

## “No Less Human”: Making History in Suzan-Lori Parks’s *The America Play*

Katy Ryan

We stand to-day at the national center to perform something like  
a national act—an act which is to go into history.

—Frederick Douglass<sup>1</sup>

Frederick Douglass spoke the above words on 14 April 1876 in a speech to commemorate the Freedmen’s Monument in Lincoln Park, Washington, D.C. The statue, financed by African-Americans, depicts a kneeling black man, shackles broken, looking up at Abraham Lincoln who holds the Constitution in his right hand and extends his left over the head of the former slave. Lincoln looks straight ahead. In *Beware the People Weeping* (1986), Thomas Turner reinforces this representation of the bowed and grateful African-American: “the response of one group of people to the assassination was particularly touching—that of the blacks, to whom Lincoln had been the Emancipator, Father Abraham.”<sup>2</sup> Douglass did not participate in the adoration or mythologizing of Lincoln as Father Abraham. In his speech before an audience of blacks and whites, he directly addressed this question of parentage: “You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children; children by adoption, children by force of circumstances and necessity” (95). Douglass made clear that this Father had fostered unequal relations among his American children, emphasizing that “Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man” (94-95). Presumably the thirty-eight American Indians who were executed on 26 December 1862 would agree that the President was more of a Father to some than others. General Sibley instructed the chaplain Stephen Riggs to inform the condemned Sioux in Minnesota:

Their Great Father in Washington, after carefully reading what the witnesses testified to in their several trials, has come to the conclusion that they have each been guilty of wantonly and wickedly murdering his white children. And for this reason he

---

Katy Ryan is a Ph.D. candidate in English literature at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

has directed that they each be hanged by the neck until they are dead.<sup>3</sup>

Douglass reminded the audience of Lincoln's early presidential years, his repeated delays with regard to emancipation, and his support of the Fugitive Slave Law. From one perspective, these actions confirm his allegiance to white Union interests; from another, demonstrate his political acumen. With ironic prescience, Douglass concluded with some words to the white people gathered in the park: "To you it especially belongs to sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory, to multiply his statues, to hang his pictures high upon your walls" (95).

I grew up in Springfield, Illinois. Land of Lincoln. I took books out of Lincoln Library. My mom took classes at Lincoln Land Community College. I traveled to the YMCA in Lincoln, Illinois for gymnastics meets. When relatives came to visit, when spring allowed for a class field trip, I found myself either at Lincoln's home or Lincoln's tomb. I preferred the tomb. (Needless to say, I never learned during all those class trips that Lincoln had ordered the largest mass execution in American history). The iconography of Lincoln surpasses that of all other Americans; his speeches, which are often reproduced in classrooms and on stages, including the floors of the House and Senate, have become part of our national discourse.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there is a Lincoln Speech Memorial at National Military Park, "perhaps the only monument to an address in the country."<sup>5</sup>

Suzan-Lori Parks's *The America Play* parodies the legacy and commodification of Lincoln, exhuming national, cultural, and individual memories. Parks's strategy is not to document Lincoln's lesser selves but to create a space for the Lesser Known, a black gravedigger who realizes his uncanny resemblance to Lincoln and capitalizes on this phenomenon by performing the speeches and assassination of the Great Man Himself.<sup>6</sup> In his interactive performance, the "Foundling" Father invites people to shoot him for a penny and provides the appropriate guns. On stage with the Lesser Known are a large Lincoln cutout and busts of the president, which he frequently acknowledges with a wink or a nod. He comments on his philosophy of performance and the tricks of his impersonating trade: "Some inaccuracies are good for business. Take the stove pipe hat! Never really worn indoors but people dont like their Lincoln hatless" (168). There is also his yellow beard, the Foundling Father's fancy beard: "Mr Lincolns hair was dark so I dont wear it much. If you deviate too much they won't get their pleasure. Thats my experience" (163). He reserves the yellow beard for holidays and admits, somewhat campily, "I got shoes to match. Rarely wear em together. Its a little *much*" (161).<sup>7</sup> The Foundling Father's struggle is a mimetic one, with all the anxiety ventures into truth and resemblance provoke.

