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The Dangerous Individual('s) Dog: Race, Criminality and the 'Pit Bull'¹

Erin C. Tarver

Abstract *Though it is generally acknowledged that there is a relationship between racist discourse and the figure of the non-human animal, this relationship is almost always assumed to be analogical: oppressed groups are compared with or treated as non-human animals. But the recent dogfighting case against NFL Quarterback Michael Vick and the attendant suspicion of 'pit bulls' suggests that racism today has a more complex relationship with (certain types of) animals than the analogy would capture. An analysis of this discourse both calls for and revises Foucault's notion of 'the dangerous individual' as an explanatory concept for contemporary racism. The concomitant revulsion toward both dogfighting and 'pit bulls' suggests an expression of fear of a perceived threat to normative whiteness, insofar as these 'dangerous' dogs are figured as carriers of the contagion of racial abnormality.*

Most academic discourse on the relationship between animals, criminality and racism is interested in the justifications of oppression through portrayals of people in marginalised racial or ethnic groups as animal-like. This critical analysis of racist language and practice has extended to suspicion about mainstream animal-rights arguments (see Bailey 2007), which, in the wake of the work of Peter Singer, rely significantly on some version of the charge of 'speciesism' (see Cushing 2003; Calder and Medro 2003; Salih 2007) – the notion that prioritising the welfare of one's own species at the expense of others is a chauvinism akin to racism or sexism (Singer 2009: 6). Critical race theory and anti-racist activists have been uneasy with this version of the analogy, which ostensibly works by turning the traditional racist comparison on its head: it is not that certain people are 'like' animals, and therefore less important; it is that all people are like animals, and thus *animals* are not less important than people, no matter what their racial or ethnic group. The notion that ethical distinctions between humans and non-human animals is arbitrary and unjust is much easier to stomach, critical race theorists and activists have argued, when one has never been in danger of being seen as, or treated like,

¹My title is an homage to Ellen K. Feder's 2007 essay, 'The Dangerous Individual('s) Mother: Biopower, Family and the Production of Race'.

an animal.² Indeed, several ad campaigns for the animal welfare activist group PETA, featuring glossy photos of models in cages, or juxtapositions of enslaved people of colour with photos of animal cruelty, have been critiqued on precisely these grounds (Nocella 2012: 145–46; Julius 2011). Surely, this argument suggests, there is reason to find the comparison between the enslavement and slaughter of humans and the factory farming of animals – as we see vividly in phrases like ‘animal holocaust’ – so deeply offensive.

It is certain, of course, that a principle means of racism’s function, both historically and today, is the insidious comparison of persons or populations with beasts, who are (it seems to go without saying in this discourse) undeserving of the same ethical consideration we extend to full humans. For this reason, suspicion of ethical discourse invoking some version of this comparison seems reasonable. However, it is important that those of us who would resist racism – and perhaps, too, the needless exploitation and suffering of nonhuman animals – take seriously the connections between racist language and practices with (certain varieties of) animality. But one recent example – Michael Vick’s criminal dogfighting case – suggests that the conceptual relation of animals, race and criminality is more complex than a simple analogy. This becomes clear, as I will suggest, particularly in this discourse’s simultaneous concerns with animal *cruelty*, and the threat posed by the animals – ‘pit bulls’ – that were its ostensible victims. In this paper, I draw on Foucault’s account of ‘the dangerous individual’ in order to argue that discourses of racial normalisation function, in the context of dog-fighting-related paranoia, not primarily to equivocate non-white populations with dogs, but to pathologise and criminalise both blackness *and* ‘pit bulls’. Moreover, as I will argue, this co-pathologising suggests a need to expand Foucault’s account of ‘heredity’ as the transmission mechanism of ‘danger’ to include proximity-contagion, if it is to remain useful for conceptualising racism and racialisation in the present North American context.

