

The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Journal 2006

A collection of scholarly works by participants in the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program

Through subtle shades of color, the cover design represents the layers of richness and diversity that flourish within minority communities.

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Preface

The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF) Program is the centerpiece of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's efforts to ensure the full and equal participation of minority groups in higher education. The MMUF Program has both immediate and long-term objectives.

The principal short-term objective of the MMUF Program is to increase the number of minority students and students with a demonstrated commitment to eradicating racial disparities who will pursue Ph.D.s in the arts and sciences. The Program's long-term objective is to reduce the serious under-representation of certain minority groups in the ranks of academia.

Since 1988, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation has appropriated over \$50 million for the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship and its supporting programs. Students at 34 colleges and universities and the 39 members of the United Negro College Fund participate in the Program. As of January 2006, approximately 2500 undergraduate students had been selected as Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellows. Since the inception of the Program, over 170 Fellows have earned their Ph.D. and are now teaching around the country. An additional 150 graduate students expect to earn their doctorate within the next two years.

The Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship *Journal* is a collection of essays by Fellows who participated in the Program during the academic year 2005-2006. Fellows are encouraged to submit works showcasing their academic achievements, such as the introduction to a thesis, a paper for a favorite class, or the culmination of research conducted under the supervision of their Faculty Mentor. While each essay demonstrates the specific interests and talents of the author, in the aggregate this *Journal* exemplifies the wide-ranging perspectives and abilities that these talented young scholars will bring to the professorate. These essays are but a sample of the research and writing that Mellon Fellows throughout the nation are currently conducting.

Monica C. Lewis, Ph.D.

Editor-in-Chief

MMUF Coordinator 2005-2006

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MMUF Class of 1999

Washington University in St. Louis

For more information regarding the MMUF Program and its mission, visit www.mmuf.org.

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America's Orientalism

Tonya S. Braddox, *Brooklyn College*

Tonya Braddox is a student at Brooklyn College. This is her first year as a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow. As an English and Creative Writing major, her long-term research interests include examining and documenting the lack of support for African American dramatic theater from the late 18th century to the present. Ms. Braddox began research for a senior project on the historical reception of Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun at the University of Chicago during the Summer of 2006.

"It's funny about 'passing.' We disapprove of it and at the same time condone it. It excites our contempt and yet we rather admire it. We shy away from it with an odd kind of revulsion, but we protect it."

—Irene Redfield in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929)

Nella Larsen's novella *Passing* (1929) addresses an identity crisis existing during the 1920s for African Americans. In pursuit to be upwardly mobile, many light-skinned African Americans, such as the central character Clare Kendry, used their skin color to move into another sector of society, living as White Americans. Although these individuals, as portrayed by Larsen, were able to make successful transitions, the decision to crossover or to assimilate into White society was not easy and sometimes resulted in devastating consequences. Edward Said's post-colonial criticism examines how Western civilization perceives non-Western societies in his book *Orientalism*. However, Said's concept of "Orientalism" is not limited to broader conceptualizations of "East" versus "West" but can also apply to race relations within African-American culture, particularly to the culture of African Americans who decide to "pass" as White Americans. African Americans who "pass" have adopted Eurocentric values that have reinforced "otherness" within the broader African-American culture; hence, the light-skinned versus dark-skinned power struggle. Using the term "Orientalism" as an apparatus for measuring how Western or European views affect literature and people's perception of themselves and others, I will examine how "otherness" is constructed in interracial power relations among African-American women who have the option to "pass."

The notion of Orientalism is not limited to the Europeans' perception of the Orient or Orientals; the ideology of Orientalism can be applied to any non-European race of people or any non-Western society, including Africa or people of African descent. "Systematic knowledge" in Western civilization "about the [Negro race]" created "otherness" in socio-economic power relations in the United States (Said: *Critical Perspectives* 879, 880). According

to Said, negative terms were used to describe non-Western nations (880). For example, the Orientals were projected as "irrational, depraved, childlike," whereas the Europeans constructed a paradigm of "rational, virtuous, mature, 'normal'" attributes for themselves (880). According to Said, "the [European]...always...[positions himself] in strength" creating an image of "a strong and a weak partner" (880). Thus, Orientalism outlined two distinct civilizations or cultures.

Likewise, "America's systematic prowhite and antiblack ideology" during the nineteenth century led many African Americans to reconsider their options if they wanted to survive and obtain the same economic status as Whites (Van Thompson 3). In her fictional representation of "evident historical realities," Larsen includes such characters as Clare Kendry's racist White aunts to depict the "scientific and religious" propaganda of Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tides of Color Against White World-Supremacy* published in 1920 (Said: *Literary Theory* 1119; qtd. in Larsen xviii). This propaganda and the famous "Plessy vs. Ferguson" case in 1896 contributed to the legalization of "separate but equal" and the economic and social segregation of African Americans and Whites based on "visible differences" (Larsen vii, viii). In addition, Jim Crow codes were practiced designating African Americans as second-class citizens and creating an "otherness" in the racial divide; the "otherness" is reference to an "association of color with inferiority" (Larsen viii). Larsen does not refrain from truthfully exposing the profound feelings African Americans have about White Americans who have caused them to view their own skin color negatively and systematically used skin color to divide a nation of people, particularly African Americans, thereby creating interracial hatred and power struggles.

What does it mean for an African-American woman to "pass" during the nineteenth century? For someone to "pass," she must physically have Caucasian features, such as straight or fine curly hair, fair or pale colored skin, and a high-bridged and narrow nose (Larsen xii). The Caucasian features in African Americans result from White masters raping their dark-skinned slaves, White masters raping their racially mixed light-skinned slaves, and light-skinned African Americans procreating with one another (Van Thompson 4). To have Caucasian features "was a commodity well understood by" both African Americans in the South and the North (Larsen x). Race in America serves as a class marker. In *Passing*, the two central characters, Clare Kendry and Irene Redfield, both possess features that allow them to "pass" in society and their "passing" features are considered

commodities to survive the brutal racial climate that existed in the 1920s (Larsen x). They represent two different rationales for “passing.” Clare assimilates into White society permanently to access “the social privileges, protections, and entitlements of whiteness;” on the other hand, Irene crosses over temporarily for “social conveniences” (Larsen xi). In addition to having the physical attributes, the individuals need to have the proper geography, education, linguistic and social behavior to be successfully undetected (Van Thompson 3).

Interracial power relations of African Americans are epitomized when passing light-skinned African Americans coexist with non-passing African Americans. Both groups understand their status in society and will maintain power relations consistent with the present racial hegemony in American culture. An old axiom, “if you’re white you’re alright; if you are brown [or mulatto], stick around; if you are black, ...get back...” operated in the socio-economic constructs of American society during the nineteenth century (Mbeki 2001). Recognizing her limitations as an African American, Clare ascends from second-class citizenship to first-class citizenship when she consciously assimilates into White society and marries a rich white man, John “Jack” Bellew, thus reinforcing the universal notion that to be White in this world is better than being anything else.

Even though Clare appears to have successfully moved into White society, her childhood friend Irene Redfield cautions her on the “hazardous business of ‘passing.’” Clare disregards Irene’s warning and questions why “more coloured girls,” have not “passed” over, declaring “passing” is “frightfully easy” to do if one has the nerve to do so. According to nineteenth century racist propaganda, to be Black means you are a thief, a liar, simple-minded, “inefficient, irresponsible, lazy,” and sexually promiscuous (Said: *Literary Theory* 1123). Who wants to be associated with a race possessing these negative characteristics? And why would someone desperately pursue life within a society who hates her presence? Clare reveals she wants to have everything, materially and socially, and would do anything to get it. She reasons: “I [am not] bad-looking and [...] I could ‘pass.’” Clare is an opportunist. She uses her advantages of skin color and good looks to attain a better “quality of life” (Said: *Literary Theory* 1115). Henceforth, the Eurocentric perception of what is “normal” and acceptable plays itself out within the “othered” race; the same methods used to divide White Americans and African Americans are used to divide African Americans into two groups of people: light and dark, respectively superior and inferior.

Language and dialogue are effectively used to add to the tension of the detection of Clare’s true identity. In chapter three of Part One, Clare’s White racist husband John “Jack” Bellew is introduced to Irene and Gertrude. During the course of the conversation, John unknowingly insults them. Clare “permit[s] this ridiculing of her race by an outsider.” His derogatory pet name for her is “Nig” and he reasons her getting darker as time passes is a result of her wanting to be a Negro. John is confident he is not married to a “nigger.”

“Oh, no Nig, [...] nothing like that with me. I know you’re no nigger [...] You can get as black as you please as far as I’m concerned, since I know you’re no nigger. I draw the line at that. No *niggers* in my family. Never have been and never will be.”

(Larsen 40)

John’s declaration reinforces physical and cultural “otherness.” Larsen cleverly discloses two things in this setting: Irene’s “passing” for social convenience and Clare’s loss of a perceived freedom to be gained because she has crossed over. Although “passing” for social convenience appears to be harmless, the individual is exposed to the possibility of being demeaned on any given occasion. In addition, fear of being detected imposes restrictions, such as not being able to openly defend ignorant remarks and racial epithets.

“Otherness” creates strangeness in the African-American “racial consciousness.” Similarly in *Souls of Black Folk*, W.E.B. Du Bois’ philosophy of the “double-consciousness,” explains that “the American world” only allows the African American to see herself “through the revelation of the other world” (Franklin 215). Larsen and Du Bois both acknowledge the “divided self” in the African-American consciousness and how it desires to be more American or more White in order to be considered a respected human being of equal status (Franklin 215). The perception of self through the perception of others is a matter of subject in Said’s “Orientalism.” (Said: *Critical Perspectives* 884). The perception of what constitutes “African American” or the African-American experience is blurred because “passing” African Americans have defied notions of African Americanism and White Americanism. The “passing” African American can cross the line without someone questioning his or her presence.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* serves therefore as an apparatus to examine how “otherness” is constructed in society. In an attempt to advance their culture and economic systems, Europeans have created knowledge systems via writers

and artists who incorporated their “prejudicial racial assumptions” about the East during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Wikipedia “Orientalism”). The United States of America also created knowledge systems via scientists, writers, and artists who enforced their racial perceptions into law, such as “Plessy vs. Ferguson” and Jim Crow codes, and created “otherness” within the American society (Wikipedia “Lothrop”). Nella Larsen’s novel boldly and successfully depicts the “double-consciousness” of the “passing” African-American woman and the existing power relations within their social construct.

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A Philadelphia Story: Race, Riots, and Miscegenation in Frank Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*

William Clarke, *Macalaster College*

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Frank Webb's novel *The Garies and Their Friends*, published on the eve of the Civil War in 1857 and one of the first black novels ever written, grapples with issues of miscegenation, black identity, and white supremacy in mid-19th-century free Philadelphia. Webb, who grew up and lived in antebellum Philadelphia, writes of the complex social and economic circumstances which characterized the black experience in Philadelphia, which by 1860, had the largest population of free blacks outside of the Slave South. Despite the strength of Philadelphia's free-black community, from 1829 onward it was terrorized by "half a dozen major anti-black riots and many more minor mob actions. Negro churches, schools, homes, and even an orphanage were set on fire. Some blacks were killed, many beaten, and others run out of town" (*Free Black Slaves in Antebellum Philadelphia*, Hershberg 370). It is against this compelling and dangerous backdrop that Webb writes his story, investigating the relationship between miscegenation, mixed race identities and the racially motivated violent response of whites as conflicting and competing oppositional forces within the economic, social and spatial realities of free but segregated Philadelphia.

The novel's plot is woven around the biracial Garie family, their complex web of friends and enemies, and the violent ramifications of their move from antebellum Savannah, Georgia to 'free' Philadelphia. The Garie family consists of Mr. Garie, a wealthy white member of southern gentry, his black wife Emily, whom he first purchases and then marries, and their two mulatto children. Upon moving into Philadelphia and a white neighborhood, the Garie family encounters violent resistance from the likes of Mr. Stevens, their racist neighbor, and other whites in the city. This resistance reacts against both the economic transfer of wealth into blacks hands, as symbolized by the Garie family and Mr. Walters, a black Philadelphia entrepreneur, and the transgression of spatial boundaries of segregated Philadelphia. By living in a white neighborhood and creating a biracial household, the Garies disregard the spatial and economic logic of segregation, a crime for which they pay with their lives.

Webb places the potential to transgress the boundaries of white supremacist society in the formation of a separate black community. In turn, the subversive possibilities of miscegenation, embodied by the Garies, are made impossible

by white society's vested economic interest in segregation and white supremacy. Webb, without indicting the Garies or other biracial characters, argues that the best path of progress lies in explicitly black economic gain. This notion is epitomized by the wealthy entrepreneur Mr. Walters, who manages to circumvent the material and physical realities of white supremacy by amassing cultural and economic capital. Unlike the Garies, Mr. Walters remains in constant contact with the black community and is thus able to survive the violence of white supremacy, while the Garies are not. The persistence of white supremacy and its reactionary violence necessitates a physically and socially cohesive black community which disables and resists the viability of racial hybridity.

Mr. Winston, the mulatto friend of the Garies, is caught between the worlds of whiteness and blackness. Raised a slave, Winston nonetheless receives a first class education and eventually gains his freedom. Moving to Philadelphia from New Orleans, he seeks a social space in which his personal desire to live and socialize amongst black folk and his professional desires to engage in entrepreneurial business opportunities across racial lines can coexist. Despite the fact that his gentlemanly demeanor and exceedingly pale skin allow him to pass as white, Mr. Winston is unable to reconcile this ability with his desire to live in a black community. Mr. Ellis, the patriarch of a respected middle class black family and an old friend of both Mr. Winston's and the Garies warns Winston that he "must live exclusively amongst colored people, or go to the whites and remain amongst them" (Webb 44). At once recognizing and rejecting Winston's notions of racial hybridity, Mr. Ellis comprehends the necessity of racial unity in the face of white discomfort and antagonism towards the smudging of racial borders.

Unlike either the Garies or Mr. Winston, Mr. Ellis and his family are described as members of "a highly respectable and industrious colored family" (Webb 16). They entertain no delusions towards racial amalgamation and comfortably live within public and private spheres of blackness. The family's lack of any pretenses toward the viability of race mixing enables them to benefit from the protections provided by Mr. Walters during the race riot sparked by Mr. Stevens. The Ellis' and Mr. Walters' shared defense of Walters' mansion indicates both the physical safety that can be found in the black community and the dangers of the Garies' hybridity, as they are unable to be warned and brought to Walters' house due to the location of their home in a white neighborhood. In mid-nineteenth

century Philadelphia, the middle ground in which Mr. Winston and the Garie family find themselves is fraught with internal contradictions and an instability which is untenable.

The Garies encounter the same barriers as Mr. Winston in their attempts to create a biracial family identity. Because of their upper class disposition, Mrs. Garie's enduring illness (forcing her to be withdrawn from the public eye) and the children's apparent paleness, the Garies' transgressions of the geographic, economic and racial lines of Philadelphia initially remain undetected, but such safety is short lived. Originally impressed by the apparent wealth and stature of the Garies, neighbors Mr. and Mrs. Stevens assign a high degree of social and cultural pedigree to the family, so much that Mr. Stevens advises his wife that they must "try and cultivate them—ask the children to play with ours, and strike up an intimacy in that way" (Webb 124). Mr. Stevens, for whom wealth alone acts as a barometer of prestige and success, desires an intimacy with the Garies that he thinks will add to his own family's social standing. For a moment, the Garies' upper class sensibilities enable them to traverse racial boundaries and gain nominal if short lived stability but one that in the face of the dominant racial logics of Philadelphia is impossible to sustain.

Soon enough, the short lived peaceful existence of the Garies is spoiled by Stevens, who uncovers the true colors of his neighbors. Mr. Stevens' outrage at living next to a race traitor married to a black woman and their black children is palpable. Stevens' first discovery is soon joined by an equally shocking revelation, that he is Mr. Garie's cousin. Moreover, due to the racist laws of the time, Stevens, rather than Mrs. Garie or the children would stand to inherit the Garie fortune were Mr. Garie to die. In this instance, the economic and social projects of white supremacy coalesce to give Stevens the opportunity to defend the physical boundaries of whiteness while simultaneously deriving significant material benefits in the process. By assassinating Mr. Garie and depriving his family of any inheritance, Stevens reinstates the physical boundaries of segregated Philadelphia while keeping the Garies' wealth in white hands. The Garies' transgressions of the established boundaries between black and white are remedied by the violent murder of Mr. Garie, the death of his wife and the subsequent impoverishment of his children.

Contrary to the racial hybridity sought after by Mr. Winston and the Garies, the Ellis family, Kinch and Mr. Walters embody the existence of stable blackness, which

offers them both community and security. Kinch's shop, like Mr. Walters' house, is in the "lower part of the city" where earlier, Mr. Garie had been impressed "by the number of coloured children he saw skipping merrily along with their bags of books in their arms" (Webb 183, 120). Kinch, after finding Stevens' list of houses and families to be attacked during a deliberately orchestrated race riot, notifies Mr. Walters of his discovery. Despite their class differences, Walters and Kinch are drawn together by their shared membership in the black neighborhood where both reside and work. The neighborhood, a black space, is constructed as a safe haven for blacks, away from the violence and corruption of white supremacy that so threatens the Garies. Moreover, the proximity between Walters and many other black families threatened by Mr. Stevens' riot allows Walters to warn or provide sanctuary to each family besides the Garies.

Robert Reid-Pharr argues that white supremacist society had adopted a racial logic "that allowed the black to enter the public sphere but only as a black, as an individual whose body was not peripheral to his subjectivity but constitutive" (72). Thus, blackness in the public sphere was only allowed so long as it was clearly marked. This enabled the continuation of segregationist culture and unadulterated white supremacy. Reid-Pharr succinctly contrasts the Ellis and Garie families, "where the Garies are a 'mixed' family, the Ellises are 'purely' black, secure in their understanding of where they stand in Philadelphia's racial economy" (Reid-Pharr 68). The Garies' hybridity and their exclusion from the black community, both physical and racial, places them on the periphery of both black and white communities, unable to rely on either.

After the riot which orphans the Garie children and maims Mr. Ellis, the differing fates of Emily and Clarence Garie complete Webb's indictment of hybridity and endorsement of black singularity. Through Mr. Walters' personal insight, the contrast between Clarence and Emily's positions can be understood: "I esteem myself happy in comparison with that man, who, mingling in society of whites, is at the same time aware that he has African blood in his veins, and is liable to be ignominiously hurled from his position by the discovery of his origin" (Webb 276). The burden of hybridity is seen in the Garie son Clarence immediately, "in his eyes an expression of intense sadness that characterized his mothers" (Webb 277). As he spends more and more time passing as white Clarence's vitality declines until he is forced by his poor health to leave the country for a warmer climate. Unlike her brother, who literally distances himself from blackness and the black community of Philadelphia, Emily Garie

embraces her blackness, marrying Charlie Ellis and giving birth to a black child, thereby escaping the dangerous ambiguity of a hybrid identity. Mr. Winston's decision to leave America for Europe and Clarence's inability to reconcile his two halves and eventual death mark the final death of the ill-fated attempts at hybridity. Even the return of Mr. Garies' wealth to his children does not rescue Clarence from the ruin of his unstable self.

The psychological scars connected to the black and mulatto experience are arguably at the heart of the identity crises which Mr. Winston and Clarence Garie are unable to resolve. Beyond the difficulty of creating a viable mixed space and community in the antebellum United States, the struggle to psychologically cope with internalized racism is equally as important. As Theodore Hershberg notes in his essay "Mulattoes and Blacks: Intra-Group Color Differences and Social Stratification in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia," "Negroes themselves internalized the hatred for the black. Contemptuous of the darker-skinned among them, many Negroes openly preferred the mulatto" (426). It is this attitude that Frank Webb's novel is actively opposing. In portraying the success, happiness and survival of the stable black families, Webb is resisting the tendency which Hershberg describes. In a sense, Webb argues that no biracial identity is secure in the face of white supremacy. Regardless of skin tone, one must take ownership of and connect with their blackness in real and tangible forms or risk facing the wrath of an angry and hateful white majority without the power of the black community behind them. As Robert Reid-Pharr observes; "The tragedy of the Garie family is that all of its members, save young Emily, are divided against themselves" (68). For Frank Webb, in the violently racist world of 19th-century Philadelphia, to be so divided is a fatal mistake.

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City of Faded Dreams: Paterson, New Jersey

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I. Introduction

Paterson, New Jersey was once known as the “Silk City” or the “Lyons of America.” It was a city of great industrial promise, and was one of the earliest centers of the American Industrial Revolution. The city’s industrial growth was due in large part to the vision of Alexander Hamilton who, in the 1790s, aided in the formation of the Society for Useful Manufacturers (SUM) to harness the waterpower of the Great Falls of the Passaic River.ⁱ This city held “a critical place in the development of American industrialization.”ⁱⁱ So it was that the city prospered during the 19th and early 20th centuries—its industrial growth spearheaded by industrial firms such as: Colt Firearms, Rogers Locomotive Works, John Royle and Sons Machinists (processing copper, zinc, and brass), and J.E. Barbour Company (manufacturing linen and cotton threads).ⁱⁱⁱ Paterson, however, would come to be defined by its silk industry, which once produced over half of the silk in the United States.^{iv} Christopher Norwood notes that “Paterson did not just manufacture; it produced articles that redefined the limits of life. It is impossible to think of any other city whose products cut so deeply into the texture of the United States and not only transformed its national character, but revolutionized American relations with the world.”^v The great potential and preeminence of the city and its industrial might had, time and again, placed the city and

its industries on the cutting edge of developments. Paterson manufactured everything from guns and railroads, to submarines and airplanes, to the silk industry that would give the city its reputation. And yet, the great promise of the city, as envisioned by Hamilton—a promise that was, in many ways, a truly American dream of unmatched, boundless industrial might—was not to be for Paterson, New Jersey.

The “Silk City” would soon be the center of the labor unrest of the latter part of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was not immune to the challenges posed by reformers and striking workers alike, who began challenging the very structures of laissez-faire capitalism and Gilded Age America. The struggles between labor and capital ultimately contributed to the city’s eventual decline. Today, the hum of the silk mills is now eerily silent; the hustle-bustle of immigrant silk workers has been stifled. In his memoir, *Spoiled Silk*, George William Shea wrote that, “Almost no one visits Paterson now. Alexander Hamilton’s dream faded; the city did not keep its promise.”^{vi} Walking through the once proud center of industry, Shea reflected:

Jobs disappeared and never came back. For a brief period, during the Second World War, the situation was turned around by the presence of the aircraft industry in and around the city (Wright and Curtis Wright), but those companies did not survive the end of the war and the city has been in decline ever since and is now, it seems to me, virtually a vast urban ghetto.^{vii}

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ⁱ Marty Blatt, “Learning About Labor History: The Botto House NHL,” *Cultural Resource Management* 16, no. 5 (1993): 13.

ⁱⁱ Marty Blatt, “Learning About Labor History: The Botto House NHL,” *Cultural Resource Management* 16, no. 5 (1993): 13.

ⁱⁱⁱ Philip M. Read, *Paterson* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 49, 53, 61-63; Marty Blatt, 13.

^{iv} Jane Wallerstein, *Voices From The Paterson Mills* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 25; *Twenty-Sixth Annual Report. Bureau of Statistics of Labor and Industries of New Jersey 1903* (Sommerville: The Unionist-Gazette Printing House, 1903), 116.

^v Christopher Norwood, *About Paterson: The Making and Unmaking of an American City* (New York: Saturday Review Press/E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974), 41.

^{vi} Ibid., 11.

^{vii} George W. Shea, “Re: (no subject),” email to the author, 19 Sep. 2005.

The fate of this city parallels that of many American industrial centers today. Nevertheless, the explanations for such developments prove elusive. Much has been written on the role played by continual labor conflicts, the intransigence on the part of manufacturers, the growth of commission weaving, and the formation of annexes in areas of low wages and little labor unrest. All of these factors played a role in the economic decline of Paterson. However, the end for Paterson was sealed by its inability to compete with artificial fabrics such as rayon, and, later on, nylon. These developments, coupled with the introduction of more effective automated technology, essentially formed the basis for the destruction of the Silk City. Throughout history, materials and technology have often revolutionized human interactions as well as industrial and economic competition. Ignoring the rising tide of artificial fabrics and the ability of competing manufacturers in the South to employ more efficient technology in their mills obscures one of the most important factors in the downfall of Paterson as a major center of industry. Therefore, to understand the roles played by artificial fabrics and more efficient technologies and their effect on the silk industry of Paterson in the long run, the demise of the Silk City must be placed in the context of when these developments occurred, and the contributing factors leading to the demise, in the short run, must also be explored.

II. America At Large, 1890–1940: Industry, Reform, and Labor Conflicts

The situation that faced Paterson during this period should be viewed within the larger trends affecting American society at that time. Technology was revolutionizing the United States. In the words of Steven J. Diner, “Americans of the Progressive Era watched new technologies, exploited by giant corporations, produce ever larger amounts of wealth, create millions of new jobs, offer a stunning array of consumer goods, and open life choices previously unimagined. [They]...lived in a world that offered exciting new possibilities even as it destroyed traditional opportunities.”^{viii}

As the silk industry boomed, industrial excess and attempts at reform collided with each other. Gilded Age America met the Progressive Era. The self-made men of this era justified their actions by using the principles of laissez-faire capitalism as well as Social Darwinism. And more often

than not, the government sided with business and capital. Progressives from both of the major political parties, as well as Populists and Socialists, challenged these views. Reformers ranging from Teddy Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, and Robert La Follette attempted to regulate the iniquities plaguing the nation. Muckrakers such as Upton Sinclair, Ida Tarbell, and Lincoln Steffens shone the spotlight on the ills and excesses plaguing various sectors of American industry.

This was an age of contradictions and of conflict. Labor struggled to gain recognition and fight for better working conditions and wages. Collective bargaining was hardly an accepted fact of daily life in the United States. In industrialized cities such as Paterson, various unions had attempted to change the ways in which industry conducted itself. The Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.) would not be the first or the last to challenge the prevailing situation faced by organized labor during this period. Prior to 1913, the Knights of Labor had attempted unsuccessfully, to organize laborers in the Paterson silk industry.^{ix} At the same time, another organization, the American Federation of Labor, was established in 1887 under the leadership of Samuel Gompers as a more moderate response to America’s growing industrialization.

For unions, especially the I.W.W., this era was characterized by violence and virulent anti-unionism. I.W.W. activities during this period of time, inclusive of the strikes in Lawrence and in Paterson, “incurred the bitter hostility of employers accustomed to a docile labor force.”^x

Its campaigns in the West aroused the primitive ‘I’ll run my own business’ spirit of western employers. Once aroused, these employers resorted to the old, lawless methods of the frontier. They attacked the I.W.W. with any and every physical and legal weapon, and they attacked the organization with words. Their verbal attack was the more significant because it convinced many Americans, with economic interests to protect, that the Wobblies were bent upon the destruction of those interests. That conviction became the basis of a fierce attack upon the organization during and after the First World War.^{xi}

Strikes by such groups were not in vain. They “made a lasting impression upon men who believed implicitly in the

^{viii} Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 3.

^{ix} Philip B. Scranton, “An Exceedingly Irregular Business: Structure and Process in the Paterson Silk Industry, 1885-1910,” in Philip B. Scranton (ed.), *Silk City: Studies on the Paterson Silk Industry, 1860-1940* (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1985), 58-60.

^x Joseph G. Rayback, *A History of American Labor* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), 248.

^{xi} Joseph G. Rayback, *A History of American Labor*, 248-249.

democratic process as the surest technique for solving all the nation's problems; it made them friends of labor because the laboring men were being denied their democratic rights. The strikes also revealed that a very large segment of the labor population was living under deplorable economic circumstances in the midst of splendor."^{xii}

The manner in which industry conducted itself, and reacted to strikes such as the 1913 strike in Paterson, reflected the idea that workers could not and should not interfere with management and the governing of an industry. Demands for increased wages and better working conditions were denied by the equally strident cry of management and manufacturers who viewed industry in terms of profitability and productivity. A wage increase, while humane and desirable, might, in some cases, hurt the ability of an industry to compete and prosper, and this is particularly true of the silk industry in Paterson. Workers called for an end to "stretch-outs," while management wanted increased production without having to pay an increase in wages. These positions imperiled the ability of industry to integrate and profit from new advances in technology, which could in turn, increase production. Such were the conflicts and contradictions of the times.

The rising tide of reform and labor conflicts were only a few of the developments occurring at this time. Frederick Lewis Allen commented on the "Big Red Scare" in *Only Yesterday*: "It was an era of lawless and disorderly defense of law and order, of unconstitutional defense of the Constitution, of suspicion and civil conflicts—in a very literal sense, a reign of terror."^{xiii} He describes that during this period, and especially during World War One, "the labor movement had been steadily gaining in momentum and prestige. There had been hundreds of strikes, induced chiefly by the rising of prices of everything that laboring-man needed in order to live, but also by his new consciousness of his power." Workers had reason to hope that "with the coming peace, new benefits would be showered upon them. Peace came, and hope was deferred."^{xiv} The effects of the Russian Revolution, the attempts at labor organizing by radical organizations such as the I.W.W., and the suspicions abounding against immigrants—all fed into the hysteria that was unfolding.

Immigrant strikers, such as those in Paterson, working with the I.W.W. and the Socialists in neighboring

Haledon, had to face, to one degree or another, the use of patriotism and exaggerated nationalism (especially the kind that would feed the Red Scare) during their strikes, including the Great Textile Strike of 1913. That the Red Scare gave way to a period of what seemed to be boundless prosperity in the 1920s merely strengthened the determination of business and industry not to recognize the collective bargaining power of unions and labor as a whole. If the prosperity of the 1920s strengthened industry, the Great Depression awoke and set fire to the consciousness of labor during the 1930s. Indeed, the widespread general textile strike of 1934 occurred alongside many other strikes, including Passaic and Paterson, New Jersey. John A. Salmond would write that:

One thing is certain, as textile manufacturers in all branches of their industry—wool, silk, cotton, even hosiery—thought about their falling profits, their workers' insistence on higher wages, and their need to adapt to technological advance, they were agreed that they had to get more out of their work force. Thus the 'stretch-out' was born. It took many forms: the assignment of more looms to weavers or more vats to dyers; stepping up the general pace of the production process, often according to the advice of efficiency experts indoctrinated with the latest management practices—the end process being to increase production without a corresponding increase in the cost of labor.^{xv}

All of these national and local conflicts would play their respective parts in the increasing conflicts between labor and capital in the Silk City. In the context of these events, the short-term causes that would eventually lead to the demise of Paterson took shape.

^{xii} Ibid., 249.

^{xiii} Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920's* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1959), 40.

^{xiv} Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 40.

^{xv} John A. Salmond, *The General Textile Strike of 1934: From Maine to Alabama* (University of Missouri Press: Columbia, 2002), 8.

Decoding Petronius: Distrust, Madness, and Readership

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Throughout Petronius' *Satyricon*, the reader is invited to distrust the world of the narrator. While observing the banquet of Trimalchio, the early exploits of Ascyrtos and Encolpius, or the events aboard Lichas' ship with Eumolpus, the reader engages with a text replete with references, imitations, and critiques of other works. While many of these other pieces of literature are highly regarded staples of the Classical literary tradition, Petronius' characters themselves fall short of duplicating the events or even the description of these events which they may seem so adept at decoding. Petronius' reader must perform a similar decoding of these references as they try to piece together the work. However, his characters constant critiques of the 'literary' rejects the coherence and categorization which readers of the extant text attempt to impose. The text as we have it allows us to understand the *Satyricon* as a work about the trappings of familiarity on the level of reader, critic, and character.

In the quest for genre, our chronicler Encolpius is oft characterized as an anti-hero prefiguring picaresque narrators. The first person narrative and roguish adventures support that kind of categorization, while Encolpius' ignobility seems to discredit the idea. What is common between the extant text and what can be classified as picaresque is an attempt to negotiate a world gone awry. Readers are first thrust into this world when our narrator loses his friend Ascyrtos and his way. Lost in a labyrinthine city where each place leads back to itself (*Sat.* 6.5), Encolpius is guided by an unknown vendor who seems to know where he lives. Ascyrtos too has been taken down winding roads and back alleys (*Sat.* 8.3). Both characters' subsequent arrival at a brothel and their similarly seedy journeys only add to the strangeness of the city they visit, the guides they've encountered, and the world which produced both of those situations.

The largest fragment of our extant text, the *Cena Trimalchionis*, forces our narrator and his companions to navigate an extraordinary world filled with 'res novas' (*Sat.* 27.3). The meals are extravagant and never simply what they appear to be. Among other things, the varied items refer to the zodiac (*Sat.* 35), are dressed like freedmen (*Sat.* 40.3; 41.2), resemble other food (*Sat.* 69.8-70.2), or are stuffed with other items (*Sat.* 40.5-.8). Throughout the dinner, our narrator remains bewildered, making use of an 'interpreter' to explain the situation to him (*Sat.* 41.2) or referring to a previous encounter at the Saturnalia (*Sat.* 69.9). Even when

he thinks he has understood something, he still attempts to defer to someone else's interpretation, soliciting the advice of Agamemnon (*Sat.* 69.9). Encolpius simply can't figure out things for himself, and the cheap tricks his host employs around food escape him.

The freedmen and their experiences also indicate that this environment is incredible. Trimalchio's rings, the symbol of his position and his seal, are gilded, making him appear to be worth more than he is (*Sat.* 32.3). This ruse works on our narrator since Encolpius thought it was made entirely from gold (*Sat.* 32.3). Furthermore, Trimalchio's retellings of commonly known stories are often inaccurate. He makes Helen the sister of Diomedes, the Trojan War a battle between the Trojans and Tarentinians, and gave Iphigenia to Achilles as a wife (*Sat.* 59.3-5). Finally, the stories of Nicero's werewolf and Trimalchio's manikin present another affront to reality. Both stories are sworn to be true (*Sat.* 63.1-2), but are by nature suspect. Yet, Encolpius and his fellow diners eat the stories up, 'et pariter credimus' (*Sat.* 64.1). Encolpius' bewilderment is only cut short by another of one Trimalchio's antics (*Sat.* 63.1). Unaware, Encolpius makes no comment on his host's gross mistakes. Throughout the *Cena* things are not at all as they appear *prima facie*, but because of their novelty, Encolpius cannot properly discern them.

After the *Cena*, Encolpius returns to a world where he finds some solace by transforming himself into his literary heroes and play-acting through his reality. In the extant text, our hero is immediately lost without a torch to reveal the way back to his lodgings, but is luckily saved by Giton's ingenuity (*Sat.* 79.1). However, when Ascyrtos and he are about to fight, Encolpius describes the scene as if he and Ascyrtos were Polynices and Eteocles (*Sat.* 80.3). Later he becomes an Achillean figure mourning his love by the shore (*Sat.* 81.2-3), and like Aeneas, he runs out of his lodgings to avenge his lost love (*Sat.* 82.1). This imagining suffices until actual action is necessary; then our narrator needs either a savior or diversion. Giton steps in between him and Ascyrtos; a soldier interrupts his quest for revenge; when Giton clings to the mattress frame like Odysseus to a sheep (*Sat.* 97.5), Ascyrtos and the magistrate come to foil his plans. On Lichas' ship he pretends he is in the cave of the Cyclops and attempts salvation through another epic event, shipwreck (*Sat.* 101.7-8). Finally, he proposes the idea of dressing up as Ethiopian slaves; pretending to be something he is not serves as his only solution. Our hero knows no way to exist as himself. Although his pretenses have not yielded successful results, he continues to believe and to use these commonplace literary characters to shape his reality.

Since Encolpius insists on manipulating disguises, Giton must remind him how the real world works:

Tamquam hic solus color figuram possit pervetere et non multa una oporteat consentient ut ratione mendacium constet...color arte compositus inquinat corpus, non mutat. (Sat. 102.14; 102.16)

As if this color alone could change our shape and not many things fitting in unison would be necessary for our lie to hold up to scrutiny...dye put on with skill tints the body, it doesn't change it.

It does not suffice to put on a costume; other factors must be in place for a guise to work. In the same vein, it is not enough for Trimalchio to wear a ring that says he is a senator; he must be a senator to have any meaning in the real world. Girding oneself with an epic sword does not produce an epic hero; only by possessing the heroes' heralded qualities can an instance have Encolpius' desired outcome. When Giton's plea is combined with Encolpius' direct identification of characters, namely Thebans (*Sat.* 80.6), Odysseus (*Sat.* 97), the Cyclops (*Sat.* 101), and Hannibal (*Sat.* 101), the shift in Petronian tactics becomes clearer; the appearances' motif has had its least subtle moment. The navigation of a world gone awry cannot depend on the mere appearance of noble qualities but, instead, their successful employment in real situations.

Beyond Encolpius' guises, the idea of the 'literary' often recurs in the *Satyricon*. Agamemnon complains about the trends in education and among scholars, criticizing those who either are well learned but use it to win the favor of the rich and those who aren't ready to learn yet are forced into knowing (*Sat.* 3.3; 4.3). The latter make a mockery of the law courts and school, while the former make mockeries of themselves and their soon to be patrons by laying 'insidias auribus' (*Sat.* 4.4; 3.3). Our text began with the narrator uttering similar thoughts. Students know how to speak sweetly but sloppily, forming words like 'mellitos globulos verborum.' In his opinion, rhetoric has been reduced to pithy statements and trite maneuvers, games full of 'levis and inanibus sonis' (*Sat.* 2.2). Eumolpus, the self-declared poet and storyteller, also laments the love of money, the lost love of astronomy and dialectic, and extols poetry. He mentions writers who believe poetry is easier than their law exercises, using it as a safe haven (*Sat.* 118.2). Finally, Trimalchio posits that literature is the most difficult art to master, followed by medicine and banking; all the professions require one to see more than just the surface (*Sat.* 56.1). Through these characters the technique of creating a literary work

remains debatable and foremost amongst the things to be discussed in the text.

