, Black subjects' relation to capitalistic subjection constitutes a doubling down – a state of always already being hailed. I understand Algeria as the geographic locale and laboratory that plants the seeds for Althusser's theory of interpolation. Black radical history and praxis represents a before, an acute distillation, and a raw site to explore interpolation's catastrophic heft. This is what I mean by the counter-factual assertion that the "Hey You!" of the Althusserian hail of subjection is always already in a Black radical context (Althusser 2014).<sup>5</sup> The plantation and its *afterlife* are scenes in which interpolation's mechanics are both stripped down to their bare essence and amplified in their sheer terror. I offer these notes in order to elucidate *Scenes of Subjection's* actualization movement: Hartman's study does not *progress*, it *actualizes* – its interrogation of different objects of analysis is knowingly partial, it moves back and forth a world of references and sites of analysis, dialectically complicating the demarcation line between enslavement and emancipation. An optimistic consequence of this problematizing of progress is that Emancipation is ceded to the future world.

### **Foraging, disfiguration, and actualization**

The "Foraging" and "Disfiguration" of concepts and categories (sometimes overtly signaled in *Scenes of Subjection* and sometimes tacit) of insurgent thought (Gramsci's integral state, hegemony, freedom, woman as political subject, Hartman's insistence that woman is not an a priori referent) mark the bold critical work of *Scenes of Subjection's* expository movement (1997, 98–99). Hartman's interpretive force and juxtapositions force such concepts to face boldly the actuality and gendered specificity of racial slavery, recalibrating their critical purchase. Note, for example, *Scenes of Subjection's* organization. Part one ("Formations of Terror and Enjoyment") and Part two ("The Subject of Freedom") constitute a dialectical whole. The terror of Part one bleeds into the emancipation event/nonevent of Part two. The promise of emancipation in Part one is emergent in the over-determined terror-ridden futures-past of Part two, which charts the conflation of race with manhood and the "metamorphosis of 'chattel into man'" (Hartman 1997, 116) and the limits of incorporating the ex-enslaved into the so-called free-labor regime of the capitalist mode of production. Such incorporation "fashions obligation" and internalizes the domination of servitude as the prerogative of duty – the conflation of responsibility with blameworthiness. It constructs a critical narrative whereas "the whip was not to be abandoned; rather, it was to be internalized" (Hartman 1997, 140).

Hartman calibrates her categories and the parts of her analytic whole to her field of analysis. This suggests a historical materialist commitment, even if Hartman does not name it explicitly. Racial slavery's recalibration of Gramsci's integral state, such a state's balance of force and consent, authorizes Hartman's critical move of dividing the whip

into two: the whip as repressive apparatus, and the whip as ideological apparatus. Again, here is a distillation and reading against the grain of the Althusserian notion of the Ideological and Repressive State Apparatus that breaks the repressive branch further into two. The actuality of racial slavery breaks down concepts by way of a further division, a further antagonism, a further melding of the on-the-ground systemic repression and the internalized repression in psychic life. The integral state functions by way of its constant maintenance of a combination of dictatorship + hegemony.<sup>6</sup> In terms of the tricky procedure of getting the proportions of this formulae right (dictatorship + hegemony), theorist Wolfgang Fritz Haug notes: “The wisdom of the powerful, therefore, leads them to minimize the first, without neglecting it, and to maximize the second” (2007, 160). Enslavement and racial capitalism skews out of proportion this striving towards balanced disequilibrium. As Dick Hebdige by way of Stuart Hall notes:

Gramsci adds the important proviso that hegemonic power, precisely because it requires the consent of the dominated majority, can never be permanently exercised by the same alliance of ‘class fractions’. As has been pointed out, ‘Hegemony ... is not universal and “given” to the continuing rule of a particular class. It has to be won, reproduced, sustained. Hegemony is, as Gramsci said a “moving equilibrium” containing relations of forces favourable or unfavourable to this or that tendency. ([1979] 1995, 16)

Racial slavery recalibrates this in-motion (dis)equilibrium; accordingly, the temptation exists in some readings of *Scenes of Subjection* to throw out the concept. Yet, *Scenes of Subjection* wages its own hegemonic “won-function” – Hartman’s asserting of a Gramscian common-sense apropos to thinking about continuities between racial slavery and Emancipation (1997, 13) – precisely in the archives it selects and how it enters its sites of analysis pivoting its abstractions to marry conventional Marxian critiques of political economy with Foucauldian attention to the reproduction of the individual.

