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WDC 640 Critical Communications

Prof. M. Ivanova

Subject: Final Paper "Melanin-cholic Skit"

In Beah Richard 1950 poem, "A Black Woman Speaks," she articulates the racial division within feminist thought that condones sexist ideologies to continue from slavery to Jim Crow Civil Rights. The activist describes the poem, a quick write "for a stop on the way to an acting audition," as a moment to speak her peace. In America, all facets of society have objectified the black woman (1). Those who appear to be looking out for her best interest, in some way benefit from her toil and suffering. The interesting part, she, the black woman is blamed for her current position at the bottom of a racially constructed hegemony bent on her demise. This is what comes across in Richard's poem. She chronicles the consistent victimization, targeting and threat to the constructed ideologies of white patriarchal supremacy and social hierarchies spawned by her very existence. In a counter attack, the status quo launched a mass media campaign that sociologist, Patricia Hill Collins calls in Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment, 'controlled images,' within the major communications platforms to preserve the capitalistic revenue produced by women of color (2). The black woman anthem is loud and clear in Maya Angelo's creative wisdom, "and Still I rise," years later.

Saartjie, a young slave of the Dutch racist label Khoikhoi people of South Africa came to fame in the 1800s. In 1810, under the guidance of William Dunlop, an English doctor at the Cape Slave lodge, and free black man, Hendrik Cesars, her brother-in-law took her to Europe after his husband's death. Historically, Saartjie is Sarah Baartman, the Hottentot Venus. In the many narrations of young Saartjie's life, she was a performer, sideshow attraction, spoke five languages and was very much in control of her career, while abolitionists protested that the performances were "indecent and against her will (7)."

After court proceedings in which Dunlop produced a signed contract by Sarah, the exploitation continued. In 1814, she is sold to a Paris animal trainer, Reaux and again to be used as proof of the link between animal and human by French Comparative Anatomy Professor George Cuvier of the Museum of Natural History. The French released Sarah's bones to her family in 2002. Vlogger Sandra Bland (Sandy Speaks) came to national and international recognition on July 13, 2015 as another victim of police brutality and causality of American white supremacy squad, the local police. The commonalities between these two women goes deeper than being similar ages when they died and initials, it shows that traditional misrepresentations of black women promoted by old media are replicated in digital platforms using an authoritative mechanism like Google that is trusted by the public.

The creation of Melancholic builds from B. Biesecker's essay, "No Time for Mourning: The Rhetorical Production of the Melancholic Citizen-Subject in the War on Terror. Biesecker examines the way mass media platform CNN played a "shock and awe campaign" in capitalizing on post 911 patriotism as a kind of melancholy to preserved American Democracy to accept the demise of the possibility of threat. The quote from then sitting President Bush to gain support for the war on terrorism, "Our nation – this generation...a dark threat of violence for our people and our future." The quote rings with familiarity in the "black menace," that has white women hiding their purses and calling the police while visiting the local park. A black man barbequing with coal in a restricted part of the local park is a threat that must be eliminated and for people of color, it is by a firing squad. It is my goal to do just as Richard's did, take a moment to speak the truth as I see it.

# MelaninCholic: From Sarah to Sandra

The Revolution will not be televised. It is the evolution of the mind  
History of black women images in mass media to digital communications

## Cast:

Crystal Perry – Narrator of ‘A Black Woman Speaks’  
Angela Washington (Angela Davis)  
Shaa’ista Sabir (Nora Nell Thurston)  
Chelsey Cole (Audre Lorde)  
Verlinda King (Ida B. Wells)  
Danielle Williams (Maxine Waters)  
Monica Gresham (Sarah and Sandra)  
Needed (Harriet Tubman)

## Film and Editing:

Christina Nicole

Inspired by:

A Black Woman Speaks...  
Of White Womanhood  
Of White Supremacy  
Of Peace

Rendition of Beah Robert’s poem at 1950 Peace Conference, Chicago.

