CHAPTER 5

The Politics of Sexuality in Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit"

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Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black body swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange Fruit hanging from the poplar trees.
Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of Magnolia sweet and fresh,
And the sudden smell of burning flesh!
Here is a fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.[1]

In her final speech before the Passage of Resolution 39, the U.S. Senate's 2005 apology for lynching, Senator Mary Landrieu asserted: "Jazz legend Billie Holiday provided real texture in her story and song 'Strange Fruit.' " In a review of various historical moments of lynching and antilynching efforts on the state and national level, Senator Landrieu introduced the lyrics of the song and further observed that "[s]omething in the way she [Holiday] sang this song . . . must have touched the heart of Americans because they began to mobilize, and men and women, White and Black, people from different backgrounds, came to stand up and begin to speak."[2] Attributing in an anecdotal way the formation of public actions against lynching to the power of Holiday's singing, Landrieu seemed to agree with most former studies of the song that have focused

on the racial and gender politics in Holiday's rendition. This essay sheds new light on the politics of sexuality embedded in Holiday's early nightclub performance of "Strange Fruit." By examining her rendition outside of the conventional discussions of the song as a protest narrative, I complement and complicate the existing interpretations of Holiday's "Strange Fruit."

Past studies have explored the politics of race, class, and/or gender of "Strange Fruit." Some scholars, including Michael Denning, David W. Stowe, and David Margolick, have pointed out the song's cultural political power as an antilynching and social protest song, and have linked it to the historical context of antilynching struggles in the cultural activism of the labor movement (Popular Front) in the 1930s, which Denning labeled the "cultural front" where the song was written and performed. "Strange Fruit" was composed by the Jewish-American schoolteacher turned political activist Abel Meeropol (known by the pseudonym Lewis Allan) around 1937. Holiday began to sing the song in 1939 at New York's Café Society Downtown (hereafter Café Society), the first racially-integrated nightclub that opened outside of Harlem, and it quickly came to be known as an establishment that welcomed "labor leaders, intellectuals, writers, jazz lovers, celebrities, students and assorted leftists."[3]

Other scholars like Angela Y. Davis and Dawn-Wisteria Bates have offered an alternative analysis, one that emphasizes, from the racial and gender perspective, the political aspect of Holiday's performance of the song, refuting previous studies by mostly white male critics and biographers alike that downplayed Holiday's political role in her rendition of the song.[4] "Strange Fruit" has been covered by a number of performers, but it is notable that among them are many Black female singers, including Nina Simone, Diana Ross (who played Holiday in *Lady Sings the Blues*), Abby Lincoln, Miki Howard (who played Holiday in Spike Lee's *Malcom X*), Cassandra Wilson, Dee Dee Bridgewater, and India Arie, who either recorded the song or covered it for live performances, suggesting that there has been a Black feminist embrace of the song following Holiday's versions. Crowned as the "Best Song" of the twentieth century in *Time* magazine's last issue before the new millennium, and selected as number one of the "100 Songs of the South" by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* in 2005, one can hardly deny that Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" maintains lasting impact and influence both in popular culture and in academe.[5]

On the other hand, "something in the way" Holiday sang the song might also have "touched the heart of Americans" in a quite different

way. Recall, for example, how the song was used in the 1986 film *Nine and A Half Weeks,* which depicted a short-lived erotic and sadomasochistic relationship between New Yorkers John (played by Mickey Rourke) and Elizabeth (Kim Basinger). In the scene where John invites Elizabeth to his friend's boathouse on their second encounter, he plays Holiday's "Strange Fruit" after making the bed, suggesting the erotic engagement afoot between the two. Why was this particular song—the song about the brutalized Black body in the southern landscape—selected for this scene to portray the white New Yorkers' erotic love affair? The combination of the song and the scene seems incongruous, yet this seemingly inappropriate matching—the way in which Holiday's "Strange Fruit" is eroticized in the recent cultural representation of the urban white couple's sexual relationship—merits further analysis to consider how Holiday's rendition of the song conjures up something sensual in modern-day white imagination. Lynching's erotic nature, however disturbing,—the rape rationale, the nudity, sadistic torture delivered against the victim's stilled body—seemed, for this filmmaker, to mirror the sexual encounter between man and woman, far removed both temporally and geographically from the site of the song's gruesome murder scene.[6]

Indeed, eroticization of the song was often the case in contemporary reception of Holiday's live performance of it. Some audiences imagined race, sex, and violence in the South in quite an erotic way through the lyrics of "Strange Fruit" and within the nightclub space. Historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall has stated that Holiday "made famous the indelible image of 'strange fruit' of race and sex in the American South," but while she suggests "the imagery of lynching—in literature, poetry, music, in the mind of men—was inescapably erotic," not many studies have closely examined Holiday's "Strange Fruit" from this perspective, thus failing to grasp more comprehensive and complicated politics of race, class, gender, and sexuality in her performance.[7] Although mostly overlooked or only briefly mentioned in past studies, such receptions make sense, I contend, given that by the time of the song's debut by Holiday, American society had become quite familiar with negative sexual stereotypes of Black men and women, and with the spectacle-like characteristics of lynching alleged sexual criminals. These erotic reactions remind us of what cultural critic bell hooks has observed about representation of African Americans. hooks contends that there is a connection between "the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy" and "the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of

race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people."[8] The eroticization of "Strange Fruit" deserves further scrutiny to elucidate how the consumption of the lynching story helped maintain white supremacist patriarchy. Close attention to the politics of sexuality in Holiday's rendition of the song shows us the nuanced ways in which Holiday meant to resist the commodification of lynching and objectification of the Black body.

This essay reconsiders Holiday's "Strange Fruit" from the perspective of sexuality by thoroughly examining the song's development; its relationship to the historical context of lynching; the lyrics' meanings and symbolism; the public reception of the song in the media and by nightclub audiences; and the way Holiday performed the song—both her bodily presence and the musical interpretation she introduced in the nightclub setting. I explore how Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit" reconstructed and reinforced in the public mind a stereotypical image of race, sex, and sexuality in southern lynching. Specifically, I demonstrate how Holiday's performance of a song by a left-wing Jewish composer, carefully directed by the progressive Jewish club owner to draw political attention to the predominantly white audience in the entertainment space, sometimes received a different reception. After discussing the song's historical context—the history of the complex elements that tied racial and sexual politics together through lynching—I argue that "Strange Fruit" was consumed in a manner most similar to the way in which the spectacle of lynching was consumed by white mobs. It is through the vicarious experience of this secondary lynching presented by Holiday's "Strange Fruit" that white supremacist patriarchy was maintained. I further examine how Holiday's rendition of the song, being complicit with the production of such voyeuristic pleasure on the one hand, simultaneously subverted the commodification of lynching and the sexual stereotyping of Black men and women. Here, I draw on the theory of a counterstrategy to contest the racialized representation introduced by hooks, who emphasized the need for the struggle to "critically intervene and transform the world of image making authority," and by cultural critic Stuart Hall, who proposes to contest the stereotype from within. I contend that Holiday's very presence as a Black woman, and her artistry—her politics of sexuality—changed the whole dynamics of white male-controlled representations of lynching, thus challenging the institutionalization of exploited images of African Americans.[9]

Lynching and Rape: Sexual Context of "Strange Fruit"

By the time of Holiday's debut of the song in 1939, the image of the Black rapist had been well entrenched in American society, thanks to denigrating popular depictions in the media. Alleged rape of white women by Black men became one of the strongest racial/sexual images associated with southern lynching. According to historian Sharon Block, as early as the Revolutionary era, rape narratives offered a discursive site to define white manhood and citizenship, and since the Post-Reconstruction period, the Black rapist image dominated this narrative.[10] The more Black men gained political and economic equality with white men, the more they were regarded as a sexual threat against white women.

