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“A MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY”: THE BOUNDARIES OF LEGIBILITY, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND COSMOPOLITAN MASCULINITY

Mark Anthony Neal

In “Ebb Tide,” the first episode from the second season of *The Wire*, Bodie Broadus, a rising lieutenant in the Barksdale crew, travels to Philadelphia on behalf of Russell “Stringer” Bell, who in the aftermath of the first-season arrest of Avon Barksdale, is running the day-to-day operations of the crew. The trip is Bodie’s first outside of the city of Baltimore, a fact that is comically presented when he is confused when his car radio begins to lose the signal to the radio station he had been listening to. Bodie’s confusion speaks to the larger issue of worldview and how the boundaries of the block often limit the worldviews of *The Wire*’s many characters. Indeed, part of the appeal of *The Wire* is that it privileges the worldview of the block, though, in the absence of experiences beyond the confines of Baltimore’s so-called inner city, the block literally becomes a *nation*—something that must be policed and defended at all cost for far too many of its characters. To speak of concerns beyond the block—something perhaps akin to a cosmopolitan worldview in which one is seen as a citizen of the *world*—is to risk censure from tightly knit *hood* (i.e., neighborhood) relations and to raise suspicions about even more tightly held convictions of what constitutes legitimate hood masculinities. In his book *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men*, sociologist Alford A. Young Jr. argues that such a limited view—a social isolation—has adverse effects on the ambitions and life chances of black men relegated to segregated, nonwhite, urban enclaves. Rather than frame his study solely from the standpoint of that isolation, Young observed men whose worldviews and ability to respond creatively to their conditions were enhanced by their mobility beyond the confines of their insular communities. As Young writes of his informants, “[T]he group of men with the greatest awareness of the complexity of the

processes of mobility and attainment in American society were those with the most extensive contacts beyond the neighborhood.”¹

If there is one character in the world of *The Wire* that personifies an awareness of the complexities that Young outlines, it is Russell “Stringer” Bell (Idris Elba), Avon Barksdale’s second in command and arguably the most integral figure in Barksdale’s operation. Bell’s character played a secondary role during *The Wire*’s initial season, but with the incarceration of Barksdale at the end of that season, Bell became more prominent, ultimately becoming a primary focus of police surveillance. Audiences were further briefed on Bell’s complexity during the first season when Detective Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West) follows him around the city, after a chance sighting at Baltimore’s Northeast Market, eliciting the retort “market day for Stringer too” from McNulty’s partner Bunk Moreland. That it is McNulty, the character who mainstream audiences were seemingly expected to most identify with that provides a real-time glimpse into Bell’s movement, signals Bell’s critical role in *The Wire*’s larger narrative. In a subculture defined by the contradictions of crass materialism (the “bling”) and understatement (the proverbial white tee), Bell’s modest sedan, button-down oxford shirts, and windbreaker easily mark him as illegible, within the context of the *block* (i.e., neighborhood). That Bell was also enrolled in business courses at Baltimore City Community College—Introduction to Macroeconomics the day McNulty follows him (“What the hell?”)—only adds the allure of a character whose worldview is so clearly beyond the realm of the *corners* (i.e., street corners) that Barksdale’s empire controls.

Bell’s corporate demeanor provides some clue into his motivation for being in the drug game in the first place; despite his evident skill set, intelligence, and discipline, the glass ceilings and doublespeak around issues of diversity in the workforce and on elite college campuses in the pre-Obama era would have likely made it difficult for Bell to function in those institutions at the high level he does within Barksdale’s operation. Bell’s embrace of the drug trade enables him to make his way on his own terms, enabling his literal ownership of the *game*, if you will, mirroring the rise of the so-called hip-hop mogul. Of *The Wire*’s many characters, Bell is the one who seems most emblematic of the American Dream. It is Bell, for example, who is largely responsible for managing Barksdale’s holdings, which, during the first season, includes a strip club, a tow-truck company, a warehouse, a print shop, and an apartment complex. By season 3, Barksdale’s businesses are formally known as B&B Enterprises (presumably for Barksdale and Bell) and into building luxury condominiums. Criminal organizations have long used business fronts to launder money and provide their

activities with a sheen of respectability, as was likely the case with Barksdale’s holdings, but Bell suggests otherwise in an episode from season 1, where he admonishes underlings for not taking their “jobs” in the Copy Cat print shop seriously.

