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Contemporary Relevance of Anne Moody, Black Studies and Imprisoned Black Intellectual Thought

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Abstract: Anne Moody's 1968 autobiographical text, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, is receiving increased interest during this current moment of legislated anti-Blackness, most observable in the removal/outlawing of Black history and thought. Moody's early life in the Deep South during the 1940s-1950s and as a foot soldier in the Civil Rights Movement inform how we understand the continuity of anti-blackness and racial terror. Glen Conley, an imprisoned citizen, examines and teaches Anne Moody within a Mississippi prison context. While her book is used across several academic disciplines, the study of Moody within the prison context is not well known. Conley's political poetry explores Moody's life and text, bringing renewed attention to themes of Black mental health, survival, and resistance under a harsh U.S. Southern regime. Using a prison-praxis framework, this paper centers the knowledge production from the civically dead (imprisoned population), which allows for broader insights into themes of racialized confinement, criminalization and surveillance. Thus, this essay situates Conley's scholarship within the lineage of Black imprisoned radical tradition where he draws attention to Moody's prescient voice during a political climate of overt forms of legislated anti-Blackness and systemic erasure.

Keywords: *Anne Moody, Black studies, Anti-Blackness, Glen Conley, Prison-praxis-approach*

Introduction

As the 60th anniversary of Anne Moody's publication of *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (1968) approaches, there has been renewed interest in this critical text during this current era of extreme-right (white) backlash to the rise of Black Lives Matter—a moment marked by legislative attacks toward teaching critical histories of Black and Indigenous people (e.g., book bans) (PEN America, 2024; Yancy, 2024). Born in 1940 to sharecroppers, Moody's life mirrored other Black people around her: Abject rural poverty and oppressive white terror with few positive examples of Black life. While the celebration of Moody's genius, relevance and humanity is in its infancy, unsurprisingly, her lack of mainstream attention follows the trend of the dearth of Black women's inclusion in history and social science curricula and as purveyors of social thought (Schocker, 2021).

It is important to note that Moody's text is considered within the canon of prison writings. Moody reflects on her own imprisonment, systems of policing, and prison-like systems such as sharecropping, illuminating how the carceral state shaped her life and the illusion of freedom. Black-American prison literature, during the Civil Rights and Black Power era, describes the effects of state and federal carceral systems seizing the ideological currency of Black criminality deeply embedded within the country's fabric (Warren, 2018; Wolf, 2017). Black prison writings explored "Blackness and Black identity that was becoming increasingly imagined through racially disparate practices of imprisonment" (Wolf, 2017, p. 5). Prisons, in concert with unchecked power of the police and local vigilante terrorist organizations (like the Ku Klux Klan), re-enslaved generations, and suppressed Black commerce, self-determination, and free Black life while legitimizing incarceration as the proper response to racial unrest and Black freedom (Dillon, 2012; Warren, 2018; Winn, 2010; Wolf, 2017).

While Moody's text is used across several academic disciplines, the study of Moody within the prison context is not well known. Glen Conley, an imprisoned citizen, examines and teaches Anne Moody within a Mississippi prison context. Conley's scholarly contributions from the position of being *civically dead*—locked out of civil society via incarceration—offer critical insights into the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement. Thus, the purpose of this essay is to contribute to discussions exploring the relationship between Black Studies and prison writings through Conley's pedogeological approach to Anne Moody. His exploration of the social-political conditions Moody explored through her personal narratives highlights historical forces that consistently conspire to erase Black life.

This paper proceeds by first describing the importance of prison writings in the lineage of Black thought and liberation movements. In this section, anti-Blackness is broadly defined within the context of slavery and its afterlife (Jim Crow). Focus is devoted to the censorship of Black knowledge challenging manifestations of legalized anti-Blackness that produced systems of structural denial, imprisonment, exploitation and violence. This paper then moves to Conley's scholarship and methodological framework—a prison praxis. The *Anne Moody History Project* is briefly introduced to describe how Moody's text has been explored through Conley's leadership within the prison context. This essay concludes with a discussion on the continuity of anti-Black racism overtime and the importance of Moody's prescient voice in this current moment of structural erasure.

Black studies and Prison writings: Glen Conley and the Anne Moody History Project

The relationship between prison writings and Black studies is well established. In the wake of New York's Attica and California's San Quentin Prison Uprisings of 1971, *The Black Scholar: Journal of Black Studies and Research* devoted the April-May 1971 and October 1972 issues to the subject "The Black Prisoner" (Winn, 2010, p. 392). The special issues featured essays and poetry written by Black prisoners and Black community members, organizers, activists, and academics. Serving as a vehicle for informing readers outside prison walls of the issues Black inmates faced, Black print culture chronicled inmates' status as a legal caste rooted in what Saidiya Hartman calls "the afterlife of Slavery" (Hartman, 2007, as cited in Dillon, 2012, p.114). Centering racial terror in the genealogy of the prison, scholars have come to understand "slave holds… and plantations of the Middle Passage as spatial, discursive, ontological, and economic analogues of modern punishment" (Dillon, 2012, p. 114).

