Teaching a Dangerous Story: Darwinism and Race in Stephen Crane's "The Monster"

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In "The Monster," an attractive black stablehand, Henry Johnson, rushes into the burning house of his white employer, Dr. Trescott, to save Jimmie, the doctor's young son. Fighting against the raging blaze that will end in the complete destruction of the Trescott home, Henry tries to escape through the doctor's laboratory. Assailed by burning chemicals, Henry falls, his upturned face is burned by acid that drips from the doctor's desk. Henry saves Jimmy's life but is horribly disfigured: "his face had simply been burned away" (29). A grateful Doctor Trescott ministers to the patient, waiting by his bedside and providing the best possible medical care. Judge Hagenthorpe, a leader of the Whilomville community, warns Trescott to put aside his obligation to Henry, saying: "'He will be your creation, you understand. He is purely your creation. Nature has evidently given him up. He is dead. You are restoring him to life. You are making him, and he will be a monster, and with no mind'" (32). Dr. Trescott persists in his efforts, and Henry survives to become, as the Judge predicts, the Monster, an object of fear and horror to the citizens of the small town of Whilomville. Eventually, the town's anger turns against the Trescotts; the doctor is criticized for allowing Henry to live in his home, and his once successful medical practice diminishes. The story's last scene describes Mrs. Trescott's drawing room on a Wednesday, her usual day to receive visitors: only one woman has called, and her husband enters the room to observe his wife crying and fifteen tea cups sitting empty on the table.

In 1987, I was a graduate student at Western Illinois University in Charlie Mayer's Realism and Naturalism course when I first read "The Monster." When I think of the experience, I am reminded of Emily Dickinson's famous test for recognizing poetry: it felt like the top of my head had come off. When I included it in an answer on my Ph.D. qualifying exams at Northern Illinois University ten years later, I felt like I'd

brought out an old chestnut; no one there taught "The Monster." Last year when I decided to include it in a proposal for a new General Honors course, *Social Darwinism and Turn-of-the-Century British and American Fiction*, I remembered my old affection for the story and anticipated the pleasure of reading it again.

This time the focus of my reading was Crane's abundant use of situations and language that seemed to be directly inspired by the theories of Charles Darwin. This is no great surprise: *On the Origin of the Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) predated "The Monster" by thirty-nine and twenty-seven years, respectively. Early theorists of American Literary Naturalism, such as V. L. Parrington, in "Naturalism and American Fiction" and Malcolm Cowley in "'Not Men:' A Natural History of American Naturalism" name Darwin as the most important influence on the work of many authors of that period, such as Theodore Dreiser, Jack London, Frank Norris, and of course Stephen Crane. In "The Monster," the judge's words about Henry—that Nature has "given him up"—roughly describe the process of natural selection as Darwin theorized it. On a more figurative level, the reader sees how Whilomville practices a "survival of the fittest" ethos that is driven by habits of imitation and competition that Darwin observed in animals. The citizens, children as well as adults, crudely imitate each other, and competition (which fire company is the best? which young boy is brave enough to touch the Monster? who will accept Mrs. Trescott's invitation to tea?) is the driving force behind Whilomville society.

As I reread "The Monster," I was also struck by how much I thought the story was about race. Why does Stephen Crane make the hero of his tale a black man? The complexity of Henry's transformation from Man to Monster presents—I began to think—not just a searing indictment of community but of white community. To the townspeople of Whilomville, Henry Johnson is "always already" the Monster by virtue of his blackness. Although Henry's beauty allows him a measure of survival, even a kind of second class celebrity, the burning of his face simply makes it easier for them to treat him as the "coon" (14) they have always seen him to be. The-Man-Who-Has-Lost-His-Face never had one to begin with; the monstrous "dark figure" has always been dark, always been monstrous.

