

Monster-Making:
Narrative/Metanarrative in the Representation of Aileen Wuornos

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The story of women who kill is the story of women.
—Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill*¹

¹ (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), xvi.

PREFACE

Aileen “Lee” Carol Wuornos, forty-six, died of a lethal injection at Florida State Prison on October 9, 2002. She was the fifty-second person executed since Florida’s reinstatement of the death penalty and the third female execution in the state’s history.²

Eight hundred and five prisoners have been put to death in the United States since 1976, more than half since 1997.³ In response to the increase in state killings, the American public has grown less interested in death penalty cases. As a result, news coverage of executions has become inconspicuous. Wuornos’s execution, however, offered the media the opportunity to recount her final hours for an eager audience. The public was informed that she declined her last meal and spent the night reading the Bible, listening to the radio, and meeting with documentary filmmaker Nick Broomfield and with her lifelong friend Dawn Botkins.⁴ Botkins told correspondents, “She was looking forward to being home with God and getting off this Earth. She prayed that the guys she killed are saved.... She was more than willing to go. It was what she wanted.”⁵

Florida Governor Jeb Bush signed her death warrant on October 2, 2002, after psychiatrists found Wuornos competent for execution. Her death was timely—a month before Bush’s gubernatorial re-election bid—and controversial as well: four months prior, the Supreme Court ruled that only juries should decide whether to sentence inmates

² In 1998, Judi Buenoano went to the electric chair for killing her husband and son and attempting to kill her fiancé. The first woman executed in Florida was a slave named Celia who was hung in 1848 for murdering her master. John-Thor Dahlburg, “Serial Killer’s Life Still Intrigues on the Eve of Her Death,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 October 2002. Accessed through LexisNexis on 23 October 2002.

³ Tracy Snell and Laura M. Maruschak, “Capital Punishment, 2002,” November 2003, <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/cp02.pdf>> (20 February 2004).

⁴ Broomfield directed the 1992 documentary *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer* and conducted Wuornos’s last interview for its sequel, *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2004).

⁵ Paul Pinkham, “Damsel of Death’ Aileen Wuornos Executed,” *The Florida Times-Union*, 10 October 2002. Accessed through LexisNexis on 23 October 2002.

to death.⁶ In Florida, judges make the decision after a recommendation from the trial jury. However, the Supreme Court's ruling did not prevent Wuornos's execution because she confessed more than ten years before, volunteered for execution, and fired her appeal lawyers.⁷

Her cryptic final statement was, "I'd just like to say I'm sailing with the Rock and I'll be back like *Independence Day* with Jesus, June 6, like the movie, big mother ship and all. I'll be back."⁸ After an injection of potassium chloride, Wuornos took sporadic shallow breaths, and her skin slowly turned ashen. She was pronounced dead at 9:47 a.m.

Terri Griffith, a daughter of one of the victims, told reporters, "She got an easy death. A little too easy.... I think she should have suffered a little bit more. Use the electric chair. Let her legs kick and smoke come out of her ears."⁹

⁶ "Court Overturns More Than 150 Judge-Imposed Death Sentences," 24 June 2002, <<http://www.truthinjustice.org/ring.htm>> (16 March 2004).

⁷ "Gov. Bush Sets Execution Dates for Two Inmates," *The Gainesville Sun*, 6 September 2002, <<http://www.cuadp.org/news/sept6.html>> (2 April 2004).

⁸ It is unknown what she meant by her reference to June 6.

⁹ Rich McKay, "'I'll Be Back,' Serial Killer Declares Before Her Execution; Grin, Final Words Puzzle Witnesses," *San Diego Union Tribune*, 10 October 2002. Accessed through LexisNexis on 23 October 2002.

INTRODUCTION

On July 4, 1990, a car careened off State Road 315 near Orange Springs, Florida, and smashed into a fence. Rhonda Bailey, who witnessed the accident from her front porch with her husband and cousin, said that two women exited the vehicle: one, a redhead, the other, a blonde whose arm was bleeding from the broken windshield. The blonde ripped the license plate from the front bumper and tossed it into the nearby woods. Upon noticing Bailey watching her, the blonde woman warned her not to call the police. The two women then drove the car further down the road, abandoning it with a flat tire shortly afterwards. Later that day, Marion County sheriff's deputies discovered that the car belonged to Peter Siems, a sixty-five-year-old retired merchant seaman, who had not been seen since June 22. Siems left his home in Jupiter, Florida, to visit relatives in Arkansas and was reported missing when he did not reach his destination.

Witnesses to the accident described the women to a sketch artist, adding that the blonde might have a heart tattoo on one of her biceps.¹⁰



Detective John Wisnieski of the Jupiter Police Department wrote a report on the suspects' appearances and distributed it to local newspapers and television stations.¹¹

¹⁰ The sketches are from Dolores Kennedy with Robert Nolin, *On a Killing Day* (Chicago: Bonus Books, 1992), n. pag. Wuornos's partner, Tyria Moore, supposedly had the tattoo.

¹¹ Michael Reynolds, *Dead Ends* (New York: Warner, 1992), 59-60.

Two [white females] who appeared to be lesbians were seen exiting the vehicle and leaving southbound on foot. Suspect #1 [white female] 25-30 [years of age] 5'8"/130 [pounds] [blonde hair] [unknown eye color] wearing blue jeans with some type of chain hanging from front belt loop, [white] t-shirt with sleeves rolled up to shoulder. Subject #2 [white female] 20's 5'4"-5'6"/very overweight and masculine looking w/ [dark red] hair, wearing gray shirt and red shorts....

This description raises several questions. How exactly did these women “appear to be lesbians”? The first suspect may have been perceived as a butch lesbian because she seemed to be wearing a chain wallet, typically worn by working-class men. The second suspect was “very overweight” and “masculine looking.” The latter description is vague: did her physicality (short hair, a cap, and excess weight) imply maleness to her viewers? Regardless, Wisnieski’s descriptors of the second woman indicate that she did not look like a conventional woman and suggest that these women were suspicious not only for driving a missing man’s vehicle, but also for seemingly subverting the feminine ideal.

The perpetrators were later revealed to be Aileen Wuornos and her partner Tyria Moore. In 1991, Wuornos confessed to killing seven men she met while working as a prostitute along Florida’s highways. Subsequently, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), followed by the police, the prosecution, and the media, dubbed her the first female serial killer in American history. The label was patently false—women have committed serial homicide in the past, in the United States and elsewhere—yet it was promoted with little question as to its veracity.

The Wisnieski report is just one example of the media’s contribution to Wuornos’s master narrative as America’s first female serial killer. Public narratives form within discourse and are assembled from oral and printed material, radio, television, film, and music. By reporting, the media makes a complicated series of events comprehensible, and its authors and audiences subsequently both create and interpret the

narrative's meaning.¹² In other words, the discourse about Wuornos formed a narrative, which told the story, and a metanarrative, which explained the story, simultaneously. What emerged from this narrative was the understanding that Wuornos's representational labels (white trash, lesbian, prostitute) were overemphasized to detract from the social circumstances that produced a serial killer like her. In examining the narrative, the "truth" of the events leading up to Wuornos's murders is less important as the discourse of these events; Wuornos the subject becomes more central to the narrative than Wuornos the person.¹³ Her representation may be examined to discover her larger cultural meaning during her particular time and place in history.

Raised in a media saturated culture, Wuornos was keenly aware of her representation. In a 1991 *Orlando Sentinel* article, she asserted, "The media has discredited me so much, making me look like a creep. I'm not a man-hater.... I am a decent person."¹⁴ Similarly, while waiving her right to be present for sentencing in her later trials, Wuornos addressed her speech:

to the public, to all the people of the world, and to the news personnel...that have stated defamations and mendacious lies...to vile my character, make me look like a monster and deranged or something like a Jeffrey Dahmer, which I'm not.¹⁵

¹² The media is defined as a means of communication that produces artifacts for the consumer through television, radio, and film, and forms closely associated with the media such as advertisements, magazines, and popular music. "High art" has been excluded from the scope of this analysis, such as Carla Lucero's opera *Wuornos* and art exhibitions that have examined images of Wuornos, most notably "Murder As Phenomena," organized by Rupert Jenkins at San Francisco Camerawork (1992) and "Deadly Responses: Murder and Suicide by Women," organized by Betti-Sue Hertz at the Longwood Arts Gallery, Bronx, New York (1996) among others.

¹³ Murder is a subcategory of homicide, which also includes manslaughter, deaths from criminal negligence, or other similar crimes. Although a legal distinction is made between homicide, murder, and killing, these words will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

¹⁴ John Bankston, "Florida Shocked by Case of Lesbian Accused of Serial Murders," *Advocate*, 21 May 1991, 51.

¹⁵ C. Carr, "Making a Killing," *Mirabella*, March 1994, 76.

To a woman interested in producing a movie about her life, Wuornos simply pleaded, “Please don’t make me a monster.”¹⁶ With these statements, Wuornos attempted to defend and humanize herself by employing the media, the same means that had disparaged her.

The narratives about Wuornos revealed the instability of social identity and the anxiety it causes, as illustrated in the discourse explaining how she was both a prostitute and a lesbian. Prostitutes service the intimate needs of their customers, and lesbians do not have sex with men, yet Wuornos engaged in romantic, emotional, and sexual relationships with both sexes. While she lived with Tyria Moore, to whom she referred as her wife, she serviced male customers as a prostitute. Her sexuality could not be clearly denoted and became a source of tension in her narrative.

At the same time, Wuornos’s class identity affected her representation. She was marked as “white trash,” a term that marginalizes poor whites whose behaviors, appearances, or lifestyles do not conform to dominant white culture. Her white trash status was viewed as a motivation behind her crimes, as the media cited her mental state and sexuality as evidence of guilt, as well as alleging that her propensity for violence was inherited.

Another way Wuornos threatened social identity was in her choice of victims: white, heterosexual, working- and middle-class men. As a supposedly white trash, lesbian prostitute, she would be the more likely victim; the men’s profiles were a closer fit to those of serial killers than her’s.¹⁷ In the discourse surrounding her crimes, the

¹⁶ Mark MacNamara, “Kiss and Kill,” *Vanity Fair*, September 1991, 104.

¹⁷ I use the term “customer” rather than “date,” “john,” or “trick” to highlight the economic aspect of prostitution.

media tried to explain how this reversal of roles could have happened. For example, narratives about Wuornos stated that she was not a respectable woman because she was white trash. Similarly, she was not a moral woman because she was a prostitute. As a lesbian, she was not even a *real* woman. The combined descriptors of white trash, prostitute, and lesbian compounded the threat posed by Wuornos. Through her representation, Wuornos was essentially convicted twice: once for the crimes she committed and again for the threat she posed to the dominant culture.

MAKING MONSTERS

If someone had wanted to learn more about serial homicide as Wuornos's execution loomed, they may have discovered these texts in the criminology section of their local library, among other books with equally salient titles:

*The Killers Among Us: An Examination of Serial Murder and its Investigation*¹⁸
*Overkill: Mass Murder and Serial Killing Exposed*¹⁹
*Serial Killers: The Growing Menace*²⁰
*Serial Murder: An Elusive Phenomenon*²¹

Centered on the exploits of individuals such as Ted Bundy, John Wayne Gacy, Henry Lee Lucas, and Richard Ramirez, these books horrified and disgusted their readers, at the same time striking a chord within humanity's fascination with its own potential for darkness. Their titles alone framed multiple murder as a "growing" and "elusive" trend, one that must be controlled before it further damages the social order.

The books reflected the moral panic about serial killers that occurred as Wuornos met the public eye. A moral panic is the process by which the media and certain political, cultural, and bureaucratic groups mobilize public opinion to turn a minor social phenomenon into a major issue that furthers the groups' agendas.²² Historian Philip Jenkins, in *Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide*, contends that the Justice Department, by virtue of its power and access to the media, created a moral panic about serial murder in the 1980s and 1990s. Most notably, the FBI, a division of the department, announced in the early 1980s that serial killers might be responsible for up to

¹⁸ Steven A. Egger (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998).

¹⁹ James Alan Fox and Jack Levin (New York: Dell, 1996).

²⁰ Joel Norris (London: Arrow, 1988).

²¹ Steven A. Egger (New York: Praeger, 1990).

²² For further information about moral panics, see Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: Thirtieth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Routledge, 2002) and Erich Gooße and Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1994).

five thousand murders a year in the United States, which would account for a quarter of all annual homicides.²³ However, it was later shown that this extraordinarily high estimate was based upon a willful misreading of the statistics.²⁴ Robert Ressler, a retired behaviorist and criminologist with the FBI, even admitted to intentional misrepresentation in his career memoir. "In feeding the frenzy," wrote Ressler, "we were just using an old tactic in Washington, playing up the problem as a way of getting Congress and the higher-ups in the executive branch to pay attention to it."²⁵ Jenkins notes that the department created a serial killer epidemic to re-establish its diminished credibility, gain national jurisdiction over crimes, and garner more federal assistance in tracking, arresting, and convicting serialists.²⁶

This is a partial explanation, because media campaigns succeed in creating panic only if the public accepts its threatening claims. Jenkins indicates two periods, 1983-1985 and 1991-1992, when the serial homicide moral panic peaked with the help of diverse ideological causes.²⁷ To conservatives, the serial killer represented cultural decadence and collapsing morality. At the other end of the spectrum, advocacy groups for women, minorities, homosexuals, and children promoted their own agendas by citing homicides in which members of their respective groups were victims.