Before the 1960s, prisoners were a legal caste whose status was poignantly captured in the expression "slave(s)" of the State (Smith, 1993, p. 131). In 1871, a Virginia court (*Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, 1871), commented that a prisoner has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his personal rights except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. Like enslaved Africans, prisoners had no constitutional rights and no platform to present grievances. But unlike the enslaved, prisoners were invisible, except for occasional riots/protests, when they captured public attention (Felber, 2020: Smith, 1993). Black Muslims and Malcom X were among the first influential forces to "redefine the Black prisoner in Black cultural consciousness, while promoting the value of self-determination most closely associated with the Black Power Movement" (Winn, 2010, p. 393). Black studies have always played a crucial role as the bridge between Black prisoners and the larger Black community amplifying the voices of a legal caste Dylan Rodriguez (2003) refers to as the civically dead—complete political and social abandonment stripped of rights to participate in civil society. As Christoper E. Smith (1993) writes in *Black Muslims and the Development of Prisoners' Rights,* the rule of law did not apply to prisoners before the 1960s prisoner rights movement. Their status as inmates placed them beyond the ken of the courts, meaning the courts were unresponsive to prisoner complaints for over 200 years. Black Muslims became the primary actors filing the legal actions to obtain judicial recognition (Felber, 2020; Smith, 1993).

In the early 1970s, Black print culture and Black studies privileged the voices of Black prisoners by inviting incarcerated men and women to share their stories and reflections on the criminal legal system (Smith, 1993; Winn, 2010). The synergy between the Black community, Black press and prison writings brought about a revolutionary consciousness driven largely by Black prisoners (James, 2003a). Joy James (2003b) states that prisons began to function as intellectual and political sites unauthorized by the state that critiqued the moral standing of the state and the prison system. Restrictions limiting/banning access to literature intensified during the late 1970s and early 1980s with the emergence of imprisoned intellectuals and political prisoners (Birch, 2022; James, 2003a; Rodriquez, 2003). This understanding helps contextualize overt forms of censorship and suppression of Black prison writings, voices and history, and the important role Black studies continually serve capturing Black prison writings.

For example, Dudley Randall's Broadside Press, founded in 1965, became a leading publisher of the Black arts movement and one of the first to publish poetry from Etheridge Knight. A Korean War veteran, Knight returned to the United States only to find his life entangled with narcotics (Winn, 2010). "I died in Korea from a shrapnel wound and narcotics resurrected me," he explained. "I died in 1960 from a prison sentence and poetry brought me back to life" (Winn, 2010, p. 401). Knight's poetry caught the attention of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, Gwendolyn Brooks, who became keenly interested in Black prison writing and believed that the prison housed many potential poets and literary artists. As an inmate in Indiana State Prison, Knight's first collection, *Poems from Prison,* was published in 1968. Other Black publications such as *Negro Digest* and the *Journal of Black Poetry* also included Knight's poems that paid homage to Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, and Malcolm X (Winn, 2010). Glen Conley, like Knight, pays homage to Anne Moody through his poetry while using her text to develop a prisoner-led discussion group.

Imprisoned at the Mississippi Wilkinson County Correctional Facility (WCCF) in Moody's home county, Conley leveraged his reputable standing to meet/interview Moody's relatives and access local archives to delve deeper into her life. In doing so, he developed a rich, robust didactic program about a local forgotten hero, unknown by many. Conley's efforts and 2017 co-founding of *The Anne Moody History Project* (AMHP) brought renewed attention to Moody. Moreover, the study of Moody's life helped Conley make sense of his own and subsequent imprisonment. Having grown up in Louisiana not far from Moody's hometown, he questioned why Moody, and her book were unknown to him especially when the parallels between his life (and those imprisoned with him) and Moody's were clear. Despite Moody's accounts occurring nearly four decades prior to Conley's incarceration, Conley recognized a continuation of terror articulated by Moody. For example, Ku Klux Klan (KKK) descendants became insurance agents, prison guards, judges and parole board members. From this initial spark, Conley began to seek what he considers the liberatory impact of Moody's words.

Born Essie Mae Moody, Anne wrote of her life growing up in Mississippi during the 1940s-50s. From making sense of her earliest memories as a precocious five-year-old, Moody detailed how her racial consciousness was formed by making sense of the material reality race created for her family and the Black people around her. While Moody spoke intimately about her family and the local politics of rural Black life under a harsh Jim Crow regime, she wove in moments such as the violent torture and murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till in 1955 and the 1963 16th Street Baptist church bombing by the KKK that claimed the lives of four Black girls. These events influenced her decision to join the Civil Rights Movement (Hamlin, 2020; Moody, 1968).