Returning to the print shop after class, Bell discovers that some orders hadn’t been filled. Directing his displeasure at three workers standing lazily a few feet away, Bell sates, “We got work orders here and ain’t nothing happening. These jobs were promised yesterday and people gonna be coming in and asking for their work and nothing been done.” When one of the workers dismisses Bell’s concerns—“Man, fuck ’em, let ’em wait”—Bell responds angrily,

No, you not gonna bring that corner bullshit up in here, you hear me? You know what we got here? We got an elastic product. You know what that means? It means that when people can go elsewhere to get their printing and copying done, they gonna do it. You acting like we got an inelastic product and we don’t. Now, I want this to run this like a true fucking business—not no front, not no bullshit—you understand me?

Setting aside Bell’s obvious concerns, his rant was emblematic of his ability to apply the lessons he had just learned in class, where the teacher lectured about “elastic products,” to his on-the-ground concerns running the Barksdale operation. Thus, when he warns the workers about “corner bullshit,” he is not just referring to their demeanor, but emphasizing a distinction between Barksdale’s inelastic product—the drugs—and the elasticity of some of his more traditional holdings. With control of the high-rise towers and low-rise apartments (the *pit*) in the section of Baltimore where he operates, Barksdale has an effective monopoly; customers have little choice but to wait for product.

Besides Bell’s corporate-style skill set, his character remains a primary cog in what is essentially a murderous crew of drug dealers. Audiences were first introduced to Barksdale because he ordered the murder of a state’s witness. Barksdale ostensibly ordered the hit to protect his nephew, D’Angelo Barksdale (Larry Gilliard), who had been charged with murder. Throughout the first season, until his own murder in the second season, D’Angelo Barksdale functions as the series’ moral conscious. The younger Barksdale is eventually convicted on a charge of drug trafficking late in the first season, which also implicates his uncle and a group of street soldiers. In jail, D’Angelo Barksdale only increases his penchant for re-

flecting about the culture of violence that he was implicated in as one of his uncle's midlevel managers, particularly as he comes to terms with his uncle ordering the murder of Wallace, a teenager he had mentored in the pit, who they feared was also going to turn state's witness. In the episode before his murder, D'Angelo Barksdale turns ghetto philosopher, discussing the choices made and not made by F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, noting that "it don't matter that some fool say he different 'cause the only thing that make you different is what you really do or what you really go through." The scene represents D'Angelo's symbolic final break from the game, though that break becomes the impetus for his murder in the next episode. The architect of D'Angelo's murder is Bell, who, sensing that D'Angelo is about to turn state's witness himself, reaches outside of Baltimore into neighboring Washington, D.C., to stage the prison murder.

The murder of D'Angelo Barksdale was one of the few instances during season 1 where Bell could be directly implicated in violence or that he acted unilaterally from Avon Barksdale, who thinks that his cousin committed suicide. But even when getting his hands dirty, Bell pulls off the deed with the tenacity and aplomb of a seasoned CEO of a Fortune 500 company, and in many ways his value to Avon Barksdale is much the same. Bell's effectiveness is premised on his access to various forms of capital. Referencing the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Young describes *capital* as "anything that is a resource for engaging strategic action toward a desired end," adding that, for the men in his study *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men*, "capital is that which they accumulated (or did not accumulate) through their past and present experiences such that they found themselves in positions near the bottom of the American socioeconomic hierarchy."² Bell notably possesses varying degrees of *cultural and social capital* defined as "the knowledge of how to function in specific social settings in order to mobilize, generate responses and affect" and the "degree to which an individual is embedded in social networks that can bring about the rewards and benefits that enhance his or her life," allowing him to flow rather easily in disparate spaces.³