Regardless of political orientation, each faction referred to serial killers as

²³ Norris, 33.

²⁴ The department, after reviewing multicides from 1977 to 1991, found that the actual threat of victimization from serial killers is at most one percent of homicides in the United States. Philip Jenkins, *Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide*, Social Problems and Social Issues, ed. Joel Best (New York: Aldine De Gruyter, 1994), 28, 61.

²⁵ Robert Ressler and Tom Shachtman, *Whoever Fights Monsters* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 203.

²⁶ Jenkins, 55-57.

²⁷ Jenkins, 63-67, 74-77.

“monsters.”²⁸ By definition, a monster is an imaginary creature that inspires horror or disgust. The word signifies abnormality, deviance, and excessiveness, and it originates from the Latin *monstrare* meaning “to point to” and *monere* meaning “to warn.” In the context of a moral panic, monsters serve as cultural warnings and point to societal problems. Scholar Edward J. Ingebreetsen’s *At Stake: Monsters and the Rhetoric of Fear in Public Culture* maps a formula for creating and destroying society’s monsters: the monster is identified; the monster is analyzed; and the monster is exorcised.²⁹ In this process, monsters show society by inversion what normal is, or should be. Jenkins agrees, arguing that serial killers “provide a means for society to project its worst nightmares and fantasies, images that in other eras or other regions might well be fastened onto supernatural or imaginary folk-devils.”³⁰ Society casts its anxieties about class, gender, race, and sexual orientation onto Wuornos’s representation. The monster narrative was constructed to allow society to distance itself from the supposedly unnatural Wuornos and from the historical and cultural context of her crimes.

RELEVANT EVENTS OF 1991-1992

Wuornos’s arrest coincided with what Jenkins indicates as the second period of the serial killer moral panic, 1991-1992. During these years, interest in Wuornos’s case was maintained by trial coverage on the cable television network Court TV and by features on the news (*Dateline NBC*), tabloid programs (*A Current Affair*, *Inside Edition*),

²⁸ In addition to the 2004 Wuornos film *Monster*, media products about serial killers with “monster” in their titles include Robert Ressler’s *I Have Lived in the Monster* (1998) and *Whoever Fights Monsters* (1992) and the CNN documentary *Monsters Like Us* (1993).

²⁹ (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 8. In Wuornos’s case, the three-step formula is explicit in the subtitle of Michael Reynold’s true crime book *Dead Ends: The Pursuit, Conviction, and Execution of Female Serial Killer Aileen Wuornos, The Damsel of Death* (New York: St. Martin’s, 2004).

³⁰ Jenkins, 112-113.

and talk shows (*The Montel Williams Show*).³¹ CBS broadcast the made-for-TV movie *Overkill: the Aileen Wuornos Story* in November 1992, and Nick Broomfield's independent documentary *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer* was released later that same year. In addition, several other events exacerbated the panic and made Wuornos's case particularly attractive to the media.

The FBI reported that 1991 marked an alarming increase in American murder rates.³² As the homicide rate doubled from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, it peaked in 1980 at 10.2 victims per 100,000 citizens, or 23,040 murders, and subsequently decreased. It rose to its zenith in 1991 of 10.5 per 100,000, or 24,700 murders. The rate held until 1994, when it declined to 5.5 per 100,000, or 15,517 murders, by 2000. Additionally, statistics indicated a trend of increasing violence perpetrated by women and an overall narrowing of the gap between female and male violence.³³

Furthermore, 1991 was marked by grisly crimes that received considerable press. Danny Rolling, who mutilated five college students at the University of Florida at Gainesville, was still at large.³⁴ On July 23, police discovered body parts in the apartment of Milwaukee resident Jeffrey Dahmer, who later confessed to murdering seventeen men and boys.³⁵ Claims of necrophilia and cannibalism further sensationalized the story. Months later, on October 16, George Hennard killed twenty-two people and

³¹ Phyllis Chesler, "A Woman's Right to Self-Defense: The Case of Aileen Carol Wuornos," *Patriarchy: Notes of an Expert Witness* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994), 153.

³² James Alan Fox and Marianne W. Zawtiz, "Long Term Trends and Patterns: Homicide Trends in the United States," 21 November 2002, <<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/homicide/homtrnd.htm>> (23 February 2004).

³³ Henry H. Brownstein, *The Social Reality of Violence and Violent Crimes* (Needham Heights, Massachusetts: Pearson Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 99.

³⁴ For more information on Rolling, see John Philpin and John Donnelly, *Beyond Murder: The Inside Account of the Gainesville Student Murders* (New York: Onyx Books: 1994).

³⁵ For a postmodern analysis of Dahmer's crimes, see Richard Tithcott, *Of Men and Monsters: Jeffrey Dahmer and the Construction of the Serial Killer* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997).

wounded twenty-three in a Texas cafeteria during the worst mass murder in American history.³⁶

Motivated by these events, the Senate passed Bill 266, an anti-crime omnibus that threatened state autonomy in criminal prosecutions and sentencing. It included limits on federal court reviews of prisoner appeals, the addition of nearly fifty felonies punished by the death penalty, and broader standards on the admissibility of evidence seized by the police.

These measures also reinforced the power of the police, who were under scrutiny at the time. In 1992, four Los Angeles policemen were acquitted for charges connected to the Rodney King beating, a verdict that inspired widespread rioting. That same year, law-enforcement organizations threatened to boycott Time Warner after one of its record labels released rapper Ice T's song "Cop Killer," whose lyrics blatantly advocated violence towards the police.

Similarly, issues of gender and sexual orientation pervaded the public discourse, such as the Tailhook scandal, the Anita Hill hearings, battles for gay rights, and attacks against abortion facilities.³⁷ The success of the 1991 film *Thelma and Louise*, the story of two women's retaliation against abusive men, may have inadvertently fueled Wuornos's publicity as well; one *Vanity Fair* article referred to Wuornos's case as "a dark version of *Thelma and Louise*."³⁸

³⁶ For more information on Hennard, see Elinor and Jason Karpf, *Anatomy of a Massacre* (Waco, Texas: WRS, 1994).

³⁷ During a Las Vegas convention of the U.S. Navy aviators' Tailhook Association, fourteen female naval officers and twelve female civilians reported being sexually abused by drunken navy pilots. Anita Hill brought allegations of sexual harassment against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, calling national attention to the issue of sexual harassment.

³⁸ MacNamara, 91.

AMERICA'S FIRST FEMALE SERIAL KILLER?

In the discourse written before or during her first trial, Wuornos is promoted as the first female serial killer in American history. Although the label sold many media accounts of Wuornos's life and crimes to a titillated audience, it does not withstand scrutiny.

According to the definition developed by the FBI, a serial killer is a person who murders in "three or more separate events in three or more separate locations with an emotional cooling-off period between homicides."³⁹ Wuornos fits this description, but an overview of criminology reveals that she is only one of many homicidal women. Depending on the criteria used, ten to seventeen percent of serial killers are female.⁴⁰ One encyclopedia profiles more than eighty female serial killers who acted alone or with female partners, several who killed ten to twenty victims.⁴¹ Prevailing theories during the moral panic profiled serial killers as white men in their thirties or forties who kill young women, often prostitutes, or other low-status individuals whose deaths attract little notice from the police.⁴² Since this conceptual frame of killer and victim is repeated by the media, any serialist who differs from this construction is not considered a real serial killer, but an aberration like Wuornos.

³⁹ John E. Douglas, Ann W. Burgess, Allen G. Burgess, and Robert K. Ressler, *Crime Classification Manual* (New York: Lexington Books, 1992), 20-21. Although the terms "serial killer" and "mass murderer" are often used synonymously, criminologists distinguish the two. A mass murderer is an individual who kills people in a single incident, whereas serial killers murder them over a prolonged period.

⁴⁰ Jenkins claims ten to fifteen percent (151). Criminologist Candice Skrapec claims seventeen percent. "The Female Serial Killer," *Moving Targets*, ed. Helen Birch (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 243.

⁴¹ Kerry Segrave, *Women Serial and Mass Murderers: A Worldwide Reference, 1580 through 1990* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1992).

⁴² Law enforcement agencies often apply the acronym NHI ("no humans involved") to the homicides of prostitutes, indicating their disregard of the victims' humanity. Elizabeth Sisco, in *Critical Condition: Women on the Edge of Violence*, ed. by Amy Scholder (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1993), 42.

When Wuornos was characterized falsely as the first female serial killer, the ordinal adjective implied that more would follow. Sergeant Robert Kelley of the Volusia County Sheriff's Office, who was involved in Wuornos's investigation, remarked, "Now women are just as capable of being predators," implying that contemporary women are becoming empowered to kill.⁴³ Similarly, a *Psychology Today* article about violent women, written shortly after Wuornos confessed, asked its readers, "Women are becoming more stereotypically male in their reasons for murdering.... Have they taken 'women's liberation' one step too far—or are they just showing their natural killer instinct?"⁴⁴ By posing this query, the article assumes that a perceived increase in homicidal women is a result of a movement toward gender equality. It also implies that murder is a gendered act and that "liberated" women will act violently like men or their natural inclination to kill will surface. Both arguments are spurious, but the article's question indicates that some criminal profilers believe men and women kill differently.

Criminologists of the serial killer moral panic, as well as the media, believed that women commit serial murder as black widows who kill their husbands, lovers, or family members in the home or angels of death who kill those in their care, such as patients in a hospital or nursing home. Women are believed to murder those whom they know by poison or suffocation. Men, on the other hand, are said to stalk and slaughter strangers, usually in a larger geographical radius than women, and more violently, by gun or knife.

⁴³ *Death Row Prostitute*, prod. Don Morfoot, Jr., 50 minutes, A&E Television Networks, 1998, videocassette.

⁴⁴ Barry Yeoman, "Bad Girls," *Psychology Today*, 1 November 1991. Accessed through Findarticles.com on 15 March 2002. Information on the female emancipation theory of criminology may be found in Freda Adler, *Sisters in Crime: The Rise of the New Female Criminal* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975) and Rita Simon, *Women and Crime* (Lexington, Massachusetts: Lexington, 1975).

By that logic, Wuornos's crimes—fatally shooting strangers along Florida's highways—were viewed as a masculine way of serial killing.

Even the language used to describe male and female serial killers is gendered. “Black widows” and “angels of death” are feminized and sexualized labels. The nicknames of male serial killers, on the other hand, are tremendously frightening, focusing on the violence itself. A few examples from the 1970s and 1980s include the Hillside Stranglers Kenneth Bianchi and Angelo Buono, the Sunset Strip Slayer Douglas Clark, and the Yorkshire Ripper Peter Sutcliffe.⁴⁵ In contrast, Wuornos was called the Damsel of Death and the Highway Hooker, which, in keeping with the other female titles, focus on her gender and sexuality.

⁴⁵ The various nicknames were compiled from Jim Goad, “Night of a Hundred Mass-Murdering/Serial Killing Stars,” in *Answer Me!: the First Three* (San Francisco: AK Press, 1994), 44-85. The fanzine article lists twentieth century serial killers and mass murderers in an engaging and facetious style. For example, Wuornos's entry begins: “RIGHT ON, SISTER! After countless creeps who prey on hookers, there *finally* comes along a hooker who kills her tricks!” (84).

TRUE CRIME TEXTS

As the moral panic escalated, the concept of the multiple murderer was adopted into popular culture. For example, in 1992, a line of serial killer trading cards sparked concern about their supposed appeal to children.⁴⁶ True crime literature and film saturated the market, such as Bret Easton Ellis's bestseller *American Psycho* (1991) and Jonathan Demme's award-winning film adaptation of Thomas Harris's *Silence of the Lambs* (1992).⁴⁷ Simultaneously, homicide studies from the fields of criminology, sociology, and history proliferated. Often, as serial murder cases were reported in the news, the lines between fact and fiction blurred.

This obfuscation can be found in true crime books, which combine elements of journalism and detective fiction. Wuornos's first trial occurred as the true crime genre became more popular than ever before.⁴⁸ In a four-year period beginning in 1990, over forty books on case studies and general accounts of serial murder appeared, as did at least twenty collections of briefer studies.⁴⁹ Three true crime books about Wuornos were published in 1992 alone: *On a Killing Day*, *Dead Ends*, and *Damsel of Death*.⁵⁰ The latter two titles were recently republished, with information about Wuornos's execution, to capitalize on the 2004 Wuornos biopic *Monster*.

⁴⁶ Valerie Jones and Peggy Collier, *True Crime: Serial Killers and Mass Murderers* (Forestville, California: Eclipse Books, 1993). The 110-card set featured organized-crime figures, law-enforcement officials and 54 serial killer cards, including one of Wuornos. She was also featured in another set: Michael H. Price, *Bloody Visions III: Lady Killers* (Irvington, New Jersey: Shel-Tone Publications, n. dat.).

⁴⁷ For an excellent overview of the controversy that surrounded *American Psycho*, see Carla Freccero, "Historical Violence, Censorship, and the Serial Killer: The Case of *American Psycho*," *Diacritics* 27, no. 2 (1997): 44-58.

⁴⁸ Gayle Feldman, "Publishers Agree: True Crime Does Pay," *Publisher's Weekly* 237 (1990): 33-36.

⁴⁹ Jenkins, 92.

