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## Black Sound, Sonic Emotion, and Racist Violence in Lovecraft Country

### ABSTRACT

This article addresses race and inequality through the horror sci-fi genre and the musical landscape of two episodes of Misha Green's TV series *Lovecraft Country* (2020). Moral responsibilities are mediated throughout the series via sonic culture; through analysis of the series' aurality, focus is on the sonic reimagining and resignifying of two episodes: Episode One (E1) "Sundown" and Episode Five (E5) "Strange Case." The unique blend of sci-fi and Cthulhu Mythos adds an additional layer of horror when situated against the backdrop of the racial realities of African Americans in the 1950s and guides the viewer to experience the familiar horror trope by disrupting the ways we experience sound in TV viewing. The soundtrack produces and thematises different sonic emotions and the result is a 21st-century representation of the 1950s: one that reframes racial inequalities of the time for contemporary sensibilities, while actively using the past as raw material for a new present. In this analysis of historical injustices of Black culture through sonic emotion, this article provides a demonstration on how *Lovecraft Country* engages with race, gender, and sonic culture while embracing the rich tapestry of Black sound by disrupting narratives, challenging racial temporalities, and inviting change.

### KEYWORDS

Sonic culture  
Historical injustice  
Aural idioms  
*Lovecraft Country*  
Racial temporality

Misha Green's TV series *Lovecraft Country* (2020), adapted from Matt Ruff's eponymous novel, addresses race, feminism, and inequality through the horror sci-fi genre and the musical landscape of each episode. Moral responsibilities are mediated throughout the series via sonic culture; the music sets the tone and guides the viewer through the most climactic moments of racial inequity. Through analysis of the series' aurality, I will interpret the sonic reimagining and resignifying of two episodes: Episode One (E1) "Sundown" and Episode Five (E5) "Strange Case." The soundtrack produces and thematises different sonic emotions and it does so by combining period-correct sound and music with modern musical and aural idioms, a kind of deliberate sonic anachronism. The result is a particularly 21<sup>st</sup> century representation of the 1950s: one that reframes racial inequalities of the time for contemporary sensibilities, while actively using the past as raw material for a new present. I will focus on song choices in the analysis of E1 to establish the musical world of the series, while concentrating on the exploitative modes of power through race and gender in E5 to demonstrate how it mediates concepts of racial inequality across two time periods. Finally, I contribute to the interdisciplinary dialogue between race, gender, and music by examining the disruptive and multilayered politics of auditory experience in *Lovecraft Country*.

The soundtrack of *Lovecraft Country* is curated by acclaimed American music supervisor Liza Richardson. Her illustrious career has spanned decades, during which she set up Mad Doll Music and music supervised many highly praised TV shows such as *Parenthood* (2010-2015), *Leftovers* (2014-2017), *Hawaii Five-0* (2010-2020), *Friday Night Lights* (2006-2011), *Narcos* (2015-2017), *Barry* (2018-2023), *Equalizer* (2021-), and *The Morning Show* (2019-). She was nominated for a Grammy for her work on Mexican classic *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (2001) as well as her work on *Watchmen* (2019) and *Lovecraft Country* (2021). When Richardson was approached to put together an audition playlist for *Lovecraft Country*, she was perplexed. She later told Patrick Doyle at *Rolling Stone Magazine*, "I could tell how unique it was. . . it's sci-fi and it's horror, and it's like *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I mean, to be honest, it was hard for me to imagine how it was all going to come together." (Doyle, 2020) Interestingly, Richardson chose not to stay within the music of the 1950s; instead, she drew from the era and incorporated other more modern musical genres such as spoken word, pop, and R&B as well as genre-specific TV theme songs. However, the musical intensity and dynamism of the show leans heavily on the