According to David Simon, though both Avon Barksdale and Stringer Bell were composites of a variety of Baltimore dealers, much of the first season was drawn directly from the Melvin Williams case.⁴ Bell's function in the story was closely related to Lamont "Chin" Farmer, Williams's "elusive Stringer Bell-like Lieutenant."⁵ Of Idris Elba, the actor chosen to portray Bell, Simon asserts, "Idris was doing stuff that reminded me of how real players would have existed in some of those scenes. It wasn't over-the-top gangster bullshit. . . . [I]t was somebody who was rationale, professional and always thinking, and that was the role."⁶ Elba suggests,

again echoing comments by Avery Brooks fifteen years earlier during his time portraying the character Hawk, “Stringer is one of the characters I’ve lived with for a long time . . . this very tailored, ferocious man, a mix between a Black American gangster and an Italian American gangster,” specifically citing the characters of Nino Brown, Wesley Snipes’s role in *New Jack City* (dir. Mario Van Peebles, 1991) and Al Pacino’s Tony Montana from *Scarface* (dir. Brian De Palma, 1983).⁷ Both films were critical to the developing cinematic sensibilities of hip-hop culture in the United States.⁸ “When I was freestyling with this character,” Elba notes, “Brown and [Scarface] would be the two characters that brought him to life.”⁹

Bell’s cosmopolitan sensibilities come naturally for Elba, who grew up in Hackney, a working-class section of London, with a Ghanaian mother and father from Sierra Leone. The ease in which Elba captures a presumed African American drug dealer from inner-city Baltimore mirrors the ways that the character Bell flows in decidedly disparate and often competing spaces; this is clearly a character who has been elsewhere and, as evidenced by the gaze that Detective McNulty provides in relation to his surveillance of Bell, audiences are encouraged to go elsewhere with Bell, be it a meeting with the drug-dealer collective he founds in season 2, negotiations with local architects, or his regular strategy sessions with state senator Clay Davis.¹⁰ But the gaze into Bell’s world is not simply about his cosmopolitan sensibilities, but a gaze that is also eroticized. Part of what made Bell such a breakout character in the series was his physical attractiveness. As one journalist described it, Bell/Elba’s “statuesque, coffee skinned matinee-idol look was primetime eye candy.”¹¹ In a cover feature on Elba in the leading African American magazine *Essence*, journalist Jeannine Amber says of the actor, “He possesses that mysterious charisma that can catapult an actor from leading man to sex symbol. . . . Physically flawless and emotionally reserved, they [Elba, Denzel Washington, and Billy Dee Williams] convey a dignified sexuality, a breathtaking magnetism that, coupled with their talent, draws us to them like a flame.”¹²

In his insightful essay “The Lost Boys of Baltimore,” James S. Williams takes observations about Elba’s physical attractiveness a step further, complicating the aforementioned heterosexist gaze, arguing that *The Wire* offers an “eroticization of the hood.” Writing about the “‘to-die-for’ black gangsta thugz” that populate *The Wire*, Williams argues that,

with their mean poses, impassive stares, and fixed killer smiles, these sad and doomed lost boys constitute in their heightened availability and vulnerability one of the great

unavowed pleasures of *The Wire*. What is one person's nightmare is another man's fantasy.¹³

Williams notes that audiences are enticed by these characters, in part, because a “homeroitics of style is created by the very way the camera ‘takes’ its young male figures. . . . [W]e are drawn into rituals of spectatorial desire through the stylized representation and mise-en-scène of the black body.”¹⁴ Highlighting my own interest in how cosmopolitanism might literally be “framed” in the context of *The Wire*, Williams notes, “The camera is almost always moving in *The Wire* . . . cutting as it were vertically into a horizontal continuum and, in the process, *queering cinematically* [my emphasis] the standard codes of television realism. Only young black male characters receive this degree of visual investment.”¹⁵ Writing about a domestic scene with Bell and Donette—the mother of the late D’Angelo Barksdale’s son—Williams describes how “whereas he moves and ‘flows,’ she is held static within the frame. The same occurs when Stringer encounters his lawyer Levy in his office; while Levy remains fixed in his seat in medium shot, we move slowly and irresistibly towards Stringer in a close-up on the other side of the table.”¹⁶ I cite Williams at length here because his work places the conceptual movement of Bell’s character in conversation with the philosophical movement on which my own interests in Bell’s character pivot.