Hartman’s expository choices, in its shifting from site to site of analysis resonate with Walter Benjamin’s identification of progress as the animating principle of bourgeois logic. Consider another one of Hartman’s analytic keyword triumvirates: “the nexus of race, subjection, and spectacle” (1997, 57). Thinking such a nexus requires a complicated theory of mediation, abundant in the pages of *Scenes of Subjection*. Her methodological query – “How does one use these sources?” (1997, 11) – is answered by way of demonstration. The book is animated by a critical dialectic of showing. *Scenes of Subjection*’s “foraging” and “disfiguration” (1997, 12) jumps between its sites of investigation, often short-circuiting what a reader might expect from such investigations. For example, the expectation to think Harriet Jacobs more explicitly alongside the eighteenth-century epistolary novel (à la Fielding and Richardson) and their attendant discussion of gendered discourses on virtue and sexual violation.<sup>7</sup> The specific employment of sources in *Scenes of Subjection* emphasizes its investment in actualization – “worrying the line” between the terrors of enslavement and the disciplinary regime of emancipation as its generative work (Wall 2005). The book’s organizational form and expository delivery compliments its argument’s insistence on the “provisionality of the archive” (Hartman 1997, 10). Not bourgeois progress, but radical actualization: through quick jump cuts and a dexterous engagement of a prolific set of examples, *Scenes* does not let its insights progress. The rhetorical world

in which *Scenes* instantiates is itself a critique of progress actualized in the work's expository form.

### Hartman and Marx on slavery and freedom

Consider the consistent engagement with Marx in *Scenes of Subjection* and note Hartman's parsing of terms: "The failures of Reconstruction are perhaps best understood by examining the cross-hatchings of slavery and freedom as modes of domination, subjection, and accumulation" (Hartman 1997, 120). She clarifies: "I have opted to use the term 'accumulation' because slavery is not a relation of exploitation in the classic Marxian sense" (Hartman 1997, 234). This refers to how exploitation is classically defined as appropriation of surplus value through the manipulation of wage labor, productivity, and compensation. In this model, commodity price is considered a set point for the sake of analysis and exposition. Still, so-called classical Marxism can be "stretched" (to evoke a procedure from Fanon) to account for racial slavery as primitive accumulation and also totalizing and absolute appropriation of surplus. Marx's *Capital Volume One* theorizes slavery in the Americas as a question of "primitive accumulation" as secular original sin. In Marx's corpus, racial slavery is foundational for capitalism *tout court* and rightfully so. It is capital accumulation's dirty secret. But there is no reason to not supplement this so-called classical explanation with a consideration of racial slavery as the extraction of totalizing and absolute surplus labor-value (not either/or but rather, both). As Samir Amin insists at the start of his *Eurocentrism: Modernity, Religion, and Democracy; A Critique of Eurocentricism and Culturalism*, "we define ourselves as starting from Marx and not as stopping with him" ([1988] 2009, 23). There is an important pedagogic and political-analytic reason to insist on both exploitation and accumulation (fungibility and exchange); in other words, a supplementary logic not an either/or analytic choice. A supplementary logic allows one to treat Marx as a starting point as opposed to an end point; yet, not eclipsing both his anti-capitalist political imperative and reckoning with the centrality of enslaved new-world African labor to the foundation of racial capitalism.

