

Madea vs. Medea: Agape and the Militarist or Murderous Maternal

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Introduction: Agape, Violence, and the Mother

Attending mass or church, one hears priests or pastors speak of “agape,” the classical Greek word for love based in commitment and compassion. The Greeks distinguished *agape* from *eros* and other forms of love. Christians mandated agape as the supreme love (or as John Coltrane would represent “love supreme”) willed by God and expressed through Christ: an affect that would compass the transcendent and the embodied, the deity, community, and self. Agape is the covenant or tie that binds. The only form of love as mystified as religious devotion is maternal devotion. Love for, and fear or awe of, the mother within patriarchal societies and cultures has the attributes of both devotion and aversion. Within modernity, Christianity has barred women from formal positions of power within religious institutions, while enabling antiblack animus and slavery. In ancient Greece, women were also displaced along with slaves from democracy’s power. In both the Christian and non-Christian world, women’s ability to manifest agape in right relation to deity, community, family, and self has been viewed with institutional suspicion. The romanticized representations have portrayed female power filtered through the Madonna who births life, the militarist who wars to protect the nation/clan, and the murderess who betrays and destroys it. The depictions of women in the (re)production or destruction of life, family, society, or nation express often male views of female agency and capacity for agape. In biblical tradition, from the first woman seduced by a serpentine fallen angel to the teen mother who birthed God incarnate to undo the first

sin, women's lives have been paradoxically portrayed as both central and marginal to redemption. Black lives are also paradoxically constructed in relation to the redemption of the Western family and democracy. So both women and blacks, and especially so black women and mothers, are challenged to prove their ability to love and serve in ways that benefit others. However, under the stress of institutional violence from poverty or criminality or structural violence from war and dispossession, the maternal's militancy can become violent and outer-directed.

The capacity to love in a violent world tests the limits of commitment and compassion. For African Americans, historically vulnerable to violence and captivity through chattel slavery, the convict prison lease system, Jim Crow segregation, and mass incarceration, the question of the black maternal commitment to agape is salvific. Maternal love during times of war and siege manifests as redemption, sometimes through violence. It is a militarist endeavor that can harbor the murderous. In antiquity, pre-modernity, warfare was the backdrop for playwrights exploring the human condition and the frailties of familial lineage. In modernity, slavery and its afterlife shape experiences of racially driven or refracted violence and the life possibilities of black life in the works of black playwrights. The creative trajectories of distinct archetypes suggest that the seemingly impossible distance between an ancient murderous maternal royal, depicted by Euripides, and a militarist criminalized black maternal, set to script and screen, and literally embodied, by Tyler Perry, may not actually intersect.

For both the ancient Greeks and modern blacks, male protagonists dominated the realization of democracy and attempted to define the limits of family life—the private realm populated by women, children, and slaves—in opposition to the public realm of the citizen enabled by his parasitical relation to the private realm, the ancient Greeks as the romanticized of Western democracy and blacks its problematic contributors or detractors. Euripides, the Greek playwright, gave Western culture Medea, an elite female archetype of combative abilities worth remembering through the ages filtered through whiteness. Tyler Perry, an African American playwright, has now given us Madea, a female archetype of combative skills filtered through blackness (and its stereotypes) worth commercializing in contemporary culture. This chapter contrasts and compares the elite whiteness represented by a Greek tragedy with the nonelite blackness of pop “crass culture.” This pitting of Madea against Medea may suggest the argumentative contrast between “low” and “high” culture, but it actually can speak to the presence or absence of agape within the frame of the militarist or murderous maternal. Who knows how many mothers have wailed, witnessed, or willed their children to deace or disappear amid strife and trauma inflicted by war and conquest? Foreign (ethnic/

racial), domestic (poverty), intimate (familial) battles routinely leave children homeless, institutionalized in refugee camps, foster care, juvenile prisons, or trapped inside dysfunctional families. Black women, the largest supporters and funders, in fact, the creators of Tyler Perry as an (inter)national entertainer, have disproportionately, on a structural level, been linked with the persona of the militarist or murderous maternal shaped by violence. Conceptually, black women have an unspoken relationship with the Medea, the personification of the murderous capacity of the maternal towards her kin.¹ By choosing Perry, specifically by identifying with his protagonist Madea, black women have found an expression of agape and rage that positions them as militarists not murderers. Tyler Perry offers the opportunity to meet the violence in the everyday life arrayed against black women and girls with a black female violence that counters their disarray. His redemptive black maternal agency battles without destroying, battles while rebirthing a resilient blackness. That his formulations are replete with antiblack stereotypes and clichés that reflect the denigration and consumption of blackness as entertaining is apparent. Nonetheless, his character(s) also functions as an expression of maternal rage against injustice, a complicated tragedy of the maternal in relation to agape that has entertained and edified audiences since Euripides.