⁵⁰ Sue Russell (London: True Crime, 1992). The new edition is titled *Lethal Intent*. Unless otherwise noted, quotations are from the first edition.

On a Killing Day, written by Dolores Kennedy with the assistance of Robert Nolin, a reporter for the *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, focuses on Arlene Pralle, a woman who legally adopted Wuornos after her arrest.⁵¹ Pralle was offered a share in the book's profits in exchange for exclusive letters, pictures, and information about Wuornos.⁵² Not surprisingly, the book portrays Pralle sympathetically, as someone who cares deeply for Wuornos.

Reuters reporter Michael Reynolds takes a different approach in *Dead Ends* by examining the forensic evidence and the police investigation. Reynolds even credits himself for breaking the case by having written an article theorizing a connection between the murders.⁵³

A British journalist of several true crime books, Sue Russell weighs in with over 500 pages in *Damsel of Death*. Her research partner was Jackelyn Giroux, who was involved in the Wuornos movie *Overkill*; she later starred as Wuornos in *Damsel of Death: The Aileen Wuornos Story*, a film she wrote, directed, and produced.⁵⁴ In her book, Russell concentrates on Wuornos's early home life, drawing conclusions from Giroux's extensive interviews with Wuornos's childhood acquaintances.

True crime books like these attempt to construct an orderly narrative out of a complex reality. For instance, the texts focus on the police investigation and court

⁵¹ I was unable to find information about Kennedy, other than she wrote another true crime novel in 1991 for the same publisher.

⁵² Although she was promised payment, Pralle never received money for her assistance because the publisher went out of business. Chase Squires, "Inmate's Ex-lawyer Says He Guaranteed an Appeal," *St. Petersburg Times*, 15 April 2000.

<http://www.sptimes.com/News/041500/news_pf/Pasco/Inmate_s_ex_lawyer_sa.shtml> (2 April 2004).

⁵³ Reynolds, 102.

⁵⁴ Dahlburg, n. pag. For more information on the film, which was selected for 2002's New York International Film Festival, see <http://www.damselofdeath.com.futuresite.register.com/>.

proceedings—processes, though efficient in print, are convoluted in real life. The books contain numerous portraits of law enforcement officials and lawyers standing before police stations and courthouses, illustrating a desire for the restoration of order upon Wuornos's conviction.

Although the authors approach Wuornos's narrative differently, they all take liberties in constructing the events that led to the murders. Kennedy and Nolin insert italicized pieces into Wuornos's courtroom testimony about her first victim, which undercuts her claim that he attacked her first. Similarly, Reynolds and Russell construct passages in which Wuornos stalks and kills her victims, as in the following selection from *Dead Ends*:

“No, motherfucker. You're not going anywhere at all. Get down on your knees.”

He was still jabbering on, but she no longer cared what he said. It sounded like begging. She wanted that.... “Not much without your clothes, you old fuck. You know that?”

She considered the first shot, aimed, and fired. The white body jerked. She cocked the hammer on the clunky Double Nine with her thumb and fired another right behind the first. He was down on his hands. She stepped closer, centered the five-and-a-half inch barrel on the base of his skull. Cocked and fired. His head jumped. She could hear him make these noises, little grunts and moans. One more. She stood over him, lowered the pistol, sighted on the protruding disks of his spine. Cocked. Steady. And fired. His knees gave way immediately and he slumped to his left. She watched him fold slowly into a fetal curl. He made no more noises. She saw something glisten in the dirt to his right. She reached down and picked up a row of teeth, holding them gingerly between her finger and thumb. She had to laugh.⁵⁵

In this highly dramatized scene, Wuornos is portrayed as a monster who taunts her victim and coldly murders him execution-style. Her last action—laughing at the teeth that she plucked from the dirt—is purely speculative and excessively gruesome.

⁵⁵ Reynolds, 100.

AILEEN WUORNOS'S LIFE AND CRIMES

The texts also construct a relatively similar account of Wuornos's life, focusing on her abusive upbringing and her criminal history, as the following section illustrates. Aileen Wuornos was born on February 29, 1956 in Rochester, Michigan, to teenaged parents Dale Pittman and Diane Wuornos, who separated before her birth. Diane, overwhelmed by raising Aileen and her older brother Keith as a single mother, gave custody of them to her parents, Lauri and Britta Wuornos, in Troy, Michigan, in 1960. Diane lost touch with her children and began a new life in Texas, briefly meeting them again when they were teenagers. Pittman, the birth father Aileen never met, killed himself in prison in 1969 while serving time for child molestation and murder.

Wuornos became sexually active early in her childhood. She engaged in incest with her brother and her grandfather. At twelve, Wuornos was shocked to discover that Lauri and Britta were not her parents, but her grandparents. Around the same time, she began offering sexual favors to the neighborhood boys in exchange for money and drugs. Wuornos became pregnant at fourteen after she was raped by a family friend. She was sent to an unwed mothers' home in Detroit, where she gave her infant son up for adoption.

Soon afterwards, her grandmother Britta died, and while her death was blamed on liver failure from alcoholism, Wuornos's mother, Diane, suspected Lauri of Britta's murder. After her death, Wuornos and her brother were kicked out of their house by their grandfather. Wuornos soon dropped out of school and supported herself by prostitution, first in her home state of Michigan, then in Colorado, and later in Florida. During her

first year as a runaway prostitute, she was beaten and raped at least six times by as many men.⁵⁶

Wuornos's young adulthood was equally chaotic. During her twenties, her grandfather killed himself, and her brother died of throat cancer, leaving her a substantial insurance payment that she quickly spent. She tried to kill herself during this period; her most serious attempt, shooting herself in the abdomen, hospitalized her for two weeks. At twenty-two, she married elderly Lewis Fell, but they were divorced a month later after they accused each other of physical abuse.

Under a string of aliases, Wuornos was arrested numerous times in the 1970s and 1980s for offenses including drunkenly firing a .22-caliber gun from a car in Colorado, throwing a cue ball at a bartender's head in Michigan, and attempting armed robbery at a Florida convenience store, for which she served fourteen months in prison. While in Florida, she was arrested for check forgery and auto theft, suspected in the theft of a pistol and ammunition, and accused of demanding money from a friend at gunpoint. Although she worked as a highway prostitute for most of her life, she was never arrested for this crime.

In 1986, Wuornos, age thirty, met twenty-four-year-old Tyria Moore at the Zodiac, a Daytona Beach gay bar. Moore had recently relocated to the area from Ohio after receiving an insurance settlement from an automobile accident. In 1987, police detained the women for questioning, on suspicion that they had assaulted a man with a beer bottle, and in 1988, a landlord accused the pair of vandalizing their apartment.

⁵⁶ Chesler, 102.

Moore occasionally worked as a motel maid and allowed Wuornos to support her while they lived in a series of trailers and motel rooms in Daytona Beach.

In a yearlong period, Wuornos killed seven customers with a .22 caliber revolver.⁵⁷ The first victim, Richard Mallory, was found on December 13, 1989. The lifeless body of David Spears was discovered on June 1, followed five days later by that of Charles Carskaddon. Peter Siems was last seen in early June. Eugene Burress's body was located in August, and September marked the discovery of Dick Humphreys's remains. The corpse of the last victim, Walter Antonio, was unearthed in November.

Initially, the police were slow to link the murders because they occurred in five different counties.⁵⁸ The cases had similarities, though: the victims were middle-aged or older, traveled alone, and were killed by multiple shots chiefly to the torso. They were found covered in debris in secluded areas with their cars abandoned elsewhere and wiped to remove prints.⁵⁹ Some of the men were found fully or partially nude near condom wrappers, which suggested that they had sex before their deaths. This possibility was not mentioned in news reports until Wuornos's arrest; the men's clothes could have been removed to delay identification, and the police wanted to save the victims' families needless embarrassment.⁶⁰

Although some personal property was missing, a robbery motive was discounted because money was left at the scene. Investigators theorized that the murderer faked car trouble or started conversations with the men at rest stops to create opportunities for the

⁵⁷ For further information on the victims, see Victim Chart and Body and Vehicle Map on pages 59 and 60.

⁵⁸ *Death Row Prostitute*.

⁵⁹ Russell, 224.

⁶⁰ Russell, 226.

killings.⁶¹ A local criminologist even suggested that a female impersonator might have committed the homicides, because he did not believe that they were characteristic of women.⁶²

In November 1990, the similarities in the cases caused the police to release the sketches of the women involved in the accident with Siems's car. The couple was identified as Wuornos and Moore, and the police began searching for them. Officers checked area pawnshops and discovered that Wuornos, under an alias, pawned items from two of her victims and left the requisite thumbprint on the receipt, which matched a print on a victim's car.⁶³ Sensing that she and Wuornos would soon be located, Moore fled to her parents' house in Ohio at Thanksgiving, briefly returning to Florida to gather her belongings. During the Christmas holidays, Wuornos was tracked by investigators and arrested on January 9, 1991, at the Last Resort, a Daytona Beach bar. The next day, detectives traced Moore to her sister's home in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and returned her to Florida to assist the investigation.

Moore was not granted immunity, nor did she plea-bargain; she was simply never charged with any crime. She entered into a partnership with investigators to profit from selling Wuornos's story to as many as fifteen interested film companies.⁶⁴ During a series of taped conversations, Moore convinced Wuornos to admit to the crimes. On January 16, Wuornos confessed to killing everyone except Peter Siems, whose body was

⁶¹ Reynolds, 108.

⁶² Sue Carlton, "Killings of Men Don't Fit Mold," *St. Petersburg Times*, 2 January 1991. Accessed through LexisNexis on 9 October 2002.

⁶³ Russell, 252.

⁶⁴ When this misconduct was revealed, Major Dan Henry resigned from the Marion County Sheriff's office, and his co-conspirators, Captain Steve A. Binegar, Jr. and investigator Bruce Munster, were transferred to other offices. Although these revelations caused internal problems in the department, there was no inquiry as to the extent that the deal tainted the case against Wuornos. For more information about Moore's deal with the police, see Malcolm MacPherson, "Let's Make a Deal," *Premiere*, December 1991, 35-41.

never located. Wuornos absolved Moore of any knowledge of or assistance in the homicides, and Moore turned state's evidence against her former lover. They never spoke together again.

In her confession and during her 1992 trial for her first victim, Richard Mallory, Wuornos claimed that she killed the men because they raped, beat, or attempted to harm her. Although her subsequent victims did not have histories of sexual assault, Mallory did: he served ten years in prison for the attempted rape of a Maryland woman. This information was never entered into evidence by either side, because the prosecution revealed it immediately before the trial and the defense was instructed not to pursue it.⁶⁵ In a television interview after the trial, prosecutor John Tanner admitted carelessness in investigating Mallory's past and wondered if the new evidence would overturn the case.⁶⁶ Tanner need not worry: the court did not accept Wuornos's self-defense plea, and she was convicted of first-degree murder and given the death penalty. In the years that followed, she pled guilty to the remaining homicides and received five additional death sentences.

Arlene Pralle, a forty-four-year-old born-again Christian who ran a horse ranch near Ocala, Florida, befriended Wuornos after reading about her in the newspaper. During Wuornos's trials, Pralle became Wuornos's advocate, speaking with her daily and claiming her innocence on television and radio talk shows. Concerned that others might

⁶⁵ *Death Row Prostitute*. During Mallory's trial, an edited version of Wuornos's videotaped confession, which omitted her self-defense assertions, was shown to the jury, which also heard evidence regarding the other killings. Additionally, the trial for Mallory lasted only thirteen days with Wuornos as the only witness for the defense. Feminist writer Phyllis Chesler arranged for experts in the areas of prostitution and violence to testify, but Wuornos's lawyer, Tricia Jenkins, was either uninterested or unable to use them in the trial. See Chesler, 110-111.

⁶⁶ Aileen Wuornos, interview by Michele Gillen, *Dateline NBC*, National Broadcasting Company, 25 August 1992.

question her motive for assisting Wuornos, Pralle stated, "People are going to try to make it into a 'sexual perversion,' but it's not like that at all. It's a soul binding. We're like Jonathan and David in the Bible."⁶⁷ On November 22, 1991, Pralle and her husband legally adopted Wuornos. As Wuornos's guardian, Pralle could visit Wuornos more often, as well as profit from selling the rights of Wuornos's story.⁶⁸ Growing suspicious of Pralle's intentions, Wuornos ceased contact with the woman after a few years. In 2000, Pralle removed herself from the media spotlight by moving to the Bahamas.⁶⁹

For the next ten years on Florida's death row, Wuornos attempted to expedite her execution by issuing damning statements in the courts. For instance, she yelled at a judge, "All I want to do is go back to prison, wait for the chair, and get the hell off this planet that's full of evil and your corruption in these courtrooms!"⁷⁰ She abandoned her self-defense plea, first stating that she murdered the men to rob them, and then claiming that she simply killed them in cold blood. In a letter to a judge requesting that he drop

⁶⁷ MacNamara, 104.

⁶⁸ The notoriety for profit law prevents convicted felons and their associates from benefiting from their crimes. Better known as the "Son of Sam" law, the New York State Legislature enacted the law in 1977 when David Berkowitz attempted to sell his story while in prison. In 1991, the Supreme Court deemed New York's version of the law unconstitutional because it violated the right to free speech. Similarly worded laws in other states were also considered unconstitutional. Before Florida could rewrite its law, Pralle legally profited from selling Wuornos's account to the media. For example, *Aileen Wuornos: The Selling of a Serial Killer* revealed that Pralle hoped to auction the rights of Wuornos's execution to interested film companies. The documentary also recorded the exchange of \$10,000 from Broomfield to Pralle and her lawyer Steve Glazer to access Wuornos for an interview. "Notoriety for Profit/ Son of Sam Legislation," 1999.