expertise of Grammy-winning producer Raphael Saadiq and Emmy-winning composer Laura Karpman. In 2012, Saadiq was called the ‘preeminent R&B artist of the 90s’ by prominent music critic Robert Christgau, and Karpman has a proven record of accomplishment with five Emmy Awards to her name. This formidable duo created a soaring and somewhat ritualistic soundtrack, giving space for the emotionally tangible storytelling to breathe. In 2020, Raphael Saadiq and Laura Karpman sat down with *Genius*’ VP of Content Strategy Rob Markman to discuss how they brought the show to life with their ‘gothic R&B’ inspired score.<sup>1</sup> During the interview, Karpman talks about how Richardson requested Saadiq’s ‘signature style’ of music for the underscore, so they developed an orchestral approach to R&B using analogue keyboards and strings taking reference from Little Walter’s harmonic melodies and J Dilla’s beats to give it a unique horror vibe. Little Walter, aka Marion Walter Jacobs, was an American Blues musician who revolutionised musical patterns on the harmonica and had a substantial impact on future generations of musicians, while J Dilla, aka James Dewitt Yancey, was an American record producer and rapper who had a huge effect on the hip-hop genre. He emerged in the early 90s in Detroit and his style was crafted with ‘lengthy melodic loops with backbeats and vocal samples’ bringing hip-hop into a more musically complex arena (MacInnes, 2011). What makes this soundtrack even more unusual is that it was composed remotely in lockdown by twenty musicians during the Covid 19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Saadiq and Karpman used the isolation to their advantage, and this, along with Richardson’s expert song choices, added to the overall ‘otherness’ of the soundtrack.

By probing the noxious history of the American Jim Crow era, I will use feminism and critical race theory to study the character of Ruby Baptiste, a Black Blues singer who gains the ability to change race played by Nigerian-born British actress Wunmi Mosaku. Ruby uses this power to live out a revenge fantasy and have an affair with a white man; however, it quickly becomes apparent that this person is not actually a white male, but a white female, who has shifted her gender through the same potion that Ruby uses to shift her race. What intrigues me about the series, and Ruby’s journey to racial acceptance, is

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<sup>1</sup> Gothic R&B is not an official genre of music but became a term coined by Richardson, Karpman and Saadiq during *Lovecraft Country* to help guide them during the creation of the soundtrack. Technically, it would come under the umbrella term Alternative R&B or Gothic Rap and R&B.

<sup>2</sup> This unusual recording process gave the composers license to play with format; the remoteness of the recording allowed the composers to double instruments that are not usually doubled and shift musical dynamics in ways that are not generally available.

that it takes on sensitive topics and uses the infamously racist H.P. Lovecraft's concept of Cthulhu Mythos—put simply, a universe of monsters – as its lens. Lovecraft, 'a loner' who dabbled in journalism as well as ethnocentric and racist poetry, was one of the early pioneers of the sci-fi horror genre; a genre which until recently was notoriously white dominated. His writings had "(a) profound discomfort with sex; others display a deep-dyed racism, with nonwhite characters used as examples of barbarism" (Soloski, 2020); this discomfort and gratuitous sexuality are highlighted in the journeys of the Black characters. It is initially unclear that this series lives in the sci-fi/horror genre; however, midway through E1, we understand that the world of monsters (human and non-human) is alive and well. To that point, this volatile atmosphere of Cthulhu Mythos, combined with the systemic racism of the 1950s in America, is illuminated by the highly provocative and complex soundtrack. It is dominated by Blues music, with songs by Nina Simone, Etta James, and Big Maybelle; yet there is also music, spoken word, and sound bites taken from James Baldwin's 1962 debate on race. Controversial artist Marilyn Manson, an accused sex offender infamous for his extreme metal music and violence is also featured on the playlist.<sup>3</sup> While the raciality explored in the series addresses a part of history that is rife with inequity, it is important to note how the music shapes the viewer's perception of 1950's America with the aim of upending stereotypes from Jim Crow and educating through music and entertainment.

In E1, aptly named 'Sundown' in reference to the notorious Sundown Towns of early-1900s America, the music is extensive and diverse.<sup>4</sup> While I do not touch on every song, I have chosen a few that I think are particularly relevant. Crucially, the series' theme song is *Sinnerman* (1956) sung by Alice Smith. *Sinnerman* was written by composers Les Baxter and Will Holt and was originally 3.07mins long; however, most would agree that Nina Simone's cover (1965) is the most famous version of the song. Simone recorded two versions of the song, with her extended version being 10.20mins long (Simone & Cleary,

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<sup>3</sup> It would be interesting to know if Manson's songs were chosen before or after he was accused of sexual assault by multiple women, though I was unable to find anything on the topic.

<sup>4</sup> Sundown Towns were municipalities and neighbourhoods in America (mostly the South) that practiced racial segregation by excluding non-whites through discriminatory laws, intimidation, or violence. The term came from signs posted telling coloured people to leave town by sundown. Many atrocities were inflicted on African Americans by the KKK during this time and was where the phrase 'Beware of the Boogieman' came from (Loewen, 2005).