Seemingly light-years in aesthetic and philosophical distance, playwrights Euripides and Tyler Perry have created maternal personas with some commonality and stark differences. Perry's creations began on stage in small, local theaters, just as with the playwrights of ancient Greece. The binary of the "high culture" of Greek tragedy and the "low-brow" culture of black comedy fails to see Greek tragedies as a form of public, popular entertainment of their day. Their meditations on family, human frailties, life, and death in a violent world is reflected in the twenty-first-century experiences of African American playwrights. What is the maternal as a threatening and avenging entity under stressful deprivation? Why does theater (film) hold such sway in the formation of our ethics and sensibilities? Medea and Madea allow us to see the possibilities of contemporary black female experience as universal as that of ancient Greeks.

Despite disparities, the relationship between both maternal icons is evident. They are Pygmalions, and some audiences are vaguely familiar with both fictional females. Viewers of Greek tragedies know about Tyler Perry films and people who view Perry productions are aware of ancient Greek tragedies. Both Madea and Medea are the antithesis or antidote to the obedient female; both are capable of planning and executing violent and destabilizing acts against their enemies. They represent political power outside of the law from distinctly different positions of authority: that of

the sovereign woman, Medea, and that of the slave/captive caste woman Madea.

Madea's name, familiarized from "mother dear," is an African American honorific title based on the woman's ability to give birth and nurture children, one's own, and given slavery's savage disruption of biological family ties, the children of others or fictive kin. Medea by contrast derives her honor from royal birth. In relation to agape, one sees that Perry's Madea, the impoverished black female "criminal" (working in semi-legal industries) restores the family through violence against transgressors and predators whereas the "white" propertied sovereign princess destroys the family. The similarity between the sound of the names Medea and Madea as homophones highlights their antonymic fictional personas. Their coexistence in contemporary cultures allows *theorizing* (feminist Barbara Christian's verb) that maternal life stratified by violence could be one of the greatest tragicomedies.

Violent Greek Tragedy and Comedic Black Suffering

In the Greek tragedy *Medea*, Euripides writes of a sovereign woman who literally kills two families—her own and that of her husband's bride—in order to exact revenge or gain restitution. Euripides's play, a tragedy of epic proportions, is globally renown for its meditation on the godlike choices of humans. Widely studied and reflected upon as Greek mythology Euripides's play explores universal implications for justice, ethics, grief, rage, the sanctity and violation of trust—and children—and the demonic madness of women.

Perhaps *Medea* is the figment of a misogynist imagination replete with sexist stereotypes and the inverse of structural dominance: male victimization at the hands of females, not other males who defeat them in battles to slay or enslave. Such females populate the nightmares of male adjudicators of power, those Greek warriors who so feared the Amazons that they speared them not in the heart—the kill of true skill—but in the breast or pubic area.² Medea is a male horror story, a mass murderer of males: her brother, the king who gives her family refuge, her two young sons, and Jason's soul.

There are distinct types of girls or women in Euripides's play, including Medea and the beautiful, vain teen princess who thought she could score the man of an older, war-seasoned princess; Glauce is the only child of Creon, the King of Corinth, who is tragically duped by Medea's performance of the dame in distress, and so fails to immediately exile or execute his adversary. Of more interest than Glauce, her adversary, here

in this case of *Madea v. Medea* is the only ally that Medea has, the chorus of slave women belonging to Medea who beg her to abandon her murderous plans to destroy Creon's family and her own. The slave women or Greek chorus are the transitional bridge between the mythologies of the ancient Greeks and modern Americans.