## ACT I

**(Filmed in black and white: Dark room, spotlight of Sarah being bought in to the room by two handlers. Actresses stop in middle of room, cloaking some of Sarah’s nakedness. The shot widens to highlight actress standing to the left in the shadows.)**

It is right that I, a woman black, should speak of white womanhood.  
My fathers, my brothers, my husbands, my sons die for it; because of it.  
And their blood chilled in electric chairs, stopped by hangman’s noose, cooked by lynch mobs’ fire, spilled by white supremacist mad desire to kill for profit, gives me that right.

**(Actress pause: insert video)**

**(Dancer enters, 1)**

I would that I could speak of white womanhood as it will and should be when it stands tall in full equality. But then, womanhood will be womanhood void of color and of class, and all necessity for my speaking thus will be past. Gladly past.

But now, since ‘tis deemed a thing apart supreme, I must in searching honesty report how it seems to me. White womanhood stands in bloodied skirt and willing slavery reaching out adulterous hand killing mine and crushing me. What then is this superior thing that in order to be sustained must needs feed upon my flesh? How came this horror to be? Let’s look to history.

They said, the white supremacist said that you were better than me, that your fair brow should never know the sweat of slavery. They lied. White womanhood too is enslaved, the difference is degree.

They brought me here in chains. They brought you here willing slaves to man. You, shiploads of women each filled with hope that she might win with ruby lip and saucy curl and bright and flashing eye him to wife who had the largest tender. Remember? And they sold you here even as they sold me. My sisters, there is no room for mockery. If they counted my teeth they did appraise your thigh and sold you to the highest bidder the same as I.

**(Actress Pause: Quote - Harriett Tubman)**

**(Each actress will place a garment on Sarah after their speech and say, "The revolution will not be televised," and then will stand in solidary to cover her. First dancer enters dressed completely in black (shadows of mourning. The next quote, a second dancer will enter to fall in sync with first dancer and so on)**

And you did not fight for your right to choose whom you would wed but for whatever bartered price that was the legal tender you were sold to a stranger's bed in a stranger land remember?

We are women all, and what wrongs you murders me and eventually marks your grave so we share a mutual death at the hand of tyranny.

They trapped me with the chain and gun. They trapped you with lying tongue. For, 'less you see that fault-that male villainy that robbed you of name, voice and authority, that murderous greed that wasted you and me, he, the white supremacist, fixed your minds with poisonous thought: "white skin is supreme." and therewith bought that monstrous change exiling you to things. Changed all that nature had ill you wrought of gentle usefulness, abolishing your spring. Tore out your heart, set your good apart from all that you could say, think, feel, know to be right. And you did not fight, but set your minds fast on my slavery the better to endure your own.

**(Actress Pause: Quote – Zora Neale Thurston) Shaa'ista**

**(Dancer enters, 2)**

'Tis true my pearls were beads of sweat wrung from weary bodies' pain, instead of rings upon my hands I wore swollen, bursting veins. My ornaments were the wip-lash's scar my diamond, perhaps, a tear. Instead of paint and powder on my face, I wore a solid mask of fear to see my blood so spilled. And you, women seeing spoke no protest but cuddled down in your pink slavery and thought somehow my wasted blood confirmed your superiority.

Because your necklace was of gold you did not notice that it throttled speech.  
Because diamond rings bedecked your hands you did not regret their dictated idleness.  
Nor could you see that the platinum bracelets which graced your wrists were chains binding you fast to economic slavery. And though you claimed your husband's name still could not command his fidelity.

**(Actress Pause: Quote - Maya Angelo) – Phenomenal Woman: I'm not cute or built to suit a fashion model's size. But when I start to tell them. They think I'm telling lies. I say, It's in the reach of my arms, The span of my hips, The stride of my step, The curl of my lips. I'm a woman, Phenomenally, Phenomenal woman. That's me.**

**(Film: Color bleeds from the speaker's mouth spreading into the frame. The two doctors exit the frame.)**

You bore him sons. I bore him sons. No, not willingly. He purchased you. He raped me, I fought! But you fought neither for yourselves nor me. Sat trapped in your superiority and spoke no reproach.

