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# ‘Bright Lights and Dark Knights’: Racial Publics and the Juridical Mourning of Gun Violence in Toronto

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# 'Bright Lights and Dark Knights': Racial Publics and the Juridical Mourning of Gun Violence in Toronto

## **Abstract**

On 26 December 2005, 15-year-old Jane Creba was killed by gunfire that erupted between two groups of young men in the central consumer district of Toronto. This article examines how the public mourning of this white high school student is routed through racial knowledges of criminality that invest her death with an affective 'public' significance in contradistinction to the other victims of gun violence in 2005, most of who were young African Canadian men reputed to participate in gangs. By explicating the racial modes of publicity that are borne of this event, this article illustrates how the mediated circulation of this crime scene works to articulate phantasmic geographies of segregation atop the more convivial forms of sociality that characterize life in the city. It then shows how 'black' gun violence is configured as a force exogenous to consumer spaces, warranting the use of legal technologies of the state to (re)establish the racial boundaries of the city. The article concludes by gesturing to the possibility of innovating modes of publicity that can resist and subvert the logic and affective force of racial knowledges that otherwise structure the mediation of crime.

# **‘Bright Lights and Dark Knights’: Racial Publics and the Juridical Mourning of Gun Violence in Toronto**

**H V Bonar Buffam**

## **Introduction**

On 26 December 2005, 15-year-old Jane Creba was killed by gunfire after two rival groups of young men opened fire on each other outside of a shopping mall in downtown Toronto. In the weeks to come her murder became a flash point for many residents of the city. That year a record 52 people had been murdered with firearms, the majority of whom were young black men reputed to participate in the city’s illicit drug economies. During this time a public memorial for Creba formed on the stretch of sidewalk where she was shot. Placed amongst the cards, flowers, candles and plush-toys that composed this memorial were signs demanding civic and legal authorities to take immediate action. On one placard in particular, someone claiming to speak on behalf of ‘The Residents of Toronto’ pointedly addressed Mayor David Miller: ‘Would you please act **immediately** to place more police patrols and to implement surveillance cameras on Yonge Street between Bloor and Queen Street before someone else is murdered in cold blood!’

In the month following the shooting, newspapers in Toronto became a medium for such expressions of outrage about the ubiquity of gun violence in the city. Public reactions to Creba’s death consistently

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demanded the mobilisation of juridical technologies of the state to better control and suppress the threat of (black) violence in the city. Despite their attempts to speak on behalf of *the* public of Toronto, peoples' participation in this public has been contingent upon their interpellation by the circulation of texts about Creba's murder. In this article I show how the discourses that are constitutive of this particular public acquired their intensity by projecting a racial conflict between criminogenic black bodies and white publicity onto the cityscape of Toronto.

Well before the 'Boxing Day' shooting, the record number of gun homicides in Toronto during 2005 led journalists to call it 'The Year of the Gun'. Throughout the year the reading public of Toronto was confronted with news that young black men were being murdered in peripheral areas of the city. Public responses to these murders were by no means uniform. While some observers bemoaned the machismo of 'gangsterism' and the incapacity of the criminal justice system to properly control violent crime, others called for a more sobering reflection on the 'root causes' of violence among disaffected, racialised youth. The intensity of these reactions also varied according to the publicised circumstances of each shooting, particularly when they occurred in spaces imbued with some meaning or feeling of publicity. In early August, for instance, a series of shootings in more suburban neighborhoods of Toronto sparked concern about the increasingly 'public' setting of local shootings. As I document later in this article, public outrage also intensified after 17-year-old Amon Beckles was shot outside a church while attending the funeral of a friend murdered earlier that week. Yet, it was ultimately the murder of Creba on Boxing Day that *qualitatively* transformed the character and intensity of the 'public' reaction to gun violence in Toronto.