The slave women as chorus verbally intervene on behalf of the children they nurture; they have great maternal agency and expression in agape but having no structural power as slaves they refuse to oppose Medea. They do not possess the will to undo the will of their mistress whom they fear. Their impotent pleas and arguments for Medea to spare the children and accept exile or leave her young sons with Jason and his new bride, or even the servants, become the noise of static, disconcerting audio as backdrop to murder. Medea will destroy the life she birthed, the young lives they slaved to raise and nurture. The tragedy is inevitable because the slave women will not meet their mistress's violence with their own. Only in Perry's plays/scripts does the violence of women from the slave caste triumph over the will and institutional power of the slave mistress.³

Domestic slave rebellions do not appear in Euripides's play, nor in Lars von Trier's film, *Medea*, used here as a cinematic reference for the play.⁴ In both Euripides's play and von Trier's adaptation the slave women remain powerless to stop child murders. Such women only function as rhetorical devices for the audience's reflections on ethics, or as witnesses for the court of public opinion that condemns Medea but cannot prosecute or punish her. Structurally but not racially "black," the women in lacking juridical standing as fully human are enablers of sovereigns empowered with agency. Positioned as mammies with hearts of gold, the slave chorus is without weapons and so incapable of recognizing another imaginative slave maternal, one who would protect children and progeny with firearms.

Only the slave chorus and the gods are aware of Medea's murderous intentions, although the King Creon has his suspicions and Jason apparently does not really know his first wife's capabilities and limits in agape. The slave women's frantic pleas increase emotional tension during the planning of child murder as neither god nor human intervenes to save toddler, boy, or teenage girl. Without the protection of adults, the children, although loved, fall prey to adults. Their vulnerability to disposability is their proximity to slave status: possessions to be discarded in times of crises, quarrels, and battles at the whim of their owners.⁵

In von Trier's film, the audience sees that the toddler has scratched himself on the poisoned crown while transporting it to the unsuspecting teen bride; thus Medea's later hanging of him becomes a mercy killing. The tragedy is not that Medea hated her children, their mutual love is

evident. Killing what one hates is merely the pathology of war. Slaying what one dearly loves is transcendent tragedy. In Christianity, one hears that "for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son." Love for the world does not inspire Medea's act; so she severs her ties to agape, and offers no conceptual linkage to Christian adaptations of agape (although there is still connectedness to the embattled black maternal).

Ironically, neither Medea nor Madea expresses a belief in a redemptive God, a God of mercy, who will guide and guard her and spare her and her family from violence and violation. Only Madea's militarism can be read as an expression of agape in a violent world. Although both personas engage in strategies that are extremist, unconventional, and criminal, only Medea destroys the sanctity of family and childhood.

The ancient Greeks, like modern Americans, are familiar with gangsta ethics: if you are not caught in the deed (sometimes even if you are) then it was permissible or permitted. Both Medea and Madea practice some variations of this ethics within and against family members. Euripides allows Medea to get away with whatever allows the dissolution of family. Perry allows Madea to get away with violence deployed to reinforce family. The families of both women are dysfunctional. Both female protagonists have brother issues. Medea helps her lover-husband Jason murder her brother and then dismember and scatter his body parts to slow the avenging pursuit of her father's ships (the king, her father, must stop his ships to retrieve each body member to reconstitute his son, her brother, for proper burial).

Madea continuously threatens to kill Joe, her brother, who is also played by Tyler Perry in prosthetics and heavy makeup. Joe is the embodiment of crassness, low humor, his very presence enables Madea to achieve a stature of civility and care as loving and maternal, and is occasionally violent only when provoked. Joe's only child is Brian, a middle-class lawyer (Perry also plays Brian), a single father with patriarchal tendencies softened by maternal love toward his children and, eventually, their drug-addicted, homeless mother.

Madea counsels children and adults, including her brother Joe, and her nephew Brian. As rebel and outlaw, she engages in criminal activity not because she is above the law (as is Medea with a goddess for a grandmother) but because she is outside the law given her political birthright as a rebellious slave. Emancipated, yet vulnerable to caricature and stereotype, Madea wants freedom without servility; her violence is proactive defense or displeasure ignited by centuries of brutality against black family life.

Antiblack bias is embedded in commercial and American culture which reduces black women and families to the debased, primitivism; all notions that justify white supremacy's disciplinary violence and disdain.

Unsurprisingly, Tyler Perry's films are painful (and boring) for some. The stereotypes girding Madea's combative confrontations are proof of black excess: obesity, "mannishness," criminality, drug abuse, aggressive black sexuality. She seemingly displays maternal love through domination, threats backed by the brandishing of illegal guns. Unlike Medea, and like the Greek chorus of slave women, Madea does not have impunity before the law. Yet like Medea she does not fear the law. The law is just an obstacle or "handicapper" to circumvent her agency and black freedom from police and captivity and poverty.