<<http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/main.aspx?dbName=DocumentViewer&DocumentID=32469>> (18 April 2004).

⁶⁹ Sue Russell, *Lethal Intent* (New York: Pinnacle Books, 2002), 516.

⁷⁰ *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer*, Co-produced by Nick Broomfield and Rieta Oord, 87 minutes, Fox Lorber Home Video, 1994, videocassette.

her appeals, Wuornos warned, "I'm one who seriously hates human life and would kill again."⁷¹ Monstrous statements like this hastened Wuornos's death.

⁷¹ Aileen Wuornos to Judge Charles T. Wells, 11 June 2001.
<[http://www.flcourts.org/pubinfo/deathwarrants/WuornosLetter\(06-11-2001\).PDF](http://www.flcourts.org/pubinfo/deathwarrants/WuornosLetter(06-11-2001).PDF)> (28 April 2003).

WUORNOS'S REPRESENTATION AS WHITE TRASH

Wuornos's murders have been explained in part by labeling her white trash, a term that marginalizes economically disadvantaged whites who do not conform to the dominant middle class white culture. "Poor white trash" dates back to the early nineteenth century when slaves used it in reference to white servants; the southern white elite quickly appropriated the label.⁷² The term's ideology developed in nineteenth-century eugenic studies and continued in popular depictions of white trash in the early 1990s when Wuornos received national exposure. Her representation shows how her white trash status was linked to criminality through an inherited propensity for violence, a presumed deranged mental state, and a perverse sexuality.

WHITE TRASH IDEOLOGY

Several works have attempted to portray the social history of poor, working-class whites.⁷³ Systematic and fair studies have rarely been conducted on the subject of the indigent white population because historians, like many people, stigmatize the poor and project onto them the qualities that the term "white trash" conveys. "White trash" invokes stereotypes of impoverished whites as simple-minded, shiftless, and inbred, prone to promiscuity, incest, and aggression, as well as a host of other social ills. Although this group seems more prevalent in the South and rural areas, white trash can be

⁷² Mitford A. Matthews, *Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

⁷³ A few worth mentioning are Wayne Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Charles Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum: South Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992); and I. A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence, 1880-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989).

found everywhere in America: even in urban, northern, and predominately minority cities like Detroit.⁷⁴ Creating a more sympathetic history, though, would not diminish the purpose of labeling white Others. The term serves as a boundary to separate whites who defy white, middle-class norms in America. Just as whiteness is maintained by excluding members of other ethnic and racial groups, white trash denotes the site where whiteness and poverty meet.⁷⁵

The causes of the perceived degeneracy of certain whites were examined in family studies produced between 1877 and 1926 by the U.S. Eugenics Records Office.⁷⁶ Claiming to demonstrate scientifically that large numbers of poor whites were genetic defectives, these studies traced the genealogies of incarcerated or institutionalized people to supposed faulty sources.⁷⁷ By solely focusing on genealogy, eugenic studies found biological reasons for deviancy, rather than economic or social explanations.⁷⁸ The accounts affected social policy and medical practice into the early twentieth century.⁷⁹ Conservatives used the findings to call for a minimization of aid for the destitute, while medical and psychiatric centers utilized them to institutionalize and sterilize poor whites.

Eugenics was discredited when the Nazis, adopting the same politics, followed them to their logical conclusion: genocide. In recent years, however, books like Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray's *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in*

⁷⁴ John Hartigan, Jr., "Name Calling: Objectifying 'Poor Whites' and 'White Trash' in Detroit," in *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, eds. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz (New York: Routledge, 1997), 41-56.

⁷⁵ Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 4.

⁷⁶ Nicole Hahn Rafter, "White Trash: Eugenics as Social Ideology," *Society* 26, no. 1 (1988): 44.

⁷⁷ Rafter, 43-44.

⁷⁸ For an overview of the nineteenth-century conception of the eugenic criminal incapable of reform, see Nicole Hahn Rafter, *Creating Born Criminals* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

⁷⁹ Wray and Newitz, 2.

American Life (1994) have promoted Social Darwinism and biological determinism as an explanation for cultural and class differences and imply a need to end the welfare state.⁸⁰ The deployment of the term “white trash” continued to function as a way to tie poverty to genetics, to mitigate poor people’s claims for social justice, and to solidify the middle and upper classes in a sense of cultural and intellectual superiority.

In the 1990s, American pop culture was saturated with images of white trash, albeit without portraying the harsh social, economic, or historical conditions that produce poverty. President Bill Clinton was considered white trash due to his Arkansas upbringing, his mother’s love of Elvis, and his sexual dalliances with “trashy” women. Americans followed white trash scandals involving ice skater Tonya Harding, husband-mutilator Lorena Bobbitt, and soured lovers Joey Buttafuoco and Amy Fisher. Sitcoms such as the highly-rated *Roseanne*, as well as *Married with Children*, *Grace Under Fire*, and *Beavis and Butthead*, found humor in white trash protagonists, and talk shows like *Jerry Springer* brought real-life white trash into American homes.⁸¹

During this time, white trash was reconfigured into an even more violent caricature than before. A *New York* magazine piece titled “White Hot Trash!”, one of many articles on America’s fascination with white trash, linked it to serial murder: “True trash is unsocialized and violent.... An even more damaged trash response than being [a Hell’s Angel] is serial killings.”⁸² Although poor, working-class whites often were

⁸⁰ (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994). For more on eugenics in the twentieth century, see Edwin Black, *War Against the Weak: Eugenics and America’s Campaign to Create a Master Race* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003) and Nancy Ordover, *American Eugenics: Race, Queer Anatomy, and the Science of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

⁸¹ Kathlene McDonald, “Talking Trash, Talking Back: Resistance to Stereotypes in Dorothy Allison’s ‘Bastard Out of Carolina,’” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 26 no. 1 and 2 (1998): 17.

⁸² Tad Friend, “White Hot Trash!” *New York*, 22 August 1994, 31. The article featured the quotation “White-trash culture commands us to ‘squeal like a pig!’ And we’re oinking” (26). “Squeal like a pig” is

portrayed as criminally minded, homicide, especially multiple murder, was now considered white trash behavior.

The nineties also saw a string of feature films that portrayed white trash serial killers: *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1990), *Kalifornia* (1993), and *Natural Born Killers* (1994). In these movies, the motivation for the sadistic slaughter, whether explicit or implied, was the murderers' white trash status. *Natural Born Killers*, for instance, takes its title from a monologue in which the protagonist explains his reason for killing: "I came from violence; it's in my blood. My dad had it. His dad had it. It's fate.... I guess I'm just a natural born killer."⁸³ This film, as well as the others, presupposes that white trash is not merely a cultural situation, but an inherited attribute. Even more distressing is the notion that an inclination to multiple murder is inborn in those labeled white trash.

WHITE TRASH REPRESENTATION

At the time when white trash was coupled with serial murder, Wuornos's story exploded into the news. Her background interested the media, particularly her biological father, Leo Pittman, whom she never met. Reporters sought information about him, rather than about Wuornos's biological mother or her maternal grandparents who raised her, because he had a violent criminal record and they did not.

the infamous line from the homosexual rape scene in the 1972 film *Deliverance* when businessmen on a camping trip are sodomized by white trash Appalachians. From the context of the article, "us" refers to the magazine's cosmopolitan readers. The quotation, in tone with the entire article, seems to find amusement in white trash culture "raping" elite culture.

⁸³ Gael Sweeney, "The Trashing of White Trash: Natural Born Killers and the Appropriation of the White Trash Aesthetic," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 18, no. 2 (2001). Accessed through EBSCOhost on 23 April 2002.

The media emphasized that, like Wuornos, Leo Pittman and his sisters were abandoned by their natural parents and raised by their grandparents. During his childhood, Pittman was reportedly a chronic truant, a poor student, and a discipline problem as Wuornos had been. After his brief marriage to Wuornos's mother, Pittman served probation for breaking and entering and three years in prison for car theft. In 1962, he kidnapped, raped, and sodomized a seven-year-old girl. After his arrest, he was considered a suspect in the assault and murder of several girls, although he was never charged with these crimes. Diagnosed as schizophrenic, Pittman hung himself at thirty-three, a few years into his sentence of life imprisonment.

Sue Russell's *Damsel of Death* cites Pittman's tendency to keep guns in his car as "[a]nother foreshadowing of Aileen's behavior."⁸⁴ The book also asserts that Wuornos's homicidal nature was inborn:

[Pittman's] potent contribution to...his daughter was an inherited predisposition towards criminal behavior. Studies have shown that the biological legacy of criminality is even more powerful than the environmental in determining the outcome of the child. Even if that child is removed from the parent soon after birth (or, in Aileen's case, before it) and raised in a different environment, the odds are that they will be a chip off the old block.⁸⁵

Russell does not cite the reports she references, but she assumes that these undoubtedly controversial studies, if they exist at all, are common knowledge. Although Leo Pittman was a violent criminal, there is no evidence, beyond the author's imagination, that Wuornos inherited his behavior. Instead, just as the eugenic studies traced their subjects back to their faulty source, the media wanted to discover the genetic cause for Wuornos's violent behavior.

⁸⁴ Russell, 50.

⁸⁵ Russell, 65.

Wuornos was also deemed mentally defective. Psychologists described her as primitive, childlike, and perceiving the world as “having evil spirits, ghosts, things that are beyond...control.”⁸⁶ Her IQ, rated low dull normal, was considered borderline retarded.⁸⁷ Although the structure of her brain was apparently without defect, it functioned improperly “like sand in a gas tank,” as one psychologist phrased it.⁸⁸ Nick Broomfield, in his 1992 documentary *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer*, claimed that Wuornos’s monstrous brain would be preserved for study after her execution.⁸⁹ No evidence exists of this happening, and Broomfield does not disclose the source of such bizarre information.

Wuornos’s white trash status was also cited when she was diagnosed with both borderline and antisocial personality disorders. *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, a reference guide to all recognized psychiatric problems, defines borderline personality disorder as “a pervasive pattern of instability of interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts.” Likewise, antisocial personality disorder is defined as “a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others occurring since age 15 years.”⁹⁰ These definitions are vague enough that a great many people qualify as having such personality disorders. Furthermore, disorders are not biologically proven, nor do they have a definite pathology or cause. Instead, a diagnosis

⁸⁶ Kennedy with Nolin, 208, 207.

⁸⁷ Russell, 451.

⁸⁸ Kennedy with Nolin, 207.

⁸⁹ Valerie Karno, “Between Victim and Offender: Aileen Wuornos and the Representation of Self-Defense,” *Critical Matrix* 11, no. 2 (1999): 75.

⁹⁰ (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 654, 649-650.

is made when certain ambiguous criteria of unacceptable behavior are met—behavior which is socially and historically defined—making mental illness a social construct.

Wuornos, therefore, was diagnosed with personality disorders because her violent acts were unacceptable. Proponents of the diagnoses of mental illness cited her courtroom outbursts as confirmation of her aggressive tendencies. When Wuornos was found guilty of the first-degree murder of Richard Mallory, her initial shock turned to fury. As jury members left the courtroom, she shouted, “Sonsabitches! I was raped! I hope you get raped! Scumbags of America!”⁹¹ Later, during the trial for the murders of Dick Humphreys, Troy Burrell, and David Spears, Wuornos yelled at Assistant State Attorney Ric Ridgeway, “I’ll be in heaven why y’all be rotting in hell.... May your wife and kids get raped...right in the ass!”⁹² Led out of the room, she continued, “I know I was raped, and you ain’t nothing but a bunch of scum. Putting someone who was raped to death? Fucking motherfucker!” and made an obscene gesture to the judge. These verbal assaults, repeated *ad nauseam* in print and video, were attributed to her personality disorders and deemed characteristic of her crass, white trash nature.

Accounts of Wuornos’s crimes also position her in locations established as decidedly low-class. For example, in *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer*, director Broomfield visited the Last Resort, the biker bar where Wuornos was arrested. In the discourse surrounding Wuornos’s crimes, she was often described as a regular patron, one who hustled pool and customers and listened to Randy Travis’s “Diggin’ Up Bones” on the jukebox. When interviewed by Broomfield, Cannonball the bartender

⁹¹ Russell, 439.

⁹² *Aileen Wuornos: the Selling of a Serial Killer*.

explained that Wuornos was an infrequent customer. Broomfield returned the next day to film the Human Bomb, an acquaintance of Wuornos who lights explosives underneath himself for entertainment. Broomfield panned the crowd of menacing bikers, recorded the explosion, yet failed to interview the Human Bomb. The extensive footage at the Last Resort established Wuornos in a white trash context.

Broomfield also narrated the details of the case over images of desolate highways and dilapidated trailers, the visual equivalent of the seediness he described. He filmed the bleak Fairview Motel in Daytona Beach, where Wuornos lived with Tyria Moore before her arrest, focusing on the late model trucks in the dirt parking lot. This shot established Wuornos's transient lifestyle, as well as her deviation from middle-class domesticity.

