

The University of Southern Mississippi
The Aquila Digital Community


Dissertations

Summer 8-2011

**The Black Plumb Line: Re-evaluating Race and Africanist Images
in Non-Black Authored American Texts**

LaShondra Vanessa Robinson
University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations>

 Part of the [Literature in English, North America Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Robinson, LaShondra Vanessa, "The Black Plumb Line: Re-evaluating Race and Africanist Images in Non-Black Authored American Texts" (2011). *Dissertations*. 663.
<https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/663>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact Joshua.Cromwell@usm.edu.

The University of Southern Mississippi

THE BLACK PLUMB LINE:
RE-EVALUATING RACE AND AFRICANIST IMAGES IN
NON-BLACK AUTHORED AMERICAN TEXTS

by

LaShondra Vanessa Robinson

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2011

ABSTRACT

THE BLACK PLUMB LINE:
RE-EVALUATING RACE AND AFRICANIST IMAGES IN
NON-BLACK AUTHORED AMERICAN TEXTS

by LaShondra Vanessa Robinson

August 2011

This study evaluates Africanisms (representations of racialized or ethnicized blackness) within three contemporary non-black authors' texts: Jewish American Saul Bellow's novel *Henderson the Rain King*, white southerner Melinda Haynes' novel *Mother of Pearl*, and Nyurican poet Victor Hernández Cruz's works "Mesa Blanca" and "White Table." Though not entirely unproblematic, each selection somehow redefines black identity and agency to challenge denigrated representations of Africanist people and culture. In the process, each author subverts faulty components of American myths of racial purity, particularly stratifying black-white dualisms that promote whiteness, racial supremacy, and resulting undue privilege. This study also traces how Bellow, Haynes and Cruz adopt and/or adapt rhetorical strategies, mutual investments in history and shared identity cues that align these writers and their works with aspects of the African American literary tradition as well as kindred authors of African descent. Racial performance and the social construction of identity factor heavily into this project as the chosen writers also challenge critical tendencies to equate authors' identities with authors' aims, particularly when writers cross identity boundaries to dismantle traditional patterns of racial supremacy and racism. The ambiguously raced author Jean Toomer and

fellow writer Carl Van Vechten also serve as key introductory comparative figures within this study. Ultimately, this project underscores the continued responsibility American writers have to address the cultural artifact American imaginations have made of racialized blackness within our national literature and corresponding social spaces and institutions.

COPYRIGHT BY
LASHONDRA VANESSA ROBINSON
2011

The University of Southern Mississippi

THE BLACK PLUMB LINE:
RE-EVALUATING RACE AND AFRICANIST IMAGES IN
NON-BLACK AUTHORED AMERICAN TEXTS

by

LaShondra Vanessa Robinson

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:

Linda Allen

Director

Jonathan Barron

Luis Iglesias

Sherita Johnson

Martina Sciolino

Susan A. Siltanen

Dean of the Graduate School

August 2011

DEDICATION

To my family elders and mentors—your accomplishments would have been much greater than mine if you had simply been born to a different era. Your wise words, unfulfilled dreams, and well-read books have fueled my life with a thirst for knowledge and righteousness. Thank you. This work is dedicated in memory of the late Minister Ann M. Houston, Reverend Leroy Boykin, and Minister Ora Jefferson. I also dedicate this work to Dorothy Smith, educator par excellence and woman of great dignity and purpose.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge you, Dr. Linda Allen, for your service as my committee chair through the final year of my writing process. Your enthusiasm and positivity have been invaluable. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Jonathan Barron, Dr. Sherita Johnson, Dr. Martina Sciolino, and Dr. Luis Iglesias—thank all of you for your contributions as committee members. Dr. Barron, I admire your genuine passion for scholarship. Thank you for your professional example, consistent support, and honesty. Dr. Johnson, I thank you as well for your prophetic act of setting time aside. Dr. Michael Mays and Dr. Mary A. Villeponteaux, I would like to acknowledge you both for your vital assistance at multiple points along my lengthy path toward completing this project. I also owe special recognition to you, Dr. Ellen Weinauer. Thank you for your administrative support and intervention during a critical point when all seemed lost. I also owe a special note of gratitude to you, Melinda Haynes. Thank you for granting me an interview. Your contribution to my research has enriched my project more than you could know. Strength and continued blessings to you. (And yes, you were right. I did finish.) I would also like to acknowledge you, Maurice Gandy, for sharing your southern writer's connections. I would also like to acknowledge F. Odun Balogun. Thank you for sharing your article (and for such speedy mailing). My Bishop State Community College family, thank all of you for your never-ending encouragement and wonderfully annoying anticipation. I especially thank you, the late Dr. Keflyn X. Reed, for the many juggling feats you performed through odd semester schedules and delays. Perhaps you will read this one day and tell me what you think. Enjoy your rest.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