However, the characterization of the figures uttering these observations reinforces the distrust created by the labyrinthine city and incredible atmosphere of the *Cena*. We have already noticed that this is an extraordinary world; Encolpius is a lost soul, while Trimalchio surrounds himself and his guests with a manufactured reality. As proven by the constant rejection from his contemporaries (*Sat.* 90.1), Eumolpus' value as a literary critic is downgraded by his mediocrity as a poet (*Sat.* 92.6). His poem resembling Lucan's *Bellum Civile* is admittedly unpolished but ridiculously trite (*Sat.* 118.6; 119). His ideas "are no more strikingly original than were the criticisms of contemporary rhetoric and they made be paralleled in various earlier writers" (Sullivan, 167). On re-evaluation of the narrative, Encolpius' declamation against the state of education is "by no means a revolutionary scheme" since harkening back to a good time long gone is quite "traditionalist" and, as happens to our hero, can win the favor of any learned man (Sullivan, 165). Even our resident learned man, Agamemnon, is "shown unequal to his preaching" through his rattling off of a long-winded but mostly vapid poem on the state of education. As a result, all three men are guilty of "intellectual hypocrisy" relying on common critiques of the literary world, borrowed phrases, and borrowed lifestyles to navigate their world (Zeitlin, 659). The reader can therefore not put implicit trust in the logic of the characters. If they should offer original judgments, these judgments are unsound, forcing the reader to become an arbiter of text at all times.

Encolpius as first person narrator allows the reader to interact with the text as participant and observer. Since Encolpius lacks the ability to see things clearly, the fact that we encounter situations from his viewpoint puts us at an interesting (dis)advantage. From his perspective, the reader can commit the same errors of misinterpretation but also may "see more clearly than he does the flaws in the system of meaning" (Slater, 249). A simultaneous experiencing of and decoding of each action becomes necessary. It is interesting then that in the *Cena*, where the collision of mere appearance and reality foreground, the three professions most highly praised by Trimalchio involve expertise at deciphering—experts of literature, medicine, and money changing (*Sat.* 56.1-3). The ability to see through the surface, knowing the *praecordia* (*Sat.* 56.2) of a man or the bronze beneath silver (*Sat.* 56.3), and to perform a diagnosis is of much value here. Yet, the mockery of the literary world

through those who claim to understand the way things should be but rely on the worn ways of describing it as they spout unskilled literary work makes even this evaluation suspect. This is the failure of Eumolpus and his epic as well as Agamemnon in his early attempt at artistry (*Sat.* 5). Encolpius, the same character that puts on the guises of literary characters to survive before and after the banquet, still cannot identify the tricks of his host. There seems to be an embedded critique of the reader and literary analyst, juxtaposed with the critique of the literary world itself; it is simply not enough to be comfortable dissecting or duplicating the accepted arguments, the familiar images, and trite quotes, as our characters seem to be. The task at hand for a reader is to look beyond, to recognize the trappings of tropes, clichés, and other types of literary sleight of hand. Without these distractions, a reader can begin to inspect the “vitals” of a work.

For modern readers, the quest for genre creates similar grounds for error. To say that the variation of literary types present in our extant text makes it difficult to establish narrative coherence would be an understatement. The Pergamene boy is reminiscent of a Milesian tale. Eumolpus’ poem is a mimicked *Bellum Civile*. The *Cena* reads like a *Symposium*. We also enjoy an Odyssean voyage at sea. In the variety of such situations, there is a tendency to want the comfort of genre, allusion, and a tradition to make sense of what this text offers. At times, conforming may be practically useful, as it proves for our narrator and Ascyltos when they acquire dinner (*Sat.* 10.6.). However, as Trimalchio’s banquet, Encolpius’ ineptitude, and Eumolpus’ ramblings prove, the ability to conform does not determine the ability to achieve an end. If anything, the impotence of the characters in the plot make the reader increasingly incredulous of the models to which they ascribe. Therefore, in the *Satyricon*, clinging to literary models with a sense of overdetermined outcomes, whether as a character or critic, proves ineffectual.

It is difficult to state much about the *Satyricon* with certainty. Nevertheless, the reflections on the literary pursuit continue to appear in the varied adventures of the characters. As new figures are introduced, the pacing of the extant text quickens, and the subtlety of the motif decreases, the *Satyricon* gains a metatextual flair that at times may appear to come from a judgmental author. Conversely, Petronius instills in the reader a distrust of the characters who pronounce these very critiques, a distrust which permits the reader to see the characters for the frauds they are. Giton’s plea is particularly fitting then not only for Encolpius as character but also as a guide for a reader thrust

into this world gone mad. Understanding the *Satyricon* as a text about text, an attempt by the reader to confine it to a genre fails to notice its most salient lesson—labels do not change substance.

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Ruth and Power in Pinter's *The Homecoming*

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Much has been made of Ruth's situation at the end of Harold Pinter's play, *The Homecoming*. Depending on the reading, she is often portrayed as either a potent example of female power or a disturbing illustration of the wife/whore dynamic gone awry. Her sexual tumble off the couch in one scene raised no few scholarly eyebrows, and her (commonly assumed) decision to remain with Teddy's family at the conclusion of the play, apparently abandoning her children, likewise places her in a very complicated and controversial position.

While a large amount of the work concerning Ruth and her role in *The Homecoming* focuses on her moral values or rise to power, I believe an important possibility has been overlooked. What if Ruth was never truly oppressed, despite the best efforts of her husband and his family? If such a reading is correct, there is no rise to power or selfhood at the end of the play but instead a reaffirmation or manifestation of her true position with respect to the men who surround her. Such a reading, although thus far apparently unexamined, is indeed quite plausible. In this paper, I will examine evidence in *The Homecoming* to support the theory that, far from rising to power, Ruth instead expands her reach beyond her husband to his family using distinctly feminine and often sexual means.

While many scholarly readings of Ruth's character portray her as a victimizer of the men around her, "turning them into childish creatures who desire nothing more than to regress to the comfort of the womb," the more sympathetic readings view Ruth as a woman oppressed by the powerful men in her vicinity (Adler 377). Scholars such as Penelope Prentice, who attempts to defend Ruth in her article "Ruth: Pinter's *The Homecoming* Revisited," continue to couch their discussions of her character in terms of a coming to power. For instance, William J. Free affirms that Ruth "redefines the family relationships and establishes a new order with herself at the center," thus moving from the position of oppressed to that of, if anything, the oppressor (2). He cites the scene between Ruth and Lenny in Act One, where Lenny attempts to subject Ruth to his will by divesting her of a glass of water, as the turning point in the power struggle. Ironically, it is Ruth's sexuality that appears to frighten the pimp most:

LENNY. Just give me the glass.

RUTH. No.

Pause.

LENNY. I'll take it, then.

RUTH. If you take the glass...I'll take you.

Pause.

LENNY. How about me taking the glass

without you taking me?

RUTH. Why don't I just take you?

Pause.

LENNY. You're joking.

Pause. (34)

Lenny seems prepared to ignore Ruth's will until she changes her tactics, going beyond questioning or refusing him and becoming more forward. She builds upon Lenny's story about the prostitute who made advances against him, leaving him baffled by her strange combination of motherly gentleness and blatant sexuality (35). Free focuses on the pauses that litter this exchange, frequently after Ruth continues to assert her power against Lenny: "The pauses indicate Ruth the victor in each exchange as Lenny searches for a new ploy. He is on the defensive. She follows her advantage with a series of verbal assaults with obvious sexual connotations" (3).

I believe the final pause above carries an additional meaning. Whereas Lenny's moments of silence frequently indicate a sense of discomfort in his position, his last pause doubles as an invitation (even a plea) for Ruth to speak. Instead, she refuses, leaving Lenny to scramble for additional explanations for her behavior and resulting in a bout of rambling which Ruth promptly ignores and thus invalidates (34). At the end of the scene, Ruth "laughs shortly, drains the glass," and thus reasserts herself while demonstrating Lenny's lack of control over her actions (35).

While this scene is a striking example of Ruth's agency and power over the men who surround her, it is by no means the first instance of her exerting her will. When the audience is first introduced to Ruth and her husband, Teddy, the nature of their relationship is quickly made clear. Teddy constantly attempts to control Ruth's actions, telling her to sit down, go to bed, and generally remain in a prone, passive position (20). However, rather than appearing assertive and powerful, he commonly seems desperate, ineffectual, and increasingly nervous. The ease with which Ruth refuses to follow her husband's directions creates the impression that, rather than struggling to gain power, she is secure in her position in their relationship. This impression is further supported by Teddy's inability to refuse Ruth the key to the front door (creating the question of who truly has

control in the first place) and his asking of her, “But what am I going to do?...I’m not going to bed without you” (24).

This view of the power dynamic between Ruth and Teddy is further supported by the contrast of behavior between Teddy’s attempts at giving orders and the response to Ruth’s suggestion of “Why don’t you go to bed?” (24). At this point, Ruth and Teddy have effectively switched roles (Teddy has been placed in the passive position as he is the one being left at home while Ruth is free to do as she pleases). Whereas Teddy’s assertion that he wanted to “walk about” and that Ruth ought to go to bed is followed by total inaction, not only does Ruth follow through with her decision to take a walk but Teddy eventually follows her suggestion and goes to bed without her (27).

That this scene serves as our introduction to Ruth and Teddy is extremely important. Ruth’s calm exterior suggests she is perhaps accustomed to Teddy’s behavior, and that his attempts to control her do not come as a surprise. Likewise, Teddy’s successive attempts at convincing Ruth to do as he wishes, though never truly assertive or demanding (he only once issues a strict command and even then finds himself rebuked and ignored), become increasingly feeble as the scene progresses. By the time Ruth ultimately steps out of the house, an image of freedom and self-assurance as she walks in a foreign neighborhood late at night, Teddy no longer frames his wife as weak or unsure. Instead, he becomes the helpless one. He watches her walk away, unable to understand her deviation from his desires. At the same time, he is needy and hesitant to remain without her (24).

Penelope Prentice discusses the methods of gaining power and control in Pinter’s plays. In “Ruth: Pinter’s *The Homecoming* Revisited,” she affirms that, “Although asserting one’s superiority over another gains an identity relative only to those one dominates, Pinter’s characters assert identity only one other way—by claiming the right of title conferred by work outside the house” (469). Through this method, Ruth again confronts the men and remains in the position of relative power. Not only is Ruth able to cite her own past employment as a model of the body, but she is also able to demonstrate competency in the occupations of two of the brothers, Lenny and Teddy.

Lenny’s position as a pimp and his manner of waltzing about the stage in a silken robe creates the appearance of a man in charge of his sexuality as well as that of the women around him. In the past, as in his story of the prostitute, he claims to have retained this control by use of physical violence, kicking and punching at infirm women in both of his

supposed exploits (31). Yet Lenny remains hopelessly lost in the face of Ruth’s sexuality, becoming so incensed that Max demands to know if he is drunk (35). More interestingly, although none of the men manage to “tame” Ruth by adding her to their list of sexual conquests, it is Joey who ultimately takes her upstairs and who, at the end of the text, retains Ruth’s full attention. In contrast, Lenny is left standing while she sits in Max’s chair, watching from a position that looks somewhat excluded from the scene rather than powerful and within it (82).

Teddy, like Lenny, attempts to put women in a lesser position within his professional life. Whereas Lenny, as a pimp, claims a certain amount of ownership over women’s bodies, Teddy attempts to assert intellectual superiority over Ruth in particular. He frames her in terms of being a great “help” to his work, trying at one point to tempt her into returning with him by proposing: “You can help me with my lectures when we get back” (55). However, his condescending representation of her as a basic assistant and a lesser philosopher seems unsound. Moments before, Ruth takes control of a philosophical conversation between Lenny and Teddy and corrects the two of them in a move that shocks and, perhaps, confuses the other characters to silence (53). Strikingly, within her example, she includes the sexual mention of her underwear and the sensual movement of her legs, thus simultaneously attacking Lenny’s control over her sexuality (and, possibly, over his own).

The assumption that Ruth enters the play in a position of powerlessness makes sense on some levels, especially when one takes into account that the play itself was written in the middle of the 1960s. Feminist readers and scholars, who appear to constitute the majority of those who consider Ruth’s actions as an attempt to gain control over her life, may be accustomed to looking at texts and, indeed, the world in such a manner. As such, it might seem inconceivable that Ruth, as a woman surrounded by five men, could remain in control for the play’s entirety. However, it is quite possible that this is exactly the case. Rather than viewing Ruth’s generally short, simple sentences as evidence of a silenced position of oppression, I suggest we ought to view them as self-assured assertions of her power. After all, as Kelly Morris states, Ruth “almost immediately becomes queen [in the household]. She simply takes her rightful place in the restored matriarchy” (186). Throughout the play, no man is able to force Ruth into anything she does not desire and, judging from her final seat in Max’s upholstered throne, it seems unlikely the family ever will.

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Objectivity in Charles Reznikoff's *Testimony*

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Within literary circles, the term “objectivism” refers to a group of modernist writers who emerged during the first half of the twentieth century and to which the poet Charles Reznikoff belonged. One of the preeminent exemplars of objectivist poetry is Reznikoff's multi-volume work entitled *Testimony*, which consists of hundreds of poems based on courtroom depositions from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. *Testimony* bombards the reader with a seemingly endless string of what today's news media would likely dub “human interest stories” or, to be more accurate, “human tragedies.” Indeed, some of the events described are so bizarre that one expects to encounter a preface to the edition containing the classic *Twilight Zone* television program's famous epigram “submitted for your approval.”

The task of this paper is not only to identify the parameters that delineate objectivity in *Testimony: 1885-1890 Recitative* but to suggest that the “reality” each poem describes is restricted on account of the selective techniques Reznikoff utilizes. This shall be accomplished primarily through a comparison of Reznikoff's own writings to the actual court cases from which he drew testimony. But first, I provide a review of literary objectivism's relation to objectivity followed by a discussion of what composing objectivist poetry entailed for Reznikoff. Although this essay analyzes a minute sample of his extensive work, the four poems discussed each illustrate a distinctive approach towards editing and selection. Moreover, I intend to establish that within Reznikoff's writing there is a higher degree of intervention than was previously assumed by those who have studied Reznikoff's “objectivist” poetry.

Even though Reznikoff's work was considered the quintessential model of objectivist poetry by Louis Zukofsky, the modernist poet credited with founding the literary movement, there is no fixed definition that covers all facets of objectivism. But lest I find myself in a bind for erroneously conflating “objectivity” with objectivism, I want to pause here

and examine the bond that exists between these two terms and how this connection relates to Reznikoff's work. One need only look at objectivism's opposite—subjectivism—to gain a sense of the niche that the objectivist poets carved out for themselves. Subjectivist writing, the objectivists alleged, revealed a “personal vagueness” (DuPlessis 10) because of the axiomatic presence of the personal feelings and opinions of the author (Murfin 466). Conversely, objectivist poetics emphasizes the construction of a form that functions as a “clear, impartial, [and] physical eye” (DuPlessis 57) resulting in poetry where the writer's personal perspective is distant or even absent (Murfin 466). The objectivists pronounced that words were to be less of a metaphor for feeling and more of a direct equivalent for physical fact (DuPlessis 27). While the standard subjectivist poetic aim was to “see beyond” what was actually present through persistent mediation, the objectivists consciously shied away from what they regarded as needless obfuscation (DuPlessis 26).

Reznikoff wholeheartedly believed that superfluous language should be expelled from poetry in favor of limpid propositions and a “speech-based poetics” (DuPlessis 52). But his writing also revealed another key feature of literary objectivism—an insistence on the form itself as an “object” (DuPlessis 8). Reznikoff and the other objectivists concerned themselves with the shape and presentation of the poem and the formation of images into a cogent structure. Reznikoff developed his own particular method to cope with the formal necessities of making the poem into an object. As we see from a handwritten blueprint that survived among his papers, Reznikoff explicitly articulated the process describing how he created the poems in *Testimony*:

The Method of Revision

1. Write all seemingly good lines
2. Examine every word to remove all possible Latinisms and unnecessary words
3. Examine the meaning of the sentences in their order
4. Examine the rhythm of the lines
5. Examine the rhythm of the whole
6. Then revision by contemplation (Watson 75)

Like a recipe explaining how to cook a dish, Reznikoff's “method” is formulaic in its approach. Unlike the measured quantities of a recipe, however, the prescriptions in Reznikoff's list, with the exception of “remove all possible Latinisms” are open to a fair amount of interpretation. As we shall observe, Reznikoff struggles to remain in accordance with certain objectivist edicts (e.g., to treat each poem as an object unto itself) while retaining enough wiggle room to

develop and construct the meaning he intends. For poets who do not wish to enter into the territory of chimerical and nonobjective writing, it is certainly a fine line to walk.

In a 1969 interview, Reznikoff remarked—in reference to *Testimony*—that the term “objectivist” means that a “writer does not write directly about his feelings but about what he sees and hears” (Dembo 202). Reznikoff further noted that the author “is *restricted* almost to the testimony of a witness in a court of law; and who expresses his feelings indirectly by the *selection* of his subject matter [emphasis added].” When asked if his poems resulted in “transcription[s] of reality,” Reznikoff explained that they do but that he “thr[e]w out an awful lot to achieve [his] purpose.” Moreover, he argued that *Testimony* is “not a complete picture of the United States at any time, by any means. It is only a part of what happened, a reality that [he] felt as a reader and could not portray adequately in any other way” (Dembo).

Reznikoff’s responses prompt further avenues of inquiry such as: how, and to what extent, did the poet allow himself to be “restricted” by the testimony of the original court documents? In Reznikoff’s mind, a collection such as *Testimony* is fundamentally incomplete as a historical chronicle because of what is *excluded*, not because of any action undertaken with respect to the details that remain. Another feature of objectivism that Reznikoff’s comment calls attention to is “reality”—a notion that should immediately strike a resonant chord whenever objectivity is at stake. According to Reznikoff, despite the necessary strictures of the poetic form to which he adheres, there is still a realness that is portrayed despite the fact that his poems inevitably offer an incomplete piece of the pie.

Reznikoff’s poems show a multitude of situations concerning the problems of everyday people that at once arouses our interest, concern, and sympathy. At times the poems elicit feelings of horror, like the cases of young children caught in industrial machinery. Sometimes, our feelings are dominated by grief and despair over senseless tragedy and harsh mistreatment. However, it is probably uncommon for readers to experience difficulty in critically reading the incidents themselves. By this I mean to suggest that it is dubious whether anyone is inclined to judge these poems by scrutinizing the accounts for errors and inconsistencies. How could a reader even begin to do so without the more comprehensive evidence that the judge or jury had at their disposal? We only have the partial information Reznikoff gives us. Moreover, the events are not usually told as if they were “unsolved mysteries.” Instead, Reznikoff

crafts each poem as if it were a painting that exudes the desired aura he wishes to extract from a particular case. To put the problem of critical interpretation another way, does Reznikoff reasonably expect the reader to question whether person *x* really shot person *y*? Or does he simply want to impart a specific effect that is tangential to the factual confines of the legal document? It seems that whatever initial skepticism or misgivings may exist in the reader’s mind will likely be brushed aside at the point where the reader harbors no serious preconceived reasons to doubt the purported statements of fact.

The principal problem with an unquestioning acceptance of Reznikoff’s poems is that his entire work is constructed from accounts that ought to be doubted or, at least, rigorously examined by virtue of their nature. Within a single trial there is typically such a plentitude of witness testimonies that the result is a cacophony of divergent voices. The implicit extension of this quandary is that chances are high that some portion of the testimony is false. After all, not everyone’s account of what actually transpired can be true if accounts conflict. One of the chief goals of the courts is to weigh the facts and sort out the conflicting evidence—to determine who is in the “right.” In effect, the legal system functions as an intermediary and arbiter given that disputant parties are frequently in direct opposition and thus the judiciary must attempt to ensure that objectivity is maintained and justice upheld.

The most basic point of departure from the source documents evident in *Testimony* is the absence of a verdict. In records of court decisions, the structure and presentation of the trial is driven wholly by the decision which is usually stated in an expository paragraph. With the proverbial “cat let out of the bag,” readers of court cases necessarily possess a crucial piece of knowledge that affects their appraisal of witness statements and the evidence’s relation to the outcome. That Reznikoff purposefully precludes this condition suggests that readers are free from undue influence which explicitly guides them in their thinking of the case at hand. However, Reznikoff has his own methods of painting the picture that he wants readers to see.

The poems in *Testimony* are grouped by geographic locale, much like the federal and state legal reporter system from where Reznikoff obtained his ideas. Each broad section contains numerous subdivisions according to the cause of the injury sustained (e.g., “Machine Age”), the issue under dispute (e.g., “Property”), or the individuals involved (e.g., “Negroes”). Thus, in some sense, considering *Testimony*’s

poems within a legal frame of mind is inevitable. But does this link to the law imply that we ought to imagine ourselves as jurors listening to testimony? On top of weighing the veracity of the information before us, should we, as readers, also attempt to judge Reznikoff's work on a "meta-reality" plane pertaining to his own *modus operandi* and style? With respect to these two levels of casting judgment, a reader would probably contend that even if a witness's testimony were apocryphal, a "reality" is nonetheless portrayed because Reznikoff is, in effect, capturing a moment in time—much like a photograph—where witness *x* gave said testimony. Consequently, the poems still fall under reality's purview because Reznikoff provides an objectivist interpretation of witness statements. This is what many have been tempted to assume over the years and it is the view that Kenneth Burke espoused in his preface to the 1934 volume of *Testimony*:

“...Reznikoff's work embodies in miniature the problem of the ‘whole truth’...marked by many pronounced differences in occupational pattern. There arise the ‘doctor's point of view,’ the ‘accountant's point of view,’ the ‘salesman's point of view,’ the ‘minister's point of view’...” (Davison, 150)

However, the situations in the book are more complex than this straightforward *x* to *y* correspondence meant to represent Reznikoff's words and those of the hypothetical witness. The inherent intricacy of Reznikoff's poems lies in the employment of a number of editing and filtering techniques, not the least of which is that within a single poem the testimony often comes from several witnesses.

There are certain cases Reznikoff apparently found so unique that they warranted their own unnamed subsection separate from the standard headings of injury/victim. One such example is a case heard by the Louisiana Supreme Court concerning the identity of a woman who went by the alias “Kate Townsend” and was murdered by her lover (Reznikoff 34). The premise of the trial was that three parties—her supposed relatives, the state of Louisiana, and her murderous boyfriend—sought to establish her identity so that the succession of her estate could be determined. The so-called kinsmen claimed that Kate was their long-lost relative, Bridget Cunningham, who came to the US from Ireland and settled in New York before suddenly disappearing.

The structure of the poem leads the reader to conclude that the woman in question probably was Bridget primarily because of the final bit of information that Reznikoff provides. In the last lines, he writes: “she was said to have told

her dressmakers, hairdressers, / chambermaids, and washer-women / that she came from a town in King's County, Ireland, / and that her name was really Bridget Cunningham” (Reznikoff 35). It is no coincidence that Reznikoff leaves us with this striking and fairly convincing piece of evidence. Across the poems in *Testimony*, he uses a similar technique of concluding on a puissant note. This “saving” of the most shocking information until the finale is especially employed to great effect in the industrial accident/fatality cases where the last few lines are usually reserved for the graphic image of the subject's disturbing death.

Similarly, in the Kate Townsend poem, Reznikoff intentionally provides a final and significant surprise, which encourages the reader to assume Kate was Bridget Cunningham given the considerable number of people made privy to this information. Of course, this belief is predicated on the testimony being legitimate. In actuality, all of the witnesses that testified to this “fact” were thoroughly discredited by the State. As the decision explains, the witnesses did “not know their own ages, [could] not remember the names of the streets which they lived on, [could] not remember whether they were married or single at the time when such disclosures were made, [and yet] distinctly remember[ed] *Rashina*, the name of Kate's birth-place, which they had heard once, and that eighteen or nineteen years before they gave this testimony” (*The Succession of Kate Townsend*).

It is no understatement to say that had this information been included in the poem, most readers would be inclined to reconsider the reliability of the witnesses and, therefore, the true identity of Kate Townsend. As it stands, Reznikoff chose not only to present the reader with these (and other) suspect claims, but he also purposefully highlighted the variety of occupations, some of which, at least within American culture, are associated with individuals who are in a unique position to listen to their clients and uncover juicy secrets, e.g., “hairdressers.” More broadly, the issue of witness reliability speaks to a persistent problem within the judicial system: the emphasis and over-reliance jurors place on vivid testimony, rather than legal concepts, to reach their decision despite the fact that witnesses often get confused as their memories become hazy (Tversky).

One could argue that Reznikoff's misleading depiction is appropriate because he is simply presenting the testimony of the claimant. However, in actuality, the testimony is drawn from all of the sides involved. Moreover, virtually every piece of information in the poem is presented in a different order than how it was originally submitted to the

court. For example, the evidence in the second stanza, which states that Bridget lived with friends for a year before her disappearance, comes many pages before the information concerning her physical appearance which Reznikoff expounds within the first three lines. Essentially, Reznikoff jumps back and forth between the paragraphs of the legal document to recreate the story in an entirely novel manner. Paradoxically, the language of the poem strictly adheres to the syntax used in the court decision. Taken individually, Reznikoff's phrases are remarkably similar to the testimony. When he does alter the form, he does so in a way that marginally affects connotation, e.g., substituting "fleshy monstrosity" for "monstrously fat." But even though the language effectively stays the same, one could make the case that the Kate Townsend poem is Reznikoff at his most interventionist. Though he stays "true" to the language of the source, Reznikoff invests a good deal of effort into constructing an alternate telling of the story—one that leads the reader to deduce the opposite ruling of the court. By inverting virtually every detail Reznikoff shapes a story intended to catch our attention and keep us intrigued. The poem has the aura of a gripping mystery novel or *film noir* and Reznikoff manages to set the mood by stressing fairly trivial and non-objective information, e.g., Kate's attractiveness, upfront.

By far, the most frequently referenced legal documents in *Testimony* are wills. Consequently, disputes over inheritance and the distribution of possessions constitute the subjects of many poems. While the Kate Townsend case dealt with issues of identity and missing persons in addition to the matter of settling the deceased's testament, the poem based on the court case *Trost v. Dingles* focuses exclusively on the will of one Gottlieb Weiss (known as Gottlieb Meyer in the poem) (Reznikoff 68). Weiss, who was paralyzed, disinherited his family because they never offered him any financial or emotional support. He decided instead to bequeath a sizeable sum of money to his two tenants and servants, Mr. and Mrs. Trost. Of dispute in the case was Gottlieb's intent. Gottlieb's relatives argued that he was of unsound mind, and that he may have been pressured by the Trosts to amend his will to transfer his savings to them.

What is most striking about this example is that instead of "removing unnecessary words," Reznikoff consistently supplements the original testimony by adding words to "clean up" the vernacular and ostensibly make it clearer to the reader. Reznikoff probably felt the need to retouch the spoken language in the testimony because it was too colloquial. For example, in the poem, Gottlieb refers to his ingrate sisters and says "neither one *comes* here and asks me: /

Gottlieb, *do* you want a drink of water? / or, how *are* you getting along [emphasis added]?" (Reznikoff 68). The entire poem closely follows the wording found in the court decision but the differences between genteel or proper diction versus lowbrow language are instantly discernible upon examination of the court's decision: "neither one come here to ask me: Gottlieb, you want a drink of water? Or, how you getting along?" (*Trost v. Dingles*). There are obvious problems with the formal grammar of Gottlieb's putative statement. Reznikoff has corrected the inflection on the verb "come" to include the appropriate third person present tense suffix "-s" and sentence fragments like "how you getting along?" have been converted into "vanilla" speech by adding one more word, e.g., "are."

One can easily imagine Reznikoff fine-tuning the language and trying to repair it in a manner analogous to someone carrying an oil can and pouring grease onto squeaky hinges to make them operate smoothly. In essence, Reznikoff eradicates the "squeakiness" of the language to produce a smooth sounding utterance that will not grate the ear. He goes to great lengths to accomplish this task and no detail escapes him. Early in the poem, Gottlieb instructs Mrs. Trost to "buy us some paper" (Reznikoff 68) but, in actuality, he told her to "get us some paper" (*Trost v. Dingles*). After considering the context of the discussion, Reznikoff apparently decided to replace the less sophisticated sounding "get us" with not just another active verb, but one that is more clearly defined, cannot spoil the "rhythm of the line" (unlike "purchase"), and does not contain a phoneme that easily morphs into one that may be pronounced in a manner associated with certain regions and socioeconomic classes, i.e., g/_/t transforms into g/_/t.

The careful linguistic restructuring of the Gottlieb case begs the question of why Reznikoff did not simply stay true to what the witness said. Evidently, he wanted to eliminate superfluous elements but does this alone call for the alteration of the individual's speaking style? It is tempting to dismiss the question on account of our expectations of legal terminology and related texts (namely that the writing is detached, neutral, and adheres to conventional grammar). But to "write off" Reznikoff's technique would be a logical fallacy given that the informal language comes from the court document. Assuming that more poems depict witnesses who spoke like country rubes, then it appears Reznikoff sacrifices individual "voice" for the sake of uniformity and complying with a standard of clarity to which not even the courts aspired.

Reznikoff takes an entirely different approach to constructing the scene in his poem based on the 1888 case, *Alexander Meuly v. The State of Texas* (Reznikoff 7). The events that took place in a Laredo tavern that led to the trial are incredibly convoluted and the court decision goes on for many pages. The concise version of the case is whether or not the defendant should be convicted of murdering one H. Douglas after a dispute over a game of pool escalated. Close to a dozen witnesses testified during the course of the trial. With such an array of voices, there was bound to be conflicting testimony. But it is the notable “silence” within certain witnesses’ testimonies that poses the more serious problem to writing an objectivist text according to Reznikoff’s description. A number of the witnesses admitted that the conversation between the men involved in the quarrel was barely audible except for a few surnames interspersed here and there. The poem, which is the longest in Reznikoff’s book, manages to fill three pages largely because Reznikoff spends considerable time developing the dialogue between individuals. But provided that so few of the statements are included in the legal document, we are driven to question the authenticity of the account (an antecedent for achieving objectivity) and, on a more abstract level, the ability of Reznikoff’s technique, in this particular narrative, to meet the standards he sets forth. It would appear that Reznikoff is minimally “restricted” by witness testimony in the Meuly example. While the facts of the case are essentially incorporated, the approach in drafting the text seems analogous to a playwright crafting the dialogue for the *dramatis personae*.

The dialogue is loosely based on the claims of Burbank (referred to as “Banks” in the poem) who, along with the defendant, was the principal actor implicated in the fracas. Looking at the specific detail of Banks’ reaction to Meuly’s gun, we observe that in the poem, the defendant points his gun at Banks and yells “get going!” and the subsequent line is: “and Banks did” (Reznikoff 10). Although he was being threatened with a pistol, Banks’ flight appears rather cowardly. Interestingly enough, by most witness accounts (among those who claimed they could hear what was being said), Banks actually responded to Meuly with the following: “Don’t shoot this man (i.e., Douglas); he is my friend” and “Do you intend to murder me?” (*Meuly v. The State of Texas*). These two quotations illustrate a very different dynamic which makes us question why Reznikoff felt the need to fashion new dialogue. When Reznikoff’s words are juxtaposed to those of the actual court case, the result can be quite jarring as one recognizes that, at least in this poem,

only the basic skeleton of the event remains and the few select “facts” are overshadowed by Reznikoff’s poetic license.

In the final poem I will analyze, Reznikoff mediates in yet another manner that is quite distinct from the reordering/selection typified by the Kate Townsend example, the “cleaning up” of the Trost vocabulary, and the invented discourse inherent to the Meuly case. In the poem about two men, Perigo and “Hidiger” (a.k.a. Hidingier), who argue over the rightful owner of a dog, we observe both the omission of a fact that fundamentally alters the terms of the legal discussion, and a high degree of linguistic revision (Reznikoff 66). With respect to the former, the key fact that Reznikoff omits is that Hidingier, who is mortally wounded by a gunshot Perigo fires, was apparently about to strike Perigo with his pitchfork twice before the final instance (which is not under dispute) when he raised the instrument and struck the defendant (Perigo) thereby causing him to retaliate.

This is an extremely important piece of evidence given that Perigo tried to argue (unsuccessfully at first) that he killed Hidingier in self-defense. Without this detail, he comes off as a lunatic suffering from the 19th century equivalent of “road-rage.” To make the poem conform to a greater level of reality, Reznikoff would need to insert a line above the second and third stanzas stating something to the effect of “and Hidingier was about to strike him with the pitchfork.” But as Reznikoff correctly notes, even “a part of what happened” is nonetheless a reality. His observation reminds us that there exists a persistent tension between the tendency to think of situations as somehow being “more realistic” and the extent to which our appraisal of “reality” is based on the completeness of information.

In a fascinating historical twist, we learn from the original source that initially Perigo was convicted of murder but later appealed and sought a new trial because the jury had not been given the option to convict based on manslaughter. His appeal was partially successful insofar as the court reversed the conviction of murder in favor of manslaughter but he was still sentenced to several years in prison. It could be that by leaving out such a key piece of evidence, Reznikoff hoped to parallel the historical context of the case and put the readers in a position where they too would be unaware of the more far-reaching implications of the legal discussion.

Unlike the other four poems, the legal source for the material used in the Perigo poem is limited to solely one paragraph from the transcript. Because the testimony was so

brief, it seems Reznikoff chose to use the opportunity to focus intensely on the words themselves. At virtually every line, Reznikoff repeatedly replaces the diction of the court with words that are similar, but hardly synonymous. Reznikoff is most attentive to the effects of “legalese” and actively seeks to undercut the dry legal language in favor of a more natural and conversational discourse. The structure and order of the sentences in the poem are almost identical to the testimony, but for nearly every appearance of a surname, Reznikoff erased either “the defendant” or “the deceased.” He further creates a more informal tone by replacing those words that are emblematic of the often sterile language spoken in a courtroom. A good example of this paradigm is the statement in the court decision which reads: “One blow was struck by the deceased with the fork, which took effect on defendant’s head, cutting through his hat, and causing a severe contused wound of the scalp” (*The State of Iowa v. Perigo*). Reznikoff transforms the expression into “a blow struck by Hidiger / cut through Perigo’s hat and gashed his scalp” (Reznikoff 66). When compared to Reznikoff’s more natural retelling of the event, the court’s wording appears absurd. A phrase like “took effect on” is needlessly euphemistic, vague, and wordy. Instead, Reznikoff gets straight to the heart of the matter sans the technical, quasi-medical terminology (e.g., “contused wound”), which most members of the jury probably did not comprehend. By continuously exercising his discretion in this editorial fashion, Reznikoff arguably constructs a more realistic version of the event. However, without question, his “recitatives” depart from the objective and detached language that ideally constitutes the verity of a courtroom setting.

A paradox, then, that confronts an objectivist writer is that certain aspects of “reality” invariably come at the expense of others. For example, the author dispenses with the ordinarily stilted language of the bench in order to render an incident such as Hidinger assailing Perigo in a down-to-earth and understandable fashion. This exchange, or forfeit, as the case may be, is the inevitable result of the interaction between discrete spheres of reality with which the poet deals. Essentially, Reznikoff contends with several levels of authenticity; he must coordinate and sometimes vacillate between staying true to the witness’s words, the trial procedure, what likely happened irrespective of what witness *x* said, etc. At times these arenas interplay in a balanced fashion (e.g., when the testimony concords with the historical record), but often they cannot coexist because one realm nudges another out. Thus, the writer is caught in a process of give-and-take, selecting what may stay and what must go.

To presume that because Reznikoff was an “objectivist” he must also have been an empiricist would be a grave mistake. While reality was a proscriptive force integral to the movement and allowed objectivism to radically differentiate itself from other poetic forms, the objectivists never meant to relegate their poetry to the role of a mirror reflecting a world of objects (DuPlessis 42). They were not on a mission solely to describe, but rather to construct and ascribe meaning to an event in time (DuPlessis 31). *Testimony* demonstrates that Reznikoff, for one, was quite active in this pursuit. This leads us to suppose that he was perhaps less concerned with the object being “seen” than with the way we see those objects (DuPlessis 49). Such a mode of thought is itself profoundly tricky and probably, in the end, subjective. In the Kate Townsend poem, Reznikoff presents the information in the way that an outsider would probably interpret the purported statements of fact. However, ultimately, this does not do much to distance the author’s opinion. Rather, it displaces whatever judgment he may hold about the case in question onto an opinion of how an outside listener would feel. Likewise, the poems occasionally miss the mark on achieving an approximate correspondence to the facts presented in the courtroom.

Certainly, Reznikoff’s pellucid style of narration, which is repeatedly stamped onto the book’s pages, could make even a court ruling appear gaudily lyrical (DuPlessis 53). But Reznikoff nonetheless problematizes poetic language through the diverse processes he uses to recount these bizarre tales (a not insignificant feat considering the difficulty some individuals encounter when reconciling guileless legal prose with preconceptions of poetry as highly lyrical phrases). In one poem, Reznikoff destabilizes dispassionate legal diction in favor of an informal speaking style, while a few pages later, he employs the exact opposite tactic through downplaying the natural and conversational for the sake of formalistic speech. On a related note, there are times when Reznikoff seems bent on reducing the prospect of bias; most notably through the uniformity he creates by placing speakers on an even plane through meticulous editing of language that might otherwise spur readers to cast baseless judgments about the witnesses’ personal lives. But such techniques are contradicted by other strategies, such as when Reznikoff ignores crucial bits of information as in the Perigo case, or when he takes poetic liberties as evident in the Meuly example. One thing is certain though, *Testimony* offers a great deal of support to the notion of objectivist theory as a collagist approach to poetic construction (DuPlessis 31, 43). This no doubt seems like an obvious conclusion given that anyone

who flips through *Testimony* can apprehend that Reznikoff presents an assortment of voices and a variety of stories. But what the reader cannot know simply from reading the text, is that Reznikoff constructs a collage on a much more fundamental and atomic scale. The variation within his method of revision and selection results in a hodgepodge of techniques similar to the various tools found in an artist's portfolio. In this sense, Reznikoff succeeds in handling the poem as both an art form and object—exactly what many of his fellow poets regarded as essential ingredients of the objectivist philosophy.

