FROM THE EUROPEAN SOUTH 14 (2024) 67–81
https://www.fesjournal.eu

Whose youth are the future? Black youth rejecting liberal futurities in favor of liberatory visions of the not-yet-here

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ABSTRACT

Investments in the future begin when we invest in children, or so they say. In short, 'save the children' is also a call to save the future. The impetus behind this paper does not rest in a shared belief that the 'children are the future'. What concerns me, rather, are the children already relegated to an anti-future and thus, out of and outside of time. In other words, I am interested in those said to be emblematic of the future yet denied a place in time. This paper is based on over one year of fieldwork at Run-a-Way – a multi-service center for youth in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Drawing on data from in-depth interviews with thirty youth, I make the case that within 'present orientations' there is prescience. Black youth rejected the future because they see and know what a racist-carceral, colonial state has in store for them today. Black youth chose not to entertain liberal futurities directed towards 'rights' and 'freedoms' associated with a 'post-racial era' but this did not make them present-oriented. It made them prepared. Forging new empirical and theoretical directions in the study of race and time by examining how time is racialized and how race is temporalized, this research reveals what it means to be emblematic of the future yet denied a place in time.

Keywords
Race, time, youth, futurity, anti-Blackness

Introduction

Embodying innocence, vulnerability, and boundless potential, children and youth are synonymous with future possibilities. Adults treat children as having the freedom to explore a world that promises protection and security. Investments in the future begin when we invest in children, or so they say. In short, 'save the children' is also a call to save the future. The motivation of this paper does not rest in a shared belief that the 'children are the future'. What concerns me, rather, are the children already relegated to an anti-future. I am concerned about those youth consistently warned that they will likely either end up dead or in jail by the same people complicit in their murder and incarceration. In short, I am concerned with Black youth who exceed containment within the category of 'children' because the innocence,[1] vulnerability and boundless potential of the Child function as exclusionary criteria. Forging new empirical and theoretical directions in the study of race and time by examining how time is racialized and

how race is temporalized, this research reveals what it means to be emblematic of the future yet denied a place in time.

Teachers are more likely to fail these youth because they 'aren't going to amount to anything'. To the extent that Black youth are interpellated within the temporal context of school, they are, according to Ann Arnett Ferguson, "tagged with futures: 'He's on the fast track to San Quentin Prison,' and 'That one has a jail-cell with his name on it'" (Ferguson 2000, 95-96). Zero-tolerance policies and racialized discipline ensure that Black students will not only be consistently held back, left back, and expelled from school, but also *suspended* in time. Doctors are more likely to ignore these children's symptoms because they 'mature faster' than their peers, thus making them less susceptible to childhood illness. Police are more likely to kill these youth because they look like a "demon" with the strength of "Hulk Hogan."[2]

In *No Future,* Lee Edelman describes the "Child" as the "perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (2004, 3). In other words, all political interventions (e.g. climate change legislation, gun control, educational reform, etc.), according to Edelman, exist for the sake of the Child. It is the innocence of the Child that "solicits our defense" (Edelman 2004, 2). What concerns Edelman is the potential of the Child to render the queer outside of time and thus the future. Insofar as the Child is emblematic of futurity, the queer cannot exist. As Edelman notes, "[t]he sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer" (2004, 28). As compelling as Edelman's argument is, I am left wondering who is eligible to access the category of the Child and whether all children are capable of sacralization. We might then ask, whose children are the future?

What concerns me are those left unprotected and largely outside of the category of the Child. If, as Edelman argues, the queer exemplifies a threat to "reproductive futurism" and the Child is "the obligatory token of futurity" (2004, 12), where and when does this leave Black youth, including Black queer and trans youth? How do Black youth fit into the future, when racialized and structural violence squeezes them out? How do Black youth read themselves into the future, when the future is always already synced to the temporal rhythms of whiteness? As I wrestle with these questions, I aim to wrest the "Child" from the clutches of whiteness and "Man" (Wynter 2003, 309) and show just how indispensable Black youth are to what was, what is and what is to be.