Thus, whites rationalized lynching in the name of justice against sexual crimes and protecting white womanhood in particular. Lynching worked as a device for whites to preserve their supremacist patriarchy in southern society, especially after Reconstruction. A large number of narratives of the "black beast" or "black rapist" were published at a time when southern whites needed an excuse for lynching African Americans.[11] People had already experienced such an image not only through newspaper accounts of actual lynchings, but also in the representation of lynching in literature and film, most notably D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), Hollywood's first feature-length megahit film based on Thomas F. Dixon, Jr.'s *The Clansman* (1905) and both hyperbolization of the perceived Black male sexual threat against white womanhood.[12] Although antilynching sentiments were widely shared on the national level (the 1937 Gallup Poll showed that 70 percent of Americans supported federal antilynching legislation), a 1939 anthropological study found that nearly 65 percent of southern white respondents believed that lynching for rape was justifiable.[13]

In this way, lynching and rape had become inseparable in the American imagination and public discourse. The rape myth so dominated society that advocates working to end the grisly practice focused their energies on refuting it.[14] It is well known that pioneer antilynching activist Ida B. Wells had challenged the myth of the Black rapist in the early 1890s, but even 40 years later, antilynching activists continued to fight against this pervasive stereotype.[15] In 1935, for instance, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sponsored the antilynching art exhibit "An Art Commentary on Lynching," and published an accompanying pamphlet by writer Erskine Caldwell denouncing the familiar reasoning that lynching existed "to protect the

honor of Southern womanhood." Such rhetoric, Caldwell concluded, served "merely [as] an excuse designed to cover up the true intent and purpose" of killing African Americans.[16]

The Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching (ASWPL), founded by southern white woman Jessie Daniel Ames in 1930, criticized the existent image of vulnerable white women who needed white men's protection from Black men's sexual assaults.[17] Whether to reinforce or to refute the rape myth, discourse was created around this image. As Jacquelyn Dowd Hall makes clear, "rape and rumors of rape became a kind of acceptable folk pornography in the Bible Belt," but some reactions to Holiday's "Strange Fruit," as will be shown later, clearly reveal that these pornographic images of savage Black men raping defenseless white women gained widespread acceptance outside the South as well.[18]

The castration of Black men likewise became a well-circulated type of "folk pornography." As seen in the lyrics of "Strange Fruit," hanging and burning were familiar aspects of lynching, but lynching very often included mutilation, particularly of Black men's genitals. Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage has shown that, across the South, castration occurred in one in every three lynchings.[19] The 1934 lynching of the alleged Black rapist Claude Neal in Greenwood, Florida, for example, haunted the whole nation on account of the detailed description of his castration reported not only in newspapers but also in the NAACP's antilynching pamphlet.[20] As historian Amy Louis Wood observes, castration, as the most powerful symbol of lynching, has "affected the cultural memories of both blacks and whites, more than any other aspect of lynching."[21]

Such a sadistic punishment came out of the white obsession with presumed Black male hypersexuality. The ritual of lynching reflected whites' imaginary fear of and desire for the Black male body.[22] The white imagination turned Black men into sexual objects or, worse, reduced them into merely parts of man—genitalia. As Frantz Fanon has posited pointedly, while projecting their sexual desires onto Black men and acting as if they truly had those desires, white men fixate Black men at the genitals.[23] Similarly, Kobena Mercer has argued that the "essence" of Black male identity is placed in the "domain of sexuality" and adds that "black men are confined and defined in the very being as sexual and nothing but sexual, hence hypersexual."[24] In other words, as Trudier Harris writes, lynching in general, and castration in particular, functioned as nothing more than "communal rape" of Black men—rape in terms of assaulting Black male sexuality.[25]

Fanon's question rightfully articulates this point: "Is lynching of the Negro not a *sexual* revenge?"[26] Rape and alleged rape of white women by Black men had caused lynching that emasculated Black men's bodies in sadistic, sexual ways in the public arena. Although the number of lynchings declined in the 1930s, public obsession with Black male sexuality still continued. It was this social context that impacted the sexual images of "Strange Fruit."

Receptions and the Lyrics: Eroticization of "Strange Fruit"

As many studies have demonstrated, Holiday's early rendition of "Strange Fruit" came out of the peak of a nationwide antilynching campaign, along with the emergence of the Popular Front culture of the 1930s. The lyrics first appeared as a poem entitled "Bitter Fruit" in the *New York Teacher,* a 1937 Union publication.[27] Lyricist/composer Lewis Allan and his wife Anne regularly performed "Strange Fruit" at leftist gatherings a year before Holiday first sang it.[28] Allan later recalled, "I wrote *Strange Fruit* because I hate lynching, and I hate injustice and I hate the people who perpetuate it."[29] Café Society's owner Barney Josephson described the song as "agitprop" and "a piece of propaganda" meant to stir the listeners to action.[30] Affiliates of the antilynching campaign and the labor movement understood correctly the intentions of the composer and the club owner in the song's performance. In 1939, the New Theatre League published the song as sheet music while the leftist magazine *New Masses* called Holiday's rendition "a superb outcry against lynching."[31] That year, the NAACP executive director, Walter White, also praised the song.[32] In February 1940, the Theater Arts Committee (TAC), a Popular Front affiliate, sent a copy of "Strange Fruit" to U.S. senators, urging them to vote for the passage of the Gavagan Anti-Lynching bill, also known as the second NAACP bill.[33] First and foremost, then, the song served as a protest narrative.