DEDICATION iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS v

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION: REIMAGINING BLACKNESS 1

II. THE VISIBLE MAN: THE UNDOING OF WHITENESS IN SAUL BELLOW’S *HENDERSON THE RAIN KING*..... 26

III. BLACKNESS AND SAUL BELLOW’S AMERICAN AFRICA 70

IV. RE-MEMBERING EMMETT: LYNCH IMAGERY AND RACIAL IDENTITY IN MELINDA HAYNES’ *MOTHER OF PEARL*..... 110

Haynes’ Manipulation of Historical Context
Haynes and Southern Literary Traditions
Lynching, Black Manhood, and Africanist Community
Destruction of the White Patriarch
Subversion of Southern White Womanhood
A Revisionary Black Southern Patriarch and Fatherhood

V. DWELLING PLACES: AFRICANISMS AND LATINO IDENTITY IN VICTOR HERNÁNDEZ CRUZ’S “WHITE TABLE” AND “MESA BLANCA” 159

Cruz’s Performance of Blackness in *Callaloo*’s “White Table”
Puerto Rican Identity and the “Mesa Blanca” of *Panoramas*
Conflations of Language and Race in the Earlier Spanish Empire
Language, Music, and Universal Latino Identity in *Paper Dance*
Cruz’s *Panoramas*

VI. CONCLUSION: RENDER UNTO CAESAR WHAT HE IS DUE 214

APPENDIX 242

NOTES 267

WORKS CITED 304

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: REIMAGINING BLACKNESS

“Every literature must seek the things that belong unto its place, must, in other words, speak of a particular place, evolve out of the necessities of its history, past and current, and the aspirations and destiny of its people”—Chinua Achebe, “Colonialist Criticism”

Jean Toomer had long passed into white America when the 1960s-1970s Black Arts Movement summoned him back into the racial fold. He would become a valued literary statesman alongside the likes of Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston and Sterling Brown, among Others. Ironically, only after African American scholars had rediscovered Toomer’s multi-genre work *Cane* did more recent scholarship place Toomer alongside non-black modernists Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, Sherwood Anderson, and T. S. Eliot, to name a few. The writer’s preferred literary relations settled him more resolutely among these Caucasian modernist peers than among African American Harlem Renaissance writers with whom scholars most often group Toomer (Gutterl 172). Another irony, Toomer’s greatest reception within this same preferred modernist community was also contingent upon his status as a Negro and ethnic commodity. His timing threw him into a popularity surge in primitive art, of delights creative and Africanist in orientation. Also ironic, during this same period, American culture was spiraling into more codified segregation laws and continuing lynching practices in the South even as equally discriminatory housing and employment practices lynched blacks economically and socially in the North. Liveright publishers and fellow writers wanted Toomer to promote his African American ancestry to endorse sales. They felt his blackness would make *Cane* more appealing (along with an exotic jungle-themed dust jacket that failed to reflect the complex rural South Toomer depicted in *Cane*’s

pages). Toomer refused and the work flopped financially, despite critical acclaim. When Toomer abandoned race, notoriety abandoned him.

Though Toomer was of African descent and lived his childhood between elite Negro and white communities, he ultimately lived his adult life as a phenotypically white man with a proverbial drop of black blood. That drop he sometimes accepted but more often denied. During his lifetime, he would rather have supporters and critics alike receive him simply as a (hu)man who wrote elegantly about Africanist culture. In lieu of racial identity, he appointed himself “American,” a multi-racial, multi-ethnic personage who supposedly melded the best of all worlds. However, he did so against a culture’s “hypnotic division of Americans into black and white” that resisted articulation of alternative identities like his (Walker 63; Guterl 155). Neither he nor his contemporary culture could make peace with such an ambiguous racial status. Judging from Rudolph Byrd and Henry Louis Gates’ most recent genealogical quest to resolve “Jean Toomer’s Conflicted Racial Identity,” our contemporary culture has also made little peace with racial ambiguity. According to Byrd and Gates’ *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, as well as a corresponding *New York Times* feature, Toomer, a “Chronicler of Black Life,” was resolutely a Negro who “passed for white,” a “Genetically...light complexioned” black man “descended from a long line of mulattoes...raised as a Negro American in a family that identified as black” (Byrd and Gates, Lee).¹ No doubt, identifying otherness and sameness is still expedient and more than justifiable; we live in an American culture where race and ethnicity have persisting and increasingly subtle agenda-setting (and agenda destroying) powers. Still, my current study dares to entertain a supposition: What if Toomer were not a member of what Americans commonly recognize as the black race?