Thinking again of Darwin, I began to see the significance of a cryptic image that appears in the story after the fire, when the narrator of "The Monster" pauses to describe a movement that Henry makes toward

Dr. Trescott: "The doctor turned and held both arms to the dark figure. It crawled to him painfully like a man going down a ladder" (34). Crane's language—Henry Johnson has become an "it," and he is no longer a man but "like a man" who is "going down a ladder"— suggests a reversal of the evolutionary process that Charles Darwin described in *The Descent of Man.* In his introduction to the work, Edmund O. Wilson writes: "*The Descent of Man* and *Selection in Relation to Sex* was the other shoe that Charles Darwin dropped after *On the Origin of Species.* Victorian society, whose wrath Charles Darwin so feared to hold back on the publication of the theory of evolution, might have been scandalized by the descent of plants and animals, but they were quite unprepared to accept the descent of man from 'some preexisting form,' as Darwin delicately put it, and most certainly from apes, as the evidence implied from the very start" (765). Henry's metaphorical descent "to" a more brutish form rather than "from" one is a typical pattern exhibited by writers of Naturalistic fiction, as Malcolm Cowley explains: "When evolution is treated in their novels, it almost always takes the opposite form of devolution or degeneration. Instead of moving from the simple to the complex, . . . the Naturalists keep moving from the complex to the simple, by a continual process of reduction" (227).

This metaphor of "devolution" works on several levels in "The Monster." Indeed, metaphorically speaking, *The Descent of Man* might have served as an apt title for "The Monster" in at least three senses. First, as the metaphor of the ladder demonstrates, the reader sees how Henry Johnson "descends" from Man to Monster, or, in other incarnations, Thing, Devil, It, Dark Figure, and so forth. Second, if the reader understands Henry's descent as not an essential matter but the community's reconstruction of his identity, the "descent" of man can describe Whilomville's movement towards depravity and inhumanity: town becomes "jungle" (58). In the third and perhaps most complex sense, the reader might interrogate the connection between Henry's "descent" and his identity as a black man. In one oft-quoted scene, Henry, his fiancé Bella Farragut, and Mrs. Farragut are described as primates: "They bowed and smiled and ignored and imitated until a late hour, and if they had been the occupants of the most gorgeous salon in the world they could not have been more like three monkeys" (16). Although almost certainly an allusion to Darwin, the metaphor raises profound and inescapable questions about racial stereotyping. What did Crane mean by it? Does "The Monster," particularly its depiction of other African-American characters, offer a larger context for understanding the significance of a metaphor that seems so blatantly racist? I was to return to these questions again and again as I continued to study "The Monster" and began to teach it for the first time.

To prepare for the *Social Darwinism and Literature* course, I decided to include "The Monster" in this semester's *Introduction to Fiction.* Our theme for this general education course (inspired by The Doors' song "People Are Strange") was to be "Strange, or Estranged?" My idea was that we would look at works that treated characters who were, for a variety of reasons, labeled "strange" by other characters who live in their midst: Emily Grierson of Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily"; the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper"; Joy/Hulga of Flannery O'Connor's "Good Country People"; and the baby/narrator of John Edgar Wideman's "Newborn Thrown in Trash and Dies," just to name a few. To what extent are these characters labeled as "strange" because of their "outsider" status? At what point does "strange" become "estranged"? I imagined the course as a study of various forms of human alienation, including (referring to the respective works above) social class, mental disease, disability, and the condition of being so unwanted that one is literally discarded. Henry Johnson could take his place in this group, ostensibly estranged from Whilomville because of his disfigurement, perhaps actually (and "always already," as I have said before) because of his race.

At this point, excited at the prospect of writing an essay about "The Monster" for this journal, I starting digging into the research. Early on, consulting Michael Schafer's *A Reader's Guide to the Works of Stephen Crane,* I discovered that quite a lot of work had been done on the question of race in the story. Schaefer places Crane's treatment of the race question in "The Monster" in several categories, among them, 1) critics who see the racial theme as important but subsumed by the text's interest in "'human responsibility'" (250) and "the failure of human compassion" (251) in a larger sense; 2) critics who "perceive a good deal less racial sensitivity and insight in the story [and] do not accuse Crane of intentional bigotry, but rather view him as unfortunately a product of his times" (252); and 3) critics who believe Crane "depicts the Farragut and Williams families in the most degradingly stereotypical terms" (253). Although Schaefer reports nuanced areas of agreement and disagreement that are not fully represented by these categories, these three divisions roughly capture the range of possible readings.

Two articles about "The Monster" were of particular interest for my teaching purposes. In "'The Monster'—Stephen Crane's 'Invisible Man,'" John R. Cooley explores Ralph Ellison's metaphor of the invisible man as it pertains to "The Monster." Noting that the white citizens' early response to Henry reveals "their ingrained minstrel image of how a black man, dressed up, is supposed to look and of the proper response to him" (11), Cooley says that "the literal fire and disfigurement are to stand for the real though often disguised injuries suffered particularly by black Americans" (13). He goes on to argue, though, that the text itself renders Henry faceless by shifting its focus away from him and on to Dr. Trescott: "from the fire onward Crane fails to restore Henry for the reader, fails to distinguish between the symbolic disfigurement of Henry represented by the actual injuries and the Henry who must reside beneath the 'monster' if we are to continue identifying with him" (13).