Others, while aware of the song's protesting message, belittled Holiday's political awareness as the song's performer. For instance, in *Time*'s April 1939 report on Holiday's first recording of "Strange Fruit," the magazine mocked the songstress and denounced her song as a "Strange Record." The author ridiculed both Holiday's femininity and her artistry, declaring Holiday "a roly-poly young colored woman with a hump in her voice . . . . She does not care enough about her figure to watch her diet, but she loves to sing." Even as *Time* extended a backhanded compliment by acknowledging that Holiday loved to sing, the article minimized "Strange Fruit's" transgressive impact, describing the song as "dirge-like

blues melody" (which the NAACP would distort into "a prime piece of musical propaganda"). By dismissing Holiday as someone who "liked its . . . melody" but was "not so much interested in the song's social content," the white-made *Time* author undercut Holiday's political potential as a feminist and civil rights advocate, as well as an artist and singer.[34]

Moreover, *Time* presented Holiday—and her uniquely unsettling rendition of the song for the Vocallion Company—as puppetry for the NAACP and its leftist supporters. Angela Y. Davis criticizes the way in which many white male critics and biographers asserted that Holiday never understood the meaning of the song without white men's tutelage. Club owner Josephson, for instance, claimed to have suggested Holiday perform "Strange Fruit." Biographer John Chilton has described how, although at first Holiday was slow to understand the song's imagery, "her bewilderment decreased as Allen [*sic*] patiently emphasized the cadences, and their significance." Similarly, Donald Clarke labeled Holiday a nonpolitical person who "never read anything but comic books" and "didn't know what to make of" the song when she first looked at "Strange Fruit." Davis writes: "Chilton's, Clarke's, and Josephson's stories capture Holiday in a web of gendered, classed, and raced inferiority, and present her as capable of producing great work only under the tutelage of her racial [and gender] superiors."[35] *Time*'s description clearly exhibited such a view by contrasting Holiday's alleged unawareness of the song's political content with the record company Vocallion's awareness.

This depiction of an ignorant, happy-go-lucky type of heavyset Black woman reminds us of the stereotypical Mammy image widely publicized in popular culture, most notably in the Hollywood film *Gone with the Wind,* released that year (1939). It simultaneously conjures up the seductive Jezebel image, deriving from the fact that the word "hump" connotes a woman as purely a sexual object.[36] Not only the love songs Holiday sang prior to "Strange Fruit," but also her lighter skin might have reinforced such a lascivious image.[37] As Farah Jasmine Griffin rightfully observes, "Billie Holiday emerged at a time when the dominant cultural stereotypes of black women were Mammy and Tragic Mulatto."[38] Record producer Jerry Wexler's comment on the song summarizes the *Time*'s reaction to Holiday's performance: "It's so un-Billie Holiday. It's got too much of an agenda."[39] Similarly, a critic with *DownBeat* magazine reviewed Holiday's recording, writing: "Perhaps I expected too much of *Strange Fruit* . . . which, via gory wordage and hardly any melody, expounds an anti-lynching campaign. At least I'm sure it's not for Billie, as

for example, *Fine and Mellow* is."[40] For such critics, political consciousness was not what Holiday represented—nor what they were prepared to see in her.

Able to wrest these stereotypical images from her performance, it should not surprise us that nightclub audiences who gave the song a cursory listening might not have understood its clear protest message. Kenneth Spencer, a notable African American actor of the 1940s-1950s, commented in 1942: "Yes, 'Strange Fruit,' that casually bitter song by Lewis Allan, is a strange song for a night club entertainer to be singing, and stranger still is the fact that the white people at Café Society Uptown call for it every night."[41] The nightclub setting very likely provided room for the audience to receive the song as merely entertaining. One audience member recalled "the contrast between the tragic song of protest sung with the deep feelings by a Negro woman who felt [the] horror of a lynching, and the patrons out for a good time[,] drinking and[,] at times[,] yakking, some of them oblivious to the message of the singer." He "wondered then whether it made sense to sing such a song in such a milieu."[42] The club owner, Josephson, stated that "Strange Fruit" was performed under carefully directed staging ("I insisted she [Holiday] closed every show with it ['Strange Fruit'] every night. Lights out, just one small spinlight, and all service stopped . . . . There were no encores after it. My instruction was walk off, period"), so that "people had to remember 'Strange Fruit,' get their insides burned with it."[43]

Judging by some audience members' descriptions, Josephson's mission—and Holiday's "nightly" mournful crooning—might have fallen on deaf ears. Some in the audience clearly thought that Holiday's performance evoked an erotic image of lynching. In her autobiography, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956), Holiday recalled how one woman in a Los Angeles audience requested her to sing "Strange Fruit" by asking, "Billie, why don't you sing that sexy song you're so famous for? You know, the one about the naked bodies swinging in the trees."[44] While Bates and Davis have dismissed the woman's reaction as "pathological" and "impervious to her [Holiday's] message," Davis has further made an intriguing observation: "What is interesting about this anecdote . . . is the bizarre and racialized way the woman links the song with the ubiquitous engagement with sexuality in Holiday's work."[45] For that white listener, "Strange Fruit" had become a "sexy song" confined by its reference to naked "black bodies swinging in the trees." Thus, the erotic nature—the folk pornography—trumped the violence described in the song and sanitized its bizarre and pathological landscape.

Even in progressive places like Café Society, Holiday received similar reactions. Songwriter Irene Wilson recalled how a white male southerner had once shown Holiday "some 'strange fruit' " after her performance at Café Society, and described how "he made this very obscene picture on his napkin and the way he had it, honey, it was awful!"[46] One can only speculate what kind of "very obscene picture" he drew, but it was possibly male genitalia, which is later described as "strange fruit."[47] This white man's perception of the song is even more pornographic, suggesting that lynching conjured up a certain erotic image in the presumed progressive and leftist nightclubs.

Focusing on how its lyrics were composed helps us further understand how "Strange Fruit," probably contrary to the composer's intention, was perceived sexually at the time. Composer Allan once mentioned his encounter with an actual lynching photograph that inspired him to write the song, and recalled that, after seeing the lynching image, he "suddenly saw all lynchings—as strange, strange fruit."[48] This powerful, yet somewhat bizarre analogy merits further attention. In Allan's imagination, the particular brutalized Black body in the photograph turned into a mere object (labeled as *strange* fruit) in a very poetic and sexual manner. While "Strange Fruit" describes the literal image of the Black body hanging from the tree, it may conjure up forbidden fruit, a biblical metaphor that represents seduction and the object of desire, yet abstinence.

This notion of taboo is often powerfully melded from Adam and Eve's original sin to narratives of lynching. In the case of the latter, the taboo rests with the sexual relationship between white women and Black men. Indeed, given that southern white women symbolized the South itself in southern legend, the southern landscape filled with the "Scent of Magnolia" possibly connotes southern white womanhood and white female sexuality.[49] Pay particular attention to the contrast between "Scent of Magnolia sweet and fresh" and "the sudden smell of burning flesh," which alludes to forbidden fruit of sweet and seductive white female sexuality for Black men (who were not supposed to have the fruit of the white female body, but could not help wanting it in the white imagination), and describes the hideous outcome of such Black men's sexual desire. The cost of coveting that fragrant fruit is clear: sudden death. Its cause—Black male sexual transgression—and effect—violence and murder brought onto Black men because of their own impetuousness—are compellingly coupled by Allan's use of "and" in his lyrics and Holiday's "then" in her performance.

Another important juxtaposition occurs between "Pastoral scene of the gallant South" and "bulging eyes and twisted mouth," in which the adjective "gallant" possibly signifies white southern manhood and masculinity—the image of the chivalric New South—analogous to how the "Scent of Magnolia" represents southern white womanhood. These four lines, alternating between romanticized and sexualized images of the South (represented by southern white masculinity and white female sexuality), with the sadistic flashback depictions of the images of the brutalized Black body, complete the lyrical description of the prevalent lynching discourse of Black men being persecuted by white men for their alleged crime of raping white women. They stimulate the erotic imagination, as evidenced by how the song describes only a black body, a sexless object, yet some audiences imagined a sexualized Black *male* body. Of course, Allan must have relied on those peaceful scenes of the South for the stark contradiction they made of the gruesome reality of lynching, but the way the lyrics are phrased could imply otherwise.

