The Whipping Man

By Matthew Lopez

Directed by Lou Bellamy

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Educational Tools
Penumbra Theatre Study Guide

Greetings! Thank you for visiting Penumbra Theatre Company's **Study Guide Library**. We are so pleased that you seek to extend and engage your understanding of the drama we produce and the thematic issues it brings to the fore.

Penumbra Theatre Company occupies a very unique place within American society, and by extension of that, the world. Penumbra was borne out of the Black Arts Movement, a time charged by civic protest and community action. An artist making art by, for and about the black community was charged with merging aesthetic (artistic) principles with ethical (moral) ones. Subsequently, in this historical and political context, art had an agenda to strive toward social change. African American artists were part of, and greatly influenced, the social currents that carried people from their homes, schools and places of worship to the streets.

Bonding artistic interpretation with civic responsibility engenders an important kind of creative dissonance, a harmony of balance. It creates something neither art nor civic action could do alone. This is mission driven art, informed by a black ethos and aesthetic, which can adequately illuminate our experience. **Ensemble Theatre** in that context is the creation of a community of people committed to the telling of a story that acknowledges the experience of everyone involved. This kind of art demands that each audience member recognize his or her place in relation to the art. When that happens, we begin to think about ourselves as interactive forces in a greater social context. Our own agency becomes clearer to us; our choices and reactions start to make sense within a broader, more nuanced environment. We begin to see that others have lived with similar issues, and that their perspectives have great potential to enrich our experience and help us problem-solve. This kind of art creates and sustains community. It encourages coalition.

The function of an **Education and Outreach Program** inside an institution such as Penumbra Theatre Company is to use informed discussion and interdisciplinary tools to unpack the issues stimulated by the drama. Just as an actor must learn lines and blocking before interpreting a character, we offer our audiences the practical tools so that they may respond to the art both critically and creatively. It is our job to push conversation, critical analysis, and commentary beyond emotion toward solution.

The **Study Guides** are meant to stimulate discussion, not to present a definitive voice or the "right answer." Theatre is *fluid*, active, interactive and reactive; we must engage it intellectually that way too.

We hope to create space for the themes inspired by the drama to take root and blossom. Penumbra invites audiences to participate in the art and social action, by using our Education and Outreach tools to locate their contribution, their voice, within the larger human story we tell over and over again. We love. We fail. We begin anew. Over and over, told by countless tongues, embodied by some of the finest actors and carried in the hearts of some of the most committed audience members; we speak our human lessons through the prism of the African American experience.

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PENUMBRA THEATRE STUDY GUIDE
The Whipping Man

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THE ARTISTIC PROCESS

An Exploratory Essay by Sarah Bellamy

The Social Symbolic: Individuals in Society

Art is a complicated process that we rarely fully engage. It stimulates emotional, intellectual, even physical responses in audiences. Art is so powerful because it is one example of a deep and necessary connection between an individual and the collective world. To better understand the process of art, it helps to consider this connection and how it works.

The connection between an individual and society is made through complex systems of meaning and metaphor; groups of symbols created by humans that represent how we feel, think, see and understand the world in which we live. These systems represent the tie that binds us all to one another in relationships that constitute identity, and help us comprehend our human experience. Art is one such system and there are others too.

Individuals can only access these systems through the collective, social world. In order for a human child, for example, to learn to use language (really just a system of symbols, meaning and metaphor), that child must come into contact with other human beings who already grasp and make use of the faculty of language. Once the child is inducted into this social system, the symbols, meaning and metaphor common to all members of the community will eventually dominate the life-experience of that child and his or her ability to reflect upon or process that experience. In fact, these systems are so powerful, that the child will also only come to understand him or herself in relation to other community members, and only through the system of meaning and metaphor common to that group. This process is called socialization. A community's system of meaning, metaphor and symbolism forms its culture. Socialization does two things: it sustains culture and forms an individual's identity.

Social Commentary and the Nature of Art

Art works by tapping into a community's system of meaning, metaphor and symbolism to represent the experience, knowledge or reality specific to that culture. Art is ultimately the expression of an idea, emotion or experience through the creation of a symbolic structure. The artistic product does not have to have *physical structure* to be considered art. Music, story-telling, and dance are all artistic modes that are active and not permanent. Instead art is defined by its ability to recreate human experience through the point of view of the artist and affect a response within an audience. This might seem fairly simple, or even obvious. A deeper examination, however, will illuminate the special quality of art and explain why it is so important to a healthy society.

Human beings have the unique ability to critically observe ourselves. We can, in other words, reflect upon our actions, emotions and experiences. The fact that the word "reflect" can mean "to think" and "to mirror, or reverse an original image back to its source," is quite telling about the nature of art. In the most basic terms, an artist creates a piece of art as a reflection of culture. Culture is made up of individuals, their experiences and the integration of all of these things to become more than the sum of its individual parts.

Artists use many different structures, or "mediums," to communicate meaning. The artist's effort to communicate his or her intent is both informed by, and limited to, his or her cultural perspective; no individual exists completely outside of some cultural context. Within that cultural context, the artist embodies different symbols that have meaning within the culture.

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His or her navigation of the cultural landscape will be informed by these symbols and will also inform the art too. This is what we mean when we talk about an artist's "voice." Even though the artistic product may not have sound (like a painting or a piece of sculpture) it was created by a particular person with a particular experience in a particular social context. The artistic product reflects those particularities (the artist's perspective or point of view) and the meaning it conveys is determined by them.

Moreover, any form of communication (like language or art) requires the use of the symbolic tools of the culture. This means that in order to reflect the culture through artistic representation, the artist has to be able to stand both outside and inside a culture simultaneously (but never be totally in either place). Only from that vantage point can the artist use the symbolic tools of a culture to communicate what he or she observes about the culture itself. This is what is known as "artistic commentary." It conveys the artist's intent, or impetus for creating something.

The Role of the Audience and the Alienation of the Artist

The process does not end with the creation of an artistic product. Art needs an audience other than the artist who created it. In solitude, the artist may marvel at his or her creation—might even be enlightened or surprised by it—but the artist will remain unfulfilled without the participation of an audience. The artist was moved to respond to cultural stimuli, the response now requires an audience to receive it, absorb it and refract it back to the artist. This is the contribution of the artistic product to the cultural landscape that inspired it. This way the artist can observe the change engendered by his or her commentary. To comment on something is to change it.

If the nature of the artist is to observe, interpret and then comment in order to change, the nature of the audience is also to observe and interpret. Because each human being has been exposed to an infinite number of symbols in widely divergent patterns and trajectories, and at different points in our lives, each spectator will "read" (or make sense of, interpret the symbols) the artistic product differently. An entire audience might have similar emotional or intellectual responses to a piece of art, but each spectator will have a slightly different experience than his or her neighbor. When the members of an audience have an opportunity to discuss their experience, the entire group is enlightened or engaged, bound by the same artistic element. This is how art creates community. A kind of spontaneous culture is fashioned by virtue of a shared experience. The culture is singular to itself because of the unique qualities of each audience member and any variance within the art.

The audience has one last critical role to play in the artistic process, and it is both enlightening and violent. The audience is invited to observe a translation of a common experience through the perspective of an artist. The audience is then momentarily able to achieve a similar distance from the culture as the artist did before creating the artistic product, but this time the audience starts at the end and works in retrospect back to the state of things to which the artist originally responded. They are afforded the benefit of the impetus for the art and the art itself simultaneously. This event illustrates the extent of, or limit to, the intent of the artist.

In order to comprehend the art, in order to feel it, the spectator must contextualize it within his or her own unique experience. Of course this experience is largely determined by the spectator's cultural context. Even as the spectator experiences the art he or she changes it, manipulates it so that it will fit within the frame of reference particular to him or her. Art encourages all who use the system of symbolism, meaning and metaphor to consider it differently. This is where the

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integrity of the artist's original intent starts to break down, and it is the moment in which the artist **loses** the ability to control his or her artistic product. The artist can no longer speak for the art; the art now speaks for itself and for the artist. By virtue of its nature, an audience changes the artistic product fundamentally from the scope of what is intended by the artist to the full breadth of the potential audience experience. To claim the art is to fulfill it, it is also to sever it forever from its original intent—it is no longer defined by a striving to effect change through artistic translation and commentary, it is the reception of the comment and the realization of change. The artistic product has traveled a very great distance between the artist and the audience. It is now absorbed back into the cultural system of metaphor and symbolism and becomes another tool for communicating meaning. The artist is impotent to reclaim or control the artistic product. So to reiterate, the nature of the artist is to observe, interpret, comment and in so doing effect change. The nature of the audience is to observe, interpret, and claim.

Perpetual Motion: The Circle of Art and Culture

The manipulation, possible misunderstanding and absorption of the artistic product by the culture, is both a fulfillment and a violation of the artist. The only way for the artist to regain agency or engage his or her artistic product from this point on is to produce more art in response to the culture. This is how art is perpetual and how culture and art continually constitute one another. It stimulates growth in both arenas and so keeps a society from stagnating.

Summary

To review, an artist responds to cultural stimuli through the manipulation of symbols that the culture uses to communicate meaning. The artistic product is a blend of the system of meaning specific to a culture and the artist's interpretation of that system. The art produced is the artist's commentary. The audience functions as an agent of translation as it claims the artistic product for itself and alters it in order to access it. The culture absorbs the art and the artist no longer can change or access his or her artistic product now that it has entered the social realm of the symbolic. The artist can only create more art, using the tools of the cultural symbolic, a system that has already been altered by its absorption of the original artistic product. Thus art and culture are constitutive of one another.

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A BRIEF OVERVIEW ON THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN THEATRE

Aspects of the dramatic performing arts can be found in cultures around the world. Globally speaking, American Theater is a relatively new tradition. As theater has evolved from the **African roots** of Greek tragedy to Shakespearean epics, American stages have produced a wide range of plays, largely influenced by the diverse peoples inhabiting this nation. In its early years, American Theater reflected the lives of its proponents, namely white, property-owning, Christian men. Ironically, even as America established itself as a sovereign nation, the drama of the day came largely from Europe, which boasted a unique canon of work. Still, as early as 1821 black American artists were creating, staging and performing for mixed audiences, showcasing both existing and original work.

One of the first theater companies to approach the dramatic performing arts from an African American perspective was **The African Grove Theater** in New York City. It was founded by **William Henry Brown** and **James Hewlett**, both who had traveled by ship throughout the Caribbean, where story-telling, performance, dance and music were essential to the culture and survival of the slaves working on sugar cane and tobacco plantations, salt flats and mines. The company performed tragedies and comedies from Shakespeare to American playwrights. Eventually, the need for work that came from within the African American experience proved itself. Two years after it opened, the first play written and produced by an African American was presented at the African Grove in 1823. The play, *The Drama of King Shotaway*, by Brown, played to mixed (though predominately black) audiences that year. However, many whites were adamantly opposed to the existence of such a theater and frequent police raids, harassment and threats forced Brown and Hewlett to relocate the theater several times throughout the lower East side of Manhattan. Eventually, the white opposition won out over the tenacity of the black actors, directors and producers of The African Grove Theater Company and it closed its doors permanently.[1]

As Americans established a canon of their own, dominant political and social trends were addressed by the work. One of the nation's most successful and fraught enterprises was racialized slavery in the American South. Depicted on white stages, black characters often fit into stereotypical characters which would haunt American stages for decades to come. Some of the most prevalent of those were **the Sambo, the Uncle, the Mammy** and **the Jezebel**. These

[1] For more information see Bernard L. Peterson Jr.'s "Introduction: The Origin and Development of the Black American Playwright from the Antebellum Period to World War II," *Early Black American Playwrights and Dramatic Writers: A Biographical Directory and Catalog of Plays, Films, and Broadcasting Scripts.* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) 1-21.

racist depictions would be reflected over and again in the theater, usually performed by white actors in blackface. African-American artists struggled against these stereotypical images as soon as they entered the public sphere. In 1857, **William Wells Brown**, (no relation to William Henry Brown) juxtaposed a stereotypical black male character named Cato with an exemplary black male character named Glen in his play *The Escape; or a Leap for Freedom.* This play highlighted the difference between an image created by black people for black audiences and an image created by white people for white audiences. It was an important statement.

Still the popularity of comical representations of black Americans continued. **Minstrelsy** was very popular in the 19th Century. This performance tradition was created as whites made light of and fantasized about slave life and plantation culture in the antebellum South. White entertainers in **blackface** would do comedic impressions of, or parody, the stories, songs and dance, jokes and music of blacks for white audiences. Minstrelsy was a very lucrative and beloved form of theater for white audiences for many years. White theatre-goers filled houses to laugh at representations of blacks as happy, contented and dim-witted. The tradition would continue long into the mid-1900s. Responsible for the creation of one familiar American character, **Jim Crow**, this theatre tradition was hardly benign. Its impact had a life that extended far beyond the stage in American social, political and civil rights policy.

For many years, (largely due to the audience expectations created by these white performers) the only work black performers could find was to perform in minstrel shows, *in blackface.* This absurd situation reinforces the notion that the depictions of blackness and black people on white stages was not real. Even black actors had to "perform" white ideas of blackness by darkening their skin, wearing silly costumes and miming the white actors' racist depictions of black people.

In Hollywood, some of America's most revered epic films depict the early stereotypes created in the theater and in the 1920s and 30s. Black artists, writers and musicians began responding to the racist depictions and creating their own artistic representations of black life and philosophy. This period of burgeoning talent and new work is known as **The Harlem Renaissance**. In 1923, the first serious play written by a black playwright produced on Broadway. It was called *The Chip Woman's Fortune* by **Willis Richardson**.[2] Still, the prevalent trend was for white artists and producers to pull from black narrative, song and dance and parody it for audiences. **Langston Hughes** and **Jean Toomer** were particularly concerned with white representations of blackness in the theater. Read below, Langston Hughes' famous poem "**Notes on Commercial Theater**":

[2] Ibid., 165.

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You've taken my blues and gone --
You sing 'em on Broadway
And you sing 'em in Hollywood Bowl,
And you mixed 'em up with symphonies
And you fixed 'em
So they don't sound like me.
Yep, you done taken my blues and gone.

You also took my spirituals and gone
You put me in Macbeth and Carmen Jones
All kinds of Swing Mikados
And in everything but what's about me --
But someday somebody'll
Stand up and talk about me --
Black and beautiful --
And sing about me,
And put on plays about me!
I reckon it'll be
Me myself!

Yes, it'll be me.[3]

This poem echoes one of the founding tenets of another critical moment in black theater history, the **Black Arts Movement** of the 1960s. It was during this period that some of the most celebrated black writers responded vociferously to the racism American citizens were struggling against in the Civil Rights Movement. Self-representation became a major focus of the movement—art was created by, for, and about black people. Artists such as **LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka**, **Ed Bullins**, **Nikki Giovanni**, **Harold Cruse**, **Ray Durem**, **Adrienne Kennedy**, **Larry Neal** and **Sonia Sanchez** all produced seminal work during this period of time. In 1959 **Lorraine Hansberry**'s famous play ***A Raisin in the Sun*** opened on Broadway in New York City. It was the first time a play written by a black playwright, directed by a black director (**Lloyd Richards**) and written about black people was presented at this level. The next twenty years saw an eruption of African American theater companies springing up around the country, one of which was **Penumbra Theatre Company** in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Founded in 1976 by Artistic Director **Lou Bellamy**, Penumbra addressed issues of racial tension and misrepresentation between what were visibly separate black and white Americas. Over the last 30 years, Penumbra has provided a consistently clear message that the African American experience is rich, dynamic and critical to the American theater canon. While visiting the Twin Cities, playwright **August Wilson** said of Penumbra:

[3] Hughes, Langston. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes.* (New York: Vintage, 1995) 215.

