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# The Play Practices of Enslaved Children

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The author examines the childhood experiences of formerly enslaved children. He suggests that the conventional understandings of scholars and historians concerning play may not be applicable to the complex lives of enslaved children because researchers do not consider such children as always proper-tied beings. Their play practices were molded by their proximity to violence and by their being owned as property. Rethinking what constitutes play for enslaved children, Harris asserts, unlocks newer possibilities for understanding the behaviors, actions, and desires of these children. Their play practices allowed them to learn about—and challenge—their place in the world. Building on and challenging seminal scholarship, Harris encourages readers to rethink what constitutes play and to view ordinary forms of play as intentional attacks against the institution of slavery and white supremacy.

**Key words:** enslaved children and play; slavery and play; white gaze

**I**N 1851 SOUTH CAROLINA slaveholder Gabriel Plowden gave his wife a special gift—a five-year-old enslaved boy named Titus Bynes. Plowden desired his wife to have someone she could groom into a reliable personal servant. Bynes, a sharp little boy with a searing desire to acquire knowledge, soon began to sneak glances at the various newspapers his owners read. The awesome words and images he encountered in this forbidden world inspired the little houseboy. One day, as Bynes was playing in the dirt and writing out various words and letters he had observed, one of the Plowden daughters caught him writing about water, and she swiftly ran off to tell her mother. The plantation mistress sternly chastised Bynes and warned him that, if he were ever caught writing again, she would be sure to have his right arm sawed off. After this encounter, the young boy never openly played games with words.<sup>1</sup>

This incident captures the complexities and risks associated with the enslaved child's play. When young Bynes first encountered words, he was restricted. He could go only so far, because it was illegal in all slaveholding states for enslaved people to read and write. The excitement of breaking oppressive

rules and the internal desire to learn spurred Byne's disobedience and metamorphosed into a playful game with an important lesson: Byne would never play with words in front of his owners again.

Before continuing, let me clarify my definition of play. I define enslaved child's play as any bodily action, gesture, or decision enacted by the enslaved child with the intent of generating behavioral, social, intellectual, or physical rewards. Historian Howard Chudacoff's definition of play as an array of "amusing activities that have behavioral, social, intellectual, and physical rewards" offers a helpful starting point, but I hope to extend his definition beyond the realm of the amusing.<sup>2</sup> Here, I incorporate the work of play scholar Thomas Henricks. His seminal essay, "Play as Self-Realization: Toward a General Theory of Play," provides a tenable framework for rethinking the boundaries of play. Henricks suggests that all forms of play are "project[s] of self-realization."<sup>3</sup> When players engage in play, they do so to "acquaint themselves with the character of the world in which they operate and to evaluate the personal standings they can achieve within that world."<sup>4</sup> When enslaved children engaged in play through more recognizable modes of games and leisure activities or less relaxed social interactions with white owners and civilians, these children were gauging their potential and capabilities as slaves. They learned what was acceptable, inappropriate, prohibited, and dangerous to their persons as Black enslaved beings. The actions, gestures, and decisions of enslaved children, ranging from the leisurely and recreational to the required, therefore, aided their navigation through life as property while simultaneously allowing them to critique their chattel status and create new possibilities of existence. Enslaved children's daily experiences constituted various modes of play in and of themselves. To be sure, these young people played in the conventional sense. They ran, fought, raced, and chased each other as well as some of their white counterparts, but, even then, they always hoped for some sort of reward or benefit. When the play practices of enslaved children threatened the authority of their masters—and, thereby, the authority of the planter class—the system often responded against the enslaved with violence. Notwithstanding this looming threat of violence and displacement, enslaved children continued to play.

### **Rethinking Play**

To relate better to the life experiences of enslaved children, I find it helpful to

establish a broader, more unconventional concept of play, one that surpasses the enjoyable and pleasurable and takes into consideration the human desire for self-preservation and the reality of slave life as unpredictable and invasive. Sociologist Orlando Patterson has argued that enslaved people of all ages were “socially dead” and that this social death constituted being “alienated from all ‘rights’ or claims of births.”<sup>5</sup> The children of slavery were birthed into a system of alienation and obligation. Due to social, cultural, and legal measures, slaveholders wielded authority “derived from [their] control over symbolic instruments, which effectively persuaded both slaves and others that the master was the only mediator between the living community to which [the slave owners] belonged” and their socially dead slaves.<sup>6</sup> Enslaved American children came of age in a world in which their greatest purpose was to satisfy the will of those who owned them. Enslaved children’s quest for self-development was buffeted by their limited legal and social mobility. The enslaved could not legally read, write, or travel freely without the consent of white masters. When Black people (free or enslaved) traveled, if patrollers found them without an authorized travel pass, they would often be punished.

Nevertheless, enslaved children contested their social and legal status by challenging and critiquing their slave status through a variety of games. Enslaved child’s play amounted to more than pleasurable or recreational games. Without question, enslaved child’s play did include moments of leisure, and I discuss some of the conventional game experiences of enslaved children. Notwithstanding this reality, I encourage a rethinking of what constitutes play and gaming. Many of the daily activities of enslaved children (staying out of trouble, getting into trouble, performing menial tasks) can be read as gaming opportunities the enslaved used to grapple with their slave status and sought to receive some sort of reward because of their behavior. When Titus Bynes leisurely wrote in the dirt, he participated in a game that levied a negative reward—the threat of dismemberment. Writing words on the ground in a society where writing words could get you cut (or killed) constituted a rebellious game.

Building on this concept, I use the life experiences of enslaved children to argue that the play practices of these youngsters ranged from leisurely games with white children and fellow slaves to spontaneous (or coerced) performances at the behest of their owners and other whites. For enslaved children, performing mundane tasks and appeasing white masters, drivers, overseers, and civilians became a game.