In the introduction to her recent collection of plays, Parks explains,

I'm re-membling and staging historical events which, through their happening on stage, are ripe for inclusion in the canon of history. Theatre is an incubator for the creation of historical events—and, as in the case of artificial insemination, the baby is no less human. (5)

Artificial insemination eliminates the need for reproductive sex and, through the interaction of biology and technology, rearranges the sites and meanings of parenthood. In her cyborg manifesto, Donna Haraway writes, "Sex, sexuality, and reproduction are central actors in high-tech myth systems structuring our imaginations of personal and social possibility."<sup>8</sup> Cyborgs, she argues, offer an alternative to "holistic politics" because they "have more to do with regeneration and are suspicious of the reproductive matrix."<sup>9</sup> In her definition of theatre, Parks also sidesteps the "reproductive matrix," and, in *The America Play*, she does so without recourse to a holistic politics that depends upon originary claims and founding fathers. Parks believes that the stage not only critically reflects on the past and continuous present, but "makes history." Implicit in Parks's statement is an understanding that history is always mediated knowledge and that cultural spaces, like theatre, like Lincoln's tomb, serve as incubators for historical events. In social and legal discourses, women's bodies have been disastrously reduced to incubators, particularly, though certainly not exclusively, in Europe during the seventeenth century when it was assumed that the sperm provided the female vessel with a complete human life: "The view of reproduction was that man's sperm contributed all the human substance to the developing baby and the woman's body was a kind of incubator."<sup>9</sup> The theatre, long associated with the feminine, boasts creative powers tending toward deceit, emotion, instability, and, as Kate Davy summarizes, the "to-be-looked at."<sup>10</sup> Parks fashions her incubating stage as an active, collaborative space; "the great hole of history" in *The America Play* transforms this imagined female body. Her understanding of theatre as a sexual act "artificially" produces a no-less-human history and offers a queerly mimetic strategy of performance that forces history out of the grave and whiteness into the open.

Sue-Ellen Case situates queer theory within the realm of ontology, "challenging the Platonic binaries of Being—the borders of life and death."<sup>12</sup> According to the heterosexist "right to life" discourse that Case traces, queer desire breaks with the "natural," reproductive world and its gendered assumptions; the queer vampire resists the discourse of pure blood with "her evacuating kiss that drains the blood out, transforming it into a food for the un-dead."<sup>13</sup> I do not want to argue here that the stage figures in *The America Play* challenge heteronormativity but rather propose that there is a structural similarity between

queer theory's intervention into heteronormative paradigms and Parks's representational approach to theatre. That is, there is something "queer" going on in the Foundling Father's attempt to pass as Lincoln, to duplicate the copy in "blackface" that resists the "natural" progression of history. *The America Play* revises "what we hear" of the past through black stage figures who tell their American family narrative. Parks summarizes, "'A man is telling the story of his life, and in the second act the family is coming to look for his remains; that's the story I want to tell.'"<sup>14</sup> This story of exploration and return, of looking for the "remains" of the Father(s), critiques both white supremacy and America's mythic self-representation of family and country.

Parks has expressed her discomfort with the notion that she is a "political playwright," and called attention to the double standard so often at work in the phrase: "'Why does everyone think that white artists make art and black artists make statements? Why doesn't anyone ever ask me about *form*?"'<sup>15</sup> Yet, it is precisely the *political* significance of Parks's form that revitalizes theatre. Parks often refers to the jazz concept of "repetition and revision" as central to her work, specifically the idea that within a dramatic narrative structure, we can revisit a phrase or scene to revise it:

In such pieces we are not moving from A-B but rather, for example, from A-A-A-B-A. Through such movement, we refigure A. And if we wish to call the movement FORWARD PROGRESSION, which I think it is, then we refigure the concept of forward progression.<sup>16</sup>