Drawing on the influential work of literary theorist Michael Warner (2002), I approach publics, not as stable, already existing collectivities of people, but as modes of organising social and political subjects through the reflexive circulation of texts. Despite their semblance of self-organisation, publics require 'pre-existing forms and channels

of circulation' through which participants are selected by 'criteria of shared social space, habits, topical concern, intergeneric references and circulating intelligible forms' (Warner 2002: 17). In this article I excavate the contours of a public organised by a shared topical concern about the incursion of black violence onto the body politic of Toronto, participation in which is initiated and intensified by the phantasmic conflict between violent blackness and civil whiteness. While traces of this public pre-existed the Boxing Day shooting, the affective modes of attention that characterised its members' textual exchanges were radically transformed by the shooting of a white teenaged girl in a consumer space of the city. Warner (2002) is right to stress that publics exist independently of state and legal institutions; yet, as I exemplify in this article, many urban publics across Canada and the United States are organised by a desire to regulate and control racially different bodies through juridical institutions of the state (Hesse 2007, Goldberg 2002). I consequently refer to these modes of textual circulation, as well as the modes of subjectivity to which they give rise, as distinctly juridical publicities, which are in turn approached as both artefacts and technologies of the racial state theorised by Goldberg (2002). Throughout this article I use the term 'affected public' to refer to the ever-mutating collective of strangers that has formed through the circulation of texts about local black gun violence. While this public aspires to a form of civic universality, I purposefully differentiate it from *the* 'public' that figures as the normative horizon of democratic politics, as symbolised by entities like '*the* public opinion' and '*the* public sphere' (Warner 2002, Habermas 1989).

To explicate the logic and force of this affected public I have divided the article into three sections. In the first section I examine how Creba's image acquires a distinctly racial and affective traction in its circulation through the local and regional mediascapes of Toronto. Next I illustrate how the texts that are formative of this public are organised by the stereotypical figure of the armed black man, the iterations of which warrant the deployment of the law to better manage the phantasmic threat posed by black bodies. Finally, in the last section of the article I explicate how the crime scene of this shooting was imagined as a place of

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beleaguered consumer publicity, ultimately configuring black violence as an alien, exogenous force that can be legally excised from this space.

I track the emergence of this affected public through one of the major commercial daily newspapers published in Toronto. With an average daily readership of 430,000 people, the *Toronto Star* has the largest estimated network of circulation of any newspaper in Canada (Canadian Newspaper Association 2008). While some of this readership lives outside the civic bounds of Toronto, stretching across the province of Ontario where it is located, the public that formed through the murder of Creba consistently imagined itself as local or urban in its composition. Granted, the commercial orientation of this medium of urban 'publicity' impedes any extrapolation of how other forums of stranger sociality mediate urban violence; yet, because the *Toronto Star* has such a sizable readership, my analysis can still provide insight into how many residents of Toronto are enveloped by, and agents of, distinctly racial publicities.

By attending to the racial dimensions of this public, I do not intend to characterise this public as an artefact of a conflict between racially 'different' populations. In a globalising city like Toronto, the modes of convivial sociality that characterise everyday life in the city transgress and exceed simple binaries of 'black' and 'white' bodies and spaces, which is especially true of the consumer district of the city where Creba was shot. Rather, I am interested in how the texts that circulate about the Boxing Day shooting work to imagine and project this event as an eruption of racial boundaries that had otherwise divided the city into perceptibly white civic spaces on the one hand and black criminogenic spaces on the other. In this vein I explicate what cultural theorist Homi K. Bhabha (2004) identifies as the phantasmic, psycho-affective dimensions of racisms. 'Neither simply objective nor subjective', these modalities of racism are as imagined and immaterial as they are productive of different forms of sociality premised on the biological *and* cultural inferiority of non-white populations (Bhabha 2004: xxii).

## 'It's a Family Affair': An Image of Familiar Whiteness

A magnificent blonde child — how much peace there is in that phrase, how much joy and above all how much hope! There is no comparison with a black child: literally, such a thing is unwonted (Fanon 1967: 182).

On 29 December the *Toronto Star* (hereinafter the *Star*) identified 15-year-old Jane Creba as the sole fatality of the Boxing Day shooting. The front page story publicising her identity was anchored by her most recent high school photograph, an image that would feature prominently in subsequent news coverage of local gun violence (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. 'No Time to Say Goodbye' (Toronto Star December 29 2005)  
Reprinted with permission - Torstar Syndication Services

As it circulated through different sites of memorialisation, her photograph became a pivot of identification for a public troubled by urban gun violence. Yet, far from travelling through already determined routes of circulation, the specific affective force her image acquires is exemplary of what Mazzerella (2006) insists are the unpredictable 'lives' of publicly motile images. While cultural theorists like Massumi (2002) and Connelly (2002) are right to differentiate the intensity of an image from its semantic content, I illustrate how Creba's image develops its affectivity from the phantasmic familiarity her whiteness acquires for

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residents of Toronto already troubled by black criminality.