Moody detailed a deeply embedded anti-Black socio-political history that Conley, through his imprisonment, grasped intimately while grappling with the erasure that comes with anti-Blackness. Scholars have explained the whitewashing of history as seeking to tell an American story that treats Native genocide and African slavery as an asterisk to the foundation of the U.S. (Venugopal, 2021). For example, Ta-Nehisi Coates, Nikole Hannah-Jones, and Amanda Gorman were among the first targets of anti-CRT book bans. Coates' 2015 book, *Between the World and Me,* was a required text for an advanced English class at Chapin High School in South Carolina. In February 2023, the text was banned after a few white students and their parents complained to the school board that the book made them feel "uncomfortable" and "ashamed" to be white (AP News, 20 June 2023, para 2). The book, written as a letter to Coates' teenage son,

discusses his perceptions, feelings, and circumstances of growing up Black in America and how racism and violence based on skin color are part of American society. Coates, like Moody, provides an autobiographical account of his formative years enduring the psychological toll of racism. Because Moody's book is mostly studied at the University level (Schocker, 2021), her book, up to this point, has escaped the fate of fellow Mississippi-native authors whose books were banned for delving into complex race relations and white supremacy: Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* (2017) and Jesmyn Ward's *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race* (2016) (American Library Association, 2023). Nikole Hannah-Jones, in a 2021 NPR interview, describes the banning/outlawing of Black writings as a powerful statement symbolic of how history is shaped and who gets to decide who tells the story (Venugopal, 2021).

Glen Conley's poetry collection, inspired by Moody's life, is one of a handful of works published within the past decade that engages with Moody and reflects on her relevance during the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement (Boisseau, 2020; Schocker, 2021). Conley's scholarly collaborations with other Anne Moody scholars, Leigh Ann Wheeler, has been publicized in *Binghamton University News* and *Mississippi Free Press* (Crown, 2022). Conley's poetry, like Knight's, follows in the tradition of articulating Blackness, anti-Blackness and freedom. Additionally, as an incarcerated citizen, Conley's critical-organic approach to Moody comes from a place of complete suppression, isolation, confinement and censorship. His position as an imprisoned-Black male in Mississippi gives him inimitable insight into Moody's life, especially in relation to the psychological violence inflicted from living under a prison regime. For these reasons, this essay argues that Conley's intellectual perspective offers a particular understanding that may elude scholars and other free-world intellectuals (Rodriquez, 2003).

Conley's research has received scholarly attention with him becoming the first and only Mississippi prisoner to present at two academic conferences and deliver lectures to a Binghamton University women's history class covering Moody's text (CN Staff, 2021; Khan, 2022). His scholarly approach follows models of knowledge production from historically oppressed groups. Collins (2009) states that knowledge from the oppressed often diverges from standard academic theory in both its production and purpose. Often taking the form of poetry, plays, music, and essays, such works emerging from Black women and other historically oppressed groups "aim to find ways to escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice" (p. 9). Hartnett (2003), in *Incarceration Nation: Investigative Prison Poems of Hope and Terror*, would situate Conley's work as political poetry. Political poetry merges the evidence-gathering force of scholarship with the emotion-producing force of poetry. In this case, it offers powerful insights into the best and worst aspects of America. Poems committed to advancing the cause of democracy by exploring relationships between politics, social actors and social justice are a form of political poetry, where Conley's work sits.

Black Situated Knowledge: Anne Moody and Structural anti-Blackness

Immediately following slavery, periods of progress towards recognizing Black humanity were met with efforts to undo this progress and perpetuate existing hierarchies (e.g., Black Codes, Pig laws, and Jim Crow) (Watson, 2023). The murders BLM highlighted

bear witness to the painful reality of the "*structural vulnerability* and precarity of Black lives in the U.S." (Yancy, 2023, p. 2). Thus, the global reception of BLM drew attention to historical manifestations of anti-Blackness that have followed cycles of hard-fought progress towards racial justice. Anne Moody's life illuminates ways a Black consciousness threatened a white-supremacist order that produces state-sanctioned unfreedoms (e.g., mass imprisonment) for Black people. This section briefly details the logic of legalized anti-Blackness through *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896. This landmark decision upheld earlier state-imposed Jim Crow laws, which reinforced systems of denial, criminalization and exclusion of Black life that a young Anne Moody would experience and challenge.

It is important to note that the 1896 ruling upheld the constitutionality of racial segregation under *separate but equal* that specifically targeted Black bodies. Anti-Blackness refers to systems of laws and legal decisions that have consistently denied the prospect of Black claims to humanity, self, space, liberation and self-defense (Bledsoe, 2021). Bledsoe (2021) further adds that anti-Blackness is the enduring and distinct logic within society that is underpinned by principles of gratuitous (needless) violence fortified through the conceptual prohibitions of self-defense that is distinct to Black populations. Williams (2024), notes that U.S. justice has never been endemic to those "who bear the brunt of its reach," thus the legal system is not capable of ensuring justice for Black people (p. 28). Highlighting Mary Frances Berry's (1995) text, *Black Resistance/White Law*, Williams (2024) draws attention to the historical specificities of Black racial social control that was created for and by white people established through slavery and fortified through Jim Crow laws and white-racial terrorism. It is the peculiarities of American social structures wherein Black people have always dealt intimately within white power structures. Therefore, Black people possess an acute awareness and knowledge of the violent nature of America and whiteness. As a result, Black critique of white-colonial order is deemed highly problematic (West, 1985).