Parks acknowledges that throughout this process, "we all want to get to the CLIMAX," and in the margin of her essay, she writes,

in X-vids the cum-shot is the money shot. Yeah but it's not a question of the way girls cum vs. the way boys cum. I'm not looking at a single sexual encounter but something larger, say, in this context, the history of all sexual encounters all over the globe, all animals included.<sup>17</sup>

It is this "larger" structural context that interests me and how Parks uses the stage to accommodate the metaphor created in the space, the opening, between A and A. Liz Diamond, who has directed several of Parks's plays, including *The America Play*, suggests that in "Parks's world, history is too vast, the individual too small for the psychologically constructed character to have any impact."<sup>18</sup> It is within

this vast performative space that the reproduction of American history becomes political—and formal.

*The America Play* creates in the first act a stylized repetition of a particular event—the shooting of Lincoln—and strains in the second act, as Lucy does with an ear trumpet, to hear voices from History. The idea to represent the assassination came to the Lesser Known after one of his free performances in which he had invited people to throw food at him while he repeated the Great Man’s words. “This was a moderate success,” the Foundling Father tells us. “He took to traveling playing small towns. Made money. And when someone remarked that he played Lincoln so well that he ought to be shot, it was as if the Great Man’s footsteps had suddenly been revealed” (164). A man then enters as John Wilkes Booth (the actor and assassin), selects a gun and shoots the Foundling Father who is laughing—“Haw Haw Haw”—as the “real” Father probably was that night. In his collection of eyewitness accounts of the assassination, Timothy Good notes, “Because the audience was laughing at the antics on stage at the time few heard the shot that felled the President.”<sup>19</sup> Visitors arrive over and over to shoot “Lincoln”—the “ones for history” who always choose the Dellinger, the newlyweds who ask if they can go “both at once,” and a woman who does not scream the usual lines, “Thus to the tyrants!” or, “The South is avenged!” but rather, “LIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIES” (165, 167). Una Chaudhuri observes that the repeated enactment of the assassination becomes a ritual that highlights the “violence at the heart of American history” and exposes the “patricidal fantasy” of national culture.<sup>20</sup>

In Parks’s dramaturgy, “now and then” is not chronologically but spatially conceived; death is always present and has something to say. The Lesser Known tries to follow in the Great Man’s footsteps “that were of course *behind* him,” impossibly trying to “*catch up*” to the past. After reciting the usual crowd-pleasing lines and the state capitals (which includes the anachronistic listing of Honolulu as a state capital), the Foundling Father announces,

the centerpiece of the evening!! (Rest.) Uh Hehm. The Death of Lincoln!—The watching of the play, the laughter, the smiles of Lincoln and Mary Todd, the slipping of Booth into the presidential box unseen, the freeing of the slaves, the pulling of the trigger, the bullets piercing about the left ear, the bullets entrance into the great head, the bullets lodging behind the great right eye, the slumping of Lincoln, the leaping onto the stage of Booth, the screaming of Todd, the screaming of Todd. (189)

The freeing of the slaves occurs in the same breath as the shooting of Lincoln and the screaming of Todd; scenes from *Our American Cousin* accompany the “present” performance of Lincoln; and, during act two, Lucy and Brazil re-view act one on TV. Such historical events can coexist because the donning of inappropriate beards, the parades of the famous, and the procession of the faux assassins are imagined within the “great hole, an exact replica of the great hole of History.” This simulacrum has been variously interpreted as the absence of African-American history in the United States, a theme park, and the hole in Lincoln’s head. David Richards writes in the *New York Times*, the hole is a “Beckettian wasteland par excellence. But it also represents the absence of black history in a society that has long defined itself by the exploits of a few select white men.” Another reviewer in the *Times* suggests that the hole accumulates various meanings but signifies, “more importantly, the hole in black history caused by hundreds of years of invisibility in servitude.”<sup>21</sup> Chaudhuri similarly refers to it as the “great hole of racism.”<sup>22</sup> In the introduction to her collection of plays, Parks sarcastically offers another possibility: “People have asked me why I don’t put any sex in my plays. ‘The Great Hole of History’—like, duh.”<sup>23</sup>