In 2007, Michael Vick, a star quarterback in the National Football League, was arrested for violating federal prohibitions on dogfighting. Though Vick’s guilty plea to financing the dogfighting ring was accompanied by a not-guilty plea on charges of animal cruelty (which were subsequently dropped), horrific news reports of dogs subjected to starvation, electrocution and hanging were linked to the operation, after which many reporters and fans began to call disgustedly for his imprisonment and expulsion from the NFL. Vick was, indeed, imprisoned for nearly two years, but was later reinstated by the league’s commissioner. His return to play prompted a wave of discourse, particularly from white fans, about the difficulty of rooting for a player who would be involved in such grotesque crimes. Although there was some public support for Vick’s reinstatement – most notably voiced by public figures who are also people of colour, including President Obama, Princeton professor Melissa Harris-Perry, and former NFL coach Tony Dungy (see Bacon 2010; Harris-Perry 2010; Maske 2009) – news outlets from NPR to *The New York Times* to NBC ran stories about fans’ predicament in choosing between supporting ‘their’ teams, or refusing to

²Lucius T. Outlaw was the first person to point this out to me, during a colloquium Q & A at Vanderbilt University.

cheer for a man who 'makes [them] sick' (Miller 2009). Meanwhile, pundit Tucker Carlson suggested that Vick should have been executed for his crimes (a claim he later retracted) (*Hannity* 2010), the website SackVick.com continued to organise anti-Vick protests at Philadelphia Eagles games, and talk-radio callers continued to express sentiments like that voiced by 17-year-old *Talk of the Nation* (NPR) listener, Natasha:

I am appalled that anybody could forgive Michael Vick. He did horrible, horrible things to dogs. And the fact that this guy can say that he would forgive a murderer – that person took someone's life. They took someone's life. . . . And I was a Michael Vick fan – not anymore. And I won't ever forgive him. (*Talk of the Nation* 2010)

I am interested in this sentiment of dis-identification on the part of (mostly white) NFL fans and reporters for two reasons: first, it vastly overshadowed any comparable sentiment toward another – white – quarterback who was also beset by public legal troubles at the same time. Ben Roethlisberger, quarterback for the Pittsburgh Steelers, was arrested before the start of the 2010 season for raping a woman in the restroom of a bar. While the prosecution ultimately dropped the charges out of concern that there was not enough evidence to secure a conviction – Roethlisberger acknowledged having sex with the woman in the restroom, but maintained that it was consensual – the league found the charges disturbing enough to suspend Roethlisberger for six games (although this was subsequently reduced to four). While there was some discomfort expressed by fans and commentators after Roethlisberger returned to play, often via allusions to 'off-the-field issues', these did not rise nearly to the level of the disgust expressed toward Vick. Indeed, although there were off-season reports of fan anger at Roethlisberger's having engaged in behavior that would result in the city of Pittsburgh's 'image [being] tarnished' (Netter 2010), Roethlisberger's return to play was marked by an overwhelmingly warm welcome of fan cheers and team support (Battista 2010). One might, of course, suggest that the comparison of these two incidents reveals much about the extent to which covert racism makes white audiences more sympathetic to white people who break the law while concomitantly demonising people of colour who do so, or the extent to which violence against women is easily swept aside as run-of-the-mill indiscretion – though a thorough explanation of the causal origins of these differences aren't my primary interest here. Moreover, as I will suggest, media and fan concern, in each case, is less with the ostensible 'victims' of these crimes than with what the crimes do or do not indicate about those who commit them. I am concerned, then, with the extent to which the Vick case illustrates the distinctly racialised character of mainstream media and culture's response to violations of the social order. Second – and just as importantly – I am interested in this particular case because of the intensity of the public loathing, and the specific quality of the disgust expressed toward Vick, of whom one reporter from his hometown wrote, 'the reason prisons exist is because of guys like [him]' (Markon 2007).