Though Reznikoff, on the whole, favored the structure and techniques of literary objectivism, it is impossible to overlook the fact that his strategies sometimes resulted in poems that deviated markedly from objectivist principles. Nevertheless, Reznikoff was determined in his goal of conveying a particular impression to the reader and his language certainly captures events, and occasionally whole life stories, in a way that most writing cannot. The presentation of the cases in *Testimony* is, without a doubt, straightforward and compendious. It is remarkable how much information Reznikoff could fit into a few lines by disregarding the standard convention of incorporating additional descriptive paragraphs filled with metaphors and similes.

Even today, much remains unknown about how Reznikoff went about writing the poems or why he utilized different techniques rather than apply a consistent approach to interpreting testimony. For example, it is commonly believed that Reznikoff altered all of the names of the characters and settings because a postscript appended to the original *Testimony* reads “the names of all persons are fictitious and those of villages and towns have been changed” (Hindus 60). A hunt for court documents, however, reveals that Reznikoff sometimes changed the individuals' names (perhaps to maintain their privacy) while at other times, he kept the appellations as they appeared in the transcripts (for the sake of being realistic?). Similarly, Reznikoff did not adhere to one technique in transferring the information and plots from the legal document to the poetry. In the end, Reznikoff approached each poem as a distinct work and molded his method to fit his objective on a case-by-case basis.

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The Ethics of Estrangement in Two Narratives of Colombian Internal Displacement: Laura Restrepo's *La multitud errante* and Alfredo Molano's *Desterrados: crónicas del desarraigo*

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Larissa graduated from Columbia University in 2005 with a B.A. in Comparative Literature and Society. Originally from Bogotá, Colombia, she was raised in the San Francisco Bay Area. Since graduation, Larissa has taught U.S. Latino literature, U.S. cultural studies, and English language courses at Bogotá's University of the Andes. She plans to begin Spanish Literature Ph.D. studies in 2007. The following essay is a shortened English translation of her senior thesis comparing two works of testimonial fiction written about Colombia's contemporary internal displacement crisis. Current statistics approximate over three million people have been displaced by violence in Colombia since 1985. Larissa's analysis explores the deconstruction of reality and the ethics of representation in the two narratives.

Postmodernism's insistence on performance and the deconstruction of "experience" behind aesthetic representation poses a problem for Latin American testimonial fiction genres such as *testimonios*, *crónicas*, and journalistic novels that depend on testifying to the existence of a reality to denounce its injustices. Literary and cultural critic Jean Franco describes this problem as the "postmodern ethical vacuum":

The problem is that by freely using all traditions and all existing histories, postmodernism seems to participate in a general process of depolitization which turns even death into an aesthetic experience.¹

As Franco reminds us, although we cannot ignore the cultural discourses and practices shaping experience, neither can we believe suffering and injustice disappear into aesthetics. But if we are not reading accounts of "experience," what do we witness in narratives of trauma? If we overlook these questions and acknowledge only the aesthetic construction of testimonial fiction, we risk ignoring the "moral imagination" shaping them. The following analysis explains how two narratives of Colombia's contemporary internal displacement crisis negotiate the tension between the deconstruction of "reality" and the moral responsibility of denunciation. The displacements of the texts conflate to encourage an ethical reading of trauma while still deconstructing the universal referent of "experience."

Laura Restrepo's *La multitud errante* and Alfredo Molano's *Desterrados* narrate experiences of individuals and families forced from their homes by violent confrontations between the Colombian military and illegally armed groups such as guerrilla and paramilitary forces. The descriptions of displacement in the texts, however, are not simply elaborations of suffering. They simultaneously depict the devastation of dispossession and the impossible but rejuvenating hope

of returning to the past. The double-sided metaphors of displacement appear as present absences, emotional corollaries to the physical displacement of the characters. Restrepo's text uses desire and Molano's text uses silence to represent the nostalgia of dispossession, a nostalgia which exists because of a subject's estrangement from his or her environment.

The paradoxical estrangement "inside the text" also occurs on the metatextual level—as the reader is separated from the text by an unbridgeable distance. This distance results from writing's impossible goal of communicating naked meaning. In telling and listening, writers and readers aspire to communicate mutually constructed meanings. Ultimate meaning, however, has never existed. The writer never knows how his language will be interpreted or who will interpret it. Meanwhile, the reader understands a text by reducing metaphors to referents, so that the reader does not understand the text but rather understands his or her own version of it. The reader's construction of meaning cancels the writer's agency over the text, as he is unable to control the reader's interpretation. The reader's agency, on the other hand, is limited to the power he or she has over the interpretation and not the text. The impossible yet always desired goal of reading is to recover the "lost" agency in interpretation. Aspiring to this goal seduces both the writer and the reader, causing the writer to desire the unknown reader and the reader to desire the ungraspable text. Both writer and reader desire through acknowledging the loss of agency in estrangement. This estrangement is the point of departure for the metonymical jump between the texts' thematic and metatextual displacements. To show how the lost ethics of postmodernism return through a reading acknowledging these parallels, I trace the literal and figurative estrangements in both texts, drawing analogies between the theme of displacement and the displacements of the narrators and the readers.

Desire in *La multitud errante*

The figurative displacements in Laura Restrepo's *La multitud errante* reveal themselves in the protagonist's and the narrator's desires. The narrator is an anonymous North American or European aid worker, reporting her experience from a shelter for displaced people in the Northeastern Colombian countryside. The text revolves around the narrator's obsession with the protagonist Siete por Tres (Three Sevens), a displaced man. The protagonist was abandoned at birth and adopted by a young woman who raised him in a rural township surrounded by political unrest between liberals and conservatives. When conservative party members attack the "liberal" township, its population is pushed into

¹ Franco, Jean. "Gender, Death, Resistance." In *Critical Passions*. Mary Louise Pratt and Kathleen Newman, eds. (Durham: Duke UP, 1999) 19.

migratory life. The people of the township escape the area physically, destined to return only nostalgically. After fleeing the violence, Siete por Tres loses the woman who raised him, and he dedicates the rest of his life to searching for her. The impossible return “home” of Siete por Tres is analogous to his maternal figure’s permanent absence. The following passage describes the powerful yearning of his desire to find her:

Me ha dicho que le duele el aire, que la sangre quema sus venas y que su cama es de alfileres, porque perdió a la mujer que ama en alguna de las vueltas del camino y no hay mapa que le diga dónde hallarla.²

Siete por Tres’ desire is a metaphor for the emotional estrangement of his displacement. This estrangement parallels the other unrealizable desires in the texts, specifically the narrator’s own desire.

Restrepo’s narrator becomes conscious of her desire for Siete por Tres when she first meets him at the shelter. For her, Siete por Tres incarnates the mysterious hope of otherness which brought her to Colombia: “¿Acaso no he venido a buscar todo aquello que este hombre encarna?”³ The narrator can never consummate her desire because Siete por Tres is consumed in chasing his own. In the absence of his presence, she longs for his attention: “Mírame, Siete por Tres; tócame, huéleme, escucha el run run que me atormenta sin lograr convertirse en palabra pronunciada.”⁴ As the desperation in the narrator’s interior monologue reveals, her desire gives Siete por Tres agency over her. This agency contrasts with hers as his observer. She observes him from afar, even sharing some of his life, but her “imperial gaze” does not penetrate his reality. As if under a spell, the narrator cannot break her desire to love him despite never being able to reach him. She, in fact, understands herself and narrates herself through the absence she feels in his presence. The distance underscored between the narrator and Siete por Tres respects the differences between the realities of both characters without causing the narrator to turn away apathetically. These frustrated desires reveal the politics of the negotiation between emotional commitment and apathy when observing another’s trauma.

Silence in *Desterrados*

The narrations of eight different lives affected by displacements compose Alfredo Molano’s *Desterrados: crónicas del desarraigo*. Silence embodies dispossession in *Desterrados*, just as desire describes literal and figurative displacements in *La multitud errante*. Although silence can be defined gen-

erally as the physical absence of noise, the poetics of *Desterrados* focuses its definition in two specific ways: (1) the emotional emptiness of “being out of place” where characters see the present and the future through muted eyes of the past, and 2) the suppression of the ability to speak or to represent oneself (comparable to invisibility.) This analysis studies the uses of silence in two of Molano’s *crónicas*: “Desde el exilio,” an autobiographical account of Molano’s political exile in Spain, and “El jardín,” a first person narrative of a woman forced to relocate to a coca farm after paramilitaries murder her family.

Silence as emotional emptiness in displacement appears first in “Desde el exilio,” confronting Molano in the realization of his exile:

Decidí escribir este libro cuando abrí la puerta del piso al que llegué en Barcelona una tarde triste y oscura de febrero, hace cerca de tres años. El silencio me golpeó la cara, y el vacío—lo confieso—hizo vacilar mis convicciones.⁵

In this description of emotional exile, Molano underscores the staggering power of silence. The abysmal silence also appears in “El jardín,” when the narrator encounters “silences and solitudes” the moment she reaches the coca farm. She describes these silences as portents of apocalypse: “Y más encima esos silencios y esas soledades tan extendidos que lo hacen creer a uno que llegó al final del mundo.”⁶ In this depiction of displacement, silence solidifies and physical space dissolves. We can draw a parallel between the emptiness of the inhabited silences of “Desde el exilio” and “El jardín” and the desires of *La multitud errante*, as they all represent disembodiments of displacement.

The second silence of the text represents the oppression behind testimonial ventriloquism. In all eight stories, a different character gives a first person account of his or her trauma of displacement; these *crónicas* reach the reader through the aesthetic form of Alfredo Molano’s narration. The silence implied by Molano’s self-conscious representation reminds readers that stigma oppresses the majority of displaced people, not allowing them to represent themselves or denounce injustices. This silence appears as the tangible oppression experienced by the characters throughout Molano’s text. In the following passage, Molano confesses his privileged ability to express himself in comparison with many other displaced people. He concludes his autobiographical *crónica* by arguing that finding a solution to Colombia’s political unrest can only be accomplished by including “the silenced” in the fabric of society:

² Restrepo, Laura. *La multitud errante*. (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana S.A., 2001) 13.

³ Ibid., 17.

⁴ Ibid., 40.

⁵ Molano, Alfredo. *Desterrados: crónicas del desarraigo*. (Bogotá: El Áncora Editores, 2001) 13.

⁶ Ibid., 105.

Al terminarlo [el libro] comprendí—agachando la cabeza en señal de profundo respeto—que el drama de mi exilio, a pesar de sus dolores, es un pálido reflejo de la auténtica tragedia que viven a diario millones de colombianos desterrados, exiliados en su propio país. Creo, con ellos, que sólo un acuerdo político profundo permitirá echar las bases de una verdadera democracia; la guerra no tendría resultado distinto a la dictadura de los vencedores.⁷

By reminding the reader of these silences, especially those imposed by the dictatorship of war, the text forces the reader to interpret the stories through confronting the hierarchical politics of representation instead of ignoring them.

The Reader's Estrangement

These literal and figurative displacements identified in both texts conflate the displacement of the reader's interpretation. Comparable to desires and silences, the reader's estrangement also exists as a yearning for the other. Roland Barthes describes the relationship of desire between the reader and the text by using the human body as a metaphor for the text. Barthes explains that the pleasure he takes in reading lies in his estranged relationship with the text. Just as insurmountable obstacles produce desire and silence, the interpretive obstacle of understanding ignites Barthes' pleasure:

To be with the one I love and to think of something else: this is how I have my best ideas, how I best invent what is necessary to my work. Likewise for the text: it produces in me the best pleasure if it manages to make itself heard indirectly; if, reading it, I am led to look up often, to listen to something else. I am not necessarily captivated by the text of pleasure; it can be an act that is slight, complex, tenuous, almost scatterbrained: a sudden movement of the head like a bird who understands nothing of what we hear, who hears what we do not understand.⁸

A text does not depend on reaching the end of a story or finding a coded theme, but in the frustration of the intermittent process of constructing meaning from the components of the text. Dependent on the frustration Barthes describes, readers can no longer be secure of the universality of their textual interpretations.

A text seduces a reader through these constituent interruptions, making the reader conscious of his loss of agency. Barthes explains the attraction of the intermittences:

Is not the most erotic portion of a body where the garment gapes? In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no "erogenous zones" (a foolish expression, besides); it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic; the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing (trousers and sweater), between two edges (the open-necked shirt, the glove and the sleeve); it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of fan appearance—as disappearance.⁹

This "erotic" frustration symbolizes the unattainable consistency of a reader's interaction with the text. The attraction of the unattainable meaning compares to the allure of the irretrievable past of the displaced person. Each case illustrates the experience of "being out of place." By conflating the reader's frustration with that of the characters and narrators in the texts, a reader can symbolically identify with the fictionalized realities of displacement.

This conflation of estrangement provides evidence for the moral imagination shaping the writing and the reading of Laura Restrepo and Alfredo Molano's texts. Negotiating postmodernism's aesthetization of experience, these testimonial fictions carefully avoid trivializing and depoliticizing the atrocities of internal displacement in Colombia. Instead, they reinforce the singularity of lived trauma through underscoring the reader's inability to understand it. By paralleling the permanent absence of dispossession with the estrangement of the reader's interpretive loss of agency, the texts discourage apathy and facilitate sensitivity towards displacement. Facing the postmodern ethical vacuum, these texts find strength in the deconstruction of reality, acknowledging the fiction of "raw experience" at the same time as they recognize the "nonfictional" injustice the narratives expose.

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⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸ Barthes, Roland. *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975) 25.

⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

Beyond Words: How Xu Bing's *Book from the Sky* Disproves Chinese Character Myths

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"To strike at the written word is to strike at the very essence of the [Chinese] culture."

—Xu Bing

Some viewers felt oppressed in the room, as if the words on the walls and the ceiling were pressing in on them. Others were awe-struck, as quiet and solemn as in a temple. Mysterious characters hung from the ceiling on scrolls, clung to the walls, and opened like waves on the floor. Everyone wanted to decode the room.

But they could not. Some viewers posited that the writing was in the Khitan or Xixia script, Chinese-based character systems that became obsolete between the Yuan and Ming dynasties (1271-1644) (Zhou 147). Some viewers came back day after day, combing the texts for a single meaningful character. They did find a few archaic characters, inadvertently reinvented by the artist. Xu Bing had spent three years inventing 4,000 characters, built upon the common elements of real characters, but with no meaning. Or rather, the meaning lay not in the characters themselves, but in the aftershock of new-found illiteracy.

This was the atmosphere at the opening exhibition of Xu's *An Analyzed Reflection of the End of This Century* in October 1988 in Beijing. Visitors soon renamed the installation *Tiān Shū* (*Book from the Sky*), which "refers to the patterns left on the skin of a person who had been struck down by lightning" (Taylor 324). *Tiān Shū* may also refer to the idea of a heavenly script beyond the understanding of humans (Yao 195). *Book* became the symbol of China's new wave arts movement, a sign that Chinese artists could produce original, meaningful work after decades of entrenchment in the socialist realist style (Erickson 30).¹ A few months later, after the government crackdown on protests in Tiananmen Square,² *Book* became a scapegoat for the new wave, decried as a meaningless work which did not serve the people. Soon after this fallout, the University of Wisconsin-Madison offered Xu a

position as an Honorary Fellow; Xu left for the United States in 1990 (Erickson 10). Since then, *Book* has been exhibited in various museums in the U.S., Japan, and Europe.

Xu does not usually like to tell interviewers what *Book* means, but he has said that he created it "to remind people that it is culture that restricts them" (Erickson 58). *Book* is clearly directed towards a literate Chinese audience which is familiar with the printed form of premodern texts. *Book* pays homage to traditional texts while simultaneously criticizing them. Xu also teases out the profound effect of the simplification of the character system, which traumatized him as much as did the Cultural Revolution.³

Book is an intensive study of the form of Chinese characters; it disproves some of the most egregious misconceptions about the writing system. These include what John DeFrancis calls the Ideographic Myth, the idea that characters bypass oral language by representing ideas, and Universality Myth, the belief that characters transcend linguistic barriers of space and time (133, 149). Xu probably did not intend to prove any such thing, but the reactions of both Chinese and non-Chinese viewers confirm DeFrancis' theories. *Book* is also a powerful commentary on the inadequacy of words in communication, on both the wonder and futility of human endeavor (Taylor 321).

Art for the People

Xu Bing, born in 1955, grew up surrounded by words. His father was a professor of history and his mother was the Senior Administrator of Library Sciences, both at Peking University. Before he could read, Xu accompanied his parents to work, where characters enveloped him. His father taught him calligraphy, an art to which Xu has devoted much of his career reinterpreting. Xu's fascination with the shape of characters began in junior high school, when he started to collect newspaper fonts (Erickson 33).

Through all of the turmoil of the early Communist era, the instability of character form and the status of certain texts affected Xu profoundly. First, the simplification of the character system in 1956 wrenched Xu's newly-gained literacy away from him. "When I finally could read them [characters],

¹ Socialist realism, a style developed in the Soviet Union, depicts utopic scenes of the "fully realized socialist state," such as harvest celebrations on the commune (Erickson 30).

² On June 14, 1989, pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, Beijing were attacked by national troops (Zhou 63)

³ In 1956, the Communist government disseminated a list of over 3,000 simplifications of commonly used characters and radicals (components of characters). It was then illegal to use the "traditional" system of characters (Zhou 63).

I was not allowed to read them” (Erickson 14). Xu had gone through the Chinese child’s right-of-passage into the reading community, the ritual which connected him with his past. Now it meant nothing, for it was this very legacy which, according to the party line, was holding China back. It was now illegal to read the books in his parents’ offices. Eight years later, when the Cultural Revolution began, the list of obstacles to modernity came to include people like Xu’s parents. Xu saw his father dragged through the streets of Beijing, condemned as a reactionary. But Xu’s calligraphic skill turned him into a “writing tool” for the masses and thus allowed him to dissociate himself from his parents.

Xu worked on the Huapen Commune northwest of Beijing from 1974 to 1976 (Erickson 21). Villagers commissioned him to write placards for holidays and family celebrations. They often asked Xu to combine four or more characters into one, such as 黃今萬兩 (huángjī n wànlǐǎng, “ten thousand catties of gold”) (18). Upon his return to Beijing, Xu enrolled as a peasant in the May Seventh College of Arts, later renamed the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He would not have been eligible to matriculate if anyone had known his parents’ status. Xu wanted to study painting, but was put in the printing department instead. He stayed at the Academy through his M.F.A. and became the school’s youngest lecturer immediately after graduating.

Xu experimented with the curriculum, using found objects for his students to draw in place of typical human figures and still-lives. His students also made prints of tire tracks and other unusual surfaces. Xu wanted his students to learn how to observe form without bias, to have no preconception of the object before their eyes. By letting go of their visual assumptions, Xu hoped his students would see things for what they really are.

Xu treats Chinese characters in the same way. After the Cultural Revolution, the reign of Mao’s *Little Red Book* ended, and literature from many eras and nations flooded into China (Wang 4). Xu read extensively, including literature on Japanese Zen. “The more I read, the more muddled my thinking became, until I felt as if something had become lost to me. I felt the discomfort of a person suffering from starvation who had just gorged himself” (Erickson 14). In his surfeit, Xu lost interest in the content of his reading and focused instead on the form of the written words itself. He examined how characters are put together as individual items, how they are arranged on the page, and how these elements influence the reader’s perception of the text itself. A novel is distinguished as such as much by its font and layout as by its content. Such “reading” is vital to *Book*.

At the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art, May 1942, Chairman Mao proclaimed that art should “serve... the millions and tens of millions of working people” (Mao 81). “Art for the people” became party policy (Erickson 24). After the Cultural Revolution, artists struggled to balance the influx of Western artistic developments with their search for a national style. *Book* struck that balance. But did it serve the people?

Xu began work on *Book* in 1985, devising nonsense characters by hand in his room at the Central Academy. He unintentionally reinvented a handful of real characters, albeit archaic and obscure ones; only viewers in Beijing who scoured *Book* for days on end found these (Erickson 37). One can speculate that the characters in *Book* critique the simplification movement, but the author has never said anything unequivocal about this connection. However, the number of characters he invented, 4,000, corresponds to the number of characters officially acknowledged as necessary for functional literacy (Taylor 325).

Book is designed like a late premodern tome. Different chapters and volumes resemble philosophical tracts, poetry with commentary, and other common formats. From the vertical lines between columns⁴ of characters to the wooden casing for each volume, *Book* remains faithful to the traditional format of publication of a great book. The printing method Xu employed, however, was not traditional. Although movable type was invented in China during the Northern Song Dynasty (1041-1048 C.E.), the multitude of characters made the technology impractical (Luo 104, Hanshan). Much more common were woodblock prints, each page carved as a whole unit. Xu carved his characters as individual woodblocks and then taught the printer he employed outside of Beijing how to use movable type.

The initial response to *Book* was favorable. While many viewers interpreted the work as a testimony to the meaninglessness of human creation, others admired it as a memorial to traditional Chinese culture. Xu had broken a formidable barrier for post-Mao artists: he had drawn on Western art and created something both Chinese and modern. *Book* was hailed as the seminal work in the Chinese New Wave arts movement.

After Tiananmen, harsher critiques of *Book* appeared. Professor Li Qun of the Central Academy’s print department declared that *Book* “does not possess any visual image nor pleasant enjoyment of beauty, not to mention any educational value or inspiring spirit.” Li pronounced Xu a “capitalist artist” (Erickson 42). While such opinions did not drown out

⁴ In premodern texts, the vertical lines were a result of the carving and printing methods.

praise for *Book*, many Western art critics believe that this backlash drove Xu out of the country. The Tiananmen massacre chased liberalism underground in China, but Westerners usually express disgust with the government's human rights violations while lauding the dissidents (and wondering why they gave up). This Western attitude colors every exhibit of *Book* in the free world, where it is often directly connected with the pro-democracy movement.

Xu usually avoids overt discussion of politics, both in regards to his personal beliefs and his artwork. Yet in 1994, he submitted a vague article to a Chinese art journal, which originally discussed the work of John Lasker; Xu swapped the original images for those of canvasses he found next to trash cans on the streets of New York City. The magazine published the article (xubing.com). Xu may not call this revenge; then again, Xu would not call his printing of excerpts from *Book* on top of the *People's Daily* revenge, either (Erickson 51).

Disproving the Ideographic and Universality Myths

In *The Chinese Language: Fact and Fantasy*, John DeFrancis defines the Ideographic Myth as the notion of “written symbols conveying their message directly to our minds, thus bypassing...speech,” along with the idea that “Chinese characters...convey meaning without regard to sound” or grammatical constructions (133). The Ideographic Myth leads easily to the Universality Myth, the concept that Chinese characters are “images and symbols which...can be read in all languages” across boundaries of space and time (135, qtd. Amiot). Xu did not set out to prove anything with *Book*, but rather to allow each viewer to develop a unique relationship to the work, to construct its meaning for himself/herself through the process of trying to read it, failing, and then finding new ways to “read” it. Xu may not know of DeFrancis’ theories, and if he does he may not agree with them. But in his quest to create symbols that are meaningless yet undeniably Chinese, he proves that DeFrancis’ so-called myths are indeed myths.

Most Chinese characters are composed of a radical, usually denoting semantic category, and a phonetic element. For instance, mā (“mom”) is written 媽; 女 is the female radical, and 馬, “horse,” is pronounced mā. Xu constructed his nonsense characters from radicals. *Book* viewers have sometimes thought the characters were Xixia or Khitan, systems based on Chinese invented to represent the native languages of their eponymous ethnic groups (Hanshan). Some viewers of *Book* believe that they can guess the meaning of some of the characters based on radicals.

In actuality, the most important indicator of a character’s meaning is its phonetic element. This is because characters do not represent concepts isolated from human language and cannot bypass oral language on the path from eye to brain. The meaning of the character for “mom” does not *look* like Mom. Even characters that are closest to being truly pictographic must be learned in order to make sense. For instance, 日 (“rì,” sun), while commonly defined as pictographic, is actually very abstract: without being told that it means “sun,” one could guess any number of meanings (mouth, window, etc.). Furthermore, ideographic or pictographic meaning has little place in function words; one cannot graphically depict “if” or “and.”⁵

The only characters with easily discernible meaning in *Book* are in its table of contents. These characters are composed of one or two ZHENG4 DEF within WEI2 DEF. Within the WEI2, the stroke order of ZHENG is followed such that the first stroke of ZHENG appears in the first box, the first two strokes in the next box, and so on. PIX Although these characters must be numerals, the WEI indicates that their meaning cannot be pinned down; as with real characters, any alteration of the form of a character or new combination of characters must be defined by the inventor in order to have any real meaning. Thus no character in *Book* has neither linguistic nor conceptual definition.

Characters originally indicated the pronunciation of a spoken Chinese word. With the natural evolution of Chinese phonology, the proximity of phonetic indication to actual pronunciation has eroded (DeFrancis 105). Written Mandarin Chinese is bound to the modern spoken language. A string of conceptual symbols has no grammar, no way in which to be read to others. This is why native Chinese speakers have to study Classical Chinese, the archaic written language: the characters are arranged in foreign grammatical constructions that do not make sense as a series of pictographs. If characters do not graphically indicate meaning to literate Chinese, how could they communicate across linguistic or historical boundaries? *Book* proves the limitation of character construction not only through its impact on Chinese readers, but also on its lack of impact, or rather different resonance, for non-readers. To the foreigner, *Book*’s characters are just beautiful shapes, no different from real characters in traditional works of art. *Book* forces Chinese viewers to see characters as a foreigner would, to look beyond the content for meaning.

⁵ The most common word for “if” is 如果 (rú guǒ). Notice that it is a two syllable word. “And” is 和 (hé).

The Trouble with Words

Zen rejects exegesis and the conceptualization of spirituality (Suzuki 7). Zen's literature instead includes many *koan*, questions asked by a Zen master, often of a student. *Koan* have no correct answer—indeed, no answer at all. “‘Correct words’ without the corresponding inner experience will cause the teacher to immediately ring the bell dismissing the student” (Wick 1). The point of such a question is not to answer it, but to use it to release the mind from the burden of thought. Things simply are what they are.

According to Zen teachings, language dances around reality; the more one says about something, the farther from that thing one gets. “Zen is not necessarily against words, but it is well aware of the fact that they are liable to detach themselves from realities and turn into conceptions” (Suzuki 5). Empty the mind of words and thoughts, and reality comes rushing in.

Zen Buddhism has had a profound influence on Xu. *Book*, then, is among the great works of Zen art. When the typical reader looks at a great Chinese classic, (s)he tries, of course, to read it. (S)he cannot look totally beyond the words to marvel at the very fact of characters themselves, of their shape and size, nor can (s)he wonder at the great invention of printing, at the very Chinese way of printing and binding a book, at the texture of the paper. If one grows up within Chinese culture, one cannot see the book in this way; but an illiterate or a foreigner can, and thus truly sees the book. By rendering its Chinese viewers illiterate, *Book* allows them to see the classics as physical objects. Some viewers believe that *Book* honors the real books that have come before it and allows one to return to original texts with new eyes.

However, *Book* still questions Chinese cultural values, as well as the value of any cultural relic. What good is a writing system that allows an artist to create nonsense in the same way others create “real” meaning? *Book* recalls Khitan stele, hieroglyphics, and other mysterious relics. Such monuments once had great meaning to someone, but now they mean nothing to all but experts.⁶ They are like *Book*, imposing but incomprehensible; and because they are incomprehensible, they are oppressive. Xu's nonsense characters also recall his frustration with simplified characters. Simplification was supposed to make reading more accessible to the Chinese people, but in Xu's case it took reading away from him. Now Xu is taking reading away from his audience.

The value of characters and other elements of Chinese culture have oscillated over the decades of Xu's life:

in his childhood, education was believed to be good by the public; as a teenager, it was shunned; as a young adult, intellectuality returned to the realm of acceptability, as long as it did not breach certain parameters. Cultural values, it seems, go in and out of style. In that case, are Chinese characters intrinsic to Chinese civilization? Can China exist without them? What truly holds society back, tradition or reform?

Perhaps this is why *Book* is so controversial, so loved and hated by Xu's countrymen. Xu takes away from the Chinese audience elements of their culture that they take for granted. He forces each “reader” to engage with the text as an individual, not as a member of an ethnic group. *Book* does not serve the people; it lets the people serve themselves.

To see *Book* and other works by Xu, visit <http://www.xubing.com>.

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Richard Wagner's Aesthetics: Attention, Art, and Social Harmony

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Notorious for his polemical contentions and obsessive personality, Richard Wagner (1813-1887) is one of the most controversial figures in the history of art. Disillusioned with the consumer culture of modernity and its effects on art, Wagner set out to create music dramas that would be more serious enterprises than Italian and French operas, which he judged as merely spectacular. His music dramas, which he described as *Gesamtkunstwerk*, were to harmoniously integrate lyric, tone, and rhythm: that is, poetry, music, and performance. His concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, he believed, would function as a sort of social ritual in which the German audience would see itself mirrored. This, in turn, would aid in unifying the folk and harmonizing society. But underlying this supposed teleology was a necessity to avoid distraction at all costs, to command the full attention of his music drama's observers.

As Professor Crary argues in *Suspensions of Perception*, Wagner's overarching concern was the problem of attention.¹ Conscious of the problems posed by subjective observers, Wagner worked towards fashioning a normative model of perception. This paper will examine some of the strategies Wagner employed in fashioning the "techniques of [his] observer."² More specifically, I will examine the architectural design of his *Festspielhaus* at Bayreuth in relation to the aesthetic ends it was supposed to bring into fruition. In doing this I will make connections to his concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and innovations it led to in theater. As we will see, to mold subjective judgments in order to effect social harmony was Wagner's essential goal.

The *Gesamtkunstwerk*

Before entering into a discussion on Wagner's strategies for perceptual manipulation it is necessary to summarize his concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, roughly translated as "total work of art." Wagner summarizes and logically connects many of his ideas in his essay "Art and Revolution,"³ which will be taken here as representative of his contentions on art, modernity, and the future. This is due to the impor-

tant emphasis on the topic of a revolution of mankind, one which Wagner presumably saw himself as a participant in. Art as a unifying goal of humanity has as its major enemy in various aspects of modernity, not only commerce, pretensions to fame, and hypocritical religion, but also distraction. Passages in which Wagner emphasizes this idea of distraction in particular will be especially considered here.

Wagner approaches what he believed to be the degenerate state of art in the 19th century in a historicizing and mythologizing manner. "Art and Revolution" begins with Wagner's exposé on the art of ancient Greece. In a predictable Western tone, he first relegates to the Greeks a position as ancestral progenitors of all subsequent European art. Apollo is taken as representative of the pinnacle of Greek culture, which Wagner equates to the moment in which humanity was given a central role in religion, as evident in the anthropomorphized deities. Patron of the muses, Apollo is connected to the performance of dramas in ancient Greece. Wagner emphasizes the totalizing quality of drama, incorporating music, poetry, and dance, and associates its harmonious integration to the harmonious persona of Apollo. The Delphian deity, a harmonious entity, embodies the Greek polity *because* his persona is one of harmony: the beauty of the Greek nation, Wagner posits, rests in the relation of its parts, in its wholeness. For Wagner, the beauty of drama was attributable to its concentration of components:

Thus, too, inspired by Dionysus, the tragic poet saw this glorious god [Apollo]: when, to all the rich elements of spontaneous art (tone and rhythm; music and dance), the harvest of the fairest and most human life, he joined the bond of speech, and concentrating them all into one focus, brought forth the highest conceivable form of art—the Drama.⁴

Adding to this connection between Apollo, social harmony, and drama, Wagner further proclaims:

The deeds of gods and men, their sufferings, their delights, as they—in all solemnity and glee, as eternal rhythm, as everlasting harmony of every motion and of all creation—lay disclosed in the nature of Apollo himself; here they became actual and true. For all that in them moved and lived, as it moved and lived in the beholders, here found its perfected expression; where ear and eye, as soul and heart, lifelike and actual,

¹ Crary, Jonathan. *Suspension of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture*. MIT Press: Cambridge and London; 2001.

² Here, I refer to Crary's *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century*. MIT Press: Cambridge and London; 1990.

³ Wagner, Richard. "Art and Revolution" (1849), in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works Vol. 1 (The Art-Work of the Future)*, transl. W. A. Ellis. Broude Brothers: New York; 1966, pp. 21-68.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

seized and perceived all, and saw all in spirit and in body revealed; so that the imagination need no longer vex itself with the attempt to conjure up the image.⁵

Admittedly, Wagner romanticizes the Greek situation to a significant degree. However, his observation on the integral social and religious role of drama in ancient Greece manages to establish a situation that contrasts with contemporary 19th century opera. As the next passage attests, the contrast is essentially concerned with spectatorial comportment:

At the summons of the choir his [the Greek's] voice was hushed, he yielded himself a willing slave to the deep significance of the scenic show, and hearkened to the great story of Necessity told by the tragic poet through the mouths of his gods and heroes on the stage. For in the tragedy he found himself again—nay, found the noblest part of his own nature united with the noblest characteristics of the whole nation; and from his inmost soul, as it there unfolded itself to him, proclaimed the Pythian oracle.

If drama was to effect social harmony, spectators would have to become attentive subjects. Wagner specifically roots this issue in the problem of distraction and its connection to commerce.⁶

Arguing that “true Art is highest freedom, and only the highest freedom can bring her forth from out itself,” Wagner denounces the constraining impact commerce has on art. In yet another whim of creative genius, he allegorizes commerce and modern art through the Greek god Hermes. He points to Hermes’ role in Greek mythology as the messenger of Zeus and focuses on the activeness of his personality. Also, he writes about Hermes’ presiding role at the death of men. To the Romans, who knew him as Mercury, he became associated with the “restless diligence of their chaffering and usurious merchants, who streamed from all the ends of the earth into the heart of the Roman world,”⁷ or, in other words, with commerce. Commerce and trade, distracting and disjunctive as they are, led to the distracting and disjunctive operas and

plays—now separate arts—of modern culture. Wagner emphatically warns his reader: “Behold *Mercury* and his docile handmaid, *Modern Art!*”⁸ Mercury was presiding over the death of Humanism.

This emphasis on the problem posed by subjective perception and its distractive repercussions points to a conscious attempt on Wagner’s behalf at employing normative measures to fashion a breed of observers, attentive subjects.⁹ As Crary argues, the nineteenth century was faced with the problem of finding new ways to glue society together, having disposed of the *camera obscura* model of vision.¹⁰ Wagner articulates the public social repercussions of subjective perception within a context that suggests that he was in fact addressing the problem of attention as Professor Crary articulates it:

Yet Art remains in its essence what it ever was; we have only to say, that it is not present in our modern public system. It lives, however, and has ever lived in the individual conscience, as the one, fair, indivisible Art. Thus the only difference is this: with the Greeks it lived in the public conscience, whereas to-day it lives alone in the conscience of private persons, the public *un-conscience* recking nothing of it. Therefore in its flowering time the Grecian art was *conservative*, because it was a worthy and adequate expression of the public conscience: with us, true Art is *revolutionary*, because its very existence is opposed to the ruling spirit of the community.¹¹

Wagner’s music dramas themselves were to provide an aesthetic experience in which art would be perceived as a collective social rite. They would be revolutionary because their central concern would be to impart messages about the value of Humanism and freedom from commerce. Commanding collective attention and suspending exterior stimuli of distraction, they were to effect social harmony by presenting to the audience a drama that they could all relate to. Drama and life were to be married.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The following part of his essay discusses the role of Christianity in the degeneration of art. He emphasizes the rupture brought about by the Christian bifurcation of heaven and earth, life and after-life, and the spiritual and the earthly. Such a disintegration of the aspects of humanity, he argues, led to a disintegration of the drama into its constituent parts. In turn, art became subject to an external ideology. Directly preceding a discussion of the situation of art in modernity, he avers that moreover than “enfranchising herself from eminently respectable masters, such as were the Holy Church and witty Princes,” Art “preferred to sell her soul and body to a far worse mistress—*Commerce*” (Ibid., p. 41). Denunciations of commerce’s negative effects on art are pervasive in Wagner’s literature; another place to look for a discussion of the issue is in his essay “On a Theater in Zurich,” (1851) in *Collected Prose Works*, vol. 3, and in *Harvard Sourcebook for Visual and Environmental Studies 179a: Origins of Modern Visual Culture*, Professor Jonathan Crary, Spring 2006.

⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *Suspension of Perception*, pp. 247-248.

¹⁰ *Techniques of the Observer* and Ibid.

¹¹ “Art and Revolution,” pp. 51-52.

Wagner's Festspielhaus at Bayreuth

Wagner had dreamed of a theatrical edifice suited especially to the audio-visual properties of his music dramas. His goal was to stage a performance of his *Ring* series in an isolated, beautiful location that would detach his artwork's connection from the industrial and commercial atmosphere of major cities.

It is important to mention the important role played by architect Gottfried Semper in the construction of Wagner's theater. In 1855, Wagner convinced Semper to leave London, where he had established himself, and to take a position in Zürich so that in case his ideal theater found a sponsor he would be available for hire.¹² Sure enough, when Ludwig II stepped forward to collaborate with Wagner in his vision for an ideal theater, Semper was employed as consulting architect.¹³ Semper was told from the outset that Wagner would prescribe the important design features of the auditorium. At Wagner's request, Ludwig also commissioned Semper to submit designs for a temporary theater inside Munich's Glass Palace.¹⁴ It was here that Semper first conceived of various fundamental designs that fit Wagner's recommendations for ideal visual and acoustic qualities.