Her exasperation arises from the tendency of critics and theatregoers to read plays by African-Americans as “about” race, not sexuality, not a black woman’s sexuality. Imposing a narrowly racial narrative onto the action results in, to borrow from Parks, sentences that are “outside the play”: *The America Play* has thus been received as a comment on “black-on-black violence,” or “so your [Parks’s] father left your family.”<sup>24</sup> If Beckett’s *Happy Days* is about anything, it is about a woman being buried alive in sand. *The America Play* demands equal attention to the literal: Lucy tells Brazil, “Keep diggin till you dig up something.” Diamond emphasizes, “‘You’re invited to say the play is about family, the country, race, men and women.’”<sup>25</sup>

The “great hole” clearly invites sexual readings, unearthing what western metaphysics has vigorously tried to bury.<sup>26</sup> The Foundling Father recalls his honeymoon and how he “loved that Great Hole so. He’d stand at thuh lip of that Great Hole: OHWAYOHWAYOHWAYOHWAY” (181). In an interview, Diamond and Parks laugh over this joke that audiences often do not catch.<sup>27</sup> Like Parks, Luce Irigaray uses the metaphor of “digging” to suggest the process necessary to uncover a buried history, in this case, the history of female sexuality:

As Freud admits, the beginnings of the sexual life of the little girl are so “obscene,” so “faded by the years,” that one would have to dig very deep in order to find, behind the traces of this civilization, this history, the vestiges of a more archaic civilization which could give some indication as to what women’s sexuality is all about.<sup>28</sup>

In white American history, black women's sexualities remain largely unknown, "unfound," though something called "black woman's sexuality" has been fabricated by "civilizing" forces. Evelyn Hammonds offers the metaphor of black holes to theorize the historical relationship between white women's and black women's sexualities.<sup>29</sup> It is in constellation with another sexual and racial identity that a "primary" one is constructed in a colonial context: the invisible reality of black women's sexuality is inferred from the orbit of visible stars, white women's sexuality. After Michele Wallace had been criticized for catering to the media image of black men in her book *Black Macho*, she also looked to this trope:

I used a black w/hole as a metaphor—a hole in space which appears empty but is actually intensely full—to portray a black feminist creativity that appeared to authorize a "negative" view of the black community but was, in fact, thereby engaged in reformulating black female subjectivity as the product of a complex structure of American (U.S.) inequality. (659)<sup>30</sup>

In her own drama, Parks engages with the complex constellation of race and gender relations in the United States through the image of a (nonempty) hole in the ground.

When Lucy tells her son that she gave into her husband "on everything," he asks,

Brazil. Anything?

Lucy. Stories too horrible tuh mention.

Brazil. His stories?

Lucy. Nope.

(Rest.) (187)

We do not even hear echoes of Lucy's stories; we hear the "rest" of silence. Lucy, who identifies not with the Great Man but with the Great Man's wife, would choose a different "moment" to enact than her husband: "me myself now I prefer tuh part where he gets married to Mary Todd and she begins to lose her mind (and then of course where he frees all thuh slaves)" (190). The "part" that Lucy prefers, the suspicion that Mary Todd Lincoln was "given to hysterics," is an excerpt from a grand narrative of marriage that obscures the experiences of "First Ladies" and assumes the absence of women of color.<sup>31</sup> Irigaray writes, women's "sex organ represents the horror of having nothing to see. In this system of representation and desires, the vagina is a flaw, a hole in the representation's scopophilic objective."<sup>32</sup> *The America Play*, situated within (but not only within) this "flaw," or "womb-

theater,” achieves a relocation similar to that of the cave in Irigaray’s *Plato’s Hystera*, in which the Shadows are newly cast within a woman’s womb, forcing consideration of the always absent mother in this found(I)ing philosophical text.<sup>33</sup>