Complicating matters in this case is the figure of the victimised animal – the 'pit bull' – that at once excites such fervent sympathy *and* fear of

danger. The image of the dogfight is fraught with meaning that goes beyond an interest in treating animals ethically. Indeed, examination of animal cruelty law and policy would suggest that the welfare of individual dogs is not, on the whole, the primary object of concern: as Colin Dayan points out, such policy routinely calls for the extermination of even those dogs that *resemble* fighting ones (2010). And, as I will explain, even organisations ostensibly devoted to animal welfare routinely describe those suspect dogs as menaces to society comparable with Vick himself.

What brings about the sentiment of repulsion or dis-identification toward Vick? As scholars of rhetoric and sports media such as Daniel Grano (2007 and 2010: 255–76) have cogently argued, the practice of sports fandom is instrumental in shaping and reinforcing regional, racial and gendered identities. Though I will not explore the complexities of the process of ‘identification’ involved in being a sports fan here, it should suffice at the moment to say that those, like NPR listener Natasha, who express a difficulty in rooting for Vick are expressing not merely an abstracted ethical judgment, but a claim about themselves – *I cannot bring myself to identify with this person* – or better, an extra-linguistic affect of rejection. (In any case, the role of identification in sports fandom is certainly an area of inquiry that deserves greater attention by theorists and philosophers of sport, particularly those of us interested in the discursive constitution of selves in contemporary, mass-mediated cultures.) Whatever the origins of this dis-identification, they do not appear reducible to an aversion to individual legal transgressions, or with violence, or even cruelty. On the contrary, I would argue that the object of this sentiment is more nebulous – and that it is hinted at in the reporter’s choice of words: *prisons exist because of guys like him*.

Michel Foucault, of course, has much to say about the functions of prisons as disciplinary mechanisms, and it is certain that we could make a fruitful analysis of the prison as disciplinary apparatus for Vick, his fellow prisoners, and so on. But in his later lectures, Foucault also suggests that when we consider the prison in its function within the larger community – and in particular the penal/psychiatric system’s role in containing the dangerous elements of society – its effects can also be understood as contributors to larger ‘mechanisms of security’ (Foucault 2007: 7). Such security mechanisms are aimed not at the disciplining of individual bodies, but at the management of the ‘health’ of the population or society, and thus have as a primary function the identification and containment of those elements within it understood to be ‘dangerous’. In regimes of security, then, imprisonment occurs not primarily for the purpose of punishing, or even for rehabilitating – for, as Foucault suggests, the figure of ‘the dangerous individual’ is precisely that which is incurable: she carries danger in her veins, it seems – but instead, for the purpose of preventing damage to the healthy body of society through the contamination that such danger would surely produce if allowed to run rampant. I am interested, in what follows, to make clear the extent to which the discourse around Michael Vick’s incarceration for dogfighting – and, concomitantly, around pit bulls themselves – is reflective of precisely this normalising concern about the defense of society from perceived dangers to it. My claim, as I will explain, has two important features: first, it depends upon the suggestion that Foucault’s notion of ‘the dangerous individual’ as *the* figure of criminality

functions in our present North American context as a racist and racialised concept³; second, because of the complexity of racialisation in that context, the supporting notion of 'degeneracy' or 'heredity' that Foucault identifies as a necessary conceptual apparatus of normalisation must be understood in a broader sense than direct genetic transmission – and instead, ought to include a kind of heredity by association or contagion.