Semper devised a plan for a seating arrangement that would offer direct visual access to the stage performance from every seat. Instead of the traditional horseshoe-shaped auditorium, Semper looked to the model provided by classical theaters, specifically the Roman *odeum*. There would be only one seating level and its shape was to be a conical extension of the stage, at least in plan. Wagner and Semper had essentially developed a concept of theater architecture that broke with centuries-old traditions. Attention was to be channeled to the music drama exclusively. Unlike other contemporary theaters, the Festspielhaus was not designed as a place to see others and to be seen: serious art was its sole purpose.

Equally unconventional design features were the sunken opera pit and a double proscenium frame. Wagner had written about the sunken opera pit before and it was one of the most important features of his personal vision. The

music-making, he believed, should not distract from the drama. Taking into consideration the laws of perspective, too, the double proscenium framing was a manner of treating the space between the front row of seats and the stage that would create an illusion of continuity. Wagner and Semper called this space the "mystic gulf," arguing that it would have a unifying effect between the reality of the auditorium and the illusionism of the stage performance.¹⁵ Both the sunken opera pit and the double proscenium were aimed at heightening the reality effects of the music drama. The former would be evocative of a sound world giving birth to and being born from the music drama; the latter would inhibit quantitative judgments of the audience's position in relation to the stage. Wagner intended to achieve in his music dramas what Adorno has called a phantasmagoric effect. Auditorium lights dimmed, spectators silenced, and orchestra invisible, there would be no way to discern the music drama's processes of production. What better way to forge the reality of a constructed world?

The plans for theaters in Munich were abandoned for political reasons and Wagner ultimately chose the site of Bayreuth for the construction of his ideal theater.¹⁶ Semper was dismissed, and Otto Brückwald was chosen as his replacement.¹⁷ Wagner's choice to have the Festspielhaus built in Bayreuth was in complete keeping with his dream of an isolated site, without competing theaters, in the center of Germany.¹⁸ Wagner's intent was for people to make their way out to Bayreuth to experience his music dramas and for nothing else. He was deeply concerned with the psychological ambiance and not just with the theatrical edifice; only in a state of physical and intellectual repose would the audience be fully receptive to the emotional, intellectual, and nationalistic messages of his art.¹⁹ This is relevant to the architecture of the Festspielhaus as well because Wagner did not want the audience to be distracted by the charm of his building or by the fame of a prestigious architect like Semper.²⁰

While Wagner constantly placed emphasis upon the frugality of the architectural project, he always urged that the stage technology be of the best possible quality.²¹ The

¹² Spotts, Frederic. *Bayreuth: A History of the Wagner Festival*. Yale University Press: New Haven and London; 1994, p. 34.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁵ Wagner, Richard. *Wagner on Music and Drama*. Ed. Albert Goldman, transl. W. A. Ellis, E.P. Dutton and Co.: New York; 1964, p. 366.

¹⁶ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, p. 39. Here, there is a summary of the events that led Ludwig II to ask Wagner to leave Munich, after which he abandoned ideas for a theater in a major city. Wagner proposed the site of Bayreuth to Ludwig II and work begun in 1873.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁸ Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama*, p. 356.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 354-366.

²⁰ Spotts, *Bayreuth*, p. 38.

²¹ Ibid., p. 42.

Festspielhaus is in keeping with Semper's concepts of the conical auditorium, deep stage, tall stage structure, and double proscenium. Originally, the theater was limited in its ornamentation, but its stage effects were of the highest caliber. Semper first pointed to the need for architecture to grow from within in an organic fashion and to be best suited for its purpose, its exterior sincerely expressing the interior.²² His design for the Dresden Theater, for example, expresses the radial form of the auditorium in its radial façade and the heightened space of the stage is indicative of its actual contribution to heightening the effectiveness of the stage. The Festspielhaus put into practice the Wagnerian concepts that Semper translated into buildable architectural form. Even from the exterior, the theater's devotion to the music dramas it would house could be inferred.

On a general level, the Festspielhaus can be considered an exhibitionary complex designed to facilitate an elusive synaesthetic experience. It has had a lasting impact on theater architecture because of the revolutionary reality effects that it can produce. Evidently, the world had paid attention.

Mythos and the Folk:

The *Gesamtkunstwerk* and Social Harmony

Wagner's concept of the *gesamtkunstwerk* as an artwork that would reflect back to society an image of itself is directly connected to his advocacy of myth. In his manuscript *Opera and Drama*, he begins an explanation of myth's role in the ideal *gesamtkunstwerk* by outlining a theory of aesthetic perception:

Just as the eye can only take up farther-lying objects in a proportionally diminished scale, so also the human brain—the inner starting-point of the eye, and that to whose activity, conditioned by the whole internal organism, the eye imparts the shows which it has gathered from without—can only grasp them in the diminished scale of the human individuality. Upon this scale, however, the functioning brain is able to take the phenomena, brought to it in a state of disruption from their native actuality, and shape them into new and comprehensive pictures by its double endeavour, to sift them or to group them; and this function of the brain, we call it *Phantasy*.²³

Wagner evidently understood aesthetic perception as a dialogue between the exterior world, the eye, and the brain.

The exterior world is naturally disjunctive and the point of visual perception is to give it order. He then argues that this act of beholding is complemented by the artist's act of imparting. The collective image that visual perception presents to the human subject drives him to represent this image in the exterior world. This, he explains, is due to man's desire to establish a measure of the phenomena which he observes. By materializing his interior phantasies, the artist supposedly becomes more familiar with the world. Since an artist ideally represents things as they represent themselves to human subjects, his artworks are common measures of phenomena, unadulterated by subjective perception. The only ideal artworks that have achieved such a status, he argues, are the dramas that sprung forth from Greek myth. For Wagner, myth held the key to achieving social harmony: by cleansing itself of subjective perceptions it would be common to all. Myth, he concludes, is thus the art of the folk.

Wagner understood his duty as a dramatist to be the actualization into visual form of German myths. Only in action, he argued, would the truth of the idea become convincing. The representation of the mythological ideas was to be succinct and simple—universally appealing. The artist's job, in sum, is “to bring to understanding the Necessity of the action, by and in the demonstrated truth of the idea”²⁴ in order to fashion social behavior so as to make it harmonious. *The Ring* is the most grandiloquent manifestation of Wagner's goal, bringing to visual life the stuff of ancient Germanic myth. Although the limits of this paper do not allow for an in-depth examination of Wagner's music dramas, it is important to at least note that he did in fact put his complex philosophical logic into practice. Attention was to be commanded by reflecting to audiences something they could universally take interest in (German audiences, in specific); they were to see in his music dramas a concentrated representation of the fundamentals of their culture. Furthermore, they were to see them in a rural setting at the phantasmagoric *Festspielhaus*. Attention was to be commanded at all costs.

Understanding the problem that distraction and the subjectivization of perception and judgment posed to social integrity, Wagner sought manners in which he could unify the Germanic folk and impart to it social harmony. He thought it important to point to the negative impact commerce and industrialism had on art. Humanity, he argued,

²² Semper, Gottfried. *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*. transl. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Herrmann. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge; 1989.

²³ Wagner, Richard. *Opera and Drama Part II, in Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Vol. 2 (Opera and Drama)*, transl. W. A. Ellis. Broude Brothers: New York, 1966, p. 152.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 156.

was becoming objectified and was not at the center of artistic conception. Art production was subservient to commercial ends, which led to the creation of mere spectacle. Italian and French opera were particularly disappointing to Wagner as he believed they were nothing more than places to see and be seen. An industrialized society was killing art and art was killing an industrialized society. To come to the aid of humanity, Wagner came up with what he thought to be methods of harmonizing society through art.

Wagner's *gesamtkunstswerk* would provide a synaesthetic experience that would concentrate into one artwork the attention-commanding forces of lyric, tone, and rhythm. Harmoniously woven together, they were to ensure a harmonious artwork that would produce a harmonious audience. This could only be achieved if the audience was in a state of complete attentiveness, without the distraction of busy cities, baroque architecture, or other audience members. The Festspielhaus at Bayreuth, set in a rural environment, was to channel the audience's attention to the stage performance and to nothing else. Its architectural form and dimmed lighting were to be especially conducive to a phantasmagoric experience, blurring the line between reality and art. Ultimately, Wagner's most valued work is to be found in his mythologically-themed music dramas. Their German mythological content was to appeal universally to the German folk, who would in turn internalize the artwork's values and behave in a socially harmonious fashion. Attention was Wagner's underlying concern; only by controlling perception could the affectivity of his art be socially effective.

New Directions of Brazilian Literatura de Cordel

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The northeast of Brazil is a dry place, poor and agrarian for the most part. Cities like Fortaleza and Recife, with populations in the millions, are centers of rural urban migration, as well as the ways of life of the *sertão*, the Brazilian backlands. Along with people and goods, a unique art form has taken root in these cities over the centuries. A uniquely Brazilian style of pamphlet poetry, Literatura de Cordel is a group of expressions characterized by extemporaneous song writing, small pastel colored pamphlets, wooden xylograph art (used to adorn the covers of the pamphlets) and metered poetry.

The written pamphlet tradition of Literatura de Cordel was imported from the Iberian Peninsula and France, whose chapbook tradition sets the framework for the written art.¹ Because Brazil was the only country in Latin America to have a monarchy, colonial society mainly centered around the seat of government, Rio de Janeiro. As the Portuguese royal family, fleeing Napoleonic Europe, modernized this city and region of Brazil, printing presses developed to support the local, literate population, but the majority of people of the vast Brazilian landmass remained without access to modern methods of print production. By the mid to late 19th century, however, the now second-hand French printing presses made their way to the rural areas of the northeast where they were used to create pamphlets documenting the rich oral tradition of the region. The rich tradition of song and story of northeastern Brazil now had a means to record and reproduce itself. As a result, literacy increased among the previously disadvantaged people of the region as the Literatura de Cordel flourished.

Typically, the Literatura de Cordel genre encompasses issues dealing with the lives of those people of the *sertão*, Brazil's unforgiving and squelching hot backlands. Traditional oral techniques and use of *matuta*, the informal Portuguese in which these pamphlets are written, give them their characteristic popular appeal. In this form, they have long been accessible—monetarily and intellectually—to the masses. Some cordeis write about the drought, others about pastoral life scenes; topics range from being born out in the *sertão* without any midwife to help your mother (a constant of pride among the hard line cordelistas) to playing soccer to the joys of living life as a *pé ralado* (literally scratched foot; a peasant).

My survey of Literatura de Cordel aims to understand the social purposes and track the history of this art form as a social advancement tool in this chronically underrepresented, typically illiterate section of the largest and most influential country in Latin America. The conclusions drawn are based on my findings while working for a semester in Brazil and becoming acquainted with the Sociedade dos Cordelistas Mauditos, a unique group of Cordelista producers in Juazeiro do Norte, in the state of Ceará. An informal study of the authors, their backgrounds, and their purpose, reveals that the direction most Cordelistas take is one of social justice and political conscious building.²

The Writers

Although tradition dictates that the poet-artists of the Sociedade dos Mauditos would be male, 7 of the 12 founding members of this group are women. Founded in 2003, this group calls Juazeiro do Norte home, a small town of 200,000 in the millenarian *sertão*. It is a holy site and a place of pilgrimage, especially on the holy day of Juazeiro's patron "saint," Padre Cicero, on November 2. During this weekend, the population of the city grows exponentially to between 3 and 4 million, making Juazeiro the site of Brazil's second largest pilgrimage site. It's here I met Salete Maria da Silva, one of the writers. She is a lawyer and university professor at the nearby Universidade Regional do Cariri. She is in her mid thirties, and speaks to me about Carl Jung's theory of "Synchronicity" as she shows me her pamphlets. She tells me she dedicates her writing mainly to the unheard voices of women, and introduces me to the artwork of local women. One of the SDM's cordeis has been adapted for the theater and is set to open a week after our interview in the city of João Pessoa.

During my field research in radio stations, where the more "traditional" cordelistas often sing their metered songs for their public, I found that the profile of the SDM group is not a usual one. Most cordelistas are men. It is a profession that despite its lack of profit has a certain honor around the male world. These men are typically either farm workers or descendants of farm workers, or at least claim to be. Pedro Bandeira, one of the most revered Cordelistas in Juazeiro is actually trained as a lawyer, but is quick to point out that this doesn't discredit him from the ability to make Cordel. In a traditional sense, because of its informalized wordplay and set rhyme scheme, Cordel was dominated by the popular, uneducated classes, and as a result there is a certain disdain for new bands of Cordelistas like the educated, highly feminine group of SDM.

¹ Candace Slater, *Stories on a String, the Brazilian Literatura de Cordel*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1982. 6-14.

² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972. 87-127.

Furthermore, the subject matter of the SDM is provocative to traditionalists. Instead of talking about drought and famine and illiteracy, the SDM writes about gay rights, homoeroticism, political activism, and historical events that are highly laden with politics. The SDM talks about anti-imperialism and anti-US sentiment, demonstrating a global world view that the other types of cordelistas simply don't mention or make evident in their writings.

Sociedade dos Mauditos and Social Justice

During our interview in Juaziero, Salete da Silva tells me that she has used the rhyme scheme to argue legal cases. She tells me that it makes for a sound argument, and also gives it a bit of flare to present it in a metered rhyme scheme. She tells me that the purpose of Cordel should be not to reinforce stereotypes but to break with them.

This is the new direction of Literatura de Cordel—social change—though it is the nature of that change, perhaps, rather than Cordel itself as an agency of social change, that is “new.” The history of the Literatura is one of helping people advance themselves through their own histories; here, however, Literatura de Cordel is also serving a social purpose, to make politically conscious people out of the inhabitants of Brazil. At this intersection of law and literature, we see that the arts can provide a true groundwork for social change.

This evolution toward social change and political awareness is not only natural given the unique educating historical role of Literatura de Cordel, but also holds much power in affecting social change. Many programs such as the Landless Workers Movement (MST) rely on written poetry—in the MST's case *Mística*—to convey their message. Poetry and storytelling act as the vehicle by which politicalization and raising of awareness that appeals to the larger population is possible. In countries like Brazil, where new constitutions are printed fairly often, the gulf between law and enforcement is being filled by forms of expression like Literatura de Cordel. It is important to understand these unique histories and story-telling traditions in order to grasp the greater tendencies of Latin American societies today.

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The Rastafarian I-an-I Ontological Philosophy: Black Women and Men Discovering the Divine in Be-ing

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Introduction:

Dandelions, Rastafarians, and Redefining Sacred Space

She would have liked a lotus, or China asters or the Japanese Iris, or meadow lilies—yes, she would have liked meadow lilies...But dandelions were what she chiefly saw. Yellow jewels for everyday, studding the patched green dress of her back yard. She liked their demure prettiness second to their everydayness; for in that latter quality she thought she saw a picture of herself, and it was comforting to find that what was common could also be a flower.¹

In everyday existence, the ordinary becomes the extraordinary, if one allows it. This beauty lies in the silence, betwixt and between the structures of our socio-cultural environment. It lies dormant waiting to be discovered and uncovered—the flower, the sacred of our ordinary lives. Captured, isolated, demonized, objectified, abused, and silenced—black people are dandelions—waiting to be discovered and recognized for their own captivating beauty. Unacknowledged in the dominant culture, black people throughout the colonial world have created liminal spaces,² those sacred localities and spaces in between space and time—in the gray areas, the ambiguous areas on the edges of the dominant hegemonic order. In these liminal spaces, black peoples (and other marginalized groups) venerate their own beauty, their own sacredness.

This article emerges out of an attempt to recognize the dandelion—the ordinary everyday beauty inherent in black peoples—and to provide ontological and practical means of venerating the ordinary as the extraordinary. Rastafari, a Jamaican phenomenon, which emerged in the 1930s and since has received worldwide attention through reggae music and its radical socio-political stance in relation to Euro-western hegemonies, inherently resides in these ambiguous spaces. Though most often characterized as an oppositional subculture because of its anti-colonial stance and its rejection of Eurocentric norms, the Rastafari pro-black and Africanist persona has situated the religion in a

liminal arena which extends beyond confrontation and is based upon spiritual, cultural, and historical cultivation. Rastafari has not yet completely escaped all the western ideological ideas about personhood, gender, and other issues of ontological significance. However, by constructing a pro-black consciousness concerned with proactively responding to the Euro-western hegemony and providing ontological and spiritual significance for black peoples' lives, Rastafari has cultivated a wholistic state of well-being among its adherents and has begun to dispel Euro-western ideologies that have denigrated and continue to demolish the mental, physical, and emotional health of African peoples.

Within the Rastafari movement the sacred aspect of black peoples' lives is signified and often enriched through both their theological and ontological philosophies. Though Rastafarian theological beliefs are empowering to black peoples, particularly Rastafarian men due to its patriarchal undertones, their ontological philosophy, which is based on a concept of *be-ing*, allows the diversity of the Divine to be revealed to *all* irrespective of race, sex, or creed. Rather than utilizing anthropomorphic symbols to represent the Divine, symbols which have been most often used to exclude and denigrate blacks and women, particularly black women, the Rastafarian ontological philosophy allows *all* black peoples to be their own hierophanies, manifestations of the sacred. Mary Daly, feminist theologian and philosopher, contends that hierophanies are not manifestations of the sacred as some "wholly other" but rather are "an experience of participation in being, and therefore a manifestation of being (ontophany)."³ She goes on to contend that the quantum leap of faith, which women and other human beings must be willing to make in an effort to become the active subjects of their reality, is to "bridg[e] the apparent gap between being and history."⁴ By closing the gap between *being* and history and as importantly between *being* and "God," the Rastafarian ontological philosophy, through venerating genuine hierophanies (manifestations of the sacredness of being) allows the Divine to be seen, felt, heard, smelt, and tasted in the everyday existence of black men, women, and children. These genuine hierophanies are their dandelions for every day and every season.

As a means of demonstrating the significance of an ontological philosophy in general and the Rastafarian ontological philosophy in particular, I will: (1) compare theology and ontology, particularly referencing black theology in relation to Rastafarian theological beliefs, (2) demonstrate the limitations of theology, particularly in regards to

¹ Gwendolyn Brooks, *Maude Martha* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1993), 1-2.

² See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970).

³ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1973), 34-35.

⁴ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 35.

women, and (3) outline the potential of the Rastafarian ontological philosophy, particularly in reference to black women, who have for too long been the oppressed of the oppressed. Black women in particular, often the most forgotten of all the dandelions, must begin to *be* even if so doing means *sinning*. Consequently, this article seeks to allocate means or at least lay out the ideological foundations necessary to allow black women in particular to *be* and to participate in all *Be-ing*. Through freeing black women to venerate the diversity of their divinities, their own authentic hierophanies, it is my belief that the black communities, too, begin to be healed.

Theology or Ontology?

In the Rastafarian context, theological beliefs, though they vary extensively among Rastas, underscore the political/religious ideologies of devotees. Theologically, Rastafarians, like Black liberationist theologians,⁵ proclaim that Jah (God) is black. However, contrary to the beliefs of most Christians, many Rastafarians believe that Haile Selassie I, a black man crowned the emperor of Ethiopia in 1930, is the black messiah, Jah incarnate. For Rastafarians, Haile Selassie's crowning was a special revelation, which fulfilled the prophetic words of Marcus Garvey,⁶ a Jamaican-born Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist, when in 1927 Garvey quoted and proclaimed the well-known Psalm 68:31, which states "Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God."⁷ Within Rastafari, the blackness of God and specifically the divinity of Haile Selassie signifies black

peoples' place as the chosen people of God and hence provides black peoples, particularly Rastafarians, with both political and spiritual agency.

Though the Rastafarians' theological beliefs enable Rastas to counter the anti-black practices and attitudes of Euro-western ideologies and systems, the Rastafari ontological philosophy of I-and-I, a belief that all beings are divine revelations in and of themselves, enables its adherents and other blacks to cultivate a truly wholistic, healing, and empowered sense of self. In an effort to go beyond oppositional confrontation to a wholistic existence of being that empowers individuals and the community as a whole to acknowledge and venerate their embodied African selves, Rastafari has constructed the ontological concept of I-and-I, a concept that speaks to the intrinsic value of existence. However, this concept of I-and-I is not limited to any one individual *I*. As a term that expresses the plurality and connectedness of all *I* (human subjects), I-and-I also provides ontological significance for other *I* selves as well as for forces of both the natural and celestial world. The heterogeneous character of the movement, as expressed through the embodiment of this I-and-I ideology, allows individuals to contest the colonialist prescribed anti-subject position of black persons by creating and recreating their own ontological meaning within the I-community.⁸ This enables each individual to define and redefine their identity in ways that are meaningful and supportive of their journey towards self-liberation. As a movement that speaks particularly to the

⁵ Black Liberation Theology, which came out of the Western Christian theological tradition, is a school of thought that emerged in the late 1960s during the Black Power Movement. Black theology adamantly contends that God is black and the liberator and sustainer of the oppressed. James Cone, the author of books such as *A Black Theology of Liberation and God of the Oppressed*, was the first theologian to create a systematic structure for Black liberationist theology. However, black liberationist theology is only one tradition within the wider liberationist theological school of thought that has emerged among other oppressed peoples throughout the world.

⁶ Marcus Garvey was well-known for establishing the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica, which he later transported to the United States where the UNIA flourished throughout the early 1920s. Garvey advocated black pride, black power, and Africa for the Africans before the advent of the black power movement of the 1960s. See Rupert Lewis, "Marcus Garvey and the Early Rastafarians: Continuity and Discontinuity," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, eds. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell et. al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 146. Even though Marcus Garvey was not a Rastafarian and did not believe in the divinity of Haile Selassie nor did he attempt to promote such beliefs, in the words of Tennyson Smyth, expressing the sentiment of many Rastas, "He was not the Light, but was sent to bear witness of the Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world of darkness, for he was like a voice calling out of the west; prepare ye the way of the Lord." This quote is cited in Nathaniel Samuel Murrell and Lewin Williams, "The Black Biblical Hermeneutics of Rastafari," in *Chanting Down Babylon: The Rastafari Reader*, eds. Nathaniel Samuel Murrell et. al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 330.

⁷ Ennis Barrington Edmonds, *Rastafari: From Outcasts to Culture Bearers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 34-35.

⁸ I am using this term, "I-community," to refer to a community of active and creative individuals connected by a shared sense of subjective reality.

oppressed descendants of Africa, as they exist throughout the Diaspora and on the continent of Africa as well, I-and-I empowers African descendants to redefine their existence in ways that are affirming of their wholistic African selves—enabling the descendants of Africa to honor their bodies, minds, and souls as ontologically significant.

Rather than merely providing a theological answer to the reality of suffering—an answer which would ultimately *speaks about God* from a particular person or group's vantage point—the Rastafari religion provides an ontological response to black oppression, which *speaks about human beings* and human communities and how they themselves are Divine. While Rastafari clearly has theological language which is appealing for any liberationist project, particularly black liberationist movements, I contend that their ontological philosophy which starts from a vantage point of *praxis* rather than *thought* is ultimately much more compelling and liberating. From an ontological standpoint, belief is central to one's entire being. Though ontology, like theology, is a form of language, its philosophical roots naturally emerge from praxis (doing and being) and from thereon practices are formulated into thoughts and then into philosophies. Consequently, ontology is always centered upon the self—both the individual and communal being—as the ultimate concern and the ultimate truth. However, theology—in this case Christian theology—attempts to transition from thought to praxis. Consequently, Jesus Christ and secondarily scripture are the ultimate truths upon which all other truths are based. Despite an avid belief in the truth of the black experience, even James Cone, who is most often considered the father of black theology, must admit, “Like Scripture, the black experience is a source of the Truth but not the Truth itself. Jesus Christ is the Truth and thus stands in judgment over all statements about truth.”⁹ As such, according to Christian theological principles, all actions should be based upon Jesus Christ and the Scriptures. While theology is “focused on goals and aspirations”¹⁰ and is concerned with *what will happen* and *what should happen*, ontology is focused on being and hence seeks to understand *what is* and *what is happening*.

In the here and now, in the *what is*, the Rastafarian I-and-I ontological philosophy contends that human beings and all other beings are the sacred present and have come forward from the past and will move forward into the future. The ultimate goal is that of *being* and it is through being that one creates and embodies belief and hence a sense of self. While theology remains fixated on personalizing “God” as Father and as Christ, the sacredness and Divine diversity of

human reality and being is ignored. Even so, what could be more personal and real than *Be-ing* itself? Through understanding the Divine as *I-and-I*, as *Be-ing*, human beings come to hear, feel, taste, see, and smell their own sacredness, their own I-ness. Consequently, rather than utilizing theologically constructed anthropomorphic symbols that truncate and diminish the diversity and universality of the Divine, an ontological philosophy, like the Rastafarian I-and-I ideology, allows all human beings to see the Divine in themselves and other beings.

Unlocking the Power of I-and-I: Rastafarians Confronting Gender Discrimination

In theory, I-and-I indicates the unity of all things, beings, and worlds. However, the divine essence of creativity and empowerment which theoretically is open to all adherents of the Rastafarian religion is in practice exclusive to its male adherents, who forgo the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being of their fellow sistren. Rather than cultivating a truly interrelated and interdependent community, as is supposedly advocated through the ontological concept of I-and-I, the gender biases and sexist attitudes of the brethren limit their own possibilities of cultivating a united community of individuals.

Though black women/Rasta women cultivate and nourish the black community, Rasta men have made themselves the normative black person, the normative *I*, as if black women are only black and human by default. As a consequence, Rasta women are seen as temporary members of the Rastafari religion. According to the Rastafari men, female adherents are not “in heart” Rastas. It is through their male counterparts that women are allowed access to the wisdoms of Rastafari. Women are, thus, denied their own identities within the Rastafarian religion. They are merely the “daughters,” the inferiors, to Rasta men. Even in cases in which black women are honored for their roles as mothers and wives, the titles bestowed to them such as Queens, Madonnas, and Earth Mothers coerce women into accepting complementary roles in which the Rasta men are the ultimate authorities, the Kingmen.¹¹ By denying black women the empowerment of I-being, Rasta men stifle the divine wisdoms of half of their community, thwart the cultivation of a spiritually and culturally healing mode of being, and prevent their own liberation. Yet committed to discovering and creating means for practicing in their faith, Rastafari women are constantly creating and recreating liminal spaces, in which, to inscribe and prescribe personal/collective meaning and significance.

⁹ James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 31.

¹⁰ See Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 36.

¹¹ See Maureen Rowe, “The Woman in Rastafari,” in Rex Nettleford, ed. *Caribbean Quarterly Monograph: Rastafari* (Kingston: Jamaican Caribbean Quarterly, University of the West Indies, 1985), 15–17, 19.

**Being in the Face of “Nothingness”:
Black Women/Rasta Women Forging Their Own Existence**

Existing as women means *being* despite the patriarchal norms that attempt to define and control. “Realizing the way out of stag-nation, the state of bondage,” Mary Daly declares, “*is* living the spiraling journey of integrity and transformation, of remembering ourSelves as verbs, as participators in the Verb, Being.”¹² This journey begins through the process of understanding and unearthing our imagination, the deep and silent secrets that define our existence and way of being. Through exposing these imaginative elements of our subconscious, we discover ourselves and enable ourselves to fix that which is not healing and cultivate that which stimulates and venerates our being.

This process of transformation through the unearthing of the imagination must first discover how women—particularly, in this case, black women and Rastafari women—conceptualize and imagine the divine. Describing the dilemma that occurs between how we conceptualize the divine and how we imagine the divine, Daly asserts:

...even when very abstract conceptualizations of God are formulated in the mind, images survive in the imagination in such a way that a person can function on two different and even apparently contradictory levels at the same time. Thus one can speak of God as spirit and at the same time imagine ‘him’ as belonging to the male sex. Such primitive images can profoundly affect conceptualizations which appear to be very refined and abstract.¹³

Indeed, some womanist and black feminist theologians have found it difficult to eradicate the white male God from their minds even if they desire to believe authentically in a more affirming divine figure. Contemplating her own experience as a theologian in comparison with the religious life she experienced in the Black Church, Dianne Stewart confesses:

...I realized that Cone’s books could not erase the ubiquitous *Whiteness* of Jesus Christ, which was deeply embedded in my consciousness and subconsciousness. My intellect was loyal to the Black Christ but nothing in my social reality, including my Black church community, reinforced Cone’s Black Christ proclamation. I *knew* the Black Christ was the true Christ, but I did not *believe* it.¹⁴

Similarly, though women may affirm that they *know* God is not a man and that men are not God, many women may

believe that “he” will bring them salvation. These imaginative thoughts must be eradicated in order to allow women to fully exist and be.

Rastafarian women are confronted by the contradictions of a male objectified God, embodied in Haile Selassie, and the fluidity and universality of the divine-I inherent in all beings, things, and realities. On the one hand, the divine is an object—a symbolic means of affirming the ontological significance of black peoples and simultaneously enforcing the hierarchal divine status of the male sex. On the other hand, the divine is being; it manifests itself permanently in all aspects of both the material and metaphysical reality. However, due to the patriarchal structure of the faith, the liberating philosophy of I-and-I is made exclusive to the male sex. While Rastafari women are free to deny the divinity of Haile Selassie and affirm their own I-ness as individuals and as a community, they must still tread their own paths and continually question their own imaginative thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

**Beings in the Divine Presence:
I-and-I and the Verb of Verbs**

In a liminal environment in which reality is defined in terms of being, the divine must also reflect this empowering and active state of existence. Historically, the divine as an object of our histories, identities, and realities has prevented marginalized communities from fully identifying with the divine. Confirming the active being of women through imagining the divine as a verb, Daly declares:

Women now who are experiencing the shock of nonbeing and the surge of self-affirmation against this are inclined to perceive transcendence as the Verb in which we participate—live, move, and have our being. This Verb—the Verb of Verbs—is intransitive. It need not be conceived as having an object that limits its dynamism. That which it is over against is nonbeing. Women in the process of liberation are enabled to perceive this because our liberation consists in refusing to be the ‘Other’ and asserting instead ‘I am’—without making another “the Other.”¹⁵

Through the confirmation that “I am,” Daly’s conceptualization of the Verb of Verbs is an analogue for the I-and-I ideology in that it confirms the interconnected of all beings and all things as *I*. Similar to Rastafari, in this conception of the divine, Daly contends “we look upon the earth and her

¹² Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, xvii.

¹³ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 18.

¹⁴ Dianne Stewart, *Three Eyes for the Journey: African Dimensions of the Jamaican Religious Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xi.

¹⁵ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 34.

sister planets as being *with* us, not *for* us.”¹⁶ Thus, this active divine principle, like I-and-I, empowers all things—including nature, women, men, children, and other spiritual and/or material beings.

However, in addition to the active divine principle inherent in I-and-I, Rastafarians also venerate the divine through the anthropomorphic symbol of Jah as embodied in Haile Selassie. Daly, however, argues that the use of such symbols undermine women’s attempts to be. She states,

It has sometimes been argued that anthropomorphic symbols for “God” are important and even necessary because the fundamental powers of the cosmos otherwise are seen as impersonal. One of the insights characteristic of the rising woman consciousness is that this kind of dichotomizing between cosmic power and the personal need not be. That is, it is not necessary to anthropomorphize or to reify transcendence in order to relate to this personally. In fact, the process is demonic in some of its consequences. The dichotomizing-reifying-projecting syndrome has been characteristic of patriarchal consciousness, making “the Other” the repository of the contents of the lost self. Since women are now beginning to recognize in ourselves the victims of such dichotomizing processes, the insight extends to other manifestations of the pathological splitting off of reality into falsely conceived opposites. Why indeed must “God” be a noun? Why not a verb—the most active and dynamic of all? Hasn’t the naming of “God” as a noun been an act of murdering that dynamic Verb? And isn’t the Verb infinitely more personal than a mere static noun? The anthropomorphic symbols for God may be intended to convey personality, but they fail to convey that God is Be-ing.¹⁷

Anthropomorphic symbols for God have historically been used to segregate the good from the evil and the religious from secularists. In the Rastafarian religion, God as verb and God as noun exist simultaneously. Though they are seemingly contradictory, God as verb, i.e., I-and-I, receives religious meaning from God as noun, as Jah and Haile Selassie. However, as I have noted earlier, God as noun—as male—has limited the use of the I-and-I concept. Even though I-and-I is theoretically inclusive of all, Rastafari men define I-ness exclusively—ignoring black women as I within the I-and-I community. Furthermore, despite the subjective empowering concept of I-and-I, by confining the divine to an

anthropomorphic symbol, God becomes the *object* rather than the subject of worship, affections, and our perceptions and desires. Thus, human beings can act upon God as *object* and utilize God as a destructive weapon for their own greedy and hateful intentions. Though God as object can also allow the oppressed to imagine the divine in their own image—to express their own historical and/or her-storical reality—this, too, has limited the potentiality of the divine. In essence, anthropomorphic symbols establish all those not reflected in the image of God as “other,” which prevents any sense of continuity from developing between ethnic groups, genders, and other culturally constructed social groups.

God as I-and-I, however, prevents the divine from being accessed as merely an *object* acted upon for destructive means. The divine becomes a proactive subject within and among other I-subjects. Furthermore, I-and-I is the fundamental assertion of the power of the first person pronoun *I* and the veneration of all subjective pronouns—meaning all things and all beings. However, while the statement “I am” is an active assertion, it includes both a pronoun and a verb. Consequently, all things are both subjects of reality and actions. If all things and all beings are pronouns and verbs, meaning active agents, then cannot the divine also be both a pronoun and the Verb of Verbs?

As manifestations of the divine, celestial beings cannot and should not be discarded but rather infused into the imaginative concept of the divine as the Verb. Rather than entirely discarding anthropomorphic symbols for God, women must transform them into genuine hierophanies. According to Daly, genuine hierophanies are “manifold and unique manifestations of Be-ing.”¹⁸ Furthermore, she states, “The fact that they are many and new, and not once and for all, is precisely because they are not external to the essence of the deity.”¹⁹ These manifestations of the divine are genuine in as much as they speak to and from the experiences of its believers. Thus, individuals are permitted to accept only those sacred manifestations that speak to their particular experience. For instance, Rastafarians can continue to venerate Haile Selassie, if they choose, but “he” cannot be the definitive definer of the Divine. Rastafarian women still may be better off limiting the use of this particular hierophany. They will have to utilize their own experiences as a means of judging if, in fact, it is and/or can be a genuine manifestation of the divine. However, most importantly, creating genuine hierophanies will allow Rastafarian women not only to venerate themselves as manifestations of the divine—as already

¹⁶ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 178.

¹⁷ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 33–34.

¹⁸ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 183.

¹⁹ Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 183.

encouraged by I-and-I—but also to unearth old goddesses and/or gods and ancestors that reflect their experience of the Divine. As a communally-oriented ideology and open philosophy, I-and-I can expand back into the African past and invoke the gods and goddesses of Africa, as well as divine manifestations from other times and historical/cultural areas. As an expression of continuity and oneness, according to Ogbonnaya, community is a “process of being in the world,” which includes the past, present, and the future.²⁰ Hence, the communal nature of I-and-I provides Rastafari women with direct relations to all temporal and atemporal existence—an unlimited means of creating and re-membering gods, goddesses, and other divine manifestations that reflect their her-storical experience.

Rastafarian women can look and find the divine in everything they create and everything they do. Their being, sinning, and doing all are genuine hierophanies that map their own paths and create new liminal spaces for further transformation and growth. In Rastafari, the courage to be I-and-I is the courage to sin and the courage to act, to go against the colonial establishment—even colonial establishments within the religion. Hence, through I-and-I, women are provided avenues for being, even if so doing means “sinning” and “bewitching.” Daly reminds women:

Being at home on the road means summoning the Courage to Be, the Courage to See, the Courage to Sin. It means be-ing Wicked. Wicked women are Wiccen women, speaking Be-Witching words. As Websters, Wicked Wiccen women unwinding the binding of mummified/numified words. This involves hearing/speaking through Other time/space, unwinding the clocks of tidy time.²¹

Through bewitching, we conjure our own selves, the new creation “within” that women have imagined in their liminal spaces, those ambiguous localities betwixt and between the socio-political reality of time and space. In these spaces, we forge new selves, new identities, and new manifestations of the divine. However, the question still remains: how do women—black women—be, sin, and bewitch in their everyday existence? How do conceptual thoughts become our imagination?

Through being, sinning, and bewitching, black peoples may begin to discover their own potentials, expand their sense of self beyond human dimensions to discover and cherish their own sacredness in all of its diversity, and relate to *all* which is *Be-ing*. Black women are in a peculiar locality socially

and culturally to be and become the movers and shakers of such revolutionary ways of being and thinking vis-à-vis Euro-western ideologies and their established norms. Yet, it all depends upon how willing black people are to no longer see the Divine as the “wholly other” divorced from our lives, histories, and experiences. It all depends on whether or not we can cherish the simple beauty of a dandelion.

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Public Image; Private Identities: Behavior Modification and Veiling American Muslim Women¹

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For American Muslim women who observe the form of Islamic modest dress known as *hijab*,² faith cannot be a private matter. The veil is more than simply an article of clothing; it is also embedded with meanings and accompanied by a strict code of conduct. Behavior modification, through adherence or resistance to this code, is the result of identity negotiation. The extent and nature of the accompanying behavior modification for veiling women is best expressed through the stories of the women who wear it. The stories of these women must be told in their own words because such narratives humanize and make relatable the "othered" experiences of the thriving Muslim American Diaspora. These stories are also essential for Western societies as we enter an age in which religion and identity politics take precedence in influencing public policy; today's policy discourse demands a better understanding of the complex diversity of our societies. My personal experiences as an American Muslim woman, which included veiling for twelve years, initiated my interest in making a contribution to the nascent literature that explores the complex lives of American Muslims from within.