Forty years before the publication of *Scenes of Subjection*, International Publishers released *The Civil War in the United States*. This material was culled from Marx's theoretical work, correspondence, and writings for American newspapers. The essays in this volume alongside more recent work by Kevin Anderson (2016) and Robin Blackburn (2011) – alongside the Gramscian common sense<sup>8</sup> of the late 1930s' conjuncture of Black radical scholarship<sup>9</sup> constitutes a rich and dense body of thought that theorizes the precarious demarcation between Enslavement and Emancipation that Hartman's work brilliantly enacts and extends upon. In a recent essay, Hartman pushes against the way that in works like DuBois's *Black Reconstruction* and C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*, "the agency of the enslaved becomes legible as politics, rather than crime or destruction, at the moment slaves are transformed into black workers and revolutionary masses fashioned along the lines of the insurgent proletariat" (Hartman 2016, 166). More detrimentally, this tendency makes it "difficult to distinguish the constitutive elements of slavery as a mode of power, violence, dispossession and accumulation or to attend to the forms of gendered and sexual violence that enable these processes" (2016, 166). Fred Hampton's formulation that *everything is political* and second-wave feminism's claim that *the personal is political*

might serve as methodological reminders, cautionary warnings against the pitfalls of abandoning the terms we want to make use of. To not forsake the work that such terms do is the challenge. Instead of repeating in order to dismiss a formulation coded as *classical*; why not push such category's capaciousness. Hartman's point here is rightfully stated: epistemic choice has implications for political legibility. Perhaps it isn't a question of having to choose between two sides of an analytical divide: attending to either slaves as workers or crime, dispossession, sexual violence and reproductive labor. *Scenes of Subjection* offers a gift in that it functions as a model in its expository choices on how to attend to all. Marx in his *Addenda* to Part I of his *Manuscripts on Theories of Surplus Value* introduces a line of logic very much at home with Foucauldian epistemic theorizing. Marx weaves together an analytical preoccupation with production as product and production as episteme *avant la lettre* ("the criminal produces not only crimes but also criminal law"):

A philosopher produces ideas, a poet poems, a clergyman sermons, a professor compendia and so on. A criminal produces crimes. If we look a little closer at the connection between this latter branch of production and society as a whole, we shall rid ourselves of many prejudices. The criminal produces not only crimes but also criminal law, and with this also the professor who gives lectures on criminal law and in addition to the inevitable compendium in which this same professor throws his lectures onto the general market as "commodities." (Marx 1861–63)

Marx's critical support of the North and his optimism for the militant praxis of John Brown – who tried to socialize the production of the wool trade and his insistence on the centrality of slavery as the cause and optic to understand Southern secession and aggression were tethered to the hope that Emancipation and a Union victory would hasten the destruction of a capitalist mode of production built from slave labor (Marx 2007). Marx insists on the need for a radical *aufheben* (abolishment, preservation, and transcendence) of the capitalist mode of production in order to constitute an Emancipation worthy of its capital letter; in other words, an Emancipation worthy of Event-status.

*Scenes* internalizes and actualizes such Marxian theoretical-political commitments and pushes their common sense elsewhere. Instead of lingering on Marxist writings that directly speak to the relationship between slavery and so-called free labor, the study maps different directions. Part II of *Scenes of Subjection* is partially framed by referencing Marx's "On the Jewish Question" (1843), in which he writes: "The limits of political emancipation appear at once in the fact that the state can liberate itself from constraint without man himself being really liberated; that a state may be a free state without man himself being a free man" (Marx 1844, 4). This is a bold citation in the context of *Scenes of Subjection's* critical work. Hartman's employment of Marx's critical discussion of rallying behind the particularity of Jewish identity, instead of the structural positionality of economic class – (liberation for and as Jews instead of liberation for and as workers) – evokes Marx's point brilliantly. Enlisting "On the Jewish Question" encourages thinking the slave's structural position as primary for a theory of revolutionary overhaul, rather than a second-order identification and obstacle to such radical transformation.

*Scenes of Subjection* evokes the political knowledge of Henry Bibb. Hartman writes: "Echoing Proudhon's 'property is theft,' Henry Bibb put the matter simply: "Property can't steal property" (Hartman 1997, 66). In light of *Scenes of Subjection's* central move

to complicate the line of demarcation between enslavement and freedom, note Marx's critique of Proudhon's *Philosophie de la misère*. Marx rails against Proudhon's belief in bourgeois progress and his unwillingness to concede that modes of production are transitory and historical and that economic categories should be seen as abstractions corresponding to actual social relations. Ventriloquizing Proudhon's views on slavery and mocking Proudhon's dialectics, Marx writes:

Freedom and slavery constitute an antagonism. There is no need for me to speak either of the good or the bad aspects of freedom. As for slavery, there is no need for me to speak of its bad aspects. The only thing requiring explanation is the good side of slavery. I do not mean indirect slavery, the slavery of the proletariat; I mean direct slavery, the slavery of the Blacks in Surinam, in Brazil, in the southern regions of North America.

