

## Introduction

I had not planned to open a book on feminist temporalities with a discussion of waiting. Waiting was a concept foregrounded in many of the texts I had been reading, and they all seemed to open with stories of death and grief—books such as Lisa Baraitser’s *Enduring Time* and Christina Sharpe’s *In the Wake*, both of which struggle with experiences of time’s suspension. Then, in February 2020, I watched Herv Rogers wait for eight hours to vote at a polling station in a predominantly Black precinct in Houston, Texas, before heading out to work. Then, in March, I waited at home, as did billions of others around the world. By April, waiting was what most people did, but that waiting’s variations only demonstrated how a superficially shared temporality was riven with multiple dimensions of hierarchical difference. Not all waiting was the same. As timelines shifted from political discussions about voter suppression to discussions of homeschooling, essential workers waited on customers, essential workers waited on PPE, and others waited for testing; meanwhile, mail-forwarding numbers at the U.S. Post Office showed that some had eased out of dense cities to wait in more isolated second homes, while others waited on unemployment hold lines. One aspect of crisis is how waiting becomes part of its *durée*—waiting for word, waiting for storms to pass, waiting for the return to normal or for better times, waiting for “all of this” to be over. For many this waiting was experienced as crisis, for others an intensification of the chronic harm they were already experiencing as the work of a system organized, as Dionne Brand puts it, on the “cumulative hurt of others” who have been dominated, marginalized, and exploited, from whom time itself is stolen (82).

In *Enduring Time*, Baraitser argues that waiting is part of the structural conditions of social abandonment but also a practice through which “a more elongated time opens up” (Baraitser 116). Baraitser notes:

what comes to be understood as political courage is a practice that emerges out of a decision to operate in terms of a different *durée* to that of the on-go of the same political order; to decide to live time in and through the impossibility of political change in the now. It is not so much about simply waiting, but “endurance within the impossible,” enduring the situation, that is, of nothing changing, which turns time into “raw material,” to be dealt with. (116–117)

This is waiting as potentiality, as possibility, in the interstices of abandonment, developing practices of suturing temporality from within the dominant time of progressive linearity that defers, discards, and entraps. Baraitser seeks to understand what it means to live in the time of late capitalism.

If the future may no longer be assumed to be open, then beyond a religious framework that gives figuration to the “end of time,” what kind of time are we left with, as we live a present that cannot promise a future, in which the idea of “future” as “promise” seems to have collapsed? . . . How do we endure in this time? What is its relation to the trauma of foreclosure, if indeed we can use that term to describe the assault, or slow violence, on future deep time that may turn out to be the distinctive product of late capitalism. (162)

Waiting becomes a concept that describes a tactic of endurance, of dreaming; lying in wait is a tactic too.<sup>1</sup> But what happens to waiting in conditions of crisis? What happens when crisis becomes the condition of existence? When the future, as we expected it, is canceled?

This book began as an engagement with the prevalent contention that the post-2016 election era is an era of crisis in the United States. This is a contention that few would have argued against in summer 2020. What that crisis is—its causes, effects, its demographic—is constitutively part of the crisis itself; as crisis signals a state of uncertainty and loss, it may call into question not only the legibility of the present and the future but also our understandings of the relation between past, present, and future. Crisis narratives, those narratives that become dominant in helping us make sense of crisis, make claims on the collective present and future as they frame ways of thinking about the present to account

for cause, blame, and solution. However, these narratives may give a thin account of time, so superficial as to make the future unimaginable. In fact, these thin accounts of time may lead to the question posed by a scholar at a recent conference: “How do we do the future?” This manuscript is a feminist reflection on that question.

According to Megan Burke, in *When Time Warps*, this “foreclosure” on the future is central to Simone de Beauvoir’s description of becoming woman. Burke describes waiting as the passive present condition of feminine existence: “what is important about Beauvoir’s claim about marriage is that it underscores that a temporal conversion is central to domination. The event of marriage sediments the temporal conversion of domination: it achieves the shift from lived time as an open structure to a closed one” (Burke 27). In this sense, the nature of a crisis that seems to be a result of the slow violence of capitalism or the resurgence of fascism in Western nation-states is also the slow violence of the normative regulation of gender. As Jeremy Rifkin argues in *Time Wars*, “A monopoly in every society begins with severing people from control of their future, making them prisoners of the present. Unable to gain access to the future, people become pawns in the hands of the temporal pyramid” (qtd. in Sharma 52). For Beauvoir, Rifkin, and Baraitser, this foreclosure on the future is the “normal” condition of the present, a present without end that exists in the shifting current of crisis that Eric Cazdyn calls the “new chronic.”

Chronic is a variation of *chronos*, the Greek word for time, and thus, might be seen to connote a way of getting at a concept of time in which time’s equation to progressive linearity, to change, is illusory, as Baraitser argues in her focus on the experience of those excluded from time’s flow. Chronic harm, its invisibility, its moribund entrance into the public eye as “the way things are”—in some sense, this is what the first chapter of this book is about, how the temporal frame of crisis pushes narratives to the foreground that most easily recuperate USians back into the flow of nation-time and not only maintains the normative harms of chronic time but re-times the nation through the accumulation of those harms.