Black writings dating back to David Walker's 1827 *Appeals* have always been deemed a threat. Walker's use of "historical, political and philosophical evidence pertaining to the enslaved African's paradoxical position in the West to undermine America's hypocritical allegiance to its peculiar institution [slavery], the source of the country's wealth and power" was seen as raising a revolutionary consciousness among enslaved people (Parris, 2015, p. 47). Thus, Walker's scholarly critique of the West's antipathy towards Africans and their enslaved descendants by challenging the erasure of enslaved Africans and their ancestors from the narrative of Western development was viewed as a threat and his Appeals as contraband. Walker, a free-Black abolitionist, addressed the nation's façade of democracy in four *Appeals*, which were the first published documents to name the former president in a lengthy refutation of Jefferson's claims and use of scientific racism to uphold the U.S. as a slaveholding nation and promote racist thought (Kaepernick, Kelley, & Taylor, 2023; Parris, 2015). Walker's Appeals were widely circulated and was accused by the *Boston Daily Transcript* of instilling Black Bostonians with a sense of purpose and pride, but it was the circulation of The Appeals to southern slaveholding states that posed the greatest threat (Parris, 2015).

Walker's *Appeals* predates the 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* by nearly 70 years. Homer Adolph Plessy, a Black man, boarded a train in New Orleans and seated himself in a 'whites-only' car and refused to move. His arrest, for violating the Jim Crow Car Act, formally known as the Separate Car Act 1890, led to the

Supreme Court ruling, in which all but one Supreme Court Justice voted against Plessy. This ruling affirmed the rights of the state to legally enact racial segregation laws (Collins, 2009; Washington, 2006). Harriet A. Washington (2006) in her book, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to Present*, refers to this period (Jim Crow) as American apartheid, signifying the legal standard of anti-Black violence at every societal level. In southern states, specifically Mississippi, racial segregation meant inferior education, nearly non-existent health care, dilapidated housing and a continuous threat of terror by white bodies deputized by the state to police, tax, and violate Black people (Washington, 2006).

Anne Moody's autobiographical writings capture Black life under Jim Crow and the penalties for fighting to dismantle it. Moody intimately detailed her relationship with her mother often recalling her mother's fears and responses to various injustices. Her mother's fears heightened when Moody joined the Movement. Moody writes how the white people in her hometown wanted her dead due to her involvement. Her account of the Woolworth sit-in in Jackson, Mississippi, on May 28, 1963, explains the violence and cost of participating in the freedom fight (Hamlin, 2020; Moody, 1968). Moody described vividly the racial slurs and death threats hurled at her before feeling a man's hands slap her, dragging her to the Woolworth's-counter floor by her hair along with the rest of her comrades who were being stomped by an angry mob (Moody, 1968). Her decision to resist also placed a target on her family in Wilkinson County who also received death threats for Moody's public demonstrations. Moody wrote of a letter she received from her mother after the Woolworth's sit-in (pp. 300-301):

> "In the letter she [Anne's mother] told me that the sheriff had stopped by and asked all kinds of questions about me the morning after the sit-in. She said she and Raymond [her mother's partner] told them that I had only been home once since I was in college, that I had practically cut off all my family connections when I ran away from home as a senior in high school. She said he said that he knew I had left home…She told me he said I must never come back there. If so he would not be responsible for what happened to me. "The whites are pretty upset about her doing these things," he told her. Mama told me not to write her again until she sent me word that it was O.K. She said that I would hear from her through Adline [Anne's sister]. I also got a letter from Adline in the same envelop. She told me what Mama hadn't mentioned—that Junior [Anne's brother] had been cornered by a group of white boys and was about to be lynched, when one of his friends came along in a car and rescued him."

Moody's account illustrates the inextricable link between the law and white vigilante violence, protected by the law/police and often one in the same. Jails and prisons were used to house/punish Black and white civil rights protesters not white lynch mobs, the agents of Black death. Moody noted plans made by Jackson, Mississippi's mayor, Allen Thompson, to "house over 12,500 demonstrators at the local jails and state fairgrounds" (Moody, pp. 301-302). If this wasn't enough space, Parchman, the state penitentiary, would be used. Governor Ross Barnett backed the mayor's decision by offering Parchman to the city of Jackson. The criminal legal system (jails, sheriffs, police deputies) was a central feature throughout Moody's text, looming and shaping the experiences of Black life. Her mother's pleas to end her involvement in the Movement and move to New Orleans illuminate how white terror backed by the legal system was mobilized to instill fear to undermine Black resolve and solidarity.

Through the themes of prison and punishment in Moody's writing, Conley developed a pedagogy and liberatory project inspired by Moody's life.