In this paper, I make the case that Black youth, particularly Black youth in poor urbanized space, are less 'present-oriented' and more prescient. Having seen the multiplicative forms of oppression they will inevitably face over their life course, Black youth from poor urbanized space retain a unique ability to foretell their futures. Hence, this paper reveals the ways Black youth are not only 'ahead of their time', but ahead of time itself. What to the untrained sociological eye seems like present orientations rooted in "deviant temporal perspectives" (Coser and Coser 1990, 201) are in fact earnest considerations over what the future holds.

Rather than endorsing ‘the power of now’, Black youth emphasize the possibilities of nowness, nonlinearity and the potential to create radical futurities on alternative spatio-temporal planes. Black youth center the now, despite being assailed by liberal futurities that promise a lot and guarantee little. This is what makes them more prescient than present-oriented. Rejecting foreclosed futures predicated on ‘equal opportunity’, freedoms, and liberties in favor of nowness, does not make Black youth present-oriented. Rather, it makes them prepared to confront structural violence that appears to lack any foreseeable end.

Suspended in the “ethnographic present”

Urban ethnography’s limited engagement with critical ethnic studies, generally, and Black studies, in particular, renders the subfield ineffectual in representing the temporal orientations of Black youth. As urban ethnographers seek to make the mundane matter and ‘make sense’ of the ‘lived experiences’ of ‘disadvantaged populations’ ‘in real time’, they run the risk of freezing racialized subjects within what Johannes Fabian describes as the “ethnographic present” (1983, 80). Seeking not only to make the familiar strange, but the strange familiar (Rosaldo 1989, 39), urban ethnographers bear tremendous responsibility for placing the lives of many on perpetual pause. The lived experiences of poor and racialized people are then crystallized and suspended in time to create a coherent and intelligible story. To be suspended in time is to be in limbo. Time is at a standstill and so are individual aspirations. The ethnographic present, though, is predicated on a set of unequal power relations between the observer and observed. Not only does the ethnographic present freeze an observed subject in time, but it also freezes temporal orientations. The future then becomes a distant temporal bridge youth will cross upon arrival, but no sooner. What to the observer (and consumer) of the ethnographic present is present, is for the observed past tense. In other words, although urban sociologists spatially-temporally assign poor and racialized people to the ethnographic present, they do not stay there.

Rather than extend urban sociology’s legacy of reifying poor, urbanized space as dangerous, chaotic, and inert, this paper contributes to an ongoing process to de-arrest Black youth from the ethnographic present. Within urban sociology and urban ethnography, ‘thinking for the moment’ signifies a present orientation to time and a product of an unpredictable life course marked by ‘social disorganization’ and violence. In this paper, Black youth demonstrate that their prescience exceeds the conceptual capacity and temporal limits of the ethnographic present.

Despite Fabian exposing the “ethnographic present” of anthropology in the early 1980s, the concept continued to prevail throughout the 1990s and well into the current moment. During this period, life course scholars, urban sociologists, and criminologists studied the values, worldviews and aspirations of poor families living in urbanized space through the lens of the

ethnographic present. With the family being widely accepted as a key site of socialization, sociologists deemed Black parents, particularly Black mothers, responsible for their children's in-the-moment thinking and abbreviated aspirations. Despite being widely taken to task by notable social scientists and Black feminists (see Spillers 1987), the Moynihan Report is still revived and recited almost verbatim by those seeking to make sense of race, space and family dynamics. For instance, in *There Are No Children Here*, Alex Kotlowitz casts aspersions over Black mothers for failing to think about both their own and their children's future:

> She [Lajoe] rarely felt she could sail through a day and enjoy such simple moments as the coming of spring, Pharoah's smile or Lafeyette's playful teasing. There was no time to reflect on the past or plan for the future. If it wasn't the shooting outside, it was her daughter's drug habit or Lafeyette's troubles at school or Pharoah's stammer. (Kotlowitz 1991, 80)[3]

The book's title says it all. If in fact there are "no children here," there can be no parents either. However, when the Child is prefigured as white, it is no surprise that Kotlowitz cannot find 'children' (or 'qualified' parents) in poor, urbanized space. The unpredictability of such space, according to urban sociologists, explains why Black youth are present-oriented and why they judge the future as futile. Present orientations are thus the product of limited knowledge of the middle class or a passive acceptance of the future.