Wuornos's sexuality was marked white trash because it deviated from respectable gender and sex norms. Wuornos called Moore her wife, which suggests that they were a butch/femme couple. Butch/femme, as feminist commentators like Dorothy Allison have noted, is often associated with working-class lesbians and is sometimes stigmatized by middle-class lesbian feminists as a retrograde form of sexuality.⁹³ Additionally, Wuornos was viewed as a promiscuous woman, supporting herself through prostitution for most of her life. She worked on the street, rather than ostensibly higher-class establishments like a brothel or an escort agency. Her customers were working- and middle-class men who

⁹³ For more information on the history of butch/femme couplings, see Sally R. Munt, ed., *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender* (London: Cassell, 1998); Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994); and Joan Nestle, ed., *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1992).

had better jobs and higher status than she did and the material comfort and stability that she lacked.

When the dominant culture labels a person like Wuornos as white trash, it deliberately marks the boundary between that person and respectable, white, middle-class society, thereby lessening the threat posed to traditional mores. More important, the preoccupation with Wuornos's allegedly inherited violence and mental illness is practically an endorsement of the outmoded concept of eugenics. If Wuornos was genetically predisposed to serial killing because she was white trash, the responsibility of the crimes rested solely on her. Thus, Wuornos remained an aberration, rather than a symptom of greater social ills that could produce others like her. In this view, the question of whether Wuornos may have acted in self-defense lost its relevance since she would have killed anyway—murder was in her genes. Just as the use of the term “white trash” has mitigated the claims of poor people for sympathy throughout American history, labeling Wuornos as white trash removed all culpability other than her own, rendering her irrefutably guilty in the eyes of many.

WUORNOS'S REPRESENTATION AS A PROSTITUTE

In the closing arguments of Wuornos's first trial, prosecutor John Tanner declared, "[Wuornos] is not a victim because she is a prostitute. She has chosen to be a prostitute."⁹⁴ This statement characterized the attitude of the media and the public at large towards Wuornos's occupation, when, in her narrative, she was depicted as a predatory prostitute who stalked the highways. In the discourse about Wuornos, little acknowledgement was granted to her limited employment opportunities, the law that favored the rights of customers over prostitutes, or the danger she faced on a daily basis. Instead, her motivation for murder was blamed on her livelihood: some believed that she killed because her career was failing, others thought she found perverse pleasure in slaying her sex partners. Either way, the narrative stressed the "unnaturalness" of the more likely victim, the prostitute, killing her customers. In doing so, according to the discourse, Wuornos revealed her monstrous disposition.

WUORNOS'S WORK CONDITIONS

Throughout her life, Wuornos worked intermittently as a waitress, cashier, maid, and pool hustler. At one point, she planned to start a carpet cleaning business with an ex-lover, but the woman stole the equipment.⁹⁵ Wuornos explored alternatives to prostitution, but her limited education and funds prevented her from pursuing them, as she explained in her confession:

I tried to be a police officer but they wanted like three thousand dollars, and I didn't have my GED. I tried to be a corrections officer but didn't have a car,

⁹⁴ Kennedy and Nolin, 201.

⁹⁵ Bankston, 51.

couldn't get into the military because I couldn't pass the tests...the only thing I could do was be a prostitute.⁹⁶

Prostitution was not so much of a "choice" for Wuornos as Tanner claims, but one in a narrow range of occupations available to her.

Wuornos's work was cyclic: she labored three to four days in a row, returned home for a day or two, and then went out again.⁹⁷ By her account, she met up to fifty men a day and had sex with three to six of them.⁹⁸ When they completed the act, or if the men were not interested in her services, she was dropped off at the nearest exit and began again. Wuornos said, "I brought home about \$300 every two weeks, but it wears you out, constantly talking to all those men, staying up."⁹⁹ She charged \$30 for fellatio, \$35 for vaginal sex, \$40 for both oral and vaginal sex, and \$100 for an hour of sex.¹⁰⁰ Most of her customers wanted oral sex, which took the shortest amount of time to complete, but it also meant that she would have to service more customers to make as much money as her other acts.¹⁰¹

Wuornos stated in her courtroom testimony that she had sex with hundreds—perhaps thousands—of men and killed only seven of them because they gave her trouble.¹⁰² Problematic customers could be physically or verbally abusive, refuse to compensate her, pay less than they agreed on, or demand services that she did not want to perform. In her confession, she recalled, "I thought to myself, why are you givin' me

⁹⁶ Reynolds, 278.

⁹⁷ MacNamara, 100.

⁹⁸ "Profile of Aileen Wuornos: Woman Behind the Murders." *Geraldo*, Investigative New Groups, 23 March 1993. Accessed through LexisNexis on 15 March 2002.

⁹⁹ MacNamara, 99.

¹⁰⁰ Kennedy and Nolin, 255.

¹⁰¹ "Profile of Aileen Wuornos: Woman Behind the Murders."

¹⁰² Kennedy and Nolin, 258.

such hell [because] I'm just tryin' to make my money."¹⁰³ In *Fatal Women*, a book about female aggression and sexuality, cultural theorist Lynda Hart points out that Wuornos did not believe that she was a serial killer, because it was common for customers to become violent and when they did, she had to defend herself.¹⁰⁴ During her first trial, Wuornos affirmed this view:

I'm supposed to die because I'm a prostitute? No, I don't think so. I was out prostituting. And I was dealing with hundreds and hundreds of guys. You got a jerk that's going to come along and try to rape me? I'm going to fight. I believe that everybody has a right to self-defend themselves.¹⁰⁵

Evelina Giobbe, founder of a support group for ex-prostitutes, Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt (WHISPER), agrees, "Aileen's fears [were] not unfounded. Close to 2,000 men a year used her in prostitution. So to say three to six a day, that seven of them may have sexually assaulted her fits with the stats...."¹⁰⁶ Given the sheer number of customers that Wuornos serviced in a year's time, it is conceivable that seven of these men would use violence against her and that she felt obligated to defend herself.

Numerous studies have documented the frequent incidence of robbery, assault, rape, and murder against sex workers, indicating that street and highway prostitutes face the highest risk of violence.¹⁰⁷ Prostitutes usually work in their own neighborhoods, while customers who live elsewhere drive into these areas with greater ease and discretion, and sex acts usually occur in the customer's car that he controls.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Kennedy and Nolin, 254.

¹⁰⁴ Lynda Hart, *Fatal Women* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 142.

¹⁰⁵ Aileen Wuornos, "America's First Female Serial Killer."

¹⁰⁶ "Profile of Aileen Wuornos: Woman Behind the Murders."

¹⁰⁷ Philippa Levine, *Prostitution in Florida: A Report Presented to the Gender Bias Study Commission of the Supreme Court of Florida* (Tallahassee: Florida State University, 1988), 42.

¹⁰⁸ Levine, 128, 43.

Additionally, prostitutes without pimps, like Wuornos, cannot depend on the protection they could offer them.¹⁰⁹ Wuornos also increased her risk of abuse when she was forced to solicit more strangers when her trusted regulars left for Operation Desert Storm in the 1990s.¹¹⁰

Philippa Levine, a history professor at Florida State University, noted that rape against prostitutes was common, yet rarely prosecuted in a 1988 prostitution report for the Gender Bias Study Commission of Florida's Supreme Court.¹¹¹ Additionally, a 1991 study by Portland, Oregon's Council for Prostitution Alternatives documented that 78% of fifty-five prostitutes reported being raped an average of thirty-three times annually by their customers; although twelve sexual assault charges were brought against the rapists, none were convicted.¹¹² In Wuornos's case, she claimed that she was raped four times during the year before her murders, in addition to the seven assaults attempted by her victims.¹¹³ Her accusations struck many people as implausible, because prostitutes are often viewed as willing to have sex with anyone and, therefore, cannot be raped. During a television interview, Wuornos said:

I don't understand how nobody can understand how a prostitute can be raped. Because when a man rapes a woman, he assaults your whole body. He puts his [censored by network] down your throat, cramming it down your throat. He tears your hair out of your head. He beats your face in. He rips your [censored by network] wide open.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Levine, 80.

¹¹⁰ Mariam Basilio, "Corporal Evidence: Representation of Aileen Wuornos," *Art Journal* 55, (1996). Accessed through EBSCOhost on 15 March 2002.

¹¹¹ Levine, 179, 43.

¹¹² Susan Hunter, *Council for Prostitution Alternatives Annual Report* (Portland, Oregon: 1991), quoted in Chesler, 99.

¹¹³ "Profile of Aileen Wuornos: Woman Behind the Murders."

¹¹⁴ Aileen Wuornos, "America's First Female Serial Killer."

In this statement, Wuornos counteracted the assumption that prostitutes deserve abuse and should passively presume the risk of rape in their occupation. Since Wuornos defended herself, she was unrepentant. During a *Dateline NBC* interview, for example, she said:

Here's a message for the families: You owe me. Your husband raped me violently, [Richard] Mallory and [Charles] Carskaddon. And the other five tried, and I went through a heck of a fight to win. You owe me, not me owe you."¹¹⁵

In another interview, when asked to apologize to the "innocent families," Wuornos stated, "Those families aren't innocent [because] those men aren't innocent. I'm not giving in. Those men are not innocent."¹¹⁶ In these statements, Wuornos placed the blame for her actions not only on her victims and their families, but also on society, for allowing men like her customers to believe that they are entitled to have full access to women's bodies.

In addition to dangerous work conditions, Wuornos had to contend with the law, specifically Florida Statute 796 (1988).¹¹⁷ A reading of the statute illuminates the greater risks of arrest and harsher sentences prostitutes could receive compared to their customers.¹¹⁸ The first six sections of the statute concern those who benefit from the prostitutes' work, namely madams, escort business owners, and pimps. Of these statutes, the strongest penalty, a second-degree felony, is reserved for one who coerces another under the age of sixteen into prostitution. Coercion of someone older than sixteen,

¹¹⁵ Aileen Wuornos, interview by Michele Gillen.

¹¹⁶ "Profile of Aileen Wuornos: Woman Behind the Murders."

¹¹⁷ See Florida Statutes Concerning Prostitution (1988) on page 61.

¹¹⁸ Briefly, Florida has two criminal classifications: felonies are punishable by more than one year in prison, and misdemeanors are punishable for less than a year. The maximum imprisonment and fines are range from 30 years and \$10,000 for a first-degree felony, 15 years and \$10,000 for a second-degree, and five years and \$5,000 for a third. First-degree misdemeanors are punishable by a year in prison and a \$1,000 fine; second-degree is 60 days and \$500. "Florida Felony & Misdemeanor Criminal Defense (Florida)," <<http://www.weblocator.com/attorney/fl/law/felonmisdem.html>> (14 December 2003).

benefiting from the earnings of prostitution, or running a house of prostitution are each considered third-degree felonies. Philippa Levine states that the overall statute was gender-neutral, but its interpretation and implementation were biased.¹¹⁹ For example, coercion and deriving support from the proceeds of prostitution are hard to prove and rely on the prostitute's testimony. Usually, if the lesser charge of aiding and abetting in prostitution is pursued at all, it results in a misdemeanor conviction rather than a felony.¹²⁰ Additionally, section 796.08, "screening for sexually transmissible diseases; providing penalties," seems to treat customers and prostitutes equally, but its implementation does not.¹²¹ Since they are convicted more often than customers are, prostitutes are tested more frequently as well, increasing the likelihood of being convicted of knowingly engaging in prostitution with a sexually transmitted disease. Customers usually receive less jail time than prostitutes and can leave jail without being tested, due to a screening backlog. Although Wuornos was never arrested for prostitution, the statute illustrates how she labored in an environment that gave preference to the rights and privacy of customers over prostitutes.

PROSTITUTE REPRESENTATION

Wuornos's monstrous narrative attributed her motivation to murder to her occupation. Some accounts have labeled her a sexual serial killer because she engaged in

¹¹⁹ Levine, 5, 201.

¹²⁰ Levine, 82.

¹²¹ At the time of Levine's report, Florida had more than 100,000 reported HIV cases, making it the third highest state of reported cases after California and New York. Levine, 176.

prostitution with her victims before the murders.¹²² In Wuornos's case, she and her victims either consensually engaged in sex or the men raped or attempted to rape her; Wuornos did not sexually assault her victims.

Similarly, Marion County Sheriff's Sergeant Munster, who coordinated the investigations of several victims, blamed what he viewed as Wuornos's faltering prostitution career for her desire to kill. Paraphrasing Munster's sentiments, author Michael Reynolds writes:

Her prostitution career had clearly been on the skids. She'd made no effort at grooming when she went out, no makeup, no sexy dresses. She didn't even own a dress. This dishwater blond with a beer gut had hit the highways in a pair of cut-off jeans, a Marine camo t-shirt, a ball cap and a pair of sneakers, toting a plastic bag loaded with a ten-inch nine-shot revolver.¹²³

Wuornos, in reality, did not attract any less business than she normally did when she began killing her customers. Wuornos chose to dress in an inconspicuous style, rather than wear "sexy dresses," since such costumes would be overly obvious to police and thus inappropriate for working on a busy highway. She also did not murder for money, although at one point she claimed otherwise in the hope that it would hasten her execution.