Direct slavery is much the pivot upon which our present-day industrialism turns as are machinery, credit, etc. Without slavery there would be no cotton, without cotton there would be no modern industry. It is slavery which has given value to the colonies, it is the colonies which have created world trade, and world trade is the necessary condition for large-scale machine industry. Consequently, prior to the slave trade, the colonies sent very few products to the Old World, and did not noticeably change the face of the world. Slavery is therefore an economic category of paramount importance. Without slavery, North America, the most progressive nation, would be transformed into a patriarchal country. Only wipe North America off the map and you will get anarchy, the complete decay of trade and modern civilisation. But to do away with slavery would be to wipe America off the map. Being an economic category, slavery has existed in all nations since the beginning of the world. All that modern nations have achieved is to disguise slavery at home and import it openly into the New World. After these reflections on slavery, what will the good Mr Proudhon do? He will seek the synthesis of liberty and slavery, the true golden mean, in other words the balance between slavery and liberty. (Marx 1846)

Marx's ventriloquism is neither in the service of minimizing the "paramount importance" of slavery, nor its centrality to modern capitalism. Rather, his parody turns on the fact that Proudhon's sweeping pronouncements mask his ultimate reconciliation with bourgeois progress and his willingness to strike a synthesis, a "golden mean," the very "balance between slavery and liberty" that *Scenes of Subjection* explodes. Proudhon's reconciliation is an outcome of his philosophical orientation. It is not a political reconciliation, yet the generalized abstractions of his categories have dire political implications. The militancy of the utterance "property is theft" acts as a cover for the failure to distinguish and theorizes changes in social development and different modes of production. Such changes require analysis not vague generalization. In this passage from Marx, Proudhon's declarations of the central role of Atlantic slavery act as a rhetorical set-up to relativize and undermine such a truth claim. The initially stated specificity of Atlantic slavery morphs into apologist opportunism that is the general slavery existing "in all nations since the beginning of the world." Identify functions to patch over difference: the formulae par excellence of apologists. In sharp contrast, Henry Bibb musters an analytical specificity that Proudhon's eternal categories cannot engender.

### Afterlife

Is Franco still dead yet? Amiri Baraka conveyed this cinematic moment damn near a hundred times. Usually, he credited the line to actor Mantan Moreland speaking to Bob



Hope. However, in the interview outtakes for *Eyes on Prize II* (one of the framing epigraphs of this essay), it is attributed to Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry's stage name Stepin Fetchit. "Is Franco still dead yet?" The syntax is striking, its insurgent work arresting. The proper name Franco conjures fascism as a response to the employer's hail to work. The utterance summons surreptitiously such fascism to correctly call a racist regime by its name. On one hand, the secondary definition of the *yet* further emphasizes the "up to and including the present time" of the *still* – a repetitive emphasis on the present's tenuous temporal resolution. The adverbial labor of *the still and the yet* announces contradiction and stages simultaneity: an interregnum space in which racial fascism is properly dead today and as of *yet* not vanquished.

Hartman's "*afterlife of slavery*" provides an expedient, critical shorthand to capture this temporal contradiction (2007, 6). Its compound-word formulation dialectically interrelates the synchronic with the diachronic, continuity with rupture, the life/death of repressive modes of production. Afterlife's dialectical savvy circumvents the partiality of similarity or difference. It serves as a cautionary note in that hasty deployments of afterlife fail to strive towards the temporal limberness of both Hartman's scholarship and this caustic retort, the limberness of its actualization of an analytic whole that thinks both identity and difference in dialectical interrelation. Both Hartman and Baraka's formulations linger in the interregnum space between slavery and freedom: a space in which praxis might be all hemmed up but resistance is continuously emerging.

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### Note on contributor

Jeremy Matthew Glick teaches African Diaspora literature and drama at Hunter College and is the author of *The Black Radical Tragic: Performance, Aesthetics, and the Unfinished Haitian Revolution* (NYU Press, 2016).