Bell’s worldview serves the needs of Barksdale’s empire well until shifts in the drug market occur during season 2. With Barksdale incarcerated, Bell tries to adapt the operation’s functions to adhere to the logic of a marketplace that transitions from controlling the project towers to a sharing of street corners with other drug crews to finally a wholesale distribution model. The shifts begin with the razing of the project towers, which forces Barksdale’s workers to share street corners with rival crews. In addition, Bell is forced to address being cut off from his drug supply in New York City, forcing him to cut a deal, against Barksdale’s initial wishes, with a rival crosstown dealer, “Proposition Joe” Stewart (Robert Chew), who gets his supply from mysterious ethnics simply known as “the Greeks.” Back on the street corners, Barksdale’s workers are in direct competition with the laborers of other crews—notably those of Marlo Stanfield (Jamie Hector)—and it is the violence produced by these new tensions that brings the increased scrutiny of law enforcement. In a telling exchange that portends an increasing riff between Bell and Barksdale in season 3, Bell attempts to assuage Barksdale’s concerns about the crew’s lack of firepower on the corners by stating, “Every market-based business runs in cycles, and we going through a down cycle,” to which Barksdale quickly retorts,

“String, this ain’t about your motherfuckin’ business class. . . . It ain’t that part of it. It’s that other thing; the street is the street always.”

Though Bell and Barksdale grew up together and are ostensibly of the same generation, their differences in opinion about the operation began to reflect a generational divide regarding the state of illegal drug markets. At the time that Ed Burns and David Simon were covering Melvin Williams in the mid-1980s, many urban drug crews followed a model that researchers Ric Curtis and Travis Wendel describe as “corporate-style drug distribution operations” which represented “monolithic enterprises that tightly integrated, wholesale, mid-level, and street level markets.”¹⁷ According to Curtis and Wendel, beginning in the late 1980s in a period best defined as “buy-and-bust,” the corporate model became downsized, in part creating the context for the contemporary prison industrial complex and an inspiration for much that would be called “Gangsta Rap” in the early 1990s. In this era, the corporate model gave way to freelance markets, where hold-overs from the corporate era simply franchised the business to local operatives. “In the reconfigured street drug markets of the middle and late 1990s,” Curtis and Wendel write, “many of the former employees of corporate-style organizations . . . began their own small drug business, assembling and serving core groups of reliable customers.”¹⁸ The Barksdale enterprise in the first season of *The Wire* is a reflection of the terrain that Curtis and Wendel describe.

As season 3 of *The Wire* begins, Avon Barksdale, who came of age during this period of franchises and the “wave of violence” associated with it, is tethered to that model—“The street is always the street.” Stringer Bell, in comparison, envisions and embraces a model that Curtis and Wendel describe as the “drug delivery business” where a “booming real estate market”—which B&B Enterprises also benefits from—and “intensive policing made street sales less viable.”¹⁹ Additionally, Curtis and Wendel note, “[D]elivery markets are far less likely to be sources of violence or community disorder than fixed location or street-based markets, regardless of the social organization of the distributors.”²⁰ Bell, in contrast to Barksdale, fully understands the threat that violence represents to B&B Enterprises, reminding the latter in a conversation before his release from prison that “it’s them bodies that got you in here.” For Bell, his engagement in the drug trade was apparently a means to an end, as opposed to an end unto itself, as he reminds Barksdale that “we making money straight in our own name.” It is in the spirit of Bell’s broader worldview that he issues what I’ll call “Stringer’s doctrine” at the beginning of *The Wire*’s season 3.