To this end, the book is structured to examine the interrelated temporal constructs of crisis, the chronic, and reparative time through a feminist lens. While I begin with crisis narratives and their accounts of time, most of the manuscript focuses on feminist work that conceives of time as a construct of social organizations and interactions, and discursive practices. I discuss the work of feminist theorists, performance artists, writers and activists whose work engages in practices of temporal

disturbance; I argue that collectively this work rearticulates the relations between past, present, and future to offer models of temporal justice, for “doing” the future as reparation. This means thinking differently about both time and feminism. I cast reparative feminism as a temporal reorientation that commits feminism to temporal justice epistemologically and materially as praxis. The reparative is a temporal frame for addressing present injustice through a reorientation to the past, recognizing the necessity of repairing past harms to any transformation of the current domination of white time: it includes recognition and the redistribution of wealth, including time wealth (such as redistribution of time for care to those at the bottom of the temporal pyramid) and the undoing of the chronic harms of white time that include the maintenance of institutional structures through bourgeois chrononormativity.

Temporal justice is a concept I have taken from critical time studies, a field of study defined by Paul Huebener in *Timing Canada: The Shifting Politics of Time in Canadian Literary Culture* (2015) as “a process of inquiry that advances thoughtful reevaluations of the social politics of time through the examination of temporal assumptions and the fostering of critical temporal literacy” (14). It is a method for “articulating and questioning temporal power . . . and drawing conclusions about the relations of power, diversity, privilege, and typically unquestioned manipulation involved in the application of unequal temporalities” (Huebener 23). This project contributes to this emerging field as well as to current scholarship in feminism that takes up questions of time and power, of feminist appropriations of the archives, and the centrality of reparations in feminist transformative activism and movement building.

As a contribution to critical time studies, it takes seriously an examination of the “times we are in,” as a claim about the nature of our social relations, how experiences of time are entangled in the power lines of temporal domination. It draws heavily on scholars in feminism and Black studies who have questioned the temporal frames of normative scholarship and recognizes the insights and actions of social justice movements as central to that questioning. As I discuss in chapters 3 and 4, Black feminists have written about the temporality of the scar, its symbolic resonance as a means of representing the domination of time; scars and wounds signal the embodied damage of time and the possibilities and limits of reparative time.<sup>2</sup> Such scars/wounds speak harm and that harm can be exploited, wounds reopened, and never fully erased. The scar

represents how reparative time can transform wounds but never restore their bearers to their original state.

Rita Felski argues:

To envision the shape of time is to be caught up in the expansive reaches of a moral and aesthetic vision. And all are saturated with affect, testifying to time's intricate alignment with the emotions. How we imagine time is not just a matter for speculation and abstract debate; it is tied to the flux of feeling, the heft and weight of the body, the aching prescience of our own mortality. Time knits together the subjective and the social, the personal and the public; we forge links between our own lifetime and the larger historical patterns that transcend us. (Felski 21–22)

Historically, feminist theorists such as Julia Kristeva have rejected patriarchal time, imagined as linear, production oriented, and driven by male-centered teleological frames. In “Women’s Time,” Kristeva argues that the patriarchal sociosymbolic contract ignores the reproduction of social relations and the symbolic representation of the social, thus, patriarchal time is the “linear time of project and history” to which women have, as Beauvoir argued, been forced to synchronize their time. Thus, women’s time has always been bound up with nation-time as it is this dominant time that affords economic and social inclusion in the future. A feminist challenge to the linear, production orientation of patriarchal time is necessarily for Kristeva a challenge to the time of nation and capital.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Charles Mills argues that the social contract is a racial contract that establishes an *a priori* white time implicitly based on the dominance of race; for both theorists, predominantly white patriarchal philosophies, narrative, and histories depend on a temporal subjugation that mythologizes the means through which the reproduction of social domination occurs. Indeed, Benedict Anderson’s theorization of the “homogenous, empty time” of the nation is culled from Walter Benjamin’s discussion of capitalist historicity (Chatterjee 5).<sup>4</sup> Throughout this book, I use the term “white time” to represent these entangled, overlapping, but never quite the same trajectories of temporal domination. At other moments in the text, it is precisely these intersecting trajectories that interest me, and I am specific in how these temporal systems intersect and structure the

temporal frames through which social relations are lived, imagined, and sedimented as universal and normative, particularly in feminism itself.