Consider the work of sociologists striving to distinguish between 'risk' and 'resilience' in poor communities. In *Managing to Make It,* Furstenberg and colleagues examine adolescent development within poor, urbanized space using the "risk and resiliency framework." While the authors note some limitations of the framework, their conceptualization of 'development' remains confined to an "iterative and ongoing process between children and the settings in which they grow up" (Furstenberg et al. 1999, 10). Lacking any analysis of the racialization of time or the temporalization of race, they attribute present orientations to an intergenerational transmission of dysfunction:

> Most parents in our study devoted their attention to the here and now, believing that the future would take care of itself if their children managed to remain in school and stay out of trouble […] parents were applying expectations appropriate for a past rather than a future economy […] many parents simply didn't have adequate knowledge of the middle-class world to guide their children in how to succeed. (Furstenberg et al. 1999, 226)

Focus on the here and now, according to Furstenberg and colleagues, is a consequence of limited exposure to middle-class norms and values and what they describe as "functional communities." Rather than acknowledging struggles to reckon with routinized structural violence, the authors believe low-income families suffer from a poverty of middle-class norms and values. The authors accuse these families of passively letting the future 'take care of itself', as opposed to actively shaping it. Consequently, sociologists treat present orientations as

symptoms of unemployment, unstructured schedules, and a general disregard for time (Wilson 1987, 60-61).

In *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men*, Alford Young describes how African American men understand their social positions in relation to the American dream. According to Young, "[m]ost of the men in the twenty to thirty age range seemed to be completely consumed by hanging out on the street and not having much to do […]. Such behavior requires little orientation to time" (2004, 39). He further elaborates:

> In the absence of obstacles or barriers interfering with my daily goals, I did not have to think about staying on schedule […]. If obstacles or barriers surfaced, then I became concerned and anxious about my schedule. The men of the Near West Side maintained nothing like that level of commitment to schedules in their lives, nor had they had much reason to do so. (Young 2004, 42)

Young's broader goal is to demonstrate how "individual action relates to external constraints or social structures" (2004, 43). For many sociologists, such interplay is foundational to the discipline. It is not enough to emphasize the iterative connection between culture and structure, especially when the primary intervention Young claims to make is the creation of a "new *cultural* analysis" (2004, 31; emphasis added). Young seems to undermine his own critiques of white ethnographers who study African American men by perpetuating the notion of a "subculture" based on "unique and different lower-income African American normative, value and attitudinal systems" (Young 2008, 182). In turn, systemic issues are reduced to the level of the individual.

Claims of a mutually-reinforcing/mutually-constitutive relationship between culture and structure are tantamount to 'blame on both sides' – the construction of a false equivalence between asymmetric social forces. With an emphasis on thoughts about the future, Young rehearses a common move out of the urban sociology/ethnography playbook by suggesting structural factors produce cultural repertoires specific to Black people in poor, urbanized space. What then becomes most enticing to those who remain beyond the boundaries of the ghetto is not the systematic evisceration of social services, education, and employment opportunities, or even the way anti-Blackness is integral to "social isolation" or "poverty concentration," but the autopoietic character of poor and urbanized space (see Maturana and Varela 1980). I am referring to the overuse of "ghetto-related behavior" (Wilson 1996, 52), "neighborhood effects" (Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley 2002), "deviance," and "social capital," as explanations for the purported self-reproducing character of the ghetto.