The third season begins with the razing of the Franklin Terrace Towers, the real estate that Barksdale et al. used to establish themselves. In the

shadow of the demolition, Bodie Broadus and Malik “Poot” Carr—two midmanagers in Barksdale’s operation—discuss the impact of the towers coming down. While Poot is nostalgic about the human relationships he cultivated in the towers as a youth, Broadus puts their destruction in specific economic terms: “You live in the projects, you ain’t shit, but you slang product there? You got the game by the ass. Now these downtown suit-wearing ass bitches done snatched up the best territory in the city from ya’ll.” It is this concern that Broadus later brings to Bell in a meeting that the latter convenes with middle management, using parliamentary procedures via *Robert’s Rules of Order*. When Broadus queries Bell about the lack of available space to operate, Bell responds,

We done worrying about territory, what corner we got, what project. Game ain’t about that no more, it’s about product. We got the best goddamn product, so we gonna sell no matter where we are, right? . . . We gonna handle this shit like business men, sell the shit, make the profit and later for that gangsta shit.

Though Bell makes clear that this new model—Stringer’s doctrine—had thus far translated into the operation selling twice the product, with half the territory, generating a 8–9 percent increase in profit, Poot pushes back over concern about perception: “Do the chair know we gonna look like some punk ass bitches out there?” In a telling response, Bell asserts forcefully, “Ya’ll niggas need to start looking at the world in a new fuckin’ light! Start thinking about this shit like some grown fuckin’ men, not some niggas off the fuckin’ corner.”

The exchange between Poot and Bell, who accuses the former of being “too ignorant to have the floor,” is interesting because it indexes the relationship between space, perception, and masculinity. In the case of Poot, whose response serves as conventional wisdom, his masculinity, and presumably that of his peers and rivals, is tethered to the control and policing of territory—in this case, the corners. Poot’s deployment of the phrase “punk ass bitches,” like Broadus’s earlier description of politicians as “suit-wearing ass bitches,” was intended to queer those who don’t function on the streets corners in ways that are legible to him. In a broader sense, Poot attempts to queer Bell’s “foreign” worldview and, by extension, Bell himself. Bell’s retort acknowledges Poot’s intent—hence his initial response, “Motherfucker, I will punk your ass for saying some shit”—but also offers his own queering function, arguing that “niggas off the fuckin’ corner” were in opposition to more legitimate masculinities (“grown fuckin’

men”). In this instance, Bell argues that his cosmopolitan worldview represents the most valid iteration of black urban masculinity—one that is in sync with the flow of capital and product. Given the energy that Bell expends to make clear the value of Stringer’s doctrine to his underlings, it was perhaps inevitable his worldview would tragically contradict that of his partner Avon Barksdale.

Nevertheless, Bell is able to convene the New Day Co-op, a collective of Baltimore drug crews, who agree to pool their resources to buy the best product from New York City and, in the best-case scenario, simply wholesale their product to less established crews still fighting over territory and their reputations on street corners. The only holdout is Marlo Stanfield, who shortly thereafter is embroiled in a war with Avon Barksdale over the very corners that Barksdale has no use for anymore. Stanfield becomes a major concern to Barksdale’s operation, especially when Barksdale returns to the fold after spending a year in prison. While Barksdale is still wedded to an antiquated worldview, where territory is directly linked to profit—and, perhaps more importantly, to reputation—Bell attempts to sell him on the brave new world of Baltimore’s drug trade. In a sit-down immediately after Barksdale’s homecoming party, Bell complains,

I mean how many corners do we need? How much money can a nigga make? . . . We past that run-and-gun shit . . . nothing but cash, not no corners, no territory, nothin’ . . . let the younguns worry about retail, where to wholesale, who gives a fuck who standing on what corner if we taking shit off the top . . . making that shit work for us. You can run more than corners B.