First, though, I want to make clear why we ought to understand the discourse around Vick to be making normalising use of the notion of the dangerous individual. In *Abnormal*, Foucault argues that the growing involvement of the discipline of psychiatry in juridical discourse in nineteenth century Europe gives rise to a new understanding of *criminality*. The individuals identified by this hybrid juridico-medical discourse as dangerous are 'not exactly ill and . . . not strictly speaking criminal' (Foucault 1999: 34), since the deviance they manifest is not reducible to a simple act of legal violation. This is not to say that 'dangerous individuals' do not commit crimes at all, however. On the contrary, they often do – but such violations are, in normalising discourse, figured as the *manifestations* of an inner essential deviance, which is then purported to be visible in all manner of prior transgressions, from childhood tantrums to dispositions to 'nastiness,' which are then, Foucault says, 'presented as already analogous to the crime' (Foucault 1999: 33). Thus, Foucault suggests, the drive to uncover some undetected latent criminality or danger that can be subsequently understood as causally connected to some particular criminal violation is part and parcel of a discourse of normalisation that is not content to merely punish crimes or discipline criminals – but instead, which is concerned to identify such unsavory elements in order to protect the health of 'good society'. These identifications are instrumental in the consolidation and reproduction of the society.

Ellen K. Feder has persuasively argued that this normalising investigation, which is 'aimed at . . . the individualising of a group against whom the population needs protection' (Feder 2007: 66), continues in earnest in the contemporary United States through federal programs whose aim is to identify individuals 'at risk' for violence – and moreover, that these biopolitical initiatives are crucially instrumental in the 'production of race' (Feder 2007: 62). Indeed, Feder's account of the pathologisation of young poor black men as 'at risk' for violent behavior closely mirrors Foucault's account of the development of the notion of 'the case' as the privileged object of knowledge in mechanisms of security. These mechanisms, he writes, require investigations in order 'to reveal . . . zones of higher risk and, on the other hand, zones of lower risk. This means that *one can identify what is dangerous*' (Foucault 2007: 61; italics mine). In the case of the smallpox epidemic, it is determined that 'it is dangerous to be less than three years old. It is more dangerous to live in the town than in the country' and so on (Foucault 2007: 61). Importantly, Foucault says, this identification of danger does not result in an external prohibition of the phenomena, but instead in a containment effort that seeks to

³My use of the word 'racist' here is intended more narrowly than Foucault's discussion of 'racism against the abnormal' in the closing lecture of *Abnormal*. The consequences of this narrower re-reading are significant, as I will explain below.

effect 'a progressive self-cancellation of phenomena by the phenomena themselves . . . the delimitation of phenomena within acceptable limits' (Foucault 2007: 66). Thus, the 'healthy' or 'normal' population is maintained by allowing the 'dangerous' elements to exist in confined spaces that will – ideally – assist in their own self-destruction.

The discourse around 'the ghetto' as a racialised space linked with criminality and deviance illustrates the extent to which Foucault's analytics of power in nineteenth century France anticipates the pathologising of blackness in the twentieth and twenty-first century United States. Beyond Feder's analysis of the demonisation of so-called 'welfare queens' as carriers of poverty-cum-violence (Feder 2007: 70), the discourse around Michael Vick's dogfighting conviction stands as another example. 'They move out of the ghetto,' the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reports, 'but the ghetto is still in them' (Laucella 2010: 47). Such discourse, as Foucault suggests, not only calls attention to the criminal act or legal violation itself, but locates and/or establishes the *source* of criminality in order to contain its threat of contagion. The perceived importance of this enterprise is visible perhaps most clearly in the NFL's extensive investigation of recruits' backgrounds and 'character' – measured in a battery of tests, including intelligence and psychological evaluations, in addition to individual surveillance and interviews with others acquainted with players' habits and associates – which is regularly assumed to be risky in the cases of black recruits, but not so in the case of white recruits (Grano 2010: 256). That these racialised mechanisms of security are so seamlessly operative in the NFL (an organisation that nevertheless employs African Americans at a much higher rate than the wider United States work force) is indicative of the extent to which 'the ghetto' as racialised space is pathologised as a zone of danger. This danger is not only the 'danger' of the so-called 'bad neighborhood' through which white folks avoid walking or driving (Mills 1997), but a danger of criminalised contagion that, it is suggested, infects its inhabitants, making of them potential criminals or deviants. 'As crime becomes increasingly pathologised', Foucault writes, 'this form of control, assessment, and effect of power linked to the *characterisation of an individual* becomes increasingly active' (1999: 38). With these mechanisms for the detection of the danger of criminality in place, the individual crime of financing a dogfighting ring is posited not merely as a mistake or even serious legal violation, but as proof of a pre-existing danger that ought to have been detected, and to which a narrative of deviance can be retrospectively drawn. Indeed, in the case of Vick, that narrative included a leaked photo of the quarterback smoking what appeared to be a 'blunt', and – as if to ensure the scoring of a Foucaultian trifecta – the accusations of a woman that he was responsible for infecting her with a sexually transmitted disease (Laucella 2010: 51).