As prescience comes to serve as a more accurate signifier of Black youth's relation to the future, we come to see why the "ethnographic present" and the pathologization of poor, urbanized space are both unsustainable and obsolete. Rather than allow urban sociologists to continue to serve as the masters of the ethnographic clock, I center the voices of Black youth to remind social scientists what/whose time it is. This paper aims to recover the study of time

(particularly its racialized valences), while making substantive interventions within Black childhood studies, the sociology of time and urban sociology. If, as I argue, time is a tool of racialized and ontological violence, then any discussions of Black youth's time use and temporal orientations must consider the role of power and how some gain greater temporal value over others by dint of racialized status. Without attending to the racialization of time and the temporalization of race, urban sociologists legitimate and naturalize the ethnographic present, while locating Black and other racialized youth squarely inside it.

Data and methods

In December 2014, my interest in race, time and youth brought me to Run-a-Way – a multi-service center in the Twin Cities providing support to youth in crisis and where most of this story takes place. "Run-a-Way" is a pseudonym, as well as a play on existing constructions of youth 'deviance', and 'delinquency'. Youth do not simply "run away." Many, are in fact, running *a way.* In other words, they are running with a vision and with prescience. I volunteered at Run-a-Way as a direct-care worker for fifteen months. Unlike group homes, residential programs, hospitals, youth jails and other restrictive settings, youth are not mandated to remain at Run-a-Way.

Among its many services, Run-a-Way offers access to a 24-hour crisis hotline, an emergency shelter program, a transitional living program for sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds, individual and family counseling, community education and outreach, and weekly support groups for boys, girls, and queer and trans youth. Youth at Run-a-Way are there 'voluntarily', though many are brought by parents, social workers, or other referral sources. Most youth attend public school outside of the program and spend a fair amount of time in their communities. Leaving the program without permission, however, places a youth at risk of 'losing their bed', or being barred from returning without staff approval.

During my time at Run-a-Way, I worked with over one hundred youth, but limited my research to thirty youth, including twenty-one African American/Black youth, seven mixed race youth (most of whom have one African American/Black parent), one Native youth, and one youth who identified as Hispanic. My sample included fourteen boys, thirteen girls, one trans boy, one trans girl and one non-binary youth and was consistent with program demographics. A significant amount of my time at Run-a-Way was spent observing how the youth spend 'their' time in both the emergency shelter and independent living program. My aim was to theorize with youth, rather than using them as evidence. I took note of Renato Rosaldo's serious, and sincere, reminder that "the objects of social analysis are also analyzing subjects whose perceptions must be taken nearly as seriously as 'we' take our own" (1989, 207). After approximately six months of ethnographic observation, I began conducting in-depth interviews.

Interviews ranged from forty-five minutes to one hour and forty-five minutes, with most averaging about one hour. With permission from each youth, all interviews were audio-recorded. The interview schedule contained a series of questions related to (1) opportunity structures; (2) perceptions of time and space; (3) race, racialization and racism; and (4) life course transitions and trajectories. In return for their participation, each youth received a $10 gift card. At the end of each interview, youth completed a one-page sheet with several demographic questions related to race, ethnicity, school, and eligibility for free or reduced lunch at school.

From morning wake-up calls to evening curfews, I and other staff at Run-a-Way remained embedded in an environment where racialized youth's temporalities manifest. During my orientation to Run-a-Way, most staff and volunteers were encouraged to 'meet youth where they are at'. To refrain from reproducing the violent temporalizing logics of the ethnographic present, I strived to meet youth both where and *when* they were at. So, when youth emphasized the importance of being in the moment, I did not interpret such perspectives as devoid of future orientations, but rather as a sort of temporal comportment to the not-yet-here.

Fugitive futures

While youth are believed to maintain a present-orientation to time, such assessments fail to appreciate the possibility that many youth have already thought deeply over their futures and concluded that there is not a whole lot to look forward to. Despite being emblematic of the future, seventeen-year-old Tanisha was more wary about what was to come.

> To be honest, something bad's gonna happen. Like, cuz Obama's not gonna be president no more and there's a man that's running and a woman that's running. And the man that's running seems very racist. And I think that he'll try to get... I think that he'll try to turn us into slaves again. Black people.