Critics have certainly given Toomer far more ethos as an African American writer than his racial outlook would have willingly accepted. What would we make of *Cane*'s profound black images if a non-black writer had authored the work? Another writer's experiences are not too far drawn from this hypothetical scenario.

Scholars have long recognized Jean Toomer's contemporary Carl Van Vechten as a major contributor to the financing and promotion of the Harlem Renaissance. Many of the period's most notable artists from various arenas (music, theatre, visual arts and literature) are indebted to him.² Conversely, Charles Larson presents the same man as a white social voyeur whose appetites for exotic blackness drove him and many wealthy whites to consume Harlem culture for "thrills" (Larson 5, 64-5). Either way, in stark contrast to Toomer, Van Vechten heavily identified with Africanist culture, and Africanist culture heavily identified with him. A writer and artist in his own right, Van Vechten's greatest color line transgression was the commercially successful 1926 novel *Nigger Heaven*. In her introduction to the Signet edition of *Nigger Heaven*, Kathleen Pfeiffer reads Van Vechten's contributions to African American arts as so significant that one would be hard pressed to label Van Vechten racist (Pfeiffer xv). Nonetheless, Van Vechten received mixed responses from his contemporaries. His work, particularly its title, offended key figures within his contemporary black intellectual community, including WEB Dubois and Countee Cullen. Still, his novel roused others—James Weldon Johnson, Langston Hughes, Charles S. Johnson, and Nella Larsen for example—to praise *Nigger Heaven*'s multifaceted depiction of Harlem life.³ According to E. Patrick Johnson, acceptance into racialized communities often depends on one's ability to perform the right cultural cues, but Van Vechten's investments in Harlem society were

not enough. Scholar Randall Kennedy suggests Van Vechten's ultimate undoing was not that he wrote about black culture or that he chose to title his work "*Nigger Heaven*" but rather that he was white. He failed to understand that he was not a fully authorized "member" of the "race privileged to address his racial kin in ways prescribed to others" (Kennedy 127). Needless to say, his work has also failed to become a mainstay within any literary canon. How much greater an impact would Van Vechten's novel and his other numerous contributions have had if he could have manifested one drop of black blood to authenticate his social identity and performed interests?

This study steps into a beehive of current identity politics to extend this query beyond Toomer and Van Vechten into greater inquiry—to evaluate significant depictions of racialized blackness within three contemporary non-black author's texts: Jewish American author Saul Bellow's novel *Henderson the Rain King*; white southern novelist Melinda Haynes' book *Mother of Pearl*, and Afro-Puerto Rican poet Victor Hernández Cruz's poems "Mesa Blanca" and "White Table." This project also touches upon contemporary trends in American literary studies. Subjectivities like Toomer's and Van Vechten's underscore those awkward interstitial social spaces in vogue throughout contemporary American scholarship. Academics love intriguing race stories because racial and ethnic ambiguities feed into a nearly divine, contemporary revisionist revelation: race and ethnicity are social constructions, orchestrations of cultural practices and imagination that become far more tangible than what we popularly define as biological race (skin tone and hair texture, among other physical features). Under this postmodern allure, scholars now acknowledge that both racial labeling and membership in racialized American communities are arbitrary, particularly for "black and white"

cultures (Kennedy 54, Favor 2-3). As a social performance, racialized blackness is internally malleable yet externally rigid. It can subsume an unwilling Jean Toomer and simultaneously exclude others who may have stronger ancestral claims or who, like Van Vechten, may more readily identify with African American culture. Of course, one could say the same for an equally arbitrary, socially constructed whiteness, the second half of the United State's hegemonic, racialized gatekeeping system.