The majority of the anthropological research on the veil deals with practices in Muslim countries. Fieldwork by Lila Abu-Lugod and Suzanne Brenner represents some of the most cited research. The most comprehensive body of work that represents veiling Muslim women in the West is a 2003 volume of Canadian ethnographic studies titled, *The Muslim Veil in North America: Issues and Debates*, edited by anthropologists Sajida Alvi, Homa Hoodfar, and Sheila McDonough. The book was helpful for my own preliminary research; however, the Canadian focus and pre-9/11 data set

warrant a more recent American perspective. While there are a few small published American studies, none focus on Muslims raised in the U.S.

This study focuses on the generation of young Muslims that has been raised in the U.S., a generation that has worked to reconcile issues of American identity and assimilation with the traditionally Muslim beliefs with which they have been raised. Taken from a larger paper that broadly examines what veiling means to Muslim American women, this paper focuses more exclusively on the veil as a self-enforcing means of behavior modification. Integral to this discussion is the fact that the interviewees articulate their thoughts and attitudes in their own words, incorporating a voice previously unheard into the limited American discourse.

Methods

I use an ethnographic approach in the interviews of eight young Muslim women in Houston, Texas. While my own analysis is interspersed throughout the paper, it will serve only to organize and clarify common themes; my primary goal is using quotations from the women themselves. Houston is an ideal location to conduct such research because of its large, diverse, and dynamic Muslim population. The young women interviewed were selected in several different ways. They were sometimes family friends, fellow students at Rice, and people I met at local universities and through mosque networks. Interviews were often one hour to three hours with follow-up contact if necessary. All interviewees are of South Asian descent and were born and raised in the U.S. The women span in age between 18 and 24 years old. The majority of the women belong to the Shi'ite school of thought.³

The format was semi-structured with several questions and an open-ended section. The interviewee's names have been changed in this essay. I used feminist research methods⁴ to make the interview more conversational. The interviewees were welcome to engage with me and ask questions of their own and several took advantage of this opportunity.⁵ In order

¹ This paper would not be possible without the support of my advisor, Dr. Elora Shehabuddin, as well as Dr. Roland Smith, Dr. Jose Aranda, Azmat Khan, and Ms. Gloria Bean.

² The most common form of Islamic modest dress in the West is the *hijab*. In its practical usage, hijab is the term for the triangular cloth scarf used to cover the hair, ears and neck. Although the word hijab has several meanings, I use it interchangeably with the word veil. Literally, the word hijab means "curtain" in Arabic. In the spiritual sense, the institution of hijab, or the veil, extends beyond physical modesty; veiling includes keeping one's mind clean with pure thoughts and actions.

³ As evidenced by their interviews, the Shi'ites rarely collectively differed from Sunnis in their experiences and attitudes. In this instance, the shared experience of wearing hijab transcended sectarian boundaries.

⁴ Feminist research methods are based on the premise that no research is objective or unbiased. All of us come from experiences that shape who we are, why we are interested in a particular subject, and how we go about studying that subject. Feminist research encourages researchers to reveal their biases, even to those who they interview. While critics contend that this may skew results, feminists maintain that they are at least acknowledging their biases and dealing with them in a way that is constructive for the reader instead of pretending that they do not exist.

⁵ One particular concern was that I would not be veiled when interviewing the women. I did not know how the women might react to this, but I did my best to make it clear that I was not writing this paper with the purpose to malign hijab, as a disgruntled former hijabi, but rather, to tell their story, as someone who feels that she has more empathy than the average outsider.

to stay true to the words of my interviewees, I taped and transcribed each interview. Everything quoted in the body of the paper is from the transcriptions.

Behavior Modification and the “Show” of the Hijab

In this section, I examine how the hijab may dictate the actions of those who wear it. Some of the interviewees point to the hijab's influence as a positive force in their lives, even as a reason in and of itself to wear the hijab. Others express some disappointment about not being able to fully share in the experiences of their peers because of how the hijab may limit their actions. Before looking at the responses of the interviewees, however, it is necessary to fully understand the relationship between religion and clothing more broadly. The strong relationship between clothing and religion is not a concept exclusive to Islam. From an anthropological perspective, clothing indicates much about societies as well as individuals. It provides a window through which one can look into a culture and discover values and ideas critical to that particular culture. Ruth Rubenstein, a professor of sociology at the Fashion Institute of Technology, draws upon ethnographic accounts to offer several distinct purposes for clothing: to separate group members from non-members, to place the individual in the social organization, to place the individual in a gender category, to indicate desired social conduct, to indicate high status or rank, to control sexual activity, to enhance role performance, and to give the individual a sense of activity (El Guindi 1999: 56).

The aforementioned purposes can be used to explain Islamic modest dress. The relationship between religiosity and dress is a phenomenon prevalent in many other faiths. As strict conformity is equated with religiosity, compliance to strict codes of behavior is demanded (Arthur 1999: 1). Internally, the body is controlled; wants and desires are muted and emotion restrained. The external body is more visibly restrained, however. Strict dress codes are enforced because dress is considered symbolic of religiosity. While a person's level of religiosity cannot be objectively perceived, as it comes from within, physical indicators such as clothing are used as evidence that an individual is on the right and true path. The research of anthropologist H. Spencer indicates that “various types of dress serve as guides to interpersonal conduct within the daily and special ceremonies of life” (El Guindi 1999: 54). Concurrently, other social researchers like Joanne Entwistle agree with the approach of dress as an embodied experience. Entwistle has determined that on the one hand, “...the way the body/dress is caught up in relations of power, and on the other, the embodied experience of dress is used as a means by which individuals

orientate themselves in the social world” (Secor 2002: 8). Many women who wear hijab argue that it provides them opportunities for empowerment. Due to either family or social pressures, it may be easier for them to venture out into public space to access to higher education or work outside the home.

The question I posed to the interviewees was: “Are there some things that you don't do, and the only reason you don't do them is because you wear hijab?” The responses demonstrate that many hijabis avoid certain activities solely because they wear hijab. Fayza describes the things she would do if she didn't wear hijab:

Um...going out and stuff, you know, clubbing and whatever. I think I have been twice and I felt so uncomfortable. I felt so out of place...like you said before, like you're representing it and everyone knows you're not supposed to be there.

She goes on to explain how she feels about the impact that hijab has on her:

Well, it depends on when you ask me that question. Sometimes, I'm like yeah,...I'm really glad because it's kept me from doing a lot of stuff I'm not supposed to be doing in the first place, whether you wear hijab or not—you're not supposed to be doing it...You know, but sometimes I kind of wish, you know, that I could go out with my sisters, and like be normal sort of...You have to be very aware, like you have to realize that you are representing all Muslims and so what you do has implications because people are going to judge Muslims as a whole...On the other hand, it's done a lot of good for me, like I think that I've become a better person because I wear it. And if I didn't wear it, I would definitely be a terrible person. I already know.

It appears that Fayza has a sense of gratitude to the kind of control that hijab has brought to her life. Yasmin was very forthcoming of how hijab keeps her in check. Here, she describes how her actions would change if she didn't wear hijab: “Well, I don't go clubbing...[*But if you didn't wear hijab would you go clubbing?*] Yes, definitely. I don't have sex. [*If you didn't wear hijab, would you have sex?*] Probably.”

Zarah indicates that she feels that she is representing Islam when wearing hijab. She says:

I do, very much. They look at you and automatically think, she's Muslim, she's representing Islam. If they see a girl wearing hijab, and they see the same girl wearing hijab at a party...

While young women like Fayza, Yasmin, and Zarah appreciate how hijab brings limits to their lives, Samina expresses some resentment with regard to the expectations of how hijabis should act:

Hijabis are people, they make mistakes. But people tend to hang onto those mistakes and not let them go. Yeah, oh they're hijabi, they can't you know, talk to boys, or you know do whatever, go out. It's always like, she's a hijabi and she can't do it. They're human beings, they have feelings, they need to battle constantly in other things.

Notions of the hijabi ideal are often referred to in this discussion. As indicated by some, having a marker of their marginality serves the purpose of reminding the individual to adhere to the hijabi ideal.

The link between sexuality, social control, and hijab has historically been strong. One of the reasons that veiling is encouraged on a societal level is because it is a means to control sex outside of the confines of Islamic marriage. Individually, women may wear it as a protective device, preventing unwanted sexual approaches from men; some of the interviewees cited these reasons as justification for hijab in Islam. Delving further in the relationship between hijab and sexuality from a feminist perspective can help us to understand this phenomenon.

Sexual instincts are acceptable in Islam so long as the proscribed laws of order are observed. Therefore, it is not necessary for a Muslim to eradicate her or his instincts or to control them for the sake of control itself; rather, the individual must express them in accordance to the demands of religious law. For instance, aggression and sexual desire, if harnessed in the correct manner, serve the purposes of the Muslim order; procreation is a contribution to the Muslim community. However, if suppressed or used wrongly, they can destroy that very order (Mernissi 1987: 46). This reductionism in the approach to women's sexuality affirms the subordinate status of women on many levels.

One of my most disturbing findings is related to sexuality and the responsibility of the woman to prevent sexual attraction. When talking about the social issues that create the need for hijab, the response of several of the girls can sometimes be empowering, as a protest to the objectification of women. At the same time, other girls blame women and how they dress on the social ills that hijab is claimed to offer protection from, such as rape. In a society that disrespects women, Samina believes that a woman who does not dress

responsibly is sinning for herself, but she is also responsible for any of the sin that a man may incur on her behalf:

It's one of the most important things to do as a female, to cover up because the sins that are committed by guys, is because of women. Because of not being covered. Just because they look at you, first of all, you're giving yourself a lot of sins and then looking at you, they're...sinning. And then it just progresses from there. If you look at world today, even in Pakistan, it's getting really bad. If the girls are much more covered up, the guys will be much more respectful. If they don't see your figure, they're not going to comment on it.

Zarah explains the broader social value of encouraging hijab among young women by talking about what Islam says about hijab and why:

You're supposed to do it. And the benefits it explains of it...it's amazing, how much good it can bring to a society. Like cutting back on rapes, it's amazing. So I think it's viewed as a really good thing...I think that Islam has so much importance on it and people just throw it off.

It is clear that even young women who were born and raised in the U.S. have internalized the attacks against women's sexuality and the notion that women and how they appear to men are responsible for unwanted male attention. I find the comments, particularly as related to rape, to be disturbing. They imply that rape is somehow the fault of the woman, and additionally, that rape is a crime of attraction. At the same time, it is important to note that these opinions did not represent the majority of the interviewees. While such dangerous opinions may exist, they are not common in this research.

Conclusion

Muslim veiling in the U.S. is a distinct phenomenon because it is a deliberate practice, not simply part of traditional dress or a requisite tool of protection, functions which may necessitate veiling in predominantly Muslim countries. In the U.S., one rarely wears the veil to fit in or be better accepted into mainstream society. Here, it may take on symbolic meanings, conveying identity and political opinions in addition to religiosity. Whether she wears it or not, each Muslim woman is making an implicit statement about the veil. By examining the responses of the eight interviewees in light of the limited, but varied research available, the results of my interviews appear to be consistent.

Having considered what was presented in this paper and what is already available on veiled Muslim women in the West, there is great potential for future research, especially in the U.S., since Canada seems to be well documented. There needs to be more emphasis on varied ethnicities and a focus on those who have spent their formative years in the West. While it will take time for the 9/11 generation to grow and make decisions for themselves, how they choose to live as American Muslims will serve as a critical indicator of Americanization. By giving voice to these women, the study of veiling practices in the West becomes a more accurate representation of the diversity and complexity within community.

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Recovering the Lost Voice of the Middle Passage in *Beloved* and *Changó, el gran putas*

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The second half of the twentieth century saw a growing number of novelists striving to reconstruct the violent history of slavery in the Americas. In particular, renowned African-American writer Toni Morrison and Afro-Colombian writer Manuel Zapata Olivella look beyond the historical record to include the oft-neglected perspective of those slaves who perished while crossing the Atlantic on the slave ships over what is commonly referred to as the Middle Passage. Despite differences of geography, culture, and language, Morrison and Zapata Olivella are both able to reconstruct this Middle Passage voice in their contemporary slave fictions *Beloved* (1984) and *Changó, el gran putas* (1983) by using “extra-realism”¹ as their narrative mode—a genre that encompasses magical realism, mythical realism, marvelous realism, and various other “isms” that blend fiction with reality, myth with history, and the ordinary with the fantastic. However, while both of these texts demonstrate a similar narrative strategy in the recreation of the Middle Passage voice, the role of this voice in its relation to the other characters differs in each novel. In *Changó*, the voice of the Middle Passage ancestors is a continuous source of counsel to the African descendants in the Americas in their ongoing battle against oppression. In contrast, Morrison depicts the voice of the Middle Passage—manifested in the character *Beloved*—as angry, spiteful, and one that forces the other ex-slaves to remember their connection to this dark past. Despite these differences in representation, in both texts it is only after the slaves and ex-slaves listen to this voice that they are able to reach an inner part of themselves that had been previously hidden, and undergo a healing process that gives them the necessary strength to look towards the future and strive for freedom.

The Guiding Voice of the Ancestors in *Changó, el gran putas*

Zapata Olivella dedicates Part I of his text (of five parts) to recreating the slave experience on a slave ship crossing the Atlantic to the New World. Several of the slaves take turns telling who they were back in Africa and how it was that they were captured, filling in the void of information on the background of these people with a name and life story to accompany it. After the slave ship is destroyed at the end of

Part I and all (save one) of its passengers are lost to the sea, the voices of the Middle Passage ancestors continue to be present throughout the history of slavery and oppression of the African descendants in the New World. In the following four parts of the text—in which we see a repeated cycle of slavery and rebellion in Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, Brazil, Haiti, and the United States—the Middle Passage voice serves as a reminder of the slave ship experience, but more importantly, as a continuous source of guidance and hope to future generation of slaves, who at various moments in history must rebel against their white oppressors.

Of particular importance are the voices of the ancestors Nagó and Ngafúa, two slave captives on the Middle Passage ship from Part I. These characters provide a voice of counsel and strength that is heard above the voices of the other slaves. They are also frequently directed by the gods themselves on how to lead their African ekobios (brothers). For example, Elegba, the messenger god between Changó (the Yoruba deity of fecundity, dance, and war) and his people, appears to Nagó and tells him:

*Toma mi sonaja de fuego: nadie podrá oscurecer tu inteligencia.
Toma el puñado de los vientos: nadie encerrará tu espíritu.
Toma la lanza y el escudo de Orún: serás poderoso por la fuerza de tu puño. (43)*

[Take my rattle of fire: no one will be able to hide your intelligence.
Take a handful of the winds: no one will enclose your spirit.
Take the lance and the shield of Orún: you will be powerful by the strength of your fist.]

Nagó is thus selected as the warring leader among the slaves who must head the battle against la Loba Blanca (the White Wolf) on the ship. Once he has received these arms, he announces to the others, “¡Oigan todos! ¡Elegba está con nosotros!” (43) [Listen everyone! Elegba is with us!], so they know they are being protected. It is Nagó who is the most frequent narrator during the Middle Passage chapters and who continues to call to Elegba and the other Orichas for protection and strength, which he then passes on to the other slaves. To him, it is essential that the slaves know they have both the ancestors and the Orichas (deities) at their side during the fight. He calls out with fervor to Elegba:

¹ Professor Kenneth Warren of the University of Chicago suggested the term “extra-realism” as a way to unify the specific techniques used in this paper—magical realism and mythical realism. However, the elaboration of the term’s definition is my own.

¡Dame la cana del timón! [...]
 ¡Dame la muela para afilar los cuchillos! [...]
 ¡No duerma un instante hasta que los míos, amos del
 barco, muerto el Capitán y la tripulación, cambiemos
 el rumbo. (72)

[Give me the freedom of the rudder!
 Give me the whetstone to sharpen the knives! [...]
 Do not sleep one instant until my people are
 masters of the boat, and the Captain and the crew
 are dead; we shall change the course [of the ship].]

The voice of Nagó is therefore what distinguishes him (along with his iron mask) as the leader of the slave rebellion. He is by far the most representative of a warring and angry voice among the victims of the Middle Passage, and continues to direct the slaves from the spiritual world in their many future battles against la Loba Blanca.

In contrast, the voice Ngafúa, the priest and spiritual leader among the group, is looked to more for wisdom and connection to the Orichas. The Babalao (voodoo priest) leads the slaves in songs of comfort, and provides them with interpretations of “*las tablas de Ifá*” [the tablets of Ifa], which foretell the fates of all the ekobios. Before his death, the Captain of the ship gave Ngafúa a drum to accompany his songs, not realizing that he was giving Ngafúa the power to rally the slaves together and give them hope. One such song reads:

*La Loba Blanca
 disminuida ante nuestra mirada;
 sus cadenas no separaran
 nuestros cuerpos
 de la sombra madre.*

*¡Vivos estamos,
 soplo de sombras,
 siempre enriquecidos
 nunca rebajados! (68)*

[The White Wolf
 diminished in our eyes;
 his chains do not separate
 our bodies
 from the shadow mother.

We are alive,
 the breath of the shadows;
 always enriched,
 never lowered by others!]

Here we see that the Babalao replaces the characteristics of captivity, displacement, and death that accompany the slaves across the Middle Passage with life, strength, and unity. He

sings, “*sus cadenas no separan / nuestros cuerpos / de la sombra madre*,” inferring that even despite their separation from mother Africa, the slaves are still connected in spirit. The chains only unite the ekobios further, despite their differences in region and language. Ngafúa continues, “*¡Vivos estamos / [...] nunca rebajados*,” revealing his desire to give hope and strength to his ekobios on the ship who must lift themselves up by force if they are to obtain their freedom. Similar to Nagó, Ngafúa continues to serve as messenger and a voice of counsel to all future generations of Africans in the New World long after his death.

Beloved as the Dark Voice of the Middle Passage

While Zapata Olivella constructs a Middle Passage voice of strength and guidance in *Changó*, Morrison prescribes a far more hostile role to this voice in *Beloved*. *Beloved* tells the story of a runaway ex-slave named Sethe, who, rather than allowing her children to be returned to slavery, attempts to kill them in her mother-in-law's woodshed. Her success, however, was limited to the death of only one child—an unnamed baby girl referred to only as Crawling Already. It is the ghost of Sethe's deceased daughter that comes back to haunt the family at 124 Bluestone Road, first as an invisible ghost that throws furniture and leaves handprints in the cake, and later in the flesh as the mysterious young woman Beloved. But as Morrison herself explains, Beloved is more than the ghost of Sethe's baby come back to life; she is also a representative of the millions of slaves who died over the crossing of the Middle Passage. Like Crawling Already, these slaves are the nameless, innocent victims of one of America's most horrible institutions. Morrison thus uses the angry, spiteful voice of Beloved to speak for the Middle Passage slaves who refuse to be forgotten, and therefore force themselves upon the memory of the living ex-slaves in the text. This forcefulness is most clearly demonstrated in the manipulative nature of Beloved's relationships with the other characters, and the emphasis she places on speaking her name out loud.

Soon after Beloved is introduced in the text, she quickly reverts to the spitefulness that characterized her as the ghost that haunted 124, demanding to be heard and recognized, yet longing to hear the past stories of others as well. However, even as a listener she has vengeful intentions. In order to hurt Sethe as she has been hurt, Beloved pries her to talk about a past she had tried to forget, forcing Sethe to re-feel what the memories of slavery were like. In one scene, Beloved asks her, “Your woman she never fix up your hair?” (60). Sethe then begins to recount how she never had much

connection to her mother, but she knew her by a mark that was burned into her skin. When Denver chimes in and asks, “What happened to her?” Sethe responds, “Hung. By the time they cut her down nobody could tell whether she had a circle and a cross or not, least of all me and I did look” (61). Sethe then appears to be very disturbed; “she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross” (61).

The next passage takes us further into Sethe’s memory, where we learn that her mother and Nan, her nurse, had actually come over the Middle Passage on a slave ship and were raped repeatedly by the crew. Sethe remembers Nan telling her the story in her youth:

She told Sethe that her mother and Nan were together from the sea. Both were taken up many times by the crew. “She threw them all away but you [...] Without names she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never.” (62)

This episode demonstrates the spiteful intent in Beloved’s voice to force Sethe to both recognize her own dark ties to the Middle Passage, as well as recall the pain that accompanies the memories of slavery.

Beloved also calls special attention to the importance of naming those individuals on the ships who have been forgotten due to the absence of these names in the historical record. In her conversation with Denver on death and the Middle Passage, Beloved makes the comment, “I don’t know the names,” referring to the fact that neither she nor anyone can remember the names of the slave passengers. Beloved then takes it upon herself, as the representative of the Middle Passage, to stress the importance of voicing her own name out loud, and forcing others to voice it as well. In doing so, Beloved demonstrates how the voice of the Middle Passage both demands and longs to be recognized, and the importance of naming “the unnamed.”

For example, in a confrontation in the outhouse between Sethe’s lover, Paul D, and Beloved, the ghost pushes him to call out her name. When Paul D resists, her voice becomes very insistent: “You have to touch me,” she says, “On the inside part. And you have to call me my name” (117). Beloved then says she will only leave his presence after he has called it, and Paul D, seduced as he is by her magic, finally gives in, but almost unconsciously:

“Beloved.” He said it, but she did not go. She moved closer with a footfall he didn’t hear and he didn’t hear the whisper that the flakes of rust made either as they fell away from the seams of his tobacco tin. So when the lid gave he didn’t know it. What he knew was that when he reached the inside part he was saying, “Red heart. Red heart,” over and over again. Softly and then so loud it woke Denver, then Paul D himself. (117)

By calling out Beloved’s name, Paul D is recognizing the forgotten victims of the Middle Passage and asserting their presence in history where before there was none. However, in doing so, Paul D is also able to find the Middle Passage voice within himself, allowing his “red heart”—his own “inside part”—to be reached and reopened and actually “wake him” from what before was a kind of ignorant slumber; a closed-heartedness towards the past. Thus, by finally naming that which had been left unnamed, Paul D recognizes the full weight of Beloved’s presence and significance, and undergoes a healing process for himself in which he recovers his “red heart.”

This analysis exemplifies the different ways in which the lost voice of the Middle Passage is reconstructed in Morrison’s *Beloved* and Zapata Olivella’s *Changó, el gran putas*. While the latter text depicts the Middle Passage voice as consoling and protective, in Morrison’s novel it appears angry and forceful. However, whether spoken by the deceased slave-ship ancestors or Beloved, in both examples the Middle Passage voice *must* be heard in order for the living characters to fully acknowledge their past and reach an inner part of themselves that had been hidden, be it the “red heart” of Paul D, or the strength and hope necessary for the characters in *Changó* to fight for their freedom. With this accomplished, the slaves and ex-slaves are able to look towards a future free of oppression by both the white slave-owner and their own past oppression.

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Making room for *Higher Goals*: space, commodity, and the black ghetto in David Hammons's aesthetic vision

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hey coah-ch
wanna outlaw the dunk, cannot deal with skyman
darrell
or double dippin hip doctors deadlly in flight
cannot deal with Magic or Kareem...hey coah-ch
coah-ch
bench yrself in the garbagecan of history o new
imperial dog
denying with lying images
our strength & African
funky beauty

—Amiri Baraka, “In the Tradition”¹

...because the streets is a short stop
either you're slingin' crack rock
or you got a wicked jumpshot
—Notorious B.I.G., “Things Done Changed”²

Basketball has become part and parcel of the American imagination in general and African American culture in particular. As Baraka's epigraph conveys, pride in sports icons is profoundly racial; “skyman darrell” (Darrell Hawkins), “hip doctors” (“Doctor J,” Julius Erving), Magic Johnson, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar are seen as innovators of black style and icons of a pro-black sensibility in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Though neither phenotypically biologic nor culturally essential, ‘blackness’ is inflected in the “aesthetic execution” of sport,

where the black player tries to *style* reality so that he becomes spectacle and performance, always projecting a sense of self; whereas his white counterpart tends toward the productivistic and mechanistic.³

Blackness, then, as a lived, enacted, culture and style, is seen in basketball as it is in the more familiar musical and literary

modes. Popular culture encapsulates the sport in both the glamorous world of professional basketball and the gritty reality of ghetto life, two realms whose overlap has caught the attention of many. That is, while our televisual culture represents basketball mainly via the spectacle of “chain-link fences, concrete playgrounds, bent and rusted netless hoops, graffiti-scrawled walls, and empty buildings,” the glamour and glitz of professional ball is concomitantly revered as the best the American Dream has to offer—a path of individualism blazed through a combination of natural talent and hard work.⁴ In the all-reaching space of televisual culture, both ‘street’ and professional basketball are commodified by outside forces. Often, this double reification in psychic space is used to justify conservative social policy ensconced in the ‘boot-straps’ myth of the American Dream.

In this discussion, ‘ghetto-ness’ refers to more than “any black area of the city,” entailing rather “a social-historical and spatial referent rather than simply a racial dimension.”⁵ Thus, the loss of physical public space in the ghetto exacerbates and limits life conditions. My second epigraph shows the limited life chances of those who live there—the black working class who peddle drugs or play ball in hopes of escaping their dismal economic situations. While the trope of the ghetto seems endlessly problematic in hip-hop, the Notorious B.I.G. (Christopher Wallace) is accurate to compare the selling of drugs—“slingin’ crack rock”—as a form of pecuniary subsistence, to the financially-driven dream of playing basketball—the “wicked jumpshot”—to get paid. While Wallace withholds moral judgment regarding the drug trade in the black community, he does make an ethical claim in this rhyme. As cultural critic, he is astute here to point out the depths of ghetto misery: drug-peddling and ball-playing, despite their stereotypical and reified status in televisual space, are indeed two post-industrial developments in an era of “urban decline, joblessness, and the erosion of recreational spaces in the inner city.”⁶ The crack economy, of course, contributed to the “increasingly militarized urban landscape” of the 1980s after Reagan-era economic restructuring, and in turn, the policing of space “devastated inner city public recreational facilities and altered the landscape of play significantly.”⁷ Thus, the

¹ Amiri Baraka, “In the Tradition,” in *The LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka Reader*, ed. William J. Harris (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1991), 303.

² The Notorious B.I.G., “Things Done Changed,” in *Ready to Die*, Bad Boy Records 73000.

³ Cornel West, *Prophetic Reflections: Notes on Race and Power in America* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1993), 98.

⁴ Robin D.G. Kelley, *Yo Mama's Disfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 44.

⁵ Loïc J.D. Wacquant and William Julius Wilson, “The Cost of Racial and Class Exclusion in the Inner City,” in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 501 (January 1989): 16.

⁶ Kelley, 44.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 47, 50.

limited life choices for the black urban poor are partly created by the politics of space in black ghettos.⁸ Both urban street-ball and professional basketball, thus, are represented through images that reflect a reality lived, dreamed, enacted, and ultimately limited.

We live in an era where the trope of ‘the ghetto’ takes on an analytical dimension that retracts race as central to its discourse. The “barren territory of dread and dissolution due to deindustrialization and state policies of welfare reduction and urban retrenchment” are historically coded by race.⁹ However, recent forces in public policy and sociology have sought to prove the declining significance of race, if not in its erasure, in its discourse about the ghetto. As Wacquant notes,

the neutralization of the “ghetto” in policy-oriented research culminated in the expurgation of all mention of race and power to redefine it as any tract of extreme poverty, irrespective of population and institutional makeup, in effect dissolving the ghetto back into the slum.¹⁰

While the process of ghetto-ization is itself complex (a “Janus-faced institution”), representations of American ghetto-life suggest a racial component, as my preceding cultural artifacts suggest.¹¹ While racial subject matter—such as that of Baraka and Wallace—is not equivalent to ‘ghetto’ subject matter, their positions intersect in the contemporary American imagination. Empirical accuracy aside (whether black basketball players’ material reality constitute a sociological ‘ghetto-ness’ or not), it is true that we connote both basketball and ghetto-ness with blackness. That said, amidst this collusion of blackness, ghetto-ness, and basketball, the larger question looms: How does art enforce or challenge typical conceptions of this reified tri-fold image?

One productive way to get at this question is through the work of African-American installation artist David Hammons. Basketball has been a favored subject throughout Hammons’s career, with pieces such as *Basketball Ballet*, 1990; *Air Jordan*, 1989; *High Falutin*, 1985-90; and *Ballroom*,

1990.¹² Hammons often emphasizes the performance of basketball in his installations, like the “ballet” exhibition that included men actually playing ball in the exhibition space. *Untitled*, 1994, is another cogent example, which includes an illustration of concentric circles on a museum wall made by dribbling a basketball covered in colored chalk. But Hammons’s most provocative basketball piece to date is *Higher Goals*, 1983 and 1986. Installed in outdoor public spaces of Brooklyn and Harlem, *Higher Goals* is a satire of the sport, “a negation of basketball.”¹³ Twenty, 30, and 55-foot tall basketball hoops render the game impossible to play; the artistry of their structure—complete with bottle-cap arrangements and wind chimes dangling from the backboard—render the game’s representation as beyond artifice, to art. Installing these exhibitions in black communities, then, is significant in at least two ways, the allegorical and the aesthetic.

On one level, brought to my attention through a class group video project, the piece functions as social commentary, made especially poignant by the ironic title: black youth can reach for higher goals than basketball. Hammons has said so himself, noting that his piece is

an anti-basketball sculpture. Basketball has become a problem in the black community because these kids aren’t getting an education. They’re pawns in someone else’s game. That’s why it’s called *Higher Goals*. It means you should have higher goals in life than basketball.¹⁴

For our group project, we asked Williams College students for their initial responses to a picture of this piece.¹⁵ Their responses, when asked to link the sculpture to their conception of the ghetto, are similar to Hammons’s comments. Fifteen students from a wide array of American and international backgrounds, through individual filmed interviews, teased out the social critique operative in Hammons’s work. Several respondents caught the irony of the title and saw basketball as part of the problems of ‘the ghetto.’ Some were

⁸ I use the Notorious B.I.G. here because hip-hop’s birth and evolution is contemporaneous with the development of ‘hoop dreams’ in the American imagination, insofar as material conditions are concerned in urban communities from the mid-1970s through the 1980s. Aside from hip-hop culture, contemporary film has addressed the problematics brought forth by basketball in the ghetto as well. I have in mind Steve James’s documentary *Hoop Dreams* (1994) and Spike Lee’s social-realist fiction *He Got Game* (1998). In the latter, Lee deploys real-life NBA All-Star Ray Allen to play the protagonist, Jesus Shuttlesworth, to get at the problems of the path of ghetto youth to professional star in a literal sense.

⁹ Loïc J.D. Wacquant, “Ghetto,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2004): 1.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² David L. Smith, “David Hammons: Spade Worker,” in *Yardbird Suite*, ed. Deborah Menaker Rothschild (Williamstown, MA: Williams College Museum of Art, 1994), 12.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kellie Jones, “The Structure of Myth and the Potency of Magic,” in *David Hammons: Rousing the Rubble* (New York: The Institute for Contemporary Art, 1991), 29.

¹⁵ This project was presented to Professor Mérida Rúa’s Introduction to Urban Studies class on March 9, 2006, at Williams College. An important consideration here is that we offered a black and white photograph of only the Harlem installation. *Higher Goals* in Harlem is considerably less ornate than Brooklyn’s. Hammons’s installation in Brooklyn includes five goals, facing different directions, rather than the singular hoop in Harlem. Additionally, the Harlem installation has much less of the bottle cap decorations and no wind chimes.

so perceptive as to point out the “institutional racism” of postindustrial cities, particularly after being reminded of the date of the piece.¹⁶ Ghetto space, for our interview subjects, was drab and in decline, marked by poverty and crime and peopled by black bodies. When asked what the limits of Hammons’s social critique may be, especially considering the placement of the critique inside ghetto space, most responded that basketball cannot allegorize all of ghetto life. One respondent from Los Angeles noted that she would prefer, as an artistic representation in and of the ghetto, “a mural showing the diversity of the city.” Thus, it is fair to say that most, if not all, of our respondents read Hammons’s piece as political, due to its location, and literal, for its title.

Thus, our interview subjects, under the pressure of the camera, found the literal reading of Hammons’s sculpture quickly and subsequently probed its limits. Yet it is provocative that this vein of analysis stops short there. The majority of our respondents found a social function to *Higher Goals* and gleaned meaning from only a black and white image of the sculpture, yet nobody mentioned the logical follow-up: what alternative does Hammons’s piece offer, as a reflection of the dire circumstances of the black ghetto? A pragmatic reading of art could offer a pragmatic resolution, yet to this reading, none is found. This point has been noted by Smith:

Hammons’s installations do not displace any existing basketball courts, and, while they provide an ironic commentary on basketball, they do not thwart any actual impulses toward playing the sport.¹⁷

Hammons’s art, then, welcomes layered interpretations. Making basketball into art within a public space can be read as a celebration, or a literal revelation, of the sport in the context of African American culture in general and ‘ghetto-ness’ in particular. The raising of the hoop, then, is to envision a “more dazzlingly inventive and transcendent basketball” altogether.¹⁸ Keenly aware that “African-Americans have taken the slow and rigid game invented by James Naismith and recast it in the image of their own rhythmic, improvisational culture,” Hammons places the cultural richness of basketball inside the black community, neither above nor below his ironically titled social critique.¹⁹ By locating the sculpture outside the ‘high-culture’ realm—the exhibit halls of curators and critics—and inside the ‘low-culture’ of black urban street life—ghetto space—Hammons’s piece performs and participates in the

culture of Harlem’s and Brooklyn’s denizens.²⁰ In this way, Hammons can have it both ways: the artist makes a provocative socio-political statement, but by inciting dialogue rather than employing didacticism.

A radical development of this latter reading of *Higher Goals* offers basketball as a manifestation of African American culture rather than economic survival tool and locates sport as a resistive act. Though not a political action, basketball “embodies dreams of success and possible escape from the ghetto” in a pragmatic sense:

But for that small minority who hold onto the dream and are encouraged, the work ethic begins quite early and they usually work harder than most turn-of-the-century child wage workers... [R]unning ball all day long is evidence of a work ethic.²⁰

Not only does play become a type of labor in the black community, but one which undermines the division of labor required of the working classes in a capitalist economy. Because ball is played in the enclosed space of the ghetto, in the intimacy of ethnic communities, this type of labor can be interpreted through Marx’s formulation of reification in “The German Ideology,” worth quoting at length as a way of closing:

The transformation, through the division of labour, of personal powers (relationships) into material powers, cannot be dispelled by dismissing the general idea of it from one’s mind, but can only be abolished by the individuals again subjecting these material powers to themselves and abolishing the division of labour. This is not possible without the community. Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible.²¹

In a sense, despite the posturing and competition that defines basketball, this stylized, individualized type of labor resists reification. Thus, if we read past the normalized values of labor and community—past capitalist wage labor and past violent images of a nihilistic black ghetto—perhaps basketball has liberating possibilities. Though not immune to the reification that gobbles it up to render it another commodity transacted in the marketplace, basketball can be a progressive, innovative form of cultural expression with a

¹⁶ Interviews conducted and filmed by Dan Aiello ’07, Laura Lee ’07, Seulghee Lee ’07, Brendan Mulrain ’07, and Norman Scott ’09 at Williams College, March 6-8, 2006.

¹⁷ Smith, 15.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 14-15.

²⁰ Kelley, 53-54.

²¹ Karl Marx, “The German Ideology,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 197.

profoundly political dimension. To return to Wallace, basketball culture, like hip-hop culture, can, at its best, exemplify “counterhegemonic social practices.”²³ To return to Hammons, if *Higher Goals* goes beyond both the castigation of already-limited life choices in the ghetto and mere celebration of black sport, then we see the artist’s progressivism that shoots black ghettoization into Baraka’s “garbagecan of history.” The vision proffered here is one that escapes the limits of space of both the ghetto and the marketplace, towards transcendence and freedom.

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“There Were a Lot of Things We Did in Quiet Ways”: Black Women’s Resistance in Jim Crow Louisiana, 1890-1940

Tiana J. Mack, *Duke University*

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Sunup and Sundown Working Women

The false construction of black womanhood under Jim Crow merged ideology and economics in a way that crystallized the triple oppression of working-class black women—race, gender, and class. Racist ideology imposed concrete limitations on their economic status. Relying on women’s accounts from the *Behind the Veil* transcripts, this chapter uncovers the memories of working-class Louisianan women in agricultural, industrial, and commercial labor sectors. Working-class black women’s politics should not be simplified to their participation in civil rights organizations or labor unions, but rather must embrace the multidimensionality of their lives, including everyday informal practices. The second half of this chapter looks “beyond the public gaze”¹ into private life and working-class culture, exposing working black women’s veiled narratives of political struggle. By 1910, some 76% of Louisiana’s black workforce was employed by whites in the agricultural and domestic sectors.² How did Jim Crow policy simultaneously create spaces for black women’s exploitation and agency inside and outside the workplace?