Felski contends that feminists are often “still prisoners of linear made progress because we no longer question the smugness of the now and the sovereignty of the new” (23–24). “Now” and the “new” are temporal orders of the dominant indebted to progressive linearity, although they may also be construed as the “untimely” that disrupts the continuity between past and present as a forward trajectory. In opposition to the idea of the untimely break with the past, which seems indifferent to the accretion of harm and knowledge accumulated in patriarchal time, reparative time is a concept that represents the power relations of differing temporalities within the time of racist patriarchy. I situate my work within feminist theories of reparative reading (e.g., reading texts as empowering new temporal orientations), even as I critique this method by arguing that it ought to be more aligned with social movement theories of reparative justice. Thus, one of the project’s contributions to feminist theory is demonstrating how this heuristic can more fully engage with social movement activism and the practices and theoretical contributions that emerge from outside of academic scholarship using the lens of critical race feminism. I derive the concept of reparative time from two fairly distinct lines of thinking and praxis: reparative reading in queer feminist literary theory, and reparative justice as often used in Black and feminist social justice activism but also widely used in critical race feminist scholarship.

Reparative reading originates in the work of Eve Sedgwick and develops as a line of thinking in queer feminist literary criticism. In “Paranoid Reading, Reparative Reading,” Sedgwick takes to task that mode of interpretation and theorizing that has exposure as its primary means of knowing as if exposure were in and of itself a means of transformation. Sedgwick argues that the dominance of this mode of cultural criticism leads to an homogenous set of interpretive models. Paranoid reading has a “distinctively rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive” because it must not only forestall any crisis in meaning in the future but also demystify the past. In opposition to these models, Sedgwick suggests that reparative reading requires a “temporal disorientation”: “the desire for a reparative impulse . . . is additive and accretive” (149). She offers camp as an example of a reparative practice that she defines as “a historically contingent practice of assembling objects in a culture” that will nurture becoming and “shared histories, emergent communities, and the weaving of intertextual discourse” (149). Sedgwick aligns reparative

practice with knowledge as a form of joy and disengagement from the normative genealogies of reproduction, opening up the possibilities of past and future: “Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did” (145). Queer camp demonstrates this reparative impulse by reappropriating the impoverished objects of the dominant culture for self-fashioning. Reparative reading is not merely a mode of interpretation but a temporal reorientation of affective relations with an oppressive history. For critics, like Heather Love, queer theory’s interest in negative affect, its rejection of reproductive futurity, is, as Robyn Wiegman argues, attentive to how “a return to history [might] secure the lessons that injury affords. . . . In feeling her way backward, [Love] wants to ‘make space for various forms of ruined subjectivity’ as a political commitment not to leave queer failure and abjection behind” (Love 29; Wiegman 14). Reparative reading, then, has a life outside of its origins in the feminist psychoanalytic frame that includes an attentiveness to historical injury that reorients our affect to injury in the present.

Often reparative interventions in feminist queer theory are limited by an intellectual and scholarly psychoanalytic archive that is silent about anti-black racism and critical race feminism, divorced from engagement with the question of reparations as articulated in social justice movements and critical race theory. Indeed, very few critics make connection between reparative reading and reparation as repair with material as well as epistemological significance. The psychoanalytical frame that has attended trauma and the reparative in literary theory has been critiqued for its lack of attention to collective trauma and its material contexts. Sedgwick writes of friends, emerging subjectivities, and aesthetic performances, turning to camp as reparative practice but not to the creative history of feminist and queer activism in which material contexts are the grounds of domination and struggle. Although she opens with a discussion of AIDS activism, she does not return to the irreverent solidarities of ACTUP mobilizations at the end of her essay.

Ann Cvetkovich’s “Depression is Ordinary” is an exception to this archive of reparative reading as she resituates the reparative within a

Black feminist frame, arguing for Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* as an example of reparative memory work that addresses collective injury by reducing the distance between past and present. Cvetkovich argues:

Combining scholarly investigation and personal memoir, Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* exemplifies feminism's affective turn not only by bringing personal narrative into scholarship, but by seeking reparation for the past in the affective dynamics of cultural memory rather than in legal reform or state recognition. Stubbornly refusing to find solace in an African past before slavery, though, Hartman provides a model of emotional reparation in which feelings of loss and alienation persist. Her work suggests the relevance of political depression to both the ordinary life of racism and to what gets called clinical depression. (Cvetkovich 136)

Cvetkovich is interested in Hartman's "use of personal narrative to frame archival recovery as motivated by political depression and the accompanying questions this move raises about the broader political work of trauma studies' affective dynamics" (Cvetkovich 139). Most significantly for my own argument about the relation between reparative reading and reparative time, Cvetkovich argues that

Hartman's turn to memoir in the context of historical research reveals the emotional labour of reparation. Moreover, even as she seems persistently suspicious about utopian visions of liberation, Hartman has her own version of a reparative dream. . . . In Hartman's version of utopia she does not have to renounce her depressive affect; it can be the source of a transformative vision of how those who are depressed, alienated, lonely, or stateless can make common cause and where utopia includes "danger" as well as "promise." She articulates a politics in which former slaves, conjured through memory despite inadequate archives, become comrades: "It requires the reconstruction of society, which is the only way to honor our debt to the dead. This is the intimacy of our age with theirs—an unfinished struggle. To what end does one conjure the ghost of slavery, if not to incite the hopes of transforming the present?" (142–143)



In this analysis, reparation requires labor toward reconstruction of the present that addresses debts—imagined not as existing in the past—but “intimate” debts shared with the dead. While Sedgwick worries about the object of love (the text), Clare Hemmings points out the difference between critique and repair is precisely the grammar of affect: “After all, one repairs as well as critiques something, and one makes reparations to someone else. Both paranoia and reparation describe orientations towards or away from others (see Ahmed 2006), rather than simply turns. And too, they are situated orientations that take place in material contexts” (28).

