

# Social death

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Social Death' and ' Possessive Individual' according to Grace Hong Grace Hong's essay d ' The Possessive Individual and Social Death: The Complex Bind of National Subjectivity' offers numerous insights into historical social constructs. Focusing on the evolution of American history since the time of the Declaration of Independence, the author charts a cogent description of how the socio-polity resisted progressive changes. The book is focused on women of color feminism and the culture of immigrant labor. But prior to arriving at their specific discourse, a broader framework of understanding is laid out. Hereby, two important terms are introduced by the author.

Possessive individual traces its origins to the framing of the constitution, whereby, only the propertied white males of the new country were accorded citizenship. Not only were blacks (who were slaves at the time) were excluded, but so were women and a large section of white male population. The privileged minority of propertied white men enjoyed laws that reinforced their ownership of material wealth. But, even before they could acquire and retain material property, they had claim to their person, which is the fundamental ownership. In effect, each of the possessive individuals is extended a right of ownership of their person, which would thwart any exploitative contractual relationships with their peers. There is a limited degree of fairness to the laws pertaining to possessive individuals, insofar as they govern the internal relations of the group. However the very notion of a national constitution catered to the possessive individual is blatantly unjust for all excluded communities. Take, say, the case of African Americans. By virtue of not even enjoying a right toward their own personhood, their aspirations and endeavors toward ownership of material property is pre-empted. The lot of women (even whites) was none too better, for they are <https://assignbuster.com/social-death/>

first the property of their father, then husband and finally her son through the span of her life. Is she is denied ownership of her own person, and thereby the possibility of ownership of material property.

The concept of social death follows swiftly from that of possessive individual. By denying the right to ownership of one's own person, the individual is reduced to a social non-entity. With respect to the idea of nationhood, he/she is not part of the society. By being excluded from the cultural epicenter of a nation, the dispossessed individual suffers a social death. They may yet serve a role in the economic system of the country, especially if it adopts the state-capitalist model. This was exactly the black American experience for more than a century after the Emancipation Proclamation. While the capitalist system does not discriminate labor based on color or gender, the idea of nationhood does. And while a shared culture is central to the formation of a nation, it is irrelevant to the needs of capitalist machinery. It is for these two complimenting reasons that black Americans were the backbone of work in Southern plantations, while virtually being socially dead. It wasn't until the end of the Civil War and freedom from slavery that they could reclaim their self. That first step, however nominal it might have proved, did lead to their social rebirth and cultural revival. The consequence of this renaissance was the acceptance of 'black voice' in several mediums of art, most notably, in American literature, since the late nineteenth century.

Reference:

Grace Kyungwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital, Women of Color Feminist and the Culture of Immigrant Labor*, Chapter 1 - The Possessive

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Universit of Minnesota Press, London, 2006, pp. 3-29.