Anthropologists John Roberts, Malcolm Arth, and Robert Bush have

classified games into three broad categories: games of physical skill, strategy, and chance.<sup>7</sup> Games of physical skill required some sort of standout competency within the physical body. Games of strategy necessitated the successful execution of a plan regardless of physical skill. And games of chance occurred in instances where the physical and the strategic had no bearing on the game's outcome. This performance may not have always brought pleasure to the enslaved, but it did lessen the possibility of bodily harm and white ridicule. The reward for carrying out the master's desires could equate to a decreased threat of physical harm, a greater assurance of family members not being sold off (or that they would be sold off together), and even small gifts that enslaved children self-appraised with value and meaning. This is not to say that every moment of an enslaved child's play was dedicated to the master's happiness. On the contrary, much scholarship highlights how the enslaved contested slavery.<sup>8</sup> I view the very act of enslaved humans finding personal joy and fulfillment in whatever space, place, or moment they occupy to be the ultimate critique against the institution of slavery.

Now, let the games begin.

### Enslaved Child's Play

Enslaved children who grew up living under their master's roof were more likely to play recreational games with white children, but here they also came into the knowledge of their racialized difference. Harriett Gresham grew up as a mixed-race, South Carolina slave. Her mother was the seamstress of the plantation. Due to her mother's exalted job, she and Harriet lived in the big house with their master. The child enjoyed the company of her master's children, but the external reality of her enslavement—and the inferior status it attached to her—followed Harriet like an omnipresent shadow. She described her recreational upbringing like this: “Honey, I aint know I was any different fum de chillen o’ me mistress. . . . We played and et [ate] and fit [fought] together lak chillen is bound ter do all over der world. [However,] Somethin’ allus [always] happened though to remind me dat I was jist a piece of property.”<sup>9</sup>

Gresham, despite her nearness to the master's children and her sharing moments of intimate play with them, felt she was treated more like a piece of property than a human being. Many of the interracial games between Black enslaved youths and white children, according to Chudacoff, were tools of socialization designed to prepare Black children for adult life as slaves. I argue that,

although these games may have “reproduced prevailing racial hierach[ies],” enslaved Black childrens’ play experiences with white children also functioned as the breeding grounds for rejecting these hierarchies and challenging white supremacy.<sup>10</sup>

Former Georgia slave Easter Brown was just four years old at the end of the Civil War. When she was still a small child, the plantation mistress gave Easter various tasks like helping the house cook, Louisa. Brown was also playmate to the mistress’s infant daughter. While the baby girl was cared for and given the best toys, Brown was forced to create and play with a doll she made with an old tree branch and a discarded rag.<sup>11</sup> Brown was determined to have a toy with or without her master’s consent or aid.

Former Mississippi slave Hamp Simmons recollected traveling with his master’s son as a small boy and “going out with one of master’s sons and catching birds under a trap and cooking them in the field.” While this may have been one of the highlights of Simmons’s childhood, he could also remember coming back from these fields barefoot with only a long shirt for clothing while his playmate played fully clothed.<sup>12</sup>

Gresham, Brown, and Simmons grew up as house slaves. Their placement within the home of their masters afforded them unique experiences that differentiated them from their enslaved peers who lived and played mostly among other slaves. Where enslaved children slept may have affected their day-to-day experiences, but it did not prevent house and field slave children from being treated as mere property in a way that white children were not.

Many inventories of plantations with children often marked in their notes slave children’s monetary worth. Historian Daina Ramey Berry notes that many enslavers identified their strongest males starting in their mid-to-upper teens and on into their forties. These “full hands” were annotated with a numerical value of “1” in many owners’ ledgers. Women and children were marked as three-quarter (“0.75”), one-half (“0.5”), or one-quarter hands (“0.25”).<sup>13</sup> The youngest children who could work in some capacity were quarter-hands, but most adolescents were likely considered half-hands. Enslaved children were not usually expected to work until the age of twelve. Masters often expected enslaved girls to mate by age sixteen.<sup>14</sup> One formerly enslaved Mississippi man, named Jim Allen, even recalled boyhood memories of toiling in the rich soils of his owner’s plantation adding that it “took two chillerns to make one hand.”<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to imagine ledgers that defined Southern white children solely by numerical notations.

Enslaved Black children learned early about notions of work. Historian Wilma King notes that some of the earliest work responsibilities for children not yet mature enough to have a trade or work in the fields could range from tending farm animals, pulling weeds, and completing miscellaneous household chores to attending babies, gathering eggs, and churning butter. Slave children were forced to make a “quantum leap from childhood into the world of work.”<sup>16</sup> Former Texas slave Ellen Payne remembered being tasked with watching the cows, chickens, and turkeys on her plantation.<sup>17</sup> Jack Payne grew up in San Augustine County, Texas, as a slave. When he was a small child too young to work in the fields, Payne’s mistress had him feeding chickens, making scarecrows to stave off hawks, and gathering wood for the fire pit.<sup>18</sup> Cora Taylor, who grew up as a child slave in Georgia, recalled thinning the cotton from the fields and “mind[ing] the flies” at her owner’s dinner table.<sup>19</sup> Mississippi ex-slave, Foster Weathersby fondly remembered churning endless gallons of milk.<sup>20</sup> Slaveholders were clear from the beginning when it came to their interactions with child slaves: the owners wanted the children to know that they existed in these spaces to fulfill the express will of the masters and to participate in the continual upkeep of the plantation.

The ability of enslaved children to utilize play as a mechanism of contestation against the institution of slavery and the authority of their masters salvaged at least part of their childhoods. Former Texas slave Henry Owens confirmed this, adding, “When I was a kid, I had to help wid almost everything.” One day Owens’ master rounded up a group of children on a trip into the field. The master told the group to “chop up everything dat was green.” Henry took this command to heart: “I told de other kids to go ahead and chop . . . and dey [started] in to choppin’ up everything dat was green, including de young cawn [corn]!” The infuriated master screamed at the zealous chopping troop, demanding to know what they thought they were doing. Owens responded, “Well, [you] told us to chop up *everything* dat was green.”<sup>21</sup>

Former Texas slave Rosa Pollard fondly recalled sneaking moments of play with other slave girls on the plantation. They played Wolf over the River and hide-and-seek. Beyond these games, Rosa and the other girls relied on the power of magic to keep them safe from the volatile temperaments of their owners. They “hung mistletoe over the door and if Maser or Mistress walked under it, that meant they would be good. . . . If we could get a rabbits foot us girls would wear it around our necks. As long as we did this, Maser would not be mean to us.”<sup>22</sup>

Enslaved children could use moments of play to undermine slavery and

thwart the plans of their owners. Little Sue Snow used music to spar with the white children with whom she lived, imploding into an epic battle of the bands that became engrained in the proud troublemaker's memory:

De white children was a singin' a song:  
 'Ol' Jeff Davis, long an' slim,  
 Whupped ol' Abe wid a hick'ry limb.  
 Jeff Davis is a wise man an Lincoln is a fool,  
 Ol' Jeff Davis rides a gray an Lincoln rides a mule.'