2003). There is a vigour and enthusiasm in Simone's version that is infectious.<sup>5</sup> The highlight of her lengthy track appears about four minutes in and has an intense musical release with a vibrating repetitive drum, twangy electric guitar, tinkling piano, and frenetic yet rhythmic clapping. Simone often spoke about her mother's deep connection to religion (Simone & Cleary, 2003) and by adding scatting and improvisational techniques, she invokes the field hollers from the American slave plantations. In the song lyrics, the sinner, who is running from the judgement of God, is told to "go to the devil" (who is waiting for him) and is ordered to change his ways before it is too late; but by the end of the song, we realise the sinner has not been saved because he calls out "don't you know that I need you, Lord? Oh Lord, wait, Oh Lord, Lord."<sup>6</sup> In Peter Rodis's documentary *Nina: A Historical Perspective* (1972), Simone says that she likes to end her sets with *Sinnerman* because "I want to shake people up so bad that when they leave a nightclub where I've performed, I want them to be in pieces" (Simone, 1972). In contrast, Smith's version of *Sinnerman* has an electric pace and disjointedness, which departs from Simone's recording in several ways: tempo, pitch, structure, form, and duration. While her melody is similar, her dynamics and overtones are more modern, embracing a funkier sound and texture. By adding the riff on electric bass rather than piano, it seems more relevant to today's music, updated somehow, since it leans into a more jazz-funk vibe; this also makes it more hypnotic, which is perfect for the Cthulhu Mythos in the show.<sup>7</sup> The mystic excitement in Smith's version heightens the overall tension of the moment, bookends each episode, and tells us to heed the warnings and prepare for what comes next.

In the opening scene of E1, we see Atticus "Tic" Freeman, played by Jonathan Majors, sitting at the back of the bus reading; a sign over his head in capital letters says, "THIS PART OF THE BUS FOR COLORED RACE." The song playing over the sequence is *Sh-boom (Life Could Be a Dream)* (1954), an early doo-wop song first recorded by the African American group The Chords. It is an affecting choice to play doo-wop under such a racially weighted sign, especially since the alternate white recording of the song, by Canadian

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<sup>5</sup> As a modern standard, *Sinnerman* has always been open to interpretation, though most jazz purists would say only Simone does the song justice.

<sup>6</sup> Field hollers and work songs stem from the oral tradition of African music. These songs were performed by slaves as they worked on plantations, hollering to each other across the fields, worshipped together or at other gatherings for entertainment.

<sup>7</sup> This could be a keyboard patch but, from what I can tell, it is an actual bass.

band The Crew Cuts, was made famous when it was used in the white-centric TV series *Happy Days* (1974–84). In her book *The Race of Sound* (2019), Nina Sun Eidsheim tackles the topics of listening, timbre, and vocality in African American music, and discusses how race is inherent in listening:

“I would like to preface the following discussion by returning to the overarching thesis of *The Race of Sound*: not only is the timbral identification of race not a direct result of racist views, but, if we work under such an assumption, we will ultimately fail to address and deconstruct racialized vocal timbre. The perpetuation of racialized timbre goes much deeper and is based on fundamental beliefs about sound. As long as we believe in knowable, stable sound, we are compelled to identify sound and to believe that identification to constitute essence. And whatever we believe to be a person’s essence—from despairing or ecstatic to white or black—is employed in the interpretation and assessment of the voice.” (170)

Interestingly, both versions of *Sh-boom* (*Life Could Be a Dream*) were released in 1954 with The Chords version charting on the American pop charts at Number 9 in March while The Crew Cuts version went Number 1 in August of that same year (Starr & Waterman 2007) demonstrating the racial inequality in music at the time. Next up is *I Just Wanna Make Love to You* (1954), written by Willie Dixon and first recorded by Muddy Waters, sung by celebrated vocalist Etta James. The lyrics are sentimental and period-relevant saying “I don't want you to be no slave, I don't want you to work all day, but I want you to be true, and I just wanna make love to you.” The inclusion of this lyric is poignant because it addresses the institutional racism of the time by referencing slavery. Then, Tierra Whack’s song *Clones* (2019) starts playing; this musically jolts us out of the 1950s period and is juxtaposed with the image of young Black children playing in front of an open fire hydrant before a white officer turns it off. By musically linking the civil unrest in America from 2020-2021 to the 1950s, Robinson deliberately chooses to show how little has changed. Later, we hear Ruby singing Sister Rosetta Tharpe’s song *I Want a Tall Skinny Papa* (1942). Sister Rosetta Tharpe was the first gospel star who appealed to both R&B and rock & roll audiences, and she later became known as the ‘Godmother of Rock & Roll’ (Wald, 2007). Next up is the 1955 hit *Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On*, originally performed by R&B singer Big Maybelle but made most famous by Jerry Lee Lewis in 1957. Finally, we hear *September Song* (1938), written by German composer Kurt Weill for the Broadway musical *Knickerbocker Holiday*; notably, *September Song* is one of Sarah

Vaughan’s most famous covers. Richardson’s sonic knowledge deeply contributes to the series’ overarching themes of forgiveness, hope, vengeance, and mercy—it is mindful to note these are also recurring themes in Matt Ruff’s novel version of *Lovecraft Country* (2016).