Reparative reading and reparations are directly connected in Wai Chee Dimock’s “Weak Reparation.” In Dimock’s approach, reparative justice is narrowly confined by limits of legal individualism and divorced from the critical race and feminist activists doing transformative justice work. Dimock extends Sedgwick’s definition of reparative reading to argue that “reparative reading wants to add layers of mediation to the world” (n.p.) and resituates Sedgwick’s reparative/paranoid binary within a law and literature frame to analyze the workings of the reparative and the punitive (n.p.); Dimock argues that weak networks of mediation can perform a vicarious mending of the gaps and holes in history through an intertextual reading of literary discourse. She uses the reparative/punitive binary to “open up that conversation as a methodological debate within law and literature, a debate between two different conceptions of justice and two different attendant outcomes—mediating circumstances versus punishable deed, extensive commutation versus discrete verdict—at work in both literary history and criminal law” (n.p.).

Dimock’s example of reparative justice, however, is not aligned with its meanings in critical race feminism. Her primary example “on the law side” as an “example of reparative justice is a program called Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI). ATI is any informal program of activity required of offenders, a substitute for penal action and leading to reduced jail time” (n.p.). Dimock describes the work of the project as “guided by the understanding that punishment is only a small and mechanical part of criminal justice, that the most necessary, and necessarily collaborative, work is in fact that of repairing lives, giving a second chance to those who perhaps have never had much of one to begin with” (n.p.). On the literature side, Dimock takes as a case study the connections William Faulkner draws between Indigenous representation in Mississippi, the Japanese after WWII and the Confederacy’s defeat in the Civil War; she

reads Faulkner as “a Southern writer trying to make amends for his region’s past through imaginary ties and long distance atonement, and, in not quite succeeding, in not even being clear about what it was that he was trying to do, also making way for input from others, an accretive vitality born of its reparative weakness” (n.p.). In this understanding, reparative justice is equally, in both cases, seen as “repairing lives” by making amends and through atonement. However, reparative justice is primarily a collective social framing of injury that does not equate the harm of individual crime with slavery and genocide; in Dimock’s alignment of reparative justice and reparative reading, the structural conditions of power that produce these weak connections remain unexamined. Dimock does not address the false equivalencies created by Faulkner’s weak, discursive gestures of reparation and does not make direct connections between these gestures and the reparations that Southern slaveowners received at the end of the Civil War, for loss of property. In other words, there is a sidestepping of normative power in the equivalencies between the white Southerner, the defeated Japanese, Indigenous people removed from their homes, and offenders in the New York legal system. The utopian counternarratives that Faulkner offers are reconciliatory without material or epistemological transformation. In fact, reparations were struggled for after the Civil War by freedmen, but, instead, were offered to white southerners as compensation for the loss of the enslaved and their labor (Franke). The temporal frame for reparative reading in this analysis remains a white temporal frame.

Any discussion that brings together the materiality of reparations with the reparative as a conceptual frame must start from the position of critical race feminism, which requires a disengagement from the weak network of white canonicity that Dimock takes as her starting point. In the early 1980s, as critical race feminism was emerging as a field, Mari Matsuda offered a normative theory of reparations by arguing that it must emerge from the experiences of those wronged. In “Looking to the Bottom,” Matsuda reframes the relationship between law and literature by examining the demands to redress in social movements and the writings of those social movements.

The cyclical time that concerned Kristeva might usefully be abstracted to reconfigure notions of repetition and labor in relation to working-class consciousness of the extraction of labor at the cost of transformation. While Kristeva and Beauvoir, as Burke notes above, approached time through the prism of gender binarism limited by bourgeois heteronormative organizations of social reproduction, critical race feminism reconfigures

gendered time and the social relations of reproduction. As I argue in chapter 3, Angela Davis, in “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” enacts a version of reparative feminism. Davis’s argument about the role of enslaved women in community and collective resistance reconfigures the gendered time of social reproduction through a Black feminist lens, using Marxist frameworks to better aid readers in understanding racial capitalism and gendered frameworks of labor and time. For Davis, the care work of enslaved Black women not only reproduces the social relations of the Black community but enacts transformation, including resistance to enslavement as well as reciprocity in care outside the binaries produced by the heteronormative white family that designates production and care along gendered lines in what Elizabeth Freeman refers to as its “reprogeneration.” Critical race feminism, then, takes as its starting point the domination of white time as patriarchal time, since the reproductive futurity of the nation depends on this heteronormative regeneration of the white family as white nation. Thus, Davis’s reparative reading is a reconstruction of feminism itself, resituating reparative reading—and feminism itself—in collective struggle.