Equally perplexing, while lynching pictures usually captured the process or immediate aftermath of lynching, as well as the white mobs happily pictured with the hanging bodies, the presence of those spectators is erased or absent from the song. A possible exception is the reference to white manhood in the phrase "gallant South," but it does not fully depict the white mobs' direct and often gruesome role in lynching African Americans. Overall, the lyrics describe the southern landscape of lynching's aftermath, particularly in the first and last parts, while the middle focuses on lynching's eroticism in a series of flashbacks capturing the ongoing event. Due to the absence of mobs and the poetic description of lynching, the lyrics, as a whole, give an impression that it is more a meditation on lynching, particularly its sexual aspects. Clearly, some in Holiday's audience found the song highly sexual despite the fact that the lyrics never illustrated overtly sexual imagery. Envisaged sexuality and lyricism might have embodied somewhat erotic tones. The imaginary lynching in the song reproduced the racial/sexual image of southern lynching that was prevalent enough in contemporary American society.

Bodily Presence and Performance: Holiday in the Contested Space of Spectacle/Witnessing

Just as lynching—the public spectacle of sadistic punishments—became a new space of consumption where Blacks themselves became commodities (the lynching scenes were often pictured with the spectators, and

Figure 5.1 Billie Holiday at Café Society, 1939. Frank Driggs Collection, Institute of Jazz Studies, Rutgers University

the victims' body parts were brought back as "souvenirs"), the image of the South and of southern lynching were commodified and consumed through Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit."[50] The performance of the song was essentially a consumer spectacle. For instance, in 1939, the *New Yorker* advertised the song by asking: "HAVE YOU HEARD? 'Strange fruit growing on Southern trees' sung by Billie Holiday at Café Society."[51] The way it was advertised ("HAVE YOU HEARD?") alludes to newspaper accounts that announced scheduled lynchings. The advertisement was intended to attract, and did eventually attract people who had never heard "Strange Fruit" to come listen to Holiday singing, thereby experiencing what a southern lynching was like. Paradoxically, Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit" in nightclub settings became a similar lynching spectacle. The public space for enjoyment, where Holiday narrated the story about southern lynching, produced a kind of secondary lynching (See Figure 5.1).

The picture of Holiday's performance at Café Society set the atmosphere for her rendition of "Strange Fruit," and this scene of people surrounding a Black person (Holiday) in the entertainment space evokes

for many the actual lynching spectacle evident in many existing lynching photos.[52] In such a space, Holiday was not only the narrator of lynching, but also embodied the Black victim, male and female. Indeed, this nightclub picture shares some similarities with the typical photographs of a lynching spectacle—in terms of their spatial composition—although the photos' different characteristics—as commemorative and documentary—have offered the camera different gazes (lynching pictures and postcards usually captured the spectators looking back at the camera). The audience surrounding Holiday at Café Society unintentionally supplemented the absence of white mobs in the lyrics, turning the club space into the spectacle of secondary lynching, albeit a benign one staged in New York. Nightclubs might not have offered a carnival-like atmosphere, but the song did help the predominantly white audience to participate vicariously in southern lynching, or its rejection as foreign to northern sensibilities.

What makes this situation even more complicated, however, is that it was Holiday, a Black woman, who represented through song this spectacle of southern lynching. A pointed remark by Robert O'Meally, who stated "that song, with its imagery of trees that 'bear' and 'fruit' that is 'plucked' or 'dropped,' also gave expression to her role as a woman who discerned a sexual motive in the act of lynching," suggests Holiday's role as a successor to Black female predecessors who disclosed lynching's true purpose behind the myth of the Black rapist.[53] They challenged white justification of Black men raping white women by focusing on the cases of lynching and rape of Black women. For instance, Ida B. Wells wrote in 1895 that "the same crime [rape] committed by white men against Negro women and girls, [wa]s never punished by mob or the law."[54] The National Association of Colored Women (NACW) passed a resolution protesting the lynching of two Black women in 1914, and campaigned, among other organizations, for further investigation into the lynching of a pregnant Black woman in 1918.[55] The Anti-Lynching Crusaders, an NAACP-affiliated organization formed by Black women in 1922, greatly contributed to fundraising for the passage of the Dyer antilynching bill that year. In all these cases, Black women activists persistently made Black women lynching/rape victims visible.[56]

As some scholars have argued, the dominant discourse of lynching by whites has excluded Black women by focusing only on white male chivalry, white female victims, and Black male rapists.[57] Until recently, the historiography of lynching has overlooked the fact that Black women were also frequent victims of lynching and rape throughout U.S. history.[58] Under slavery, the sexual abuse of Black women never fit into the

category of rape, not only because of their status as white slaveholders' property but also due to their dominant image as immoral. This image of sexually-loose Black woman functioned as an excuse for slaveholders to repeatedly impregnate enslaved females for profit.[59] American justice hardly persecuted the perpetrators of the postbellum rape and lynching of Black women, and even lynching of Black men was attributed to Black women's lack of virtue and alleged promiscuous nature.[60]

As Hazel V. Carby rightfully asserts, "rape of black women has never been as powerful a symbol of black oppression as the spectacle of lynching."[61] Indeed, what is striking about the lyrics of "Strange Fruit" is that the gendered-ambiguous "black body" in this fictional southern lynching fails to represent the Black female experience, thus reproducing another lynching narrative similar to the white racist dominant discourse. Under such circumstances, Holiday's bodily presence in this consumer space—the fact that the audience witnessed and listened to a Black woman telling a story of lynching—adds to the interpretation of the song's more complicated dynamics of race, gender, and sexuality. In the consumer space of a nightclub setting that resembled the scene of a lynching spectacle where Holiday was surrounded by the predominantly white audience, not only did she represent Black male victims and/or their mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters, she also possibly embodied Black female victims of lynching *and* rape.