Perry's Madea willingly embraces the label of fugitive but it must be comedic lest it become too political and incite disciplinary retribution. Madea has a golden heart like the Greek chorus; unlike the slave women, she threatens homicide to prevent violence. Madea claims the right to use violence as an instrument; unlike the Greek princess she never kills. Killing would be difficult for Madea (and likely damage the franchise's "comedy" label); killing children would be blasphemy. "My Dear" in the child's pronunciation of the protective black maternal only sees the unforgivable sin of Medea. Madea's world cannot embrace Medea (but perhaps could reflect upon the historical figure of slave fugitive Margaret Garner whose violence against her children inspired Toni Morrison's creation of Sethe in *Beloved*⁶). Medea shocks with violence enhanced from years of warring since she first met Jason of the Argonauts. Madea entertains with violence, a by-product of being black, poor, and female under white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. That Madea is performed in drag by a black adult male celebrity is part of the comedic relief or insider/outsider joke for black/nonblack viewers. In the absence of Madea's verbal, physical aggression, audiences are often slightly bored by Perry productions. (To a lesser extent this may be true of audiences for Euripides's play who tensely anticipate the violence of the murderous maternal.)

Madea intimidates and humiliates those who "deserve" such abuse: batterers, bad mothers, unruly children, state authority, and police. Her confrontations are never lethal. Madea mocks class status and the pretensions of blacks claiming that mere money had erased their proximity to a forced slave caste. Medea resents what Madea never possessed, the loss of personal status in the public world. Thus, abandoned for the young virginal royal, Medea cannot merely mock Jason for sacrificing her honor, youth, fidelity, to his power and prestige, she must drive him insane through murdering their children.

Medea possesses the ancient sovereignty that permits narcissistic rulers to dominate through fratricide and the elimination of competitors. For Madea, who lacks public sovereignty, there is no competition to vanquish, only oppression from white supremacy, misogyny, and capitalism to counter. Within the context of urban, impoverished black familial

culture, and its legal and illicit economies, she has only the right to self-defense for herself and her (extended) family, a right, if one thinks in terms of progressive understandings of figures such as Trayvon Martin, which blacks are presumed not to legitimately exercise. No male kin has stolen the honor of Perry's avatar, none given the legacies of enslavement are structurally empowered to do so.⁷

Born into an extremely violent world for blacks, particularly black females, Madea appears to be not shocked by anything or anyone. Yet, she would have likely crossed the street if she saw Medea coming.⁸ Madea's refusal of recognition of or compassion towards Medea suggests a divide shaped by wealth and racial sovereignty, the chasm between masters and slaves.⁹

The Militarist Black Maternal

Madea represents the combative, traumatized mother who has the capacity to suffer, engender, and forgive and heal through agape. She appears to be the stereotype depicted in the "Moynihan Report" on the "pathology" of black female-headed households.¹⁰ The most vulnerable to her raging and shaming impulses are her children, and their father(s) who fail their familial responsibilities. Her violence as depicted by Perry is cathartic even if inexcusable (for Tyler Perry the comedy is supposedly an erasure of the violence enacted).

Perry's female persona is not a victim but heroine. Her kin are shamed by her into trying to do better but are not ashamed of her. For those who recognize her as biological or fictive "mother," her homicidal gestures are pure performance, slapstick comedy. Guns are rarely discharged, and when they are, only into the air. Damage is done more to pride and possessions than to bodies or souls. Perhaps this avenging angel, this mother of restorative justice backed by physical intimidation, is the maternal figure that Perry longed for during his youth of paternal neglect or violence and survival of neighborhood sexual predators. Or perhaps this is the maternal icon that all black children, of all ages, should be blessed with: the black woman with the aggressiveness of the alpha male in service to the well-being of black families. Madea threatens but never performs lethal violence.¹¹ She breaks the law, risks imprisonment, shaped by centuries of resistance to policing by slave drivers, patrollers, paddy rollers and "popo" (police), she breaks the law and risks imprisonment.

Madea is a prophet of love and rage. Like Christ, she hangs with and converts the socially marginal, Marx's lumpen proletariat: the prostitutes, hustlers, unsavory elements of society including her brother. She is a zealot; the crazy "negress" whose violent transgressions are laughable

largely because they are enacted mostly against blacks; some of whom might celebrate when Madea attacks whites. Whites would not find her amusing if her combative skills were mainly directed against white characters. For example, in *Madea's Witness Protection* (2012), Madea only threatens physical violence against disrespectful white children; she slaps black children in other Perry films. Despite the possibility that she may function as a rogue "Mammy" for whites, Madea confronts and expels the violence generated by society's refusal of the religious mandate for agape with blacks.