**Table 1.** Narrative Elements of Episode 1 ‘*Sundown*’

Title	Genre & Features	Song Elements
1. <i>Sinnerman</i> (1956)	Gospel–vocally dominant, Christian dominant, clapping	frenetic, vibrant, pulsing
2. <i>Sh-boom (Life Could Be a Dream)</i> (1954)	Doo-Wop (Blues)–entire focus is on ensemble singing, vocally dominant	simple, harmonic, nonsensical syllabic vocalisation
3. <i>I Just Wanna Make Love to You</i> (1954)	Blues–main harmonic feature is the 12-bar progression, 3-line verse with 3 4 bar phrases	microtonal, wailing bass, call & response, dissonant harmonies and flattened “blues” notes
4. <i>Clones</i> (2019)	Hip-Hop/Rap–Rhythmic beatboxing, rapping, repetition, samples, heavy bass lines	Edgy, heavy beat, ominous, creative menacing rhymes
5. <i>I Want a Tall Skinny Papa</i> (1942)	Gospel–vocally dominant, Christian dominant, clapping, call and response, tenor sax	moderate jump tempo, swing spiritual
6. <i>Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On</i> (1955)	Rock & Roll–combines jazz, country, and R&B with electric instruments	fast tempo, energetic performances, catchy lyrics
7. <i>September song</i> (1938)	Jazz–improvisation, bent notes and modes, swing, syncopation, distinctive voices	melancholic, harmonic shifts, unique expressive vocals

In the end, the most compelling aural addition to E1 is James Baldwin’s *Debate Speech* (1965) delivered opposite William F. Buckley at Cambridge University. This celebrated speech indelibly shapes the moment, cleverly laid over a visual montage echoing the trials of Black people during that era. When this debate occurred, Buckley (conservative and white) and Baldwin (liberal and Black), came face to face to discuss America’s racial divide, and fifty-five years later, Baldwin’s advocacy for civil rights has lost none of its relevance. In Daphne Brooks’ book *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound* (2021), she calls Baldwin “a pivotal voice on Black Music’s

sociocultural and spiritual value and urgency” (86). Conversely, Buckley was a widely known, and socially accepted, wealthy pro-segregationist whose overtly racist ideologies were somehow palatable to many due to his entitled upbringing; yet Baldwin won. In *Lovecraft Country*, the debate is underscored in several racialised tableaux: in one evocative scene, Baldwin is heard speaking about racial inequality as a Black family is ignored while white customers are served first at a segregated hotdog stand, heightening the reality of racial separation being part of the fabric of lives, a system of one’s reality; in another, Baldwin discusses how white people have access to better schools and opportunities, while Tic is refused service at a restaurant. Using Baldwin’s words, as underscore, to explain how Black people were not allowed to live the “American Dream” because they were denied basic rights, is extremely successful.

In 2020, the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) gained further momentum from its initial introduction into social consciousness in 2013. #BlackLivesMatter began to trend on social media, and worldwide protestors took to the streets to speak out against racial inequality and, most significantly, address Trump’s America and his racial bias and lies (Diverlus, Hudson & Ware 2020). Many prominent intellectuals, academics, and writers began to lean heavily on Baldwin’s work, in particular journalist Ta-Nehisi Coates and novelist Jesmyn Ward. Baldwin was unapologetic in his willingness to accept the risks of being Black; he called out America’s hypocrisy and challenged its racist style of democracy (Standley et al, 1989). He wrote about America’s depravity and beautifully confronted its myth of freedom with direct honesty (Baldwin et al, 2014). In 1962, Baldwin authored an article for *The New Yorker* stating:

“There appears to be a vast amount of confusion on this point, but I do not know many Negroes who are eager to be “accepted” by white people, still less to be loved by them; they, the blacks, simply don’t wish to be beaten over the head by the whites every instant of our brief passage on this planet. White people in this country will have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this—which will not be tomorrow and may very well be never—the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed.” (Baldwin, 1962)

Baldwin’s words not only prove his relevance to today’s #BlackLivesMatter movement, but also foreshadow the racial challenges Ruby faces in E5 of *Lovecraft Country*.