In "Blunders of Virtue: the Problem of Race in Stephen Crane's 'The Monster,'" John Cleman argues that "the story seems to reflect two contradictory attitudes toward African-Americans" (119). On the one hand, the story emphasizes Henry's bravery and explores, through him, "the unjust situation of African-Americans generally in the 1890s" (120). Acknowledging that "Crane specifically includes race prejudice as an aspect of social criticism," Cleman goes on to argue that Crane "often appears blatantly racist, utilizing the sort of negative racial stereotyping common to minstrel shows and pro-slavery accounts of the South" (120). The depiction of Henry as a comic minstrel figure, Cleman believes, "undermines the concept of him as hero, and therefore, the very grounds on which he is sometimes thought to escape or defy racist stereotyping" (120). As I considered the positions of Cooley and Cleman, my concept of what this article about "The Monster" would be began to change. Was the matter before me not *how* Crane's "The Monster" should be taught but *if* it should be taught?

Trying to make my way out of this morass, I called Charlie, now retired Professor Emeritus, whose 1973 article "Social Forms Versus Human Brotherhood in Crane's 'The Monster,'" Schaefer places in the first category listed above. We spent a morning talking about the story. We agreed that while Crane's portrayal of Alek Williams and the Watermelon Alley Farraguts might be flawed, Henry Johnson's great humanity is the central, abiding theme of the story. Many men come to the fire, but only one rushes into it to save another. Further, if Crane sees his work as fiction writer as akin to "reporting," an epistemology supported by his work as a journalist and a practitioner of Literary Naturalism, isn't it fair to assume that Crane was presenting what he considered an objective report?

Even granting, of course, that true objectivity is impossible, it seems important to make a distinction between Crane's owns views and those he is attributing to his characters. In the scene where Judge Hagenthorpe meets with Alek Williams to discuss the latter's fee for boarding Henry, the view of Alek as a buffoon originates with the Judge, who ridicules Alek and his family for their fear of Henry. The reader who adopts the judge's perspective will, also, see Alek as a buffoon. But the reader who judges the Judge will observe his hypocrisy, as he condemns Alek and his family for the same reactions to Henry that will later be exhibited by the white citizenry and, in this context, publically condoned. The same scene reveals that Alek Williams, unlike the Judge and Whilomville's other leading citizens, is wise enough to recognize a distinction between Henry Johnson The Man and his now fiendish appearance: "'Tain't no devil. It's Hennery Johnson . . . but he *looks* like er devil" (37). Alek, unlike the powerful Judge, assumes no prerogative to "reclassify" Henry as something less than human. But it is precisely the Judge's ability to do so that so blinds him to a sense of connection with his fellow human beings. And so the Judge exemplifies one of Darwin's great observations about the ironical nature of "evolved" man: "If man had not been his own classifier, he would have never thought of founding a separate order for his own reception" (885).

The story's frequent use of animal imagery to describe human beings of all types suggests that Crane sees the people of Whilomville through a Darwinian lens. In the fire scene, Jimmie is compared to a bawling calf (22); Sykes Huntington, the former fire chief, to a bellowing "bull" (27); the Williams children to "ducklings" (44); Jimmie's young friends to "roosters and lambs" (53), and Jack Winters to "a little dog" (59). Trescott's neighbor Hannigan can be observed "howling" (26) during the fire, and when Jake Winters challenges Dr. Trescott, the narrator says the latter "had heard an utterly new challenge in the night of the jungle" (53). So when the lawyer, young Griscom, and later, "the man who had information" (28) call Jimmie a "coon" (14, 28), the epithet seems ironic. Both men are part of ineffectual social institutions: a legal system in a community that judges blindly and a reporting system (including the newspaper) that can't get the story right. And so, looked at through a Darwinian lens, the comparison between three African-Ameri-

cans at tea and monkeys makes a statement about "the human animal" and the more primitive form from which it descended. The only difference between Whilomville and Watermelon Alley is, as Mayer comments, that the latter is "doubly insulated from reality, being a thorough imitation of an already imitative white society" (34).