Using Davis’s frame, paranoid and reparative modes of interpretation might be rethought as a closed ideological circle aligned with Charles Mills’s theorization of the racial contract. Mills argues that Western political philosophy’s construction of the social contract operates through a system of white supremacy that works through an amnesiac domination of its own origins, a “white racial temporal regime,” the dominant temporality through which life is lived and imagined within the United States and through which time itself is imagined. It is this foundational framing of time through whiteness that Black feminism has resisted and reconfigured in critical race feminism.

In this project, it is temporality understood as power that interests me. Davis’s critical race feminism, her concern with working in a reparative temporality re-orientes feminism and Black studies toward a consideration of Black women’s gendered labor and the reproductive labor of social relations as care and coercion. There is a temporal labor that oppressed subjects must perform in order to synchronize their time with dominant temporalities; this labor takes many forms, such as standing in line to vote and serving meals according to the itineraries of others. For Pierre Bourdieu, in addition to waiting, there is an entire catalog of “behaviors associated with the exercise of power over other people’s time . . . on the side of the powerful (adjourning, deferring, delaying, raising false hopes,

or conversely, rushing, taking by surprise). . . . It follows that the art of taking one's time . . . of making people wait . . . of adjourning . . . is an integral part of the exercise of power" (Bourdieu 228). As Sharma argues, "temporalities . . . exist in a grid of power relations. . . . The social fabric is composed of a chronography of power, where individuals' and social groups' senses of time and possibility are shaped by a differential economy, limited or expanded by the ways and means that they find themselves in and out of time" (Sharma 9). According to Sharma, what "most populations encounter is . . . the structural demand that they must recalibrate in order to fit into the temporal expectations demanded by various institutions, social relationships, and labor arrangements" (138). Recalibration "is to learn how to deal with time, to be on top of one's time, to learn when to be fast and when to be slow" (133). Recalibration occurs in the lived experience of assimilating one's time to the dominant temporal order, but it also occurs in the symbolic meanings attached to that lived experience.

If time is a producer of social relations, discourses of temporality construct the temporal order as a shared universal experience, but Sharma argues that "chronographies of power have to do with how different time sensibilities are produced" (15), and "discourses about time maintain lines of temporal normalization that elevate certain practices and relationships to time while devaluing others" (Sharma 15). These lines of temporal normalization are epistemological, social, and historical; they are power lines of domination that shape the material structures of resource distribution, exploitation, and mortality. The work of this book is to study these intersecting power lines as they structure lived experience of time and organize the temporal frames through which time and power are mutually constructed from a feminist perspective that necessarily moves between the cultural, historical, and the social.

In Benedict Anderson's theorization of the imaginary community of the nation, this shared temporality produces the shared imaginary forming the bonds of the nation. As in the story of the social contract, the nation depends for its affective attachment on both the diachronic story of origins and the synchronicity of tempo in keeping to the same clocks, calendars, and paid holidays. Moreover, as Partha Chatterjee has shown, this is the time of capital, which structures the dominant tempo of the nation according to its own flattening equation: time is money, and money is time. As Anderson argues, "[the nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal

comradeship” (Anderson 6). This inequality and exploitation represent the universalizing, dominant times of race, gender, and capital as intersecting power lines that construct nation-time. Paul Huebener argues that Homi Bhabha’s assertion that “the disjunctive temporalities associated with the margins of society form a ‘distracting presence’ that works to break down the authority of normative, singular time—the idea that, in Wai Chee Dimock’s words, alternative temporalities challenge the ability of the nation ‘to standardize, to impose an official ordering of events’—is haunted by the spectre of appropriation by which the normative archive can claim alternative experiences as mere contributions to its authoritative collection” (251–252). Similarly, Michelle Bastian contends that this appropriation is a normative form of time management:

What is particularly problematic is that if linear time “manages” difference by ignoring it and focusing on commensurability, then this mode of relating to difference becomes hidden inasmuch as linear time is thought to be commonsensical or straightforward. “Time” comes to appear as if it were an inert, yet cohesive, background within which social life, in all its diversity, is negotiated . . . That is, linear time represents one of the models by which Western societies manage social diversity. (Bastian 154)

Feminist temporalities must model a relation between time and community, and social justice and temporality that is contra nation-time, that must counter not only linearity but also the appropriation of the untimely in feminism, its disruptive logics and counter-tempo institutionalized and ushered into the waiting room of the future.

But, to go back to the beginning and start again: what happens when that future seems foreclosed?