This building of racial tension brings us to E5, by far the most graphic and disturbing episode thus far in the series. One assumes this was done purposely to show the systemic violence toward Black people because, from the beginning, this episode is different. There is a distinct sonic shift; there is tonal apprehension, a disquietude to Saadiq and Karpman's music here as we hear electric guitars wailing and screeching while Ruby violently sheds her Black skin and transforms into a white woman named Hilary Davenport, played by Jamie Neumann. The musical dissonance against the backdrop of such unpalatable imagery is hypnotic. Suddenly, we hear abrasive city noises—cars, people speaking, and sirens—which are jarringly loud and incredibly effective. As Hilary runs out into the streets, the music abruptly stops while the camera zooms out to convey the complexity of her situation; the perspective changes and we see a near-naked hysterical white woman in an all-Black neighbourhood just as Hilary glimpses herself in the reflection of a barbershop door and starts screaming. A Black man tentatively comes outside to inquire if she is okay and Hilary steps back unsure of what is happening, accidentally bumping into a young Black boy causing him to spill his box of popcorn. As she starts to apologise, two white police officers rush over and violently push the boy over the hood of their car accusing him of molesting Hilary. This small moment lays bare the specific nature of the racial violence of that era and highlights the blind spots, and silences, of the cultural manifestations of racial inequalities. It is important to note that the use of silence in this moment is key. As this scene unfolds without music, the viewer feels the inequality of the situation which is further heightened by only hearing angry white voices and people breathing. This is reminiscent of Jennifer Lynn Stoever's description of ideologies in her 2016 book *The Sonic Color Line: Race and the Cultural Politics of Listening*. In Chapter 2, "Performing the Sonic Color Line in the Antebellum North", Stoever compares the vocal stylings of Swedish Opera singer Jenny Lind with that of Elizabeth Taylor Greenfield, a former African American slave. Stoever states:

"Unlike the overwhelming raves about the unifying melodies emanating from Lind's white body, white elite critics' reviews of Greenfield perceived her singing as noise, primed to intensify white America's festering divisions of race, class, gender, and region. However, scholars have underscored the importance of Greenfield's performances, particularly as sonic challenges to America's racial regime and as evidence of what Nina Eidsheim calls "sonic blackness," the attribution of "black" qualities to classical voices based on visual impression." (78)

Thankfully, Hilary has the cognitive resources to explain the boy did not hurt her, which the officers begrudgingly accept as truth. We hear a voice on the police radio saying her 'husband' William, played by Scottish Actor Jordan Patrick Smith, is concerned about Whereabouts. In an instant, Hilary's reality shifts from that of a powerful white woman in a Black neighbourhood to one of a helpless white woman in a white man's world as she is locked in the back of the police car. This moment beautifully illustrates the ways gender and race intersect with the binary world of power. During this car sequence, we hear *Tonight You Belong to Me* (1926) written by Lee David and Billy Rose sung by Patience & Prudence. The violent collocation of Hilary's reality against the sentimental harmonies of the song brings both history and futurity to the moment, lending itself perfectly to the horror genre, which might explain why this song has also been used in other TV series like *American Horror Story* (Murphy and Falchuk, 2015-). Hilary's transformation back into Ruby is then underscored by spoken word, and while she shapeshifts, we see a swarm of African locusts on the television in the background as William takes a knife and stabs Hilary in the heart. Just as we see Ruby's eye peering out of Hilary's mouth, the announcer says:

Breaking News: a swarm of 16 billion Kenyan locusts are moving across North Africa to Great Britain. . . after seven days they will reach full maturity as adult locusts, destined to devour everything in their path.

To say it is spine-chillingly macabre might be an understatement, especially with the comparison to the moulting and metamorphosis process of the locusts. This could be seen as a reference to Franz Kafka's allegorical novella *Metamorphosis* (1915) which chronicles a man waking up just as he transforms into a giant cockroach. Whether it is a purposeful comparison or not, the moulting process presented in the episode shows us that Ruby's racial metamorphosis is painful and terrifying. When interviewed in the magazine *Town & Country*, Mosaku says:

"I was quite shocked when I was told about the character's journey... I just thought it was an incredible thing to explore the idea of passing, but just on another level... If I was to go around as a white woman, a white man, an Asian woman, an Asian man... the world would just respond to you so differently because of your outward form, right?" (Foussianes, 2020)

Mosaku addresses the concept of racial passing in the article but refrains from discussing consent. The fact that author Mischa Green is a Black female being vocal about race, choice, and equality is cleverly portrayed in this narrative as Ruby does not initially consent to the racial transformation; therefore, it is understandable that Mosaku did not comment on the topic.