Social theorists and anthropologists alike have effectively documented the peculiar affective force of the photograph (Biber 2007, Mazzerella 2006, Berger 1982, Barthes 1981). By preserving an arrested moment in time, photographs can convey two distinct messages: 'one concerning the event photographed and another concerning a shock of discontinuity' (Berger 1982: 86). Thus, even as the apparent 'indexicality' (Barthes 1981) of the photograph proves that the object imaged had at one time existed, the temporal gap between when the photograph was taken and when it is viewed can register jarring feelings of discontinuity (Mazzerella 2006, Barthes 1981). Although this second message is typically ignored or repressed during peoples' routine encounters with photographs, it is precisely this feeling of discontinuity that lends such affective force to Creba's image. In registering the temporal gap between the time she was alive and the present, when she is violently dead, this message of disjuncture registers the act of murder itself.

Images of murdered youth have played a formative role in warranting draconian criminal justice policies and practices. In Canada, the United States and Great Britain, 'public' demands for the implementation of more punitive legislation are often anchored by iconic images of murdered youth like James Bulger, Reena Virk and Megan Kanka, the latter having become the namesake for a sex offender registry bill named 'Megan's Law' in the United States (Hogeveen 2005, Young 1996). During 2005 the reading publics of Toronto were regularly confronted with news that young men were being murdered in different areas of the city. In the majority of these cases, the victims were young black men reportedly 'known to police' for their participation in the city's illicit urban economies of drugs and violence. When pictured in the *Star* these victims were typically imaged through mug shots that affix their blackness with a foreboding criminality. The circulation of such images circumscribe the capacity of publics, who are already anxious about crime and violence, to mourn or even *identify with* the violence to which young black men are often subject. It is against a backdrop



of these motile images of black criminality that Creba's photograph acquires its capacity to mobilise an outraged juridical public, in what literary theorist Roland Barthes (1981) terms its singular force of animation.

Declarations of grief about Creba's murder convey the relation of intimacy that this public felt with her phantasmic persona. As one columnist for the *Star* explains, 'there is a powerful sense among the residents of our city that this week is different. Partly it's because at 15, she could have been *anybody's* daughter, sister and friend' (Diebel 2005, emphasis added). Whereas the blackness of the other victims acquired a menacing difference or positivity, inhibiting public identification with their victimisation, Creba's whiteness allows her to become a pivot of seemingly universalised identification, 'the absent centre against which everything is silently compared' (Lee and Lutz 2005: 18). A news article about Creba's memorial, suggestively titled 'Girl's slaying has touched each one of us' also gestures to the sense of intimacy many people felt toward Creba's public figure (Evans et al 2005). According to reporters at the memorial, one spectator announced that her shooting 'has touched each one of us in Toronto, one of our sisters, her life cut short by a gun' (Evans et al 2005). Once again Creba's familiarity is expressed and metaphorised through a phantasmic familial relation with *the* public of Toronto. Granted this semblance of universality, Creba and her image of whiteness became a symbol of beleaguered civility and publicity through public practices of memorialisation.

For three days after the shooting, this iconic image of Creba was published above the obituary released by her family, affixed with the caption 'Our bright light tragically scattered into darkness.' As her image circulated through different practices of memorialisation, the words 'bright light' often appeared written atop it. For instance, in a photo of her memorial released on the website of the Canadian Broadcast Corporation, three copies of Creba's image appear duct-taped to the window, surrounding a sign assembled of loose-leaf paper that asks 'Why Must Innocent Die?'. Directly to the right of this sign is the same image of Creba cut out from a newspaper, with the phrase "Bright Light" once

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again printed across it. Repeatedly anchored by this caption, any potential ambiguity in the meaning of her photograph is fixed, transforming it into a symbol of goodness and light. It is the mobilisation of this Manichaean vocabulary, which pairs and opposes 'Good-Evil, Beauty-Ugliness, White-Black' (Fanon 1967: 183), that allows her shooting to be narrated as a momentous eruption of civic order and legality.

One week after the shooting, the affected public organised a candlelight vigil for Creba and the other victims of gun violence in front of the Foot Locker Athletics retailer where she was killed. In conjunction with this vigil, residents of Toronto were asked to turn on their porch-lights as part of a city-wide 'Referendum of Light' to express their solidarity against this mounting local violence. By framing this event as a populist movement against violence, which is in turn metaphorised as 'darkness', the affected public transformed the shooting into an assault on white legal publicity that necessitates civic action. As I explain in the next section of this article, this response was informed by distinctly racial regimes of truth that imagine certain modalities of blackness as symptoms of biological and/or cultural incivility (Mawani 2008, Stoler 2002, Stoler 1995).