## Part I: Crisis and Reparation

In chapter 1, “What Time Is It? Mourning America,” I examine crisis temporality and how in the years leading up to the 2016 elections and in the first years of the election’s aftermath the crisis frame served to marginalize histories of chronic harm that could not be recuperated into the story of American exceptionalism. In *Narratives of Crisis*, Seeger and

Sellnow argue that crises “are a radical departure from the status quo and a violation of general assumptions and expectations, disrupting normal activities and limiting the ability to anticipate and predict. The severe violation of expectations is usually a source of uncertainty, psychological discomfort, and stress. In retrospect, however, warning signs and signals of a crisis are often evident . . . crises precipitate a meaning deficit by disrupting the processes and patterns of sense making” (11). Furthermore, Seeger and Sellnow help us understand the extent to which crisis is seen as such because it disrupts dominant expectations, describing “crisis as a function of perceptions based on a violation of some strongly held expectation. Social or cultural expectations therefore create a kind of baseline of normalcy, and the violation of these expectations will be judged as a crisis” (12). Crisis narratives seek to bring coherence to the violation of normative expectations and those most deemed “timely” are widely circulated as a means of recuperating those normative expectations in linear time.

There are two lines of thinking about crisis in contemporary theory. The disruption of normative expectations has a history in political and epistemological thought as a site of *possibility* for challenging the sedimentation of normative structures of thought and being. Janet Roitman summarizes:

the concept of crisis becomes a prime mover in, for example, poststructuralist thought: while truth cannot be secured, it is nonetheless performed in moments of crisis, when the grounds for truth claims are supposedly made bare and the limits of intelligibility are potentially subverted or transgressed. Thus, for example, epistemological crisis is defined by Judith Butler as a “crisis over what constitutes the limits of intelligibility” . . . For Butler, then, subject formation transpires through crisis: that is, crisis, or the disclosure of epistemological limits, occasions critique, and potentially gives rise to counternormativities that speak the unspeakable. For Foucault, crisis signifies a discursive impasse and the potential for a new form of historical subject. For both, crisis is productive; it is the means to transgress and is necessary for change or transformation. In keeping with this, because reason has no end other than itself, the decisive duty of critique is essentially to produce crisis—to engage in the

permanent critique of one's self, to be in critical relation to normative life is a form of ethics and a virtue. (Roitman 34–35)

In this sense, meanings deficits open a gap in the structure of normative time.

However, a second line of thought is more focused on how crisis is part of the structure of normativity itself. Bonnie Honig argues that “‘Anticipation’ captures potentially inaugural and radical innovations that might have opened up a new time and sets them to work on behalf of dominant forms of law and politics” (Honig 66). Similarly, Roitman argues in her discussion of the rhetoric of crisis in contemporary politics that crisis forecloses some possibilities by incorporating a narrative of normalcy into the crisis frame. In other words, the chronic harm of injustice is often normalized through a crisis narrative, even as crisis appears to demonstrate the contingency of dominant temporalities. Moreover, as Roitman notes, crisis has become a condition of attentiveness in the twenty-first century. Felski calls this the “currency of crisis,” arguing that “crisis has proved enormously attractive in recent times: we hear endless tales of masculinity in crisis, femininity disrupted, gender in disarray. Feminists often think of themselves as allies of the new, as fervent proponents of radical change. The language of rupture and revolution, upheaval and cataclysm permeates our thought. Yet feminist scholars are also among the most trenchant critics of crisis as an organizing metaphor; they question what Cornelia Klinger calls the ‘futile gesture of heroic rupture’” (21). Eric Cazdyn concludes that the “new chronic” is that of crisis, in which crisis becomes the “encompassing temporality affecting every aspect of our lives” (44). Miranda Joseph contends, “crisis temporality does not provide the greatest insight into the ongoing, ordinary, endemic processes of exploitation, or into (at least some forms of) what David Harvey (2003) calls ‘accumulation by dispossession’ and Costas Lapavistas (2009) calls ‘expropriation’” (1). And Lauren Berlant argues that the crisis framework misapprehends “the ‘structural or predictable’ situation as an epidemic event—making a ‘population wearing out in the space of ordinariness’ ‘radiant with attention, compassion, analysis and sometimes reparation’ -- but also, while appearing to call for heroic action, in fact becomes ‘a way of talking about what forms of catastrophe a world is comfortable with or even interested in perpetuating’ (761)” (Joseph 62). Crisis as an organizing metaphor, then, bears deliberate investigation as an organization

of temporality, in literature, in social movements, and political rhetoric. Huebener reasons that “If the act of timing is performed in relation to assumed sociological and ideological structures, then one of the central ambitions of the critical study of time must be to take the measure of the timing itself, to try to uncover the assumptions that shape our very approach to gauging time” (8).