Still, in his account of the development of the normalising categories of criminality and deviance as objects of psychiatric (and concomitantly, bio-political) knowledge, Foucault notes that the identification of singular 'dangerous individuals' is not the only or even primary goal. Rather, insofar as this knowledge is to be mobilised in mechanisms of security, it becomes necessary to identify and consolidate the *sources* of that danger:

What kind of body can produce a condition that definitively marks the whole of an individual's body? This gives rise to the need to discover the background-body, so to speak, that by its own causality confirms and explains the appearance of an individual who is the victim, subject, and bearer of this dysfunctional state . . . What is this background-body, this body behind the abnormal body? It is the parents' body, the ancestors' body, the body of the family, the body of heredity. (Foucault 1999: 313)

Foucault thus suggests that the advent of mythico-scientific heredity-based explanations for behavior is directly connected with normalising power – which, he suggests, comes to a particularly ugly head in the eugenics projects of Nazi Germany. Both Feder (2007) and Ladelle McWhorter (2009) have persuasively argued that similar logics have operated in bio-political regulatory mechanisms such as anti-miscegenation laws and differentially distributed access to reproductive technologies, and that these have been centrally instrumental in the reproduction of whiteness and racial hierarchising in North America. I would suggest, however, that this direct, biological understanding of 'heredity' as the mechanism of the transmission of danger or abnormality ought to be supplemented by a broader notion of heredity that can account for the more nebulous uses of this concept in our present context – a context in which, as sociologist Ann Morning reports, popular conceptions of race are (even if ontologically incoherent) less and less likely to be purely biological (2009). This broader understanding of heredity-as-contagion will enable us to make sense of *both* the discourse around Vick (particularly its explanations of criminality) *and* the concomitant treatment of 'pit bulls', which are figured at once as pathetic victims and dangerous potential threats.

'Heredity' is, Foucault argues, already a slippery concept. He writes, 'The causal permissiveness of heredity makes it possible to establish the most fantastic or, anyway, the most supple hereditary networks. Finding a deviant element at any point in the hereditary network will be sufficient to explain the emergence of a condition in an individual descendant' (1999: 314). Such 'causal permissiveness' is demonstrable in contemporary pseudo-scientific genetic explanations, in which everything from alcoholism to xenophobia can be 'gotten from' one's grandparents, uncles and cousins. But it is also, I submit, evident in claims about environmental heredity such as those made about Vick: 'the ghetto is still in him'. There are the less direct statements as well, made by people from league psychologists to sports commentators: some athletes are 'unable or unwilling to put distance between themselves and the thug life' (Williams 2007), having 'unsavory associates' (Judd 2007), often from childhood, who are dangerous. These friends from their former lives, the story goes, should really just be 'cut . . . loose' (Williams 2007), because, while 'no one is saying athletes should forget where they come from . . . as a sports star's fame and wealth increase, so does the number of people watching his every move. If he's not careful, it can all fall apart . . .' (Laucella 2010: 58). The implicit claim, then, is that the contagion of criminality one can inherit from growing up in the 'ghetto' results in the pathologising of all those associated with it, through a kind of proximity-transmission. It thus becomes crucial, according to this racist discourse, to separate oneself from

one's former life, lest contact with the zone of dangerousness result in infection of the rest of the social body.