Criminology sources echo the robbery motive. Forensic psychiatrist John MacDonald's book *Rape: Controversial Issues* lists Wuornos under the "Homicide and Rape: A Monstrous Crime" section, stating that "[l]ike many male serial murderers, Aileen Wuornos used a con approach to persuade victims to go to an isolated place, then

¹²² Wuornos's motive is cited as "sexual homicide connected to the crime of prostitution." Michael D. Kelleher and C. L. Kelleher, "Sexual Predators," in *Murder Most Rare: The Female Serial Killer* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1998), 75.

¹²³ Reynolds, 226.

killed and robbed them.”¹²⁴ Similarly, criminologists Jack Levin and James Alan Fox place Wuornos under the category of “Women Killing for Profit and Protection,” claiming that her motive was greed.¹²⁵

As the narrative attributed various motivations to Wuornos, the metanarrative demonstrated how a prostitute killing customers reverses the “natural” order of power in society. In a 1991 *Dateline NBC* interview with Wuornos, anchor Jane Pauley introduced the segment with these significant words: “This is a story of *unnatural* violence. The roles are reversed. Most serial killers kill prostitutes.”¹²⁶ These statements imply that killing prostitutes is natural. Hart writes, “whereas male serial killers are ‘naturally unnatural,’ as a woman, Wuornos has committed *unnatural unnatural acts*.”¹²⁷ In other words, male killers are considered more natural than female killers because the tendency towards violence is perceived to be inherently masculine. Wuornos becomes monstrous for two reasons: not only is she a woman who kills, but she is a prostitute who kills customers.

In her representation, Wuornos’s occupation as a sex worker was believed to be a motivation for her murders. Instead of viewing her work as a situation that put her at considerable risk and disadvantage to her customers—such as convicted rapist Richard Mallory—she was depicted as being a sadistic monster who slaughtered for money or

¹²⁴ (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1995), 80.

¹²⁵ “Female Serial Killers,” in *Female Criminality: The State of the Art*, ed. Concetta C. Culliver (New York: Garland, 1993), 225.

¹²⁶ Hart, 142, italics mine.

¹²⁷ Hart, 142. For further discussion of gender politics in multicide, see Jill Radford and Diana E. H. Russell, eds. *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (New York: Twayne, 1992); Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazier, *The Lust to Kill: A Feminist Investigation of Serial Murder* (New York: New York University Press, 1987); and Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1987).

sex. By portraying her this way, the narrative removed society's culpability in producing a culture that ignores and implicitly allows prostitutes to be robbed, raped, and killed on a regular basis, yet condemns them for defending themselves.

WUORNOS'S REPRESENTATION AS A LESBIAN

“In our part of the state, the ‘lesbian’ label is just as damaging as ‘serial killer,’” noted Tricia Jenkins, Wuornos’s defense lawyer during her first trial.¹²⁸ Jenkins had a point: the most damaging aspect of Wuornos’s representation was the discourse about her homosexuality. Discussing Wuornos in a 1992 *Advocate* article, journalist Donald Suggs writes, “As the media coverage attests, the answer to this question [of whether Wuornos is a serial killer] has little to do with how many men the Florida prostitute may have killed and everything to do with how the crime is classified by gender, and in this case, sexual orientation.”¹²⁹ Writing for a gay audience, Suggs got to the heart of Wuornos’s media representation: in some minds, her sexuality merged with her criminality.¹³⁰ Since Wuornos’s narrative stated that she was not a “real” woman—that is feminine and heterosexual—her lesbianism not only demonized her, but also allowed her to commit serial murder.

LESBIAN GENDER

The 1990s saw a resurgence of issues surrounding lesbian butch/femme identity in both the straight and gay worlds. In “Butch-Femme and the Politics of Identity,” historian Tracy Morgan outlines the butch/femme lesbian sex war of the 1990s.¹³¹ The butch, Morgan states, can be traced back to the advent of sexology when mannish women

¹²⁸ Carr, 77.

¹²⁹ Donald Suggs, “Did the Media Exploit the ‘Lesbian Serial Killer’ Story?” *Advocate*, March 1992, 98.

¹³⁰ For information about the history of lesbians and the justice system, see Victoria Brownworth, “Crime and Punishment: Are the Rules of Law Different for Lesbians Charged with Crimes?” in *Deneuve*, January/February 1995, 58-61; Nan D. Hunter, “Life after Hardwick,” in *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 85-100; and Ruthann Robson, *Lesbian (Out)Law: Survival under the Rule of Law* (New York: Firebrand Books, 1992).

¹³¹ In *Sisters, Sexperts, Queers: Beyond the Lesbian Nation*, ed. Arlene Stein (New York: Plume, 1993), 35-46.

were labeled “inverts.” The femme lesbian, on the other hand, was defined by her relationship with a butch; the femme’s ability to pass as heterosexual denied her an identity of her own. Morgan, as well as Joan Nestle, a founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives and editor of *The Persistent Desire: A Butch/Femme Reader* (1992), comment on the resurgence of the butch-femme aesthetic in the 1990s, marked by work such as *Stone Butch Blues*, a novel about butch identity, and *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* about Buffalo’s butch/femme bar life.¹³² Lesbian identity was discussed in the mainstream as well, when popular shows like *Donahue* focused on butch and femme lesbians.¹³³

Within this context, constant tension arose from Wuornos’s dichotomous portrayal as a femme prostitute who lured men into illicit sexual relations and a butch serial killer who murdered them in cold blood.¹³⁴ These roles were never transposed—Wuornos was not depicted as a butch prostitute or a femme killer—because conventionality reasons that prostitutes are not masculine and killers are not feminine. Wuornos’s transition between butch and femme was evident when she was compared to girlfriend Tyria Moore. In Detective Wisnieski’s description of the suspects involved in the accident with Siems’s car, Moore was described as “masculine looking” due to her stockiness, the cap obscuring her short hair, and her heavy jaw in her sketch. Wuornos’s

¹³² Leslie Feinberg, *Stone Butch Blues: A Novel* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1993).

¹³³ Morgan, 39-40.

¹³⁴ For historical analysis of lesbian prostitutes, see Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994); Donna Penn, “The Sexualized Woman: The Lesbian, the Prostitute, and the Containment of Female Sexuality in Postwar America,” in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); and Joan Nestle, “Lesbians and Prostitutes: A Historical Sisterhood,” *A Restricted Country* (New York: Firebrand, 1987), 157-177.

drawing was more feminine, featuring her long, blonde hair and high cheekbones that were more pronounced in her sketch than in real life. When the pictures are compared, Moore was marked, textually and visually, as the more masculine of the pair.

The dyad reversed after Wuornos confessed. Upon taking full responsibility for the murders, Wuornos found that public attention—and masculinity—centered on her. Moore was described at this point as having had knowledge of, but not participating in, the killings, and her stable, supportive family and middle-class background were emphasized in contrast to Wuornos’s tragic history. Similarly, emphasis was placed on Wuornos’s reference to Moore as her wife and that Wuornos supported her while they were together.



Wuornos’s transformation to a butch killer is apparent in “The Aileen Wuornos Story” in the comic *True Crime*, published to capitalize on the salacious details of her

case.¹³⁵ In the account, two detectives discuss the investigation of a string of murders in Florida. Wuornos is introduced to the story while working on the side of the highway. She is depicted as a young, busty blonde in a low cut tank top, attractive but disheveled from a life of prostitution and hard drinking. When Wuornos is arrested, however, she becomes masculine. Even her name changes: instead of "Aileen," she is referred to as "Lee," a defeminized version of her name. On the cover of the comic book, Wuornos frowns, flanked by stern guards. She appears haggard and flat chested in a drab unisex prison jumpsuit, holding her shackled hands in fists as she glowers from the page. The phrase "the first female serial killer" is emblazoned above her head, with enlarged text emphasizing the word "female." Here, Wuornos is unmistakably butch.

Although Wuornos was portrayed as masculine, some accounts explain that she murdered in a womanly manner, such as a 1991 article for the beauty magazine *Glamour* titled "The First Woman Serial Killer?" The piece focused on Wuornos's lack of femininity and was written for young, single, heterosexual women, a group highly receptive to warnings about the dangers of appearing unfeminine. Even the title can be read two ways: does it debate her "first" or "woman" status? In the article, Sergeant Munster states that he assumed the killer was female because the victims were shot in the torso, rather than the head. According to Munster, "Women won't shoot in the head. A man shoots in the head, a man punches in the face."¹³⁶ Wuornos's firing into the torso, as she did with a majority of her victims, was, according to author Susan Edmiston, a "remnant of femininity" in an otherwise masculine crime of serial killing.¹³⁷ Neither

¹³⁵ "The Aileen Wuornos Story," *True Crime* (Forestville, California: Eclipse Comics, n. d.), n. pag.

¹³⁶ Susan Edmiston, "The First Woman Serial Killer?" *Glamour*, September 1991, 304.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

Munster nor the author explained how they concluded that the act of discharging into different areas of the body could be gendered, nor did they mention that Wuornos shot her last two victims in the head. In a similar vein, accounts of Wuornos's crimes cited her use of a .22 caliber gun as womanly as well. In both instances, shooting in the torso and a smaller caliber murder weapon were thought to be feminine because, according to the narrative, a male serial killer would apparently choose a more direct mode of execution.

LESBIAN REPRESENTATION

The discourse of Wuornos's crimes blamed her sexuality as a motivation for murder. Cinema studies professor Christine Holmlund, writing about female serialist films, argues that "a murmured fear of lesbianism lurks beneath the general discomfort with violent women, and hides behind their portrayal as man-hating feminists or as men..."¹³⁸ "Fear" is the key word in this quotation, as Paula Ettelbrick, legal director of the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, explains, "There is nothing more threatening than the thought of a woman who has already chosen not to have any men in her life—a lesbian—unless it's a lesbian killer."¹³⁹ Numerous accounts label Wuornos as a "man hater," a euphemism for lesbian. This projected dislike of males was utilized because blaming lesbianism outright would be homophobic and render the hypothesis subject to broader public scrutiny. Retired FBI agent Robert Ressler proposes that Wuornos killed because "there may be an intrinsic hatred of males here, as well as

¹³⁸ Christine Holmlund, "A Decade of Deadly Dolls: Hollywood and the Woman Killer," *Moving Targets: Women, Murder and Representation* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 148.

¹³⁹ Victoria A. Brownworth, "Dykes on Death Row," *Advocate*, 16 June 1992, 62.

identification with male violence which helped push her across the line into what has been considered a ‘male’ crime.”¹⁴⁰ Forensic psychiatrist Kathy Morall finds an analogous rationale for her crimes:

You might not expect a woman of clear sexual identity to do this. I see her as a woman whose sexual identity is distorted. If this woman’s makeup is such that she takes pride in being masculine, her motivation would be a psychological challenge to the male—“I’m more masculine than you.”¹⁴¹

The use of the word “distorted” is particularly problematic: it points to the ambiguity of Wuornos’s sexual identity as a person who had a romantic relationship with a woman, yet had sex with multiple men. Her sexuality could not be narrowly delineated so it was considered threatening in her narrative.

Descriptions of Wuornos treated her lack of femininity as a symptom of her brutal nature. The *Glamour* article quotes Munster commenting that Wuornos was “dominant and aggressive...carry[ing] herself as a bigger individual than she is.... She was rough-and-tumble from childhood.”¹⁴² He cites her removal of the license plate from Siems’s car with her hands, rather than a screwdriver, as proof of her strength.¹⁴³ A local convenience store clerk described Wuornos as aggressive in “the way she carried herself, the way she flexed her muscles. Whenever a nice-looking male customer would come in—I mean, I looked, Ty looked, but [Wuornos] didn’t look. Or if she did, she snarled.”¹⁴⁴ A *Vanity Fair* article about Wuornos noted that she drank Budweiser and smoked Marlboros, two stereotypically macho signifiers.¹⁴⁵ The media did not view

¹⁴⁰ Edmiston, 325.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Edmiston, 324.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ MacNamara, 100.

¹⁴⁵ MacNamara, 91.

Wuornos's toughness as a protective measure for survival, stemming from her abusive childhood and her dangerous profession, but as a trait that made her a monstrous killer.

One may find it astonishing that, as recently as the 1990s, a woman's supposed masculine behavior would be relevant to her crimes. The media's focus on these details can be understood in the context of a larger backlash against women's increasing freedom and an apprehension of a crumbling sexual order as examined in the 1991 national bestseller *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. In the book, journalist Susan Faludi criticizes both the media and the social sciences for promoting the theory that the equality women achieved in previous decades brought profound unhappiness to them in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁴⁶ This anti-feminist sentiment was echoed in the *Glamour* article, which concluded with an expert's foreboding warning: given "today's more aggressive female, the numbers of female murderers will increase during the nineties."¹⁴⁷ Statements such as this one showed how society projected its anxiety about gender equality onto the subject of Wuornos.

¹⁴⁶ (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

¹⁴⁷ Edmiston, 325.

CONCLUSION

In the 1991-1992 media coverage of the case, Aileen Wuornos was condemned for being white trash, a prostitute, and a lesbian. Together, these traits made her an unsympathetic character in her narrative, even to those who might have championed her rights such as gay, sex worker, or anti-death penalty activists in the years leading up to her execution. Exploring the lack of advocate support in Wuornos's case, psychologist Robert Butterworth states in a 2001 article for the British newspaper, *The Guardian*:

Female killers will always see gender working in their favor if the public perceives them as feminine. We instinctively see women as gentle, maternal, incapable of violence and give female criminals the benefit of the doubt. But when they discard that femininity, and Wuornos did, they lose our built in reserve of sympathy.¹⁴⁸

Based on Butterworth's assertion, would Wuornos have been more sympathetic if she could have dismissed her representation and behaved in ways that were more feminine?