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> It was with the indomitable spirit associated with pioneers and visionaries that Lou Bellamy took a handful of actors over [sic] twenty years ago and challenged them not only to believe in themselves but to have a belief larger than anyone's disbelief. When I walked through the doors of Penumbra Theatre [sic], I did not know that I would find life-long friends and supporters that would encourage and enable my art. I did not know I would have my first professional production, a musical satire called *Black Bart and the Sacred Hills.* I did not know then what Penumbra Theatre would come to mean to me and that there would come a time when Penumbra would produce more of my plays than any other theatre in the world. And that their production of ***The Piano Lesson*** would become not only my favorite staging but a model of style an eloquence that would inspire my future work. I only knew that I was excited to be in a black theater that had real lights, assigned seats and a set that was not a hodgepodge of found and borrowed props as had been my experience with all the black theater I had known. We are what we imagine ourselves to be and we can only imagine what we know to be possible. The founding of PTC enlarged that possibility. And its corresponding success provokes the community to a higher expectation of itself. I became a playwright because I saw where my chosen profession was being sanctioned by a group of black men and women who were willing to invest their lives and their talent in assuming a responsibility for our presence in the world and the conduct of our industry as black Americans.[4]

Through artistically excellent theater, Penumbra has sought to plumb the depths of the human experience by presenting culturally specific and historically accurate depictions of African Americans. Sadly, many of the black theater companies founded during the BAM have closed over the years, largely due to lack of funding, managerial problems and poor attendance. Penumbra's survival is a testament to all the people who believe in its power for social change. Our artists, administration, audiences and community have consistently buoyed us up and kept this important institution afloat on the occasionally stormy seas of non-profit arts administration. Today, because of our growth and the changing world, Penumbra is widely regarded as a pioneer of cross-cultural dialogue. Our template of finding the universal through the specificity of human experience has become a model for teaching, arts application and

[4] August Wilson, excerpted from a speech given at Penumbra Theatre Company, 1997.

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criticism. We are nationally and internationally recognized as a preeminent African American theater company.

Lou Bellamy explains that black people not only "have to be at the table" to engage in cross-cultural conversations, but host such debates as well. In an America that increasingly more often accepts oversimplified answers, we seek out nuance and enjoy disturbing the veneer. At Penumbra, we provide the table at which artists and audiences alike may sit down and rigorously engage one another with complicated questions. We are proud to have these artists in our midst and excited to produce work that circumvents a hackneyed black / white binary.

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CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

CALEB: Twenties. White. The only child of the De Leon family. A defected Confederate captain. John's half brother.

JOHN: Twenties. Biracial. The son of Mr. De Leon and one of his slaves. A former slave in the De Leon household. Caleb's half brother.

SIMON: Fifties. Black. A former slave in the De Leon household. Simon is the elder of the family and has a wife and daughter who also worked in the De Leon household serving the white family.

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SYNOPSIS: A SCENE BY SCENE BREAKDOWN

SCENIC BREAKDOWN

Act I

Scene 1: Late night, April 13, 1865.
Scene 2: Mid-morning, April 14, 1865.
Scene 3: Evening, April 14, 1865.
Scene 4: Evening, April 15, 1865

SETTING

The ruins of the once grand De Leon home in Richmond, Virginia. April, 1865.

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Strangers in a Strange Land: The Making of an American Identity

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, go unto Pharaoh, and say unto him,
thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me."
Exodus 8:1

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves:
for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy,
and not with grief: for that [is] unprofitable for you."
Hebrews 13:17

"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.
Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand."
Romans 14:14

Introduction

The Whipping Man, by Matthew Lopez, revisits one of the most singularly important events in world history, the fall of the **American Confederacy** and the end of slavery in the United States. In the hours after the surrender of **General Robert E. Lee** at the **Appomattox**, the nation was at its knees, waiting with bated breath for the uncharted territory ahead. Given our reluctance to revisit the institution of slavery in this country, most contemporary Americans do not understand the intricacies of the four hundred year slave system in the US, its vastness and deep entrenchment in our culture and identity, from the birth of the nation to its restructure in the **post-bellum** period. To this day Americans struggle with the legacy of institutionalized racial slavery and the corrosive influences of racism that continue to plague us in the modern world. *The Whipping Man* gives audiences the opportunity to consider the complexities of the system in a most intimate way, through the story of one family on the brink of collapse in a new era for what is today the world's most influential superpower.

The Whipping Man brings to light several themes too large to fully explore here, and each reader will bring a different set of questions to the text, each member of the audience a different perspective and interpretation of the play. One might find that the play and the themes therein speak to biracial identity in contemporary America; one might use it to complement or complicate an exploration into Ethiopian Jewish identity, or even to differently situate the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. For the purposes of this guide, produced within the context of an African American theatre company, focus will be placed on exploring the experience of being both black and Jewish in America, and how fully each of these identities might be experienced at a very particular historical juncture. A bibliography of suggested reading follows the essay for those interested in exploring some of the themes not illuminated here.

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A significant theme for contemporary American audiences is the relationship between African and Jewish Americans in the New World. In recent years, tension regarding the history of slavery in the United States complicated relations between black and Jewish Americans. The conflict that arose surrounding the 1991 book published by the Historical Research Department of the Nation of Islam entitled *The Secret Relationship between Blacks and Jews* is exemplary. Eli Faber, a Jewish historian, takes issue with the way in which it "charged that Jews financed and dominated the slave trade, owned slaves well in excess of any other group, and inflicted cruelty with abandon on slaves."[5] He then cites the remarks made in an address by the chairperson of the Black Studies Department at the City College CUNY positing that Jewish people have contributed to the continued suppression of African Americans and that "wealthy Jews had been instrumental in financing the slave trade."[6] Faber's main criticism of the book published by the Nation is that the "omission of comparative information about non-Jewish participants in the slave system implied that Jewish domination could simply be assumed; it did not have to be proved empirically."[7] The following year, Henry Louis Gates Jr., chair of Harvard University's Afro-American Studies Department criticized the rise in anti-Semitism he noticed amongst African Americans, hoping to quell what he feared would become an increasingly popular idea: that Jewish people, a minority population during the antebellum period, were suspiciously over-implicated in the system of American slavery.

Most historians find that the Jewish involvement in the slave trade was not disproportionately high as had been suggested, but rather that Jews occupied similar roles within the system of racial slavery as other whites. There were Jewish slaveowners, traders and insurers just as there were non-Jewish slaveowners, traders and insurers. There were Jewish **abolitionists** just as there were non-Jewish abolitionists. Still, as horrific as the practice of slavery was, owning, buying and selling slaves was largely regarded as a rather mundane and commonplace practice. As white men outlined the rights of freedom, liberty and justice for American citizens, the majority of their families were being cared for by black slaves, their tobacco, cotton and sugar plantations maintained by slave labor. They saw no discrepancy in their philosophy, nor hypocrisy in their actions. The fact of the matter was that black slaves were not considered human beings, but rather property—commodities to be bought and sold on an international market as necessary. These are the foundations of global trade and capitalism.

The Whipping Man takes the conversation further, by illuminating the site of one Jewish home in which both the slaveholding and slave families practice Judaism. In Lopez's exploration

[5] Faber, Eli. *Jews, Slaves and the Slave Trade: Setting the Record Straight.* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998) p. 6.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid, p. 8.

of this relatively unique situation, the correlations between Jewish enslavement in Egypt as documented by the Old Testament, and African American enslavement in the New World, offer powerful examples of the bonds black and Jewish Americans could choose to highlight as commonalities versus the divisive particularities of power and disenfranchisement in more recent history that prevent coalition and understanding. This is not to make the bondage and oppression experienced by black and Jewish peoples the same—it is critical to recognize the specificities of cultural, racial and spiritual differences. It is instead to offer insight into the complexities of these experiences, to realize the ways in which meaning is dispersed amongst different groups, and to explore the interpretations of historical events in a culturally specific way relevant to the experiences of the people implicated.

Life in the Antebellum South

Often it is hard for contemporary Americans to wrap their heads around the concept of American **chattel slavery**. How could one deny the humanity of another human being? How could anyone subjugate a child to bondage? How is it possible that families could live and work next to one another in the same households where one was master and the other slave?

First it is important to understand the concept of human "chattel." This is a different conception of the slave than one might find in ancient Greek, Roman or Byzantine empires. Chattel slavery is built upon the notion of certain classes of people as non-beings, more closely related to beasts of burden than to human beings, born into generations of interminable servitude. Yet slaves were repeatedly required to demonstrate their humanity in various ways that confounded the notion of them as objects. The faculty of (many) language(s), their need to care for themselves and others, to nurse wounds, birth and care for children, bury and mourn their dead, recite their history of ownership and various skill sets, even to market themselves by feigning desirable characteristics, all the while being told they were nonhuman.

Under the system of chattel slavery, people are seen as commodities, items of value that increase based on age, ability, gender, form, function, skill, disposition and obedience. Once purchased, a master had all rights over a slave, from the very functions of and access to the body, to the labor that body could produce, to any skills the slave acquired and any offspring the slave conceived. In this system, the master had complete control over the life and living of the slave; "nothing was private: sexual relations and 'marriage,' children and childrearing, education, food and the rituals of eating, labour, leisure, everything could be watched and

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controlled."[8] Yet as German philosopher Georg Hegel pointed out, this relationship, oppressive as it was for the slave, also affected the master in a curious way. The master, having entered into a contract of complete and perpetual servitude with another human being, would become totally reliant on that other human being, the slave, to exist himself. Simply put, without the slave, there is no master; the slave was a necessary and validating presence for the master and as such harbored a degree of power within this relationship of total domination. As sociologist Orlando Patterson puts it,

> …the master-slave relationship was not a static one in which an active master constantly got his way against a wholly passive slave. In spite of the extreme power of the master, certain constraints were inherent in the very nature of this relationship. One was the self-interest of the master himself. The whole point of keeping slaves was to get them to serve him, in whatever capacity he chose, to the best of his ability. To achieve this objective, the master could use various combinations of punishments and rewards. Slavery was unusual in the extraordinary extent to which the slave could be punished for not serving—even to the extreme of murder. But a dead slave, or one incapacitated by brutalization, was a useless slave. This stark fact, plus the recognition that incentives usually work more effectively than punishment in inducing service, was enough to encourage most masters in all slaveholding societies to search for the best balance between reward and punishment.[9]

This paradox—the reliance of the master on the slave—allowed for certain compromise. When pushed to a limit, slaves could exact the small bit of power they held over their masters and mistresses. These were rare and dangerous occasions, but powerful when they worked. As he combed through the annals of American slave narratives, historian Walter Johnson came across the story of Moses Grandy, once owned by Bill Grandy, infamous for selling off his slaves to pay for his "entertainment." A drinking man, this could have included gambling, prostitution, purchases made on flight of fancy, or any other such whimsical and irresponsible expenditure of the family resources he desired. As a child, Moses remembers the threat of being sold as constantly looming. Johnson writes,

> though Grandy's mother could not hope to carry eight children to freedom [along the Underground Railroad], she was for sometime able to keep them from getting sold. 'I remember well,' Grandy later wrote, 'my mother often hid

[8] Wood, Marcus. *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865.* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) p. 216.
[9] Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study.* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982) p. 205.

> us in the woods to prevent master selling us.' During that time the Grandy family lived on wild berries they found in the woods and potatoes and raw corn that could only have come from slaves who remained behind or lived nearby. Word that the slaveholding Grandy had relented came from the same quarter: 'After a time, the master would send word to her to come in, promising her he would not sell us.' By enlisting the support of other slaves in the neighborhood and withholding her labor and that of her children, Grandy's mother repeatedly postponed their sale.[10]

The kind of rebellion such as Moses Grandy's mother enacted against her master illustrates the codependency of the master-slave relationship. Rather than sell one or a few of the children and risk the rebellion or escape of the rest along with their mother, Bill Grandy allowed Moses' mother an exertion of power in which she enforced her will to keep her family together. To think that the whole time the children were hiding in the woods, that their mother was receiving help from the network of slaves living nearby, is to signal the largesse of the bonds created between slaves to support one another, a dynamic that eventually led to the large scale secret exodus of runaways along the **Underground Railroad**. This same sense of community and kinship persisted as a continual and nagging threat amongst the ruling class, ever aware that slaves knew the land, the people, and the capabilities and the weaknesses of the master class, better than they. Thus to a degree the master lived in fear of the slave, as the slave lived in fear of the master. Still, as Patterson points out,

> it is a mistake to characterize such a highly asymmetric interaction as one of "give-and-take"…. Husbands and wives give and take, sometimes; employers and wage earners, maybe; masters and slaves, never. What masters and slaves do is struggle: sometimes noisily, more often quietly; sometimes violently, more often surreptitiously; infrequently with arms, always with the weapons of the mind and soul.[11]

It is this struggle that *The Whipping Man* illuminates so profoundly.

The American Slave System: A Model Built for Durability

Racial slavery was a new concept that folded millions of culturally and ethnically diverse people into one lot by virtue of their race. With anywhere from nine to fifteen million

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[10] Johnson, Walter. *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market.* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1999) p. 32. Johnson quotes from the narrative of Moses Grandy, a runaway who published his memoir in 1844; *Narrative of the Life of Moses Grandy, Late a Slave in the United States of America.* (Boston, 1844).

[11] Patterson, p. 207.

people forcibly relocated from Africa to the New World, the trans-Atlantic slave trade changed the history of the world forever. In the New World a slave's destiny was predetermined, as was the fate of any children and their children's children *ad infinitum.*

In 1789, the year of the **Haitian Revolution** in which black African, mixed race slaves and free people of color unified to take control of the world's wealthiest plantation economy, the US Constitution incorporated a provision that led to a ban on the importation of African slaves after 1808,[12] leaving a window of a few years for Americans to wean themselves off of the flow from the trans-Atlantic trade. Cautious about the rebellious behavior and violence exacted upon whites during the Revolution, American slaveowners were content to let the slave population reproduce itself "naturally," eliminating the need for importing and "**seasoning**" new slaves, a long and arduous process that slaveholders often likened to breaking wild horses for domesticity. Indeed, breaking the human spirit was part of transforming a person into a slave; the brutal process included torture, degradation and the enforcement of a new language and customs upon recent arrivals to the New World. The intent was not just to cut those men and women sent to replenish the slave economy off from their own culture, but to enforce the total domination of the white slaveowning class. This process of bringing in new slaves to revitalize the work force was regarded in Brazil and the Caribbean as fiscally responsible. There with the unyielding grind of massive plantation economies, it was economically more prudent to work a slave to death then purchase a new one, rather than wait for the labor force to reproduce itself. Under these extreme working conditions, and with a constant influx of Africans into the creole population, revolution was imminent.

Americans learned from the mistakes of this kind of economy and adjusted their practice accordingly. They realized that they did well to keep the slave labor force relatively content, allowing slaves a semblance of humanity by encouraging family and kinship networks, permitting slaves to practice Christianity and in some cases Judaism, and occasionally by setting aside a day of reprieve, usually on Sundays. These sanctions were not demonstrative of the goodly nature of white American slaveowners as they were recast in post-bellum arguments meant to exhibit the merit of slavery. Instead, these small concessions brought great gain to American slaveholders. Indeed the largest threat of punishment was the stripping away of these privileges, most powerfully the division of families. Wisely investing in the contentment of their labor force, American whites worked hard to avoid the large-scale revolution that had swept the Saint Domingue colony asunder. In fact, as the American slave economy progressed over its four hundred year reign, one might argue that the enforcement of slave status became less

[12] See Johnson, ibid., p. 4-5.

volatile and even "proper," with slaveholders vying for a reputation of goodliness and benevolence in relation to their slaves. It would not be until the emancipation of black people that the terror of mob violence, lynching and rape that besieged African Americans was considered socially acceptable. Once supremely valuable commodities, after manumission in the eyes of white anti-abolitionists, "Negroes" were expendable.

The difference between the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the domestic slave trade in the US is often overlooked, or collapsed into one overarching concept of "the slave trade." The fact is that these separate but interlocking enterprises had different functions and served different needs for those in control of them. The domestic slave trade in the US focused on moving black American slaves, many who had been born into bondage, from region to region within a domestic slave economy. Slaves were moved when hardships such as drought or debt from poor management fell upon plantations, when slaveowners died and bequeathed their property to family elsewhere, and very rarely where a slaveholder became swayed by the mounting abolitionist movement. Most frequently, slaves were relocated when problems occurred on plantations. The threat of being separated from one's family, the ultimate evidence of one's humanity and the pride of the American slave system, was constant and interminable.

> For some, the sale into the trade was more than they could bear. Separated from the world that had given their lives meaning, some slaves were overwhelmed by the traders' brutality, the numbing privatization of the slow southward march, and the terrifying contingency of lives put up for sale. To the social death experienced by those torn from their histories and identities and the physical death they faced in the killing fields of the lower South must be added the psychic deaths—the "soul murder"—that left many of the trade's victims with little will to resist.[13]

Still, as the story of Moses Grandy illustrates, slaves often resisted their sale either by forcing slaveholders to recognize their limited power or "by refusing to accept their owner's account of what was happening, by treating events that slaveholders described in the language of economic necessity or disciplinary exigency as human tragedy or personal betrayal."[14] This sentiment is illustrated in *The Whipping Man*, when Simon learns that De Leon has sold his wife and daughter. Simon feels a deep sense of disloyalty. The seduction of the mitzvah or promise for **manumission** money that has kept him thus far in check (and in some ways willfully blind to the hypocrisy of the slave system) is immediately lifted, the bonds of family greater than any security he could attain by staying to care for Caleb and the house. American slaveholders used

[13] Johnson, p. 64.
[14] Johnson, p. 52.

the tactic of relocation as an enactment of their absolute power over their slaves, quelling rebellious behavior, punishing disobedience, and often ridding themselves of the indiscretions of **miscegenation** by selling off the light-skinned offspring of illegal unions between white slaveowners and black slaves, as De Leon did when he learned his son Caleb had impregnated Sarah, and years prior his own son John.