Consoled your outrage with an added diamond brooch. Oh, God, how great is a woman's fear who for a stone, a cold, cold stone would not defend honor, love or dignity!

You bore the damning mockery of your marriage and heaped your hate on me, a woman too, a slave more so. And when your husband disowned his seed that was my son and sold him apart from me you felt avenged. Understand: I was not your enemy in this, I was not the source of your distress. But you would not help me fight thinking you helped only me. Your deceived eyes seeing only my slavery aided your own decay. Yes, they condemned me to death and they condemned you to decay. Your heart whisked away, consumed in hate, used up in idleness playing yet the lady's part estranged to vanity. It is justice to you to say your fear equalled your tyranny.

**(Actress Pause: Quote)**

**(Dancer enters, 3)**

You were afraid to nurse your young lest fallen breast offend your master's sight and he should flee to firmer loveliness. And so you passed them, your children, on to me. Flesh that was your flesh and blood that was your blood drank the sustenance of life from me. And as I gave suckle I knew I nursed my own child's enemy. I could have lied, told you your child was fed till it was dead of hunger. But I could not find the heart to kill orphaned innocence. For as it fed, it smiled and burped and gurgled with content and as for color knew no difference. Yes, in that first while I kept your sons and daughters alive.

But when they grew strong in blood and bone that was of my milk you taught them to hate me. Put your decay in their hearts and upon their lips so that strength that was of myself turned and spat upon me, despoiled my daughters, and killed my sons. You know I speak true. Though this is not true for all of you.

When I bestirred myself for freedom and brave Harriet led the way some of you found heart and played a part in aiding my escape. And when I made my big push for freedom your sons fought at my sons' side, Your husbands and brothers too fell in that battle when Crispus Attucks died. It's unfortunate that you acted not in the way of justice but to preserve the Union and for dear sweet pity's sake; Else how came it to be with me as it is today? You abhorred slavery yet loathed equality.

**(Actress Pause: Quote)**

**(Dancer enters, 4)**

I would that the poor among you could have seen through the scheme and joined hands with me. Then, we being the majority, could long ago have rescued our wasted lives. But no. The rich, becoming richer, could be content while yet the poor had only the pretense of superiority and sought through murderous brutality to convince themselves that what was false was true.

So with KKK and fiery cross and bloodied appetites set about to prove that "white is right" forgetting their poverty. Thus the white supremacist used your skins to perpetuate slavery. And woe to me. Woe to Willie McGee. Woe to the seven men of Martinsville. And woe to you. It was no mistake that your naked body on an Esquire calendar announced the date, May Eighth. This is your fate if you do not wake to fight. They will use your naked bodies to sell their wares though it be hate, Coca-Cola or rape.

**(Actress Pause: Quote - Angela Davis) Angela**

**(Dancer enters, 5)**

When a white mother disdained to teach her children this doctrine of hate, but taught them instead of peace and respect for all men's dignity the courts of law did legislate that they be taken from her and sent to another state. To make a Troy Hawkins of the little girl and a killer of the little boy!

No, it was not for the womanhood of this mother that Willie McGee died but for a depraved, enslaved, adulterous woman whose lustful demands denied, lied and killed what she could not possess. Only three months before another such woman lied and seven black men shuddered and gave up their lives. These women were upheld in these bloody deeds by the president of this nation, thus putting the official seal on the fate of white womanhood

within these United States. This is what they plan for you. This is the depravity they would reduce you to. Death for me and worse than death for you.

**(Actress Pause: Quote – Maxine Waters) Danielle - Reclaiming my time**

White supremacy is your enemy and mine. So be careful when you talk with me. Remind me not of my slavery, I know it well but rather tell me of your own. Remember, you have never known me. You've been busy seeing me as white supremacist would have me be, and I will be myself. Free! My aim is full equality. I would usurp their plan! Justice peace and plenty for every man, woman and child who walks the earth. This is my fight!