This "Darwinian" reading of the monkey reference is supported by the work's insistence that Henry Johnson, a black man, is Whilomville's most "evolved," that is, most human, citizen. Early in the story, when Henry steps out on the town, the narrator makes clear that though Henry seems to be playing a role, he is, in fact, the real thing: "The change was somewhere far in the interior of Henry" (13). Even though there is "no cake-walk hyperbole" (13) in Henry Johnson's self-presentation, the citizens of the town cannot recognize this, exclaiming, "Hello Henry! Going to walk for a cake to-night?" and "Why, you've got that cake right in your pocket, Henry!" (14). It is interesting to note that in the traditional cake-walk, the slaves performed exaggerated imitations of the dominant white culture's conventional dance styles, such as ballroom, in a contest format where a piece of hoe cake was the prize. The form was by nature hyperbolic and imitative and, although staged for the amusement of the master, was perhaps akin to forms of "signifying" in that the slave may have been enjoying the last laugh at the master's expense.

This is precisely the case in the aforementioned scene, when Henry is able to observe his own performance: "Henry Johnson was not at all oblivious of the wake of wondering ejaculation that streamed out behind him. On other occasions he had reaped this same joy, and *he always had an eye for the demonstration*" (15, my emphasis). The eye that "sees" in this scene foreshadows "the scrutiny of the unwinking eye" (31) that Johnson trains on the judge after the accident. The fact that the Judge must escape the presence of the eye to make his pronouncement that Henry should die (31) gives Henry a preternatural power of sight that belies the Judge's pronouncement of his monstrous condition. The eye, by suggesting keen perception, supports the view that Henry maintains his uniquely human qualities in the face of the monstrous behavior of the town.

Of course, the most powerful proof of Henry's humanity comes in the form of his rejection of a "survival of the fittest" ethos; he risks his own life to save Jimmie's. Here again, Crane calls upon Darwinian metaphors of inheritance to describe Henry Johnson's actions. When the fire threatens to overcome him, Henry almost gives up because that is what he has been conditioned to do: "He was submitting, submitting because of his fathers, bending his mind in a most perfect slavery to this conflagration" (23). This line, as well as symbolic burning of the "Signing the Declaration" engraving (21), offer a clear indictment of slavery. A human being who is robbed of agency and is therefore not allowed to act in his own self-interest also cannot act in the interest in his fellows. If Henry had enacted his prescribed role, Jimmie would have died. As it is, Jimmie's sight of the "apparition of his pal" (22), the hero come to save him, is likened to "a case of kidnapping by a dreadful robber chief" (22) because the community ideology that frames Jimmie's view of the world can only conceive of a black man who runs into a dark house to grab a child as a criminal. Henry overcomes all of these obstacles and saves a life. This is no small accomplishment for a man whom the narrator has previously described as just another fish in a town that is a "great aquarium" (14). The metaphor of Whilomville as "fishbowl" implies that the town is populated by lower life forms. This, of course, turns out in large part to be true. But it is Henry who breaks away from the others, proving his humanity.

Crane's treatment of race in "The Monster" and the question of "to teach or not to teach?" might take part in a larger discussion about other works from the nineteenth-century, like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In her January, 1996 article "Say It Ain't So, Huck: Second Thoughts on Mark Twain's 'Masterpiece,'" Jane Smiley declares that "it undoubtedly would have been better for American literature, and American culture, if our literature had grown out of one of the best-selling novels of all time . . . *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (64). She says: "To invest *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* with 'greatness' is to underwrite a very simplistic and evasive theory of what racism is and to promulgate it, philosophically, in schools and the media as well as in academic journals. Surely the discomfort of many readers, black and white, and the censorship battles that have dogged *Huck Finn* in the last twenty years are understandable in this context. No matter how often the critics 'place in context' Huck's use of the word 'nigger,' they can never excuse or fully hide the deeper racism of the novel" (63-64). She declares the inclusion of Huck Finn in school curricula "a political act, because the entry of *Huck Finn* into classrooms sets the terms of the discussion of racism and American history, and sets them very low: all you have to do to be a hero is acknowledge that your poor sidekick is human; you don't actually have to act in the interests of his humanity" (67).