The systematic rape of black women by white men is one of the most absent parts of American history (if one can speak of degrees of absence), and Parks’s staging of a “patricidal fantasy” that spatially coincides with “the freeing of thuh slaves” evokes this history. Yet in Parks’s play, the hole is never singular; it is always both a metaphor and the stage itself, constantly revisited and revised. Women’s sexualities are similarly variable, hardly one story of pleasure or terror. The “lip” that the Lesser Known was so fond of is not the same as the edge of the theme park, or the border of a bullet hole. In an interview with Parks, Steven Drukman suggested that her plays start from a “fabricated presence. In other words, you assume that the figure is a historical construction.” Parks changed the phrase to “the fabricated absence, actually. It’s a fabricated absence. That’s where I start from. And that’s where the Foundling Father came from. It’s the hole idea.”<sup>34</sup> This fabricated absence, the hole idea, encourages shifting and simultaneous readings, like the subway in Adrienne Kennedy’s *The Owl Answers*, which is the Tower of London is a Harlem hotel room is St. Peter’s. Meanings are (re)generated, not given. Parks writes out of this assumed absence with relentless irony. Haraway describes irony as being “about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true.”<sup>35</sup> Parks’s hole of history contains such incompatible truths, congregating “Amerigo Vespucci, Marcus Garvey, Ferdinand and Isabella, Mary Queen of thuh Scots! and Tarzan of thuh Apes!” Here, the multiple contexts of American history incubate—hardly, as Parks says, a single sexual encounter.

Lucy recalls the

Great Hole where we honeymooned,—son, at thuh Original Great Hole, you could see thuh whole world without goin too far. You could look intuh that Hole and see your entire life pass before you. Not your own life but someones life from history, you know, somebody who killed somebody important, uh face on uh postal stamp, you know, someone from History. *Like* you, but *not* you. You know: *Known*. (197)

The Original Great Hole, the honeymoon site, becomes the receptacle of the Known, in biblical and historical senses. The Known may resemble you—the wife of a Greater or Lesser Man—but the face on the stamp is *not you*. Gayatri Spivak stresses, “Knowledge is made possible and is sustained by irreducible difference,



not identity. What is known is always in excess of knowledge. Knowledge is never adequate to its object."<sup>36</sup> The objects of history, the "wonders" that Brazil digs up from the hole—George Washington's wooden teeth, a bust of Lincoln, a trumpet, a bag of pennies, a yellow beard, a TV—are grossly inadequate to what Brazil (whose name "'comes from the Brazil nut that is called nigger toe'"<sup>37</sup>) and Lucy know about being American. Brazil, along with most audience members, must dig through the stories he has inherited and make distinctions. When he glories in the marvels of the great hole—"Just like thuh Tee Vee. Mr. George Washington, for example, thuh Fathuh of our Country hisself, would rise up from thuh dead and walk uhround and cross thuh Delaware and say stuff!! Right before their very eyes!!!!" (179)—Lucy interrupts his enthusiastic narration to remind him that there is a difference between the Real and the "lookuhlike": "That Hole back East was uh theme park son. Keep your story to scale" (180). Keeping the story to scale is precisely the difficulty when one is dealing with history, whether familial or national.

\*\*\*\*\*

For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival.

—Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*<sup>38</sup>

In dialogue with Stuart Hall, Henry Louis Gates writes, "our social identities represent the way we participate in a historical narrative. Our histories may be irretrievable, but they invite imaginative reconstruction."<sup>39</sup> Parks's play responds to this invitation by reconstructing historical narratives vis à vis sexual and racial positionings that, like queer theories, refuse the ontological verity of social identities and upset the most intransigent of borders—that between life and death. The stage has long been crowded with the not absolutely dead, with the stories we tell about the past. Parks's writing constantly returns to the twin acts of burial and mourning. *The America Play*, like *Venus* and *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, blurs the distinction between the living and the dead; it is a play preoccupied, not only with the aspirations of a gravedigger, but with the grave itself. Chaudhuri writes, "*The America Play* locates America where the theoretical imagination has long looked for it: in a grave."<sup>40</sup> During the literal and mental excavation of act two, the Lesser Known returns after a thirty-year absence to find his coffin prepared for him. Characteristically, the Foundling Father decides "to say a few words from the grave"; he performs Lincoln a final time and becomes a spectacle in the Hall of Wonders (197). Brazil showcases the newest item: "To our right A Jewel Box of cherry wood . . . Over here one of Mr. Washingtons bones, and here: his wooden teeth . . . To my right: our newest