I was mad anyhow, an' I hopped up an' sung:  
 Ol' Gen'l Pope, he had a short gun,  
 Fill it full of bum,  
 Kill 'em as dey come.  
 Call a Union band,  
 Make de rebels understand  
 To leave our land,  
 Submit to Abraham<sup>23</sup>

Sue bellowed these lyrics with her mistress standing right behind her. She soon had such gutsy song knocked out of her when the irate mistress whacked the insubordinate slave with a nearby broom.

These methods of play had the power to inspire and equip the enslaved, bestowing some with the necessary tools to be rid of slavery for good. The recorded actions of three ex-slaves—Richard Harris, Henry Bibb, and Bethany Veney—illustrate the diversity of enslaved child's play and its dual ability to appease white onlookers while concealing the enslaved from some of slavery's horrors. Furthermore, these three historical witnesses exist as lucid examples of enslaved youths striving for selfhood through mundane acts of play. Harris, Bibb, and Veney each used everyday actions to make the subtle case for self-possession even while being the legal property of someone else.

In 1916 John George Clinkscales was not satisfied with how the twentieth century viewed slavery, so he wrote a book more accurately portraying the days of slavery and the positives associated with them. *On the Old Plantation: Reminiscences of His Childhood* was, he said, "written primarily for the benefit of my own children and grandchildren." As far as this proud white Southerner was concerned, "Too many of our young people know of the institution of slavery only what they've learned from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*."<sup>24</sup> Clinkscales had launched a virtual public relations campaign on behalf of former slave owners and pro-



slavery sympathizers. His objective was to capture the light-hearted moments of slavery and prove to the world (and his children and grandchildren) the necessity and rightness of the institution. Richard Harris, a former slave, and boyhood playmate of Clinkscales played a prominent role in *On the Old Plantation*.

We come to know Richard Harris only through the eyes of John Clinkscales. Without question, this is a problem, but it also helps us understand the complex relationship between enslaved child's play and the contestation at work in Harris's quest for selfhood. Thomas Henricks articulates that selfhood has a bifurcated purpose. First, it functions as a "way for individuals to understand themselves." But it also exists as a result of the "pattern of [one's] connections to the world." Moreover, one can often learn more about oneself by how others describe them.<sup>25</sup> Selfhood oscillates on a pendulum that adjusts the self from being an "active negotiator" to a "stable object."

In the case of Richard Harris, readers come to know him only through the eyes of a man who was invested in an institution intent on robbing Harris of his selfhood. This is an unfortunate reality, but those who work in archives pertaining to slavery in any context know this reality all too well. Clinkscales's aim, to be sure, is to soften the brutality of Harris's enslavement and make the former slave appear content with his lot as an enslaved person. Observing the interactions between Clinkscales and Harris offers a realistic, complicated example of how enslaved people strove for selfhood even while being someone else's property.

Although the author's original intent may have been to romanticize owning Black people, his account of Harris's interactions with those who owned him can serve a greater purpose than justifying slavery. Finding slivers of Black joy in sites and spaces of Black subjugation and bondage never negates the reality of Black oppression. The owners of enslaved Blacks were intimately connected to their property, and their views and ideas about the Black people they owned and lived among provide modern readers with valuable information about both themselves and Black people. It is therefore critical for us to understand selfhood as a "process of active involvement" that includes—both positively and negatively—"others."<sup>26</sup> Clinkscales provides us with an outsider perspective of enslaved child's play that helps us gain a fuller understanding of Richard Harris's actions as an enslaved child player seeking self-possession.

Clinkscales drew on a wealth of fond memories to reflect on Harris's place in the South Carolina plantation home of his childhood. As a boy, Clinkscales remembered being with his father when they both first laid eyes on Richard Harris. A slave trader had stopped in town with an excellent-looking group of



slaves. When Clinkscales's father saw Harris, he was intrigued. The planter asked Harris his name, and he said, "Richard Harris, suh, dey calls me Dick. . . . He [the slave dealer] say Richard too long name fur a nigger."<sup>27</sup>

Hearing the young boy talk, the planter's son was fascinated by Harris's response. Clinkscales watched from a distance as his father and the boy conversed. When the planter asked twelve-year-old Harris about his previous owner's name in Virginia, the young boy's immediate response was "Who dat, suh?"<sup>28</sup> Clinkscales's father continued to pry. He followed up his previous question by asking about the boy's biological father. Harris retorted, "Me ain' had no daddy, suh; mammy say me ain' gut no daddy—she say she des find me."

The Clinkscales made Harris a house servant with hopes of grooming him to be a body servant to the mistress. As Harris grew, his quick wit and intelligence blossomed. Even Clinkscales had to make special note of the "little negro [being] so bright and quick and 'smart.'"<sup>29</sup> Three years into Harris's servitude, one of the wealthiest men in the community passed away, and buyers came from near and far to participate in picking apart the deceased man's prized inventory of goods—several acres of land, various livestock, and the golden prize of 350 slaves. The Clinkscales hosted five of these prospective buyers for a week-long stay. By the end of their stay, the five men were so enamored by Harris's superior intelligence and reputation among the slaves that one offered three thousand dollars to take the teenager back home with him to Georgia. The plantation mistress remained firm, not allowing Richard to be sold.