Barksdale’s response speaks palpably to his worldview: “I ain’t no suit-wearing businessman like you. I’m just a gangsta, I suppose, and I want my corners,” echoing the sentiment expressed earlier by Poot and Bodie Broadus, albeit minus the distinct queering mechanism. Young notes in *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men* that “social location”—in this instance, Barksdale’s philosophical tethering to the street corners—“does not merely isolate individuals from better prospects. It also creates a barrier denying them the capacity to interpret that which lies beyond their social milieu.”²¹

There are myriad reasons for the difference between Bell’s worldview and that of Barksdale. The characters themselves suggest that, even as kids, they fundamentally saw the world differently, as they reminisce during season 3 about a young Bell being “all heavy into that black pride shit,

talking about . . . two grocery stores and mak[ing] motherfuckers proud,” and conversely a young Barksdale wishing to “go to war” with AK-47s in the spirit of the film *Scarface*. I can only speculate about the nature of Bell and Barksdale’s friendship—*The Wire* doesn’t really provide any inkling into the complexity of the relationship—but it seems safe to suggest that Bell found some value in living a “life of the mind,” whereas Barksdale, as a former boxer who came up through the ranks as a street soldier, was valued for that skill set. As someone who was essentially a laborer, Barksdale obviously valued what Bell brought to the table as a thinker—in fact, he needed Bell in that regard to act upon the opportunities that presented themselves when the corporate mode of drug trafficking began to collapse. But this also means that Barksdale could view the world from only the standpoint of his role as a laborer. As Young writes, “The narrowness of the men’s perspective on potential work opportunities sheds light on another effect of social isolation. The aspect of the world of work that was most desirable to these men was one that was in actuality diminishing as these men came of age.”²² This is not to suggest that Barksdale and others like him were not thinkers; their ability to function on the block suggests an embodied social awareness that represents a distinct cognitive skill set attuned to the random quality of the urban experience. As one of Young’s respondents reflects, “[S]hit can happen anyway.”²³

Barksdale’s natural instincts for the block lead him to try to reclaim the corners he feels were taken from him during his absence and during Bell’s reign. Those instincts make him aware of his own social capital on the block despite not sharing Bell’s more cosmopolitan view. Indeed, the insular world of the block meant that Barksdale’s social capital was even more hard-earned and personally cultivated. While Bell’s social and cultural capital were enhanced by a sense of fluidity, Barksdale’s was decidedly local and largely buttressed by his effective and strategic deployment of violence.²⁴ This threat to Barksdale’s social capital leads him to attempt an ill-advised attack on Marlo Stanfield. Barksdale is shot in the arm, and one of his soldiers killed, in the botched attempt to reestablish his authority on the block. Bell, who Barksdale no longer values with regard to “that part of it,” was left out of the loop and confronts Barksdale in one of the series’ most dramatic scenes. Recognizing the threat to the economic empire that he has helped to build, Bell angrily says to Barksdale, “War man? We past this bullshit!” With this comment, Barksdale finally takes aim at Bell’s cosmopolitan worldview: “I look at you these days and you know what I see? *A man without a country*. Not hard enough for this right here and maybe not smart enough for that out there. No offense, I don’t think you ever were [hard enough].” For Barksdale, Bell’s cosmopolitanism is

not just an articulation of weakness, particularly given the hypermasculinity that propels identity on the block, but ultimately representative of a mode of indecisiveness that Barksdale views as a threat to his much-valued social capital.