This logic becomes comprehensible if we read Foucault's account of the pathologising of the abnormal in light of Charles Mills' claim that the racist structure of the social body 'races space' itself, such that everything from individuals to music is racialised (Mills 1997: 41ff). The zone of dangerousness thus may be carried not only in the bodies of individuals or populations, but in the environments, artifacts, practices – and animals – associated with them. Thus, we learn from reports surrounding the Vick case *both* that dogfighting constitutes 'one of the lowest forms of savagery in modern society' (Rhoden 2007) *and* that the dogs victimised by such 'savagery' are themselves '*bred as killing machines*' (USA Today 2007: 10A; italics mine). This is not to say that the practices involved in dogfighting are not cruel – on the contrary, I would suggest that the starving, drugging or beating of dogs to incite them to fight is act of reprehensible cruelty. It is, however, telling to note the difference between Americans' general response to the cruelty of dogfighting, and the cruelty of, say, the making of *foie gras*, which requires the (equally horrific) force-feeding ducks through metal tubes in their gullets until their livers become enlarged. *Foie gras* is routinely served as a delicacy in high-end North American restaurants, and though it is officially banned in some locales, this ban is almost never enforced. More importantly, the cruelty involved in its production is *never* met with the level of outrage on the part of the general public produced by the Vick dogfighting case – indeed, it is often not registered *as* cruelty at all. As geographers Elder, Wolch and Emel have pointed out, this apparent inconsistency is all too common: 'Specific human-animal interactions that are legitimised and rationalised over time, become accepted as civilised behavior. Those who do not stay within this repertoire, however, fall over . . . into the netherworld of savagery' (Elder, Wolch and Emel 1998: 195). It is not surprising, then, that the making of *foie gras* is not on the whole met with the suggestion that those involved – whether humans or ducks – are dangers to society. *Foie gras* is a delicacy associated with wealthiest members of mainstream (white) American culture.

This is in stark contrast to the general social comportment to the parties involved in dogfighting rings. Dogs confiscated from fighting operations – or even those suspected of being part of a fighting operation, often because their breed – are figured as such a threat that they are routinely (and often summarily) euthanised, often without investigation or due process (Dayan 2010). This includes such egregious cases as the seizure and killing of 57 'pit bulls', including 19 puppies, by the Louisiana LSPCA in 2005, as part of a sting operation of a kennel that turned out *not* to be a dogfighting ring (Dayan 2010). In the Vick case, both the Humane Society and PETA – organisations whose mission is animal welfare – recommended that all of the 50 'pit bull' dogs confiscated from Bad Newz kennels be euthanised (Gorant 2008).

But it is not only those dogs immediately caught up in suspected fighting operations that are figured as carrying the contagion of criminality. The specter of the 'pit bull' looms large in the discourse around dogfighting: this breed is, as major news organisations sensationally put it, a 'killing machine' and a 'time bomb on legs' (Brand 1987). It also, according to the American Kennel