As immense as the trans-Atlantic slave trade was, the domestic trade within the US rivaled its enormity relationally. "In the seven decades between the Constitution and the Civil War, approximately one million enslaved people were relocated from the upper South to the lower South according to the dictates of the slaveholders' economy."[15] This figure does not account for those slaves relocated domestically in the three hundred and thirty years prior.

This practice of relocating individuals, uprooting them from the only homes and families they knew to send them along threads of trade that connected the US, was a distinctive feature of enslavement in America—arguably the element of the system in which slaves most desperately experienced their bondage. In the overwhelming majority of slave narratives, this experience is mourned viscerally. Black slaves were often able to bear the beatings, infringement upon their privacy, the work, even the rape to which both men and women were subjected—but tearing them from their families was truly agonizing. It is not a coincidence that upon their emancipation, black Americans hit the roads and back-ways of the South to find their families. Reconnecting with those who had been sold away took precedence over anything else. Black people risked traveling alone on the open road, risked not eating or sleeping for weeks on end, risked their very lives, to find one another. Remarkably, many did. Through intricate networks of kinship and community word passed from person to person when someone was looking for her children, his wife, her grandparents. Piece-by-piece, black Americans rebuilt the families and communities that the domestic trade had deliberately disbanded. By many accounts, even with the terror of mounting racial hatred, it was a most joyful time.

Ironically, the sale of the grandchild De Leon made in *The Whipping Man* is illegal, as with the fall of the South slaves throughout the country had *de facto* been emancipated. While the **Emancipation Proclamation** is often considered the moment at which slaves were freed, only the **Fourteenth Amendment** to the Constitution officially liberated the slaves *de jure*. Still, exhibiting the reluctance of the former Confederacy to cede to the force of the Union, De Leon enacted two last performances of his power and authority. First he sells his female slaves to his neighbors, the Taylors, in an illegal exchange of contraband for money. Second, he sends John, a free man, to the Whipping Man because he had tried to stop De Leon from banishing Elizabeth

[15] Johnson, p. 5.

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and Sarah. In this way, as so many slaveholders did, De Leon washed his hands of his burden. By getting rid of the evidence, so to speak, his life, money, and family would be unaccountable for profiting from the slave system.

While he was not the owner of a massive agricultural plantation, De Leon was wholly invested in the Confederacy and the right of Southern states to sovereignty. The play is set in Richmond, Virginia the capital city of the Confederate States of America, made up of the eleven states that ceded from the Union: South Carolina, North Carolina, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, Texas and Mississippi. Today, Richmond Virginia is still regarded by some with heartfelt nostalgia, and the Confederate monuments erected in 1887 to celebrate the ostensibly gallant, but fallen Confederate soldiers still stand, as does the White House of the Southern Confederacy.

Before the sixteenth president of the United States, **Abraham Lincoln**, was sworn into office, seven states had declared their independence from the Union. After the **Battle of Fort Sumter**, in which the Confederacy took control of the fort signaling the beginning of the Civil War, four more states followed. For four years between 1861 and 1865 the Confederate States of America regarded themselves as a sovereign nation. Bonded by their interest in preserving their right to hold slaves, the Confederacy elected its own president, slaveholder **Jefferson Davis**, and even printed its own money. Secession from the Union was illegal and the United States refused to recognize the authority of the newly created Confederacy. The election of a false president and the manufacture of counterfeit currency were regarded as treasonous crimes. After four years of struggle, in the spring of 1865 Union **General Ulysses S. Grant** forced Confederate General Robert E. Lee to abandon his post at Richmond. Nine days later on April 14, 1865 Lee surrendered his army at the Appomattox Court house, signaling the fall of the Confederacy and the end to American slavery. No longer secure the "sons and daughters of the South," as they regarded themselves, quickly took flight leaving their wealth and property—including their slaves—behind. They left the handsome estates and plantations to the Union soldiers, the property-less whites and the black slaves they had fought so fiercely to retain. After years of hardship and war, hunger and fear, Richmond and its outlaying plantations was severely looted. In a final gesture of conquest over the Confederate reign, many homes were set afire.

It is in this state that *The Whipping Man* begins, with the once grand home of the De Leon family, situated in the heart of the Confederate capital, disheveled and torn apart. Simon remains, waiting for the return of De Leon with his own wife and daughter. De Leon has left with President Davis and the rest of the cabinet, implying that he may in fact represent an official in the Confederate Party, many of whom fled immediately after the fall of Lee's army,

fearing retribution for sedition. His son Caleb returns—the young master of the house—to find his world shattered beyond recognition. A defected soldier from the Confederate army, he is wounded both by his cowardice and a gangrenous bullet wound to the leg.

Unlike the story Caleb spins for Simon about his surrender and the callousness with which the Federal army treated the defeated Confederate soldiers, in actuality, the Union took great pains to let the South retreat with some pride intact, hoping for a restoration of the Union to its full capacity. Federal doctors busied themselves with caring for the sick and dying on both sides, sparing the lives of those who had been enemies only days before. Both Federal and Confederate officers would, however, hold a defective soldier, particularly a Captain responsible for troops, highly accountable for his actions. Caleb's premature withdrawal was a most dishonorable and deplorable act, and would cost him dearly should anyone discover his secret.

In a rather wretched state and fearing retribution, Caleb finds immediate solace in Simon's gentle presence. He is comforted by what he hopes is a return to life the way it was. Lopez deftly illustrates the density of slavery and the challenges of emancipation. Even as Caleb reflexively barks a series of orders at Simon, he trusts Simon's advice that his leg needs amputation. As evidenced in this exchange, the relationship between elder slaves and the adult children of a slaveholder was complicated. The white children of slaveowners often regarded the elder slaves who raised them as surrogate parents, yet the relationship—mediated by the contract of racial slavery—swings quickly from a kind of childish nostalgia to acts of strict domination as white children claim their birthright and begin to assert their power. As Caleb routinely commands various tasks, Simon carefully reminds him that times are different:

> SIMON: Caleb?
>
> CALEB: What?
>
> SIMON: All these things you're telling me to do, by rights now you need to be asking me to do.[16]

It was this reflexive ability to treat black people as a servant class that the Southern plantocracy had such difficulty surrendering. Even poor whites, disenfranchised by their poverty, could exact a measure of power over black people because of their racial privilege, instilling in them a sense of self-worth to combat their degradation as a lower class. This kind of rapport is yet another incarnation of the master-slave relationship alluding to the magnitude of manumission. Emancipated slaves destroyed the master class. Without slaves to punctuate their privilege, whites were left with two ways of maintaining a sense of power over their former servant class,

[16] Lopez, Matthew. *The Whipping Man.* Reprinted by permission. (New York: The Gersh Agency, 2008) p. 11.

by using the twin pillars of race and class (and gender where appropriate) to support their elite status. These tactics often still mediate relationships between whites and people of color today.

Freedom with a Price: The Economics of Emancipation

In the spring of 1865 the stars and stripes raised over Fort Sumter, signaling the fall of the Confederacy. After four years of Civil War, the Southern stronghold of eleven states opposed to the abolition of slavery fell under the jurisdiction of the Union, freeing black people throughout the South. It was not until the post-bellum, the difficult period known to most Americans as the **Reconstruction** (a term that unlike "post-bellum" is not directly linked to slavery and so lends itself to the "reconstruction" of an American history without slavery), that the challenges of abolition became evident.

One of the major problems the post-bellum South faced was the transition from slave labor to wage labor. Orlando Patterson finds Karl Marx's conception of this evolution in the *Grudrisse* useful in explaining the seminal differences in perception and action as this transition is made:

> Commenting on the fact that…ex-slaves refused to work beyond what was necessary for their own subsistence, [Karl Marx] notes, 'They have ceased to be slaves, …not in order to become wage labourers, but, instead self-sustaining peasants working for their own consumption. As far as they are concerned, capital does not exist as capital, because autonomous wealth as such can exist only either on the basis of *direct* forced labour, slavery, or *indirect* forced labour, *wage labour*. Wealth confronts direct forced labour not as capital, but rather as *relation of domination*'.[17]

In a colonial environment in which the majority of production was focused on exportation, **subsistence** labor was tertiary. Agricultural production needed to sustain the slave labor forces was regarded as a fixed cost, or operating expense, that would be made up after the harvest and sale of plantation crops, often not directly useful to the population nurturing its growth. While slaves worked vast sugar, tobacco, coffee and cotton plantations, none of the products harvested could be used directly for human consumption. Instead, these products were known as **cash crops**, commodities to be traded on a larger market of supply and demand. The shift Marx and Patterson note in the behavior of liberated slaves is antithetical to the system of capitalist production, leaning more toward subsistence model of living in which one's labor is exerted solely for one's comfort and survival. In this new model, subsistence agriculture was the end to

[17] Patterson, 2. Patterson is quoting Karl Marx's *Grudrisse* (London: Penguin and New Left Books, 1973) pp. 325-326. Emphasis is original to text.

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production, not a means to engender a larger outcome. Excess, the paramount principle to the colonial marketplace is unnecessary and undesirable. A philosophy and practice of subsistence living amongst the labor forces was therefore a cog in the capitalist machine that could grind the entire colonial enterprise of **mercantile capitalism**, worth billions of dollars, to a halt. Without enticing laborers to invest their energies in something sellable, the economy would be one of pure subsistence, a community working for its own continuity, needing no more than what was necessary for survival, no excess and no waste.

Since black people in America owned nothing upon their liberation save their own bodies and selves—a monumental achievement in relation to where they had been—in the American South plantation owners circumvented the creation of a subsistence model amongst the labor force which would have threatened the integrity of the capitalist economy by creating a system of debt and credit known as "**sharecropping**," in which laborers could use a portion of the land to make a living in return for a share of the crop produced. As slavery did before it, the sharecropping system catered to the interests of the plantation owners. Laborers were lucky to break even and many sharecroppers actually found themselves in debt, even after fruitful harvests. The contract forced them to buy planting materials (seeds, tools, work animals) as well as food and clothing from the owner of the plantation. These purchases were made almost exclusively on credit. As part of the lease agreement to the land, plantation owners were permitted to buy a portion (sometimes over half) of the crop at a fixed rate set much lower than market price. Plantation owners were responsible for maintaining the books and they commonly falsified the records to ensure that sharecropping farmers made little to no profit. The planters would then fetch double or triple what they paid the sharecroppers when they sold the harvested crop at top market values. At the end of the season, sharecroppers were required to pay back their debt to plantation owners for the materials purchased during planting. With the small amount garnered from the remainder of their year's harvest most could not pay and went into debt. As a result, many sharecroppers were essentially working for free—a system that undoubtedly felt much like slavery.

Why go to such lengths to keep black Americans from self-sustainability? The answer lies in how deeply entrenched the slave system is in the American economy. It can be measured by the tenacity with which the Confederates fought to preserve their right to hold slaves, by the hatred heaped upon emancipated African Americans, and by the institution of sharecropping, an economic system intended to keep the labor population in check. Perhaps most telling, though, is the financial mire in which the South found itself without the presence of slaves to mediate even their most practical and minute business exchanges:

> The entire economy of the antebellum South was constructed upon the idea that the bodies of enslaved people had a measurable monetary value, whether they were ever actually sold or not. Slaves were regularly used as collateral in credit transactions; indeed, rather than giving an IOU when they borrowed money, many slaveholders simply wrote out a bill of sale for a slave who would actually be transferred only if they failed to pay their debt. The value attached to unsold slaves was much more useful to antebellum businessmen than that attached to land, for slaves were portable and the slave traders promised ready cash. In antebellum East Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, slave accounted for eighty percent of the security offered in recorded mortgages. Similarly, slaves were used as collateral by purchasers of shares in Louisiana's investment banks. … Everyday, all over the antebellum South, slaveholders' relations to one another—their promises, obligations, and settlements—were backed by the idea of a market in slaves, the idea that people had a value that could be abstracted from their bodies and cashed in when the occasion arose.[18]

This is largely the evidence left of the slave trade: the financial dockets, the account and log books, the insurance papers and bills of sale, the letters between slaveholders bemoaning the coming tides of abolition. An economic story of a dismantled institution, privatized, silenced and stored away. This is not for lack of alternative narratives.

There are hundreds of testimonies of freed slaves and fugitives who made their way north where abolitionists waited to cull their stories for vast circulation. These stories, though available to the keen researcher, were not made widely available to the American public. Walter Johnson calls this "one of the most durable paradoxes of white supremacy—the idea that those who are closest to an experience of oppression (in this case former slaves) are its least credible witnesses."[19] Even as recent examinations of American history try to incorporate these stories, Johnson cautions—as **William Wells Brown** did before him—that slave narratives are "incomplete accounts [derived from] the stories of the escapees and survivors of an institution that gave up very few of either."[20] He reminds us that the vast majority of black slaves died as they had lived—in bondage—and that those stories will never be told. Still, the stories that were preserved were circulated with a distinct purpose in mind:

> White abolitionists, in turn, forced their own version of antislavery upon those who tired to tell their stories of slavery. "Give us the facts," Frederick Douglas

[18] Johnson, p. 26.
[19] Johnson, p. 9.
[20] Johnson, p. 10.

> was told, "we will take care of the philosophy." …the narratives rarely enlarge upon the daily life, joys, and travails of enslaved communities. As stories of saved souls, they sometimes ignore the sufferings of enslaved bodies. As vehicles for supplying a moralistic bourgeois audience with the ideal slaves they demanded, the narratives often gloss over the anger, dissimulation, sexuality, and occasional brutality of real slaves' daily lives.[21]

Add to this mixture the cultural and epistemological notion of a "freed slave" and the situation becomes more complicated still. As living commodities, black slaves had underscored every portion of antebellum society. Upon emancipation, the value housed in these bodies vanished. In a matter of minutes, an enterprise worth hundreds of millions of dollars went bankrupt. The financial shock was unlike any stock market crash experienced in the US. In the eyes of slaveholders, traders, insurers and outfitters, freedom for black people represented a debt that never paid.

As objects of value who owned nothing, slaves were in no position to buy their own freedom. Forced manumission, therefore, would always appear to owners as a direct loss to their net. If, as Orlando Patterson explains, another were to buy the freedom of a slave from a master, so settling the debt there, yet another individual would be out the value of the slave whose freedom he had just purchased. The balance would remain unpaid, a mark upon African Americans which would allow bitter whites to claim that they were leeching off of the system, taking unfair advantage of American munificence, getting something for nothing. These sentiments would be recycled decade after decade and are present today in arguments against affirmative action, welfare, and programs designed to ease the burden of poverty and racism amongst the nation's most disenfranchised citizens. The massive wealth that whites accrued in generation after generation of slaveowning families, while profiting off four hundred years of slave labor, is not accountable according to this system of reckoning. Instead, white privilege is quietly dismissed and regurgitated as individual achievement as opposed to racial inheritance. Even those who did not own slaves were swept into the roiling economy that slavery generated. Whether they were related as attorneys who settled disputes between insurance companies and slave traders, or metalworkers fashioning shackles and chains out of iron, everyone was implicated in the business of American capitalism—and that business was built on slavery.

[21] Johnson, p. 10.

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Life in the De Leon House: Urban versus Plantation Slavery

As tremendous as the economic blow of emancipation was to **antebellum** society, the cultural and social remnants of slavery would be the most difficult to overcome. The delicacy with which people now had to relate meant that every word had to be chosen wisely, tone and demeanor would have to be checked. Fiercely protective of their hard-won rights, black Americans began to stand up from under the shadow of slavery, and day by day rebuild the pride of humanity that had been so thoroughly stripped from them.

As a newly freed man, Simon cannot abide by Caleb's treatment without reminding him that the dynamics of power between them have shifted. This newfound license toward self-determination allowed Simon to help the Confederate soldiers in hospital, return to the De Leon estate as the mistress asked and save their son from death's door. In this momentous exchange, Simon outlines his actions for the first time in his life as *choices*. Choices he can make or not, depending for once upon his own will, his own heart. Caleb retorts with "are you asking me to chop off my leg or are you telling me?" Simon replies that he is telling him. "Then I'm telling you," Caleb replies, "to go get the goddamned whiskey. If you're giving orders, I'm giving orders. That sound fair to you?" Simon agrees, "fair enough for now."[22] Given the circumstances, Simon is willing to acquiesce, allowing Caleb a semblance of control over his manic fear. But Simon is precise. "For now," defines this exchange as temporary, something Simon is choosing to tolerate, a demeanor between them that must end.