Black maternal love despite pervasive social, personal, and structural violence is agape. In Perry's films, the black maternal ensures the maturation (and mutation) of black childhood through corporeal punishment, and physical opposition to the state, represented by courts and cops. In a world where black children are disproportionately abused and murdered by individuals and structures that in theory exist to foster their well-being, Madea becomes the avenger for justice and redemption.

The Black Militant Maternal as Female Criminal

Madea Goes to Jail opens with Welsh torch singer Tom Jones's "She's a Lady" and a montage of Madea's maturation from a young incorrigible to a full-fledged felon: photos of Madea apprehended at age nine for petty theft; arrest for illegal gambling at eighteen; sporting a large Afro and the black leather garb of the Black Panther Party, one clenched, black gloved fist pumped into the air; "Platinum Simmons," exotic dancer/sex worker; and elderly woman violently resisting arrest.¹² All photos display the child and young woman inhabiting the frame of a six-foot, two-hundred-plus pound man. No child actor is employed to represent a youthful Mabel Simmons, so no child exists, just as no woman exists. Just a large black man padded as a "Hottentot Venus." The visual running gag disrupts black society's apprehension and fear of the police. Hence the comic relief that is ongoing is actually an emotional relief from stressful environments and racially driven policing and incarceration.¹³

The impact of incarceration on families is depicted through family conversations and fights. Uncle Joe (played by Tyler Perry), suffering from diabetes and respiratory problems, opines on his sister's criminality and criminalized sexuality: "Mabel always running from the police.... She's a popo ho." The comedy offers a sober view of white and black women prostitutes and drug addicts beaten and raped by pimps. The disposability of the black female protagonist's body is embodied in her plea against the Latino pimp that if he releases her she will not report the

crime; he retorts that he is not afraid even if she does. The impunity he reflects is his sovereignty in relation to hers: the pimp tells her that she is a “slave” and that every slave needs to buy their freedom. Candy escapes, is arrested for prostitution, and in prison later meets Madea.

Madea will mother Candy and her own biological family: her daughter Cora; brother Joe; nephew Brian, his children and their mother, drug-addicted Debrah. She is also the maternal figure in the lives of foster children, as well as incarcerated women. In this herculean task her resentment and violence are displayed as folksy, comedic, and transformational in the lives of others. In *Madea's Family Reunion* (2006), Madea advises battered women: “When you get tired of a man hitting on you there is nothing you can do but cook breakfast. Throw it and swat. Venus and Serena. Grit ball.”¹⁴

Madea's proximity to violence and despair among blacks in her community and extended family is profound. It suggests a familiarity with purgatory if not hell itself. The issue of how to avoid depression when faced with repetitive and structural violence and deprivation, particularly if one is poor, black, and female, is raised in Perry's films. Religion becomes one avenue of redress. But Madea mocks it as a remedy for her suffering. Cora and Madea banter in the “*What Would Jesus Do?*” road rage scene before Madea instructs: “Cora I didn't raise no punk,” and chokes her daughter until she complies with pursuit of the car of a white man who rudely cuts their vehicle off in traffic. The ensuing confrontation, among others, will lead to arrest, and court-mandated anger management sessions with psychologist megastar Dr. Phil who was introduced to the public by Oprah Winfrey. When forced by the courts to seek professional care, Madea engages in a verbal battle with Dr. Phil, one that she wins.¹⁵ Just before the enraged psychologist throws her out of his office, Madea counters any admission of vulnerability by stating her trust in the three Gs: “Get, Got, and Glock.”¹⁶

Conclusion

Tyler Perry's imagination gives birth to a woman skilled in the art of war. As Zeus did with Athena, historically men have told mythic tales of deadly female maternals ushering in or preventing tragedies. Their agency dominates the power and will of the men who threaten or seek to control them, it even overwhelms the will of their creators, as the militant or murderous maternals take on lives of their own that outlive the names of their male creators. In the case of Madea, some audiences are comforted by this rebellious female agency who is actually a black male seeking the comforts and safety of conventional, family life.¹⁷