**All Cast: PEACE IN A WORLD WHERE THERE IS EQUALITY.**

**Dancers surround the cast to complete South Africa dance of mourning**

**All cast point off stage with emotion**

## **ACT II**

**(Classroom screen lowered and video of Sandy Speaks. Cast lowers head with fist in air.) ask about use of video on line of facebook post of her, "I'm talking to white people." Professor Mina**

**All Cast: "Say her name."**

**Clothed Sarah is now Sandy speaks**

**(Actress is dressed in graduate cap and gown, Kenta cloth draped on shoulders)**

**Actress: Hello, my name is Sandra Bland. Today's discussion (raises the book)  
The Algorithms of Oppression**

**All Cast: Say her Name!**

**(Cast looks directly at camera and camera spans to audience of students behind computers)**

**All Cast: It is the evolution of the mind**

**Fades to black with rap music**

**(Black Girl Solider or Rap song about both women)**

In conclusion, Collins attributes, “the growing influence of television, radio, movies, videos, CD’s, and the internet constitutes new ways of circulating controlling images,” to further disenfranchise certain ethnic groups, but also serves to solidify constructed ideologies of race and class (pg93). In *Melanin*, I am using written text, cultural dance, and digital imagery as a radical intervention to give voice to those who suffered and suffering under white patriarchal belief systems, social infrastructures, and to change the constructed negative labels given to black women. The revised poem speaks in a post-civil rights voice, akin to the Black Power Movement of the 70’s and the quotes from historical black women activists, Harriett Tubman, Maya Angelo, Maxine Waters, and more provides the narratives of personal autonomy on African American women into modern times. In combining moments in the lives and deaths of these women in performance, I memorialize those who lost their lives at the hands of these systems and celebrate the activism born from their sacrifices.

- Sarah Baartman is clothed, and honored by African American activists. South African cultural dancers memorialize her suffering during her European exploitation.
- Sandra Bland is memorialized as a professor addressing a class of women coders on the continued discourse while holding Safiya Noble’s, Algorithms of Oppression dressed her ungraduated gown and cap.

In the rapidly changing world of Technology where algorithms change within seconds, the negative stereotypes and labels of black women continues in society as a whole. The low percentages of diversity in academia is noted in Dr. Joni Jones, *Sistah Doc* as she inspires and supports the women of color walking the journey and those that finished with doctorate credentials. The expected change desired by people of color must come from their own creations and promotions of true images of our culture and accurate histories of our past. Vlogger Sandra Bland did just that in *Sandy Speaks*. The silencing of Sandra by the very institution created to police slaves denotes the same rhetoric of mass media in

keeping women of color controlled, oppressed, or dead. Gil Scott-Heron's 1970 album *Small Talk at 125<sup>th</sup> and Lenox* presented the never-ending activism for equality in his poem, "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised," of the African American fight to secure equality in a racist environment. He is correct in the statement, "it will not be televised."

The American white male led mass media branding of black women as hypersexual and undesirable products of society promoted the continuing insensitivity to the brutality she faces everyday. At the same time creating melancholic campaigns that capitalized financially by inducing a fear in white women's of being replaced in economic status and beauty. In addressing the white woman citizen-subject, *Melanin* examines and defines the promotion of angst that fuels the melancholic mood of white women against black women when it comes to desire. It asks the question that makes plastic surgery a billion-dollar industry, what is it about the black woman that captures his attention?

Mass media is very cautious if not nonexistent when it comes to black positive imagery. A fear born from mass media and films like the "Birth of a Nation." Gil's evolution of the mind of black folks is the weapon that is repressed in the constructed narratives of the ugly, hypersexual, and aggressive woman of color in mass media. We must take on the task of flooding the internet with different images, accurate narratives, and challenging academia's indifference to the discourse surrounding women of color. To sum it up, Sean Combs lyric, "Can't stop, Won't stop," comes to mind when thinking of black women's presence in American society and academia. We cannot stop and we will not stop until every woman, man, and child is free.

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