## **'Guns and Gangs': The Racial Stereotype of the Armed Black Body**

The biggest difference between us and white folks is that we know when we are playing (Alberta Roberts as cited in Kelley 1997: 15).

As for the Negroes, they have tremendous sexual powers. What do you expect, with all the freedom they have in their jungles! They copulate at all times and in all places. They are really genital. They have so many children that they cannot even count them. Be careful, or they will flood us with little mulattoes (Fanon 1967: 157).

On 18 November 2005, 17-year-old Amon Beckles was shot outside a church while attending the funeral of a friend murdered earlier that week. To assuage mounting public outrage about Beckles's murder, particularly that it occurred on the doorsteps of a church, local Member

of Parliament Dan McTeague petitioned the Canadian Ministry of Immigration to ban iconic gangster rapper 50 Cent from entering the country to perform at a concert scheduled in Toronto. In justifying his attempt to exclude the performer, McTeague cited the deleterious effect of gangster rap on the morality of young (black) men, particularly its alleged glorification of gun violence (*Toronto Star* November 28 2005).

The purported criminogenic influence of Afro-American music has long animated legal efforts to restrict its consumption (Hagedorn 2008, Gilroy 1993). Long before gangster rap drew the ire of political figures and legal authorities, jazz was condemned for drawing impressionable white youth into lives of immorality and cocaine use. To circumvent its consumption by these white audiences, the city of New York passed a series of zoning and licensing ordinances that heavily restricted where jazz could be performed in public (Rose 1994, Gilroy 1993). More recently, gangster rap artists have been the target of censorship campaigns that bemoan their propagation of misogyny, violence and consumerist excess (Hagedorn 2008, Rose 1994). In fact, just one month after this campaign to ban 50 Cent from Canada, the contagious effect(s) of gangster rap were returned to the forefront of public debate.

Only two days after the Boxing Day shooting, the *Star* published a story that connected the recent spate of gun violence to a rap DVD that is alleged to have inflamed a gang war between two housing projects on the Northwest periphery of the city, an area known locally as the Jane and Finch corridor (Powell 2005a). A historically Afro-Canadian neighbourhood, the Jane and Finch corridor is oft-regarded by outsiders as a zone of violence and (sub)urban decay. Earlier that year Toronto police entered the rap DVD as evidence in the trial of a young man charged with a series of weapons-related offences. In the article, reporter Betsy Powell (2005a) is careful to deny any explicit connection between the young men seen on the DVD and those responsible for the Boxing Day shooting. Yet, the publication of this story in the immediate wake of the shooting, as authorities grappled to explain its causes, reconfigured the imagery of gangster rap as a symbolic resource to understand the criminality of the shooters.

In her description of the DVD, Powell fixates on the image of armed black men (see Figure 2). According to Powell (2005a), such images of ‘gun-wielding youth are nerve-gangling to watch in a week when Torontonians are reeling after a 15-year-old girl lost her life during a brazen Yonge Street gun battle between two armed groups of about 15 youths’. Because of its imagined resemblance to the Boxing Day shooting, the imagery of this gangster rap video is imbued with a menacing potentiality.



Figure 2. ‘Knives and .45s in Doomstown’  
(Toronto Star December 28 2005)  
Reprinted with permission - Torstar Syndication Services

That Powell characterises this shooting as ‘brazen’ — an adjective that recurs throughout descriptions of black gun violence in the city — works to affix its perpetrators with qualities of ‘shamelessness’, ‘imprudence’ and ‘immodesty’, all of which have been mobilised historically to mediate the fabricated incivilities of black men (Farley 1997, Gilroy 1993, Fanon 1967). In concluding her article, Powell cements the semantic connection between the images on the DVD and the perpetrators of the Boxing Day shooting, remarking:

That the gunslingers on Yonge Street audaciously pulled out their weapons and began firing in front of hundreds of thousands of shoppers and pedestrians in the downtown’s busiest shopping area ... is reflected in the fearlessness in the eyes of the gun-brandishing youths, some of them in police custody, heard and seen rapping on the DVD (2005a).

Amidst the delirium wrought by the shooting, distinctions between

fact and fiction, art and reality became obsolete as the stereotyped figure of the armed black body traverses the bounds of the screen to acquire traction in the psychic realm of the city. In mobilising a distinctly stereotypical regime of truth, which ensures its iterations are always 'in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed' (Bhabha 1994: 95), the armed black body is irreversibly marked as an agent of violence and danger.