After eluding the threat of being displaced and sent into the lower South, Harris and some of his enslaved contemporaries enjoyed a fleeting celebratory moment, a moment opportune for play. According to Clinkscales, once the men left, Harris intentionally slipped into the backyard and began jumping for joy in front of the other slave children. The curious white child must have followed Richard to the backyard while his father saw the eager businessmen off. Young Clinkscales was amazed at what he saw. Harris "danced a jig, cut the pigeon wing, and walked on his hands, all to the delight of a group of pickaninnies, who looked upon him as a kind of wonder." As Clinkscales put it, "every negro either admired him or looked upon him with a kind of suspicious awe."<sup>30</sup>

Here, Harris engaged in a game of physical skill that had no other competitor. Instead, it was a play performance done for the children. Harris's victorious dance solo entranced his adoring audience. The rewards for Harris in this game were the wonder-struck faces of the enslaved children that solidified his mythic hero status among his fellow slaves. Richard Harris was obviously familiar with

life on the road as a slave, since he had been already forced to travel hundreds of miles from Virginia to South Carolina. The prodding and violating inspections, the meager rations, the abuse, and the constant threat of being sold were everyday experiences for the boy as a traveling piece of property, and it is hard to imagine someone who would not be ecstatic in Harris's situation.

Not long after this incident, Harris contracted typhoid fever and lost complete mobility in his legs and feet. The bright teenager with a sharp intellect and fluid movements was now immobilized. Still, Harris's "unfailing good humor and ready wit won for him many kindnesses from his fellow slaves. The men carried him from place to place on their backs."<sup>31</sup> As Harris continued life disabled and enslaved, his masters found work for him. He was given charge over the enslaved children on Clinkscales's plantation (about fifty of them). This group consisted of children ranging from a few weeks old to about age fourteen.

Harris made a game out of learning how to read, which as we know was illegal for the enslaved. Harris took the initiative and found creative ways to learn the sounds of various letters he saw. Harris noticed these letters in all sorts of places. He noticed them on the body of a wagon parked on the plantation. He also saw obscure letters on discarded pieces of paper that flew across the plantation. He even observed them in the leatherbound books his owner's children read. Soon, Richard Harris yielded to the curiosity these symbols invoked in him. The enslaved teen sharpened a stick and began writing out the letters he saw.

At first, it was a challenge to draw the letters correctly, but the boy "kept it up day after day until he succeeded in making on the ground a creditable copy of the names [on the wagon]."<sup>32</sup> Many members of the Clinkscales family played a role, sharing their school knowledge of words with Harris. One day, he noticed one of the master's daughters walking past his dirt letter drawings. The brave slave beckoned, "Miss Sallie, please ma'm, will you tell me whut them marks is on the wagon body?" Sallie was astonished, but she briefly showed the slave how to pronounce every letter.<sup>33</sup> He also asked another daughter, Jennie Clinkscales, to explain the meaning of letters and words, and she relented. The youngest sister, Ida, even gave the curious young Harris a tattered, faded copy of her *Blue Back Speller* of the McGuffie reader series. Once the plantation mistress found out the teen could read, she offered him a New Testament Bible and a Methodist hymnal. As Richard Harris mastered reading and writing, this only increased his popularity and reverence among the other slaves. Clinkscales remembered Harris soon spending "the long winter evenings reading to the other slaves. Sometimes a score or more of them would assemble in his cabin to hear him."<sup>34</sup> Harris boldly violated

state and local laws that prevented slaves from reading and writing.

Henry Bibb's account of living as an enslaved youth paints a less rosy image of slavery than does Clinkscales's. Henry Bibb was born in May 1815 in Shelby County, Kentucky. His mother Milldred Jackson had seven boys, all of them were born into slavery. Many of Bibb's earliest childhood memories were haunted by the specters of violence and separation. Bibb recalled, the "first time I was separated from mother, I was young and small. I knew nothing of my condition then as a slave."<sup>35</sup> But he knew firsthand the effects of scant food and clothing during bone-chilling winter months. By the time he became a teenager, Bibb was often hired out to other plantations by his owner, a man named White.

All the proceeds White made from Bibb went toward his daughter Harriet's education fund. Like many child slaves, one of Bibb's earliest jobs on the plantation was to serve as a play object to his master's daughter. Bibb may have first developed a fondness for hiding in his early play with Harriet. Bibb's unique ability to hide became useful as a game of strategy, with the reward being Bibb's escape from the presence of a violent woman. Bibb did not state the origins of his stellar hiding skills, but he did acknowledge them as a gift: "I learned the art of running away to perfection. I made a regular business of it, and never gave it up."<sup>36</sup>

Bibb's first attempt to run away came after harsh treatment by a neighboring plantation mistress, a woman named Vires, to whom his master had hired him out. The mistress flogged Bibb every day he showed up for work. Her insults, "flogging me, boxing, pulling my ears, and scolding" were so overwhelming that Bibb soon dreaded making the journey. Bibb finally sought relief by fleeing the woman's terrorizing clutches: "I was often gone several days before I was caught. They would abuse me for going off, but it did no good. The next time they flogged me, I was off again; but after a while they got sick of their bargain, and returned me back [to the Whites]."

Vires's insatiable bloodlust for Bibb put him on the run. As a hired slave, Bibb found refuge in the woods, but he also learned the importance of staying mentally alert there. When he passed by other white members of the community and they questioned why he was alone in the woods, he told them he was out searching for the family horse or rounding up stray cows. In the woods, Bibb found the art of deception and a creative imagination essential to his survival.

The slave's running and hiding soon paid off. He was sent back to his owner, where he did not have to face daily floggings. By the time Bibb returned to the White household, his widowed master had married a new wife. Her attitude and

actions toward Bibb resembled those of the Vires's plantation mistress he had just fled. No surprise then that "she kept me almost half of my time [hiding] in the woods, running from under the bloody lash." When he was not ducking beat downs, Bibb—a house servant—was tasked with cleaning furniture, waxing floors, and even fanning his owners to shoo away flies.<sup>37</sup>

Bibb eventually used the specialized training garnered in his childhood to conceal himself and become a free man in Canada. He relied on his keen ability to hide and received the ultimate reward—freedom.