On March 31, 1996, Leslie Fiedler responded to Smiley in his keynote address for the Northern Illinois University Graduate Conference on Language and Literature, "*Huckleberry Finn*: The Book We Love to Hate." At the time, I fancied Leslie Fiedler (though brilliant and influential, of course) somewhat of the Old War Horse. I expected the speech to be a little dry; instead, I was moved. I took notes in my conference program and kept them. Fiedler described the many assaults on *Huck Finn* since the time of its publication. Contemporary reviewers referred to the book as "coarse, trashy, and vicious;" since then, Fiedler said, it has been attacked from both the right (McCarthy) and the left (the NAACP). The novel's use of the word "nigger" does not, he claimed, only reflect the language of the time and region; it serves as a reminder of our own troubled history. Fiedler cited a scene from Chapter 32, where Aunt Sally expresses concern about Huck's account of a steam boat accident:

> "Good gracious! anybody hurt?"
> "No'm. Killed a nigger."
> "Well, it's lucky because people do get hurt." (279)

Here, Fiedler explained, Twain creates an exchange that reveals the characters' profound inhumanity. "*Huck Finn* undermines all pretenders," he said.

The implications of the Smiley-Fiedler debate are profound, indeed, because decisions about value, canonicity, and ultimately curriculum spring from discussions such as these. What should—or should not—be taught? Is the former "Great American Novel" now a dangerous book? Crane's "The Monster," which William Dean Howells once declared the greatest American short story (Stallman 334), lies on this same fault line. In my *Social Darwinism and Fiction* course, part of the point will be to reveal the manner in which Darwin's theories participate in cultural conversations about race. In the *Introduction to Fiction* course, I elected to take a more general approach to the matter by first focusing how Henry Johnson's facelessness raises questions about human identity in general. I decided to spend three class days on "The Monster," anticipating problems the students might have in reading Crane's prose. I divided the work into equal thirds, Chapters 1 through 8; Chapters 9-16; Chapters 17-24. On the first day the students worked in six groups; each was assigned a question to discuss as they prepared to share their findings with the class as a whole. Among these: what do we know about Henry Johnson's character? How does his perception of himself differ from the way he is viewed by the town? What early impressions do we get of the Whilomville citizenry? What are their values, and how are these values expressed?

I won't lie—it was a little rough going. The students answered the questions, but mechanically. I couldn't blame them, really; for one thing, the prose is difficult, and, what's more, it's not clear in the first eight chapters where the story is headed. One of the best students in the class asked some basic questions about the plot, and they all looked a little dazed. On the second day, though, I decided to truck out a question that Charlie had spoken into the air during our morning meeting, no doubt the echo of one that had excited my interest in "The Monster" all those years ago in his class. "What would it mean to not have a face?" To this I added, "How would it change a person's identity and place in the world?" Students wrote for about fifteen minutes in class, and we discussed their answers. One remarked on the importance of a driver's license picture as a significant marker of our public identity. And if Crane intended to depict Whilomville as a tough crowd, what would he think about a cyberspace community like "Facebook," where virtual contact depends on looking at a picture of a face that pops up on a computer screen? Such questions provide an important bridge to more complicated ones about what Crane accomplishes in his story.

At the end of the third day and last day on "The Monster," I brought our discussion back to Darwin by sharing with them a little gem from my research, Bill Brown's study of how Crane's conception of Henry Johnson might have been influenced (albeit unconsciously, Brown says) by a character featured in the Barnum and Bailey sideshow, an "Africanized" "Missing Link" whose real name was William Henry Johnson. Brown explains

> within Barnum's American Museum, . . . by 1860, one could witness both a blackface show and an "actual" black savage. That year, as Barnum says in a letter, "a certain museum proprietor in St. Louis—I don't know his name—saw a queer little critter in Phila. a few months since. I have secured it, and we call it 'What Is It?'" The advertising pamphlet that eventually accompanied the specimen, composed in the freak-hunting idiom, notes important physical features—"the teeth are nearly double all around"—and makes much of the exhibit's contribution to knowledge, "men of science" having pro-

> nounced it to be "A CONNECTING LINK BETWEEN THE WILD NATIVE AFRICAN AND THE BRUTE CREATION"—"a great fact for Darwin." "What Is It?"—supposedly captured in Africa, actually born a microcephalic in New Jersey—became one of Barnum's and America's most celebrated freaks." (217)