Throughout the Year of the Gun, the lethal capacities of the armed black body were belaboured by legal and intellectual authorities alike. After a drive-by shooting endangered a number of bystanders, a *Star* reporter cited research undertaken by criminologists at the University of Toronto to demonstrate the increasingly public nature of shootings (Daly 2005). When asked to comment on this phenomenon of public shooting, criminologist Voula Marinou from nearby Brock University explained that 'in this kind of violence there's an underlying disregard for human life, not only for the victim but for whoever gets in the way' (as cited in Daly 2005). In an article about rising bystander casualties published after the Boxing Day shooting, journalist and gang expert Antonio Nicaso warns that 'definitely they don't value life, including their own' (as cited in Edwards 2005). Through the dissemination of these criminological knowledges, the armed black body already feared by the reading public becomes a potent threat to civic life. Public anxieties about this threat are indexed most vividly in a cartoon published by the *Star* one week after Creba was killed (see Figure 3). In the cartoon, the familiar figure of the armed hoodlum is pictured carrying the scythe synonymous with the Grim Reaper, imagining the anonymous black body as a harbinger of death.



Figure 3. 'Grim Reaper Thug' (Toronto Star January 4 2006)  
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The black male body has long been a stimulus to anxiety in social spaces structured by racial modes of identification (Gilroy 2002, Farley 1997, Fanon 1967). In widely circulating racial imaginaries, it is typically the mythic phallus of the black male body that figures as the source of these anxieties. According to Fanon when the black body enters the field of vision, the colonial subject 'is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is a penis' (1967: 170). In this sense, the black male body has been rendered a distinctly biological menace to the white body politic, which it threatens to pollute with more 'untoward' black bodies. During the Year of the Gun, it was the incapacity of young black men to fulfil their role as fathers that was almost habitually imagined as the cause of violent crime in Toronto, a perception that is well-furnished by the widely circulating trope of welfare and crack mothers (Kelley 1997).

In the wake of Creba's shooting, the *Star* featured an article intended to extrapolate policy directives from a series of grassroots initiatives undertaken to combat gun violence in Philadelphia. In the article, *Star* reporter Catherine Porter (2006) describes one particular African American neighbourhood where these programs were undertaken, where 'more than 85 percent of killers and their victims are young black men ... [and] where fathers are more rare than health insurance' (Porter 2006). Through this description of the neighbourhood, Porter establishes a semantic connection between absent paternal authorities

and the violent capacities of young black men, a theory of black criminality that recurs throughout different legal and vernacular explanations of crime (Biber 2007, Kelley 1997). During a sermon on gun violence at an African Canadian church in Toronto, a reverend, visiting from Massachusetts, reportedly proclaimed that for this violence to be curbed, 'the Black community has to have a stronger emphasis on the role of fathers' (as cited in Roach 2006).

In Lacanian psychoanalysis fathers are intended to serve a proscriptive function in the genesis of the subject, who they enter into the social order by mediating the imaginary relation between the mother and the child. For Lacan and his disciples (1966), it is only through identification with the father and the Law this position signifies that social subjects can learn to regulate and properly perform their desire (Žižek 1989). By virtue of their phantasmic biological and cultural excesses, black men are thought to be incapable of fulfilling the proscriptive function of the Father, depriving their ('hoards of') offspring of the ability to properly regulate their desire. It was this racial knowledge of criminality that a member of the affected public re-articulated while attending a candlelight vigil for Creba when, according to a *Star* reporter, she lashed out at fathers who 'abandon children who then grow up to seek respect at the end of a gun' (Gombu 2006). In this explanation of putatively black violence, the gun serves as a metaphoric substitution for the absent parental figure, becoming a symbol of the undisciplined masculine excess of the black body. As I illustrate in the next section of the article, the affected public looks to juridical apparatuses of the state to assume the role of the surrogate father and inculcate discipline and civility in these black bodies.

A series of images published after two high profile shootings most vividly convey how racial anxiety about black criminality is displaced onto the gun. In the first image, published immediately after the November shooting of Amon Beckles, a black revolver is pictured pointing at a white hand, which is raised in a recognisably vain attempt to halt its impending discharge (see Figure 4).