### Notes

1. The easy reproducibility of "the spectacular character of black suffering" (Hartman 1997, 3) takes on a ghastly contemporary resonance when considering the ease with which even insurgent anti-racist forces screen and reproduce ever proliferating scenes of black suffering and black death. Such tactics of visual reproduction indicate a not-so-latent positivism: a wish that a radical rupture will occur if people not only know what's happening but see it happen again, and again, and again.
2. A Marxist critical dialectic can incorporate Foucault's epistemic preoccupations and archaeological and genealogical methods without sacrificing its analytic purchase and transformative commitments. I see Foucault's project and Marx's project not as antagonistic, but rather as firing on different levels vis-à-vis their respective uses of abstraction. See Foucault ([1981] 1991) for more on the encounter between these two thinkers.

3. “The term ‘burdened individuality’ attempts to convey the antagonistic production of the liberal individual, rights bearer, and raced subject as equal yet inferior, independent yet servile, freed yet bound by duty, reckless yet responsible, blithe yet brokenhearted. ‘Burdened Individuality’ designates the double bind of emancipation – the onerous responsibilities of freedom with the enjoyment of few of its entitlements, the collusion of the disembodied equality of liberal individuality with the dominated, regulated, and disciplined embodiment of blackness, the entanglements of sovereignty and subjection, and the transformation of involuntary servitude effected under the aegis of free labor” (Hartman 1997, 121).
4. One of the key ways in which I understand the theoretical work of event/nonevent is by way of the work of Alain Badiou (2012). This is complicated business that needs to be tracked throughout his changing work. For our purposes here I find this gloss helpful: “Definition of the event as what makes possible the restitution of the inexistent is an abstract but incontestable definition, quite simply because the restitution is proclaimed: it is what people are saying in the here and now” (56–57).
5. This is the full-length volume that contains Althusser’s famous discussion of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses, reproduced as an excerpt in his *Lenin and Philosophy*. It comes out of a critical working group analyzing schooling in France.
6. Speaking on the conceptual problems of the enslaved as a class, the illegibility of the enslaved as class in a Gramscian model, and the problems of the enslaved waging hegemonic struggle, Hartman writes: “The everyday practices of the enslaved occur in the default of the political, in the absence of the rights of man or the assurances of the self-possessed individual, and perhaps even without a ‘person,’ in the usual meaning of the term” (1997, 65).
7. I want to signal a recent, brilliant critical supplement to Hartman’s archival project, Ramesh Mallipeddi’s *Spectacular Suffering: Witnessing Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic* (2016). Specifically, in light of the archival aspect of *Scenes of Subjection*, consider Mallipeddi’s discussion of “recovery”: “Attention to the historical activities and practices of slaves is necessary because, in spite of their seeming opposition, both the romantic and tragic views of the archive construe the project of recovery in similar ways: that is, they see recovery as a means, as one definition in the *OED* puts it, of “regaining possession or control of something lost, as repossession, as reclamation, regaining, and recouping.” In other words, the predicating subject of these projects is the critic and the historian, because we are the ones ultimately tasked with recovering or not recovering lost lives. But the word *recovery* also has another meaning: a return to a normal state of health and strength. Bodies recover – and also fail to recover – from harm, injury, assault, shock, and sickness. The project of recovery is thus not solely our prerogative as critics, since the historical subjects of slavery equally engaged in acts of regeneration and recuperation – that is, in recovering themselves. As I suggest, it is by foregrounding this second meaning of the word “recovery” that we can avoid the opposing romantic and tragic views of the archive that respectively reduce slaves to either pure agents of resistance or mere victims of power” (14–15).
8. *Scenes of Subjection* employs Gramscian “common sense” in order to illustrate the “challenges [of] the official accounts of freedom and [the] stresses [of] the similarities and correspondences of slavery and freedom” (13).
9. Some examples include: W.E.B. DuBois’s *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935); C.L.R. James’s Westminster Theatre’s production of *Toussaint Louverture* (1936); and Herbert Aptheker’s *Negro Slave Revolts in the United States, 1526–1850*.

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