After Ruby's initial post-transformational shock, she then chooses to become Hilary to experience the level of freedom living as a white woman allows. As we observe Hilary walking in town, being given free ice cream, and enjoying her freedom sitting on a bench reading the newspaper, we hear Ntozake Shange's 'choreopoem *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1975).<sup>8</sup> Of the piece, William Anderson says:

“The theme of *Colored Girls* is mainly Shange's view of other women of her own race. She writes of dreams that all black women had during her time. Dreams of love and of the good life were the only things that kept many women going according to Shange. Despite all of the dreams and the steps that black women took to reach them they always seemed to be shattered by some heartless lover or destroyed at the hand of the white folk.” (Anderson, 2019)

The addition of this choreopoem as underscore makes the scene feel tragic because it emphasises the racial divide by showing Hilary's white privilege. Ruby then starts to use the transformational potion to her advantage. First, she returns as Hilary to a department store where she was denied a customer service job due to her race and is hired as a manager. She despises her boss, who is a racist sexual predator, and starts to concoct a revenge plan. However, the racial freeness of Hilary becomes intoxicating to Ruby, and she uses her whiteness to shame the one Black employee, Tamara, played by Sibongile Mlambo. Luckily, Ruby comes to her senses after witnessing her boss try to sexually assault Tamara and decides to shed her skin one last time so she can vengefully seduce her boss.

This next sequence is one of the most prolific and bloody in the entire series and is underscored with Cardi B's song *Money* (2018). The use of this song is deliberate as it has

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<sup>8</sup> A choreopoem is a piece of work that is written as a poem but is intended to be acted out on stage. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* is a Tony Award-Winning piece of theatre conceived and narrated by Ntozake Shange. (Seibert, 2019)

lyrics like “Cold ass bitch, I give broads chills,” “Touch me, I’ll shoot,” “Bring brass knuckles to the scuffle,” and “Bitch, I will black on your ass” and tellingly, is from her sophomore album *Invasion of Privacy* (2018). Erin Lowers says in *Exclaim* magazine that Cardi B “uses *Invasion of Privacy* to remind us that instead of being a statistic, she empowers herself (and others) by reclaiming any negativity thrown her way” (Lowers, 2018). After one last drink of the potion, Ruby becomes Hilary for the final time. She goes to work and starts seducing her boss, who is thrilled by her overt sexuality. Hilary adopts a dominatrix persona: strips him down, ties his belt around his neck, hogties him on his front and then rapes him with a stiletto while *Money* plays in the background. It is distressingly violent and exceedingly difficult to watch, and while she attacks him, she starts to moult back into Ruby. Once she is done, she grabs his head, looks him in the eye and says, “I wanted you to know that a n\*\*\*\*r bitch did this to you” and walks out the room while he screams in pain. It is important to note the use of the stiletto here as they rose to popularity in the 1950s and signified power and sexuality (Brennan 2019).

In conclusion, by framing H.P. Lovecraft’s racist and segregationist beliefs within the horror sci-fi genre of television, *Lovecraft Country* addresses racial inequality through sonic emotion and aurality. The unique blend of sci-fi and Cthulhu Mythos adds an additional layer of horror when situated against the backdrop of the racial realities of African Americans in the 1950s and guides the viewer to experience a familiar horror trope—one where the demons are everyday people just like us—by disrupting the ways we experience sound in TV viewing. Using multilayered political aurality as the sonic landscape helps to situate race and gender at the forefront of the conversation in an unusual and unique way. Sadly, *Lovecraft Country* has not been renewed for a second season and it’s possible that this style of provocative media was too much for mainstream audiences; interestingly, *Lovecraft Country* appears to have had an effect on the genre as Danny Glover’s new series *Swarm* (2023) similarly provokes audiences through sonic culture and brings a fresh perspective to an established idea. The use of period-correct sound and 21<sup>st</sup> century musical and aural idioms as an educational tool to expose racial and gender inequities reframes racial and political inequalities. Lastly, in this analysis of historical injustices of Black culture through sonic emotion, I have demonstrated how *Lovecraft Country* engages with race, gender, and sonic culture while embracing the rich

tapestry of Black sound by disrupting narratives, challenging racial temporalities, and inviting change.

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