Figure 4. 'Gun Cartoon #1' (Toronto Star November 21 2005)  
Reprinted with Permission from Author Tak Bui

Positioned next to an editorial about ineffectual gun laws, the white hand signifies the impotence of the (white) law, which appears wholly unable to stop the black violence symbolised by the gun. One month later, the *Star* printed a similar image after the Boxing Day shooting. In this image, however, the index finger of the white hand is now stuck directly into the shaft of the gun, perhaps signifying the more urgent need to contain violence following the discharge of a black gun onto the body of a young white woman (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. 'Spiking Toronto's Guns' (Toronto Star January 4 2006)  
Reprinted with Permission from Author Tak Bui

In a cartoon printed only a few days later, the impotence of existing gun legislation is further satirised by the image of a black semi-



automatic gun plugged-up with a small white cork that reads 'gun laws'. This sequence of images dramatises the futility of existing laws by presenting it as an apparatus wholly incapable of containing the black violence symbolised by the gun. As I document in the next section of the article, it is precisely these juridical apparatuses of the state that the affected public of Toronto is accustomed to having manage and contain the threat posed by 'untoward' black bodies.

### **The Juridical Preservation of 'Toronto the Good'**

Three days after the Boxing Day shooting the *Star* published a cartoon satirising the eruption of gang violence in one of the city's central consumer districts. In the cartoon a plaque that once read 'Toronto the Good' has been spray-painted to read 'Toronto the Hood'.



Figure 6. 'Toronto the Hood' (Toronto Star December 29 2005)  
Reprinted with permission - Torstar Syndication Services

Synonymous with hip-hop culture, the mode of graffiti pictured above has become a means by which racialised youth can acquire a visible presence in urban spaces from which they are otherwise excluded (Keith 2005, Kelley 1997, Rose 1994). Yet, re-capitulating racial perceptions of graffiti as a harbinger of gang violence, this cartoon configures graffiti as a sign of disorder to dramatises the incursion of violent blackness onto 'Good' civic spaces (Wilson and Taub 2006). By having the word 'Good' signify from behind the graffiti, as a reminder of how the city once was,

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violence is configured as an abject entity that can simply be removed or erased from civic space. Through this analogy the cartoon also mobilises a distinctly racialised spatial imaginary of Toronto, in which its cityscape is differentiated into perceptibly different civil spaces of consumption and (black) spaces of crime and disorder. It is this imaginary of the city that warrants the mobilisation of juridical technologies of the state to manage the threat posed by criminogenic black bodies.

In this political geography of Toronto, the area where Creba was shot is thought to be of universal importance to *the* public of Toronto. During the first weeks after her shooting, politicians at all levels of government bemoaned how this violent act endangered the public body of the city. For instance, while addressing a candlelight vigil for Creba, Toronto Mayor David Miller declared that, ‘Yonge Street is *our street* – it’s like a shooting happening in front of your own house. I think that’s how *everyone* reacted’ (Evans et al 2005, emphasis added). By invoking these tropes of civic universality, Miller invests this space with measures of accessibility and publicity that he denies to the other crime scenes, which are located in more impoverished areas of the city peripheral to the publics he is addressing. According to the racial logics of this geography, such black, peripheral areas of the city are but figments of ‘magical and implosive maps of anarchy and containability where residents are left largely to do almost whatever they find personally profitable or appealing as long as such acts and their material implications ... are confined within strict spatial constraints’ (Goldberg 2002: 178).

At the same vigil, then Leader of the Federal Opposition Stephen Harper more clearly characterised the type of publicity this space is intended to cultivate. Having appropriated the shooting as evidence of the government’s lax criminal justice policies, Harper bemoaned to his audience that ‘this is the second time this year that gunfire has broken out near Dundas Square, a place where students gather, where people walk, where tourists shop’ (Whittington et al 2005). For Harper this area acquires its publicity, not by virtue of its universal accessibility, but rather its capacity to foster different practices of social and spatial mobility. Years earlier, it was precisely this vision of a public space, which could help

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make the area appear safe for consumption, that led civic authorities and business leaders to create Dundas Square in the first place.