Methodology: Prison Praxis Framework

The U.S. prison regime, since Nixon's law and order state, has undergone critique by Black imprisoned radical intellectuals. Most of these writings are housed in Black studies as stated earlier (Winn, 2010). Incisive analysis from a population Dylan Rodriguez (2003) refers to as a counterhegemonic bloc of social theorists and political philosophers often served as theoretical texts and a call to combat. Operating from the understanding of the prison regime's reliance upon the logic of anti-Blackness fundamental to capitalism in the U.S., Assata Shakur, Mumia Abu-Jamal, Angela Davis and George Jackson were considered a type of *embodied contraband* (Rodriguez, 2003; 2006). As prominent figures, their writings and life testify to the depth and reach of the carceral state as a structure of political repression and social formations (Felber, 2020; Hansen-Day, 2015; James, 2003b; Rodriguez, 2003; 2006). Those who operate from the lineage of imprisoned and formally imprisoned intellectuals recognize that "movements for transformative change must center the knowledge of those most directly impacted by systems of domination" (Hansen-Day, 2015, p. 1).

Scholars have called attention to the undertheorized nature of imprisoned/formally imprisoned intellectuals' collective historical specificity (Dillon, 2012; Felber, 2020; James, 2003a; 2003b; Rodriguez, 2003; Rodriques, 2023; Winn, 2010). However, their intellectual work laid the foundation for a counterhegemonic-prison praxis (Rodriguez, 2003) and radical-prison praxis (Hansen-Day, 2015). As this discussion's guiding methodological framework, a prison-praxis approach considers a style of intellectual activity produced from a population that is civically dead—existing outside the realm of civil society and polity (Rodriguez, 2003). The civically dead write/think from a social location shaped by psychological and physical repression. Therefore, knowledge produced from this location is prolific in its orientation, often circumnavigating state-sanctioned terror, isolation, violence, and racism. Rodriguez (2003) considers five key factors that constitute a prison praxis framework: (1) Organic and creative in its approach to knowledge production; (2) Encompasses and exceeds disciplinary structures of "academic" and "activist" discourse (p. 66), (3) Strives to produce ideological and political unity among prisoners across racial divisions, (4) Constitutes a multi-layer field of alternative vernaculars, "including the construction of new languages of agency, politics, freedom, identity and self-actualization" (p. 67), and (5) Considers and comprehends, criticizes and antagonizes new carceral formations that extend beyond prison walls.

For example, Elias Rodriques' 2023 article, *The Poetry of Prison Uprising*, discusses Celes Tisdale's 2022 edited volume, *When the Smoke Cleared: Attica Prison Poems and Journal*. Tisdale chronicles a poetry workshop he led at Attica prison in 1972 after the uprising in September 1971. Tisdale, in speaking of the transformative nature of the workshop, highlights early challenges of keeping the men focused on the poetry as opposed to the politics of the time. Tisdale soon learned that the men saw the two (politics and poetry) as interrelated, defining poetry as "[p]ersonal, deals with emotions, historical, compact (concise), eternal, revolutionary" (Rodriques, 2023, p. 3). Rodriques (2023) notes that the Attica poets' insistence upon inspiring mass political engagement and action reflects the writings during the time prison populations were

increasing to what we know today as mass incarceration. Poetry is a testament to the depth of the political radicalism that foreshadowed the prison abolitionist movements that is often abandoned in academic discourses and theorizations of the carceral state.

Conley's pedagogical approach to Moody and his 2019 published poetry collection, *Reflections in Black: Remembering Anne Moody and Others Who Pave the Way,* situate his poetry within the tradition of imprisoned Black intellectual thought. Imprisoned intellectual thought is related to but is distinct from Black intellectual thought because it is produced by individuals the state categorizes as civically dead. It is from this space that Conley connects with Moody's life through his own. His exploration of the human condition draws from Moody to examine contemporary issues and processes of dehumanizing and structural denial.

Moody's text is taught across academic disciplines to explore race and its impact on material outcomes, human welfare, and the experiences of Black women prior to the Civil Rights Movement (Schocker, 2021). Conley's approach draws from her life as she articulated themes of Black family, consciousness, education, survival, surveillance, confinement, and mental anguish. Additionally, Conley's poetry offers a framework for robust discussions of Moody as society continues to grapple with notions of 'Black being' and 'Freedom'. Given this, this essay characterizes Conley's pedagogy as *perversely therapeutic*. Meaning, the process of learning the genealogy of anti-Black oppression/racism is *perversely liberating* at the personal pyscho-emotional level: "I am not the only one experiencing this, and I will not be the last." It is liberating because it locates the source of anti-Black oppression as structural and not unique to the individual. Gordon has demonstrated how Black people collapse to *become* the "problem" rather than people who *experience* challenges and problems (Gordon, 2000, pp. 62-95). When the individual recognizes how oppression is structurally organized, they no longer remain paralyzed in the Fanonian neurosis and thus become a *subject* with liberatory efficacy and potential.