Club, does not exist – the 'pit bull' as such is not a registered breed; most dogs known in the popular consciousness as pit bulls are American Staffordshire Terriers, or Staffordshire Bull Terriers, or just some combination of canine genetics that resembles an Ideal Pit Bull. As Marjorie Garber puts it, "Everyone knows" and "no one knows" what a "pit bull" is. Everyone knows, and no one knows, that "they" are dangerous' (Garber 1997: 194). Because of the difficulty of isolating this 'they', many of the growing number of local governments issuing breed-specific 'pit bull' bans include language indicating that the law covers any dog thought to embody the physical characteristics of a 'pit bull', regardless of pedigree.⁴ An anti-'pit bull' ordinance in Dade County, Florida, for example, specifies that any dog that 'substantially conforms' to a set of characteristics associated with the above-mentioned breeds will be counted as a pit bull, and moreover, that the affirmative expert testimony of 'a veterinarian, zoologist, animal behaviorist, or animal control officer' that such an animal is a pit bull will constitute a 'rebuttable presumption' of this fact (Garber 1997: 194–95). Interestingly, as Colin Dayan points out, this 'breed'-specific danger is a comparatively recent development, as Staffordshire Terriers were, in the early twentieth century, depicted as prototypical American pets, appearing everywhere from RCA and Buster Brown ads to *The Little Rascals* (Dayan 2010). In the 1980s, however, when reports surfaced connecting dog bite attacks by 'pit bulls' to gang violence by urban youths (Huemer 2000, Applebome 1987, Sager 1987), the dogs themselves began to be figured as carriers of the contagion of criminality. This image was, it seems, propped up at least in part by the association of 'pit bulls' with the hip-hop music scene⁵ – itself a strongly racialised genre in the United States, and, arguably, abroad: a law passed in France in 2000 created canine police units whose primary responsibility was to monitor the behavior of pit bulls and other 'attack dogs' in French housing projects occupied primarily by non-white people (particularly of Arab descent); the popularity of the 'dangerous' dogs in these sectors was ascribed to the influence of the culture of 'urban ghettos' and 'Afro-American lifestyles' in the United States through the transatlantic influence of hip-hop music (Aidi 2004).

It is important to note, moreover, that while the 'causal permissiveness' of the concept of heredity is quite saliently exploited in the case of the 'pit bull', this is made possible by the notion of a *breed as such*. As John Borneman famously demonstrated in his comparative analysis of American and continental European light-horse breeding, breed classifications in general are contingent human categories masquerading as natural ones: breed names are 'first taken from human categories and then projected onto animal classifications' (Borneman 1988: 48). Thus, their primary function is thus revealed in

⁴Nashville, Tennessee is one example, banning the presence of dogs which resemble pit bulls in public parks. The province of Ontario likewise bans the breeding of 'pit bulls' and prohibits any dog classified (presumably by border guards) as a 'pit bull' from being brought into the province.

⁵Pit bulls' have figured prominently in music videos and albums released by several major hip-hop artists in the past 20 years, including Jay-Z, DMX, and Bow Wow. Another hip-hop artist (Armando Christian Pérez) goes by the stage name 'Pitbull'.

'naturalising and legitimating the social order about which they speak' (Borneman 1988: 47). Breed designations, sometimes requiring the documentation of lineage, sometimes the 'correct' physical features or gait – but *always* requiring investigation and certification by an authorised credentialing body – thus purport to signify heredity as simply *given*, but do so through a complex system of knowledge production. The fact that the 'pit bull' is not a recognised breed, but a generic 'type' – which one presumably knows when one sees it – makes the 'pit bull,' as a hereditary figure, even more malleable, subject to various forms of knowledge production, both within and without authorised governing bodies.

As the specter of the monstrous pit bull is reiterated and reinforced, association with the dogs themselves comes to mark its owners as sociopathic deviants. One study of every *New York Times* article published between 1987 and 2000 on pit bull owners, for example, found that they consistently portrayed such individuals as thuggish and unsympathetic (Cohen and Richardson 2002). Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, a 2000 study found that some pit bull owners intentionally misrepresent their dogs' "breed" in order to avoid the stigma associated with it (Twining, Arluke and Patronek 2000). Interestingly, during the same period as the uptick in media reporting on pit bulls and their owners, journalists popularised the use of a new term, 'wilding' to describe the criminal violence of 'packs' (or sometimes, 'wolfpacks') of black and Latino youth (Welch, Price and Yankey 2002). A metonymic feedback-loop thus comes to characterise the relationship between pit bulls, blackness and the perception of criminality – a relationship which, if Robin James is correct, functions at least in part to set these dogs up as a proxy for the black men that municipalities would *like* to legislate against, but cannot (James forthcoming). The contagion that makes this relationship possible works not through traditional heredity, but proximity and association. This will not surprise critical race theorists, who have long suggested that the scientific untenability of biological explanations of race poses no real threat to racist thinking. Summing up the content of racist ideology in the racing of space – particularly 'the ghetto' – Charles Mills writes, 'You are what you are in part because you originate from a certain kind of space, and that space has those properties in part because it is inhabited by creatures like yourself' (Mills 1997: 42). We could aptly apply a variation on Mills' account to precisely this relationship: 'you are what you are in part because of your dangerous dogs, and those dogs have that property in part because they are kept by creatures like yourself'.