Wonder: One of thuh greats Hissself! Note: thuh body sitting propped upright in our great Hole” (199). Returned from the “dead” to enter another grave, the Foundling Father quickly becomes a spectacle, a commodity, buried in another narrative, as the nation mourns.

This theatrical rediscovery of Lincoln and return of the not absolutely dead provides a material analog for the specific haunting of history in a colonial context. In his now familiar thesis, Homi Bhabha argues that “the excess or slippage produced by the *ambivalence* of mimicry (almost the same, *but not quite*)” in colonial discourses undercuts the “original.”<sup>41</sup> We know “whiteness” because the Foundling Father, “digging his holes bearing the burden of his resemblance,” is “*not quite*” the real Lincoln—no more than the bust, no more than Lincoln was Father Abraham; race and History are put on. Marc Robinson reads the Foundling Father’s mimicry of the assassination of Lincoln as more than “merely returning to a legendary moment. He is also forcing the past back into the present, and thus enabling himself to revise history.”<sup>42</sup> “What we hear” of history—“so says hearsay”—are echoes of a historic gunshot and whispers that “dont always come up right away. Takes time sometimes” (178). What we see of history are ever more Disney theme parks, TV pictures, and pasteboard cutouts.

In contrast to this capitalist model, Parks’s play presents an “act that will go into history,” a “counter-memory”—Foucault’s term for the kind of remembering that alters our relation to the past and changes our present understanding of truth.<sup>43</sup> The absence of white bodies on stage is critical to this project. Parks offers one clue to *The America Play*: “Well, one meaning or reading is the fact that there are all black people in the play. And that’s something I feel very strongly about.”<sup>44</sup> This is an interesting play to consider in light of present discussions about “cross-racial” casting. The humor and despair in the play relies on the discrepancy between black skin and white images. Without blackness, there could be no play on the white construction of Lincoln. For the production of meanings, Parks relies on a kind of strategic essentialism, even though she rightly insists,

there is no single “Black Aesthetic” and there is no one way to write or think or feel or dream or interpret or be interpreted. As African-Americans we should recognize this insidious essentialism for what it is: a fucked-up trap to reduce us to only one way of being.<sup>45</sup>

The front cover of *The America Play* displays a picture of Lincoln’s top hat, beard, and dark suit against an American flag. There is no body, no color—only the outline of a president. His, presumably his, whiteness is invisible.<sup>46</sup> On the back

cover is a black man wearing the same top hat, beard, and dark suit in front of the red, white, and blue. As in the performance, a “white” body could not be substituted for a “black” one, since the history of the United States, the performance of “America,” has everything to do with perceiving differences in “race.” By incubating history on a stage filled with black performers, Parks fundamentally shifts the ground on which the events of America’s official past are remembered. Her “refiguration” of theatrical space extends the possibility that just as babies can be born without reproductive sex, history can be made without whiteness. Male and female bodies are still necessary for reproduction, and history is more than one color, but the processes by which we create ourselves, biologically and historically, can be transformed.