Bethany Veney found refuge and safety not in the woods as did Bibb, but through her faith. She was born in 1812 on the Fletcher plantation in Virginia. She published her narrative in 1889 at seventy-seven years old. Veney grew up on a plantation where her owners made the fear of God a literal weapon to keep their slaves in line. As a small child, Veney remembered the frightening apocalyptic Bible stories told by her pious mistress, who warned the little slave that the entire world as she knew it would one day be burned into oblivion. The "moon would be turned into blood, the stars would fall out of the sky, and everything would melt away with a great heat and . . . every little child that had told a lie would be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone."<sup>38</sup> A traumatized Veney soon asked her mother if the woman's words were true. To the little girl's horror, her mother confirmed the mistress's words. But gave a more optimistic end by adding that good fortune would come to those who told the truth and did what was right. This encounter whetted the young girl's appetite for religion.

Veney also had vivid memories of performing at the behest of her master. As a house slave, she was already at the beck and call of the Fletcher family. Whenever the family hosted guests, Veney was often coerced into becoming the evening entertainment. After supper, Fletcher "would call me into his room . . . giving me to understand what he wanted of me. I would, with all manner of grotesque grimaces, gestures, and positions, dance and sing." A contorted and distorted Veney delighted the white onlookers as she engaged in her complex performance.<sup>39</sup> The master had asked, and Veney had delivered. By the time she was nine years old, her master had died, and his death was followed by the typical inventory of property that often threatened to disrupt social ties among the enslaved. The threat proved all too real for Veney, who was soon separated from her three siblings. With no one left to turn to, Veney sought religion for solace and fulfillment.

The persistent threat of slavery and its broken family led Veney to seek refuge in the imaginary. When the Fletcher estate was settled, Veney and her sister

Matilda had become the property of her former master's eldest daughter Lucy, who—bothered by the nature of the South's peculiar institution—attempted to turn Bethany over to a white man visiting from Ohio. Soon after Fletcher's death, Lucy moved in with her sister Nasenath and brother-in-law David Kibbler. Veney remembered Kibbler as being a violent man who frequently abused her. When Kibbler discovered Lucy's plot, he intervened, to Bethany's dismay. With freedom so close, but still so far away, Veney, often, over the years, wondered about the prospects of living life as a free Black girl. "I have sometimes tried to picture what my life might have been could I have been set free at that age; and I have imagined myself with a young girl's ambition, working hard and carefully saving my earnings." Moreover, she often comforted herself by imagining that she could use such hard-earned money to buy a home big enough to plant a garden and bring "my sisters and brothers to share with me these blessings of freedom."<sup>40</sup> Veney used the imaginary realm to think about her life and family members in contexts larger than enslavement. In her make-believe world, she could make money and save. She could plant food and have enough to share with her siblings. Her family could be a whole unit. These imaginations consoled the sulking slave, but even they fell short. One night Veney's sympathetic mistress decided to send her off with her sister-in-law to a revival meeting in hopes of lifting her spirits. This meeting would transform Veney's life forever.

Bethany Veney used her newfound faith as a game that could challenge her master's authority. It was a game of strategy. Its reward for Veney was a greater range of mobility. By the time Bethany and her master's sister had arrived, the big-tent meeting service was well underway. As they inched closer to the revival, the preacher's voice rang through the air, winding through both woods and hearts. Although she could not remember the exact message he preached, she would never forget the hymn the preacher sang after the sermon. "It was a hymn of many verses (I afterwards got an old woman to teach them to me). . . . There was such tenderness in his voice and such solemnity in his manner that I was greatly affected." After the minister finished his soul-stirring number, he managed to lock eyes with the vulnerable-looking slave girl. He approached her and asked if she wanted a new religious experience that would result in a happier afterlife. He then whispered specific instructions into her ear: go home, get on your knees, and ask God to "give me the witness that I was his. . . . As soon as I reached home and was alone, I knelt down, and in my feeble and ignorant way begged to be saved."<sup>41</sup>

Following her conversion, Veney became zealous for her newfound faith.

The teen girl generated enough fuss on the plantation to be sent to “Mr. Levers, two miles away.” Her master sent the girl “there to stay until I should get over my ‘religious fever’ as he called it.” This was a sickness that he did not want to spread. Veney’s religious conversion marked a dramatic alteration in her behavior that left her owner feeling threatened. Whatever Veney experienced in those sketchy revival services may have done her more harm than good. The meetinghouse the enslaved girl attended was a great distance from her plantation, far enough for her master to allow her to go services and come back the next morning. As Veney’s faith continued to interfere with her status as a slave, her master grew irritated. One day, “in the middle of the meeting, Master Kibbler came up to me, and taking me by the arm carried me out, scolding and fuming, declaring that [the minister] was a liar.”<sup>42</sup>

Veney’s meeting days were in danger of being at an end. One night—dis-traught and overwhelmed by the prospect of never again being able to attend the meetings—she was praying, and the idea came to her to remain on her knees and grovel at her master’s feet. “At last, I . . . was able to enter the room, where I saw him sitting.” She made her request: “O Master, may I go to meeting?”<sup>43</sup> The master saw the slave girl pleading on her knees and relented. Veney had put on the performance of a lifetime and was never worried about attending religious meetings again.

The irony in Veney’s account stems from the reality that the very religion Mistress Fletcher thought would tame and acclimate young Bethany to her slavery would be the same faith that weakened her hold on the slave. Bethany Veney would make her eventual exit from slavery when she was sold to a man from Rhode Island. She spent the remainder of her life in Worcester, Massachusetts, where she became an active member of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Veney died at the ripe age of 103 in 1915.

### **Race and Play Practices Revisited**

The play practices of enslaved children challenge conventional understandings of recreation and extend the invitation to think about slavery, race, and play in a new way. I have highlighted a variety of play practices from the lived experiences of three formerly enslaved Black people. These practices ranged from feigning ignorance, dancing on the spot, hiding, fighting, singing, and sabotaging crops to finding religion. Play practices enabled enslaved Black youths to challenge their

status as chattel by pushing the boundaries of their status as slaves. Play practices enabled enslaved children to realize the breadth and depth of their selfhood. Conventional acts of play are often associated with pleasure or amusement, but they do not consider enslaved children's obligations to their masters or the aims of the enslaved children. Master-slave obligations were not seasonal, nor like tides. These children were always owned by human beings. Play for enslaved Black children held an inherent politicization for enslaved youth because of this constant surveillance and ownership. Also, enslaved children still attempted to salvage their childhoods. They still sought ways to reap rewards whether these were praise, tangible products, or inward feelings of comfort.