An analysis of crisis temporality can provide insight into how dominant narratives become a means of restoring coherence, filling the gaps of deferral and anticipation, and reengineering white time in its alignment with the normal. Moreover, what we find in analysis of crisis temporality is that in contemporary capitalism domination in time is also a freedom from the temporal norms that regulate and bind the majority of peoples; capital accumulates through the binding harm of racialized and gendered bodies, while credit in both time and money accrue to those at the top of the temporal hierarchy. Miranda Joseph argues that “capital accumulation and the reinscription of social hierarchies proceed through an orchestrated (if at times cacophonous) deployment of diverse temporal norms. Embodying what might be understood as a radicalization of the abstraction of time attributed to capitalism (empty, equivalent, temporal units are freed completely from particular order or location), bankers and the Jeff Skillings of the world deploy the credit that allows free—liquid—movement through time and space, enabling them to live in whatever present they might prefer” (25). In effect, capitalist time is the expropriation of others’ times in daily labor and in life shortening, and in the binding of racialized and gendered bodies to the precarious timings of capitalism.

In the aftermath of the 2016 elections, to the extent that “economic anxiety” became a dominant crisis narrative to explain the violation of expectations that many experienced when the anticipated outcome did not emerge, white supremacy as the structuring conditions of these events had to be actively suppressed in mainstream narratives. This suppression was most apparent in mainstream media narratives that focused on the “alt-right,” rural America, and white voters without a college education, while ignoring income and whiteness as signifiers of identity. Early headlines and national news stories focused on making distinctions between college-educated white voters and those without a college education and social class and income were less emphasized. Working-class white masculinity became the signifier of Trumpism. These stories persisted despite evidence from scholars, journalists, and activists who pointed out that



whiteness is the single most shared characteristic of Trump supporters.<sup>5</sup> In the mainstream press, particularly in cable news outlets, white nationalism remained a secondary story focused on the “rise of the alt-right,” making space for its popularizers to tell their stories. The perspectives that permeated mainstream news in November 2016 can be seen in a post-election conversation on MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*; Trump voters were described as “living paycheck to paycheck” by Joe Scarborough and Michael Moore. Moore argues: “They’re not racist. . . . They twice voted for a man whose middle name is Hussein.” Furthermore, Moore and Scarborough use the dichotomous frame of the “elite bubble” versus “Midwesterners” who feel “forgotten” to explain voting patterns. Anand Giridharadas tries to argue that the majority of New Yorkers are not, in fact, the culturally or economically elite, but nevertheless voted for Hillary, his point being that poor and working-class people of color did not vote for Trump, but the subject is changed to focus on the low turnout for Hillary Clinton by African American voters in Detroit and Flint. In other words, Scarborough and Moore convince themselves that white supremacy and sexism are not the motivating factors in Trump’s support.

A more complex analysis of voters in the 2016 election is found in Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck’s *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*. Here, the authors implicitly argue that the dominant headlines about economic crisis widely accepted as the cause of Trump’s popularity with white voters ignore how temporality and identity function in white America. As *Identity Crisis*’s authors point out, “[The] comment ‘We know he’s not acting like an American’ distills what the election was fundamentally about: a debate about not only what would, as Trump put it, ‘make America *great again*,’ but who is America and American—in *the first place*” (2, my emphasis). The authors argue based on their analysis of voting results and voter responses that “In 2016, the important groups were defined by the characteristics that have long divided Americans: race, ethnicity, religion, gender, nationality, and, ultimately partisanship. . . . What made this election distinctive was *how much* those identities mattered to voters” (2). *Identity Crisis* contends, instead, that the 2016 election, resembles a psychological identity crisis: “When that term was coined by the psychologist Erik Erikson, it referred to the individual’s struggle, particularly in adolescence, to develop a sense of self—that is, his or her true identity. Analogous crises were the preconditions, and arguably the legacy, of this election” (10). The authors argue that the election “was also remarkable for how it crystallized the country’s

identity crisis: sharp divisions on what America has become, and what it should be” (200). This language of crisis assumes a coherent divide between factions in understanding the past and moving into the future. But such an identity crisis is established on the narrative of a shared, unitary identity at some earlier point in time. In this way, crisis temporality emerges as a divide, a split in the progressive normative timeline of the nation; as a framing mechanism, then, it is also that which manages chronic harm in the dominant temporal regime of whiteness. In contrast to the dominant media narrative of economic anxiety, Black scholars and activists, anti-racist feminists, and others argued that white nationalism was the motivating force for Trump voters. As Keeanga-Yahmetta Taylor argues in *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective*:

The search for answers to how the loathsome Donald J. Trump could become president of the United States tended to focus on who did and did not vote. Of course that was part of the explanation, but what was often missing was closer scrutiny of what kept tens of millions of people from participating in the election. To that point, given Trump’s repeated appeals to racism, why would fewer, not more, African Americans, including Black women, have participated in that critical election. (1–2)

Taylor’s argument points to the conditions of chronic harm that were deepening their hold on Black women’s lives and in their communities, including voter repression: “Looking at Black communities through the specific experiences of Black women would have revealed the depths of *economic and social crisis unfolding* in Black America. Black women had led the way in electoral support for Barack Obama, and with those votes came the expectation that life would improve. Instead of getting better, wages stagnated, poverty increased, and policing was an added burden” (Taylor 2, my emphasis). Crisis, in Taylor’s use of it, refers to the medical definition of crisis—that moment of turning when a condition dissipates or *worsens*.