Analysis: Moody's autobiographical account and themes of racialized confinement

The discussion now turns to Conley's analysis of race and by extension a Black racial consciousness that emerged early in Moody's (1968) text. Themes of racial social control are salient with Moody recalling the thought process of her five-year-old self contemplating the differences in the dwellings of the Black sharecroppers and white landowners and overseers. She observed that the contrasting dwellings represented a system far beyond her immediate surroundings—a system that institutionalized and deputized the white body as superior and deserving of Black deference. White people, according to Moody, could chart their own destinies, whereas Black people could not. Places where Black people could live, work, and drive (e.g., sundown towns) were heavily surveilled and strictly enforced by regular white (often poor) people with the backing of the law. Moody noted that only Black skin served as the marker that consigned people to complex systems of confinement and systemic denial, which extended beyond the physical body to the psychological and symbolic.

For example, Moody reflected on many childhood events, recalling a time when her mother took her and younger siblings to the movies. Upon seeing the white children who lived in the big house across the field from them, Anne greeted them and walked

with them, unknowingly, into the white section. At the time she didn't understand the panic her actions drew from her mother:

> "I never really thought of them as white before. Now all of a sudden they were white, and their whiteness made them better than me. I now realized that not only were they better than me because they were white, but everything they owned and everything connected with them was better than what was available to me. I hadn't realized before that downstairs in the movies was any better than upstairs. But now I saw that it was. Their whiteness provided them with a pass to downstairs in that nice section and my blackness sent me to the balcony." (Moody, 1968, p. 34)

This moment where she 'discovers' her blackness—not that she is Black but what Black means—is the *dialectical* moment similar to W.E.B. Dubois recounting the rejection of a Valentine's Day card by a fellow white student as a child, which made him aware of his blackness (Du Bois, 1903/2003). From this moment, Moody questioned the inferior position Black people were relegated. Conley reflects on these themes as elements that both shaped Moody's consciousness and marked Black people for premature death and bare life. In his poem "Better Days Ahead" Conley (2019) writes (p. 45-46):

> So what's the real reason
> You often act the way you do?
> Are you afraid that I may someday
> Excel a little more than you?
>
> Are you justified in utilizing
> The tone with which you speak:
> Being derogatory and condescending
> With the words you say to me?...
>
> I've considered your position,
> Now the logic is very clear:
> It's really not my black skin,
> But my strong mind that you fear.
>
> In your narrow-minded thinking
> I'd be willing to bet-
> An educated black person
> Ranks among your greatest threats…
>
> It's not my goal to supersede you,
> Superiority's not my game.
> But your leftovers-you can keep them.
> My standards and yours are both the same.

Conley's reference to *superiority* reveals an intimate understanding of the operations of dialectic and how Moody set out to transgress it by refusing to acquiesce to an inferior status. Moody understood that Black resistance to white supremacy and Black upward mobility incited a special type of fear and violence from white people, yet she remained firm in her condemnation of the South. Her courage to imagine different possibilities of

Black life free of confinement/violence/terror informs contemporary experiences of Black bodies continuing to bear the violence of the modern democratic state. For Black people, Moody observed that the distance between freedom and captivity is fragile at best.

In her 1978 essay, *Women in Prison: How We Are*, first published by *The Black Scholar*, Assata Shakur, Black Liberation Army member, picks up where Anne Moody leaves off. Shakur offers the gendered aspect of racism, with a particular focus on the urban context, and the emerging prison-industrial complex. For Shakur, the regulations of a burgeoning neoliberal-carceral state rendered the free world an extension of the prison for poor white and Black women. An assemblage of race, gender, capital, policing, and penal technologies produced a symbiosis between the de-industrialized landscape of the late-twentieth-century, urban spaces, and prisons (Shakur & Chesimard, 1978). Widespread structural networks of racism and sexism, for Shakur, mimicked the steel bars of a prison cage. Her analysis of the urban context comes a decade after Moody's articulation of rural Black life.

Moody's experiences with the police only heightened when she engaged in the Movement. She ended her book by describing Mississippi as a prison-like place for Black people from which she had to escape: "I was trying to get away. The walls of Mississippi were closing in on me… and all the other Negroes in the state, crushing us. I had to get out and let the world know what was happening to us" (Moody, 1968, p. 422). Moody's anti-elitist voice, which was also critical of aspects of the Civil Rights movement's white-middle class aspirations, elucidated the ontological character of the carceral web eroding Black freedom. She expressed a desire to let the world know the threats of terror, death, and imprisonment that loomed consistently over Black life, demarcating a caste-like system.

Moody recalled Emmett Till's murder with a particular knowing. Till, for the white people in her town, represented a Northern Negro who did not know his place, thus getting what he deserved. Browne (2015) contends that constructions of Black criminality drive technologies of surveillance that has historically stripped Black people (free and bound) of humanity. The spirit of Conley's poetry draws on themes of surveillance and confinement and their relationship to unfreedoms experienced by Black people. In his poem, "The Sun Does Shine", Conley links injustices described by Moody to the struggles of Malcom X and Nelson Mandela to reflect on his own imprisonment (Conley, 2019, p. 47).