The lived reality of enslaved children amounted to this: every piece of their physical body belonged to their owners. The feet they jived and hid with, the throats that released in melodic song, the brains they used to create the objects of their artistic imaginations were all legally owned by someone else, and the slaves did not have to travel far to learn this hard truth. Auctions, slave codes, owners, and nonslaveholding whites constantly reminded them. The enjoyment and leisure of slaves so often touted by early twentieth-century apologists for slavery comprised a historical publicity stunt aimed at restoring the reputation of white men and women who participated in one of America's most brutal institutions. Men like John Clinkscales perfectly embodied this movement. They sought only to show the love and harmony fixed between the needy, backward Black people, and the noble, protective white masters who made them property, all done to say that slavery was not all that bad.

Slavery was not a game, but in a sense, surviving the institution—or even evading it—required game-like skills. Saidiya Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* suggests that violence was central to the experiences of all slaves—young and old. For enslaved youth, the concept of playing cannot be disentangled from the specter of violence. Hartman argues that enslaved peoples' "enjoyment was predicated on the wanton uses of property, it was attributed to the slave in order to deny, displace, and minimize the violence of" slavery.<sup>44</sup>

Each of the enslaved young people I have highlighted employed play practices to make living through slavery more tolerable. Their efforts required tact, creativity, and careful calculation. Too much play could get an enslaved Black child sold or killed. Those who denied Black people their equality with whites would later use Black play practices against the enslaved and the newly freed. The efforts of writers and scholars on slavery at the beginning of the twentieth



century attest to this reality.<sup>45</sup> Supporters of slavery used the play of slaves to bestow a false sense of acceptance by the enslaved about their status as toys (objects) and to conceal the wretchedness of the institution. Making enslaved children appear oblivious to pain and welcoming to white discipline made the violence of slavery an act of benevolence from the perspective of the enslavers.

Acts of play by enslaved children were not always indicators of contentment. It is certainly true that enslaved children and adults who lived outside of the big house formed meaningful relationships with each other and carved out spaces of happiness when they were not supposed to be working. Enslaved young people had to tow a fine line as they engaged in various forms of recreation. Play in front of white spectators could be volatile. Any form of play that undermined the plantation system or made a public challenge to the master's authority could be met with violence or even death. However, Hartman encourages readers and students of American slavery to challenge voyeuristic mentalities that make slavery inhumane solely because of its violent moments. Slavery would have still been an evil even if no violence occurred for the simple reason that under slavery human beings were systematically prevented from being and possessing themselves.

While dwelling on the institution's brutality may lead to voyeurism, hanging on to the songs, dance moves, and quirky comments of the enslaved disrupt the full "recognition of Black humanity [which] itself becomes an exercise of violence."<sup>46</sup> Slave play matters for this reason. John Clinkscales's racist interpretation of Richard Harris's existence matters and should be included here for this very reason. Understanding the life experiences of enslaved young people beyond the realm of violence helps us avoid becoming "voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and sufferance."<sup>47</sup> Associating the institution of slavery with jovial, young slaves must not make the institution any less evil. Allowing violence alone to define slavery in itself makes us indifferent to the problems of Black humans being owned. The ultimate goal is this: not to become desensitized to the ravaging of Black bodies in the past, present, or future.

Even if the enslaved were fed, played games, and could count on stable housing in bondage, they were still rendered as property and were not people by law. Furthermore, accounts of the "slaves dancing in the quarters" and the "outrageous darky antics of the minstrel stage" should be viewed with just as much disdain as accounts of slaves being brutalized by the lash. Seeing enslaved children used "like animals and treated as if they existed only for the master's

profits” should incite rage.<sup>48</sup> For Hartman, one troublesome element of slave narratives is that many of their white readers can get a front-row seat at some of the more gruesome incidents in the personal lives of the enslaved. The plight of the enslaved becomes a “freak show,” one in which the purchase of its narrative becomes the price of admission. White, abolitionist publishers hoped that their fellow (white) readers would be able to imagine themselves in the shoes of the slaves. The medium of pain and loss—a “universal” experience—became a catalyst for “slipping into the captive’s body.”<sup>49</sup>

That the empathy of many readers was activated only by placing themselves in the position of the enslaved, is problematic and has lingering consequences today. For the suffering of the enslaved to become worthy of activism, it had to first take on a new identity—it had to put on white face. Hartman argues that this ostensible act of empathy works to inculcate a sense of Black peoples’ opacity. Taking the suffering lives of enslaved Blacks and imposing oneself in their stead to make the experiences of the enslaved legible obscures the full humanity of the enslaved. It renders them and their experiences translucent. Displacing the enslaved to see oneself legitimizes the experiences of the enslaved but misappropriates the Black body as a “vehicle of the other’s power, pleasure, and profit” while also making them poor stewards of their pain. The concept of the enslaved Black body being opaque feeds into the concept of the Black body as a fungible object. Black fungibility makes Blackness malleable and prone to shape-shifting. In this context, the lived witnesses of the enslaved become “vulnerable to the projection of others’ feelings, ideas, desires, and values.”<sup>50</sup> The words, accounts, and play practices of enslaved children will never stand alone. They are sampled and mastered in a studio of white exploration. Here the raw notes of the enslaved take on a different sound. The sonic transformation is unpredictable, because it sways with the feelings, emotions, and agendas of the ones behind the production.

Nevertheless, enslaved young people worked within this apparatus, employing their play practices to envision alternate realities, challenge social labels, and cultivate social bonds. Play practices of the enslaved assisted in socializing slave relations among themselves and with their owners. Young Richard Harris first met his new owner and was forced into a one-on-one dialogue before other white and Black spectators just before his bill of sale was signed. His conversation with the man was a performance, a form of play.

As a slave for sale, Harris had likely engaged in conversations with other inquiring white buyers. He knew how to go through the motions of entertaining

someone who would own him for the rest of his life. Harris's performance in the conversation was memorable enough to make the slaveholder's son remember it decades after it occurred.

