

## Presumption, Initiation, and Practice

From a theological point of view, reading black performance as (in part) a tactical response to white supremacy suggests placing in juxtaposition two histories of the body that can be made to question each other provocatively. Here, we would set Du Bois's articulations alongside the biblical text of crucifixion: a *hyper-tensed black body* nearly torn asunder by its doubling in the eye of race that continues to query American theology in particular as a "practice of privilege" and a *ruptured Jewish corporeality*, pinioned to the cross at the crossroads of empire and oppression, that continues to query Christian theology in general as a "practice of order." Two bodies, two bloods, two histories of anguish and its overcoming, as a task of articulation.

In framing the question thus, however, I am not only concerned with analyzing the black body as a resource for struggle and formation in the African American community, but also with halting before its complex significations as a sign of the entire nation. Specifically in this project, I am proposing the collective (and contested) performance of blackness in all of its manifold meanings, as a kind of critically productive *aporia* for the confession and reformulation of Euro-American self-understandings and practices. White America is put radically *in* question—corporeally and materially—in the very same instant the black body is solicited as revelatory (as it is in James Cone's polemics). In the historical logic of American racism, it cannot be otherwise.

But then we also need to go further and acknowledge that the spiritual polemics of a black nationalist group like the Nation of Islam strike close to the mythic core of America when they castigate the white system as "blue-eyed devilry." Any attempt to articulate the

theological meaning of the white American body must begin with its likely condition as already “possessed.”<sup>1</sup> The very material position and practical conditions of my identity as white are already in thrall to the real history and mythic fantasy of white supremacy, before I ever become either conscious in my intentions or deliberate in my actions. As a form of taken-for-granted identity, whiteness stands forth in the time and space of this country as a structure of violence and a significance of injustice. The black body as a “possibility of theophany” would thus have as its unrelieved mythic correlate the white body as a “question of exorcism.” Theologically, the relationship between them must be understood, at one level, as a form of spiritual combat, a struggle for possession and counter-possession in the various times and spaces of both the body politic and the personal body. *Deliverance of either requires releasing each to a merely human and fully humanized, negotiation of difference.* Ultimately, exorcism of the powers of racism and healing of racial division demands a radical rethinking of the “*daemon* of difference” in relationship to the body incarnate. Such will be the preoccupation of chapters 6–8 under the rubrics of *white postures* (of being), *white initiation* into the racial situation (of America), and *white post-supremacist practice*.