Brown goes on to point out that the "'The Monster's' central scene of terror echoes this history" (217) when Theresa Page begins to scream "What was it? What was it? Was it a man? She didn't know. It was simply a thing, a dreadful thing" (217). Significantly, the same manner of questions are asked about Henry *before* the fire, when he strolls through town. In this scene Reifsnyder the barber, his assistant, and his clients, though they know Henry Johnson, all wonder aloud "who" this attractive young man is. Who is it? Is he, as Reifsynder suggests, a "Pullman-car porter"? (15). It is in this scene that Griscom calls Henry a "coon" (14), and another identifies Henry by the lavender pants he has given him (15). Foreshadowing the later scene that takes place at the children's party, this exchange underscores the connection between Henry's identity problem before and after the fire. In both, he is objectified, reduced to a "thing." Brown's work and these observations about "The Monster" that proceed from it offer a link—no pun intended—between the fundamental questions about Henry's identity—what does it mean to not have a face?—and the more complex ones invoked by Crane's probable allusions to *The Descent of Man*.

I received some interesting student responses to "The Monster." One came to my office with an excellent draft of a paper comparing it to Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." When I asked him what he thought about "The Monster," he commented that his only disappointment was that Crane sets aside Henry Johnson's story to take up the story of Dr. Trescott, a point taken up by John R. Cooley. Another student—also bright and articulate—came to me and said that she was offended by the course material, particularly the works that were applying the "Strange or Estranged?" questions to stories about African-Americans. Who was I saying was "strange?" In particular, she said that she "couldn't read" "The Monster." Our talk ended up being a productive one, I think, on both sides. I explained in more detail my concept of the course's theme and my desire to call attention to a variety of experiences and subjectivities that alienate humans from other humans, including racism. Based on her experience in this class and others, she believes material that engages questions of race causes discomfort for students in general. Near the beginning of our discussion, she told me that she didn't think such material should be taught. I'm not sure if what I said convinced her—or should have convinced her—otherwise. But she told me several times that she felt better for the chance to express herself on the subject.

I ended up offering three paper topics for students choosing to write on "The Monster": 1) Explore how Henry Johnson's loss of face changes his identity over the course of the story. What type of life does he have with a face, and how does that life change after the fire? 2) What are the characteristics of the community, Whilomville, and how do these characteristics affect the lives of the citizens? What do you think Crane's work is saying about community, perhaps particularly small town life? 3) Is Henry Johnson the true hero of the story, one of the only characters who displays true humanity, or are Henry and other African-American characters like Alek and the Farraguts presented as stereotypes? The last topic allows students the opportunity to engage an important—perhaps *the* most important issue—for contemporary critics of "The Monster."

Though I believe it is crucial to ask students challenging questions such as these, I am ever mindful of the earnest objections of the student who is not comfortable with such questions. How do I promote an "acceptable" level of discomfort without alienating individuals? I'm not sure I know the answer. The conversation with this student reminds me of two others that have occurred during my teaching career. Many years ago, a young woman objected to my showing of the 1967 film starring Sidney Poitier, *In the Heat of the Night*, because it portrayed the negative image of African-American workers picking cotton in the fields of Mississippi in the 1960s. I faced a slightly different response another time, when I taught Gwendolyn Brooks' "To Those of My Sisters Who Kept Their Naturals (Never to look a hot comb in the teeth)," a tribute to black women who wear their hair naturally:

> You have not bought Blondine.
> You have not hailed the hot-comb recently.
> You never worshipped Marilyn Monroe.
> You say: Farrah's hair is hers.
> You have not wanted to be white. (460)

None of the students appeared to have any point of reference—cultural, personal, or otherwise—for understanding this poem. One African-American woman commented that she wore her hair how she wanted. Hair was hair. I thought later that maybe such an attitude represented progress; I wondered, even, if Gwendolyn Brooks would think so. Maybe a less politicized coiffure levels the playing field?

And maybe leaving Stephen Crane's "The Monster" off the syllabus would allow us to set aside racial concerns for a more unified humanity, not to mention class discussion. I agree more, though, with a statement about racism made recently by one of my best friends, a multiculturist: "That shit's not going away, at least not anytime soon." This friend, for the record, would likely side with Crane's critics and therefore never teach "The Monster." My own belief is that, despite its flaws, "The Monster" has much to teach us about humanity, of the weakness and folly of that creature we know as the "human animal" as well as, in the case of Henry Johnson, the extraordinary ability of the best among us to rise above our baser instincts.

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