From the beginning of the conversation, Harris subtly showed his rebel streak. When the potential owner asked the boy his name, he gave his legal first and last name even though the slave trader had given him a shorter nickname (Dick). The elder Clinkscales asked the boy for the name of his previous master, and Harris responded by appearing puzzled asking whom he meant. As a young, enslaved boy at the age of twelve, Harris would have been acquainted with and remembered his owner's name. To feign a lack of knowledge of the man's name suggests that at least in the boy's mind, his former owner did not exist.

At one point, it seemed as though Harris might face the possibility of being sold further South. After the threat waned, Harris ran to the back of the big house and put on a private show for his fellow slaves. He danced, twisted, and flipped with joy and relief. Harris, who had already experienced being sold once, did not want to go through that process again. As the white spectator saw it, Harris was doing all sorts of dance moves either to impress the onlooking enslaved children or because he was satisfied with being the Clinkscales's property.

The reality is that Harris may have been overjoyed, but it had less to do with remaining on the Clinkscales's plantation and more to do with avoiding the horrors of the domestic slave trade. Scores of slaves were chained by the ankles and held together by adjoining metal collars on their necks. Slaves sent further South were forced to travel on foot for hundreds of miles. They had to brave the unpredictability of nature with scant food, water, or clothing. They had to undergo the experience of being examined, poked, and jabbed in city after city—all while witnessing the separation and horrors associated with slave auctions across the Eastern seaboard. It is fitting to see the entire affair as a tour of terror for enslaved Blacks. The truth about Harris's dancing is therefore made plain. He did not dance as a satisfied South Carolina slave. He danced because he escaped a more traumatic experience than the one he was currently living through. The audience of enslaved children became a part of the performance as they watched and celebrated with him. They rejoiced with Harris as he rejoiced. All of this occurred with the younger Clinkscales watching and creating his interpretation of the event from a distance.

When Henry Bibb continuously resorted to hiding in hopes of curbing his mistress's abusive behavior, the two became intertwined in a modified game of cat and mouse. Bibb would come to work and take a beating every day, but when

it became unbearable, he would hide for weeks at a time. He would eventually be found and punished, and then he would be hired back out to the same woman. The cycle went on and on until the lady finally grew tired of Bibb's game and sent him back to his owner. This give-and-take between the white woman and the fleeing slave represents Bibb's constant quest for self-possession. The owners of enslaved people knew they could never fully own or control their human property, so they yielded at times to mild rebellion to maintain control of the system.

When thinking within the context of enslavement, games must take on a new identity. As privileged free people, it can be challenging to observe a game and assume this game to be a space for joy or pleasure. The enslavement of young Black children complicated the utility and purpose of games. Some games were played for the sake of survival or protection. Bibb's repetitive hiding was a direct challenge to the violence and authority vested in his owners and a direct attempt at self-possession. State and local laws gave slaveholders total authority over the bodies of their slaves. Most violence meted out against the enslaved was acceptable by law. Enslaved people were not considered full-fledged human beings under the law—they were more like ghosts. Their presence could be felt (through slave codes), but they were not seen, and they had no protections under the law. The paradox in Henry Bibb's playing is that each time Bibb took cover in the woods to conceal his afflicted body, he simultaneously beckoned for more humane (less violent) treatment while also putting himself at a greater risk of a violent, white response. Bibb envisioned running away as an "art." It was a performance that he perfected. Bibb began the play practice of running and hiding at an early age. This skill proved essential in his eventual escape North.

Bethany Veney found religion helpful in navigating her life as a young Black enslaved girl. She attended a meeting one night and became a converted soul. Veney's retention and performance of her faith can be classified as a game. It was a game of strategy with the reward of spending less time on the plantation under the watchful eye of her master, who loved forcing her to sing and dance at his good pleasure. Bethany's already intersectional life as a Black enslaved woman became even more complicated by her religious zeal. The young girl became an antebellum Jesus freak. As her interest in learning more about faith overcame her ability to complete her slave duties, the master had to stop Veney's performance. He even called it a sickness and forced her to leave the plantation until she was rid of the ailment. The girl's mistress had hopes of using religion to keep Veney under her control, but Veney used religion to undermine it.

The play practices of enslaved children illuminate the realities of slavery

and enrich myriad fields of study. This article stands as proof of that because it encompasses scholarship from a vast array of disciplines. Although conventional understandings of play practices often have more positive connotations, enslaved young people had a different relationship with play because they were not considered fully people. Play cannot be distinguished from power. Enslaved peoples' play practices existed against a backdrop of not possessing themselves.

Many of the forms of play I have mentioned were grounded in Black quests for self-possession. Historians and critics have long debated just how much agency enslaved people owned. Analyzing the play practices of enslaved children suggests that there was a daily fight for agency between the enslaved and their owners. Bibb's cat-and-mouse game of hiding from his violent owners is emblematic of Black youths' elusive quest for ownership over themselves. The experiences highlighted here suggest that play practices could be both self-induced and commanded by white owners or even a mixture of both.

Whatever the case, all forms of enslaved child's play required both the owners and the enslaved to be in proximity to each other. Saidiya Hartman argues that the historical archives holding the documents scholars and historians use in the field is always and already problematized. Moreover, the archives is "a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property."<sup>51</sup> It becomes the final resting place for those who died *with the power*. The archives levy a sometimes stealthy white gaze that already skews the words, actions, and decisions of the enslaved. Hartman does not suggest that the archive be abandoned, but she does articulate the need for scholars to reckon with the loss and incompleteness found there. The rawest and most authentic performances of enslaved youths may not have been recorded for the books because they were not committed for spectators or eavesdroppers. They held meaning and significance unknown to the dominating group. Notwithstanding this lack, what remains in the archives proves invaluable and necessary for evolving studies about the social development of enslaved children amid the penetrating white gaze and its modern parallels.

## Conclusion

November 22, 2014, was a cool, overcast day in the city of Cleveland, Ohio, but the city soon stirred to its boiling point. On this day a boy named Tamir Rice was labeled armed and dangerous and gunned down by the city police. Rice was just

twelve years old (the same age as Richard Harris when he met his owner). Rice had a replica of a Colt pistol for which he had traded for a cellphone earlier in the day. In school, Rice was known for playing pranks on his peers. After school, the boy shuffled with excitement to the park near his home. While at the park, he brandished and waved the toy gun in the faces of passersby. A civilian soon called 911 to alert authorities that someone was pointing a pistol and scaring people. He noted that the gun was “probably fake” and that the assailant was “probably a juvenile.” By the time the rookie police officer Tim Loehmann arrived all the “probables” had vanished.