With this broader notion of heredity or contagion in mind, Foucault's analysis of the normalising functions of the dangerous individual – or, we might add, of the dangerous individual(s) dog – are chillingly prescient. It is not *only* that the 'racism against the abnormal' (Foucault 1999: 316) constitutes an oppressive norm, whether that norm is psychiatric health or racial whiteness. It is also that, insofar as the norm is deployed in the service of mechanisms of security, it functions, as Foucault puts it, 'to justify the existence of a sort of protective continuum throughout the social body ranging from the medical level of treatment to the penal institution strictly speaking, that is to say, the prison and, *if it comes to it, the scaffold*' (Foucault 1999: 38). It is thus not altogether surprising that at least one national news anchor

suggested that Vick ought to be executed for his crimes (Zirin 2010). We ought, then, to take seriously the relationship between claims like those of PETA director Ingrid Newkirk – ‘we can only stop killing pits if we stop creating new ones’ (Huemer 2000: 32) – and the suggestion that ‘prisons exist because of guys like Michael Vick’. Not because unethical treatment of dogs is analogous to racist treatment of humans, but because the racist function of normalisation pathologises and criminalises them both.

Epilogue

Contrary to the recommendations of some fans, Tucker Carlson, PETA and the Humane Society, both Vick and (most of) his dogs are, today, alive and well. In contrast with typical practice, most of Vick’s dogs were not killed, but were ‘rescued’ by two organisations dedicated to rehabilitating the ‘pit bull’ image: BADRAP (Bay Area Doglovers Responsible About Pitbulls) and Best Friends Animal Society. Having been granted permission by the judge in Vick’s case to attempt to rehabilitate and rehome the majority of the dogs, the BADRAP and Best Friends have relocated and worked to re-socialise them into (mainstream) human and dog society (Gorant 2008; Wittenauer 2008). By all accounts, they have been successful, and many of the dogs are, today, kept as pets in individual homes.

What does this mean for the analysis of Vick, and his dogs, as paradigmatic dangerous individuals? It means, most importantly, taking seriously the ‘causal permissiveness’ of the notion of heredity-as-contagion, or heredity through the association of racialised space. It is significant that Vick’s dogs had to be removed from their associated locales, taken across the country by animal-rescue organisations – founded and staffed primarily by middle to upper-middle class white people – to rural Utah and San Francisco, in order to be cleared of the contagion of danger. Similarly, it is significant that, after his release, Vick was castigated for attending ‘a birthday party in his honor in Virginia Beach [near his hometown] that he should never have attended, given the guest list, [where] a former co-defendant got shot’ (Bisinger 2010). In each case, the contagion of dangerousness can be escaped only through dissociation with its supposed hereditary origins, which may, nevertheless, threaten to re-emerge. A constant vigilance in the opposite direction, and a performance of significations indicating that the danger has been excised, is called for. Surveillance of those suspected of being carriers of dangerousness – unlike mere perpetrators of individual criminal acts, like Roethlisberger – extends to that which would otherwise appear mundane, or insignificant. Most telling, then, is the case of Hector, a former Vick dog rehomed in San Francisco, whose foster owner proudly told the *Associated Press*, ‘I put on Yo-Yo Ma one day, and he cocked his head, laid down, and listened to the cello next to the speaker . . . He’s turning out to be a man of high class and culture’ (Wittenauer 2008).

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