A useful comparison is thirty-eight-year-old Karla Faye Tucker, who died of lethal injection in 1998, after serving almost fifteen years on Texas's death row.¹⁴⁹ In 1984, Tucker and her boyfriend, Daniel Ryan Garrett, killed her ex-boyfriend and his girlfriend with a pickax as they slept. Both were given the death penalty, but Garrett died of natural causes in 1994.

Tucker was unrepentant during her trial, claiming that she climaxed each time she axed her victims. In prison, however, she became a born again Christian and a model inmate. She was soft-spoken and feminine, with well-groomed hair, subtle makeup, and

¹⁴⁸ Sharon Krum, "Lady Killer," *The Guardian*, 2 August 2001, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/women/story/0.3604,530951,00.html>> (15 March 2002).

¹⁴⁹ Information about Tucker was compiled from Brownstein, 104-106. Just as Florida Governor Jeb Bush approved Wuornos's execution, his brother endorsed Tucker's. George W. Bush reportedly mocked Tucker's pleas for clemency shortly after her execution in an interview: "'Please,' Bush whimpers, his lips pursed in mock desperation, 'don't kill me.'" Tucker Carlson, "Devil May Care," *Talk Magazine*, September 1999, 106.

modest clothing. Due to these changes, Tucker won many secular and religious supporters when she began appealing her death sentence in 1992.

Henry Frederick, a court reporter at Wuornos's case, compared Wuornos to the pious prisoner, "If she was acting like Karla Faye Tucker—sweet, contrite—the public might be more sensitive.... But Aileen Wuornos is no Karla Faye. She's angry, she's abrasive.... She's a vile, sick woman."¹⁵⁰ The amount of perceived femininity in each woman seemed to influence her public opinion.

A MONSTROUS TRANSFORMATION

On the very day of Wuornos's execution, advance publicity for *Monster* began. The film billed itself as "an unlikely story between two misfits": Aileen Wuornos, played by Charlize Theron, and Selby Wall, the fictional Tyria Moore, played by Christina Ricci.¹⁵¹ Of the performance, movie critic Roger Ebert writes:

[*Monster*] refuses to objectify Wuornos and her crimes and refuses to exploit her story in the cynical manner of true crime sensationalism—insisting instead on seeing her as one of God's creatures worthy of our attention. She has been so cruelly twisted by life that she seems incapable of goodness, and yet when she feels love for the first time she is inspired to try to be a better person.... There are no excuses for what she does, but there are reasons, and the purpose of the movie is to make them visible. If life had given her anything at all to work with, we would feel no sympathy. But life has beaten her beyond redemption.¹⁵²

Wuornos, the subject or person, had seldom been portrayed with compassion in the mainstream media, let alone described as "one of God's creatures worthy of our attention." The execution of a media-created monster who embodied society's anxieties

¹⁵⁰ Krum, n. pag.

¹⁵¹ "Synopsis," n.d., <<http://www.monsterfilm.com/story/synopsis.html>> (23 April 2004).

¹⁵² Roger Ebert, review of *Monster*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, 9 January 2004.

<http://www.suntimes.com/ebert/ebert_reviews/2004/01/010901.html> (11 April 2004).

about class, race, and gender was a social exorcism. It was only through her sacrifice that Wuornos gained some type of empathy in her narrative.

Monster opens with Wuornos contemplating suicide beneath a highway overpass, immediately creating sympathy for her. Down to her last five dollars, she heads to a bar where she meets young Selby Wall, who is unfazed by Wuornos's work as a prostitute. After a series of dates, Wuornos convinces Wall to flee her family and embrace Wuornos's transitory life. However, the added stress of supporting a girlfriend wears on Wuornos, who must solicit more strangers, some of which are violent. One customer rapes and tortures her, but she shoots him, hides his body, and steals his car. After the murder, which Wuornos initially conceals from Wall, Wuornos tries in vain to obtain legitimate work, but no employer will hire her. The film demonstrates how institutional realities circumscribed Wuornos's life, making prostitution not a choice, but a way of survival for herself and her new girlfriend.

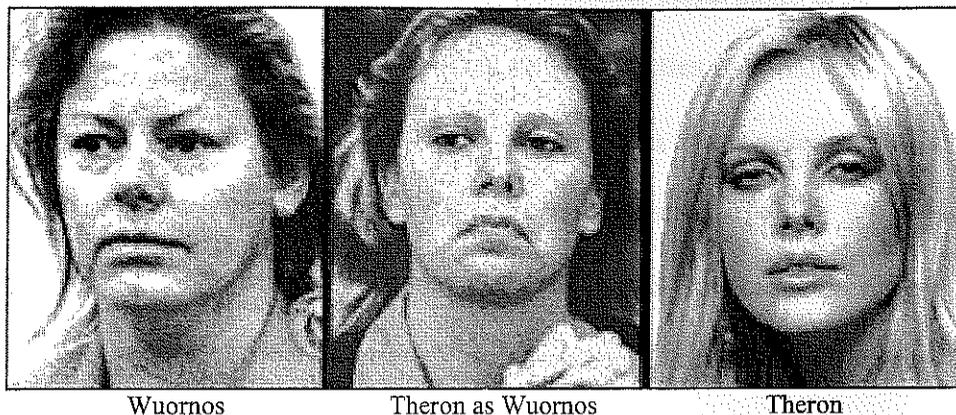
When Wuornos returns to prostitution, her motivation for killing becomes more unsubstantial as her victims become progressively more innocuous. The film at this point alternates between the homicides and the relationship between Wuornos and Wall. Although they share tender moments like skating together during a slow song at a roller rink, deepening troubles emerge between the pair. *Monster* posits that Wuornos killed to support Wall, who manipulated her lover into continued prostitution; romantic love becomes the motivation for murder.

Similarly, *Monster* makes love the reason why Wuornos confessed. After Wuornos is arrested, Wall collaborates with investigators and attempts to have Wuornos implicate herself in the murders during a taped telephone conversation. Wuornos realizes

what is happening, and *Monster* climaxes as Wuornos tearfully absolves Wall of all guilt and takes sole responsibility for the murders.

The *Monster* narrative is controlled primarily by Charlize Theron. The actress produced the film and used it to elevate herself into greater stardom. Like Academy Award winners Hilary Swank in *Boys Don't Cry* (1999) or Nicole Kidman in *The Hours* (2002), Theron shed her glamour to win the coveted Best Actress award, and *Monster*'s release, a month before the nominations, was timed to make Theron a contender.

The press on Theron's performance frequently remarked on her cosmetic transformation into the Wuornos character, as illustrated by these photographs from the film's website:¹⁵³



An article for the fashion magazine *Elle* describes the transformation in terms that invoke poverty and decay:

At 27, the long-limbed, lush-lipped, cherubic-faced star has left Hollywood and landed in this derelict Orlando, Florida, neighborhood in a rundown house near the railroad tracks. She's gained a good 30 pounds and has let her expensively highlighted hair oxidize into a rusty brownish overgrown shag. Her hyacinth blue eyes have turned dark, cold. She could use a good dentist. Her face is bloated, double-chinned, and appears aged by too much sun, too many cigarettes, and too little sleep. The former camera magnet now knows what it's like to be

¹⁵³ "Transformation," n.d., <<http://www.monsterfilm.com/story/transformation.html>> (19 April 2004).

unrecognizable in the most painful sense of the word: When people see her coming, they don't look twice, they look away.¹⁵⁴

In this passage, the star is portrayed as sacrificing her health, youth, and beauty to assume the role of Wuornos. The film highlights the voluntary mutability of Charlize Theron in relation to Wuornos's representation. Wuornos's case not only shows the instability of social identity, but her identity is subject to social constructs projected onto her. On the other hand, Charlize Theron's social mobility and self-empowerment lies in her ability to alter her representation at will: specifically, to depict herself as Wuornos and then revert to Hollywood glamour. Theron controls and improves her representation by using the subject of Wuornos in ways that Wuornos, herself, was unable.

As the media proclaimed Wuornos as the first female serial killer in American history, Wuornos the subject formed a site where social anxieties of contemporary culture could be projected. Discourse about her portrayed the woman as a murderous, white trash, lesbian prostitute. The narrative and metanarrative constructed about Wuornos asserted that she killed because of the supposed inherent faults that these descriptors embody. Finding the root of the problem in Wuornos herself, the narrative absolves society from any blame for the circumstances that create serial killers. Wuornos, once again, becomes an aberration, a freak of nature, a monster.

¹⁵⁴ Holly Millea, "Charlize Angel: Why She's the Toughest Woman in Hollywood," *Elle*, June 2003. <http://www.elle.com/article.asp?article_id=2339§ion_id=36&page_number=1&magind=2336> (22 March 2004).

Timeline

February 29, 1956: Wuornos is born Aileen Pittman in Rochester, Michigan, to Leo Pittman and Diane Wuornos, who separated several months before her birth.

March 18, 1960: Maternal grandparents Lauri and Britta Wuornos of Troy, Michigan, adopt Aileen and her brother Keith.

March 23, 1971: At a maternity home, Wuornos delivers a boy she gives up for adoption.

July 7, 1971: Grandmother Britta dies, prompting Lauri to kick Aileen and Keith out of the house. Wuornos quits school and supports herself by prostitution.

May 1, 1974: Using the alias Sandra Kretsch, Wuornos is jailed in Jefferson County, Colorado, for disorderly conduct, drunk driving, and firing a .22-caliber pistol from a car.

May 4, 1976: Wuornos marries elderly Lewis Fell; the couple divorces a month later.

July 13, 1976: Wuornos is arrested in Antrim County, Michigan, for simple assault and disturbing the peace, after throwing a cue ball at a bartender's head.¹⁵⁵

July 17, 1976: Keith dies of throat cancer.

May 20, 1981: Wuornos is arrested in Edgewater for a convenience store robbery.¹⁵⁶

May 4, 1982 - June 30, 1983: Wuornos serves thirteen months in prison for robbery.

May 1, 1984: Wuornos is arrested for passing forged checks at a Key West bank.

November 30, 1985: Using the alias Lori Grody, Wuornos is a suspect in the theft of a pistol and ammunition in Pasco County.

January 4, 1986: Wuornos is arrested in Miami, charged with auto theft, resisting arrest, and obstruction of justice for giving false information to the police.

June 1986: Wuornos meets Tyria Moore at the Zodiac, a Daytona Beach gay bar.

June 2, 1986: Using the Grody alias, Wuornos is detained for questioning by Volusia County deputies after a man accused her of robbing him at gunpoint.

July 4, 1987: Daytona Beach police detain Moore and Wuornos, using the alias Susan Blahovec, for questioning on suspicion of hitting a man with a beer bottle.

December 18, 1987: Using the Blahovec alias, Wuornos is cited for walking on the interstate and possessing a suspended driver's license.

¹⁵⁵ Unless an alias is given, Wuornos was arrested under her own name.

¹⁵⁶ For convenience, towns or counties listed without states are in Florida.

March 12, 1988: Using the alias Cammie Marsh Green, Wuornos accuses a Daytona Beach bus driver of assault, claiming he pushed her off the bus following an argument; Moore is listed as a witness to the incident.

November 30, 1989: Richard Mallory, an electronics repair shop owner, is last seen in Clearwater.

December 1, 1989: Mallory's car is abandoned in Ormond Beach.

December 13, 1989: Mallory's body is discovered several miles away from his car.

May 19, 1990: David Spears, a construction worker from Bradenton, leaves his workplace to visit his ex-wife in Orlando.

May 25, 1990: Spears's supervisor spots his abandoned pickup.

May 31, 1990: Charles Carskaddon, a part-time rodeo worker, is reported missing after he leaves Booneville, Missouri, to meet his fiancée in Tampa.

June 1, 1990: The body of David Spears is found in Chassahowitzka.

June 6, 1990: The body of Charles Carskaddon is found along State Road 52 in Pasco County.

June 7, 1990: Peter Siems, a former merchant mariner, leaves his home in Jupiter to visit relatives in Arkansas. Carskaddon's car is also found.

June 22, 1990: Siems's family files a missing person report.

July 4, 1990: Wuornos and Moore are involved in a minor accident with Siems's car in Orange Springs.

July 30, 1990: Eugene "Troy" Burress leaves his Ocala workplace to start his deliveries.

July 31, 1990: Burress is reported missing, after his truck is found abandoned.

August 4, 1990: Burress's body is discovered by picnickers in Ocala National Forest.

September 11, 1990: Charles "Dick" Humphreys fails to return home from his job as a child abuse claims investigator in Ocala.

September 12, 1990: Humphreys's body is found.

September 19, 1990: Humphreys's car is found abandoned with its license plates missing.

November 18, 1990: Truck driver Walter Gino Antonio is last seen alive.

November 19, 1990: Antonio's body is discovered near Cross City.

November 24, 1990: Antonio's car is abandoned in Brevard County.

November 30, 1990: Sketches of Wuornos and Moore from the July 4th accident are released to the media.

December 6, 1990: Using the Green alias, Wuornos pawns Mallory's items in Daytona Beach; she later pawns items belonging to David Spears in Ormond Beach.