Holiday's presence as a Black woman in the song's performance as well as her bodily politics of sexuality through attire, expressions, gestures, and musical artistry, contributed to recuperating a hidden transcript of the buried history of Black sexual oppression.[62] While nightclubs offered a space where Black female sexuality was objectified and consumed, Holiday subverted the white gaze and challenged the negation of Black female sexuality through her artistic qualities.[63] Evelyn Cunningham, a prominent Black woman reporter for the *Pittsburgh Courier* in the 1940s, recalled that "many times in nightclubs when I heard her sing the song it was not a sadness I sensed as much as there was something else; it's got to do with sexuality."[64]

Although Cunningham mentioned sexuality in a sense that she "never had the feeling that this [rendering of 'Strange Fruit'] was something she [Holiday] was very, very serious about," her comment raises the possibility that Holiday's performance was, as Angela Davis has proposed, deeply rooted in the blues tradition. It was in this tradition that Holiday challenged the negation of Black female sexuality in the dominant discourse of lynching. In her analysis of Holiday's love songs, Davis argues

that some of Holiday's renderings represented "a juxtaposition and performance of the conflict between representations of women's sexuality in the dominant popular musical culture and those in the blues tradition—the former denying female agency, the latter affirming the autonomous erotic empowerment and independent subjectivity of female sexuality."[65]

This was clearly the case in Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit." Despite the fact that the media and audiences, intentionally or not, downplayed her agency as a Black woman and reproduced the discourse of lynching through consuming her nightly performances, Holiday resisted these limitations by her very presence as an embodiment of Black female sexuality. While Holiday's sexuality was exposed and objectified in nightclubs, it was through this attention to her sexuality—and sexual freedom expressed overtly in her love songs—that Holiday could remind the audience of the sexual exploitation and captivity of Black women so long and so deeply suppressed in the white supremacist discourse of lynching. It is significant that Holiday protested the white supremacist discourse of lynching through the musical affirmation of sexuality rather than the politics of respectability, which was a strategy of collective racial uplift often used by educated Black female reformers to counter the denigrated image of Black women by over-desexualizing Black womanhood.[66] While organizations such as the NACW and the Anti-Lynching Crusaders deployed this strategy, Holiday's politics of sexuality stood out as a strategy to challenge negative stereotypes of Black women in quite a different manner. By affirming the autonomy of Black female sexuality, something Black women had never attained under slavery, Holiday offered her Black foremothers a symbolic liberation from bondage of the long-overlooked history of their sexual exploitation.

Holiday's attire, a vital part of the performance, clearly exemplifies the affirmation of Black female sexuality. Her Grecian-style stage dresses were, most of the time, very fitted to her voluptuous body and showed her curves. The sleeveless long white dress in the picture above, for instance, exposes her arms and accentuates her breasts with its tightened belt. Holiday's hair was usually swept up neatly, showing her full face and neckline. She often wore various kinds of artificial flowers in her hair, most notably gardenias, or magnolias that represented white female sexuality in the lyrics of "Strange Fruit." Holiday was possibly claiming that Black women, too, could be represented by this emblematic southern flower, thus embodying southern womanhood. Also, Holiday's facial expressions and gestures during her performance of the song—her closed eyes, slightly uplifted chin, and half-opened mouth—further played up her sexuality.

It is important to note that Holiday usually performed "Strange Fruit" at the very end of the show, as the club owner Josephson explained, after singing several other songs in her repertoire that were mostly torch songs. Having heard other love songs that openly expressed Black female sexuality, the audience might have received "Strange Fruit" not as a clear protest message but rather something similar to a love song.

What, perhaps, ultimately determined most audience's experiences of "Strange Fruit" is Holiday's musical artistry, i.e, the way she utilized her voice, tone, phrasing, timing, and intonations in the rendition of the song. Through this performative presentation of the song, Holiday refused to simply reproduce the fictional lynching scene based on the dominant discourse of lynching to be consumed. Holiday first recorded "Strange Fruit" on April 20, 1939, soon after she started performing it regularly at Café Society. This particular recording explains the mood around the earlier time the song was performed and received.[67] A cursory listening to this version might give us an impression that Holiday's overall melancholic tone sounds almost like that of the other love ballads in her repertoire, in contrast to the later versions in 1945 and 1956, for example, in which both Holiday's hoarse warbling voice and the dramatic arrangement of an accompanied trumpet and piano demonstrate much more gripping strength.[68] But this very gloomy timbre in her voice, which expressed love, pain, and despair for Black women in her early torch songs, echoes Black women's same feelings about the loss of their loved ones in "Strange Fruit." The way in which the voice of a Black woman (Holiday) describes the landscape of southern lynching in a calm, objective, and meditative manner amplifies her sorrow, and Holiday's musical phrasing and intonation of each word deepens it even more.

In the 1939 recording of "Strange Fruit," Holiday's lyrical performance of the song begins after a minute-long slow introduction of a trumpet solo accompanied by tenor and alto saxophones, followed by a piano solo backed by bass, guitar, and drums. Her simple, descriptive way of singing the first line ("Southern trees bear a strange fruit") that makes the listeners wonder about "a strange fruit," immediately changes by the second verse. Here, Holiday sings most of the words ("Blood" "on" "the"/"blood" "at" "the") with staccato phrasing, conveying musically the scene of blood dripping from the strange fruit. We do not know what this fruit is until the third line: "Black bodi[es] swinging in the Southern breeze." Note that Holiday changes the singular "black body" in the original lyrics into plural "black bodies" in her performance, making clear that this violence is often repeated against many African American men and women's bodies alike.

This slight lyrical alteration successfully inserts in the lyrics a much more horrifying image of lynching, thus reinterpreting lyricist Allan's view.[69]

With Holiday's emphasis on "black bodies" and her stretching out the words "swinging," "Southern," and "breeze," it sounds like the gentle wind is blowing Black bodies, thus perfectly depicting a horrifying picture of hung bodies. It also makes the scale of lynching larger: like the tree's many branches, there swing the many nameless victims across time.

In the song's second section, where the lyrics portray the flashback of lynching paralleled to southern scenery, her rendition makes more palpable, although subtle, the stark contrast between the serene southern landscape and the gruesome lynching scene. Holiday overstretches "pastoral" and emphasizes the peaceful scene in the South while she rises and drops the pitch in the pronunciation of "twisted," thus illustrating the victim's mouth being crooked with pain, as well as the stillness and silence that follow violence and death. In the following line, after stretching "Magnolia," she pauses for a moment before quietly adding "sweet and fresh," as though evoking the sexuality of southern white womanhood.

The last section of the song, portraying the lynched body's predictable fate—"a fruit for the crows to pluck/ for the rain to gather/ for the wind to suck/ for the sun to rot/ for the tree to drop"—is the climax of Holiday's lyrical performance. While stretching each noun and verb, she gradually raises her voice as the song goes, much like the soul leaving the victim's body or the crows taking flight after their grisly gouging on African Americans' remains. In the last two lines, Holiday slows down and makes long pauses between each section. Her phrasing of the words, the way she overstretches "rot," "drop," "bitter," and "crop" even more, dramatically heightens the atrocity of lynching. In particular, Holiday's intonation of "drop"—first rising then falling down slowly in a parabolic way—induces imaginatively the moment the body is being dropped from the tree. Although the lynched body is already dead, it appears to have been killed once again by her powerful performance. It is this musical interpretation of "Strange Fruit" that allowed Holiday to contest the audience's voyeuristic gazing on imaginary lynching and her sexuality.

Indeed, Holiday's musical revisiting of the southern landscape of lynching raises the specter once again for the audience of another imaginative scenario, where a Black woman standing in front of the lynched body hanging from the tree recalls her encounter of the lynching practice and prays for the dead with deep sorrow and anger—did she run into the ongoing incident? Did the mob force her to look? Or did she have to

bear witness because the alleged sexual criminal was someone she knew, or her very loved one?