The notion of choice is a powerful one, particularly in an environment in which people were stripped of any sense of choice at all. In American antebellum society choice—the right to it—was thorny. When Caleb defends his involvement with the Confederate army after Simon confronts him, he endorses his right—and the right of other whites—to choose to keep black people enslaved. The weight of this irony seems ludicrous to Simon:

> SIMON: You fought to keep us slaved?
> CALEB: I…
> SIMON: Did you?
> CALEB: I fought for the right to make that choice.
> SIMON: Seems to me that choice wasn't yours to make.[23]

This is one of the more paradoxical elements of the American slave system, and illuminates the effect it had on whites. Rather than deal with the nature of the institution of slavery as oppression, they chose to regard forced abolition as oppressive. Fighting to keep human beings in bondage is not honorable; fighting for the choice to live one's life as one sees fit is. Yet and

[22] Ibid.
[23] Lopez, p. 35.

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still, it was the perception of black people as objects and the paternalism of slavery that justified denying this same choice to slaves. As long as one did not recognize the humanity in a slave, one could decry his or her own rights without impediment, without recognizing culpability for the theft of another's rights. This irreconcilable claim is part of what haunts white people today when dealing with the history of slavery. Until one assumes accountability for one's part in the process, including the inheritance of certain privileges, the psychic battle ignited by this paradox will never end.

The challenges of realizing emancipation also had an effect on freedmen and women. Triumphant as the advent of freedom was, it was uncharted territory. When John returns to the De Leon house, he tells Caleb that he has been in Richmond. Caleb asks of the news from the capital. "There is no news," John replies matter-of-factly. "War's over. You lost. We won."[24] The "we" in this statement demonstrates the complexity of the experience of freedom for former slaves. While the fall of the Confederacy does hail the release of black Americans throughout the South, for many the only life they had known was in and amongst those who held them captive. Born into the house in which he served, John's only conception of family resides in the De Leon household, where two families, black and white, servant and master, negotiated one another in a delicate balance of dominance and subordination. Now that this struggle has been lifted, the history of their interactions is recast and John is unsure how to relate to Caleb, Simon, and even himself.

There are particular implications that make life in this kind of a household unique versus a large-scale plantation household. The lifestyle of slaves, the expectations they faced, and the relationships they experienced with the ruling family, are different in a smaller domicile than they would be on a plantation housing up to a thousand slave men and women. When John expresses grief over his former captivity, Simon reminds John that he could have been sold southward to the plantations, that he is lucky he was given a place to stay, a family to raise him, a faith to guide him and a most precious gift—the ability to read. Yet John is a deeply disturbed and wounded young man, with the cancer of pain and bitterness eating away at his heart. His experience was unique in these ways, many slave children—especially those born from interracial unions, faced sale upon their coming of age rather than being incorporated into the paternalism of a particular family.

At anywhere from five to nine years old, children born to a plantation were often put to work in the big house as "pet servants," where they not only served to punctuate the wealth and power of the white family but were trained in various skills that would make them more valuable on the slave market. A young girl or boy who had learned the proper codes of his or

[24] Lopez, p. 14.

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her gender, perfected the art of service and attendance to an upper class master or mistress, or could demonstrate skill as a cook or craftsperson, was worth a notable price. These children, born to slaves already bought and paid for, embodied a potentially huge return on a slaveowner's investment. With calculating precision, owners tallied births and decided whether it would be more lucrative to keep or sell a slave. House slaves were reserved for the well to do and only the very wealthy could afford to house a full team of attendants, cooks and servants. For those children given the "luxury" of working in the big house, each learned skill became yet another threat to his or her security. Chances were that learning how to serve properly meant a child was destined for the slave market.

With eloquence and detail, Walter Johnson describes the environment of what became the largest slave market in North America, located just blocks from the levee in New Orleans at the intersection of Charles Street and the Esplanade. New Orleans, a bustling port city that rivaled New York, was lively and industrious in the nineteenth century, with ships and barges docking to unload and reload goods such as guns, cotton, tobacco, sugar, wine cattle, hogs, corn and whiskey.[25] Other markets sprang up in the region, in which competing firms fought for the attention of tourists, onlookers and buyers. The long passage excerpted below helps recreate the strange and spectacular quality of the American capitalist slave system, in which human beings were treated as commodities and the practice of buying and selling black people was commonplace, an important and lucrative facet of our American economy:

> Between September and May—the months that bounded the trading season—the streets in front of the [slave] pens were lined with slaves dressed in blue suits and calico dresses. Sometimes the slaves paced back and forth, sometimes they stood atop a small footstand, visible over a crush of fascinated onlookers. As many as a hundred slaves might occupy a single block, overseen by a few slave traders whose business was advertised by the painted signs hanging overhead: "T. Hart, Slaves," "Charles Lamarque and Co., Negroes." …
>
> The walls surrounding the pens were so high—fifteen or twenty feet—that one New Orleans slave dealer thought they could keep out the wind. Inside those walls the air must have been thick with overcrowding, smoke and shit and lye, the smells of fifty or a hundred people forced to live in a space the size of a home lot. And the sounds that came over the walls from the street outside must have been muted and mixed—horses' hooves striking the stone-paved street, cart wheels and streetcars, fragments of conversation, laughter, shouting. Along the inside walls were privies, kitchens, dressing rooms and jails. The jails were

[25] Johnson, p. 1.

> sometimes as many as three stories high and built of brick. They looked like the slave quarters that can be seen today in the yards of many New Orleans houses: steep-backed, one room deep, and fronted with railed galleries. In the nineteenth-century slave pens, however, those galleries were lined with barred windows and doors that locked from the outside. Behind the doors were simple rooms with bare pine floors and plain plastered walls; measuring ten or twelve feet across, they were intended for multiple occupancy. On the ground floor of one of the jails or across the yard were offices and a showroom. The traders' offices were probably the type of spaces where nobody sat down—places for drinking, pacing, signing, and counting. The real business took place in the showrooms, which were large enough for a hundred slaves to be arrayed around their walls, questioned and examined. These rooms had finished floors and painted walls, a fireplace, a few chairs and doors all around—a door from the offices where the traders did their counting and signing, a door from the street where the buyers gathered before the pens opened, and a door from the yard where the slaves waited to be sold.[26]

It was the wealth of the De Leon family, their need to keep airs as a prominent Confederate family, and by sheer luck, that John was afforded a stable place within the De Leon home. De Leon himself may also have wanted to be near to his son, John, even though the crime of his miscegenation could threaten his standing within the Confederate party. Common as it was for white slaveholders to impregnate their slaves, racial mixing was looked upon as degradation of the white race, its offenders having succumbed to a base and lascivious weakness. Whatever the motive behind John's return to the De Leon home at six years of age, his experience in an urban estate was very different from those slaves who worked the cotton, tobacco and sugar plantations elsewhere in the US.

In his brilliant analysis of the nature of slavery, Orlando Patterson illuminates the differences between large-scale plantation slavery and household slavery, more akin to what Lopez depicts in *The Whipping Man*. "Large farms" he explains, usually "meant a higher level of whippings, less contact with owners, fewer chances therefore to manipulate the political psychology of the relation, and more work."[27] The reputation of brutality in large-scale plantation slavery made it easy for urban slaveholders to believe that they were offering a more merciful brand of bondage by keeping their slaves from the fields, as Caleb believes.

[26] Johnson, pp. 2-3.
[27] Patterson, p. 206.

CALEB: I saw how field hands lived. And I saw how you lived. And I know there was a world of difference between the two. How did you spend the last four years, John? Did you fight in this war? Did you break your back out in a field? I don't need a lesson from you about what this was. I saw it. I know what war is. I lived it. What did you see? What did you live? I was starving to death at Petersburg while you were here reading novels.[28]

Even as Caleb argues his point, he cannot bring himself to call the enterprise by its name, to recognize the laborers as slaves, a denial that John forces both Caleb and Simon to revisit later as he questions their faith.

From a slave's perspective, while more contact with slaveowners in a smaller domain sometimes meant that they could exact a kind of personal relationship with owners built on nostalgia and sympathy,

> proximity to the master also carried enormous risks and disadvantages. The slave was under the constant supervision of the master and therefore subjected to greater and more capricious punishment and humiliation than those housed elsewhere. This was particularly true of the female slave, who ran the additional risk of the jealousy and vengeance of the "free" women of the household, especially the master's senior wife. The famous adage should have run: hell has no fury like a free wife scorned in favor of a slave.[29]

As the lower South (Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana) developed into large-scale plantation agriculture, the need for labor increased exponentially. It became quite lucrative to sell house and small farm slaves for the vast fields of the South. Johnson explains that three historic events contributed to the massive domestic relocation of American slaves from the North and East to the emerging lower South.

> The invention of the **cotton gin** in 1793, the purchase of Louisiana in 1803, and the subjugation of southern Indians, finalized along the **Trail of Tears** in 1838, opened new regions of the South to cultivation and slavery. Slaveholders called it a "kingdom" for cotton, and they populated the new states of the emerging Southwest…with slaves brought from the East: 155,000 in the 1820s; 288,000 in the 1830s; 189,00 in the 1840s; 250,000 in the 1850s. As many as two thirds of these one million or so people were carried south by slave traders, whose

[28] Lopez, p. 34.
[29] Patterson, p. 175.

> daily business resolved the diverging fortunes of the declining upper South and the expanding lower South into mutual benefit.[30]

The reputation of the lower South was one of brutal, unyielding work in the sugar and cotton plantations made the threat of being sold into this region horrifying for slaves living in the upper South, where smaller farms were more common. Still, as Patterson points out, small farms such as these could often be just as treacherous:

> Small farms, while physically less demanding, offering more opportunities to acquire skills, and allowing far more contact with (and manipulation of) the owner, had their own special horrors. More personal contact meant greater exposure to sexual exploitation for slave women, including the not infrequent experience of gang rape by adolescent kinsmen of the owner. The probabilities of family breakup as the result of such sexual exploitation, and of being sold away, were also greater on such farms.[31]

How much money could be garnered for selling a slave during this economic boom? In the 1840s Johnson notes that the slave system was so entrenched with the economy of cotton production that

> the price of slaves could be determined by multiplying the price of cotton by ten thousand (seven cents per pound for cotton yielding seven hundred dollars per slave). …As those people passed through the trade, representing something close to half a billion dollars in property, they spread wealth wherever they went….The most recent estimate of the size of [the ancillary slave trade economy in which slaves were insured, clothed, fed, and cared for during their transport] is 13.5 percent of the price per person—tens of millions of dollars over the course of the antebellum period.[32]

The profits garnered from this system made investment in the slave trade lucrative business and slave children were prized possessions for slaveholders. The American economy which stressed the "natural" reproduction of the slave labor force—often following the breeding dictates of owners—meant that childhood was rather charmed period in relation to puberty and adult life for slaves. Slaveowners did not wish to risk their investment and future income so small children were usually excused from all but simple daily chores.

As Walter Johnson points out, this charmed childhood was short-lived and usually brutally interrupted, as it was for John in *The Whipping Man.* One former slave, Henry Clay

[30] Johnson, pp. 5-6. Emphasis mine.
[31] Patterson, p. 206.
[32] Johnson, p. 6.

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Bruce, remembers this transition keenly. Johnson notes that Bruce "nostalgically [remembers] his youth as an easy time when 'slave children had nothing to do but eat, play, and grow, and physically speaking attain a good size and height'."[33] Another former slave remembers the mistress of the house calling the children "up to the big house every morning [to] give us a dose of garlic and rue to keep us 'wholesome,' as she said and make us 'grow likely for the market'."[34] She also forced her young slaves to run laps, lashing them with a whip to make them "nimbler," and thus more desirable.[35]

As John tragically describes, the transition from a relatively "human" childhood to adolescent slave status was painful. Walter Johnson uncovered countless stories in the slave narratives of childhood being brutally interrupted by a cruel coming of age.

> Henry was adjudged 'right awkward' and beaten by his mistress, who thought his arms too long and hands too aimless for work in her dining room. Ten-year-old Moses Grandy was flogged 'naked with a severe whip' because he 'could not learn his [master's] way of hilling corn.' Thirteen-year-old Celestine was beaten until her back was marked and her clothes stained with blood because she could not find her way around the kitchen. Twelve-year-old Monday was whipped by his mistress because his lupus made his nose run on the dinner napkins.[36]

Childhood relationships between slave children and the children of the master were also destroyed, like the friendship between John and Caleb. Playmates for awhile, the time would eventually come when, as De Leon did, owners would want their children "to learn the true relationship between a master and his slave."[37] Children, innocent to the ways of the world, were often irreparably psychically damaged from this drastic shift in exchange between them. John's bitterness and hurt at the destruction of his friendship is heartrendingly summed up in the story of his first visit to the Whipping Man:

> JOHN: What happened first, Caleb? You remember?
>
> CALEB: Please, John…
>
> JOHN: The Whipping Man had me on my knees, didn't he? He took off my shirt. He attached my hands to two leather straps. And I was whipped.

[33] Johnson, p. 20.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Lopez, p. 41.

[On "whipped," JOHN stomps the floor with his foot then claps his hands afterwards. The sound he makes is a rhythmic "boom-smack."]

And whipped.

(*Boom-smack!*).

And whipped.

(*Boom-smack!*).

And whipped.

(*Boom-smack*).

Wasn't I, Caleb.

CALEB: Yes.

JOHN: Then in the middle of the whipping, I heard Caleb's voice. "Stop!" he yelled! "Stop!" I thought to myself, "Caleb is saving me. Caleb is rescuing me. Caleb cares about me." And then I heard Caleb say, "I want to do it myself." The Whipping Man handed Caleb the bullwhip. And Caleb whipped me. Didn't you, Caleb? You whipped me.

(*Boom-smack!*).

And whipped me.

(*Boom-smack!)*

And whipped me.

(*Boom-smack!)*

(*Boom-smack!)*

(*Boom-smack!)*

And that's when we stopped being as close as you remember, Simon.[38] While bringing to light the pain of realizing the master-slave relationship, this scene also viscerally illuminates the price exacted upon bodies in an economy of flesh. Whether subjected to beatings, mutilations or rape, slaves had no right to control access to their bodies—violently opened and put on display by the master class to punctuate their subordination. Robert E. Lee, a member of the Virginia aristocracy, reportedly had brine poured in the wounds of some of the 196 slaves he inherited upon his father's death, after subjecting them to severe whippings.[39] This sadistic

[38] Lopez, p. 41.

[39] See wikipedia.com: Wesley Norris himself discussed the incident after the war, in an 1866 interview printed in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard.* Norris stated that after they had been captured, and forced to return to Arlington, Lee told them that "he would teach us a lesson we would not soon forget." According to Norris, Lee then had the three of them tied to posts and whipped by the county constable, with fifty lashes for the men and twenty for Mary Norris (he made no claim that Lee had personally

behavior served to keep slaves living in fear for their lives. The true art of this kind of torture was exacted by bringing a slave as close to death as possible, without wounding him or her beyond repair. Thus the punishment, humiliation and pain would live on not just in the scars in their flesh, but in memory as well. It was often in the punishment, the beatings, and the rapes in which slaves most deeply felt their bondage. Runaway slaves were frequently rewarded with amputation of a limb upon their retrieval. Some masters took an ear, an arm or a foot—anything to remind the unruly that their disobedience would cost them. Reduced to pure flesh, having to send their minds and hearts elsewhere to survive the brutality to which they were subjected, slaves were split open with calculating cruelty.

It is ironic, then, that after the surrender of the Confederate forces, Caleb is subjected to an amputation at the hands of the former slave who raised him. Symbolically charged, this scene in which a slave takes the leg out from under his master, a Confederate captain no less, resituates the economy of flesh. In this opening passage, Caleb is likened to the dead horse he rode home, a work animal, a beast of burden. Simon strips both of their flesh stoically, without the aid of the whiskey that John and Caleb need to endure the gruesome situation. Simon's focus and precision is as calculating as it is calm, but rather than destroy lives with this sordid surgery, he saves them. On a larger scale, this grotesque scene represents the fall of the Confederate South (no longer able to stand on the pillar of slavery) and the purging of its sickness through the liberation of the slaves.