January 9, 1991: Wuornos is arrested at the Last Resort, a Daytona Beach bar.

January 10, 1991: Moore is located at her sister's house in Pennsylvania.

January 16, 1991: Wuornos confesses to six murders, saying that she killed in self-defense. She denies killing Peter Siems, whose body has never been located.

November 21, 1991: Arlene Pralle and her husband legally adopt Wuornos.

January 14, 1992: The trial for the murder of Richard Mallory begins.

January 24, 1992: Wuornos takes the stand, claiming she shot Mallory in self-defense after her raped her.

January 27, 1992: Wuornos is convicted of first-degree murder for Mallory's death.

January 31, 1992: Wuornos is sentenced to death.

March 31, 1992: Wuornos pleads no contest to the murders of Dick Humphreys, Tony Burress, and David Spears.

May 7, 1992: Wuornos receives a second death penalty for their murders.

May 15, 1992: She receives three more death sentences.

June 1992: Wuornos pleads guilty to the murder of Charles Carskaddon.

November 1992: Wuornos receives her fifth death sentence.

February 5, 1993: After pleading guilty to Walter Gino Antonio's murder, Wuornos receives her final death sentence.

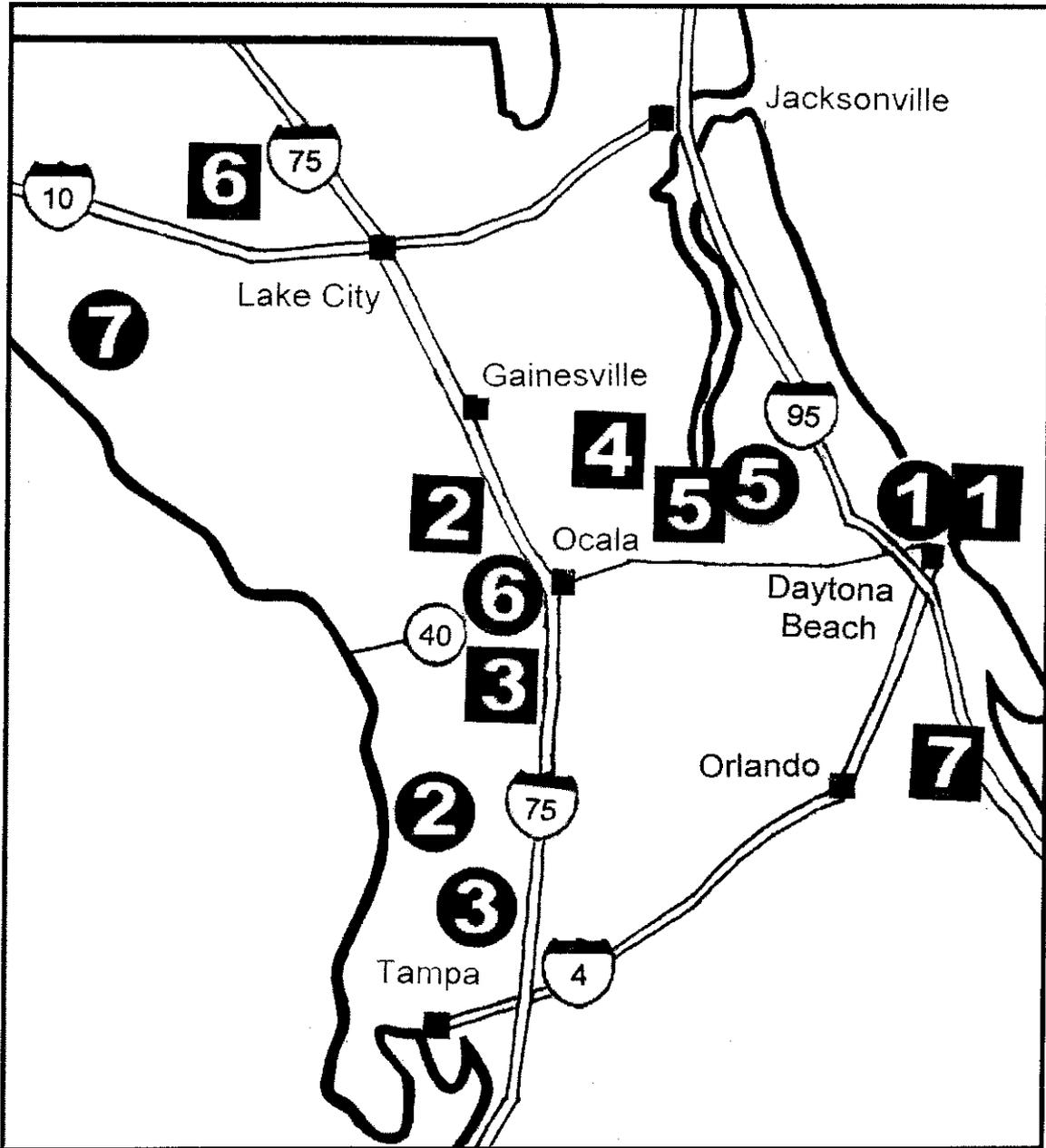
September 5, 2002: Florida Governor Jeb Bush signs Wuornos's death warrant.

October 9, 2002: Wuornos is executed at Florida State Prison by lethal injection.

Victim Chart

Name	Age	Residence	Vocation	Last Seen	Vehicle Date and Location	Body Date and Location	State of Dress	Bullet Wounds
Richard Mallory	51	Clearwater, FL	electronics repair shop owner	November 30, 1989	December 1, 1989 in Volusia County	December 13, 1989 in Volusia County	fully clothed	3 to torso
David Spears	43	Bradenton, FL	construction worker	May 19, 1990	May 25, 1990 in Marion County	June 1, 1990 in Citrus County	nude except for baseball cap	6 to torso
Charles Carskaddon	40	Boonesville, MO	part-time rodeo worker	May 31, 1990	June 7, 1990 in Marion County	June 6, 1990 in Pasco County	nude	9 to torso
Peter Siems	65	Jupiter, FL	missionary, former merchant mariner	June 7, 1990	July 4, 1990 in Marion County	body never found	N/A	N/A
Eugene Burress	50	Ocala, FL	sausage deliveryman	July 30, 1990	July 31, 1990 in Marion County	August 4, 1990 in Marion County	fully clothed	2 to torso
Charles Humphreys	56	Crystal River, FL	child abuse investigator, retired Air Force major, former Alabama police chief	September 11, 1990	September 19, 1990 in Suwannee County	September 12, 1990 in Marion County	fully clothed	5 to torso, 1 to head, 1 to wrist
Walter Gino Antonio	60	Cocoa, FL	truck driver, occasional security guard, Reserve Police member	November 18, 1990	November 24, 1990 in Brevard County	November 19, 1990 in Dixie County	nude except for socks	3 to torso, 1 to head

Body and Vehicle Map



● Body	■ Vehicle
1	Richard Mallory
2	David Spears
3	Charles Carskaddon
4	Peter Siems
5	Eugene Burress
6	Charles Humphreys
7	Walter Gino Antonio

Florida Statutes Concerning Prostitution (1988)

796.01 Keeping house of ill fame.

796.02 Lease of house to expire on conviction.

796.03 Procuring person under age of 16 for prostitution.

796.04 Forcing, compelling, or coercing another to become a prostitute.

796.05 Deriving support from the proceeds of prostitution.

796.06 Renting space to be used for lewdness, assignation, or prostitution.

796.07 Prohibiting prostitution, etc.; evidence; penalties; definitions.

796.08 Screening for sexually transmissible diseases; providing penalties.

796.01 Keeping house of ill fame. Whoever keeps a house of ill fame, resorted to for the purpose of prostitution or lewdness, is guilty of a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084.

796.02 Lease of house to expire on conviction. When the lessee of a dwelling house is convicted of the offense mentioned in the preceding section, the lease or contract for letting the house shall, at the option of the lessor, become void, and the lessor shall have the like remedy to recover the possession as against a tenant holding over after the expiration of his term.

796.03 Procuring person under age of 16 for prostitution. Whoever procures for prostitution, or causes to be prostituted, any person who is under the age of 16 years shall be guilty of a felony of the second degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084.

796.04 Forcing, compelling, or coercing another to become a prostitute.

(1) After May 1, 1943, it shall be unlawful for anyone to force, compel, or coerce another to become a prostitute.

(2) Anyone violating this section shall be guilty of a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084.

796.05 Deriving support from the proceeds of prostitution.

(1) It shall be unlawful for any person knowing another person is engaged in prostitution to live or derive support or maintenance in whole or in part from the earnings or proceeds of such person's prostitution.

(2) Anyone violating this section shall be guilty of a felony of the third degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084.

796.06 Renting space to be used for lewdness, assignation, or prostitution.

(1) After May 1, 1943, it shall be unlawful to let or rent any place, structure, or part thereof, trailer or other conveyance, with the knowledge that such place, structure, trailer, or other conveyance will be used for the purpose of lewdness, assignation, or prostitution.

(2) Anyone violating this section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor of the second degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082 or s. 775.083.

796.07 Prohibiting prostitution, etc.; evidence; penalties; definitions.

(1) As used in this section:

(a) "Prostitution" means the giving or receiving of the body for sexual activity for hire.

(b) "Lewdness" means any indecent or obscene act.

(c) "Assignation" means the making of any appointment or engagement for prostitution or lewdness, or any act in furtherance of such appointment or engagement.

(d) "Prostitution" as used in paragraph (a) shall be construed to exclude sexual activity between a husband and his wife.

(e) "Sexual activity" means oral, anal, or vaginal penetration by, or union with, the sexual organ of another or the anal or vaginal penetration of another by any other object, or the handling or fondling of the sexual organ of another for the purpose of masturbation; however, the term does not include acts done for bona fide medical purposes.

(2) It is unlawful in the state:

(a) To keep, set up, maintain, or operate any place, structure, building, or conveyance for the purpose of lewdness, assignation, or prostitution.

(b) To offer, or to offer or agree to secure, another for the purpose of prostitution or for any other lewd or indecent act.

(c) To receive, or to offer or agree to receive, any person into any place, structure, building, or conveyance for the purpose of prostitution, lewdness, or assignation, or to permit any person to remain there for such purpose.

(d) To direct, take, or transport, or to offer or agree to take or transport, any person to any place, structure, or building, or to any other person, with knowledge or reasonable cause to believe that the purpose of such directing, taking, or transporting is prostitution, lewdness, or assignation.

(3) It is also unlawful in the state:

(a) To offer to commit, or to commit, or to engage in, prostitution, lewdness, or assignation.

(b) To solicit, induce, entice, or procure another to commit prostitution, lewdness, or assignation with himself or herself.

(c) To reside in, enter, or remain in, any place, structure, or building, or to enter or remain in any conveyance, for the purpose of prostitution, lewdness, or assignation.

(d) To aid, abet, or participate in the doing of any of the acts or things enumerated in subsections (2) and (3) of this section.

(e) To purchase the services of any person engaged in prostitution.

(4) In the trial of any persons charged with a violation of any of the provisions of this section, testimony concerning the reputation of any place, structure, building, or conveyance involved in said charge and of the person or persons who reside in, operate, or frequent the same and testimony concerning the reputation of the defendant shall be admissible in evidence in support of the charge.

(5) Any person who violates any provision of this section is guilty of a misdemeanor of the second degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084.

796.08 Screening for sexually transmissible diseases; providing penalties.

(1)(a) For the purposes of this section, "sexually transmissible disease" means a bacterial, viral, fungal, or parasitic disease, determined by rule of the department to be sexually transmissible, a threat to the public health and welfare, and a disease for which a legitimate public interest will be served by providing for regulation and treatment.

(b) In considering which diseases are to be designated as sexually transmissible diseases, the department shall consider such diseases as chancroid, gonorrhea, granuloma inguinale, lymphogranuloma venereum, genital herpes simplex, chlamydia, nongonococcal urethritis (NGU), pelvic inflammatory disease (PID)/Acute Salpingitis, syphilis, and human T-lymphotropic virus type III (HTLV-III) infection for designation and shall consider the recommendations and classifications of the Centers for Disease Control and other nationally recognized authorities. Not all diseases that are sexually transmissible need be designated for purposes of this statute.

(2) Any person arrested under s. 796.07 may request screening for a sexually transmissible disease under direction of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services and, if infected, shall submit to appropriate treatment and counseling.

(3) Any person convicted of prostitution under the provisions of s. 796.07, shall be required to undergo screening for a sexually transmissible disease under direction of the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services and, if infected, shall submit to treatment and counseling as a condition of release from probation, community control, or incarceration.

(4) Any person who commits prostitution and who, prior to the commission of such crime, had tested positive for a sexually transmissible disease and knew or had been informed that he had tested positive for a sexually transmissible disease and that he could possibly communicate such disease to another person through sexual activity is guilty of a misdemeanor of the second degree, punishable as provided in s. 775.082, s. 775.083, or s. 775.084. A person may be convicted and sentenced separately for a violation of this subsection and for the underlying crime of prostitution.

(5) The department or its authorized representatives may examine or cause to be examined any person or inmate who injures a law enforcement or correctional officer, or a firefighter or paramedic acting within the scope of employment. Evidence of injury and a statement by a licensed physician that the nature of the injury is such as to result in the transmission of a sexually transmissible disease covered by this act shall constitute probable cause for issuance of a warrant duly authorized by a court of competent jurisdiction.

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