Considering Holiday's performance as well as her bodily presence in the nightclub helps us see more clearly the multilayered dynamics of this contested terrain, where the audience vicariously witnessed the southern lynching while simultaneously seeing Holiday, a Black woman, looking at the lynching. On the one hand, Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit" offered a cultural space where audiences imagined and consumed race, gender, and sexuality through southern lynching. Her performance sometimes unwittingly helped reinforce the existing discourse of lynching, whereby Black men were said to threaten white womanhood sexually, and allowed the audience to participate imaginatively in an actual lynching. It reconstructed, reinforced, and commodified the image of southern lynching in the popular mind outside the South. The song first appeared when racially and sexually stereotypical images of lynching and of Black men and women were well propagated in society while antilynching feeling was simultaneously emerging among the public. Holiday's "Strange Fruit" grew out of such a unique historical conjuncture, and her performance itself functioned as a conjunctural space where those contested ideas and perceptions of lynching, race and sex were encountered, contested, and intertwined.

On the other hand, Holiday's performance—her physical and vocal presence in the story of a lynching—revealed further complicating politics of race and sexuality in the actual and imagined lynching. While the media and audience commodified lynching stories that exploited Black male sexuality and negated Black female sexuality in the realm of popular culture, Holiday subverted the institutionalization of racialized and sexualized images of "black body" by her very sexuality, thus challenging white supremacist patriarchy. Furthermore, her bodily presence in the vocalist reproduction of southern lynching made Black women and Black female sexuality visible in the dominant lynching discourse that had long obscured their presence. For Holiday, as a Black woman, to sing "Strange Fruit" was not only to protest against racial violence: it also allowed her to give voice to her silenced sisters who had been continuously denigrated as racialized/sexualized others. In the cultural space of her performance of "Strange Fruit," Holiday's body became the principal site where she contested racialized representation of lynching from within.

Holiday's rendering of "Strange Fruit" likewise offers another interpretation on the politics of sexuality from the perspective of white women.

It created a cultural space where, by listening to Holiday's musical affirmation of women's sexual autonomy, white women could also participate, albeit differently from Black women, in resisting white patriarchy that suppressed female sexual subjectivity. While southern white men had long exploited Black women sexually and excluded them from the category of rape victims in the lynching narrative, they attempted to control white women's sexuality by confining them to the protective rhetoric of innocent rape victims. Hence, on the one hand, Holiday's public avowal of Black women's sexuality resisted the sexual objectification of Black women and the historical silencing of their sexual abuse as examined here. White women's affirmation of sexuality through consuming Holiday's performance, on the other hand, liberated themselves from the imposed notion of rape victimhood. Although the consensual sexual relationship between white women and Black men had often existed in the United States, it became one of the key threats to the weakened white patriarchal positionality, particularly since Post-Reconstruction. According to historian Martha Hodes, ideas about "the agency of white women" in such interracial liaisons had been replaced by new ideas about "the dangers of empowered black men" (the image of the Black rapist) by the 1890s. But the notion and reality of consensual relationships between Black men and white women, by their persistence into the twentieth century, carried within them the germ of another subversive force: the agency of white women.[70] Thus, by consuming "Strange Fruit," white women could subtly validate the proscribed interracial sexual relationship Holiday elegized in the song. In so doing, they undermined the taboo of Black-white consensual liaison, thereby subverting white patriarchal norms.

In this case, the request for the "sexy song" by a white woman in Los Angeles makes more sense; indeed, it would seem that she valued it as the genuinely sexy song that it was. She said "sexy" because of "the naked bodies swinging in the trees," thereby emphasizing not only the brutality inflicted upon these black bodies but rather their nakedness, which conjured up something erotic and seductive in her mind. She actively asked for Holiday's musical rendering of what she considered the sexy, naked bodies of Black men.

It is this very act of this white woman, her affirmative and autonomic desiring for imagined (and possibly actual) Black male sexuality that white men had long tried to suppress through the rape myth. Thus, through the act of musical consumption, Holiday's white female audiences acquired a new vehicle for challenging the dominant social norm of women's

sexuality that restricted female agency. And they were able to do so without damaging their respectable womanhood. The picture of Holiday at Café Society included here clearly captures how comfortably well-dressed, decent white female audiences consumed Holiday's overtly sexual performance of both love songs as well as "Strange Fruit" that musically described Black male and white female sexuality, forbidden interracial sex, and sadistic violence as an outcome of such a relationship. From the perspective of the politics of sexuality, the complicit relationship between Holiday and these white women becomes more apparent. Through the performance and consumption of the song about lynching in nightclub spaces, both parties gained access to agency in affirming female sexuality and eventually challenged the white supremacist patriarchy that suppressed, albeit differently, Black and white female sexuality.

In the arena of actual politics, middle-class Black women had tried but largely failed during the 1930s to foster interracial cooperation with southern white women in the antilynching movement. But such an alliance became possible, if not always successful, within the imagined realm through cultural politics.[71] Holiday's "Strange Fruit" contributed to creating an alternative transgressive interracial culture and sisterhood between Black women and white women through the politics of sexuality. Both the song "Strange Fruit"—and Holiday's performativity that suffused the song—thus opened multiple windows of subversive possibilities.

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Notes

1. Lewis Allan, *Strange Fruit* (New York: New Theatre League, 1939), Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 14, Folder 14, Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center, Boston University.

2. *Congressional Record*, 109th Congress, 1st Session (June 13, 2005), S6366. The resolution officially apologized to the victims of lynching and their descendants for the Senate's failure to pass the federal antilynching legislations over a century.
3. David Stowe, "The Politics of Café Society," *Journal of American History* (March 1998): 1391. The latest book on Café Society has corrected the notation of the club name as the original "Cafe Society" while I use the former in this essay. Barney Josephson with Terry Trilling-Josephson, *Cafe Society: The Wrong Place for the Right People* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009).
4. Michael Denning, *Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), 324–361; Stowe, "The Politics of Café Society," 1384–1406; Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 181–198; David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday, Café Society, and an Early Cry for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2000); David Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography of a Song* (New York: The Ecco Press, 2001); Dawn-Wisteria Bates, "Race Woman: The Political Consciousness of Billie Holiday" (Master Thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 2001); and Joel Katz, directed, *Strange Fruit* (California Newsreel, 2002). See also Kathy A. Perkins and Judith L. Stephens, eds., *Strange Fruit: Plays on Lynching by American Women* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 15–20; and Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson, *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America* (New York: Broadway, 1998), 259–260.
5. *Time,* December 31, 1999; "100 Songs of the South," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (*AJC*), n.d. but in 2005, http://alt.coxnewsweb.com/ajc/swf/songsofthesouth/index.html (last accessed on July 20, 2011). The *AJC* calls "Strange Fruit" an "anti-lynching song," commenting: "When Billie Holiday took it [the song] on, it became one of the most powerful pieces of popular music ever recorded. The chilling images are made even more horrifying by Holiday's reportorial, matter-of-fact delivery." Other songs among the Top Five include Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come," Nina Simone's "Mississippi Goddam," and "We Shall Overcome," showing the *AJC*'s inclination to political songs.
6. Adrian Lyne, directed, *9 ½ Weeks* (MGM, 1986). In this scene, when John asks Elizabeth "Do you like music?," the camera briefly captures him smiling at her and zooms into her perplexed look while the song plays "Southern trees bear a strange fruit." John says, "It's Billie Holiday," showing her the record jacket with a seductive look (and the song goes: "blood on the leaves and blood at the root"). Elizabeth tries to change the topic to break the sexual tension by asking him what he does for a living while the song plays: "black body swinging in the Southern breeze/ Strange Fruit hanging from

the popular trees," and the song fades away as their conversation continues. John's blatant seduction scares Elizabeth and she leaves the boathouse, but this critical scene predicts their subsequent sexual relationship.

7. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, 1993), 150.
8. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 2.
9. hooks, *Black Looks*, 4. Stuart Hall explains of this strategy that it "positively takes the body as the principal site of its representational strategies" and "deliberately contests the dominant gendered and sexual definitions of racial difference by working on black sexuality." Stuart Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 274.
10. Sharon Block, "Rape without Women: Print Culture and the Politicization of Rape, 1765–1815," *Journal of American History* (December 2002): 849–868. Diane Miller Sommerville emphasizes that the rape myth was constructed after Reconstruction, warning that historians have sometimes confused the postbellum stereotype of Black rapists and the antebellum image of libidinous slave men. Diane Miller Sommerville, "The Rape Myth in the Old South Reconsidered," in Darlene Clark Hine and Earnestine Jenkins, eds., *A Question of Manhood: A Reader in U. S. Black Men's History and Masculinity*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 438–472.
11. Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry*, 145–149; Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Race Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 116–118, 183–185, 306–309; Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the 19th-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 198–207; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 301–307; Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 8–11; and William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836–1916* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 149–154.
12. The film was repeatedly released in 1924, 1931, and 1938. John Hope Franklin, *Race and History: Selected Essays 1938–1988* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 14–17, 22. On the Black rapist image in *The Clansman,* see Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 28–43. For the themes of lynching and rape in literature, see Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984); Gunning, *Race,*

Rape, and Lynching; Robyn Wiegman, "The Anatomy of Lynching," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3.3 (1993): 445–467; and Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

13. Hortense Powdermaker, *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South* (1939, New York: Russel & Russel, 1968), 54–55, 389; George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935–1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 48.
14. Jonathan Markovitz argues that while antilynching activists were concerned with racist representations of/racial violence against both Black men and women, they were forced to combat mainly the rape myth (thus less able to confront racist representations of Black women) because the major justification for lynching was Black male sexuality and criminality. Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, 3, 8–18.
15. On Wells' antilynching campaign, see Hazel V. Carby, " 'On the Threshold of Woman's Era': Lynching, Empire, and Sexuality in Black Feminist Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 262–277; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995): 45–76; Patricia A. Schechter, "Unsettled Business: Ida B. Wells against Lynching, or, How Antilynching Got Its Gender," in W. Fitzhugh Brundage, ed., *Under Sentence of Death: Lynching in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 292–317; and Jacqueline Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 43–104.
16. Erskine Caldwell, "A Note," *An Art Commentary on Lynching* (1935), Papers of the NAACP, Group I, Box C-206, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
17. Jessie Daniel Ames, "Can Newspapers Harmonize Their Editorial Policy on Lynching and Their News Stories on Lynching?," speech delivered at the Southern Newspaper Publishers' Association Convention, May 18, 1936, reprinted in Ames, *The Changing Character of Lynching: Review of Lynching, 1931–1941* (1942, New York: AMS, 1973), 58; ASWPL, "Southern Women Look at Lynching" (Atlanta, 1937), 4–5; and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, " 'The Mind That Burns in Each Body': Women, Rape, and Racial Violence," in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 338.
18. Hall, *Revolt against Chivalry*, 150.
19. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880–1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 66.
20. NAACP distributed and sold over 15,000 copies of *Lynching of Claude Neal*. James R. McGovern, *Anatomy of Lynching: The Killing of Claude*

Neal (Chapel Hill: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 126–131; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998), 222–227.

21. Amy Louise Wood, "Lynching Photography and the 'Black Beast Rapist' in the Southern White Masculine Imagination," in Peter Lehman, ed., *Masculinity: Bodies, Movies, Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 204.
22. Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 46–47; Williamson, *Crucible of Race*, 306–310.
23. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), 165.
24. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 174.
25. Harris, *Exorcising Blackness*, 23.
26. Fanon, *Black Skin*, 159. Emphasis is added.
27. *New York Teacher*, January 1937, 17, Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 14, Folder 15.
28. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 327.
29. *PM*, September 23, 1945.
30. Josephson quoted in Denning, *Cultural Front*, 327.
31. *New Masses*, June 20, 1939, 55.
32. "Night Club Singer Records Song About Lynchings In South," *New York Age*, June 17, 1939.
33. *TAC*, n.d. but after March 1940, Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 15, Folder 27. For the Gavagan bill, see Robert L. Zangrando, *The NAACP Crusade against Lynching, 1909–1950* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1980), 161–162.
34. *Time*, June 12, 1939, 66.
35. Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 184–187. In her intriguing exploration of the myths that surround Holiday, Farah Jasmine Griffin praises Davis' discussion for its contribution to rescuing Holiday from those white critics and biographers. Farah Jasmine Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday: If You Can't Be Free, Be a Mystery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001), 130–131.
36. On the images of Mammy and Jezebel, see Deborah Gray White, "Jezebel and Mammy: The Mythology of Female Slavery," in *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1985, 1999), 27–61. In the United States, the usage of "hump" in the sexual sense dates from the 1910s. Jonathon Green, *Cassell's Dictionary of Slang* (London: Cassell, 1998), 624.
37. In her 1937 performance at the Fox Theatre in Detroit, for example, Holiday had to "black up" her face because her skin color was too light. Donald Clarke, *Wishing on the Moon: The Life and Times of Billie Holiday* (New York: Penguin, 1994), 130.

38. Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday*, 28. Griffin, too, mentions *Gone With the Wind* as well as *Imitation of Life* (1934), which she points out "reproduced the stereotype of the oversexed, over-ambitious 'tragic mulatto' " (29).
39. Wexler quoted in Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 60.
40. *DownBeat*, July 1939.
41. *New York Post*, February 11, 1942, Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 15, Folder 27. Café Society Uptown opened on 58th street in October 1941.
42. Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 35.
43. Josephson quoted in Denning, *Cultural Front*, 327.
44. Billie Holiday with William Dufty, *Lady Sings the Blues* (1956, New York: Penguin, 1992), 84.
45. Bates, "Race Women," 19; Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 195.
46. Wilson quoted in Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 37.
47. In his analysis of the modern-day representation of Black men, Kobena Mercer describes that "the lynching of black men routinely involved the literal castration of the other's 'strange fruit.' " Mercer, *Welcome to Jungle*, 185.
48. "Of 'Strange Fruit' (the song)," an unidentified article clip, n.d. but after 1944, Abel Meeropol Collection, Box 15, Folder 27. Although journalist David Margolick speculates that Allan was possibly inspired to write the song by a widely-publicized photograph of the 1930 lynching in Marion, Indiana, this photograph of two lynched men is less likely the one Allan referred to, given that Allan described what he came across as "a lynching of *a* human being." Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 21. Emphasis is added. It is possible, however, that Allan saw the same photograph in different framing showing only one lynching victim, just as writer Jacquie Jones did. Jacquie Jones, "How Come Nobody Told Me about the Lynching?" in Deborah Willis, ed., *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: The New Press, 1994), 153.
49. W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941, 1962), 115–116. Mary Jane Brown argues that it was a crucial aspect of southern legend "that the *delicate flower of southern womanhood* needed protection from rapacious black males . . . ." Brown, *Eradicating this Evil: Women in the American Anti-Lynching Movement 1892–1940* (New York: Garland, 2000), 27. Emphasis is added.
50. Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 200–239; Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2–15.
51. *New Yorker*, March 18, 1939, 68. It reprinted the lyrics incorrect, combining two lines in the first section into one and using a different verb—"growing." This indicates the advertiser's indifference to the lyrics' detail.