I heard about your story.
I understand your pain.
The mental anguish you suffered
Would drive an average man insane

It seems we have something in common;
I've been wrongly convicted, too-
And now when I'm at my weakest
I'll draw strength from brothers like you

Conley's engagement with Moody's life also challenges prevailing stereotypes of incarcerated people, especially the notion that they do not matter or lack the capacity to contribute meaningfully to society once imprisoned. By speaking and writing, Conley centers and privileges the voices of imprisoned thinkers that expand how we engage

with Moody. From his position (as civically dead), a distinct consciousness surfaces that moves beyond the stratified nature of what constitutes a public intellectual, which often excludes imprisoned intellectual thought. Imprisoned intellectual thought has always challenged and complicated notions of liberation, race, gender, state violence, survival, and resistance (Hansen-Day, 2015; James, 2003a; Rodriguez, 2006).

Beyond the Civil Rights Heroine: The Psychological Toll of Anti-Blackness

Conley's poetry covers a diversity of themes related to Moody. While academic scholarship expounds upon and elucidates aspects of Moody's activism, very little attention is devoted to her mental state and health, which were devastated by anti-Black racism (Hamlin, 2020). In March 2022, Conley, in an Anne Moody virtual workshop, commented that the end of Moody's life was fraught with mental illness and poverty. While Moody is known for her resolute stance in the face of terror, Conley noted that death comes in many forms, and for Moody, death had come by a thousand cuts. Conley's poem "Let's Tell the Whole Story" draws attention to the gaps in understanding Moody's life (Conley, 2019, p. 14-15):

> Not many know the story
> Of Moody's psychological history:
> How she hid within the shadows
> And lived in fear of what might be
>
> The fact of the matter is
> That the story should be told
> Of her mental anguish from the Jim Crow Era
> That remained as she grew old.

Conley highlights the paranoia, self-isolation and mental suffering Moody experienced that were likely exacerbated by her decision to resist. He implores readers not to move so quickly past Moody's schizophrenia diagnosis and institutionalization in her later years (Hamlin, 2020). For Conley, her mental state, if not considered in equal measure with her heroism and activism, diminishes her human afflictions of anxiety, depression, and mental unwellness. Yet, society often silences/mutes such afflictions for our hero narratives to be heroic. He continues:

> Let's tell her whole story,
> Even if it makes us cry;
> And remember that a half-truth
> Is nothing more than a fancy lie.

Conley's focus on mental health often intersects with experiences of anguish among Black youth living under Jim Crow. The poems "The Woman We Call Anne" and "In God's Court" were inspired by Moody's reflection upon learning of Emmett Till's murder after a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, accused Till of whistling at her. Moody (1968) discussed how Till's murder shaped her entrance into high school "with a completely new insight into the life of Negroes in Mississippi" (p. 127). Conley's poems speak to the mental toll that racism had on Black youth similar to what Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) describes as well as the psyche of the white people, during this time, who viewed such atrocities as normal and necessary. "In God's Court" Conley explicitly calls our attention to the denial of Black youth's humanity (p. 30).

I know in your eyes my life amounts to less than one thin dime.
You eradicate my future before I lived to reach my prime.

You murdered me to teach a lesson, but I hope you know for sure-
The boy you killed is just one of many whose spirits will live forevermore.
"Polite Society" judges harshly a white woman who makes a black her choice,
But a white man can rape a black woman and no one heeds her voice.

Moody's and Emmett Till's childhood experiences exemplify the rigidity of anti-Black racism and sexism in an American caste system that continues to devalue Black life. Moody's consciousness was shaped by the constant threat of violent white terror sanctioned at the highest political levels. Interpersonal racism (lynching), structural economic constraints (employment, education, health care, housing), and politically driven policies like legal segregation forced Moody into activism at an early age, as with so many Black youths today. However, it was when she learned about the violent murder of Till, who was the same age as her, and witnessed white people's endorsement of Till's murder, that she truly grasped the extent of the brutality (Moody, 1968). Moody understood that Black youth were not exempt from the violence perpetrated by state actors and ordinary white citizens.

The denial of Black humanity is a central theme in many of Conley's poems. In "I'm a Person, Too," he reflects on Moody's life being shaped by such denial, but he also connects Moody's fight to the present moment, as seen in the poem, "Hi, I'm Anne Moody." In this poem, Conley explores themes of hope to show that while there is a lot that needs to be done, Moody's sacrifice, and that of others like her, have laid a foundation from which we continue to resist. He frames this poem in the form of an appeal. At its core, Conley examines the complexity of human life. Anne Moody is well known for her public life, but everyone has a private life, and there is a private part to all aspects of life. Conley directs our attention to the very human struggles of Moody, urging us not to forget that there was a personal cost for the public profile and the work she did in the public's gaze. Or perhaps the public profile was the remedy for her private suffering.

Conley points out that Moody's public work is more authentic and impactful due to her suffering. He is not glorifying suffering, nor is he glorifying activism and advocacy. Rather, Conley's poem is an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of Moody's life, reflecting on her full humanity as a human, daughter, sister, mother, and activist. He obliquely refers to Moody's mental challenges as a direct result of racial oppression, the very issues she worked hard to resist.