In the Fields. In the late nineteenth century, nine-tenths of African Americans resided in the South, and 80% of this demographic was restricted to rural areas.³ The agricultural southern economy demanded a large workforce, and the black population labored as farm tenants and sharecroppers. Tenant farmers—black and white—invested energy into cultivating lands which they would never own, nor did they have legal ownership of their raised crops. The Louisiana economy functioned chiefly as a sugar plantation system, in which black women earned fifty cents per day. By the 1930s, nearly 80% of sugar in Louisiana was produced through wage labor, and three-fourths of this workforce was African American.⁴

The escalation of Jim Crow in the 1890s was simultaneous with the migration of black southerners to industrial work in northern cities. Over half a million African Americans headed to the North between 1916 and 1919, followed by a million more in the 1920s.⁵ Less often told is the story of the rapid movement of African-American rural populations to the urban South. At the close of World War I, southern states suffered a sharp decline in farming prices.⁶ Subsequently, black farm families headed from the countryside to villages and from there to southern cities. Between 1880 and 1900, for instance, over 20,000 blacks left their homes in rural Louisiana and Mississippi and settled in New Orleans.⁷

In the City. In 1900, approximately 50% to 70% of black women in southern cities worked outside the home,⁸ and more than 90% were relegated to household work.⁹ The average cook or domestic earned \$4 to \$8 per month, enduring a 12- or 14-hour workday.¹⁰ Women who worked as live-ins were on call at all hours. Jessie Lee Chassion of New Iberia, Louisiana, recalls, “If a woman worked and she made two and a half or three dollars a day, she was making big money...And they paid you three dollars a day you went in there in the morning. You did everything—you cook, you wash, you, iron, you mind the children. You stayed all day for those three dollars.” The typical black domestic was young and single; 15% to 20% of domestics were live-ins. White families of all classes enjoyed the privileges of cooks, washerwomen, and caretakers. Scholar Tera Hunter notes, “White Southern domesticity at nearly every level of society was built on the backs of black women.”¹¹ Black women’s work in white folks’ homes demanded close proximity as they cared for children, prepared meals, and nursed them when in bad health, yet blacks entered and exited through the rear of the house. In their workspaces, black women simultaneously experienced exclusion and intimacy.¹²

In fields, factories and homes, it was common for black women to experience sexual harassment from their

¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 36.

² Greta De Jong, *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 22.

³ Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family, from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1986), 80.

⁴ De Jong, *A Different Day*, 27.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷ Blair L. M. Kelley, “Plessy and Early Challenges to the Doctrine of ‘Separate, but Equal,’” in *From the Grassroots to the Supreme Court: Brown v. Board of Education and American Democracy*, ed. Peter F. Lau. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 24.

⁸ Jones, *Labor of Love*, 113.

⁹ Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 111.

¹⁰ Jones, *Labor of Love*, 128.

¹¹ Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom*, 111.

¹² *Ibid.*, 105.

white male employers. Black and white men both made claims to their wives' bodies and decided what forms of labor were considered indecent for their ladies.¹³ Thus when white employers violated the black female body, it was socially interpreted as an affront to black manhood. White men reinforced their claims to superiority as men and whites through sexual violence. In Jim Crow society, legal definitions of rape crimes applied only to accusations of black men's exploitation of white women.¹⁴

In addition, the assertion of black manhood as manifest in the New Negro movement contributed to the feminization of domestic labor. Black men were hesitant to perform servile labor, which they considered emasculating, racially degrading, and reminiscent of slavery times. There was a fear that such work affirmed not only their unmanliness, but also their inferiority to whites.¹⁵ At the bottom of the economic ladder, African American women were paid the lowest wages, greatly hampering their upward mobility. Despite such bleak prospects, black women pushed on for the sake of their families and communities.

**"But I laugh, and eat well, and grow strong":
Black Women's Agency**

The collective experience of African American women is not a seamless narrative of victimization and passive submission; rather, their subordinate status in Jim Crow allowed them to offer profound social critiques. Their material conditions informed their "infrapolitics"—their strategies for resistance and liberation rooted in cultural practices. Black women understood that the socioeconomic hierarchy of Jim Crow had produced their conditions of poverty. Their individual and collective acts of resistance were subtle and covert, but had political explications. New Orleans native and teacher Louise Bouise comments, "Yes, we had to take a lot of insults, but there were a lot of things we did in quiet ways."¹⁶

Women decided on which terms they performed domestic labor, carving out spaces for autonomy. Family emergencies, community events, and holidays took priority over work demands, disrupting white mistresses' daily agendas. White employers did not understand wage theft as black opposition or reappropriation of material wealth, but

attributed it to blacks' moral inferiority.¹⁷ Bringing home leftovers and hand-me-downs from their employers was considered retribution for unpaid wages or abuse; some considered it morally responsible to make use of the surpluses of white families. In the factory, strategies in the subversion of Jim Crow included slowing down work, taking long breaks and sick days, destroying equipment, or simply walking off the job. Some used their time on the clock to complete duties for their families. If an irreconcilable discrepancy arose over working hours, pay, work conditions, or employers' unreasonable expectations, quitting undercut employers' power over black labor. Veiled opposition reinforced stereotypes of black workers' incompetence, shiftlessness, and inferiority, yet these very performances of laziness lowered work expectations. African American women's exploitation as a reserve labor force had provided a powerful platform for resistance. Daily survival was a form of resistance in itself, and working women "pieced together a livelihood"¹⁸ with their resourcefulness.

Nightlife. When the workday ended, many young black women headed to the New Orleans hotspots on Rampart Street to let their hair down, cut a rug on the dance floor and flirt up a storm at a bar. Among the most popular lounges were the Blue Eight, the Night Cap, and House of Joy.¹⁹ Nightlife was another "weapon of the weak" for black women. As the ragtime roared, after a grueling nine to five, black women took back ownership of their bodies and sexuality. "Lowdown music"—blues, ragtime, and hot jazz—was the medium to exchange misery for joy, tears for laughter, and pain for pleasure. The creolization of Louisianan society blended African, European and Latin American traditions, and New Orleans became a hotbed for cultural exchanges. Jazz grew out of the city's rich musical legacy. By the 1920s, this art form spread worldwide as the first musical genre born in the United States. In its early days, jazz was dismissed as "jungle music," yet its unconventionality spoke to blacks who felt ostracized, reduced, and alienated from mainstream society.²⁰ The hottest night clubs featured a roster of legendary artists, including Danny Barker and Ferdinand "Jelly Roll" Morton. Florence Borders comments, "South Rampart Street. Jazz, parades, everything you associate with black culture was probably centered on Rampart Street...Rampart definitely had its own flavor and

¹³ Delores E. Janiewski, *Sisterhood Denied: Race, Gender, and Class in a New South Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985), 52.

¹⁴ Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 34.

¹⁵ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 23.

¹⁶ Louise Marion Bouise, interviewed by Kate Ellis, New Orleans, LA, June 20, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

¹⁷ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 19.

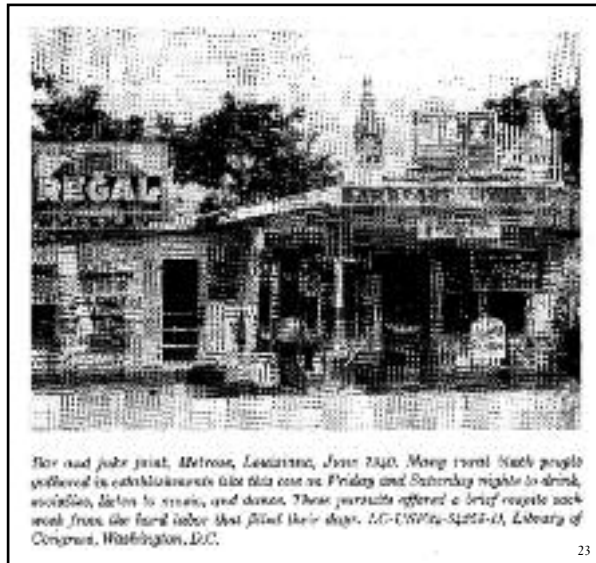
¹⁸ Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 62.

¹⁹ Beverly Arlene Caitone, interviewed by Michele Mitchell, New Orleans, LA, July 8, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

²⁰ Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 293-294.

ambiance.”²¹ In juke joints, black women’s loose, improvised body movements were a radical departure from more formal, calculated European dance forms. According to historian Tera Hunter, in the nightclub these women were performing a different kind of labor:

Though dancing was seen as interfering with wage labor, the connotation of “work” in black culture had multiple meanings. Work not only meant physical labor, it also meant dancing. In addition, it meant engaging in sex. Dancing enabled a momentary escape from wage work, even as dance itself was considered work—of a different order. The ethics of drive, achievement, and perseverance took on a different meaning when removed from the context of wage relations.²²



White mistresses often forbade their employees from going to nightclubs, demanding productivity from black women even in their leisure time. White employers associated black dance with criminal activity, filth, disease, and promiscuity. But while black women’s bodies may have been held captive during the workday, on Saturday nights these bodies were free of the straining mistress/maid power relationship. Women reclaimed their bodies for self-gratification rather than their bosses’ financial gain.²⁴ Entering these autonomous spaces, the black female body as an instrument

of labor was transformed into something new. This form of expression counterposed the construction of black women’s identities as laborers under Jim Crow, presenting the alternative of self-definition. For Negro working-class women, losing themselves in dance was more than recreational—it was liberation.

On the other side of the coin, nightclubs often were spaces for the exploitation of African American female sexuality, and some whites desired a taste of “black magic.” The objectification, exoticization, and hypersexualization of the black female body fed a burgeoning entertainment industry in New Orleans. Nightlife provided rare environments where exchanges among the races were socially tolerable, though still carried out with discretion. A number of young black women were hired as waitresses and dancers in bars, saloons, cabarets, and brothels, occupations which frequently offered better pay than housework. Other women turned to the underground economy—prostitution, gambling, bootlegging—as sources of income. People of all backgrounds traveled to red-light district Louisiana to experience black authenticity. “White slumming” was a chance to explore, even devour, the Other:

Sleek black boys in a cabaret
Jazz-band, jazz-band,—
Play, play, PLAY!
Tomorrow...who knows?
Dance today!

White girls’ eyes
Call gay black boys
Black boys’ lips
Grin jungle joys.
Dark brown girls
In blond men’s arms.
Jazz-band, jazz-band,—
Sing Eve’s charms!

—Langston Hughes, “Harlem Night Club”²⁵

By the 1920s, entertainment districts and big boarding houses were locations for criminal activity. These establishments overlapped with black residential sectors. Due to this geographic pattern, disproportionate numbers of sex workers were African American. Delores M. Aaron, a lifelong resident of New Orleans and Xavier graduate, notes how a number of black women in the neighborhood who were passing for white

²¹ Florence E. Borders, interviewed by Michele Mitchell and Kate Ellis, New Orleans, LA, June 20 and August 12, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

²² Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom*, 181.

²³ De Jong, *A Different Day*, 44.

²⁴ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 45.

²⁵ Langston Hughes, “Harlem Night Club,” in *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1994), 90.

were sex workers. At night they would put heavy powder on their faces so as not to be revealed. Aaron recalls, "My mother saw to it that we walked on Rampart Street because straight up Burgundy Street was just the red light district. The ladies were out there hustling and calling men into the doors... Even the lady who lived across the street from us when we lived on Toulouse Street, she was one of the ladies of the evening."²⁶ Prostitution and bar dancing involved the marketing of black women's bodies, but simultaneously these were professions of pleasure which were alternatives to the degradation of domestic work or toiling in the factory.²⁷

Behind the Veil. Excluded from participation in political life, black Louisianans' resistance emerged from informal networks among loved ones, which provided protection against the brutalities of systematic racism.²⁸ They depended on social institutions, including churches, schools, fraternal organizations, and benevolent societies for survival. These organizations contributed to the social welfare of struggling families, the elderly, the sick, and the unemployed, illuminating the African American cultural tradition of the extended family.²⁹ Although Negroes were denied bank loans and worked with far less capital, their small businesses—grocery stores, tailoring shops, restaurants, fruit stands, banks, insurance companies, laundries, barber and beauty shops, saloons, and hotels—served a rapidly increasing population. Because blacks were restricted from Canal Street, the main street of New Orleans, the center of black business activity took place on Dryades Street,³⁰ dubbed "the black Canal Street."³¹ Jazz funeral marches and yearly carnivals echoed the city pulse. More than embodying the spirit of the community, informal infrastructures shaped the black working-class political agenda. As in the workplace, white employers compensated "stool pigeons" to monitor black communities.³²

Legislation was used to undermine this economic network. For example, during World War I, "work or fight" federal laws (1918) were enacted, and the Louisiana state legislature's interpretation of the orders targeted black business. All eligible men in the United States were obligated to serve in the Armed Forces or contribute to the war effort through their occupations, but a list compiled by the Louisiana State Council of Defense dismissed several venues of black self-employment as "nonessential," including barbershops, pool halls, fruit vendors, etc.³³ Blacks risked imprisonment unless they abandoned such jobs. In addition, if blacks quit, took time off, or complained of unfair working conditions, white employers warned them to work or face charges of violating "work or fight" laws.³⁴ Threats of legal prosecution were a method to regulate and monopolize black labor.

Blacks of the early twentieth century were scarcely one generation removed from slavery. Standing against the inhumanity of Jim Crow, they fashioned a "moral economy" to ensure racial unity and advancement.³⁵ Black working-class women contributed much to this community network, conducting business in the home as hairdressers, seamstresses, and laundresses. Women were the guardians of the black family, ensuring its continued existence against Jim Crow.³⁶ In establishing a sharp division between home and work, black women expressed desires for self-rule and self-ownership. Rather than experiencing racism daily in the workplace and enduring the indignities of working directly for whites, women often labored in their own homes free from white supervision, for example as laundresses. While scrubbing away with soap in their hands, they would look after their neighbors' children during the workday and meet other community needs. Florence Borders reflects, "We were literally the children of everybody in the

²⁶ Delores Mary Aaron, interviewed by Michele Mitchell, New Orleans, LA, June 30, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

²⁷ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 48.

²⁸ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 200.

²⁹ William Chafe, Raymond Gavins and Robert Korstad, eds., *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South* (New York: The New Press, 2001), 89.

³⁰ Beverly Arlene Caitone, interviewed by Michele Mitchell, New Orleans, LA, July 8, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

³¹ Peter Dave, interviewed by Michele Mitchell, New Orleans, LA, June 23, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

³² Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 52.

³³ De Jong, *A Different Day*, 74.

³⁴ Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 231-232.

³⁵ Chafe, et al., eds., *Remembering Jim Crow*, 89.

³⁶ Claudia Jones, "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!" in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995), 108.

neighborhood.”³⁷ Although a minority of domestics worked as live-in maids, the more common decision was to live scattered throughout black communities because of the threat of sexual violation and desire for autonomy. Working as a live-in was less popular because “you’d never be off.”³⁸

Black mothers proved to be resilient and resourceful. When bills were due, many women scraped together money by hosting “rent parties.” The main purpose of these events was economic alleviation, but these socials also fabricated a wild social atmosphere, a sexual playground. Guests paid anywhere from a dime to fifty cents to enter, and stayed up all night gossiping, playing cards, smoking, drinking, and chowing down on soul food. Mothers also found inventive ways to protect their children from the indignities of Jim Crow. Delores Aaron recalls the humiliating experiences of shopping in white commercial areas, remembering, “The signs told you that you could not try on a hat, and you could not try on any clothes, so I hated to go shopping. That’s why Mama did most of our sewing for us.”³⁹

Segregationist policies in Louisiana framed a vibrant black infrastructure behind the veil. Under Jim Crow, African Americans wore a public face and a private face, and the institutions they established mirrored this duality. Businesses run as drugstores, cigar stores, and candy shops in the day transformed into juke joints, liquor stores, and cabarets when the sun went down. Black working women waged resistance against Jim Crow America in their daily *material* struggle for survival. Their collective struggle—above and below the veil, on and off the clock, visible and invisible, in public and private—reflects the complexity of southern black life and the intricacies of covert resistance. Out of their subculture rises a hidden dialogue oppositional to the dominant transcript of Jim Crow.

³⁷ Florence E. Borders, interviewed by Michele Mitchell and Kate Ellis, New Orleans, LA, June 20 and August 12, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

³⁸ Jessie Lee Chassion, interviewed by Michele Mitchell, New Iberia, LA, August 2, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

³⁹ Delores Mary Aaron, interviewed by Michele Mitchell, New Orleans, LA, June 30, 1994, *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South*. Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

In Search of a Consciousness—My Journey in the Valley of Bond/age: The Assumption of Difference between Caribbean-Americans and African-Americans

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Last year, I engaged in a conversation with a classmate that opened my eyes to what I regard as the dilemma of identity. The dialogue and my initial reaction to it led me to question the dynamics that lie behind identity consciousness. Next to me sat my peer, a smart Jamaican-American woman who I had known to always be quick to racialize issues because she adamantly believed that racism is still alive. The conversation I had with her went as follows:

"If you don't mind me asking, what island are you from?" she said.
"I am not from any island. I was born in New York," I replied.
"Oh really? What about your parents?"
"Both were born in the United States; my mother is also from New York and my father from North Carolina."
"So you have no ties to the Caribbean?"
"Nope. I'm all Yankee ... if that's what you call it."
"Wow. I would have never thought. That's surprising."
"Why is that?"
"(Smile) Well, I don't know, maybe it's because you're in school (giggle). And I see you always working, and in honors (giggle). You know?"
"Oh, well, I don't know ... (nervous chuckle). But hey, you know."
"(Light laughter) Yeah. Well okay, I just wanted to know."
"(Forced, nervous smile) Sure thing."

Just then, I felt I wanted to collapse, piece by piece. In a matter of seconds, I crumbled to a pile of rubble; my self-worth was enervated from my brokenness. I could not prevent immediate damaging effects of such a blow because shock held my self-assurance captive. My faith in my scholarly competence was drained and withered.

I was angered, but paralyzed. I could not move. The nervous smile and chuckle prohibited me from responding differently. I was angered, but speechless. As I opened my mouth to defend myself, the emotions bubbling in my chest were choked at my throat by confusion and surprise. I was angered and enslaved. I was unable to think clearly because I felt that I had been defined by someone else and then confined to that definition. I was angered, but I could not react. A confused astonishment stared me in the face. I was stupefied and I realized that I needed to step back and seek to make sense of what had happened.

This conversation between my classmate and me delineates the ways in which stereotypes—and on a larger level, discriminations concerning race and ethnicities—operate in our social relationships. The reason I refer to identity as a dilemma is that identities can function both positively and malignantly, both as a bond and a form of bondage. The bond/age nature of identity is something that we should pay close attention to because the line that separates the functions of identity is thin and can be easily traversed. I liken identity to the keys of a prison keeper: in many ways, our identities can open gates to unifying and liberating autonomy and conversely, our identities can shut the bars to a prison of homogenizing and restrictive confinement.

I want to share the experience of what I was able to learn as a result of this conversation because the identities we subscribe to are not relevant only to us as one of our individual traits. The ways in which we identify with a particular group also affects the people around us. Our identities are in part formed by defining who we are not. Thus, if a second generation black immigrant child is brought up to believe that all native black Americans are unproductive, then that child's understanding of native black Americans will be largely constituted by preconceived notions and by defining/confining those that look black American, that dress black American, that excel on the athletic court or field, that congregate on street corners, and that populate prisons, according to a restrictive definition of what it means to be a native black American. We cannot ignore the operation of power in our social relationships and the ways in which these power relations influence how we identify ourselves; we must consider how those who were marginalized and discriminated against formed identity politics in response to their oppression.

Identity politics developed as a reactionary assertion of pride against the inequalities of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and ethnocentrism, to name a few. The idea was to create identities that function as bonds in order to fight against physical and social bondage. Pride-identities were promoted and made manifest through the emergence of ethnic studies programs, equal rights movements, and the articulation of the voices of women and cultural minorities; strength was embodied in the identities formed by individuals standing together, responding to similar struggles. Yet, this unifying function of identity failed to include all of those who are marginalized. Many of the racial equality movements minimized the voice of women, women's rights movements ostracized feminists from the "third world," and both movements excluded homosexuals from their equality initiatives. Identities became ordered.

Certain identities have been made abject. For example, history shows homosexuals to be rejected or only paid lip service by all equal rights movements. Under the inclusive term “black,” descendants of African-American slaves are considered the abject of Caribbean-American blacks and African immigrant blacks. Identities began to make claims for superiority and although the intent was to function as a bond for strength, the ways in which one identifies can be a form of bondage that holds them prisoner to an identity said to be of an inferior position to another. As a result, discriminatory “-isms”—be it racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, or others—find residence and operate through our identities.

How is it that the bond of pride-identities, whose purpose was initially considered to be empowering, became inverted to serve segregationist purposes? Pride-identities are constructed in order to combat illegitimate marginalization; they are not based on or grounded in a concrete truth. Thus our identities should not be thought of as essentialist qualities; there is no more fundamental nature in the bond of our identities than there is in the oppression that we unify against to challenge. The problem arises when we believe that our identities are fixed truths, descriptive of the essence of our beings, from which we regulate who is greater than or less than another.

This problematic of identity essentialism and abjection is the same that appeared in the conversation with my classmate. The surprise of my classmate derived from a stereotypical understanding of what it meant to ethnically identify as a native black American in relation to those who identify as black ethnic Americans. When identities are regarded as fixed definitions of a person, then identities function as restrictive labels, defining a person according to that label. Therefore, we need be weary of the tendency to ascribe the “label” of an identity onto a person who physically looks like or behaves in a manner similar to the characteristics of a constructed identity-label.

A study conducted by sociologist Mary Waters on the assimilation patterns of second-generation immigrants in New York City speaks directly to the native black/ethnic black discord that exists under the inclusive banner of black. Of three different patterns of assimilation, one pattern was described as follows: “It [is] important for [them] to stress their ethnic identities and for other people to recognize that they [are] not American blacks [...] They tend to agree with parental judgments that there [are] strong differences between Americans and West Indians. This often involved a stance that West Indians [are] superior to American blacks in their behaviors and attitudes” (179). This desired segregation delineates the influence of power relations concerning race and ethnicity.

At the time of the dialogue, I believed that black is black and minority is minority; how one ethnically identified was not a major concern for me. We are all in minority enrichment programs together; we are all in the ghetto areas of the city together. Thus, I was taken by surprise when I found my peer shocked at the idea that I identified as a native black American. What was the reason that she was shocked? Similarly, what was behind the need for the aforementioned model of assimilation to establish a clear distinction from native black Americans?

The same logic that informs race and the discourse of racism is similar to that which informs ethnocentric thought which subtly appears in my classmate’s shock and dominates in the mentioned pattern of assimilation. We should note the correlation. Race is not something innate, biological, or pre-discursive. It is a social construct. So are identities, constructed in order to combat inequalities and encourage solidarity. Racist discourse in America has set up relations that ranks white superior and above blacks. Also reported by Waters, when black immigrants come to the United States, they do not want to be relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy because they look like the blacks already present. As a result, distinction between native black Americans and black ethnic Americans is critical for some immigrants and second-generation immigrants so they are not subsumed under what racist discourse has made out to be “black”: degenerate, out of school, unemployed, unintelligent, and lazy. Thus, the rationality that informs racism is employed by the ethnocentric tension that exists between native black Americans and some black ethnic Americans.

The functioning of discriminatory discourse here goes beyond racism and its implications for the native black and the ethnic black American. We find that sexist and heterosexist discourse similarly construct hierarchies, then establish an either/or system that glorifies one way of identifying, such as white, or man, or heterosexual at the expense of the abject other, i.e., the person of color, the woman, the homosexual. This accounts for why in spite of the women’s rights and feminist struggles, our patriarchal society yet defines and orders our world according to gender. It also accounts for why heterosexuality is normalized so that identifying in any other manner is considered abnormal. These are not historical problems, pertinent only during the era of equality movements; we face these imprisoning effects of identify as strong now in the twenty-first century as we did forty and thirty years ago.

We cannot escape the dilemma of identity or the bond/age nature of identity. We enjoy the bond that we make with other racial minorities, with those enduring similar sexual and heterosexual inequalities, and with those who

share the same national heritage. At the same time, we are not all the same; being from the same country does not mean we have the same concerns, or being of the same sex or color does not mean our points of views are identical. In order to maximize the benefit we receive from the dilemma of identity, we should “live with fractured identities [...] find solidarity, yes, but recognize contingency” (Appiah and Gutmann 104). Solidarity does not make the claim that we have to forget our differences and stand together. Each individual is different from the next and our idiosyncratic differences are vital in constructing who we are. When we are mindful of the need to acknowledge our differences, solidarity entails people of different identities choosing to work together to actively struggle against oppression. Honoring our differences while standing in solidarity strengthens our struggle because it employs mutuality and accountability to all those involved. This makes an equal rights struggle larger than solely a black effort, a women’s effort, a gay effort, or an ethnic effort.

Across ethnic identities, solidarity can be embraced because regardless of how we identify, marginalized ethnic groups face racial inequalities and minority discrimination. Identities are not to be viewed as fixed labels because when this occurs, identities are a confining box where discriminatory discourse can take residence. To play the thin line that separates identity bond/age, we can use our bond of blackness or minority as a site for power against the oppression of racism and inequality. In the same breath, it is critical not to lose sight of the multiplicity of our identities and to be receptive to the differences of those with whom we stand together in solidarity. What is important is that we have the critical perspicacity to recognize the dilemma of identity in our struggle to combat discriminatory inequality.

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Imag(in)ing Race After Slavery: Race and Service in the White House¹

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Photography is never innocent—it is an essential tool in creating difference, and as such, it operates to establish relations of domination and subjugation. As visual indicators of difference, photographic images set up norms in opposition to that which is considered different, or “other,”² and in the representation of race in the United States, photography has been a tool in creating a binary opposition between white and black, through which “white” is marked by power and privilege, and “black” by subjugation and subservience. This method of representation replicates relations of racial inequity that stem from slavery, and shores up the ideology that slaves, who were historically black in the American experience, were born to serve in the homes of whites. Thus the non-visual realities of white supremacy are supported and propagated by the visual representations of racial inequity, which together amount to a racial project. Therefore, the photographic representations of blacks in positions of domestic service operate as a continuum of the ideology that supported slavery and the conditions of white supremacy, and that continues to divide labor along racial lines, for such images work as visual indices forwarding the privileged status of whites over blacks, masters over slaves.

This essay addresses the recent photo exhibition at the White House Visitor Center, “Portraits from the President’s House: The Staff of the Executive Residence,” which consists of twenty-nine black and white photographs that feature individual members of White House residence staff within the workplace accompanied by their tools of trade (e.g., housekeepers are captured with linens in hand,

butlers with feather dusters, engineers with wrenches). The age of the staff members appears to range from twenty-five to seventy, and of the twenty-nine staff members featured in this exhibition, fifteen appear to be black, thirteen white, and one Asian American. The titles of the photographs are simply the individual subject’s occupational title, and his/her years of service in the White House (e.g., “Butler, 31 years”). The visitor center exhibition was held from September through December 2004 as one of the Center’s free attractions.³ The visitor center is operated by the National Park Service under the Department of the Interior, and its one permanent and most popular attraction is the White House tour—reflecting the White House’s draw as a historical landmark as opposed to a serious institution of art.

Though the exhibition is no longer showing at the visitor center, the images have been available in digital form since the exhibition’s launch on the official White House website.⁴ The site link to the collection is easily found among the website’s other photo essays, which range from documenting the administration’s policy initiatives, such as the signing of a bill, to more human-interest subjects, such as an Easter egg hunt on the White House lawn. The photographs were captured by White House photographer Tina Hager, who appears to be one of five regular White House photographers judging from the photo credits.⁵ Hager is an American photojournalist with Focus, an international photo agency based in Germany, from at least as far back as 1997, and the Focus website lists her as a staff photographer based in Washington, D.C.⁶

The reception of this exhibition appears to have been rather dismal, because there are no print references to the exhibition in either of the ProQuest Direct and LEXIS/NEXIS databases. In addition, the exhibition is mentioned on only a few non-governmental websites, and mostly among

Note: My debt to my mentor and friend, Stephanie Bower, for her helpful criticism and encouragement cannot ever be fully acknowledged.

¹ This title is borrowed from: Eleanor M. Hight and Gary D. Simpson, “Colonialist Photography: Imag(in)ing Race and Place,” (New York: Routledge, 2004).

² Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, “Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture,” (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 102-104.

³ President’s Park Welcome Page, April 2005. <http://www.nps.gov/whho/welcome.htm>.

⁴ White House Photos, April 2005. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/president/gallery/photoessay>.

⁵ I made many attempts to contact various entities at the White House and the White House Visitor Center to gain more information about Hager and her relationship to the White House, but received no replies. However, after examining the credits of other photo essays featured on the White House website, Hager appears to be one of five White House photographers.

⁶ From online searches through Google, ProQuest Direct and LEXIS/NEXIS, I traced the photo credits listing Tina Hager with Focus, and the oldest such credit I could find was from 1997. Agentur Focus, April 2005. <http://www.agentur-focus.de>. I also made many attempts to contact the Focus company headquarters in Germany to gain more information about Hager, but I received no replies.

other exhibition listings.⁷ I believe that the public reception of the exhibition illuminates the conditions of its consumption: since the main draw to the White House Visitor Center is the White House tour, this exhibition was meant solely as a supplementary attraction to the visitor center, not as an important display of art or cultural artifact. Therefore, it is no wonder that no mainstream media have paid any attention to this exhibition, because it was not billed as a serious photo exhibition, and therefore, it was never meant to draw much attention in the first place. The implication of the lack of fanfare on the part of both the White House Visitor Center in terms of publicity, and the consumers of these photographs in terms of critical response, is that the images captured in this exhibition are too benign and insignificant to merit greater exposure, and that the exhibition as a whole is of little cultural consequence.

However, I have found two postings on different political blogs that offer some insight into the meaning that individual consumers have derived from the exhibition. The September, 2004 *Wonkette* posting titled, "A White House Residence Staff That Looks Like America" reads, "When it comes to putting minorities in the White House, we're making more progress than we thought!"⁸ Further, an October 2004 posting on *DovBear* reads:

Ok, folks, MANAGEMENT 101: Isn't it usually considered, I don't know, POLITE to refer to the people who work for you by their first names? So why are the president's servants, as depicted in this photo essay, all called "doorman" or "houseboy?" A little rude. A little cold. Not at all compassionate.⁹

I find it interesting that the former posting views the representation of minorities in the White House (albeit in positions of domestic service) as a sign of racial progress, while the latter views the labeling of the staff members by their service occupations as rude and archaic. In other words, one posting focuses on the representation of race, and the other on the representation of domestic servants, and so according to the reaction of these two postings, the portrayal of race and domestic service in this exhibition appears to be mutually exclusive. I believe that this disconnect between these modes of representation bespeaks the commonplaceness of the exhibition's images, which I find to be pertinent to the exhibition's collective cultural meaning: it is significant

that these methods of representing race and domestic service, which I argue are uncomplimentary and racist, are so unremarkable to the consumers of these images.

This failure to notice on the part of consumers of these images is the work of ideology: the practice of representing blacks in positions of domestic service is so persistent that it appears to reflect the natural order of things; and thus, the racist messages that circulate the exhibition have gone presumably unnoticed. Therefore, what is so striking to me about this exhibition is the racial disparity in the occupational status of the photographs' subjects, because with the exception of one black carpenter, all of the black staff members represented in this exhibition hold positions of domestic service (e.g., butler, housekeeper, doorman), while all of the white staff members hold more technically skilled positions (e.g., engineer, curator, administrative assistant). While this disparity is alarming, it is hardly unprecedented; for much of the American experience, most of the occupations available to blacks have been in the service sector with the clear exception under slavery when slaves had access to more skilled positions.¹⁰ Slaves could hold such positions, because the conditions of their enslavement excluded them from wage labor; however, after Emancipation, blacks were barred from holding non-service occupations once they were seen as a threat to whites for higher wage employment. Hence, there was an ideological imperative after Emancipation to represent blacks as subjugated servants in order to justify the segregation of the labor market and to support the conditions of white supremacy. As a result, the visual representations of blacks in the postbellum era almost solely depict them in positions of service.¹¹ This link between structure and representation,¹² according to Michael Omi and Howard Winant, constitutes a *racial project*.

A racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines.¹³

The institution of slavery had ensured that blacks remained in subservient positions to whites, but with the abolishment of that structural framework, the visual representations of blacks as domestic servants began to reflect the anxieties that emerged once blacks competed with whites in the labor

⁷ Google Search: "Portraits from the President's Home: The Staff of the Executive Residence," April 2005. <http://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Portraits+from+the+President's+House:+The+Staff+of+the+Executive+Residence%22&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.

⁸ Wonkette: A White House Residence Staff That Looks Like America, April 2005. <http://www.wonkette.com/politics/white-house/a-white-house-residence-staff-that-looks-like-america-020939.php>.

⁹ DovBear: 10/24-10/30, April 2005. <http://www.videovotevigil.org>.

¹⁰ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture," (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 124.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Racial Formations in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s," (Routledge: New York, 1994): 56.

¹³ Ibid.

market, and such images function in part to reorganize divisions of labor along racial lines—in this case, relegating blacks to menial occupations in the service sector.

Further, the same period saw the development of photo-technologies that allowed for cheaper methods of printing and circulating images than ever before. This technological development, therefore, engineered the proliferation of images depicting blacks in positions of service after Emancipation, and so the long tradition of representing blacks as servants is intimately tied to the institution of photography. Hence, the exhibition at the White House Visitor Center can be seen as simply a contemporary rendering within the continuum of racial representation. To Susan Sontag, these consequences of photo-technologies are the only way to understand the function of the image-world created by cameras. “The present function is clear enough, if one considers in what contexts photographic images are seen, what dependencies they create, what antagonisms they pacify—that is, what institutions they buttress, whose needs they really are.”¹⁴ In consideration of the concurrent development of photo-technologies with the modern need to image blacks as domestic servants, one can recognize how the institution of photography has sustained the production and dissemination of such racist images, and by doing so, has helped to shore up the ideology of white supremacy.

Moreover, in addition to the racial disparity in the occupational status of the staff members, there is a blatant racial disparity in the ways in which race is imaged in the exhibition. With very few exceptions, these images capture the black staff members in minimal light, and all are featured indoors, and mostly in dark, shadowy spaces. Take, for example, “Butler, 31 years” where the only light source in



Butler, 31 years

this image is from two heavily draped windows. The effect is a dramatic darkening of the entire image, where only the

barest amount of light reaches the darkened rooms, not to mention the subject's dark skin and suit. Further, the black and white film used to capture the subject and his surroundings only intensifies this darkening effect, and so the end result is a darkened subject, who is difficult to distinguish amongst his shadowing setting. Conversely, all of the white staff members in the exhibition are captured under direct lighting. The white subject in “Horticulturist, 32 years” is



Horticulturist, 32 years

cast in direct sunlight (the most flattering method of lighting for film), his skin is fair, and his light khaki uniform distinguishes him from his surroundings. The bright sky behind him illuminates the entire image, and sunlight shines off of the fountain and the vividly white White House directly behind him. The image of the horticulturist exudes an intense brightness, which is in stark contrast to the darkened butler in the other image. These lighting techniques also reflect the convention of manipulating the lighting in photographs to darken the subject in order to connote evil and social deviance.¹⁵ Therefore, the use of lighting in these images reflects the specific visual code of marking the socially inferior black subject with the negative connotations of darkness, and esteeming whites with the positive allures of brightness.

This binary opposition can also be read from the code of framing, in particular, the framing of the subjects' gaze and pose in the images. The viewer traditionally holds the power over the object of his/her gaze by possessing visual control, and so in photography, the gaze can be a means to empower an image's subject, by allowing the subject to confront the viewer with his/her own gaze, and thus, repurchase visual control from the viewer. Therefore, these images denote a clear contrast with the ways the white subjects are privileged with the power of their own gaze, for nearly every white subject directs his/her gaze at the viewer, while only three of the fifteen black subjects do. For example, the white subject in “Engineer, 30 years” clearly challenges the viewer with his

¹⁴ Susan Sontag, “On Photography,” (New York: Picador, 2001): 178.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 24.



Engineer, 30 years

gaze by staring directly into the camera, and in effect, directly at the viewer. He leans forward, and thereby possesses a kind of physical proximity with the viewer, and his firm grip on his wrench conveys a physical authority that commands the viewer's attention and respect.¹⁶

In comparison to this bold and perhaps aggressive depiction of the white subject, the black subject's pose in "Doorman, 49 years" is passive and indirect. The doorman stands with his back to the viewer, and his gaze is mediated through a mirror, which inhibits his contact with the viewer. Even spatially, the white subject looks out into the limitless space before him, while the black subject's gaze is confined within a small dark elevator, and is weakened by its reflection through a mirror. Jan Nederveen Pieterse points out that the conventional sign language of subordination and servility used to depict black servants is constructed in the gaze as if "watching the eyes of the person being served—a look which does not have to be reciprocated; on the contrary, the person served usually looks past the servant."¹⁷ Also, as bell hooks reminds us, slaves were punished by their white masters for looking, because the racialized power relations under slavery were such that slaves were denied their right to gaze.¹⁸ The gaze of black servants, and thus, one could assume, the historic gaze of blacks in the American experience, does not have to be reciprocated as these contemporary images suggest. Further, as Richard Dyer argues, pro-slavery practices of representation depicted slaves as docile and humble, which conveys the message that slaves

were predisposed for bondage.¹⁹ The product of these representational practices was to connote a lack of determination and resentment on the part of slaves, which offers no model for black rebellion or advancement, and props up the myth of the natural subservience of blacks to whites. Therefore, this exhibition recreates visually the justification of white supremacy by privileging the gaze of the whites, and repressing the gaze of blacks, and in turn, denying the blacks a model for advancement.



Doorman, 49 years

The visual codes brought to bear in these images become all the more culturally significant given that the institution of the White House, and hence, the American presidency and the greater nation, is inextricably linked to the production, distribution, and consumption of this exhibition. The exhibition's ideological content is created by juxtaposing complimentary images of white staff members with uncomplimentary images of black staff members, and so the collective message becomes "there exists a natural and timeless division of labor between whites and blacks on the basis of the racial inferiority of blacks," which could not have been conveyed by one image alone. This message is augmented by the fact that these images are staged and displayed within the White House, a symbol of white power and privilege in the United States. Within this condition of use, the ideological content broadens, for the image of a black person serving in the home of the white president not only supports the myth that blacks are meant to serve in the home of whites, but that blacks serve the nation by serving whites. Loyalty to one's

¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu on posing for photographs: "It is certainly possible that the spontaneous desire for frontality is linked to the most deep-rooted cultural values. Honour demands that one pose for the photograph as one would stand before a man whom one respects and from whom one expects respect, face on, one's forehead held high and one's head straight." Evans & Hall, p. 166.