Plato’s discomfort with mimesis resulted from (in addition to the unpleasant spectacle of a weeping male actor coming perilously close to “being” a woman) the “imply[d] difference—the copy is not the model; the character not the actor; the excited spectator not the rational male citizen, yet both occupy the same ontological space.”<sup>47</sup> In Parks’s play, the Lesser Known mimics a copy of a president: a black man, a white president, a female character from a nineteenth-century play occupy the same late twentieth-century ontological space within an exact replica of the hole of History, the hole of a bullet, the hole of a female body. As Elin Diamond suggests, mimesis offers subversive or resistant possibilities, not because it provides a mirror reflection, but rather because it functions as “a trick mirror that doubles (makes feminine) in the act of reflection”; the result is “mimesis without a true referent.”<sup>48</sup> The potential of queer theory / politics / performance often resides in the strategic appropriation of dominant discourses to effect a kind of mimetic visibility and shift in perception through meaning’s “homecoming festival.” *The America Play* critically engages with the mythologizing and apotheosis of Lincoln to suggest the viability of personal memory as an interventionist strategy in the creation of historical imaginations. The play satirizes nostalgia for objects dug up from a history echoing with LIES and gunshots, realizing the difficulties of archeological inquiry. Diamond has urged a reconsideration of mimesis as a feminist, and I would add, queer project: “It is through some manipulation of referentiality,” she gives a nod to Brecht, “that the political may be broached.”<sup>49</sup> Queer mimetic practice asks how we recognize what we know, attending to the absences that structure presence, and the epistemologies that adjudicate Being and Time: to whom and to what are we attached; what stories and performances constitute this attachment; what hole sets the stage? In Lucy’s words, we “need tuh know thuh real thing from thuh echo. Thuh truth from the hearsay.” Or in Nietzsche’s, “the past is the gravedigger of the present.”<sup>50</sup>

## Notes

1. From "Expression of Gratitude for Freedom" in *Building the Myth: Selected Speeches Memorializing Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Waldo W. Braden (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990) 92. All references to Douglass's speech are from this edition.
2. Thomas Reed Turner, *Beware of the People Weeping: Public Opinion and the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U, 1982) 27.
3. Qtd. in David Nichols, *Lincoln and the Indians: Civil War Policy and Politics* (Columbia and London: U of Missouri P, 1978) 116. The transcripts of the trials indicate that the average case was given ten to fifteen minutes.
4. According to Braden, "No iconography of any other American, not even George Washington, has rivaled that of Lincoln" (17).
5. Braden 20.
6. The play does allude to Lincoln's lesser selves, including a reference to Lincoln's tribute to the confederacy after the Civil War: he asked his troops to "play Dixie [sic] I always liked that song" (160).
7. Parks comments that humor is "'a way of getting to the deep stuff, the kind of joke that really hurts: the digger/nigger joke is so funny it's painful and you go ouch.'" Qtd. in Andrea Stevens, "A Playwright Who Likes to Bang Works Together," *New York Times* 6 March 1994: C10.
8. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991) 169.
9. Haraway 181.
10. Emily Marting, "Body Narratives. Body Boundaries," *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paul A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992) 419.
11. Davy, "Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative," *Drama Review* 33:1 (Spring 1989): 157.
12. Case, "Tracking the Vampire," *differences* 3.2 (Summer 1991): 3. Moe Meyer also defines queer as "an ontological challenge to dominant labeling philosophies" in her introduction to *Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1994) 1. Cindy Patton, conversely, defines queer as "de-ontology"—a moral position rather than "being" in "Tremble, Hetero Swine!" *Fear of a Queer Planet*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1993) 143-177.
13. Case 6.
14. Stevens C10.
15. Qtd. in Solomon, "Signifying on the Signifyin': The Plays of Suzan-Lori Parks," *Theatre* 21:3 (Summer/Fall 1990): 73. Solomon identifies the inextricability of form from politics in Parks's work. In an interview, Parks admits, "'I never wanted to be a spokesperson for the race . . . My plays are for the kind of black people who relate to funk music, to Parliament-Funkadelic. When those guys get out of a spaceship—the idea that black people are from outer space, there's a poetic truth to that.'" *New York Times* 17 April 1996: C1+.
16. Qtd. in Alice Rayner and Harry J. Elam, Jr. "Unfinished Business: Reconfiguring History in Suzan-Lori Parks's *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*" 447.
17. Parks, "Introduction," *The American Play and Other Works* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1995) 9. All page references to *The American Play* will be taken from this edition.
18. Diamond, "Perceptible Mutability in the Word Kingdom," *Theatre* (24.3): 87.
19. Timothy S. Good, *We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eye Witness Accounts* (Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995) 123. Good also includes the following quotation from Lincoln: "'Some people find me wrong to attend the theatre, but it serves me well to have a good laugh with a crowd of people'" (3).

20. Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995) 264.

21 David Richards, "Seeking Bit of Identity in History's Vast Abyss," *New York Times* 11 March 1994: C 3:1. "A Singular 'American Play' and a Gory 'Titus,'" *New York Times* 20 March 1994: 5:5+.

22 Chaudhuri 263.

23. *The American Play and Other Works* 16.

24. Qtd. in Stevens C10.

25. Interview with Steven Drukman, "Doo-a-ditty-dit-dit," *Drama Review* 39.3 (Fall 1995) 62. Writing in the *New York Times*, Alvin Klein provides a representative response from those who have been disappointed with the elusive quality of Parks's work: "Ms. Parks's ideas are so crammed and arbitrarily unfolded that her play—her play as a play—is neither fathomable nor cohesive. But her unanswerable questions are freeing." "Yale Rep Offers 'America' Premiere," *New York Times* 30 Jan 1994: CN 17:1.

26. Although I am specifically referring to women's sexuality, male homosexuality has been similarly buried. In her essay "Playing Dead in Stone," Peggy Phelan makes another connection between holes and sexuality, performing what she calls a "psychoanalysis of excavation" while refuting the popular notion that "the disinterred object will redeem us" (66).

27. Diamond and Parks discuss the sexual innuendo in *The American Play* in the interview with Drukman, 72-73. Unfortunately, Drukman refers to this reference to the "hole" as a "dirty joke."

28. Irigaray, "Sexual Difference," *French Feminist Thought: A Reader*, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987) 100-101.

29. Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," *differences* 6.2+3 (Summer-Fall 1994): 126-145.

30. Wallace, "Negative Images: Towards a Black Feminist Cultural Criticism," *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paul A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992) 659.

31. Elizabeth Keckley, a seamstress in the White House during the Civil War years, provides an interesting sketch of Mary Todd Lincoln in her autobiographical account, *Behind the Scenes, or Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (New York: Oxford UP, 1988). Keckley also mentions Lincoln's preference for the song "Dixie": "It has always been a favorite of mine, and since we have captured it, we have a perfect right to enjoy it" (172).

32. Irigaray 101.

33. In William B. Yeats's poem "Leda and the Swan," a woman's body also becomes the site for historical action. After Zeus in the form of a swan accosts Leda, a "shudder in the loins" "engenders there / The broken wall, the burning roof and tower / And Agamemnon dead." At a precise mythohistorical moment, war, a devastated city, and a dead King are "engendered there"—in the hole, in the woman's body—and rape sets history in motion.

34. Drukman 67.

35. Haraway 149.

36. Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 9.

37. Qtd. in Stevens C10.

38. For an interesting look at Bakhtin's theory of dialogism in relation to drama, see Helene Keyssar, "Drama and the Dialogic Imagination: *The Heidi Chronicles* and *Fefu and her Friends*," in *Feminist Theatre and Theory*, Helene Keyssar, ed. (New York: St. Martin's P, 1996) 109-136.

39. Henry Louis Gates, "The Black Man's Burden" 231.

40. Chaudhuri 262.

41. Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 127.

42. Marc Robinson, "Four Writers," *Theatre* 24:1 (1993): 39.

43. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. and trans. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977).
44. Drukman 61.
45. *The American Play and Other Works* 21-22
46. Bell hooks writes, "In white supremacist society, white people can 'safely' imagine that they are invisible to black people since the power they have historically asserted, and even now collectively assert over black people accorded them the right to control black gaze" (340). "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," *Cultural Studies*, eds. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paul A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992) 338-346.
47. Diamond 368.
48. 368, 370
49. 367.
50. Quoted in Chaudhuri 254.