Medea, sheltered in the classics, immortalized through Western civilization and its family tree's glorified roots in ancient Athens, meets Madea, a resident and product of the ghetto. One finds in such an encounter that the nonelite "bad mother," who never loses faith in family and struggle, is in direct opposition to the elite maternal who will destroy agape. Comedy triumphs over the tragedy. In real life, they converge and the tragicomedy balances our encounters with life and war. Neither Madea nor Medea will romantically meet a man who comes as "restorer"—a Christ-like figure to absolve and cleanse her wounds and sins. Neither maternal icon is susceptible to sentimental longing for a rescuer who would morph into a new paternal captor. Both have experienced transformational agape. Yet only the black maternal, ridiculed by stereotype, denigrated and disciplined by public rejection, exudes the power to be in communion with agape as a spiritual journey.

Notes

1. For scholarship on historical representations of black women see the writings of Hazel Carby, Saidiya Hartman, Darlene Clark Hines, Mary Helen Washington, and Patricia Hill Collins.
2. See Eva Keuls, *The Reign of the Phallus: Sexual Politics in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
3. The slave women as chorus are the bridge between the murderous Medea and the militarist Madea; yet Medea will not cross that bridge between the sovereign royal and the servant/slave, so her lack of humility separates her from agape and leads to the execution of the children.

The slave women chorus is vulnerable to the violence of those empowered over them. The price for slave rebellion against or betrayal of a master-owner is banishment, torture, or death. The agency of the Greek chorus is constrained by its vulnerability to violation from either Medea or her enemies. Whether grateful or ambivalent about the survival of Jason's sons, sovereign outrage at slave insolence might eclipse leniency for their rebellion. Even the father, who in looking into the eyes of his sons might see glimpses [or a glimpse] of the woman who had the potency to create or destroy his political future, feels uneasy about keeping close at hand slave women who had demonstrated their own independence, even that for a greater good.

As surrogate mothers, or child advocates, the slave women are logically not defiant. They have no immunity under the law, so they fear the consequences of resistance; likely, they also fear any rebellion against the "natural" order of things, even if that order permits unspeakable violence through the decree or indifference of the gods.

4. Lars von Trier's black-and-white film is disrupted when the shocking blood color of Medea's hair is unloosed after she is aboard ship, the captain and shipmates now realizing the deed of their only passenger eyeing her from a safe distance. The color marks the murderous Medea as the only thing truly

alive. She embodies life, gives it color, as does Perry's *Madea*. Both depicted by their respective authors as needed in the world.

5. In Lars von Trier's film, the children choose mother over life; the eldest fathoming her intentions does not have a self-defense mechanism that allows him to fight or flee: honor is at stake, as well as deep affection. The boys love *Medea* to such an extent that the oldest child aides her by retrieving his toddler brother running playfully through the field and holds him in place for the noose that will hang him; before he climbs to the gallows gesturing to his weeping mother that he understands the necessity of the sacrifice.

In Euripides's play, antichild violence is motivated by revenge and honor, and a need for restitution. So, *Medea* enacts timor, a code usually attributed to men in the public realm of democracy, the state, and warfare. Yet in her caste as royalty, nobility would require this extreme measure in order to restore itself once tarnished. One can rationalize that the children would have been at risk of the wrath of the new stepmom; that they would have been ridiculed and persecuted in exile and without the protection of their father. However these arguments seem hollow. One can recover from scorn, social ostracism, persecution, one does not recover from an execution. Lars von Trier's stunning visual of the children's death, in which the older son comprehends the double homicide and helps to corral his exuberant younger brother, a cherubic blond toddler racing about a field, into the hanging noose, permits a fatalistic acceptance and participation in the trauma, and underscores the horror of the death of a valued "white" child.

6. Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Random House, 2004).
7. In Tyler Perry's *I Can Do Bad by All by Myself* and *Madea's Family Reunion* black men who refuse the roles of villain or hero become clowns, as do *Madea's* brother, Joe, and her once paramour, Mr. Brown, Cora's father, unlike *Medea's* men who are sovereign as is she.
8. *Medea's* fictional violence is evoked in 1990s crime in the United States. Depicted as a traumatized feminized figure, a media representation which mitigated her double homicide in criminal court, true crime Susan Smith's infanticide of her two male toddlers could be read as the result of severe depression, aberrational, forgivable. *Madea's* violence though seems writ large as a biological construct of blackness as something to contain in a cell or in comedy.
9. *Medea* is able to flee the scene of the crime because she has divination skills and is a sovereign subject who can exact promises to safety as a fugitive from Cretan law for mass murder, and regicide. White privileged women's capitulation to extreme violence as aggressors who have been slighted not physically injured, beaten, raped, or starved seems incomprehensible for those who face physical and sexual injury along with material deprivation as the given historical known traceable to slavery. So that female violence becomes an extension of the right of racial rule, whatever personal trauma the individual or collective privileged woman has experienced is in comparison (only) to black women's lives, not a structural mandate from master-slave mandates (although it may be a structural phenomenon in patriarchal mandates).