¹⁷ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, "White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture," (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 131.

¹⁸ bell hooks, "Black Looks: Race and Representation," (Boston: South End Press, 1992): 115.

¹⁹ Richard Dyer, "Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society," (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986): 86.

white employer can, therefore, be construed as loyalty to the nation. Graeme Turner sees nationalism as intimately linked with the acceptance of the possibility of subordination, and argues that the idea of the nation “can be used to convince those who are inequitably treated to accept their subordination as being the national interest.”²⁰ Therefore, in order to fully grasp the symbolic and classificatory practices that operate within these images, one must consider the particular historical and institutional conditions, which enable and regulate photographic meaning.

Approached as a contextual system, this message conveyed in this exhibition is not only ideological because it represents a false view of the world, but because it does so in the service of specific vested interests. As Marxists have argued, and as demonstrated in this essay, cultural products are ideological when they implicitly or explicitly support the interests of the dominant groups, who socially, politically, economically, and culturally benefit from the economic organization of society and division of labor. In the case of this exhibition, the ideology of these images also does not take the form of a direct statement from, say, the White House, or the office of the president, but rather it lies in the symbols, myths, conventions, and visual style that are employed in these images.²¹ Therefore, what becomes clear in a textual analysis is that the manifest visual codes of lighting and framing used in these images, as well as the latent meanings of hierarchy and domination that circulate within this exhibition, are historically contingent upon race relations in the United States. While the realities of racialized politics exist outside of this exhibition, these images operate to reinforce white supremacy and make it not only known, but visible.

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²⁰ Turner, p. 135.

²¹ Ibid., p. 150.

African Americans in Ghanaian Chiefship: Identity in Progress

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Introduction

How did African Americans come to hold traditional leadership positions in Ghana and how does this influence their identities? For most scholars, the story of African Americans in Ghana begins in 1985 when the king of the Asante region in Southern Ghana created a traditional position called *nkosuobene*. *Nkosuobene*, or the development Chief, is responsible for creating innovative development projects in Ghanaian villages. Although the first *nkosuobene* was Ghanaian, an ever-increasing number of non-Ghanaians (both men and women) have attained these positions in Southern Ghana because villagers want access to the economic resources they believe many foreigners have.

It is by no accident that African Americans make up the majority of foreign-born Chiefs and Queen Mothers in Ghana. Research on African American inclusion in traditional Ghanaian institutions is particularly important in light of Ghana's history as a major point of exit for enslaved Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, its political significance as the seat of "Pan-Africanism," and its wide recognition within African American communities as a place with valuable cultural traditions (Benson 2003). In particular, I wish to focus on African American identifications with chiefship by exposing the various meanings of chiefship for the individuals in question. In doing so, I am able to further detail the multiple ways in which African Americans integrate chiefship into their concepts of self in the U.S.

Literature Review

Susan Benson (2003), the leading scholar on African Americans in Ghanaian chiefship, has attributed the proliferation of these stool positions to African American identifications with Africa and African material culture. Scholarly discussions of "African American imaginative discourse"

focus on a set of tropes that articulate a connection between African Americans and their African past. This discourse ranges from assertions of cultural continuity (Scott 1991), familial connection (Appiah 1993), and essentialized "blackness" (Asante 1998) to articulations of African American longing and desire to "return" to an African society from which African Americans feel alienated (Hartman 2002). Discussions of African American imaginative discourse help inform the reader of the dominant narrative that brings a majority of African Americans to "mother Africa." I have found that these tropes have helped shaped my respondents' conceptions of their experiences in traditional African governance. Those who become Chiefs or Queen Mothers in Ghana hold *stools*, or thrones, that not only signify their affiliation with a particular family, but also their status within a Ghanaian community.

Benson argues that African American's own political "agenda" of return and reconnection helps to build a "shared historical identity" between African Americans and Africans (Benson 2003: 113). These "connections [are]...mediated by the idiom of chiefship and the idea of a personal connection with particular places" (Benson 2003:120). However, I find that Benson spends little time examining the varying ways in which chiefship's meaning varies among different social actors, and the way these meanings shape their concepts of self.¹ I seek to destabilize static notions of chiefship to allow for further exploration of its meaning for my respondents.²

Findings

I have not only discovered a considerable amount of heterogeneity in the way in which my respondents ascribe meaning to their chiefship positions but also found a rich range of ways that these meanings deploy African American imaginative discourse, and influence my respondents' self-concepts, and mediate their experiences with Ghanaians. I have identified three categories of experience that detail the way in which African Americans integrate their Ghanaian positions into their self-concept: identity consistency, identity inconsistency, and identity transformation. Additionally, I created two categories that divided my respondents'

¹ See Mead's (1934) work on meaning construction through social interaction and Goffman's (1959) work on the dialectic between performers of social roles and observers.

² I have conducted a qualitative study using tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews with five men and four women who have become Chiefs and Queen Mothers of southern Ghana. I have also had the opportunity to observe some of my respondents outside the context of an interview as a participant at one respondent's community center and as a guest on another respondent's black radio show. All names of respondents and the communities in which they were enstooled have been changed, but the aliases I have selected reflect the type of name my respondents used during their conversations with me. Some used their Western names more prominently than their American names; for others the reverse is true.

experiences interacting with others into moments in which their identities as Chiefs and Queen Mothers were confirmed or disconfirmed. I will briefly provide some examples from the aforementioned categories.

Identity Consistency, Identity Inconsistency, and Identity Transformation

I have used the term *identity consistency* to refer to respondents' perception of chiefship as a role that fits into their self-concept seamlessly. Nana Kwasi, an *nkosuohene* living in Delaware, concisely articulates his belief that his chiefship is consistent with his own self-concept by asserting that he embodied a Chief even before traveling to Ghana:

So basically, I was like a chief even before I went [to Ghana]. You see, [laughs] that's the point I'm making. I was really acting in the role of a chief. I have not changed, you know, I have not changed one iota of what I do after me going to Ghana. I just incorporated that into what I was already doing.

The most compelling aspect of Nana Kwasi's assertion is the way in which he retrospectively applies "chiefly" descriptors to his behavior in his Delaware community. For him, as for several other respondents, chiefship is not only about his actions in Africa after his enstoolment,³ but a lifestyle that he believes he lived prior to his trip.

In opposition to identity consistency is *identity inconsistency*, which refers to an experience in which chiefship conflicts with one's own self-concept. Based on her conception of chiefship, Mrs. Edgeley, a Philadelphian in her mid seventies, believed chiefship to be inconsistent with her own identity and interests. In her discussion of chiefship, Mrs. Edgeley told me: "I'm not a person who likes to be...in a position as I find myself. It's not something I would pursue." She expressed her disinterest in becoming a Queen Mother thus: "I didn't really feel that I was up to it because I knew of the obligation or the commitment that should be made for that type of thing. But they dragged us in, my husband is happy." Unlike most of my respondents, who generally felt honored by their nomination into chiefship, Mrs. Edgeley felt ambivalent and "annoyed" by her nomination. In her eyes, her selection had little to do with her own identity; for she claimed she was asked on a "fluke" and "dragged" into her position in chiefship through a series of accidents. Since Mrs. Edgeley associated chiefship with her own exploitation, she does not conceive her position as one that suits her. She

indicates that her willingness to remain a Queen Mother has more to do with her husband's influence instead of her own motivation.

While some of my respondents discussed the difficulty or ease with which they identified with chiefship, still others talked about its transformative capabilities. Nana Amina, a Philadelphia woman who trained to be a Chief of shamans in Ghana for almost 20 years, described the way her position has changed her concept of self:

For a major part of my life I was one of the most angriest people on the planet. I'm not angry today. I'm not angry *in the way* I was angry. I was *dangerously* angry. [F: For?] For everything. I was dangerously a racist...I was angry at my inability to change my own condition in my community, to change the oppression that is evident all around. I was just angry...I was angry at God. I was angry at everybody. But I'm not, I'm not angry in that way today. So I'm not dangerous today. I may be dangerous though because a person who has information—the kind of information I have—is still dangerous. But I'm not dangerous to myself.

Nana Amina described her transformation as a shift from disempowerment to empowerment. During her time as Chief, Nana Amina's outlook on the world and her identity changed. She found a source of empowerment in her position that has helped her heal many of the frustrations experienced as an oppressed minority in the U.S. Through her training as an African Chief and her activism in black communities on both sides of the Atlantic, Nana Amina developed new systems of knowledge to help her accomplish what she identified as one of her primary goals: "healing wounds to identity." Instead of being "dangerous" as a self-destructive person, she is "dangerous" because she has the knowledge to support and heal her community and herself.

Confirming and Disconfirming Identity

While the previous set of examples foreground the way in which African Americans relate to their traditional positions, this section focuses on the way in which my respondents engage in the management of their conception of chiefship. I assess two types of interactions: interactions in which one's construction of chiefship is confirmed, or supported, and interactions in which one's construction of chiefship is disconfirmed, or rejected. It is not only important to identify when these moments exist, but also assess the strategies my respondents deploy to handle these situations.

³ To "enstool" someone into chiefship is to perform a ceremony in which the candidate ascends the throne of his or her traditional position.

Professor Kofi, a Philadelphia professor who had his enstoolment ceremony in both Philadelphia as well as Ghana, has had positive experiences presenting himself as a Chief to Ghanaians. As he observed:

Ghanaians are quite happy...They accord you a different respect. They hold you in a higher place. They can't believe it sometimes, but they have to honor it because they honor the stool. The stool is extremely important, it's not the person...it means that you come directly from the descent line.

In his account of his interactions with Ghanaians, Professor Kofi emphasized the amount of respect he received from Ghanaians. Interestingly enough, embedded within his positive depiction of his interactions, Professor Kofi identified disconfirming moments in which Ghanaians "can't believe" that he is a Ghanaian Chief. To counter these moments, Professor Kofi asserted the importance of his stool position as a representation of the ancestral lineage. This meaning construction allowed him to frame his interactions with Ghanaians and confirm his already held beliefs about his chiefship.

Nevertheless, some of the African American Chiefs and Queen Mothers whom I interviewed have had interactions in which their identities were not confirmed. Nana Adjua, an 83-year-old *nkosuohema*⁴ from Philadelphia, discovered that *bruni*, the Akan word for "foreigner," was incorporated into her stool name. Nana Adjua expressed her anger:

Bruni means foreigner. White person. I said, 'Here I got all these people to help the children...scholarships. People doing things for the children....' And she called me *bruni*. *Bruni* means foreigner, it means white person...And so I've dropped it. [...] It really hurts to think that people are like that. Because that's what we call 'using.'

Nana Adjua told the Chief of her village of her plans to modify her name. She told him firmly, "I think that I have paid my dues and I'm dropping the '*bruni*.' I don't think that I'm a stranger now."

Within the context of my discussion of African American imaginative discourse, it makes sense that Nana Adjua would be enraged to learn that her name bore the mark of foreigner, 'bruni,' instead of the more familial association Nana Adjua desired as a Queen Mother of her village. What becomes most interesting is Nana Adjua's strategy of reconciliation. Instead of dismissing the community that placed the foreign signifier upon her, she decided

to erase the name. In a physical sense, this required blotting out *bruni* on every piece of paper she'd used with her stool name. In a more spiritual sense, Nana Adjua's erasure of *bruni* required an assertion of her worthiness as a part of the African family. As she told the Chief of her village, "I've paid my dues." Her identity project then became a process of reclaiming her desired status in the community to which she has developed deep connection.

Conclusion

African American identity is inextricably linked to Africa. That African Americans have come to be Chiefs and Queen Mothers in Ghana presents a rich site for the assessment of identity construction and management. Indeed, African American imaginative discourse offers a vocabulary for understanding the way in which African Americans generally relate to the past as an identity project in the present. However, despite these dominant discourses, I have found a considerable amount of variation in my respondents' use of different meanings of chiefship for their own identities. Without an account of the different ways in which individuals understand their position, one would wrongly assume that African American Chiefs and Queen Mothers had similar ideas about the institution of chiefship.

⁴ "hema" is the suffix for female traditional positions.

Sutpen the Half Human

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When the white man steps behind the mask of the trickster his freedom is circumscribed by the fear that he is not simply miming a personification of his disorder and chaos but that he will become in fact that which he intends only to symbolize; that he will be trapped somewhere in the mystery of hell (for there is a mystery in the whiteness of blackness, the innocence of evil and the evil of innocence, though, being initiates, Negroes express the joke of it in the blues) and thus lose that freedom which, in the fluid, "traditionless," "classless" and rapidly changing society, he would recognize as the white man's alone.

—Ralph Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" 53

As Rosa chronicles the legacy of Thomas Sutpen to Quentin Compson during the opening of *Absalom, Absalom!*, she sums up all of his hubristic efforts by concluding "He wasn't a gentleman. He wasn't even a gentleman" (9). From the beginning, Sutpen plays the role of the trickster figure in the community, as knowledge of his interracial marriage would guarantee his ineligibility to erect the dynasty that he pursues; he disavows his wife and son, only to be victimized by the intergenerational transference of the same disavowal by the son whom he does claim. Faulkner uses the motifs of the African American vernacular to illustrate Thomas Sutpen's inability to embrace wholly his "blackness" through his past and present experiences, resulting in his being trapped in the mystery of hell (the whiteness of blackness) that Ellison speaks about in "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke." Within this hell, he is destroyed.

Sutpen's "dark" past and "demonic" tendencies are reiterated several times throughout the novel. This darkness, which is characterized so often as "blackness" by Edgar Allan Poe and others, only exists in contrast to whiteness, and it is stratified in a dichotomy with whiteness as the measuring stick. In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison observes the perversion of blackness by white authors as "Africanism," and states, "The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror...it requires hard work not to see this" (17). The false assumptions placed upon blackness are merely echoes of one's own insecurities, as illustrated by Morrison's choice of the words "fear" and "terror." Ellison

uses the word "fear" to describe the sensation experienced when a white man attempts to decipher the black experience with merely words or symbols. The source of fear is the "dreadful" subconscious knowledge that when the white man steps behind the mask of the black trickster, he discovers that he and the black man no longer have differentiating traits. In fact, the white man discovers that they *never* had differentiating traits, which endangers the "freedoms" Ellison describes as exclusively belonging to the white man; if the black man and white man are not different (dare I say equal), then it is impossible for the white man exclusively to possess his precious freedoms and privileges.

As Fishkin states, "Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* put the construction of 'whiteness' on the table to be investigated, analyzed, punctured, and probed" (430). Morrison accomplishes this by stating that "Whiteness, alone, is mute, meaningless, unfathomable, pointless, frozen, veiled, curtailed, dreaded, senseless, implacable" (59), which is why it is essential, though not necessarily appropriate, to juxtapose whiteness with blackness. Ellison's awareness of this fact justifies his analogy of blackness to whiteness and evil to innocence and their initiation of each other; the reader cannot be aware of one force without acknowledging the other. An analysis of whiteness leads to the conclusion that it grants Sutpen the ability, the *privilege*, to carry out his campaign. Race becomes a prevalent issue in *Absalom, Absalom!* because of the presence of the Negroes and Sutpen's mulatto offspring. Sutpen's bloodline is "tainted" with (Haitian) Negro blood, and it is this seemingly ceremonial mud bath that symbolizes this final, inescapable amalgamation. The Negroes who are described repeatedly throughout the novel as savage, beastly, and terrible, are the same Negroes whom Sutpen huddles with in the mud pit, the same Negroes whom he fights with cuffed fists for the entertainment of the male population of Jefferson; in an ironic reversal of roles, Sutpen as a boy, is told by a [Negro] to never come to the front door of a plantation mansion (242). Even as an adult, he is not allowed to approach the front doors of residences in Jefferson until the death of his wife, Ellen (138). Thus, it can be said that Sutpen never sacrifices the privilege that accompanies his whiteness, because he embarks on his mission without any privileges whatsoever. His "white" privilege must be earned.

Particular social status or class often allows access to privileges, albeit through subversive procedures. Ellison includes "traditionless" and "classless" within quotations to indicate the paradoxical attitude that Americans have considering their culture. The application of the melting-pot theory

should absolve American culture of any specific standard, yet simultaneously, Eurocentric ideologies are imposed, and power is distributed directly in proportion to one's economic status. As Ellison says, "America is a land of masking jokers" ("Change" 55); his statement makes his allusion to classlessness and traditionlessness more applicable. Tradition is an imaginary concept for a country as young as America, yet the Eurocentric hegemony, "the cannon," dominates education. The concept of "classlessness" within the context of "all men are created equal" is *equally* laughable when observing the disenfranchisement of poor whites, such as Sutpen prior to his expedition to the West Indies, and especially the Negro. Class status is Sutpen's first priority when he arrives in Jefferson, and it is not easily attained—hence Sutpen's volatile conquest.

Regarding Sutpen's mentality, Maritza Stanchich concludes that "Sutpen's first perceptions of the power of the land-owning, white ruling class from the basis of his own supremacist philosophy [are influential]. He is psychologically assaulted by the realization that he is doomed to an ancestry of 'white trash'" (603). Sutpen's own recognition of his static class clashes ironically with Ellison's idea of a white man being trapped in the hell of the whiteness of blackness, and Sutpen's 'white trash' status is no better—worse, in fact, than a black slave's considering Sutpen's living conditions during his youth. What Sutpen does not realize is that the Negro's slave status and his white trash status are equivalent; the conflict occurs when Sutpen determines that his skin should grant him the ability to be better. Equality is unfortunately unfathomable. Stanchich continues to say that once Sutpen is aware of his social condition, he sets out to Haiti to elevate his class through race supremacy; he flexes the muscles of his whiteness in a setting where he is superior to the Haitians based upon his whiteness alone, and not his own economic status like in America, where Negro slaves are dressed better than he. Linda Dunleavy describes Sutpen's marriage to Eulalia and Ellen as a need for "social legitimacy, money, and connection to a respectable family that these marriages provided" (455).

Race is the essential factor on which Sutpen bases his decision to forbid Judith and Bon's wedding. Bon is black by definition of the one-drop rule, and as Fishkin notes, "if we apply to our culture the 'one drop' rule that in the United States has long classified anyone with the one drop of black blood as black, then all of American culture is black" (454). The difference between Bon's mistress and Judith is the color line, and he chooses Judith, the young, fertile, white woman—a fatal decision. Even Rosa fantasizes about Bon's prestige as she does about Sutpen (for Rosa is as obsessive

about class and status as Sutpen, and she never actually sees Bon). But when Bon's true nature is revealed, his stock collapses into death. If he were to pursue the passive Clytie, the relationship between Bon and Henry would be forbidden, but Charles's life would not be forfeited. In "Change," Ellison offers a perspective that helps illuminate the significance of Bon's death:

When we move in from the wide-ranging spaces of the [trickster] archetype for a closer inspection we see that the specific rhetorical situation involves the self-humiliation of the "sacrificial" figure, and that a psychological dissociation from this symbolic self-maiming is one of the powerful motives at work in the audience. Motives of race, status, economics and guilt are clustered there. (49)

After Bon's death and Henry's disappearance, Sutpen, a former Confederate Colonel, resorts to vending trinkets at a country store to support his family, with his clientele consisting of freed Negroes, and as Shreve candidly states, "white trash" (Faulkner 188). Bon's death transpires at the peak of Sutpen's dynasty, and afterward, Sutpen returns to the poverty he experienced in his youth.

Because Sutpen's social status in chapter six reverts to the same status he experiences as a child, it is appropriate and absolutely essential for Faulkner to address Sutpen's past in chapter seven. Sutpen's childhood allows the reader to observe him while his innocence is intact. Faulkner says, "His trouble was innocence. All of a sudden he discovered, not what he wanted to do, but what he just had to do, had to do it whether he wanted to or not, because if he did not do it he knew that he could never live with himself for the rest of his life" (229). This innocence is violated when Sutpen "had learned the difference not only between white men and black ones, but he was learning that there was a difference between white men and white men not to be measured by...how much whiskey you could drink and get up and walk out of the room" (235). The white men whom Sutpen wishes to imitate are those born rich and lucky; unfortunately for him, he is born neither. In his pre-teens, Sutpen is exposed through his own consciousness to the mystery of the whiteness of blackness, perverted through the latent evil of his own misguided innocence, which is not necessarily his fault; "tradition" and "class" falsely assert the white man's superior status over that of the black man, and Sutpen's fragile mind recognizes this phenomenon through the American slave system. These factors demand that Sutpen should assume his privileged position in society, despite his origination at the bottom of the social hierarchy—like that of the Negro.

As a child, after he is told to go to the back door, Sutpen begins to think, "that he was trying to laugh and that he kept on telling himself it was laughing even after he knew better" (245). The concept of laughing to keep from crying is a blues motif, and Sutpen, when he is in his lowest state, sheds the tears with a smile and the aspirations to do better, just like the Negro does in the blues. From this point forward, Sutpen assumes the mask to protect himself from his own "white trash" status. Later, intergenerational transference occurs again, not with Henry, but with Judith, after the death of Bon. She, from Bon's death until her own, dons her rendition of an impenetrable mask that she uses for a face, probably to conceal her pain and anguish (210). Most telling is how Faulkner describes Clytie when Rosa comes to Sutpen's Hundred after Bon is shot: "It was Sutpen face enough, but not his; Sutpen coffee-colored face enough there in the dim light...waiting there (oh yes, he chose well...who created in his own image the cold Cerberus of his private hell)" (140-141). Clytie passively scrutinizes Sutpen's dynasty from the beginning until she personally destroys every trace of it by burning down what is left of the mansion. Rosa makes the resounding observation that Clytie is the apparition of Sutpen's failed legacy, revealed through the dim light. Morrison's *Playing in the Dark* seems to be metaphorically named in the context of the dim light *Absalom, Absalom!* provides. Here, the linguistic relativity of light and darkness is operationalized to further illuminate a curiosity in the discourses of race and the (mystery of the) whiteness of blackness.

Sutpen realizes that in order to ascend the hierarchy, he must disenfranchise someone or as Morrison states, an "other," and this conscious "otherness" is the source of Sutpen's troubles; he is preoccupied with trying to establish "otherness" through racial and social distinctions while his own household implodes within the unattainable conditions he desires. A person can maintain a superior status only if another person concedes the power. To obtain this superiority, Sutpen travels to the West Indies for his Negro slaves and wife (the "others"), whom are the keys to accessing his status as white gentry. When Sutpen finally attains in the social hierarchy what is considered successful and prestigious, he remains ignorant of the African American aesthetics that he unconsciously utilizes to obtain his position, and he rebukes his black wife and son. To disregard one's traits is to deny self-identity, and if Sutpen cannot sustain self, how can he sustain others, including the important figures, Henry and Judith, of his dynasty? Sutpen's obsession with race and class brings Rosa to the conclusion that "He never

had a soul" (Faulkner 187). The fragments of his being are within all of his offspring: Judith wears the mask, Henry possesses the aggressive fervor Sutpen uses to usurp his status, Charles is the cunning trickster, and Clytie is the spirit or soul of Sutpen himself, and she quietly oversees the entire development and deterioration of the empire.

Sutpen's failure to recognize and engage in the celebration of his blackness results in the obliteration of his dream dynasty. By embracing the aesthetics of African American culture instead of merely imitating them, Sutpen's plan could have succeeded, and he might not have been trapped in Ellison's mystery of hell that is blackness. The only way to eliminate the mysteriousness is to not merely stick one's toes in, settling for shallowness. Only plunging into its depths—allowing oneself to be absorbed in a haven of self-identity where she or he can fearlessly acknowledge the characteristics of her or his ethnicity, which is not limited to skin color, but all facets of culture—alleviates the perils involved in such an action. Albert Murray in *The Omni-Americans* states, "American culture, even in its most rigidly segregated precincts, is patently and irrevocably composite. It is, regardless of all the hysterical protestations of those who would have it otherwise, incontestably mulatto" (22). Unfortunately for Sutpen, he acknowledges only the part of him that he believes will most benefit him. He later finds that members of both races including the white Wash Jones, the mulatto Charles Bon and even himself, aspire to ascend the class hierarchy. Unknowingly, Sutpen secures his destruction by disavowing his mulatto family members Eulalia, Bon, and Clytie. He is so circumscribed by the fear of becoming "black" that he initiates the death of his achieved status which was supposedly achieved by his whiteness. In order for a person to be, one must embrace, not conceal her or his identity, and had Sutpen done this after his exploits in Haiti, perhaps Henry not have never had to shoot Charles, and his dynasty could have surpassed the barriers of race in the South.

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Puerto Rican Civil Disobedience

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Two Puerto Rican leaders played a major role in transforming Puerto Rican society through protest, civil disobedience, and direct action. Santiago Iglesias Pantin and Pedro Albizu Campos both fought against the exploitation and oppression of the Puerto Rican people. Santiago Iglesias Pantin, a Spanish socialist, protested from within the United States legal system and supported Puerto Rican statehood which, he believed, would give Puerto Ricans full legal representation and equality as U.S. citizens. On the other hand, Pedro Albizu Campos, the former president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, felt that Puerto Ricans would never get full representation under an Anglo-Protestant American legal system if they became a state or a commonwealth territory. He advocated Puerto Rican independence through direct action tactics as the only solution to the colonial problem. This paper will illustrate how two major Puerto Rican leaders rallied and protested against colonial oppression within or outside the American legal system through protest, civil disobedience, international rallying and armed revolt.

In his essay “Resistance to Civil Government,” Henry David Thoreau asserts that “[T]he progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual” (Thoreau 9). Thoreau protested against legal injustices and did so within the legal constraints provided by the American constitution. Thoreau rejected the poll tax, for example, because he believed that the money would be used to expand slavery in the southwest. The money would “further the pro slavery war with Mexico” which he objected to on moral grounds. Thoreau stated: “All men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist, the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable” (Thoreau 2). Thoreau was later arrested and incarcerated for his disobeying the U.S. southern poll tax law and was labeled an American radical.

Santiago Iglesias carried out similar work on behalf of his native country, Puerto Rico, at the turn of the century. In his study of the Santiago Iglesias case, “Origins of American Trade Union Involvement in Puerto Rico,” William George Whittaker writes that “trade union centers resulted from the

work and personality of Santiago Iglesias Pantin, the Spanish-born father of the free trade union movement in Puerto Rico” (378). Iglesias was a man who advocated the legal protection and representation of trade workers in Puerto Rico who were continuously exploited by American businesses. Iglesias was a carpenter, a labor rights activist and a union organizer on the island in 1901. He united the labor organization “Federacion Libre” with the American Federation of Labor (AF of L) organization and became a close ally to its president, Samuel Gompers, despite their differing political perspectives: Iglesias being a Socialist/Marxist, and Gompers an anti-socialist (378).

On October 26, 1901, Iglesias was arrested in the United States. Whittaker describes the event: “During the summer of 1900, Iglesias, Eduardo Conde (a carpenter) and six others had been arrested and charged with conspiracy to raise the price of labor, a crime under the pre-war Spanish code” (391). The Spanish code did not allow workers to protest, demand higher wages, or prevent the reduction of wages. Iglesias was told that he would have to post \$2,000 bail to get out of jail. This bail was later reduced to \$500 when it was discovered that the Spanish code violated the U.S. constitution (383). After being released from prison, Iglesias organized a mass workers meeting. The meeting was long overdue: “Puerto Rico suffered along under the combined force of Spanish, military and American law, and ill defined and permissive of virtually any jurisdiction interpretation. With the decision in the Iglesias case, organized labor in the United States called loudly for code reform” (Whittaker 391). The Iglesias case illustrates that, despite his direct confrontational tactics, the labor movement in Puerto Rico was a symbol of unity for all Puerto Rican industrial workers with the American labor movement, notwithstanding Iglesias’s negative representation in American newspapers and in big businesses as a social agitator.

In “The Puerto Ricans: Protest or Submission,” Manuel Maldonado-Denis argues that Puerto Rican nationality survives “because there are groups within our society which fight for the survival of our nationality that it has survived to the present day” (Maldonado-Denis 28). Maldonado-Denis believes that Puerto Ricans live with a “colonial mentality or world view” (26). Many cannot think outside the ideas and beliefs that their colonizer—the United States—forces upon them. One important revolutionary figure in Puerto Rico embodies this fight for survival: Pedro Albizu Campos. Albizu exclaims, “The essential goal of any colonial regime is the cultural assimilation of the colonized people” (28). Albizu describes Puerto Ricans as a

group of people pushed into a process of cultural assimilation, wherein the Puerto Rican culture is being dissipated by American culture. English would become the spoken language, Spanish customs would become passé and the Catholic religion would be replaced with the Anglo Saxon Protestant religion. Ultimately, Puerto Rican culture would cease to exist, making Puerto Rico the next colonial territory to become a state.

Albizu's interest in international affairs began while studying for his law degree at Harvard University. He was influenced by the Irish Republican Movement, also known as the *Sein Fein*. Of Albizu's interest in Sein Fein, Arturo Morales Carrion writes, "The intransigence of Irish in fighting the British rule must have impressed him deeply" (221). Albizu believed that the experiences of Puerto Ricans in America were similar to the experiences of the Irish in Britain (222). In the 1930s, the Irish were treated as second-class citizens in Britain and had no control over their country, Ireland. Similarly, Puerto Ricans were under American military rule and were not given any control over Puerto Rico's political and economic affairs. In America, Albizu himself experienced marginalization and racial prejudice when he was segregated into an all black U.S. army unit during World War I. This experience confirmed his belief that Puerto Ricans would continue to be treated as second-class citizens because of their mixed racial heritage, their Catholic religion, and the Spanish language. All these factors contributed to his anti-colonial stance and support for Puerto Rican independence.

On Palm Sunday 1937, Pedro Albizu Campos led a group of his followers in a march through the city of Ponce in support of the independence of Puerto Rico. Fernando Pico explains in his book, *History of Puerto Rico: A Panorama of Its People*, that although the march began as a peaceful demonstration, it became a bloodbath of innocent people, known forever in Puerto Rican history as the "Ponce Massacre," as peaceful nationalist demonstrators were gunned down by a U.S.-controlled Puerto Rican police unit (257).

Albizu Campos was incarcerated several times and ultimately tortured with radiation poisoning for being a symbol of the Puerto Rican nationalist/independence movement. His legacy of protest against American colonialism and the U.S. government's foreign policies in other Latin American countries convinced many Puerto Rican youth to rebel against the pressure to register for the U.S. military service. In the 1960s and 1970s, Maldonado-Denis states, "A movement has emerged, particularly among university

youth, for the purpose of refusing to serve in the United States Armed Forces" (29). Albizu Campos's leadership, direct action tactics and political persecution influenced many Puerto Ricans to disobey American laws in Puerto Rico and in the U.S., reacting against what they viewed as an assault on their culture and distinct identity. Many of these Puerto Rican radicals believed that through protest and disobedience, Puerto Rico would one day gain its independence from the United States.

Both Santiago Iglesias Pantin and Pedro Albizu Campos advocated and defended the dignity and human rights of the Puerto Rican people. Santiago Iglesias Pantin fought for the rights of Puerto Rican industrial workers whom he felt had been misrepresented and unprotected by American legal institutions in Puerto Rico. He championed the rights of Puerto Rican industrial workers with the support of the American Federation of Labor, and was labeled a social agitator by American companies and political officials. Albizu Campos fought for the independence of Puerto Rico and the freedom of all Puerto Ricans while jeopardizing his legal career and endangering his own life.

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"We Wear the Mask": Black Entertainers in Blackface in 1930's D.C. and the Performance of Race

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"He has done more for our race than I have. He has smiled his way into people's hearts; I have been obliged to fight my way."

—Booker T. Washington,
on black vaudeville entertainer Bert Williams

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.

—Paul Laurence Dunbar¹

In expressing his regard for vaudeville entertainer Bert Williams, Booker T. Washington places black performers on the level of black intellectuals like himself in terms of their importance to the African American community. Washington explains that Williams has appealed to both whites and blacks through humor, his "smile": a feat more impressive than Washington and other activist intellectuals who have had to "fight" for the race. Addison Scurlock, known mostly for his portraits of powerful black figures like Booker T. Washington, created a series of photographs of black vaudeville performers in blackface, much like Bert Williams, in the 1930s. The very fact that Scurlock took these photographs gives the performers immediate significance by putting them on par with his other subjects in Washington, D.C.'s prominent black community. Like Washington's regard for Bert Williams, they convey a recognition that the vaudeville performer is also important for the black community off the stage. However, unlike Washington, the images do not simply suggest the idea that the performers are as important as the intellectuals. In all of Scurlock's photographs, performers and intellectuals engage in a kind of performance, and the blackface is a literal reminder of the symbolic blackface put on by the rest of D.C.'s black community and also by Scurlock himself; they all wear the mask.

Addison Scurlock was the founder of Scurlock Photography Studio, one of the many well-known black businesses on D.C.'s U Street. At its height Scurlock Studio was the premier photographer for the African American

community in Washington, D.C. and the official photographer for Howard University. In the early and mid 20th century, Addison, along with his sons George and Robert, captured various aspects of black life, including the vaudeville performer series and the more traditional portraits. The blackface photographs' significance within the larger black community is apparent in their similarities to the other Scurlock portraits and to the larger portraiture tradition. Visual analysis of the series reveals that, like these images of blackface performers, much of Scurlock's photographs convey the idea of race as a performance: Scurlock's other sitters, as well as he himself as the photographer, wear the symbolic blackface of their race through the authentication of blackness in the images.

Historical Context

Since the early days of vaudeville theater in America, white performers "blackened up" their faces using burnt cork or shoe polish in order to play certain stereotyped African American characters. Different authors on the subject vary in their analyses of why blackface characters were so common and so popular among white performers and their audiences. For Eric Lott, author of *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, blackface minstrelsy is exactly that: the tension between racial envy (love) and desire to control black cultural representations (theft) explains why white actors chose to perform in blackface.² They were simultaneously able to take on stereotypical notions of black masculinity while mocking this behavior in blacks themselves. On the other hand, Susan Gubar argues in *Racechanges* that blackface performance was mainly about "spirit-murder": blackface performance represented a symbolic lynching, "repeatedly obliterating the black body, substituting in its stead not only the white body but also the white man's parodic imitation-black-body."³ Either way, white performance of blackface represented an attempt at power over blacks, both by the spirit-murder occurring onstage as well as the very fact that whites controlled black representations. Blacks began to challenge this power, however, reappropriating and reauthenticating their own representations by donning blackface themselves, creating a performative cycle of black mocking white mocking black.

The Scurlock blackface series mirrors this trend in publicity stills produced for vaudeville performers, as evidenced by the image of "Robert Taylor and partner" (*Image 1*)⁴. The image portrays a male and female character, and the woman in

¹ Dunbar, Paul Laurence. "We Wear The Mask" (1895). in the *Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2004. 918.

² Lott 18.

³ Gubar, Susan. *Racechanges*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 56.

⁴ From SIRIS (Smithsonian Institution Research Information System) Archives. www.siris-archives.si.edu.

this image is pointing to the male character, who is in blackface, with large whitened lips, and wearing a costume that is goofy and ill-fitting: note the short jacket and pants and the unfashionable hat worn by the male character. The form of the image is also reminiscent of similar photographic portraits at the time: it is a full-body portrait of the performers in which the painted background is clearly false, visible at the performers' feet against the large patterned carpet.

However, there is a key difference that sets this image apart from the typical publicity image of a blackface performer. In the Scurlock image, Robert Taylor is facing away from his partner, and she is leaning away from him, her weight on her back foot, indicating a psychological distance between the two. Also, Robert Taylor seems uncomfortable in character. Perhaps it is just his body language and facial expression, but there is a sense of fear and unhappiness that he projects from behind the mask of his blackface. His position as a performer behind the mask is made even more apparent by the color of his partner's skin. Though Robert Taylor is in character, the image invites us to take our interpretation further.

For African American performers in blackface, there is a fine line between reappropriation and reaffirmation of the stereotypes associated with blackface performance. For black performers, there is the threat that the person will become forgotten behind the blackface mask of the caricature. Since the goal of whites in blackface was to reaffirm these caricatures, black performers sought to distance themselves from the negative stereotypes of their characters in a way that white performers did not have to. This attempt at separation between character and self is an important distinction for black performers in blackface; one that Scurlock delicately captures in Robert Taylor's facial expression and body language.

The way that the Scurlock image captures the attempt of black performers to separate character from self is mirrored in Scurlock's attempt to distance his vaudeville series from stereotypical publicity shots of white performers in blackface. The Scurlock images of performers in blackface were more than just publicity shots; they served to reposition the role of the blackface performer within D.C.'s black society and the black community at large. These are not simply images of the performers; they are mirrors held up to D.C.'s black society, a group of prominent individuals, many light enough to pass, who had to live behind the figurative blackface in segregated Washington.

The Vaudeville Series:

Within the Context of the Scurlock Collection

The Scurlock Studio's vaudeville series' role as a symbol for D.C.'s entire African American community and the relative anonymity of the performers calls into question whether these images of blackface performers can truly be considered portraits, or are simply types, meant to code for the blackface all blacks must wear. In his discussion of Louis Agassiz's daguerreotypes, Brian Wallis puts forth a distinction between portrait and type. For Wallis, the photograph as type is meant to represent a group rather than an individual, and focuses on physical form rather than cultural substance: "Another feature of type classification and the typological photograph was the emphasis on external appearance, on the measurement and observation of the human form (that is, the skeletons and skulls), rather than on cultural forms."⁵ Taking Wallis' description alongside Gubar's notion of blackface performers as obliterated and objectified black bodies, the Scurlock series of blackface performers reflects a type rather than a portrait. However, there is much more to the Scurlock series, such as the separation of character and self in the Robert Taylor photograph, that indicate the images' function as portraiture.