Slavery, Self and Religious Practice in the New World

Much has been made of the role of Christianity in preserving the faith and lives of black slaves in bondage. Less documented is the practice of Judaism amongst black slaves, though as Matthew Lopez elucidates, the correlations between Jewish religious scripture and the African American experience are strong.

The first Jewish congregation in Richmond, Virginia was **Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalom**. It was the sixth Jewish congregation organized in the United States. As early as 1822, members of the congregation erected the first synagogue built in the state of Virginia.[40] As Lopez elucidates by referencing the other Jewish families surrounding the De Leon house, Jewish people have long roots in Richmond. Being the capital city of the Confederacy, most of these families either endorsed, practiced or tolerated slavery. As the dominant tides of the country tolerated slavery, most whites benefited from the practice and abolitionists, Jewish or otherwise,

whipped Mary Norris). Norris claimed that Lee then had the overseer rub their lacerated backs with brine.

[40] See wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richmond,_Virginia.

were not regarded fondly. In fact, Jews who advocated the emancipation of black slaves may have borne the brunt of a more ferocious ostracization than their Christian counterparts. As Eli Faber illustrates, there were Jewish people on both sides of the issue; "Rabbi Morris Raphall of New York City preached in defense of slavery, counterbalanced by [abolitionist] Rabbi David Einhorn, an opponent of slavery in Baltimore who was forced to leave the city because of his views."[41]

It was not uncommon for slaves to follow the religious affiliations of their masters, and while Jews in colonial America were a minority, they were present and maintained close communities. Even as slaves preserved cultural elements from their African roots and incorporated these into the religious practices of their masters, many slaves found solace in what was preached, if not what was practiced. Faith was instrumental in helping many black slaves develop a sense self-awareness. It also gave them room for the covert activity that supports a rich tradition of African American activism and protest that became integral to the American **Civil Rights Movement** in the 1960s. Most importantly, it gave them the hope they needed to make it through another day of bondage.

Largely what appealed black slaves and drew them to practice were the stories of overcoming strife, a heaven or resting place in the afterlife—as life on earth was so unstable. The perk of a day of reprieve and the ability to congregate across plantations or homes should also not be overlooked.

While in some ways it was beneficial to the master class that black people practiced their religions—they could assure a better life in the hereafter, or encourage obedience and hard work by promising heavenly rewards—indoctrinating slaves into Christianity and Judaism presented serious ideological problems. In both realms it was impossible to perpetually enslave other believers, as chattel slavery in the US did. Rather than account for this hypocrisy, Christians for example ignored the dictates of their faith and situated black slaves outside of the purview of humanity to solve the quandary. Thus Africans and their American born children were relegated to an ambiguous and oxymoronic existence; they were not human, they were not exactly beasts, they were somewhere in between. Whatever they were, because of their race they were justly enslaved.[42] Christians even employed biblical references to the story of Noah and his son Ham, who uncovered his father's nakedness and was thus cursed with a mark of impurity. This marking was then interpreted, in what Rabbi Joseph Edelheit rightly identifies as an eisegetical reading of the Bible to reinforce racist ideas with scriptural "proof" as to the cursed

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[41] Faber, p. 6.

[42] For further reading see Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern 1492-1800.* (New York: Verso, 1997). The author provides a well tracked, trans-contiental analysis of the historical record as the colonies were established in the New World.

lot of black Africans.[43] This fundamental misreading of the scripture was then used to account for the mass enslavement of Africans in the New World. As Lopez situates it, the irreconcilable dissonance between the scripture and John's lived is the heart of the issue. The questions John raises are unanswerable, and even as Simon reminds him that Jews are encouraged to ask questions, "talk with God," and "wrestle with him," the problem John discovers is contradictory, shaking his faith and his sense of self to the very core.[44] Yet Edelheit, a reform rabbi aware that his voice—largely influenced by the roiling American 1960s Civil Rights Movement—cannot represent the myriad experience of Judaism, explains that though they may intend to practice Judaism, neither John nor Simon read the scripture as Jews; "no Jew would justify slavery by saying you can find it in the Bible."[45] Instead they read the Bible in the same way that their pseudo-Christian, puritanical forbearers did, superficially, exacting a kind of predetermination over the words, to justify something they already believe. In this case it is that they have a right to freedom. John in particular uses his ability to read to go looking for it, a weapon he wields against the tyranny of slavery experienced in his own life. Still Rabbi Edelheit finds the implications of this reading that go back to the birth of the nation. He notes that the earliest settlers understood that even as the Exodus was employed as a motif that motivated and supported the founding of a sovereign nation, it also includes permission to hold other humans in bondage.[46] This paradox is larger than John merely pitting bits of text against one another.

This simple yet powerful paradox, that an individual could be indoctrinated into a particular faith and held captive as a slave, harkens back to the origins of the slave trade and the role of European religions in the making of the New World. Early explorers and missionaries deemed it their divine mission to civilize the so-called heathen peoples of the world. This was known as **manifest destiny**.[47] Upon entering the New World, having encountered literally millions of indigenous people who, despite elaborate evidence of their spirituality, the early explorers deemed godless, the colonists set about a major effort to convert and thereby "save" the souls of the "heathen tribes." Even as colonists attempted to enslave the native peoples of the Caribbean, Mexico and South America, many Europeans wanted to Christianize the indigenous peoples.

Establishing a solid slave labor force amongst the native peoples of the Americas proved quite difficult for two reasons: one, native people were dying rapidly and *en masse*, having been

[43] Rabbi Joseph Edelheit. Personal interview. July 26, 2008. Minneapolis, MN.
[44] Lopez, p. 37.
[45] Edelheit, ibid.
[46] Edelheit, ibid.
[47] For a complex and detailed Freudian analysis on the idea of manifest destiny as it pertains to the New World, Anne see McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest.* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). See especially the first chapter.

infected with the plagues of European disease brought to the New World. Various illnesses to which sailors had established relative immunity wreaked havoc on the fragile ecosystem of the New World. Colonists regarded these disastrous plagues a testament to their rightful ownership of the vast land in the New World. This is a powerful example of how religious ideology of the time merged with the imperial project in the New World: it was interpreted as a spiritual intervention, the manifestation of a divinely ordained right to the land and its riches. The other major complication the Europeans faced was that native people were well acquainted with the land and had the upper hand on the Europeans, both in terms of knowledge as to the terrain and navigational abilities in US coastal and Caribbean waters. In short, the few natives who survived the plagues simply would not stay put, much to the dismay of the colonials. Given the enormity of the project of developing the New World, a large-scale, dependable workforce was needed—and quickly.

It was at this juncture that Europe began an unparalleled effort to import what would eventually amount to an estimated nine to fifteen million Africans who would deforest, develop and work the lucrative plantations. European reasoning declared Africans a heartier bunch than the people indigenous to the area. Indeed, imported African populations withstood both European and tropical diseases comparatively well.

One of the most hotly contested issues in European philosophical and legal circles during this period revolved around the question of the African's soul. While early missionaries regarded the native people of the Americas as naïve children in need of protection and guidance, a trope of brutal bestiality was projected onto black African people. According to colloquial opinion, indigenous Americans were simple, trusting, in need of protection; they were salvageable. Upon realizing their value as a free labor force, however, indigenous Africans were described as a wholly brutish race, whose inherent tendencies toward disobedience, viciousness and even cannibalism, necessitated the order of slavery in order to save them from themselves. Eventually, however, the colonists realized the value in suspending their racism enough to allow Africans and their progeny to practice Christianity. The belief in a life hereafter and salvation upon death was a great motivating force for keeping people bereft of human rights alive and obedient. Religion also provided colonists with a forum for the orientation of new slaves, a primary stop along the trajectory of seasoning.[48] Still, government officials and land proprietors

[48] See Sue Peabody's "A Dangerous Zeal": Catholic Missions to Slaves in the French Antilles, 1635-1800." *French Historical Studies* 25:1 (2002) 53-90. The goals of the seasoning process were twofold: the first was to acclimate new slaves to their surroundings including basic language acquisition, lay of the land and laws to abide; the second goal was to break any rebellious spirit that would encourage newcomers to incite trouble amongst the senior populations. Seasoning was a brutal, confusing and critical feature of the slave system.

with a vested interest in the rich economy of the plantations were wary of the church and fought the indoctrination of black people into their faith. They did not want to surrender such a wildly lucrative project by recognizing their slaves as human beings with souls. Religion eventually established its custodial role as a trusted organization with the potential to assuage fear, enforce law, and keep track of developing allegiances between slaves. Once slaveowners recognized the value in religiosity, the debate as to the souls of slaves was swept under the rug as conversion proved its worth in keeping slave populations complacent and content.

Of course converted slaves in the New World were already imbued with their own ideologies about life, spirituality and the order of the world. As time went on and the "civilizing mission" gained momentum, these original African spiritual systems from various regions across the continent would blend covertly with proselytizing traditions, forming new comprehensions of faith and spirituality. In Haiti and Cuba, for example, African slaves began to underwrite the teachings of the Catholic priests and missionaries with their own interpretations of the word, of the saints and the stories as told by the scriptures. Imbued with centuries old **epistemological** knowledge, they began to make their own meaning out of what they were being taught.[49] Thus the religious houses of the master class, albeit entirely by accident, began to articulate, perambulate and sustain an underground, subversive culture that allowed for a sense of cultural cohesion, creativity, and autonomy that would threaten the very foundation of the colonial presence in the New World.[50]

In the religious houses of the master class, black slaves came together to get news of loved ones on other plantations and from the Old World, both from Europe and Africa. They shared information about masters and slaveholding families, of how various plantations were run, who the sentries were and what habits they maintained. They got and spread word about the major ideological crises and shifts within Europe that would soon usher in the **French Revolution**.[51] They shared stories of uprisings, of protest, of revolution. Since the middle of the 16th century, religion was established as a space for refuge, community, spiritual sustenance, creativity, and strength for black people in the New World.

Indeed, it is the scripture itself that leads John to difficult and unanswerable questions about freedom and enslavement. His inability to reconcile the ideals of his faith with his own

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[49] Still one of the most valuable analyses of Creole or New World systems of spirituality and religiosity is Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art & Philosophy.* (New York: Vintage, 1984).
[50] Carolyn Fick makes excellent use of the Creole systems of meaning-making that were established in the New World and nicely relates these frameworks to a growing revolutionary spirit. See her book *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990.
[51] For a more detailed account of the covert meetings at least pertaining to the francophone Caribbean, more specifically the colony of Saint Domingue, see Carolyn Fick's *The Making of Haiti*, ibid.

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lived experience instigates a fracture so powerful John ultimately abandons his faith, and to a degree, his identity thus far. Thus the fall of the Confederate South represents more than an end to an era, but a moment of rebirth for so many black slaves born into bondage whose lives and sense of self was largely mediated in relation and often in varying degrees of opposition to slavery.

Black Jews: An Alternate Road to Freedom

An interesting element that *The Whipping Man* brings to the fore is how the experience of blackness and Jewishness complicate one another. John endures an irreconcilable internal struggle. What is fascinating is that his body literally becomes the site of conflict. His skin, hair and features betray African ancestry. His blood bequeaths both his birthright and his assignment to bondage. It is the occasion of the Seder in which this conflict is visually represented for the stage. In religious practice John's body and the American context of blackness and bondage inserts itself in a peculiar way into the Jewish ritual.

The Seder is a telling of the story of redemption, and as Rabbi Joseph Edelheit elucidates, it represents a resolution of the need to remember history and keep the moment of redemption sacred. The paradoxical question he raises is "how do you keep [the memory of the redemption] in the community, without reenacting it, because to reenact it is actually to make it ordinary?"[52] The answer lies in the telling of a story, a recitation of the Haggadah of Pesach, the story of Passover. The ritual begins with the youngest at the table asking a seminal question of the elders, *why is this night different from all other nights*? The question serves as an invocation. As the story of the liberation of the Jews from slavery in Egypt is told, the directive to tell the children about the redemption is fulfilled without falsifying the momentous occasion by performing it. Yet for an ethnically and spiritually oppressed people, the Seder presents a dubious situation; as with any important historical event Rabbi Edelheit wonders, "what happens when there is no one left who can say *I*?" How do you keep alive a memory when all who were there have passed on? This is a critical question not just for contemporary people of the Jewish faith, whose history includes enslavement, genocide and cultural and spiritual persecution, but also for contemporary black people in the New World whose identity is marked by slavery either through cultural memory or via its remnants of racism that deny access to and full participation in Western society. There are none left amongst us who can say *I* in relation to slavery. Faced with the directive to put the past away and "get over it already," many black Americans have succumb to a sense of shame in relation to enslavement, as if the vile practice

[52] Edelheit, ibid.

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says something about them instead of its propagators. Thus history and cultural memory are complicated facets of the human condition, how we embody the experiences of our ancestors, both the gifts and the burdens we inherit through our blood, changes with shifting cultural contexts and new meanings applied over time. How we understand and "remember" slavery today is very different from those who lived the experience. In this way, the Jewish Seder that Caleb, Simon and John perform is specific to an American experience of bondage and liberation. On the cusp of the American emancipation, the story of the Exodus takes on a symbolic weight that is both unique to and different from the story of the liberation of the Jews from Egypt.

Rabbi Edelheit also underscores the prominence of the symbols in this truncated Seder as particular to the American experience. As Simon hopes to cope with stolen eggs, a shank bone from Caleb's expired horse, collard greens in the stead of bitter herbs, whiskey in place of wine and soldier's hardtack as a substitute for matzo, gathering these symbols together takes up a special importance. The replacements are symbolic of having to make do, and it seems that the figurative weight of gathering the items is more important than the ritual itself. Like the culturally relevant foodstuffs of traditional African American fare, the detritus from the master's table such as chicken and pig feet, ribs, ox tail and chitterlings, these foods have cultural relevance that includes the symbolic weight of their use as a means of survival.

As was often the case, the slaves of the De Leon household had their own rituals and practices unbeknownst to the slaveowning family. Like the slaves in Haiti and Cuba who restructured Christianity to more adequately incorporate their own experiences and account for the hypocrisy of the ruling class, John, Simon and his family held a Seder of their own in the kitchen while the De Leon's held theirs. In part to resituate the ritual to reflect their experiences and in part because they likely had to serve the De Leon family during their Passover meal, the Seder that the slaves held was shorter than that of their masters. Unlike Caleb's family, or John who has the ability to read, Simon is illiterate and tells the spirit of the story detailed in the Haggadah given to him by Caleb's grandfather from memory. Even in his deeply conflicted state, the power of the words and the magnitude of Simon's ability to remember prompts John to participate in the Seder. John and Caleb fill in the words that Simon forgets and together they resituate the story of the redemption to commemorate the first Seder in America in which the slaves are unequivocally free.

Another important difference in this impromptu Seder is that Simon, the eldest amongst them, asks questions of Caleb and John. On one level this could be read as an attempt to keep the brothers from fighting over the special role of asking the questions. Read through an African American lens, Simon's questions give him a sense of security when he hears that the

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youngsters have answers for him—he is comforted by the fact that they will remember, that his life will not be lived in vain. As the adage goes, history forgotten is history repeated.

The Seder is interrupted, however, as the relevance of the words of generations of Jews being enslaved falls heavy upon Caleb's conscious. As he recounts the divine act of redemption that lifted the Jews from Egypt, thus sparing their children and their children's children the fate of bondage, Caleb feels compelled to tell Simon that his wife and daughter have been sold to the Taylors. Religion is thus positioned as alternately redemptive and enlightening and hypocritical and exclusionary. As John has lost his faith because of the scripture, Caleb finds its correlations to the current situation meaningful and allows himself to be changed by the words.

Rabbi Edelheit points out an important correlation between John's killing of the Whipping Man and the story of Moses who killed an Egyptian beating an Israelite. He notes that after Moses killed the whipping man, he walked amongst his peers who questioned his motives and asked if he would replace the whipping man and beat them.[53] Instead Moses led his people to freedom, and one wonders if John is not given to the same fate. His cowardice in the face of retribution within the American context makes him impotent, but he is not the only one. Caleb too has correlative elements to the Bible. Rabbi Edelheit explains that in Numbers Thirteen and Fourteen Caleb was one of two of the twelve scouts that Moses sent out into the Promised Land to bring news who argued that in spite of the intimidating presence of the walled cities, the people should press on. Yet this American reincarnation, Caleb is also rendered impotent by fear of retribution for desertion. Burdened by the magnitude of the history to which they are heir and the implications of their actions, at the end of the play the two men, black and white, brothers, are left alone still calling for the aide of their elder. Simon tells them they must help one another, that they need each other. It is a frustrating realization for both.