Before Dundas Square was unveiled in 2003, the intersection of Yonge Street and Dundas Street housed a number of businesses reputed to attract 'unsavoury' clientele. In fact, the sidewalk outside the Eaton Shopping Centre, which is adjacent to Dundas Square, was notorious as a place where young black men loitered and disrupted shoppers who traversed this space to reach the mall or nearby subway stations. To make the area more hospitable to 'respectable' consumer capital, the Toronto City Council approved the purchase and demolition of these businesses to make way for a public space that would transform the area into one that appears safe for consumption. Analogous to the well-documented recreation of Times Square in New York, the erection of Dundas Square in Toronto was intended to attract putatively 'normal' users of space, who would then displace untoward black and vagrant bodies from the area (Zukin 1996). Although it is oft-regarded as a 'public space', Dundas Square is actually the artifact of a private-public partnership between civic authorities and a number of neighbouring businesses. Thus, despite rhetoric that promotes the accessibility of this space, the business association that owns part of Dundas Square has charged private security with policing the square and ejecting all bodies that disturb the consumer aesthetic of the area. Following the Boxing Day shooting, these histories and practices of racial displacement have been obfuscated as the crime scene is imagined as a place of endangered consumer publicity.

Throughout the news coverage of the shooting, practices of retail consumption are foregrounded as part of the area's natural landscape. For instance, on 27 December 2005 the front page of the *Star* featured an image of paramedics attending to victims in an otherwise familiar scene of consumption (see Figure 7). In fact, the crime scene is identifiable as a Foot Locker Athletics Wear retailer by the black and white striped uniforms worn by the staff, who are visible behind the paramedics.

In that same issue of the *Star*, interviews with people at the crime scene belabour the effect of this shooting on the consumer public. As one shopper complained, 'It screwed up our day. We were out to buy

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a big screen TV, but I guess not anymore' (as cited in Chung 2005). Such practices of consumption even acquire traction in news coverage of the public memorial that formed at the crime scene. In one article in particular, the reading public's attention is brought to a passer-by who is reported to have remarked, 'Oh this is where the girl was shot while carrying a Starbucks Coffee' (as cited in Gombu 2006). Cast against this naturalised scene of consumption, the black bodies cast as the source of this violence are rendered exogenous entities that can be surveilled and expelled using juridical technologies of the state.



Figure 7. 'Seven Shot on Yonge St' (Toronto Star December 27 2005)  
Reprinted with permission - Torstar Syndication Services

In *The Racial State*, David T Goldberg (2002) identifies these twin tasks of surveilling and policing racial difference as the bedrock of contemporary racial governance. Whereas racial difference was once the constitutive outside of European state formations, the prolonged movement toward a 'guarded internalization of race' has elicited 'a new racial governmentality of containability and containment, to enclosing race within' (Goldberg 2002: 166). Like Goldberg, Hesse (2007) accords juridical apparatuses of the state a fundamental role in administering the entrance of racial difference into modern social spaces. Yet, in globalising cities like Toronto, successive waves of (post) colonial migration have repeatedly polluted stable racial geographies, frustrating the surveillant optic upon which racial strategies of policing are premised (Valverde 2007, Keith 2005). Yet, in the wake of the

Boxing Day shooting, it is precisely this 'imaginative geography' (Said 1979) of a city divided into white spaces of civility and black spaces of crime and decay, that sustains 'public' desires to govern and suppress black criminality through the law.

On the one hand, different surveillance technologies are touted as a viable means by which to maintain the consumer publicity of this area. During an interview just days after the shooting in Dundas Square, Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair suggests that, 'it makes sense to expand our use of surveillance cameras in the area. Like a public square, that's our main downtown spot; that's where people come and people need to be assured that they can be safe, CCTV cameras can help in that regard' (as cited in Powell 2005b). Even as he conflates the people who frequent this area with *the* public of Toronto, Blair assumes that mechanisms of surveillance can return civility to the area. Yet, as Herbert and Brown (2006) document, such neoliberal technologies of crime control are premised on the capacity of authorities to effectively differentiate 'criminogenic outsiders' from the 'law-abiding public', a task that invariably results in the deployment of a racial semiotics of criminality (see also Fiske 1998, Goldberg 1997).

On the other hand, the mobilisation of a larger, more visible police presence in this area of Toronto is configured as a reflexive response to the outbreak of violence. Immediately following the shooting, the Yonge Street Business Improvement Association invested an additional \$200,000 to intensify security for the area. One week later, the Ontario government pledged an additional \$51 million for court security and police patrol officers. In a cartoon published less than a week after the Boxing Day shooting, Mayor David Miller — who was criticised throughout the year for not providing funds for more police patrols — is pictured ducking from bullets, forcing him to grudgingly declare 'Okay, Okay ... More cops' (see Figure 8).