52. On lynching photographs, see Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 7–45; Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 103–109; Goldsby, *Spectacular Secret*, 214–281; and Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Lynching Photographs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007). A collection of lynching photos and postcards is available in James Allen et al., eds., *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, NM: Twin Palm, 2000).

    Although I admit that a contemporary lynching photograph could best underscore the relationship of victim to spectators in comparison with the photo of Holiday at Café Society, it is my decision not to use/abuse any lynching photos in this essay. As a scholar of lynching, I would like to call our attention to the fact that we often include, too easily, images and depictions of lynching into works as historical documents without fully noticing the possibility of running a risk of triggering an exploitative and/or voyeuristic gaze, thus possibly reproducing the white supremacist ideology that was originally inscribed in those representations. For discussions regarding the scholarly use of representations of lynching and other brutalization of the Black body, see Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 306; Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3–4; and Wood, "Lynching Photography," 207–208.
53. Robert G. O'Meally, *Lady Day: The Many Faces of Billie Holiday* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991), 130.
54. Ida B. Wells, *A Red Record* (1895), reprinted in Jacqueline Jones Royster, ed., *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892–1900* (Boston, MA: Bedford, 1997), 127.
55. NACW Convention Minutes (1914), 25. Records of the NACW, reel 1; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850–1920* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 96.
56. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "African-American Women's Networks in the Anti-Lynching Crusade," in Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, eds., *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1991), 157–158; and Brown, *Eradicating this Evil*, 115, 144–148. For other cases of Black women's role in the antilynching movement, see Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching*, 18–23.
57. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, 176–177; Nell Irvin Painter, "Who Was Lynched?" *Nation* (November 11, 1991): 577; and Weigman, "The Anatomy of Lynching," 446 n. 1. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn points out that the history of antilynching movements also overshadowed Black women's contributions to them. Terborg-Penn, "African-American Women's Networks," 159.
58. 76 Black women were lynched between 1882 and 1927. Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (1929, Notre Dame: University of

Notre Dame Press, 2001), 267. For examples of Black female lynch victims, see Gerda Lerner, *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History* (New York: Vintage, 1972), 161–162; and Terborg-Penn, "African-American Women's Networks," 150–153.

59. For the sexual exploitation of female slaves, see Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 27–36, 51–52; Thelma Jennings, " 'Us Colored Women Had To Go through a Plenty': Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women," *Journal of Women's History* (Winter 1990): 45–74; Melton A. McLaurin, *Celia: A Slave* (New York: Avons, 1991), 22–37; Nell Irvin Painter, *Soul Murder and Slavery* (Waco: Markham, 1995), 15–21; and Daina Ramey Berry, *Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe: Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 77–88.
60. For rape of Black women after emancipation, see Lerner, *Black Women*, 149–161, 172–190; Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Toronto, ON: Bantam Books, 1976), 133–140; Angela Y. Davis, *Women, Race and Class* (1981, New York: Vintage, 1983), 175–177; Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 342–349; and Nell Irvin Painter, *Southern History across the Color Line* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 121.
61. Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 39.
62. I am referring to anthropologist James C. Scott's concept of "hidden transcript" that represents "a critique of power behind the back of the dominant." James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1990), xii.
63. Farah Jasmine Griffin points out that Holiday is a "salable commodity" just like other American icons. Griffin, *In Search of Billie Holiday*, 32. David Margolick writes that Holiday was often referred to in the press accounts as "the buxom, colored songstress" or "the sepian songstress." Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday*, 62. For example, in its review of the performance by the all-white Artie Shaw Orchestra at the Savoy Ballroom in Chicago on October 22, 1938, *Billboard* magazine described Holiday as "his [Artie Shaw's] sepia songstress Billie Holliday [*sic*]." *Billboard*, October 29, 1938, 11.
64. Cunningham quoted in Margolick, *Strange Fruit: The Biography*, 61.
65. Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 175. Davis argues that the blues departed from other contemporary popular music in terms of its "provocative and pervasive sexual—including homosexual—imagery" (3) and that its distinctiveness came from the unique historical context of African Americans who had been long denied their sexual autonomy. Davis, *Blues Legacies,* 3–24. Michael Denning also examines the relation of Holiday's love songs to the blues, but from the perspective of the Popular Front culture. Denning, *Cultural Front*, 344–347.

66. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 185–299. Another strategy often used to desexualize Black womanhood was the "culture of dissemblance," the attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of public openness but actually, shielded reservedly the truth of their inner lives from their oppressors. Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thoughts* (New York: New Press, 1995), 380–387.
67. For reviews of Holiday's rendition by music scholars and critics, see Margolick, *Strange Fruit: Billie Holiday*, 65–67.
68. Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit" (recorded on April 20, 1939), in *Billie Holiday Strange Fruit 1937–1939* (Jazzterdays, 1996); "Strange Fruit" (recorded on February 12, 1945), in *Billie Holiday Verve Story Vol. 1: Jazz at the Philharmonic* (Polygram, 1994); and "Strange Fruit" (recorded on June 7, 1956), in *Lady Sings the Blues* (Polygram, 1995).
69. Indeed, many contemporary media, including the aforementioned *Time* that reviewed the 1939 recording, reprinted this part of the lyrics as "black bodies." Perhaps Holiday regularly sang it as such in nightclubs, judging from the comment by a woman in Los Angeles ("naked bodies"). Today, Holiday's lyrical version seems more popular than the original.
70. Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 176–208.
71. ASWPL did challenge the southern patriarchal system by refuting the rape myth, not necessarily because white women affirmed their sexual autonomy but rather because they attempted to emphasize their respectable womanhood. Their antilynching efforts mainly aimed at educating the southern white community about uncivilized and un-Christian acts of lynching because lynching, from their perspective, was a moral-threatening problem for the white community that respectable white women should solve; it was not a problem because of the victimization of African Americans.

    Thus, the ASWPL's strategy of moral uplift did not entail such actions as organizational support for the federal antilynching legislation that would directly challenge state power. Sachiko Hishida, "Jinshu-kan Kyouryoku eno Kitai to Zasetsu: 1930 nendai no Han-rinchi Undou wo Jirei ni [The Hope and Failure in Interracial Cooperation: A Study of the Anti-lynching Movement in the 1930s]," *The Journal of American and Canadian Studies* 23 (2005): 78–92.