The crisis narrative in American culture is a compelling one. Its dominance is almost as prevalent as the triumphalist narrative of American exceptionalism that saturates U.S. political rhetoric; historically speaking, these two narratives have worked together, most recently in Trump’s campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again,” itself an echo of Reagan’s 1980 “Let’s Make America Great Again” and Reagan’s 1984 revision, “It’s

Morning Again in America.” These slogans suggest a rupture in national progress, but they also argue for the forward momentum of recovery of a national identity that is not significantly different from the America of the American project imagined by conservative Charles Murray in *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010*. While Murray sees a kind of “unraveling” of national identity, these slogans reaffirm the normative teleology of nation-time, allowing for a dominant resynchronization through a formal assimilation or rejection of bodies that are out of time. In fact, this sense of crisis may, to use Freeman’s terms, renew nation-time by rebinding some bodies into its linear trajectory through the marginalization of others. The feminist reparative frame is distinct not only from the *a priori* claim of white time, not only from those who chant “Make America Great Again,” but also from the normative temporality of nation-time in which the Trump administration’s politics on immigration and race are “not America.” White time is manifested in its allegiance to nation-time throughout the years of the Trump presidency in phrases such as this is “not America.” These statements reflect the necessity of reengineering progressive nation-time with the facts of slavery and colonialism; it excludes the “now” from nation-time and manages national identity through the crisis frame.

Part of my argument in chapter 1 is that 2016 represented a rupture in the chrononormativity of white time. Elizabeth Freeman argues that “Chrononormativity is a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts. Schedules, calendars, time zones, and even wristwatches inculcate what the sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel calls ‘hidden rhythms,’ forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege. Manipulations of time convert historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos, which in turn organize the value and meaning of time” (Freeman 3). These chrononormative regimes regulate the social collective and, thus, the social imaginary. As Freeman argues, “In a chronobiological society, the state and other institutions, including representational apparatuses, link properly temporalized bodies to narratives of movement and change. These are teleological schemes of events or strategies for living such as marriage, accumulation of health and wealth for the future, reproduction, childrearing, and death and its attendant rituals. Indeed, as the anthropologist John Borneman’s work clarifies, so-called personal histories become legible only within a state-sponsored timeline” (4). Freeman contends that “in zones not fully reducible to the state—in, say, psychiatry,

medicine, and law—having a life entails the ability to narrate it not only in these state-sanctioned terms but also in a novelistic framework: as event-centered, goal-oriented, intentional, and culminating in epiphanies or major transformations” (5). Thus, those crisis narratives that can most easily be recuperated into the tempos of white time are those most likely to be valued as “timely” explanations of the crisis of 2016.

In chapter 1, I examine popular texts that have been packaged and circulated in mainstream media as “timely” explanations of this national identity crisis. I demonstrate the extent to which chronopolitics is embedded in these texts and in the elevating of specific types of narrative storytelling because of their organizing chronotopes. I attempt a gendered and raced “untiming” of crisis and precarity in nation-time, analyzing the assumptions built into the concept of the timely text. These working-class memoirs put forth the trauma of the white family as working-class trauma, so that the health of the “race” becomes a signifier of national health. This aligns with Freeman’s theorization of the relation between the productivity of time and the chrononormative narrative of the white family as synecdoche for the nation: “The logic of time-as-productive thereby becomes one of serial cause-and-effect: the past seems useless unless it predicts and becomes material for a future. These teleologies of living, in turn, structure the logic of a ‘people’s inheritance: rather than just the transfer of private property along heteroreproductive lines, inheritance becomes the familial and collective legacy from which a group will draw a properly political future—be it national, ethnic, or something else” (Freeman 5). I juxtapose these timely memoirs with “deaths of despair” narratives that attribute a rise in white mortality rates to economic and social despair, symptomized by drug overdose, alcoholism, and suicide. Deaths of despair narratives make brief appearances in all these texts; these narratives have a particular affective currency for describing white America that acts as a counterweight to the dominance of white supremacy and white complicity in ignoring that dominance. The deaths of despair narrative implicitly excludes other groups from this same despair; it cannot account or only account for the persistence of other groups in the face of ongoing dispossession and harm.

The “identity crisis” that Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck discuss in their book has been represented not as typical of white time but as an atypical violation of progressive nation-time. The “deaths of despair” narratives and the texts examined in chapter 1 realign white time and nation-time through their recuperative mourning of key mythic figures in U.S. culture, the hillbilly and the rural farmer. Mourning is a political act. David McIvor,