I conducted this interview in July 2015, almost one year before Donald Trump secured the Republican nomination for President. My purpose here is not to assess the accuracy of Tanisha's premonition, but to offer a counterframe to the ethnographic present and urban sociology's preoccupation with present orientations. Tanisha's ominous outlook not only reflects her insight into the future, but also a deep and abiding connection to the past. Tanisha portends problems for Black people based on past and present violence. All too often, scholars construct youth like Tanisha as being too focused on the now and devoid of future orientations. Ironically, it was Tanisha's connection to the past that made her way ahead of her time. Witnessing increasing anti-Black violence, many youth saw the past and present as indistinguishable.

Elliot Liebow takes the stigma surrounding present orientations to task in *Tally's Corner*:

[F]rom the inside looking out, what appears as a "present time" orientation to the outside observer is, to the man experiencing it, as much a future orientation as that of his middle-class counterpart […]. Thus when Richard squanders a week's pay in two days it is not because, like an animal or a child, he is "present-time oriented," unaware of or unconcerned with his future. He does so precisely because he is aware of the future and the hopelessness of it all. (Liebow 1967, 42)

Age and experience certainly help "streetcorner men" recognize "the hopelessness of it all"; however, youth are also capable of gathering experiential evidence to figure out that pursuing liberal futures is futile. Having had a preview of structural inequalities associated with 'possible trajectories into the future', Black youth must adjust their time horizons accordingly. Because Black youth at Run-a-Way had a strong sense of what was to come, they refused to entertain false promises. For example, Kendra, age fifteen, shared why she felt Black youth may think in the moment:

Because I guess they might think the moment is what we're living in now. Why think about the future if it might not really come? Some people might not think that there is a future cuz the future isn't promised. So they might just think, "Well, I'm gonna think about now, right now at this moment so I can live in this moment and not in some fairy tale that might not even happen."
Author: Why do you think the future is so uncertain?
Kendra: Because it's never been confirmed that we're gonna have another day. We might make plans in the future, but there's no telling if it will really happen. This world could end right now, we wouldn't even... we wouldn't have anything to say about it.

In suggesting that "it's never been confirmed that we're gonna live another day," Kendra does not limit the threat of a premature death to environmental risk factors, but widens the definition of risk to include the threat of state-sanctioned violence. I asked whether she felt that the notion that tomorrow is not promised is a 'realer' feeling for Black people and Black youth.

Yeah. Definitely. Because... Black kids don't really... they don't really look up to anything… I mean, we see Black people get killed for absolutely no reason at all. Police officer is not gonna spare my life because I'm a kid. They're not gonna spare my life because I'm a girl. I'm still Black! The color of my skin is still the same as Trayvon Martin or Eric Brown [sic]. So I... sometimes I feel like I might not even have a future... or my brothers might not have a future. I mean, we can say… we wanna go to college and stuff. But how many youth have said they wanted to go to college and ended up on the street? I mean, all youth say they wanna go to college.

At the time of this interview, the Black Lives Matter movement was in full effect and, to youth like Kendra, so was anti-Blackness and misogynoir. With an athletic physique, long braids, and dark complexion, Kendra 'fit the description' sketched by many police officers. When the 'description' is always already Black, Kendra must emphasize, "I'm still Black." In other words, Kendra is still the description. What does it mean to fit what one is? To Kendra, it means that describing the future is a challenge because she has already been described as the description. I am reminded of Katherine McKittrick's warning: "Description is not liberation" (2021, 44). The possibility that the future, in Kendra's words, "might not even come" signals its fugitivity. Or perhaps Kendra's future is held captive within what John Mbiti calls "no time":