The Scurlock images frame the vaudeville characters in such a way that the photos' background mirrors that of other Scurlock portraits. In addition, these portraits draw on larger traditions of landscape background in American portrait painting. Similarities can be seen in Scurlock's framing of the vaudeville images compared with his other portraits and other portrait paintings. In all but one of the pictures in the series, the characters are set against a painted backdrop that is clearly fake. In the Scurlock image discussed earlier (*Image 1*), Robert Taylor and his partner are in front of a background painted with a scene that includes a column on the left. In the image of Dooley and his partner (*Image 2*),⁶ Scurlock uses a background picturing a swampy landscape with a fancy frame-like border on the bottom. This background is one that Scurlock uses often as the backdrop to his portraits of prominent African Americans not involved in vaudeville performance. For example, in Scurlock's portrait of Howard University biologist Ernest Just,⁷ the same tree line from the middle of the Dooley image can be seen in the background to the right of Just's head. The conventions of the background that Scurlock uses in his portraits of vaudeville performers

⁵ Wallis, 49.

⁶ SIRIS archives.

⁷ SIRIS archives.

and intellectuals such as Just—scenic landscape, columns—are also typical in early American portrait painting, features which fashionable American colonial artists borrowed from British portraiture traditions to signify their connection to the British elite. In John Singleton Copley's 1776 portrait of his daughter Elizabeth,⁸ the background contains an expansive landscape with trees, flowers, and a column, though the girl seems to be indoors, standing on a carpet. Often, in American portraits like this one, the landscape in the background is representative of the availability of the land and the subject's claim over it. The Scurlock portraits echo the framing of the Copley portrait with the landscape background, column, and decorative carpet. Scurlock frames his portraits in this way in order to place his portraits of the black community in the larger tradition of American portraiture in order to signify that his subjects are just as significant.

However, in the instance of the vaudeville portraits, the backdrop does not simply blend into the image as in the Copley portraits; it is distractingly false. Unlike Copley's daughter, for whom the prospect of owning large amounts of land is real, the false landscape background in the Scurlock portraits seems to serve as a reminder of what is *not* available to his sitters. The landscape cannot simply be seen outside of a window or in the background of the photo; it needs to be draped on a backdrop in order to exist.

Nonetheless, it is significant to note that portraiture is always a social construction. A portrait reflects, with the help of the photographer, how the sitter wants to be perceived. In colonial portraits, like that of Copley's daughter, the sitters request the painter depict expansive backgrounds to show viewers of their portraits that "this is mine." Though the framing of the vaudeville series reflects a lack of reality for the subjects, they are aware that the portrait is constructed in such a way. The image of a "black theatrical performer" holding a bag (*Image 3*)⁹ exemplifies this construction of the image. The man is posed in front of a false landscape background, lifting his arm as if to point out the expanse of land behind him. His disparate facial expression and the "Poor Me" written on the bag make it obvious that the man laments what is not available to him. However, just as the man would perform on stage, he is performing in this portrait. The performer mocks what is not available to him; one can even interpret it as mocking blacks' migration northward during this time period.

After the Civil War, Reconstruction policies made it seem as though much of the land in the South would become available to black farmers. However, with the growth of Jim

Crow policies after Reconstruction and the heightening of segregation (what Rayford Logan has termed "the Nadir"), much of these opportunities for land were taken away from African Americans in the South, forcing them to migrate North in search of jobs. The Scurlock image of the male theatrical performer makes a farce of this situation. The "Poor Me" bag resembles a suitcase, and the man reaches northward, as if searching for a solution for the land that is seemingly right behind him, yet unavailable to him.

In the way that they represent a fake world of opportunity, the false backgrounds have a theatrical aspect to them. In the Robert Taylor image discussed earlier (*Image 1*), the backdrop is rumpled at the point when it hits the ground, calling attention to the fact that this is simply a painted illusion on a curtain that could be raised, lowered, or pulled aside, as on a stage. In the Scurlock image of Oakley and Oakley, two other vaudeville performers, the background is even more obviously false. The man and the woman are posed in front of the landscape, which is on a tapestry hung from a wooden panel. The image shows enough of the panel to reveal that it stands alone on wooden feet, suggesting that it could be rolled or otherwise easily moved, or perhaps turned around to reveal a different background. The only way these black vaudeville performers can enter the endless world of opportunity represented by the landscape is if they perform in front of a stage set representing this land. Also, though the background is more obvious in the portraits of the performers, since it is often used in Scurlock's other portraits, it is likely he is trying to convey the same sense of lack of opportunity in the portraits of intellectuals such as Just and other prominent Washingtonians whose only barrier is the mask of their race which they must perform.

In addition, the fact that these are full body portraits help to signify the subject as a performer. Unlike Scurlock's bust-like portraits of intellectuals like Just, which focus on the head (the mind), his images of the vaudeville performers focus on the body at labor, for it is their body and movements that make these performers known. As Susan Gubar explains in her book, *Racechanges*, blackface causes a performer to become "all body": it "destroys the human subject on stage, replacing it with the black Other as a corporeal object whose insignificance makes him invisible...or hypervisible."¹⁰ Scurlock's entire vaudeville series consists of head to toe shots of male performers in character, often posed next to an "uncostumed" woman,¹¹ who at once makes the blackface character "hypervisible." This hypervisibility as a black body differs from Scurlock's treatment of other performers and popular entertainers at the time which do not

⁸ Google Images.

⁹ SIRIS archives.

¹⁰ Gubar 81.

¹¹ The woman is costumed in such a way (stylish dress, hair and makeup) that any woman sitting for a portrait would be in order to maintain a certain respectability. I mean that she is "uncostumed" in that she is not in vaudeville dress, as opposed to the male performer who is clearly in stage dress.

necessarily picture the performer in character. Why, then, did Scurlock take these images of vaudeville performers in costume and makeup and pose them in such a way that connotes their performance as black bodies? Yes, these were likely publicity photographs, but Scurlock uses the literal blackface in his images of vaudeville performers to signify the figurative “blackface” put on by his other subjects.

Many black Washingtonians were relatively light-skinned. The significance of these figures wearing symbolic blackface can be enhanced using a photography metaphor: that of the negative. In the photographic process, the image captured on film is that of a color-reversed negative, in that what is black appears white in the negative, and vice versa. When a negative is made of a negative, the colors are reversed back, resulting in a positive image. All of the images in the Scurlock vaudeville series are positives made from film negatives. Let us take a moment to consider what the negative of one of these images would look like, such as the image of Robert Taylor. Since Taylor is so blacked up on his face, the negative would appear to be a light-skinned (perhaps white) man wearing a dark suit, instead of a white one. Perhaps it would be difficult to tell that it was a negative; the stark blackness of the face makes the positive image itself seem like a negative. This metaphor demonstrates how easily the blackface mask can be created or eliminated, as easily as making a positive or negative image.

Race as a Performance

This discussion of the Scurlock series of vaudeville performers thus far has repeatedly touched on the fact that race is performative. The blackface characters remind the viewer that they are literally painting on and performing their “blackness.” In addition, the images themselves have a highly staged appearance to them. The subjects are in character and seem to be posed *mise-en-scene*. Also, the framing of the photograph—an obviously false painted backdrop and a moveable wood panel are a few examples—indicate a staged set for the image.

In light of such an analysis of the Scurlock images of vaudeville performers, I would argue that they are literally signifiers of the figurative performance in other Scurlock portraits, especially ones of D.C.’s most notable figures. Many of the subjects of other Scurlock portraits wear what I call “symbolic blackface”: though not literally caricatures, they too are exhibiting their blackness through a performative “mask.”

An example of a portrait that exhibits this symbolic blackface is one of Judge Robert E. Terrell, D.C.’s first black municipal judge, at his desk, taken around 1930 (*Image 12*)¹². Though this image seems like a straightforward portrait of a successful figure, there are several aspects that indicate performance. First, Judge Terrell is very much in costume: his three piece suit with visible cufflinks is an overt indicator of his status. Secondly, the setting of the photograph is very much staged, with Judge Terrell center stage at his large desk in his large office. Third, his pose, seated at the desk with his arm leaning on his work, indicates his proprietary ownership, not just of the physical space of the office but of the intellectual space of his success. Finally, the portrait within the portrait reminds the reader that this, too, is a portrait, staged in the same way to exhibit Terrell’s status as a judge.

As I mentioned above, all portraits are social constructions, and this portrait of Judge Terrell is constructed just as any portrait of a judge, black or white, would be. However, the fact that this portrait could just as easily depict a white judge *is* what signifies the symbolic blackface. Everything in the image resembles a regular portrait, and even Judge Terrell himself could pass for white. The defining characteristic of this portrait is that it was taken by Addison Scurlock, a mark of distinction placing Terrell as a member of D.C.’s black community. Scurlock imposes the mask on Terrell taking the photograph. Though there should be no distinction between Terrell and his white colleagues pictured in the portrait on his office wall, the symbolic blackface becomes obvious, to evoke the metaphor again, in the literal black face of the photograph’s negative.

Scurlock uses the literal black faces in the negatives to create portraits of black Washington and their symbolic mask. The fact that race is highly performative in his images of blackface performers, as well as his other portraits, is also an indicator of Addison Scurlock’s performance as the photographer. In a way, the images in the Scurlock collection of D.C.’s black community serve as symbolic blackface for Scurlock himself. His photographs represent all aspects of black life: youth, education, patriotism, success, leisure, art and theater, race, and gender. Being photographs, the tendency is to think of them as factual and authentic representations, but analysis throughout this paper has provided evidence to the performative nature of Scurlock’s portraits, such as the metaphor of the negative or the social construction of portraiture. His photographs depict a certain politics of respectability within the black community; for Scurlock, they are the mask that represents the “authentic” blackness he performs.

¹² SIRIS archives.

Image 1



Scurlock, Addison.
Robert Taylor and partner [male figure turning back: acetate film photonegative].
Silver gelatin on cellulose acetate film sheet, 8"x 10."
No date.
Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 3



Scurlock, Addison.
[Male theatrical performer (blackface) before painted backdrop, with bag reading
"PooR-ME": nitrate film photonegative].
Silver gelatin on cellulose nitrate film sheet, 10"x 8."
No date.
Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 2



Scurlock, Addison.
Dooley [male and female theatrical performers: nitrate film photonegative].
Silver gelatin on cellulose nitrate film sheet, 10"x 8."
No date.
Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Image 4



Scurlock, Addison.
Judge Robert E. [sic] Terrell [photoprint].
Silver gelatin on resin-coated paper, 8"x 10," unmounted.
No date.
Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

Semantic Change in Black Vernacular: *Nigger* and its Present Use

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As a result of my social network, the music I listen to, and the films I watch, my exposure to the term *nigga* occurs daily.

Nigger is derived from the Latin word *niger*, which refers to the color black.¹ The word *nigga*, which entered the English language as *nigger*, was employed eventually to objectify a person's race; however, the term *nigga* is now an accepted term in the *Black English Vernacular* (BEV). Arguably, the term *nigga* no longer debases the black race, as users of the BEV use the word *nigga* to demonstrate a brotherly bond to another person.

Through one-on-one interviews concerning dialogue both among blacks and between blacks and non-blacks in casual, everyday settings, I seek to address these misconceptions.

In regard to the formations of words and concepts in Black English, Geneva Smitherman argues that "many Black Semantic concepts enter the American cultural mainstream and serve to enrich the general language of all Americans," and that Black semantics "is metamorphic and imagistic." Thus Smitherman describes "Semantic Inversion" as a process by which blacks take words from the Standard English form and turn them into their opposites; for example, "fat," spelled *phat* in hip-hop, refers to a person or thing that is excellent and desirable, thereby conveying that weight is in fact a good thing.² *Nigga*, being the diminutive of the racial slur *nigger*, is a case of Semantic Inversion. Though the term still has sensitive connotations, its general usage reflects a kind of camaraderie in our generation.

In his analysis of African-American language use, Arthur Spears discusses the concepts of normalization, neutralization and generalization in his investigation of whether or not words like *nigga* indicate a degeneration of social life, ethics, and values. Normalization refers to the "use of uncensored expressions by some types of people in most social settings in an evaluative neutral way, e.g., the expressions are not inherently positive or negative" (232). Neutralization means that the terms "are negative, positive, or neutral in force depending on how they are used. Last, generalization of the term *nigga* means that neither ethnicity nor lineage determines its use anymore. Instead of being a consequence

of neutralization and normalization, generalization appears strongly to be a consequence of the higher level of adoption by the general American community of aspects of African-American culture in our day and age" (233).

Kennedy (2002) condemns the usage of this word, arguing that the "use of the *nigger* by black rappers and comedians has given the term a new currency and enhanced cachet" or that "in some cases, blacks' use of *nigger* is indicative of an anti-black, self-hating prejudice." Regardless, the meaning of the word requires further investigation and only through empirical data can some conclusions be drawn about whether the word *nigger* can be said.

Kennedy's view on the racial politics of the word *nigger* explicitly focuses on the *negative* implications, yet he fails to consider how racial politics differs from person to person. My methodology, namely consisting of interviews, will test the validity of Kennedy's argument by attaining blacks' views on whether the blacks have an ethical right to exploit this stigmatization. Conversely, we can inquire, from a black perspective, whether members outside the black race should occasionally be subjected to that kind of exploitation.

I conducted my first interviews at Dartmouth College and interviewed students at Princeton University, Stanford University, UCLA and a professor at Columbia University. Of the fourteen participants interviewed, there were five males and nine females. The average age was 22. All 14 participants had intended to pursue or are currently pursuing graduate work. Four respondents grew up in a suburban and diverse environment. Four out of the fourteen respondents grew up in a suburban and predominantly white neighborhood; meanwhile, only one participant grew up in a suburban and predominantly black community. Three out of the fourteen respondents grew up in an urban environment where the majority of the population was black. The remaining two respondents lived in an urban neighborhood with a diverse community.

The interview consisted of a video clip from *The Dave Chappelle Show*, an audio clip by Chris Rock,³ the application of a linguistic insecurity test, and several follow-up questions. Actor and comedian Dave Chappelle, a frequent user of the word, incorporates this bond in an episode entitled "The Nigger Family."⁴ Resembling the famous show *Leave It to Beaver*, the Nigger family is a white, middle-class family and Chappelle plays their milkman. The family is constantly

¹ On the etymology of *nigger*, see the *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang*, ed. J. E. Lighter (1997), 2:657.

² Smitherman, Geneva, "The Lexicon of AAVE," *African-American English: Structure, History and Use*, eds. Guy Bailey, John Baugh, Salikoko Mufwene and John Rickford (London: Routledge 1998), 214-216.

³ Listen to Chris Rock, "Niggers vs. Black People" on *Roll with the New*, Universal Studios (1997).

⁴ Watch *The Best of Chappelle's Show Season 2 Volume 1*, Episode 28, Paramount Home Video (2003).

addressed by their last name, which provides comedic value and symbolizes the complexity and sensitivity of that word's usage. Most important, *only* Chappelle says the word to the white family as a greeting; however, when a white man says "Oh no, a nigger" after hearing that his daughter intends to date the son of the Niggar family, it regains its cultural significance and resembles an act of racism. The episode tackles the implications of using that word among whites and blacks. Chappelle clearly uses the word without discretion; however, there are individuals—both black and white—who do not sanction that kind of interjection.

In "Niggers vs. Black People," Chris Rock differentiates "niggers" from black people by arguing that the stereotypical lazy, uneducated, and rude black people portrayed in the media are the "niggers." Moreover, Chris Rock claims that niggers are the individuals who gloat about a task that an ordinary person would not; for example, "a nigger would brag about taking care of his or her kids."

Both the Dave Chappelle video clip and the Chris Rock audio selection fostered strong reactions about the word *nigga* and its usage. There were mixed reactions to "The Niggar Family" clip; the respondents who found it to be sardonic still commented on the clip's controversial theme. Candice, a 19-year-old female from Los Angeles, California, affirms that because the clip is humorous, you have to appreciate that aspect of Chappelle's show. She argues, however, that the excessive use of the term *nigga* compromises its meaning: "It's lost in the joke, and therefore it's trivialized," but that "you can't necessarily trivialize something without acknowledging the meaning of the word." Ultimately, none of the respondents reported enjoying the audio clip.

Martin, a 51-year-old former Black Panther and current college professor, appreciated the skit for its usage of the word. Claiming that Chappelle does an excellent job of tackling "taboo social issues and putting them out there," Martin clearly values the controversy the skit generates. Elaborating his opinion, he finds that "it should make us uncomfortable; it's the same thing with poetry. They say poets and comics kinda represent the tip of the social consciousness sphere in terms of being able to prick us and make us bleed. And, I think that's what that piece did...it did prick us and made us bleed in terms of how people use that word. I liked the skit."

One of the more important questions in the interview investigated the respondents' sentiments concerning the

utterances of the word *nigga* and whether they used the word themselves. All fourteen respondents affirmed definitively their consciousness of the word's usage. For example, Barry, an 18-year-old male from Los Angeles who attends college in Hanover, New Hampshire, replied, "Always. It always sends off a red flag in your head, even if it is used in a nonchalant context." Among the fourteen respondents, however, eight personally use the word in their everyday language. Their reasoning for using the word varied greatly. Carol, a 20-year-old female from Waterhill, Florida, states that "It's probably something that I notice, but it's not something that like intensely affects me. I guess sometimes, I mean most times, when...I guess you could understand this, when I'm excited...And it's not like I say 'Oh, nigga' and then I cover my mouth up, but I would ask myself if I should have just said that." Notably, one's consciousness can also depend on who exactly is uttering the word: "Not necessarily well, yeah. I'm flexible with it; if I'm around a bunch of black males, I don't care. But if someone says it and it's not really a part of the conversation or within the context, then it will definitely stand out." Hence, the word *nigga*, to some individuals, is circumstantial and can depend on the person's surroundings and/or comfort level.

Use of the word in interracial settings is a topic that necessitates further analysis and opinions generated from first-hand experience. I therefore asked the respondents if they have ever been in a situation where blacks addressed non-blacks with the word *nigga*. Of the fourteen respondents, eight claimed to have been in a situation where the word was in fact being used in interracial settings. Reflecting on an experience in Puerto Rico, Janice, an 18-year-old female from Los Angeles, California, asserts that she "was pretty surprised that a lot of Puerto Ricans use the N-word when speaking to each other." While Janice attributes her experience in Puerto Rico to the 'nonchalant usage' among blacks, other respondents claimed that the non-blacks in those situations can befriend the blacks. Matthew, a 32-year-old male from Long Island, New York, for example, asserts that those instances "are interesting circumstances" because "the people were not black. Most of the time the people were Latino or Asian who grew up in the neighborhood who are like culturally, purely just accepted." As Matthew affirms, regardless of ethnic background, camaraderie in a neighborhood fosters relationship where the language type is applicable to all individuals.

Describing a conversation, Carol explains her conflict with the words like *nigga* being iterated by non-blacks. Carol states that "I took a class last semester, um, Introduction to

Research Methods on African-American Studies, but my preceptor, one of the graduate students we had here, he told me that I have a problem with boxing off what I feel should be like cultural separates in terms of like, I told him I had a problem with watching lil' white kids singing 50 Cent because I feel like they don't know what it means, and if they're gonna' be singing something, make them sing something positive about a black person. Sing some Stevie Wonder or something else." Though she does not discuss an instance where she witnessed blacks call non-blacks a *nigga*, Carol expresses her viewpoint concerning the word's usage. Since the word, according to Carol, has such strong connotations and misrepresents black people, the word should not be iterated by those who cannot comprehend its meaning.

The third question addressed specifically the respondents' utterances of the word to non-blacks. Only two respondents, both of whom happen to be the eldest of the participants, claimed that they call non-blacks *niggas*. Martin, the 51-year-old college professor, simply responds that "If you're my friend, and we have a clear understanding of who you are and who I am in society, then yes I will say *nigga* around them." In addition, Matthew, the 32-year-old doing graduate work in Palo Alto, California, justifies his utterances by claiming that he says the word explicitly to "The two Asian guys that I mentioned;" the two Asian guys Matthew refers to are his closest friends from his hometown.

I questioned the respondents about whether they would anticipate to hear or use the word in any formal setting, at a restaurant or during a discussion with an elder. All of the respondents denounced the idea of iterating the word to an elder or in church. In a formal setting, nevertheless, the word's utterance is contingent upon the respondent's company. Stephanie, a 20-year-old female raised in Inglewood, California, for instance, asserts that if she is with "someone from LA [Los Angeles] that I know, then they would probably say it. My guy friends would say it anywhere." Monica, moreover, admits "it would be said among" her "close friends at a restaurant." Since Monica and Stephanie would both anticipate hearing the word at a given restaurant, one can presume that despite its strong connotations and slang origin, *nigga* is a word that young people can use with their peers without discretion.

To Monica, a 20-year-old female from Houston, Texas, the word "doesn't refer to black people;" to her, "it is the definition of people that are ignorant of some aspect of society whether it be education, career development, things like that, or even another person's culture. I think it could

even be classified as that because if you don't take the time to get to know a person's culture and then you make an assumption or judgment, you're a 'nigga.' Don't do that. You have to understand those things and find people that will help you understand those things. I know it's hard to say that, but I'm not just talking about black people." Monica identifies the word *nigga* as any given person unwilling to self-prosper as well as any person who is reluctant to expand his or her knowledge of cultures, but is frequent to pass judgment. Acknowledging that her statement is a bit innovative, she affirms adamantly that *nigga* does not only represent black people. Monica's sentiments concerning whom the term *nigga* can depict correlates with Spears' notion of generalization because as Monica explicates, the term is no longer contingent upon ethnicity or lineage. Instead, the term represents various types of characteristics.

Maria, a 23-year-old female who attends graduate school in Palo Alto, California, takes a linguistic approach to the question. She states that, "they [black people] often use it as a noun, but I think that it's becoming a verb, like being a 'nigga' is a way of being, so it's like an action almost, which I absolutely don't like because the way people act should not be quantified in one light. To me, it's very negative."

While declaring that this particular inquiry was "the million dollar question," Fred discusses his "duality of meaning" regarding the word. Fred considers the word derogatory, and "the being renamed in a derogatory manner is not something I like, and that emotion behind it with the racially charged energy is very disturbing to [him]." Nonetheless, he continues to say that when he hears it among blacks, "I take it in a different context that they have, you know, experienced enough to earn the right to change the meaning of the word if they so choose because they've heard it used towards them in both contexts and so your experiences give you the privilege of self-definition." The 'privilege of self-definition' that Fred refers to intrigues me because I've met blacks who willingly define themselves as a *nigga*; meanwhile, I've encountered blacks who entirely dissociate themselves from the word. Fred's response to this question correlates with Spears' point of neutralization because the term *nigga*, according to Spears, can be positive or negative depending on its usage.

My next question examined the kinds of situations and/or people where the respondents would refrain from using the word *nigga*. Among the fourteen respondents, seven affirmed that they would refrain from using the word *nigga* around non-blacks. One stated that he would use the

word around any kind of person except his family. Carol, however, claimed that she “probably would not address any kind of upper-class male—no matter how close we became—I would probably never say the word; I would probably never address him like that. But I guess there are certain cultural and social markers where that word is brought to mind for me.” The dialogue continued as I probed her reasoning for not saying the word around upper-class males. She replied that, “it bothers [me] that imply that, and I think to myself about why should this person be a ‘nigga’ while Skippy from wherever isn’t and would never be in my mind. That’s probably what bothers me most.”

Meanwhile, Alvin states that he would only refrain from using the word in professional settings; thereafter, he describes his frustration with his restraint. “...so only in those situations would I see myself trying hard to speak extremely properly and not use the word because you know sometimes you gotta put your white speak on to try get ahead in this world...you gotta, you just gotta know how to talk to them you know.” Alvin identifies proper English as a more appropriate language system for whites because he finds difficulty in not saying *nigga* in professional settings.

Lastly, I inquired their thoughts on whether there was a difference between the words *nigger* and *nigga*. Eight respondents claimed that there was no difference between the words; the remaining thirty-six percent asserted that there was a difference. The remaining six all contended that *nigger* is a word used by white people to degrade blacks, whereas *nigga* is a word used by black people in a positive and negative manner. Candice, on the other hand, argues that there is no subtle or blatant distinction between the words *nigger* and *nigga*. The term has experienced a kind of renovation where the term can refer to other blacks with amity and also as a harbinger of loathing, fear and violence.

Conclusion

There are polarized viewpoints concerning the term *nigga*, its usage, who can use it, and where it can or cannot be used. References to *nigga*, as demonstrated by this project, continue to generate and stimulate ardent discussion. While some respondents treated *nigga* as the publicly stigmatized word, others maintained a benign opinion towards the word. Among the respondents who incorporate the word in their vernacular, the great majority of them use it solely when among other blacks. Since the term is used as both an insult and a sign of brotherhood, it is not surprising that there was such a diversity of responses made by the participants.

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The Transition to El Greco's "Extravagant" Late Style: Stylistic Change in *The Coronation of the Virgin* from the Altarpieces of Talavera la Vieja, the Capilla de San José, and the Church of the Hospital of Charity at Illescas

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Beginning with his commission for the altarpiece of the Colegio de Doña Maria de Aragon in Madrid (1596), a dramatic stylistic change marks the late work of the Spanish master El Greco. Scholars of the artist have made much of this shift in style, and as early as 1673 the Spanish art theorist Jusepe Martinez wrote that El Greco "introduced a manner so extravagant that to this day nothing so fanciful has been seen and the best connoisseurs would be hard put to imagine his extravagance, for such is the discordance between his works that they do not look to be by the same hand." Although perhaps not as pronounced as in his Doña Maria altarpiece, El Greco's late style is also evident in his altarpiece for the Church of the Hospital of Charity at Illescas. Created three years after the Madrid commission, the Illescas work may be considered significant in addition to its aesthetic value because included among its paintings is a version of the *Coronation of the Virgin*. This theme was repeated multiple times in El Greco's career, appearing three times in a 1614 inventory of the artist and five times in an inventory dating from 1621.¹ Indeed, by comparing earlier versions of the *Coronation of the Virgin* to the Illescas canvas, it is possible to analyze this subject's development over the span of El Greco's career. Thus, by considering the evolution of El Greco's *Coronation of the Virgin* pieces as representative of his general body of work, a gradual stylistic evolution may be discerned in El Greco's painting, thereby countering the notion of extreme "discordance" between his early and late work.

For the purposes of this paper, paintings of the *Coronation of the Virgin* from the Church of the Virgin of the Rosary in Talavera la Vieja (Cáceres; 1591-92), the Capilla de San José in Toledo (1597-1599), and the Church of the Hospital of Charity in Illescas (1603-05) will be examined. Painted before, concurrent with, and after the Doña Maria altarpiece, these works provide an appropriate range over the most drastic period of stylistic change in El Greco's late career. Additionally, since all three *Coronation* canvases to be discussed were commissioned as parts of programs for church altarpieces, it can be assumed that El Greco's creative

motivations for painting each work were similar. Finally, the Coronation of the Virgin was a popular subject in Counterreformation Spain and therefore is suitably representative of the many themes El Greco painted for his sixteenth century patrons.

Notable differences appear when comparing the composition of the *Coronation* canvas from Talavera to those from San José and Illescas. In all three *Coronations*, Mary is portrayed near the center of the canvas, flanked by Jesus on her right and God on her left; however, the depiction of the celestial and earthly realms in each canvas is drastically distinct. In the Talavera canvas a clear division between the earthly and celestial realms exists: above, Mary is being crowned by Christ and God while a multitude of putti look on; below, a circle of saints gaze towards the heavens in a mixture of surprise and devotion. Compositionally, the clouds supporting the heavenly figures divide the canvas in two; indeed, as proof that the two realms of the canvas can exist independently, a painting including only the upper half of the Talavera *Coronation* which is believed to be a preparatory study by El Greco for the Talavera piece currently hangs in the Prado.² The division between the two worlds is also reinforced in the idealization of the holy figures in comparison to the tattered, earth-bound saints; thus, while Mary piously receives her crown, just below her feet Saint Sebastian bleeds from an arrow that pierces his chest.

Although the attributes that divide the Talavera canvas (clouds and saints) also appear in the San José work, the division between the celestial and earthly worlds is not as pronounced in this later piece. Perhaps due to the dimensions of the canvas (the Talavera *Coronation* is more rectangular than the canvas at San José), the saints in the San José work seem superimposed upon the robes of the divine figures, particularly in the left corner where the saints James Major, John the Baptist, and Peter crowd the image of Jesus. Compared to the billowy clouds and layer of darkness that separates the two zones in the Talavera work, the clouds in the San José piece have been reduced to a narrow triangular band that hugs the robes of the Virgin; instead of splitting the canvas, these clouds merely frame the Coronation scene, an idea reinforced by the angle of St. John the Evangelist's arm.³ Furthermore, although not as idealized as the Virgin, God or Jesus, the saints in the San José *Coronation* appear less destitute than those in the Talavera work; none are

¹ *El Greco: Identity and Transformation*. Ed. José Alvarez Lopera. Italy: Skira, 1999, p. 395.

² *El Greco: Identity and Transformation*, p. 421.

³ Interestingly, the face of this saint is believed to be a portrait of El Greco's son Jorge Manuel, whose image occurs in other El Greco canvases including *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*.

depicted as suffering, they are painted without their earthly attributes, and the ochre, carmine, and blue robes of saints Peter and John the Evangelist appear more brilliant (and thus more heavenly).⁴ With the division between the celestial and earthly worlds reduced, the San José *Coronation* seems to serve as a transition between the Talavera and Illescas piece, where only the celestial world appears. It seems reasonable to conclude that as El Greco progressed in his career, his style shifted away from the division between the world of heaven and that of earth. Indeed, a clear division between the earthly and celestial worlds is common in El Greco's early works in Toledo (for example, the *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1586-88), yet is hard to find in his later pieces.⁵ Thus, as modeled by the progression of his *Coronation* paintings, El Greco's increasing tendency to reduce his art "to its bare essentials, spiritually and physically" via the elimination of references to the earthly world, can be interpreted as evidence of an evolution in his style.⁶

El Greco's gradual elimination of the two realms not only reflects a shift in his composition, but also affects the energy of his art. In comparison to the Illescas canvas, both the Talavera and San José works appear static, in part because of the presence of the saints. Indeed, despite the saints' gaping mouths and dramatic positions, the "shock" in the saints' expressions does not veil their primary function as a framing device for the main subject.⁷ It is as if the saints create a barrier through which the viewers must look in order to get to the heart of the painting: the Coronation. On the other hand, viewers of the Illescas canvas are granted immediate access to the Coronation. Free of distractions, the action of the Illescas canvas is more directly translated to the viewer than either the Talavera or San José works. Although both the Talavera and San José works lack the

immediacy of the Illescas painting, again, the San José canvas seems to provide a transition between the Church and Hospital versions. Unlike in the Talavera piece where the upturned heads and gesturing arms of the saints gently draw the viewer's attention up to the Virgin, the close proximity between the saints and the holy figures in the San José canvas draws focus to the Coronation. This focus is further aided by the gesture of St. John the Evangelist, whose outstretched arm and direct glance toward the spectator attracts attention more abruptly to the Virgin than any of the saints' gestures in the Talavera scene. While the focus in the Illescas version makes it seem as though the canvas has captured the precise moment of the Coronation, both the Talavera and San José versions lack this vitality, and seem as if they are frozen in time. Thus, the increasingly direct portrayal of subject matter in the art of El Greco's later years expresses the energy of its subject matter in a more powerful manner than does his earlier work.

Differences in point of view in the three works also help explain why the Illescas painting appears more energetic than the other two canvases. In keeping with the traditional placement for Coronation scenes, all three canvases were located at the top and center of their individual altarpieces.⁸ However, while the two earlier works were meant to be "seen from high up but in front of the spectator," as a *quadro riportato*, the Illescas canvas was intended to be viewed overhead.⁹ Perhaps with this position in mind, El Greco painted the figure of the Illescas Virgin from a *di sotto in su* (seen from below) perspective.¹⁰ Such a perspective creates not only a more dynamic effect in comparison to the stiff frontality of the Talavera and San José canvases, but also points to El Greco's increasingly intellectual approach to his art.

⁴ It must be admitted that this may be more the result of aging and restoration than evidence of stylistic change. Indeed, the Talavera canvas appears heavily abraded, therefore complicating analysis of its colors.

⁵ The tendency to divide the canvas between the earthly and spiritual worlds is also common in the art of Titian, whose works El Greco studied during his stay in Venice in the years 1567-70. Indeed, the composition of Titian's *Annunciation of the Virgin* (1516-1518) has clear parallels to El Greco's Talavera *Coronation* in its depiction of saints, angels, and clouds. Brown, Jonathan. *Painting in Spain, 1500-1700*. Singapore: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 64.

⁶ *El Greco: Identity and Transformation*, p. 421.

⁷ Including "foreground, framing figures shown half-length or seen from behind" such as the saints in both the Talavera and the San José canvases, is a typical device of Mannerist art. In fact, El Greco, with his elongated and twisting figures, is considered one of the best representatives of this style. Guinard, p. 56.

⁸ Coronation scenes were traditionally located at the tops of altarpieces "partly because it signified the culmination of the glorious life of Mary, and partly because it was a heavenly scene and thus appropriate that the believer should contemplate it from below." *El Greco: Identity and Transformation*, p. 395.

⁹ Harris, 160.

¹⁰ Sanchez, p. 171.

Another striking difference between El Greco's earlier and later versions of the *Coronation of the Virgin* canvases is the brushwork. While the individual brushstrokes in both of the earlier works are difficult to distinguish, distinct streaks of paint are noticeable throughout the Illescas canvas. Perhaps one of the best ways to illustrate this difference in brushwork is to compare the painting technique of the clouds in the Talavera and Illescas canvases. In the Talavera *Coronation*, the clouds look like soft yet solid cumuli as a result of El Greco's subtly blended brushstrokes. In contrast, the clouds from the Illescas version appear wispy and insubstantial, an appearance caused by the distinct jabs of paint left by El Greco's brush. Mostly unblended and often leaving long, diagonal streaks, the paint in the Illescas canvas conveys a violent energy, as if it had been rapidly applied. Indeed, in parts of the canvas, the vigorous brushstrokes seem as though they were from an abstract or modern work of art, not from an altarpiece painting from the turn of the sixteenth century. Yet, although it may seem difficult to reconcile the more distinct brushstrokes of the Illescas work with those from either Talavera or San José, it has been argued that this shift represents an incorporation of El Greco's early style as an icon painter (a style of painting that usually uses "discreet and unblended brush marks") with what he had learned in Italy and Spain.¹¹ Additionally, this shift in brush technique corresponds with Jonathan Brown's assessment that El Greco's late art "progress[ed] along a path of increasing pictorial abstraction, which he followed until the day he died."¹²

Taking the changes in composition, energy, movement, and brushwork into consideration, it is important to keep the ultimate purpose of El Greco's *Coronation of the Virgin* works in mind. Since these works were only parts of altarpieces intended for various churches, it can be assumed that El Greco painted them with awareness of the Counterreformation attitude that religious art should instruct the faithful and animate devotion.¹³ Perhaps in an effort to guide his viewers to such religious inspiration, El Greco infused his Talavera and San José *Coronations* with a

tone of pious devotion. This is particularly noticeable in the depiction of the Virgin, who gently clasps her hands in prayer while tenderly looking toward her son in both canvases. In comparison to this tranquil image, the Virgin in the Illescas canvas is much more animated; instead of looking at Jesus, her head is raised in the direction of her crown and the Holy Spirit. With her eyes rolled back and her hands clasped tightly together, Mary's position in the Illescas work captures more a sense of religious ecstasy than quiet contemplation. The rays of light cast by the Holy Spirit in the various canvases further support this sense of frenzied religious passion. While the beam of light from the dove in the Talavera canvas extends only as far as the Virgin's crown, in the Illescas' piece it radiates both laterally and through the crown to Mary's head. The extension of light to her head makes the Virgin appear as though she is being energized or shocked by her faith. As a result of the Virgin's depiction, the tone of the Illescas *Coronation* goes far beyond the lesson of quiet devotion from both the Talavera and San José canvases; indeed, the increasingly frantic spirituality of El Greco's works is one of the most distinct aspects about his later career.

Looking at the three versions of the *Coronation of the Virgin* from Talavera, San José, and Illescas, El Greco's artistic development in composition, energy, movement, brushwork, and portrayal of religious devotion can be traced. The fact that these aspects can be observed gradually shifting with each subsequent canvas illustrates that El Greco's shift in style between his early and late Spanish works was not as drastic as was once considered by people such as Jusepe Martínez. In fact, as noted in the discussion on brushwork, even links to El Greco's earliest style as an icon painter can be found in his late work. Acknowledging that a logical progression in style can be traced in El Greco's career is an important realization in the field of research about the artist, for past academics have once tried to explain his "sudden," "extravagant" style as having been caused by such bizarre circumstances as astigmatism, a hyperthyroid condition, and even a hashish addiction.¹⁴ Nevertheless, although El Greco's gradual shift in style now discounts such extreme

¹¹ Franco, 9.

¹² Brown, Jonathan. *Painting in Spain, 1500-1700*. Singapore: Yale University Press, 1998, p. 76.

¹³ Davies, David. "The Ascent of the Mind to God: El Greco's Religious Imagery and Spiritual Reform in Spain." *El Greco: Identity and Transformation*. Ed. José Alvarez Lopera. Italy: Skira, 1999, p. 189. According to Ferdinand Marias Franco, "The Council of Trent had not only defended religious imagery against the attacks of Protestant iconoclasts but had also laid down a program for the reform of religious art, both in content and formal expression, in order to give it a role of unprecedented importance in the missionary campaign of the Counterreformation." El Greco must have been aware of the Council's opinions, for included in his library was a Greek translation of *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. Franco, 6.

¹⁴ Guinard, p. 110.

hypotheses, more research must be done to discover the driving force behind this shift. One recent theory suggests that “increased interest by private collectors [following the Dona Maria altarpiece] placed great demand on El Greco for ‘easel’ pictures, which afforded him both money and support for his new late style.”¹⁵

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¹⁵ Schroth.

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