The little boy playing with a toy gun at the park had become a legitimate threat in the eyes of the officers who shot him. One officer’s excited, anxious voice can be heard over the dispatch system: “Shots fired, male down . . . Black male, maybe twenty, black revolver, black handgun by him.”<sup>52</sup> The officer’s gaze envisioned a Rice stripped of any childlike characteristics. He recasted the twelve-year-old boy into a gun-toting, adult menace. Although America has long done away with the institution of chattel slavery, the play practices of Black American youths today remain liable to be met with public violence or outright execution.

## NOTES

1. George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Florida Narratives* (1972), 17:52–53.

2. Howard Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (2007), xii.

3. Thomas S. Henricks, “Play as Self-Realization: Toward a General Theory of Play,” *American Journal of Play* 6 (2014): 190.

4. *Ibid.*, 197.

5. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1982), 5.

6. *Ibid.*, 8.

7. John M. Roberts, Malcolm J. Arth, and Robert R. Bush, “Games in Culture,” *American Anthropologist* 61 (1959): 597. These anthropologists collected ethnographic data on a host of African tribes. They confined the realm of play to the recreational. While I do argue for a more expansive understanding of play than Roberts, Arth, and Bush’s propose, the anthropologists’ three classifications of games help establish my argument for the pervasiveness of play (and games) in every aspect of enslaved children’s lives.

8. For scholarship on the resistance of American slaves see Sharla Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* (2002); Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (2004); Walter C. Rucker, *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and*

*Identity Formation in Early America* (2006); Gerald Horne, *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America* (2014); and Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *She Came to Slay: The Life and Times of Harriet Tubman* (2019).

9. Rawick, ed., *Florida Narratives*, 156.

10. Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, 60.

11. *Ibid.*, 138–139.

12. George P. Rawick, ed. *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement Series 1, Mississippi Narratives* (1977) 10:1934–35.

13. Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (2017), 68–69.

14. Many of the accounts of enslaved people in the WPA narratives mention the age of twelve being the year that official work began. It was also common to see many enslaved teenaged girls would get married off or forced into a breeding situation between sixteen and twenty. The bulk of the examples used throughout this essay relies on the experiences of children sixteen and under.

15. Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, 44. See George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement Series 1, Mississippi Narratives*, (1978), 6:55.

16. Wilma King, *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America* (1995), 21–29. King suggests that most enslaved children were doing routine forms of work by the age of nine or ten.

17. George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography, Supplement Series 2, Texas Narratives* (1979), 8:3040.

18. *Ibid.*, 3044.

19. Rawick, ed., *Florida Narratives*, 41.

20. Rawick, ed., *Mississippi Narratives*, 10:2229.

21. *Ibid.*, 3007. Emphasis mine.

22. Rawick, ed., *Texas Narratives*, 8:3122.

23. Rawick, ed., *Mississippi Narratives*, 10:2007–8.

24. J. G. Clinkscales, *On the Old Plantation: Reminiscences of His Childhood* (1916), 5.

25. Henricks, “Play as Self-Realization,” 198, 200.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Clinkscales, *On the Old Plantation*, 37. Clinkscales describes the purchasing of the human chattel Harris as a passive, nonchalant act: “The price was named, a check was written, and Dick stepped out of line.”

28. *Ibid.*, 38.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, 41.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*, 43.

33. *Ibid.*, 44.

34. *Ibid.*, 46. Harris died at the age of fifty, having survived slavery by over two decades. Clinkscales reflected on his life with an affirming tone despite the man’s Blackness: “He had a brown skin, but a golden heart...” [p.51] This former owner’s reflection



was a part of the larger propaganda machine in the South that became popular after Reconstruction. It sought to portray Southern slavery as an era of harmony, love, and stability between Blacks and whites. Harris was looked upon with such good graces because he made himself at heart unassuming and warm in Clinkscales's eyes. Harris's heart was "golden" if he appeared docile, jolly, and meek in the white gaze.

35. Henry Bibb, *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (1849), 13.

36. *Ibid.*, 15. Here it is significant to note an important discrepancy. The original narrative of Henry Bibb, which was published in 1849, states that Bibb made his first significant escape to the woods in 1825. This would make Bibb around ten years old if this dating is accurate. However, a reprint of Bibb's narrative in an edited compilation of slave narratives by Gilbert Osofsky, *Puttin' on Ole Massa: The Slave Narratives of Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, and Solomon Northup* (1969) places Bibb's first escape date ten years later in 1835. If he escaped in 1835, he would have been a twenty-year-old man. While Bibb's testimony may vary between the two texts, readers do know that he grew up playing with his master's daughter Harriet.

37. *Ibid.*, 16. Here Bibb specified, "she would often seat herself in a large rocking chair, with two pillows about her, and would make me rock her, and keep off the flies."

38. Bethany Veney, "The Narrative of Bethany Veney a Slave Woman," in *From Bondage to Belonging: The Worcester Slave Narratives*, edited by B. Eugene McCarthy and Thomas L. Doughton (2007), 214.

39. *Ibid.*, 215.

40. *Ibid.*, 218.

41. *Ibid.*, 219.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, 220.

44. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (1997), 25.

45. See James Curtis Ballagh, *A History of Slavery in Virginia* (1902); Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* (1918); and William Sumner Jenkins, *Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South* (1935).

46. *Ibid.*, 35.

47. *Ibid.*, 3.

48. *Ibid.*, 4.

49. *Ibid.*, 18. See *Get Out*, a feature film directed by Jordan Peele (2017).

50. *Ibid.*, 50–51.

51. Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12 (2008): 2, 4. That we come to learn of Richard Harris only through the account of John G. Clinkscales reifies Hartman's argument.

52. Shaila Dewan and Richard A. Oppel, Jr., "In Tamir Rice Case, Many Errors by Cleveland Police, Then a Fatal One," *New York Times*, January 22, 2015.