"what has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence" (1969, 17). Could it be that youth like Kendra find it futile to always try to capture that which is already held captive within the realm of "no time"? Not only does Kendra see her future under threat of expropriation by police terror, she also questions liberal conceptions of the future, including the popular 'college for all' trope. Is Kendra rejecting the possibility of improving her life chances over time? Or is she rejecting a future she does not want? Perhaps she is rejecting what Dylan Rodriguez calls a liberal futurity predicated on false promises of equal opportunity, civil liberties and neoliberal freedoms that will backfire as soon as she attempts to become an entrepreneurial subject (2015, 34). Because liberalism requires consistency, universality, mutuality and commensurability, liberal futurities stand in as the aspirational goals for all. In rejecting liberal futurities, Black youth also rejected key frames to colorblind racism, including abstract liberalisms, predicated on the false equivalences of 'choice', 'individualism' and 'equal opportunity'. As Kendra says, "I mean, we can say… we wanna go to college and stuff. But how many youth have said they wanted to go to college and ended up on the street? I mean, all youth say they wanna go to college."

Despite being repeatedly told that "education is the key," many Black youth at Run-a-Way saw through the veneer of progress narratives and education-for-all discourse. Present-day structural violence had already foretold their futures. Kendra's prescience belies notions that she and other Black youth are merely present-oriented. Kendra has received a preview of that which has yet to come and opts out of a future undergirded by empty promises. Kendra and other Black youth at Run-a-Way echo José Esteban Muñoz's critique of Lee Edelman for prefiguring the Child as white. As Muñoz writes, "[t]he future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity" (2009, 95). Remy is a sixteen-year-old, Black, non-binary youth who affirms Muñoz's claims when responding to my question about how they think about the future:

> I don't think about the future... I'm in the moment. To me, the moment right now *is the future.* What you're doin' in this moment is going to affect what's going on in the future. I see this very stressful road because my life has been hard since day one. I don't really think about the future cuz people keep telling me it's going to get better. But it's like if I have to go through all this shit in order for it to get better, I dunno if I wanna see it at all cuz... I wanna stop. I don't wanna do it no more. Cuz the more I keep going the more shit keeps happening… So, I just don't really think about the future like that...

For Remy, contemplating over the future is futile, precisely because tomorrow's struggles are so evident today. In turn, Remy rejects what La Marr Jurelle Bruce describes as "Western Standard Time," a hegemonic teleology directed "toward normative futures, toward narrow horizons of happily ever after tailored to white, heteronormative, middle-class, rationalist subjects" (2017, 4). In privileging 'future orientations' as an indicator of youth's direction in life,

urban sociologists have ignored Remy's assertion that "now is the future." Echoing the work of queer-of-color theorists, Remy recognizes that "the future is in the present."[4] As Muñoz writes,

> Rather than invest in a deferred future, the queer citizen-subject labors to live in a present that is calibrated through the protocols of state power, to sacrifice our liveness for what Lauren Berlant has called the "dead citizenship" of heterosexuality. (2009, 49)

Remy is laboring to live the present, while within the "dead citizenship of heterosexuality" and anti-Blackness. It is no surprise then that Remy envisions the future as so stressful. According to Remy, to be oriented to the future is to also be oriented to the present and vice versa. By asserting "right now is the future," Remy complicates enduring representations of the time perspectives of racialized youth living in poor urbanized space. In so doing, Remy reminds us of the importance of recognizing the heterogeneity and multiplicity of Blackness. Perhaps Remy is thinking and being within the context of what Tavia Nyong'o calls "non-binary Blackness: a Blackness that asserts another temporality than that which is enforced within straight time."[5] Remy does not entertain chrononormative logics or progress narratives endorsing the accomplishment of a singular, specific gender identity.[6]

Far too often, scholars and activists alike wield intersectionality as a tool for inclusion (e.g., adding race, gender, class, etc.). However, intersectionality is anti-additive and the analytic power of intersectionality rests not so much in attention to who or what is included, but in the revelation of absences. As María José Méndez writes, "Whereas the space of the intersection within the inclusionary disposition points to a presence, the intersectional way of thinking that foregrounds power relations shows an absence" (2018, 4). Thus, when Blackness is consistently equated with maleness and femininity, womanhood and queerness are all equated with whiteness, where do Black girls, femmes, and queer and trans youth fit into such provincial epistemologies? My aim in centering these specific groups is to expose elisions within both Blackness and existing research on youth temporality.