Figure 8. 'Drawing Conclusions' (Toronto Star January 1 2006)  
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Black bodies that 'persist' in the downtown core are cast as symptoms of a police failure to properly preserve the desired racial topography of the city. In the week after the shooting, one letter writer to the *Toronto Star* cast these bodies as 'out-of-place' there when she insisted that, 'our police force needs to be better deployed. I rarely see a police presence outside the entrance to the Eaton Centre at Douglas and Yonge Street but that is where many young people hang out and are often quite intimidating because of their sheer numbers' (Dune 2005). While this reader did not explicitly reference the 'race' of these untoward bodies, she nonetheless deployed tropes of racial incivility that dramatise the incapacity of black bodies to obey the aesthetic decorum of public spaces (Goldberg 2002, Rose 1994).

In the spatial imaginary that sustains this circulation of texts, it is the responsibility of legal authorities to contain black bodies in different carceral spaces. In response to the Boxing Day shooting, one member of the affected public bluntly demanded: 'Before anyone else dies let's just get on with job one: sweep the trouble areas, search the prime suspects, round up the guns, and impose harsh, long-sentences' (Rheume 2005). Another letter writer to *The Star* expressed her desire for the incarceration of criminogenic bodies, insisting that those 'lost young men and women'

who live by the gun 'need to be put away for a long time to protect the innocent ones and to send a strong message to young brothers and sisters' (Katz 2006). For both letter writers, the mass incarceration of dangerous, 'wayward' youth appears as the most effective way to return civility to the city of Toronto, a juridical solution that has spawned the mass incarceration of African Americans in the United States (Wacquant 2001).

### **The Ethical Difference(s) that News Can Make**

In her monograph *Precarious Life*, literary theorist Judith Butler (2004) re-imagines public practices of mourning as sites through which to affect global processes of ethico-political transformation. Writing amidst the call for securitisation and compensatory violence that followed the 9/11 attacks on the United States, Butler (2004) insists that such mass-mediated traumatic events provide the opportunity for people across geo-political boundaries to recognise their common corporeal vulnerability. For Butler (2004) such moments of recognition possess the potential to affect an extensive re-organisation of our corporeal and epistemic relationality with others through and across geo-political boundaries. While Butler (2004) acknowledges that publics' capacities for mourning are circumscribed by sociocultural frames of the human, she can ultimately offer no assurance that news of political violence will be consumed beyond the racial knowledges that suffuse many mediums of publicity.

In this article I have illustrated how commercial publicities in the city of Toronto are organised by racisms that conflate particular modalities of blackness with criminogenic potentiality and *actuality*. As I have shown, the recursivity with which the reading public of Toronto is confronted with radically de-contextualised news of local black violence has transformed the phantasmic figure of the armed black body into a threat to civic life itself. Against this backdrop of racial anxiety, the shooting of a young white woman became a symptom of Manichaeian delirium, wherein the boundaries of both good and evil, black and white were plunged into disarray. The crime scene was thereafter imagined as a place of beleaguered consumer publicity, the

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‘reclamation’ of which required juridical technologies of the state to contain and expel the threat of black violence. In this sense, far from generating recognition of our ‘convivial’ vulnerability to others (Gilroy 2006), the public circulation of these violent events propelled calls for the juridical excision of violent blackness from the civil body politic and the forceful (re)inscription of racial boundaries.

For the public mourning of violence to acquire any ethico-political potential, urban publics must come to disassociate from regimes of truth that cast criminal behavior as a symptom of racial proclivities, whether biological or cultural, as Goldberg (2002) argues. In this vein, we must work to excavate and innovate different mediums of ‘counter-publicity’ that respond differently to acts of ‘criminal’ violence. For these media of communication to be both ethically effective and affective, violence visited upon black bodies must not be cast as a predictable consequence of their imagined criminogenic difference, becoming assimilated into a racial ontology that demands the mobilisation of the law. Perhaps tethering news of urban crime to the histories of epistemic and corporeal violence that shape these ‘events’ might affect a transgression of the racial modes of identification explicated throughout this article. Such a ‘radical’ contextualisation of urban crime might also allow violent events to circulate through affective registers that differ from the modulations of fear, anxiety and indignation that animate and suffuse the juridical publicities documented above (Zukin 1996). Without some attention to how this news might circulate otherwise, media of urban publicity will remain virulent conduits for the elaboration of racial exclusions, continuing an all-too-alarming, global movement toward the mass incarceration of impoverished minoritised populations in ghettos and prisons (Hagedorn 2008, Wacquant 2001).

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