10. In a presidential response to urban unrest, Lyndon Johnson requested Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY) to author a report on the stability or instability of the black family; that report became the (in)famous 1965 "Moynihan Report" that castigated black women for alleged emasculation of black men and evisceration of the patriarchal family. Moynihan's denigrating myth of "the black matriarch" would have identified Madea, not poverty, underemployment racial exclusion, and violence, as the source of the breakdown of the black (patriarchal) family. To suggest that the black woman is the source of the violation of the black family, that she cannot reproduce "normal" children to be assimilated into the labor market, also suggests her destabilizing violence has extended beyond the black family into the (white) state and civil society.
11. Madea likely could not have withstood the violence of the murderous maternal embodied in *Precious* (directed by Lee Daniels, Lionsgate, 2009) or *Medea*. Perry's protagonist displays a violence that is not proprietary; for example, *Precious's* mother's possessive, violent assaults and sexual abuse against her daughter are unforgivable and so without redemption. Thus she becomes the maternal monster. It is not the presence of violence but the absence of love that represents the murderous maternal banished from community, even if not from or by God.
12. In the play Madea puts out a cigarette on the arm of the Puerto Rican batterer, whose accent and culture she mocks, call her nieces' infant a "crack baby," and pulls out multiple guns to threaten people. Her violence in the play script shifts to the alter ego, brother Joe, in the film screen. Madea jokes about being the household sovereign willing to use violence to protect: "I am George Bush. I might have cheated my way into the White House but I will defend it at all costs."
13. The images are screened in a district attorney's office, the leading attorneys, all prosecutors, are all black, yet with different shades of skin and character. The Head DA is a striking beauty displayed through dark skin, close cropped head, and prominent African features. Her counterpart is the corrupt DA, an ambitious, affluent light-skinned black female attorney with straightened hair.
14. To the score of Al Green's "Love and Happiness" Lisa repeatedly hits her former fiancée with a cast-iron skillet, before throwing the diamond ring onto his prone, crumpled body and shaking off the encounter in the manner of a victorious boxer. Poet Laureate Maya Angelou closes the film reciting the assurance of a distant home, for "bludgeoned by circumstance." "We have loved each other in and out of time."
15. While in group therapy, after an incarcerated woman speaks of her father's incestuous rape against her, Madea dismissively responds: "I can't stand folk want to be a victim. Your momma and daddy gave you life that is all they were suppose to do."
16. Harriet Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).
17. For Tyler Perry, manhood references the painful difficulties of his childhood: "Life was very hard in the house I grew up in. Had two sisters and mother.

Walls held so many bad memories. Part of what motivates me is never having to go back with them.” Perry acknowledges that his father was in the home and worked to provide financially for the family but “everything he represented was negative.” Aunts and the women in the neighborhood instructed his mother to take her son with her whenever she left the home and to never leave him alone with his father who brutalized him. Perry was introduced into the vernacular and emotional worlds of black women congregating in churches, beauty salons, and shops and stores. His familiarities and affections may explain one reason why black women made him wealthy and launched his career.

Perry’s Christian religiosity provides sustainable hope for disappointed lives: “If you love god every negative thing that happened to you will work for your good. When you get to the point when you stop being angry.” Perry continues a self-reflection that places all responsibilities on the shoulders of the self-made multi-millionaire: “Change comes from within. I was a person who self-sabotaged [who believed that he] didn’t deserve anything good.” Perry maintains that God is his inspiration, and art is his expression. Families in crisis dealing with molestation and drug abuse tied to issues of molestation will see themselves in Perry’s plays and films. The author’s stated motivations center on his desire for “people to be more patient with people who have issues because you never know the whole story.” See “Meet Tyler Perry,” *The Madea Family Reunion: The Play*, DVD.