Conclusion

Through his exploration of the correlations between Jewish enslavement in Egypt as documented by the Old Testament, and African American enslavement in the New World, Matthew Lopez revisits one of the most important sites of global history with questions of agency, legacy and memory that further agitate and provide insight to what have become simple binaries between the black and white American experience.

While black and Jewish Americans share different and specific histories, our collective memory and the stories we use to retell those histories illuminate connections between us that are deep and unique. To this day, the Exodus remains a powerful influence on the creation of

[53] Edelheit, ibid. Edelheit also points out that John is the most anti-Semitic of the gospels.

African American spirituals, and black American renditions of "Go Down Moses (Let My People Go)" by the likes of Paul Robeson deeply stir the soul. There is something intangible and fundamentally human about our ability to relate through stories. This play offers American audiences the opportunity to do just that.

The damage done to the American psyche because of the "peculiar institution" of slavery is vast. The legacy of racism we have inherited, the anger, fear and guilt surrounding our mutual history, seems at times insurmountable. However, as Simon, John and Caleb find unique moments of recognition, concern for human welfare, and frustrating interdependence, so can we as modern Americans plumb the depths of our shared history to learn new and better ways of relating to one another with respect, compassion and courage.

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SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW: THE PLAYWRIGHT
by Stephanie Lein Walseth, August Wilson Fellow
January 23, 2009 via telephone

Lein Walseth: I am starting from scratch with this piece, to be honest. I have read it and it's very lovely. I've read the study guide and some of the accompanying materials, and I'm curious to know how you and this play came to be a part of Penumbra's 2008-2009 season?

Lopez: The play had its world premiere at Luna Stage in Montclair, New Jersey in the spring of 2006 and Frankie Faison played Simon, the nominal lead in the play. Frankie had worked with Lou [Bellamy] on a production of *Two Trains Running* at the Signature Theatre in New York after he had done *The Whipping Man* at Luna, and he gave Lou a copy of the script and said, "There's this play, I really like it and I think you might like it too. Take a look at it." Lou did, and then I got a phone call from him, which is the best kind of phone call to get as a playwright, just out of the blue, "I like your play and I want to do it." They're rare. (Laughter) So, he called me up and it was a very simple conversation, it was like, "Hi, I read your play, I like it, we're going to do it at our theatre. Is that cool?" And I was like, "Sure!" And that's how it came to be at Penumbra. It was one of those great star-aligning moments. It got pushed back, I think, because Lou's directing calendar and teaching schedule was so full, so I'm happy that we're finally getting to do it, because it's been in the works for a while.

Lein Walseth: So, the play had its world premiere in 2006. Can you tell me a little more about its evolution and process?

Lopez: Yeah. It started as a very brief one-act play, around maybe 20 minutes in length. It was part of a larger piece, a triptych of one-acts dealing with race and identity, and it was actually the last piece that I wrote of the three. I think if you went back and looked at it in comparison to the other two, it was the least fully formed. It was, I hate to call it an afterthought, but it was the thing I wrote in order to have a triptych. I didn't really know these people very well, these characters, I just knew the given situation, which is, of course, the end of the Civil War coinciding with Passover that year. It was a wonderful historical coincidence.

I was starting on my writing career at the time, and I had sent it to a couple of places that had an open submissions policy. Usually theaters have a very strict firewall to keep writers away and only agents can get in. But Luna Stage has an open submission policy, and I sent some of my writing to them and they were interested in reading more of my stuff. So, that's when I sent them this play in its short form. Of all of the things that they read of mine, that one play, that at the time I had felt was very unfinished, they latched on to and suggested that I expand it to a full-length play. They suggested that perhaps the reason that it felt unfinished is because it was, and they offered their support. So, I spent quite a bit of time over maybe a year and a half, two years figuring out what the play was, what it wanted to be, and I had their support throughout the entire process. It was interesting writing a play that came from a smaller play. It didn't start like other plays with this germ of an idea and then you write a full-length play. It started as a smaller play. So, the challenge was keeping the intentions of the smaller play, keeping the intimacy of the smaller play, but all the while creating a full night of theater, so that's how it came about.

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Lein Walseth: Wonderful. So, tell me about the impetus or catalyst for this specific subject matter. It seems that stories of Jewish people during African American slavery and the Emancipation are largely absent from the history books, so I'm curious to know what sparked your interest in that particular topic.

Lopez: Well, because of my parents, I had always had an interest in the Civil War. It was engendered by my parents' interest, because they were Civil War reenactors. They started doing that when I was a teenager, which I thought at the time was *incredibly embarrassing* (Laughter from both). This was like, in the 90s when all those crazy Minutemen groups and those right-wing anti-government organizations were active, so as a teenager I was just completely embarrassed because I associated them with that. Of course the comparison couldn't have been further from the truth. Civil War reenactors are, I don't think they would argue with the appellation that most of them are amateur historians. They are really quite sincere and quite dedicated to re-creating history as it was. I kind of got sucked into it by that. As someone who had always worked in the theater (as a kid I was a child actor), I saw the drama and the theater behind it, which of course *it has.* I've always thought of the Civil War as this wonderfully low hanging fruit for great dramatic exploration. So, the general interest came from that.

One day I told my dad that I was looking for something to write on the Civil War that wasn't kind of melodramatic, that wasn't a bodice-ripper, and he pointed out this book on his shelf which was called *The Jewish Confederates* by Robert Rosen. It was a history of Judaism in the antebellum South, and I just devoured it. And you're right, there really is not a lot of history written about Jews in the South before and during the Civil War…I think I've probably found all of the books that have been written on the subject.

Even before I made the discovery of the fact that [General Lee's surrender at] Appomattox happened the day before Passover started that year, I was just fascinated with this idea of Jewish slave owning as a concept, how horrifically hypocritical it was, and it struck me as a wonderful topic for exploration. Slavery is referred to as our original sin, and it is filled with all different kinds of hypocrisies and moral games of twister that people played in order to excuse the practice. But, I found that there was *particular* discussion and angst and revulsion by northern Jews toward the idea of Jewish slave owning, and on the other hand quite a bit of moral twister going on in terms of the southern point of view of Jewish slave owning. For me that's drama. That's conflict. There you go.

I'm kind of fascinated, as a writer, with those moments when history as it is written ends. History is always these giant swings from big event to big event. Alan Bennett says in *The History Boys*, "What is history? It's just one thing after the other." And that is [how we understand] history, you know, "History is World War I and then the Treaty of Versailles and then World War II," and it's these grand, big, epic moments, but I've always been fascinated with the quiet that comes right after those big, grand moments, and I was looking to do something with that around the Civil War. How you go from being a slave to being free? I mean, and it literally was, one day you were [a slave], one day you weren't…legally at least. How do you make that change emotionally, psychologically? It must have been quite daunting for everyone, but most particularly for the recently freed slaves. It's like waking up and the whole world has changed. So, I wanted to explore that notion of the quiet after the storm, when the real work actually starts being done.

So, all of that led me to discovering a happy accident. I don't even remember *when* the eureka moment was, but it certainly was a eureka moment when I discovered that Lee surrendered at Appomattox the day before. I need to go back and double check, but I'm almost positive that I'm right, that it was the day before the first day of Passover that year. It was just one of these

discoveries that seemed so offhand, it was just matter of fact. It was just like, "Oh, and by the way, Passover started the next day." And I thought, "Well, wait a minute, wait a minute, are you kidding me? Passover started the day after the Civil War ended? And no one has written this? Are you kidding me? No one had thought to write about this? No one thought to dramatize this? Well, I'll be the first!" (Laughs) It was like discovering an actual pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. "*Surely* someone else has seen this before." And no! So, I was like, "Alright, well I'll do it then." It just seemed like a no-brainer to me, I mean you'd have to be a complete idiot not to make it work (Laughs). So, I took all of those elements and I put them into this play.

Lein Walseth: So, it sounds like you're really interested in those intimate, quiet moments *and* this particular historical moment that no one has really dealt with *and*, on a larger scale, transforming our understanding of history and which moments are deemed worthy of our attention.

Lopez: I think that's true. I mean, history is written by the winners, obviously, but with the Civil War there were no winners, there were no losers, we were all Americans. We were Americans and we stayed Americans, and so the Civil War was a particularly different deck of cards. That change, at the end of it, is both *so well known* and also *so profoundly unknowable.* For every story that we know about that time, or about any time really, but particularly that one, there are all these histories that we don't know.

There is always the 'why' behind every play, every piece of art, every movie. Someone asked me about this play, "Why did you tell this story?" And to be quite honest, it wasn't always asked out of pure curiosity. I think people felt that there was some danger with the idea of portraying Jewish slave owners, the idea of portraying a Jewish family in a way that wasn't very, for lack of a better work, very sympathetic. And why? Why deal with it? I was asked this after a reading, "Why deal with it?" And I think my answer goes to answer the question that you just asked. I think it is the artist's responsibility, when they find dirt on the floor, to point out the dirty floor and not sweep it under the rug.

Slavery is *embarrassing* to Americans. It should be and it is. I daresay for the ancestors of slave owners it is very embarrassing. The majority of slave owners were Christian, it's true, but the idea of Jewish slave owning, like I said, was just so antithetical. It's a national embarrassment and Americans don't like to be reminded of their embarrassments. But one of the reasons that I wrote the play, one of the reasons that I'm drawn to the kinds of stories I'm drawn to is because we can't, as Americans, be afraid to face our collective shame. This is, in some ways, what I try to deal with in the play.

Lein Walseth: That sounds so much like the work we've been doing with the August Wilson Cycle - the idea that *we think we know what slavery is.* As a nation, we've heard that word so many times that it has become an ingrained concept that we just want to move on from. But really, we don't have any idea about those intimate moments and how it played out in people's day to day lives. Plays like Wilson's and *The Whipping Man* really reanimate and allow us to revisit these specific historical moments, which, as you say, is painful but necessary.

Lopez: Completely necessary. I have to say, any American writer, any dramatist, but especially anyone who attempts to write about the African American experience, owes a great debt to August Wilson. When I saw *Gem of the Ocean* on Broadway, I was writing *The Whipping Man*, and I almost didn't go because I was afraid of being faced with the master and thinking to myself, "I can never live up to that standard." But, what he dealt with in *Gem of the Ocean*, which I believe you did earlier in the season…

Lein Walseth: We did it last year, last spring.

Lopez: Right. Well, he dealt with it throughout the cycle, but in that play, which is the first play in the cycle I believe, right?

Lein Walseth: Yes. It is set in 1904.

Lopez: Yeah, and it is *right there* [at the end of slavery]. It rubs up against it, it is rubbed raw by it, and it was really inspiring for me to see how he dealt with it in such a personal way.

It also makes me think of *Persepolis*, the book and the film, and dealing with something that is so huge. These are things that would take an historian decades, centuries to figure out and sort through, and you deal with it through the eyes of a little girl. All of a sudden that huge monolith becomes somewhat knowable. And most people who read or saw *Persepolis* were not Iranian. How can you understand what it's like to be an Iranian, especially going through the [Islamic] Revolution? You can't help but understand it a little better when you deal with those big calamities as seen through the eyes of an average person. That's who the great calamities effect, you know. Jefferson Davis was *fine* after the Civil War. All of Lincoln's cabinet, they were *fine* after the Civil War. Everyone was fine after the Civil War but the soldiers who fought in it. They *weren't* fine. And the families who lost sons, *they* weren't fine. And those wounds, especially in the African American community, you know, I'm sure you have a question coming up about Obama, but those wounds are still healing, you know?

Lein Walseth: It is not an Obama question, but an idea that you touched on is related, and that is the larger scope of the African American experience. Penumbra's work centers on presenting this multitude of experiences, and I'm wondering how you see your play and yourself as a playwright fitting into this framework, and how, if at all, your own ethnicity influences your position in this regard?

Lopez: Well, first of all, I would say that I would never *ever* pretend to be an authoritative voice on the African American experience. I just got lucky. (Laughs) I had quite a bit of trepidation as to whether or not I *could* pull it off, and also *should* pull it off, whether or not I was the right person to do this. We are very sensitive about our own identities, we're very sensitive about how they are portrayed. I understand why Spike Lee felt so adamant that he make *Malcolm X* rather than Norman Jewison. And I don't think anyone could have made *Schindler's List* other than Steven Spielberg. There is something to be said for owning the property so to speak…but there is also something to be said for simply having the sensitivity and the intelligence to tell a story compassionately and intelligently, and if you understand human nature you stand a good chance of getting it right on the page, regardless of whether you are Puerto Rican, which I am, or black or whatever.

It did worry me that the play would be met with resistance, that I would be told either explicitly or implicitly that I didn't have the right to tell this story. But in the process of developing it at Luna it was never an issue. It was an issue for *me*, certainly, but it wasn't an issue for the audiences. No one was mentioning it, no one was saying it. So, looking for trouble, I brought it up at one of the talkbacks. I said, "Does it bother you that I'm white, or not African American?" And it was like, "No. No, you told the story well." So, it took me a while to get over that, but once I got over it I got *completely* over it and I owned the right to do it.

Growing up in the panhandle of Florida, even though I wasn't around as many Latinos as someone who grew up in Tampa or Miami, the identity that really shaped me was being gay. That was what made me really feel like an outsider. I never felt like an "other" for being Puerto

Rican growing up. It didn't feel strange. Being gay certainly did. So I do believe that in many ways I was molded and shaped by that experience, which I believe probably gives me some kind of sensitivity to what it's like to be "other," to feel like you don't belong, to feel disenfranchised, to feel like you don't have a voice. If there's anything in my experience I believe that's probably it.

Lein Walseth: You raise a really interesting issue, which is the triangulation between the playwright, the piece, and then the audience.

Lopez: Right.

Lein Walseth: Ideally, who do you imagine your audience to be for this piece, and how you think that might be different at Penumbra than Luna and any other places that this has been staged?

Lopez: Well, initially, because this was the first play I ever wrote, I was just too terrified to think of anything else other than getting the job done. I wasn't initially thinking of the audience, I was just writing the play. I didn't know what I was doing, so the audience was the least of my concerns.

I *was* worried that I wouldn't be accurate in my depictions of what it's like to be African American or Jewish though. And, while you can read books about the nuts and bolts of Judaism, the prayers, and the Seder, what you can't read about is nature – how your identity shapes your thinking and your reactions, and so I was concerned that I would alienate both Jewish audiences and black audiences. It was dangerous for me. I don't know if it would have been dangerous for someone else, but I felt it was dangerous for me to do this. I certainly don't want to be called an anti-Semite, I don't want to have my work being referred to as a minstrel show, and I don't want to fall into any of those traps of insensitivity or the inability to get it right.

What I found, in the play's previous production, was that both groups *came*, which was wonderful, but also that both groups identified so completely with it. It was this amazing marriage of two very different identities coming together in a theater and having the exact same experience, albeit two different ends of the same experience. I had little old ladies, both black and Jewish coming up to me after the play in tears, saying, "Oh surely you must be Jewish." "Oh surely you must have been raised in a very large African American community." It felt really good that the audiences identified with the play. So all those fears that I came into the process with, none of them were said, and none of them were felt. It was just the honesty of the situation and the honesty of the presentation.

It is not really my achievement, so much as it is the achievement of all art that is done intelligently and honestly: it underscores the idea that we're not as different as we think. The differences that separate us are not as large as what binds us. I have to say I'm proud of this play, I'm proud of the production that was at Luna. The reaction to the play was so *overwhelmingly* emotional and supportive, it truly was one of the most gratifying experiences of my life.

Lein Walseth: So, what is your hope for this production at Penumbra?

Lopez: First of all, I'm very excited to see this play again for the first time in three years – it's like getting to revisit an old friend. I hope the audiences have the same experience that the audiences at Luna did. I hope we're able to not only meet but surpass the last production. I know that I'm in expert hands, so I know the chances for that are pretty good.

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I have always said that the play, for me, was in many ways about the beginning of the journey that African Americans have been on since Emancipation. It is that first painful step in a very long journey that certainly didn't end, but started a new chapter on the 20th of January this year. I hope, especially given this current moment in our nation's history, that people will look at the events of the election and our new president, and when they see the play will make a parallel between where we are and where we've been. I hope that audiences will see the play as dramatizing that first step that has landed us, most recently, with our first African American president. I'm very proud that this play is going on at this time, and I hope that it might capture this moment.

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DESIGN STATEMENTS

The creative design team is responsible for making the text on the page into a literal reality onstage. By using sound, lighting, set and costumes elements, the designers create an atmosphere inside which the actors play. Designers use methods such as color, temperature, or volume to help them as they work. Each of these methods can create a feeling onstage based on which tools the designer chooses to use.