Dominique is a sixteen-year-old, Black trans and "gender fluent"[7] youth who seems acutely aware of the ways that flattening differences within Blackness inevitably results in their absence. Dominique was not only oriented to liberatory futurities, but also offered fresh ideas for addressing existing issues of lateness. For Dominique, it mattered less whether someone is late. What was most important was having the opportunity to "re-feel" what happened.

> Lateness? When somebody... when you needed something at a certain time but you're about to do something else and that thing is late. But I feel like there's no such thing as lateness as long as you showed up and you can re-feel what happened. You know? I don't think people should be marked tardy if they can catch up on what happened already. You know?

Dominique rejects temporal protocols for punctuality, while envisioning a world where lateness does not apply. By suggesting that there is "no such thing as lateness" because people can

complete what has already been done, Dominique illustrates an iterative and perhaps nonlinear relationship to the past, present and future. Within Dominique's analysis is the possibility of reconciling the past with the present, while acknowledging the presence of the past in the present. To what extent is Dominique speaking to the way systematic forms of racialized violence leave many Black people and other racialized persons always already outside of conventional opportunity structures and behind white time? In Dominique's world, not only can people materially make up what was left undone, but Dominique's emphasis on how people can "re-feel" what happened reflects their connection to the experiential dimensions of social time so often lost within *chronos* and white time.

Dominique's analysis signals the inextricable connection between space and time. By privileging presence over punctuality, Dominique creates the necessary space to eliminate the strictures of time. Perhaps Dominique is engaging with what M. Jacqui Alexander describes as "the embodiment of the Sacred" (2005, 309). Like CP Time, the Sacred dislocates "linear time," while centering transformative and transgressive temporalities that exceed the conceptual boundaries of the "West," modernity, and progress. I imagine Dominique would agree with Alexander's claim that "linear time does not exist because energy simply does not obey the human idiom" (2005, 309).

Toward the end of each interview, I asked youth to utilize their time-traveling talents and imagine what they will be doing in five years. Dominique had this to say:

Um, I think I will be twenty-one. I hope to be doing really good in college and I hope to have an apartment and be working and just trying to free myself from depression and free myself from time. Like, I hope I have a soulmate by then.
Author: How will you work towards those goals?
Dominique: Just [pause]. Forget about time. I feel like that's so essential. Even though, like, [we're] basically oppressed by this time infinitely, you know. Just try to fight back and enjoy things instead of regretting that they're gone... You understand what I'm saying?... Cuz when you think of things like that, you're thinking of a stopwatch for your life… I don't think you should think like that. I think you should enjoy the moments and, you know, let them go and then like, surround yourself with things that remind you of moments such as that. Like pictures and videos and food that remind you of those people and moments. You know?

Within Dominique's response exist both liberal and liberatory futurities. Dominique endorses liberal ideals of attending college, but also emphasizes the importance of temporal liberation or liberation from time. Perhaps Dominique is calling for a commitment to what Damien Sojoyner describes as "black radical time" that "places human concerns over material demands of a Western racial capitalism infrastructure" (2017, 67). Being both Black and trans, Dominique might also be echoing Muñoz's theorizations on queerness: "Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (2009, 1). In freeing themselves from time, perhaps Dominique is engaged in a project of otherwise worldmaking – specifically a world without time. Michelle M.

Wright's *Physics of Blackness* provokes readers to not only ask 'what is Blackness?', but also "'where and when' is Blackness?" Wright helps to account for the space and time of both Blackness and queerness, while affirming the liberatory futurities of Black trans youth like Dominque.

By definition, abolishing time is an anti-capitalist act. It is unclear whether Dominique identifies as an anti-capitalist. They do, however, appear to be anti-time. What would the telos of time look like? For many adults, whose identities are inextricably linked to their labor or industry, the thought of a world without time is unfathomable. For Black youth, like Dominique, who are emblematic of the future, yet assigned to the ethnographic present, transgressing time is essential to creating another world.