Literary scholar Walton Muyumba offers some insight here, writing in another context about “cosmopolitan blackness” among African American writers in the post–World War II period. Citing the examples of Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Amiri Baraka, Muyumba writes, “Life outside the U.S. forced each writer to interrogate the meanings of blackness, American identity, and the post–World War II political world in ways that exposed conflicts at the center of his intellectual/literary practices.”²⁵ Muyumba further suggests that the three writers used the concept of jazz improvisation effectively as a mechanism to communicate “philosophical attitudes befitting the shifts in American political and social life during the 1950s and ’60s.”²⁶ I cite Muyumba at length here because, whereas Ellison, Baldwin, and Baraka could use jazz improvisation as a lingua franca for their distinct cosmopolitan experiences, Stringer Bell lacks a language to articulate his own cosmopolitan worldview. Central to that worldview are the conflicts and contradictions that animate his efforts to move beyond the block, yet remain wedded to it, because it is where his black masculinity is so firmly inscribed and vital. Bell may no longer be of the block, but the block clearly still matters to him, else he would be content with just being another black businessman. No, Bell thrives on his mobility but has little language at his disposal to sing the praises of that mobility in ways that resonate on the block. As such, it’s not surprising that Bell falls back on performances of violence, like his public dressing down of Poot, recalling, in response to Barksdale’s question of his “hardness,” his thus-far-unknown role in the death of D’Angelo Barksdale. “Not hard enough because I think before I snatch a life?” Bell spews before owning up to the life that he snatched and tussling a wounded—both physically and emotionally—Barksdale to the ground while uttering, “You gotta think what we got in this game for. Was it the rep? Was it so our names could ring out on some fuckin’ ghetto street corners? There are games beyond the fuckin’ game!” Barksdale’s faint response, “let me up,” is recognition that Bell has finally spoken back to him in a legible language.

Not so ironically, it would be Barksdale who would have some semblance of a last laugh. When Bell’s relationship with state senator Clay Davis sours after the latter accepts payoffs from Bell but is unable to deliver the kind of municipal services that Bell had employed him for, Bell laughably reaches out to Barksdale to pursue a hit on Davis. Here it is Barksdale lecturing Bell on the pitfalls of the very violence that Bell had

once cautioned him about. Barksdale understood, better than his soon-fallen comrade did, that social capital was a product of location and the terrain of elected officials and well beyond the scope of life on the block.

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NOTES

1. Alford A. Young Jr., *The Minds of Marginalized Black Men: Making Sense of Mobility, Opportunity, and Future Life Chances* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 147.
2. *Ibid.*, 58.
3. *Ibid.*, 59.
4. Rafael Alvarez, *"The Wire": Truth Be Told* (New York: Pocket Books, 2004), 47.
5. Simon, quoted in *ibid.*
6. Janice Roshalle Littlejohn, "London Chill," *Savoy Magazine* 1, no. 2 (2005): 70–73.
7. *Ibid.*, 70.
8. Spike Lee's 1995 adaptation of Richard Price's novel *Clockers* was an attempt to intervene in the genre of urban films that *Scarface* and *New Jack City* inspired. David Simon has cited Lee's film as an influence on *The Wire*, for which Price has been a regular writer. See also S. Craig Watkins's *Representing: Hip Hop Culture and the Production of Black Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
9. Littlejohn, "London Chill," 70.
10. I say "presumed" because knowledge of Elba's English and African roots more than hints at the reality of a generation of African-Americanized children of African immigrants.
11. Littlejohn, "London Chill," 70.
12. Jeannine Amber, "Essence August Issue: Sexy Talk with Idris Elba," *Essence Magazine* 13 July 2009, www.1.essence.com/news_entertainment/entertainment/articles/idris_elba_covers_essence.
13. James S. Williams, "The Lost Boys of Baltimore: Beauty and Desire in the Hood," *Film Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2008–9): 58–63, quotation on 59.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*
17. Ric Curtis and Travis Wendel, "'You're Always Training the Dog': Strategic Interventions to Reconfigure Drug Markets," *Journal of Drug Issues* 37, no. 4 (2007): 867–92, quotation on 871.
18. *Ibid.*, 876.

19. Ibid., 880.
20. Ibid., 883.
21. Young, *Minds of Marginalized Black Men*, 194.
22. Ibid., 170.
23. Ibid., 45.
24. Notable here is that the murder of Omar’s lover Brandon was largely intended as a public recognition of Barksdale’s ruthlessness.
25. Walton Muyumba, *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation, and Philosophical Pragmatism* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2009), 24.
26. Ibid., 25.