In production, the design elements come together with the text, the actors and the direction, to create a three dimensional world. Penumbra Theatre is guided by an ensemble aesthetic, which means that no element is more important than another. This is Penumbra's ethical approach to art, in which every voice is unique, necessary and communally rooted. This approach also creates artistic balance and excellence. The audience often does not realize that any of the elements were at one time separate. They are totally bound; the result is something greater than the sum of each of its parts. Patrons of Penumbra Theatre Company often say the work looks effortless because the end result feels magical, feels surreal. This is one way the creative team, including the director, designers, cast and crew, can evaluate the success of their endeavor.

It is not magic, though. A lot of work goes into creating a production. Here you can read about the intent of the designers, how they arrived at their concepts and what challenges and methods they used to make their part of the play come to life. (For information on production internships, please visit our website at www.penumbratheatre.org, or call 651-288-6791)

SCENE DESIGN
KEN EVANS

Design statement coming soon!

SOUND/MEDIA DESIGN
MARTIN GWINUP

Design statement coming soon!

LIGHTING DESIGN
KATHY A. PERKINS

Design statement coming soon!

COSTUME DESIGN
KALERE A. PAYTON

Design statement coming soon! See costume sketches below.

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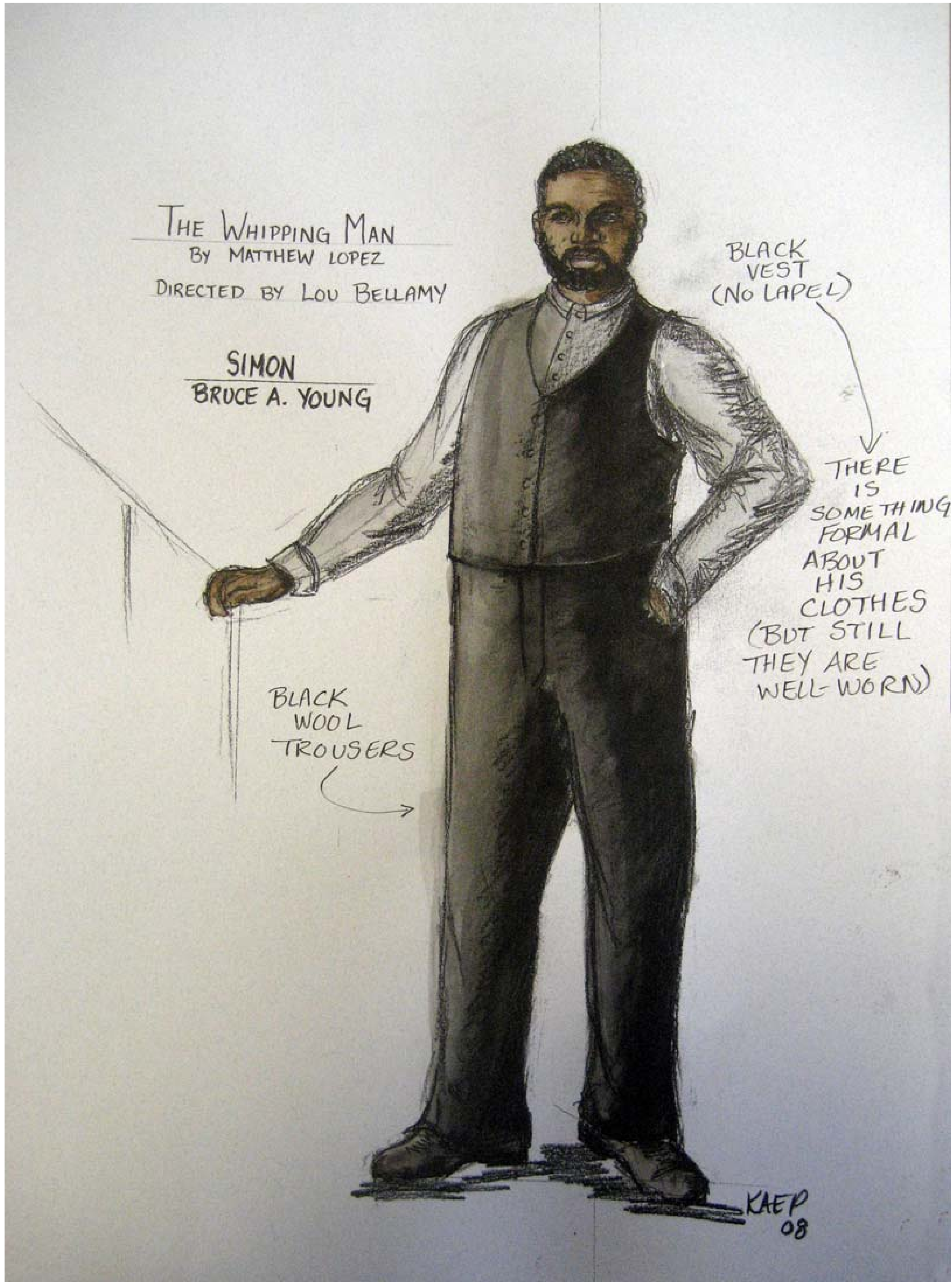
THE WHIPPING MAN
BY MATTHEW LOPEZ
DIRECTED BY LOU BELLAMY
SIMON
BRUCE A. YOUNG
BLACK VEST (NO LAPEL)
THERE IS SOMETHING FORMAL ABOUT HIS CLOTHES (BUT STILL THEY ARE WELL-WORN)
BLACK WOOL TROUSERS
KAEP 08

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TOOLS FOR TEACHING

The following are a series of questions you may use to prompt discussion, critical analysis or dialogue about this play. They may be used either before or after the play, either to guide audiences toward specific issues as they watch or, to stimulate conversation about topical issues afterward.

Penumbra Theatre Company now offers Lesson Plans that use the script, the production, and the study guide to investigate specific themes! Developed by high school teachers and curriculum consultants Kimberly Colbert and Kaye Peters, these questions are intended to meet the state standards for High School Language Arts and Literacy set by the Board of Education. (Grades 9 through 12). Each plan can run from approximately 15 to 45 minutes for discussion. Please contact Penumbra Theatre's Education Director for more details: sarah.bellamy@penumbratheatre.org

A Guide for Teaching Matthew Lopez's *The Whipping Man*

Overview

This guide provides a broad framework in which teachers may anchor their own classroom practice. For easy reference, lessons have been divided into three strands (historical context, literary, and thematic). Teachers may choose to follow one strand for the unit or weave together elements and/or lessons from the various strands. A broad essential question for the entire *The Whipping Man* unit is suggested, as well as more specific essential questions aligned with strands (highlighted below). The essential question provides a foundation for study, with guiding questions for study imbedded in each lesson which will allow for a range of critical thinking and analysis within both English/language arts and social studies content areas. Anchor, or suggested, lessons are provided for each strand along with resource readings and classroom tools we have found effective in our own classrooms.

The suggested lessons are designed to meet high-school level Minnesota Reading and Literature and Writing standards and Minnesota Social Studies standards for Institutions and Traditions in Society. The standards are noted by the possible lessons in boldface type. "LA" is Language Arts standards and "SS" is Social Studies standards. The numbers and letters refer to the specific standard.

LA – is Language Arts standards
SS – is Social Studies standards

Vocabulary of Important Terms

Abolitionists — supporters of the project to end racial slavery and liberate black Americans. The movement gained momentum after the British Parliament outlawed the African slave trade in 1807 and incorporated people from various ethnicities and cultural backgrounds including but not limited to free blacks and liberal whites such as the Quakers. In 1863 slavery was outlawed in the United States with the formal declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation.

American Confederacy — also known as the Confederate States of America was the government formed by eleven southern states of the United States of America between 1861 and 1865 in response to the push for abolition of slavery within the Union. They elected their own president, Jefferson Davis, and even printed their own currency—both treasonous crimes according to the Union. The capital of the CSA was Richmond, VA where today monuments still stand to honor its legacy. The Confederacy fell after the surrender of Robert E. Lee to Ulysses S. Grant at Fort Sumter in the spring of 1865.

Antebellum — the period of time before or existing before the American Civil War during which slavery, the slave trade and the sale and purchase of slaves was legal and protected by local and federal governments.

Appomattox — the site of the final engagement of Confederate General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia before it surrendered to the Union Army under Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865 signaling the end of the American Civil War.

Battle of Fort Sumter — (April 12, 1861 – April 13, 1861) was the bombardment of Fort Sumter by the Confederate Army near Charleston, South Carolina. The battle started the American Civil War.

Brown, William Wells — (November 6, 1814 – November 6, 1884) was a prominent abolitionist lecturer, novelist, playwright, and historian. Born into slavery in the Southern United States, Brown escaped to the North, where he worked for abolitionist causes and was a prolific writer. Brown was a pioneer in several different literary genres, including travel writing, fiction, and drama, and wrote what is considered to be the first novel by an African American.

Cash Crops — crops grown for money versus the sustenance of those farming them.

Chattel Slavery — was the type of slavery that dominated the American slave system. Chattel slaves existed as living commodities and were considered their masters' property. On the market, chattel slaves were exchanged for goods or money. In addition to their labor, masters had control over slaves' bodies and their children. Chattel slavery is most often based on race.

Cotton Gin — is the abbreviated name for the cotton engine, a machine that quickly and easily separates the cotton fibers from the seedpods and the sometimes sticky seeds, a process previously achieved through slave labor. With the invention of the cotton engine, expectations for production skyrocketed, making work even more demanding for laborers.

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Davis, Jefferson (June 3, 1808 – December 6, 1889) was a slaveholding politician who served as President of the Confederate States of America for its entire history from 1861 to 1865 during the American Civil War. His insistence on independence, even in the face of crushing defeat, prolonged the difficult war. Davis was captured in 1865 and charged (though never convicted) with treason against the United States of America.

Emancipation Proclamation the document, issued on September 22, 1862 by President Abraham Lincoln, that declared all slaves held in captivity in the Confederate States of America were free.

Epistemological the philosophical investigation of the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge.

Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution is one of the post-Civil War amendments (also known as the Reconstruction Amendments), first intended to secure rights for former slaves. It includes the Due Process and Equal Protection Clauses, among others. The amendment provides a broad definition of United States citizenship, superseding the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that had excluded slaves imported from Africa and their descendants. The amendment requires states to provide equal protection under the law to all persons within their jurisdictions and was used in the mid-20th century to dismantle racial segregation in the United States.

French Revolution (1789–1799) was a pivotal period in the history of French, European and Western civilization. During this time, republicanism replaced the monarchy in France and the Roman Catholic Church underwent a radical restructuring. While France would oscillate among republic, empire and monarchy, for 75 years after the First Republic fell to a coup d'etat, the Revolution is widely seen as a major turning point in the history of Western democracy--from the age of absolutism and aristocracy, to the age of the citizenry as the dominant political force. The slogan of the French Revolution was "*liberté, egalité, fraternité, ou la mort*!" ("Liberty, equality, fraternity, or death!"). This slogan outlived the revolution, later becoming the rallying cry of activists, both militant and non-violent, who promote democracy or overthrow oppressive governments.

Grant, General Ulysses S. (April 27, 1822 – July 23, 1885), was an American general and the eighteenth President of the United States (1869–1877). He was the first president to serve for two full terms since Andrew Jackson forty years before. He led Radical Reconstruction and built a powerful patronage-based Republican party in the South, with the adroit use of the army. He took a hard line that reduced violence by groups like the Ku Klux Klan.On April 9, 1865, he accepted the surrender of his Confederate opponent Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House. He is credited as the leading Union general in the American Civil War.

Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) was the most successful of the many African slave rebellions in the Western Hemisphere and established Haiti as a free, black republic, the first of its kind. Africans and people of African ancestry freed themselves from slavery and colonization by taking advantage of the conflict among whites over how to implement the reforms of the French Revolution in this slave society.

Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalom was the first Jewish congregation in Richmond, Virginia. Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalom was the sixth congregation in the United States and was the westernmost in the United States at the time of its foundation. By 1822 Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalom members worshipped in the first synagogue building in Virginia. This congregation eventually merged with Beth Ahabah, an offshoot of Beth Shalom.

Lee, General Robert E. (January 19, 1807 – October 12, 1870) was a career United States Army officer who defected to join the secessionist Confederate States of America. A slaveholder himself, Lee was the pride of the Confederate Army and is still hailed in parts of the South as a gallant soldier. His army was defeated at the Appomattox Courthouse on April 9, 1865 by Union General Ulysses S. Grant, who reclaimed control of Fort Sumter for the US and ended the American Civil War.

Lincoln, Abraham (February 12, 1809 – April 15, 1865) was the sixteenth President of the United States, Before his election, he was a lawyer and member of the United States House of Representatives. As an outspoken opponent of the expansion of slavery in the United States, Lincoln won the Republican Party nomination in 1860 and was elected president later that year. During his term, he helped preserve the United States by leading the defeat of the Confederate States of America in the American Civil War. He introduced measures that resulted in the abolition of slavery, issuing his Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and promoting the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution. His assassination, only a week after the end of the Civil War in 1865, was the first presidential assassination in U.S. history and made him a martyr for the ideal of national unity.

Manifest Destiny a phrase that expressed that the belief that the Unites States had a mission to expand, spreading its form of democracy and freedom. Advocates of Manifest Destiny believed that expansion was not only good, but that it was obvious ("manifest") and certain ("destiny"). Originally a political catch phrase of the 19th Century, "Manifest Destiny" eventually became a standard historical term, often used as a synonym for the territorial expansion of the United States across North America towards the Pacific Ocean and an ideological excuse or pardon for the slaughter or forced relocation of vast numbers of indigenous peoples. The term fell out of usage by U.S. policy makers early in the 20th Century, but some commentators believe that aspects of Manifest Destiny, particularly the belief in an American "mission" to promote and defend democracy throughout the world, continued to have an influence on American political ideology.

Manumission the formal emancipation from slavery.

Mercantile Capitalism an economic system of the major trading nations (largely European) during the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries based on the premise that their national wealth and power were best served by increasing exports from their colonies to sell at market in exchange for precious metals such as gold and silver.

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Miscegenation is the mixing of different ethnicities or races, especially in marriage, cohabitation, or sexual relations. *Interracial marriage* or *interracial dating* may be more common in contemporary usage. While the English word has a history of ethnocentrism and racial superiority, the Spanish, Portuguese and French words, *mestizaje*, *miscigenação* and *métissage*, connote a positive ethno-cultural melting pot. It was outlawed in the United States until the landmark civil rights decision was enacted in 1967 by the US Supreme Court and declared Virginia's anti-miscegenation statute, the "The Racial Integrity Act of 1954", unconstitutional, thereby ending all race-based legal restriction on marriage in the United States.

Paternalism describes a system under which an authority presence decides to supply needs or regulate conduct of those under its control as individuals as well as in their relations to the authority and to each other. A paternalistic society is organized much in the way of a patriarchal family structure wherein the leaders are not only responsible but additionally control and mediate any interaction between other members of society.

Post-bellum the period of time after or existing after the American Civil War during which slavery, the slave trade and the sale and purchase of slaves was illegal. Local and federal governments struggled to enforce the new laws and many white Americans were opposed to the ruling. During this period, nostalgia for the old slave regime became prevalent.

Reconstruction refers to the period between 1863 or 1865 and 1877 when the federal government focused on resolving the consequences and aftermath of the American Civil War (1861–1865). It is also the common name for the general history of the post-Civil War era in the former Confederacy between 1865 and 1877. The start of the period is often dated to the capitulation of the Confederacy in 1865, shortly after which the practice of slavery was brought to an end after the Emancipation Proclamation.

Saint Domingue Colony was a French colony from 1659 to 1804, when it became the independent nation of Haiti. This island of the Greater Antilles was "discovered" by Christopher Columbus in the winter of 1492. He named it Hispaniola. The people of culture Arawak, the Caribbean and Tainos occupied the island before the arrival of the Spaniards. In 1767, it exported 72 million pounds of raw sugar and 51 million pounds of refined sugar, one million pounds of indigo, and two million pounds of cotton. Saint-Domingue became known as the "Pearl of the West Indies" — one of the richest colonies in the 18th century French empire. By the 1780s, Saint-Domingue produced about 40 percent of all the sugar and 60 percent of all the coffee consumed in Europe. This single colony, roughly the size of the state of Maryland, produced more sugar and coffee than all of Britain's West Indian colonies combined. In 1804, Saint Domingue became the independent nation of Haiti.