Conclusion

I would like to return to a central question orienting this paper: What does it mean to be emblematic of the future, yet denied a place in time? It means that social scientists are more inclined to depict Black youth as devoid of future orientation and, simultaneously, the most recognizable residents of the ethnographic present. It means that even in the midst of climate chaos, we are left to wonder whether Black youth are included in the future climate justice activists are seeking to save. It means that even as firearm deaths surpass car accidents as the leading cause of death in children, we must ask whose children are legible in conversations about mass shootings?[8] It means that even while asking "What time is it?" may seem grammatically correct, the question suffers from serious solecism. Rather than using an adjective (i.e., "what"), it is more generative to use a determiner (e.g., "whose"). Asking "Whose time is it?" exposes the possibility that some may own time, while others can only owe it. Not only does the question help distinguish between time's owners and borrowers, but it opens up space for explanations of temporal exploitation and violence. What if being on time meant that others were always off time or late and thus penalized? To what extent does possession of time require dispossession?

Urban sociologists and ethnographers remain complicit in relegating Black youth to the ethnographic present and not only suspending them in time, but also denying them coevalness (Fabian 1983). Youth's asynchronous relationship to white time is not, however, indicative of their preoccupation with the present. Instead, present orientations are grounded in a prescience familiar to many Black youth. As they look through what W.E.B. Du Bois called "the veil," Black youth see themselves through the revelation of a white world that renders them outside of modernity and outside of white time. Rather than assume that Black youth in the inner city place a moratorium on their own future orientations because of the disorder of neighborhood effects, this paper reveals a prescience within present orientations.

Youth reject the future because they see and know what a racist-carceral, colonial state has in store for them today. Youth's preparedness is a product of their perspicacity and overall awareness that racial struggles are extending, not ending. In the final sentences of his essay on William Faulkner and desegregation, James Baldwin writes, "There is never time in the future, in which we will work out our salvation. The challenge is in the moment; the time is always now" (1985, 148). For Baldwin, liberatory futurities are not defined by dates on a calendar or in a schedule. Instead, the making of Black liberation resides in the here and now. Blurred temporal boundaries induce experimentation with new and often nonlinear spacetimes – such as nowness. Many youths tarry within the moment knowing that the future is now. For them, it was and still is now or never.

Notes

[1] In their study exploring whether Black youth are afforded similar protections of the category of "childhood" as their non-Black counterparts, Goff et al. find that Black youth are consistently seen as older, less innocent than their peers, and thus less worthy of the protections that accompany the ontological status of "Child." According to the authors, "the perceived innocence of Black children age 10-13 was equivalent to that of non-Black children age 14-17, and the perceived innocence of Black children age 14-17 was equivalent to that of non-Black adults age 18-21" (Goff et al., 529).
[2] Darren Wilson used these terms to describe Mike Brown before killing him. See Sanburn 2014.
[3] Though not a sociologist by training, Kotlowitz is widely read, cited and taught within sociological subfields, including the life course perspective, sociology of families, urban sociology, and criminology. Even more disconcerting is that *No Children Here* is classified as "Sociology/Black Culture."
[4] Muñoz adapts "the future is in the present" from C.L.R. James' first volume of collected writings, *The Future in the Present* (1977). See Muñoz 2009.
[5] Tavia Nyong'o, "Non-binary Blackness: After the End of the World with Samuel R. Delany," Art Practical, November 21, 2019, http://www.artpractical.com/feature/non-binary-blackness-after-the-end-of-the-world-with-samuel-r.-delany/. Cited in Aiken, Modi, and Polk 2020, 429.
[6] Elizabeth Freeman describes "chrononormativity" as "a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts" (Freeman 2010, 3).
[7] It is possible that Dominique intended to self-identify as "gender fluid," a more commonly accepted identity along the gender spectrum. However, this should not diminish the applicability of "gender fluent." While less conventional among gender scholars, "gender fluent" conveys a sense that one is fluent in gender discourse, especially when it comes to articulating their own gender identity.
[8] See Rabin 2023 and Choi 2023.

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