Moody concludes her text by detailing events she pondered on a crowded bus in 1964 traveling to Washington D.C. to participate in a hearing about the Council of Federated Organization's (COFO) work in Mississippi (Moody, 1968). Moody reflected on the many deaths, dehumanization and devaluation of Black life by the state, local white actors, and some Black individuals. When asked why she was not joining in the singing of *We Shall Overcome*, she responded: "I wonder" (p. 424).

Discussion and Conclusion: Anne Moody Illuminates the limits of Emancipation

Understanding Anne Moody's contemporary relevance requires understanding how the nature of anti-Black racism has changed - or stayed the same. Conley addresses Moody's mental health struggles, which creates space for seeing Moody beyond her role in the Movement. Malaklou and Willoughby-Herard (2018) speak of the harm caused by the liberal sanitization of Black women and state violence during Civil Rights Movement, in which they refer to as the most violent era of American apartheid. The authors notes that when figures like Rosa Parks are captured into the custody of historians, legislators and creative writers, such figures are presented as a hollow symbol of freedom. The authors argue that it is imperative to understand contemporary forms of anti-Black violence though the frame of a world made possible through the antiblackness of slavery and racial capitalism. Through this frame, we come to understand Blackness is, thus, targeted for erasure. It is through Black activism that pressures the State and civil society to reckon with the hyper-marginality of Black figures, meaning Black being only has access to emancipation, and never freedom.

The distinction is important; for under such logic, the (slave) Master is never fully disclosed as the malevolent Master he is, but only ever as a benevolent parent, thus the probity and 'goodness' of the master is maintained. Emancipation presupposes a parent-child relationship thus the limit of emancipation is that the parent will always maintain a benevolent status that hides the malevolent Master-Slave relationship (see Mignolo, 2007). Moody, while she reflected fondly on some childhood memories, elucidated the Master-Slave dialectic through inescapable racial terror. Moody, through personal accounts of surveillance, murder, and violently enforced racial segregation, explores what Saidiya Hartman (2007) writes, "[t]his is the afterlife of slavery — skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment" (p. 6). Franz Fanon, in his description of the *damné,* writes:

> "…the disinherited perceives life not as a flowering or a development of the essential productiveness, but as a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death. The ever-menacing death is experienced as endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future. All this gnawing at the existence of the colonized tends to make a life something resembling an incomplete death." (Fanon, as cited in Madlonado-Torres, 2007, p. 254-255)

The naturalization of extraordinary events where Black bodies are viewed excessively violent and erotic as well as viewed as the *legitimate* recipients of excessive violence— "[k]illabillity and 'rapeability' are part…of the 'essence' of Blackness in a colonial anti-black world" (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 255).

Conley's attention to the white psyche also adds critical nuance to contextualize how anti-Blackness is understood as an extension of the "normal world" where the hyper and wrongly imprisonment of Black people are fulfilled through the criminal legal system. By paying homage to Moody's courage but also recognizing her as deeply human with human challenges, Conley appeals to readers to consider all the costs of injustices, especially the psychological toll. Gordon's (2022) articulations of anti-Black invisibility explore how exoticization leads to a type of invisibility that often manifests in the "valorization of Black women, who, from this exotic perspective, supposedly have

a special 'magic'" (Gordon, 2022, p. 136). Gordon explains that while valorization brings attention to the often-ignored achievements of Black women, it often leaves Black humanity to the side. Thus, space is created for the achievements of Black women, while at the same time rendering their humanity invisible. Conley implores readers to consider ways we contribute to this invisibility by emphasizing Moody's mental struggles.

Anne Moody's life offers a lens that maps the racial genealogy of systemic denial that continues to mark Black life to this current moment. The violent police encounters experienced by many during the Civil Rights Movement have largely been erased from public discourse and national consciousness, obscuring the link between Anne Moody and the lives of Black women such as Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, Chrystul Kizer, and Sonya Massey. Discourse from Black people most affected by slavery's afterlife (e.g., hyper-imprisonment of Black people) have always found a home in Black studies (Reece, 2022; Winn, 2010). As Gwendolyn Brooks speak of the contributions of Black imprisoned citizens, like Etheridge Knight, declaring such works as vital, she states "some of our best work is coming from prisons. Where people are at last having time to sit down and think over their lives and then to reflect, meditate, and develop their thoughts in poetry and exciting fiction" (Winn, 2010, p. 401).

Conley's intellectual work, while acknowledging Moody's remarkable activism, also underscores the weight of the carceral system. The relationship between the State and Blackness is characterized by centuries-old structures that continually perpetuate systems of structurally denying Black humanity. Black print culture has always combated systems of erasure and asked readers to consider the relationships between the incarcerated and the free world. Just as *The Black Scholar*, the *Journal of Black Studies,* and other publications sought to inspire Black Americans on both sides of prison walls to engage in the struggle against the oppressive and inhumane conditions of prisons inside and outside (Winn, 2010), Glen Conley, through reflections on Moody, inspires us to do the same.

Declarations

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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