Seasoning the forced acclimation of newly arrived slaves. The goals of seasoning were twofold: the first was to acclimate new slaves to their surroundings including basic language acquisition, lay of the land and laws to abide; the second goal was to break any rebellious spirit that would encourage newcomers to incite trouble amongst the senior populations. Seasoning was a brutal, confusing and critical feature of the slave system.

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Sharecropping a leasing system in which laborers could use a portion of the land owned by another to farm for a living in return for a share of the crop produced.

Subsistence is self-sufficient farming in which farmers grow only enough food to feed the family and to pay taxes or feudal dues. The typical subsistence farm has a range of crops and animals needed by the family to eat during the year. Planting decisions are made with an eye toward what the family will need during the coming year, rather than market prices.

Trail of Tears was the forced relocation of Native Americans from their homelands to Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma) in the Western United States. The phrase originated from a description of the removal of the Choctaw Nation in 1831.The removals were motivated by U.S. desire for expansion, the desire to "save" Native Americans from extinction, and to profit from the acquisition of their assets and resources. Many Native Americans suffered from exposure, disease, and starvation while en route to their destinations.

Underground Railroad a network of clandestine routes by which African slaves in the 19th Century United States attempted to escape to free states, or as far north as Canada, with the aid of abolitionists. Other routes led to Mexico or overseas. It's estimated that at its height between 1810 and 1850, between 30,000 and 100,000 people escaped enslavement via the Underground Railroad, though U.S. Census figures only account for 6,000. The Underground Railroad has captured public imagination as a symbol of freedom, and figures prominently in Black American history.

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***The Whipping Man*: Teaching the Play**

Unit Essential Question:

How does *The Whipping Man* help us understand what unites us as people?

Historical Context Strand Question:

What is the significance of Exodus and Passover to African Americans?

Literary Strand Essential Question:

How does historical and religious allusion develop the plot, characters and meaning of *The Whipping Man*?

Theme Strand Essential Question:

What is the nature of love and how does that affect the way we see and relate to others?

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Historical Context

<u>Essential Question:</u> **In what ways might Exodus and Passover be significant for African Americans?**

In *The Whipping Man*, playwright Matthew Lopez draws connections between the enslavement of Jews in Egypt and the enslavement of Africans in the New World. Lopez sharpens the ethical conflict of the De Leon family owning slaves through the irony of their ancestors' servitude. Through a shared Jewish faith, Lopez reveals complex relations between the slaveholder and the slave.

The questions raised by the play align with state social studies standards related to people and cultures and provide an opening for historical study that is personal and immediate when combined with attending the play. The following lesson focuses on the Jewish flight from Egypt and allows students to draw parallels to slavery in America.

As noted by Michael Walzer in his book *Exodus and Revolution*, "the strength of Exodus history lies in its end, the divine promise" (10). With Canaan as the promised land and Egypt representative of bondage, Walzer argues that Exodus teaches that "the world is not all Egypt. Without that sense of possibility, oppression would be experienced as an inescapable condition" (21).

The biblical exodus of the Israelites from Egypt has been an inspiration to revolutionaries since it was recorded. Interestingly, Walzer points out that the Puritans saw their venture into America as an exodus from the religious oppression of England and Jefferson and Franklin both suggested it as the theme for the seal of the newly established United States. The story of Exodus is the story of liberation. So, Simon's departure from the De Leon plantation at the end of *The Whipping Man* represents his own exodus. With an awareness of his newfound independence, he leaves a symbolic Egypt.

Other possible lessons could be:

- Effects of slavery on the slave and the slaveholder.
- Economic factors of slaveholding societies
- Relationships between slaveholders and slaves.

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Slavery and Exodus

Sample Lesson: Research Lesson (3-5 days)

This lesson is designed as a foundation for study or attendance of the play to deepen student understanding of the play's plot and themes. It may be followed by a seminar discussion or other forms of analysis after attending the play to draw comparisons between the De Leon's ancestors' experiences and that of Simon and John.

SS (Peoples and Cultures) Standards:

A. Identifying societal concepts that influence the interaction among individuals, groups, and institutions in society.

B. Examining tension between individuality and conformity.

Guiding Questions:

1. What were the circumstances surrounding the enslavement of Jews in Ancient Egypt?
2. How were they set free?
3. What is Passover and its significance to the Jewish people?
4. What are the lessons of the stories of Exodus and Passover?
5. How do they relate to Simon and John?

Materials:

Markers
Poster paper

Preparatory Set:

"And Moses said unto the people. Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place:"("Exodus" 13).

Write quote on the board and ask students:

- What do they know of the story of Moses and the Israelites?
- Does the story of the exodus of the Israelites have parallels to other historical events they can think of?
- What do the Israelites have in common with others who have fled persecution or oppression?
- You can suggest possibilities for them to consider: the Puritans, the American Revolution, American slaves, the Mariel boat people from Cuba. Brainstorm and write ideas on the board.

Lesson Plan:

1. Divide students into five groups or more, as class size demands.

2. Assign each group a topic to research. Be sure that one group researches the Exodus including the celebration of Passover. Others may come from the brainstorming or teacher selection.

3. Students will research the topic individually at home and return to class the next day with notes about the topic assigned.

4. Each group will meet for 15-20 minutes and collect their research, establishing subtopics: What happened, who was affected, who was the oppressor and oppressed, for example. Students will write subtopics and details from their topic on a piece of poster paper and put on wall when finished.

5. Class will then get up and look over each posted paper for connections between the experiences. (May add comments to the papers.)

6. Class will take seats. Discuss what the similarities and differences are.
Revisit guiding questions.

7. Have students journal on the connections between the various experiences and what Exodus, as an allegory, might tell us about oppression and liberation. Why might African Americans, for example, relate to the Israelites?

8. Final reflection: After seeing or studying the play, ask students to analyze the parallels of the Exodus story to Simon's departure at the end of the play.

Work Cited:

Walzer, Michael. *Exodus and Revolution.* New York: Basic Books, 1985.

Literary Strand

<u>**Essential Question**</u>: **How does historical and religious allusion develop the plot, characters, and meaning of *The Whipping Man*?**

"Allusion" is a reference in a literary work to a person, place, or thing in history or another work of literature. Allusions are often indirect or brief references to well-known characters or events ("Allusion"). Allusion is a widely used literary device and yet frequently readers and audiences skip over the unfamiliar allusions and take the familiar as either window dressing or attempts to set a work within a historical context. This lesson is designed to both help students become more aware of the powerful significance allusions can play in a work and also to deepen their understanding of their effect in Lopez's *The Whipping Man*. This lesson could succeed a study of the historical contexts established in the above strand, which would result in less research in this strand, or it may be taught independently with students researching terms and events with which they are not familiar. For guidance, see Study Guide Introduction.

Two significant families of allusions are used within the play: Civil War history and Judaism (its ceremonies and its history). The play is set at a critical juncture in U.S. history: Lee has just surrendered at Appomattox and news of President Lincoln's assassination comes before the play ends within one twenty four hour cycle. The South has fallen and in this historical context, two former slaves and their former owner confront their new roles. Obviously, the historical context (with which American students are at least generally familiar) is significant to the plot of the play and the themes it develops. Layered on top of this dynamic, however, is the role of the Jewish faith in the men's lives. Jewish history plays a critical role in the climax of the play and its resolution.

Other potential literary aspects for study include:

- **The unities**. Following classical Greek form, this play is told in the same location within a twenty-four hour cycle. This device, known as "the unities" was a disciplined structure that the Greeks believed brought cohesion to a work. What is its effect here?

- **Mise en scene**. What is the significance of the *mise en scene* (stage design) and its effect on developing the play? How do the decimated house and the addition of neighbors' belongings help to develop the play's plot and/or meaning?

- **Character study**. How do the three characters in the play help us to understand the effects of slavery on both the slave and master?

"Let My People Go": Slavery as a unifying device in The Whipping Man
Sample Lesson: 3 days plus play study and/or attendance

This lesson is designed to begin before studying or attending the play to heighten student awareness of allusion during study and then to reflect on the play's meaning.

LA Standards: I.A. 1-4, I.D. 1, 4, 6, 11, 14
Guiding questions:

1. Who was Moses and how might he be relevant to slaves in America?
2. Who was Abraham (Old Testament)?
3. What links Abraham and Abraham Lincoln?

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4. Why does Simon revere Abraham Lincoln?
5. What is the story of Passover?
6. How does the story of Passover relate to Simon and John?
7. What is the historical context of the setting of the play?
8. How does setting the play on April 14-15 affect the plot and theme?
9. Consider the significance of the timing in terms of the plot: how does it develop the meaning/themes of the play? (For example, what is the effect of where news of Lincoln's death falls within the plot?)
10. How does the aspect of allusion help overall to develop *The Whipping Man*?

Preparatory set (1 day prior to play study):
Hand out to students the lyrics to the song "Go Down Moses" (appended to end of lesson). If music is available, play the song and have students follow along. Ask:

- What is this song about?
- How does it relate to the fate of African slaves in America?

Discuss the relationship of Moses and the Israelites to the African slaves in terms of what is similar and different from students' current knowledge.

Following preliminary discussion:

1. Break students into five groups to research:
   a. Moses (Old Testament)
   b. Abraham (Old Testament)
   c. Abraham Lincoln
   d. Passover
   e. Appomattox and the fall of the south, 1865.
2. Once students have looked up the events (may assign as homework), have them in their groups discuss the central significance of these events.
3. In class discussion, groups should present what they researched and discussed in small groups. What connects these stories?

Materials:
Notebook paper and writing utensils
Poster paper
Markers

Lesson (study of play and 2 days afterward):

1. During study of the play or attendance of a performance, have students write down textual references to Judaism and to historical events surrounding the Civil War.

2. Students should look up references noted (whether or not they think they know them). As with figurative language, students will better understand allusion if they look up the details and do not rely on vague recollection. For example, what is the significance of Appomattox?
3. Teacher or students should then create T-charts on large poster paper and distribute one to each group. Groups will continue from preparatory set. Groups that researched Civil War-related topics will write "Slavery and the Civil War" on their charts; groups that studied topics related to Judaism will write "Slavery and Passover" on their charts.

   Set up: These charts will eventually allow comparison between the two groups of allusions. Quotes from the text will go in the left-hand column and in the right students will write a short explanation as to the significance of the text.

4. Students will, as noted above, write down specific text related to the topic set out at the top of the paper and explain what they found significant about it. Text should be pulled from the journals they kept while studying the play.

5. When finished, the poster charts should be posted next to each other in the front of the class. All of the Civil War charts on one side and the Passover on the other. Allow students a few minutes to look at what their classmates found, and add references from their own notes. This will give students with information to share on the topic they were not assigned to a chance to add their ideas. Then begin discussion:
    a. What parallels do they see between the experiences of African American slaves and the Jews of Moses' time? What is similar and different?
    b. How do these parallels help to develop the play?
    c. See guiding questions above to help students delve into the connections made by allusion in the play, beyond what they discovered themselves.

6. Students should reflect in writing on the specific allusions they found meaningful in developing their understanding of the play, its characters, plot and themes.

7. An end-of-unit assessment could focus on analyzing the effect of a prominent allusion, such as Passover, to the play's meaning.

Work Cited:

"Allusion." *All American: Glossary of Literary Terms.* 15 August 2008. University Of North Carolina at Pembroke. http://www.uncp.edu/home/canada/work/allam/general/glossary.htm.

"Go Down Moses" (also known as "Let My People Go) lyrics
Traditional Hymn, author and composer unknown

When Israel was in Egypt's Land,
Let my people go,
Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
Let my people go.

Chorus
Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt's Land.
Tell ol' Pharoah,
Let my people go.

Thus saith the Lord, bold Moses said,
Let my people go,
If not, I'll smite your first-born dead,
Let my people go.

Chorus

No more shall they in bondage toil,
Let my people go,
Let them come out with Egypt's spoil,
Let my people go.

Chorus

The Lord told Moses what to do,
Let my people go,
To lead the Hebrew children through,
Let my people go.

Chorus

O come along Moses, you'll not get lost,
Let my people go,
Stretch out your rod and come across,
Let my people go.

Chorus

As Israel stood by the waterside,
Let my people go,
At God's command it did divide,
Let my people go.

Chorus

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When they reached the other shore,
Let my people go,
They sang a song of triumph o'er,
Let my people go.

Chorus

Pharaoh said he'd go across,
Let my people go,
But Pharaoh and his host were lost,
Let my people go.

Chorus

Jordan shall stand up like a wall,
Let my people go,
And the walls of Jericho shall fall,
Let my people go.

Chorus

Your foes shall not before you stand,
Let my people go,
And you'll possess fair Canaan's land,
Let my people go.

Chorus

O let us all from bondage flee,
Let my people go,
And let us all in Christ be free,
Let my people go.

Chorus

We need not always weep and mourn,
Let my people go,
And wear these slavery chains forlorn,
Let my people go.

Chorus

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Theme Strand: Love

<u>**Essential Question**</u>: **What is the nature of love and how does it affect the way we see and relate to others?**

Humans have wrestled with defining love ever since time began. The ancient Greeks classified four types of love (*phileo*, *eros*, *storge* and *agape*), and these definitions remain as guides in psychology and humanities study today. In *The Whipping Man*, Lopez provokes his audience to define love.

In addition to love, other possible themes for exploration in *The Whipping Man* are:

- Oppression: The effect of slavery on the oppressed as well as the oppressor.

- Betrayal: De Leon selling Simon's family, and John and Caleb keeping it a secret.

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The Ties that Bind: Love in *The Whipping Man*
Sample Lesson in 3 days

This lesson is designed to follow viewing or study of the play. Through studying the various literary elements of character, setting and plot, students will interpret what the play teaches them about human's capacity for love.

ELA Standards: I.D. 1, 6, 11, 13
SS (Peoples and Cultures) Standards:

A. **Identifying societal concepts that influence the interaction among individuals, groups, and institutions in society.**

Guiding questions:

1. How can someone who owns another individual love them as a family member or partner?
2. How could someone who is owned by another individual love the person who owns them?
3. Can people "own" their families in a literal or figurative sense?
4. What is the effect of power on love?
5. What provokes Caleb to tell Simon the truth about his family and why is his confession significant to the play?
6. What kind of love can transcend ownership, if any?

Preparatory Set:

1. Students will do a quick journal from memory of their interpretation of each of the main characters, one at a time: Simon, Caleb, John. Teacher may provide guiding questions on the board such as:
   a. What motivates the character?
   b. Who is the character's family?
   c. Does this character have power? How?
   d. Who does the character love?
   Suggestion: Give students five minutes for each character and then announce to begin on next character so that each is given equal attention.
2. Place students into discussion groups of 4 and have them share their interpretations.
3. Provide each group with a large piece of paper and have them map the character's relationships, adding in Caleb's father and Simon's family. Draw lines between characters and note the type of relationship. Here, different color markers could differentiate types of relationships or just a written summary of the relationship could be written along the lines. (If using markers or colored pencils, have students create a key for the meaning of each color in a corner of the map.) For example: love, ownership, family. Students may draw as many lines between any two characters as they think relevant.
4. Discuss the map in groups and each group will choose a presenter to share with class.
5. Share.

Lesson Plan: Padeia Seminar

1. Ask students:
   a. What kinds of relationships bind these characters?
   b. Is love possible between the three characters in the play? Why? How?

2. Ask student to define love.

3. Share the following definitions of love from the Greeks:

   Eros Love - It meant physical passion; its gratification and fulfillment.

   Storge Love - Storge is the natural bond between mother and infant, father, children, and kin.

   Phileo Love - Phileo love is a love of the affections. It is delighting to be in the presence of another, a warm feeling that comes and goes with intensity.

   Agape Love - Agape love is God's kind of love. It is seeking the welfare and betterment of another regardless of how we feel. Agape does not have the primary meaning of feelings or affection. ("Paxvobisca")

4. Ask students to label on their charts from preparatory activity which kind of love, if any, exists between each of the characters.

5. In the previously formed groups, have students work together to answer the lesson's guiding questions. Each student should take notes to be able to participate in seminar.

6. Establish rules of Padeia Seminar:
   a. Each student must have written responses to guiding questions.
   b. Students will respect each others' opinions.
   c. Sitting in a circle, if possible, students will self-facilitate, with the current speaker calling on the next.
   d. Responses must remain connected to the guiding questions or in response to a point made by another student.

   Teachers may require participation or offer points for participation.

7. At conclusion of the seminar, allow 10 minutes for students to write a reflection that summarizes their interpretation of what the play tells them about love.

Work Cited:

"Four Loves." 29 August 2008. http://paxvobisca.tripod.com/literature/fourLoves.html

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