As much as Americanists tout increased understanding and even movements beyond race and ethnicity, again, a supposedly post-racial national culture still struggles with increasingly complex and multiplied racial identities. This difficulty bears repeating because accompanying issues of class, gender, and sexual orientation have compounded upon tender historical racial wounds. On the literary front, critics are experiencing conflict because they have not fully divorced their ways of thinking and operating from older, socially constructed modes of identification that, at times, unfruitfully categorize and police racial boundaries. These same ways of thinking and doing determine a writer's relevancy within our now numerous American literary traditions. Nevertheless, despite rising liberalness, American literature remains a segregated art, at times by necessity, at times by proclivity. Ironically, amid so many cultural divisions, one element remains the constant. One element is the unifying linchpin that brings order to every identity. This same element also refines this study's focal point: blackness, the extreme ethnic universal, continues its contradictory duty as the absolute difference among authors and the lives they create on the written page. After all, as Toni Morrison suggests, our country's now exploding multicultural literary tradition developed from its earliest point against black tropes, or what she terms "Africanisms." In many ways, blackness still

serves the three main functions Morrison identifies among the earliest American literary projects: to explore European American identities, to reinforce white privilege, and to develop oppositionally our national literature's foundational themes (Morrison, *Playing* 44-5).⁴

This project desires, first, to evaluate the ways the previously named non-black American writers cross racial boundaries to utilize black tropes. How do they constructively wield "Africanisms" to redefine Africanist people's identities and agency? Much like Toomer, American literature is ever searching to make peace with this "abiding" Africanist presence even as American culture maintains black difference for better and worse. Readers already know what this literary past has offered in black and white. When supposedly progressive, non-black authored works have addressed racist misrepresentations of blackness, these American texts have also effaced Africanist identity with belittling extremes: idealized black suffering or romanticized black congeniality. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a well worn but excellent example with its pickaninnies, sapphires, and Uncle Toms. Is it possible, as Toni Morrison suggests, to escape the "racial house" that is American literature? Is it possible for contemporary non-black writers to activate Africanist "racial specificity" within their literary works without reproducing racist hierarchies through their creative decisions (Morrison, "Home" 8)?

Though not without glitches, each work in this project sloughs off flat, strictly raced representations of Africanist *peoples* to expose a dynamic, multifaceted humanity. In the spirit of this introduction's epigraph, Bellow, Haynes and Cruz disrupt traditionally stratified, black-white racial dynamics to permit *potential* for "peace." Out of this

reconciliation, American literature can begin to speak more effectively and justly of multifaceted American places, particularly those associated with blackness. As Chinua Achebe's words further suggest, these chosen works evolve out of the necessities of this country's racialized past(s) and present histories. The selected works also embody an eclectic American people's hopes and aspirations for balanced ideals of freedom and independence, self identification and communal power.⁵

Also principle to this study is how the chosen writers' revisionist undertakings implicate their own identities. To what degree does each writer's identity—each writer's ethnicity, gender, and background—influence the ways each manipulates black tropes? Bellow, Haynes, and Cruz ultimately challenge the ways critics and readers alike often conflate authors' identities with the effectiveness of the work they do to free language from predictable racialized patterns.⁶ Again, Toomer's example motivates this thinking. If Toomer were authentically white (whatever that might be) or of some other racial or ethnic persuasion, would the writer have enjoyed a different level of artistic influence among his fellow white modernists or Harlem Renaissance writers? These questions remain unanswerable in part because, according to arbitrarily rigid race politics and the one drop rule, Toomer was not white. Again, would contemporary scholars both within and outside Africanist communities have reclaimed *Cane* if it had been the product of a different Other? American predispositions towards what Martin Favor terms racial "authenticity" have conditioned critical eyes to see the worth of Toomer's project, not beyond, but in light of (and in spite of) Toomer's often fickle racial attitudes. Could the same be true for Other American writers, particularly those selected for this project? Could these writers' contributions be significant in addressing unbalanced representations

of blackness within American literature? Cross cultural influence and authority remain key to this project's third focus as well.

This project explores kinships or commonalities between its selected non-black authors and authors of African descent—for this third aim, this study seeks to expose where shared rhetorical strategies, investments in history, and identity enable these writers to align their works with some aspect of the African American literary tradition as well as the tradition's goals to bring balanced representations of Africanist people to light. This questioning comes at a critical point when African American culture and its artistic and academic extensions are enjoying greater releases of freedom, acceptance, and authority. This flow could either grow or wane in the current cultural studies laden atmosphere. American literature and the African American literary tradition continue to evolve as our nation constantly witnesses more developments and shifts in dealings with race and ethnicity. As these shifts continue, the selected authors' works could usher in the next dimension of conversations.

Though gazing into the future, a new study must also engage the existing critical conversation. Of preceding scholarship, quite a few publications are relevant to this project's examination of "Africanisms" in non-black authored American texts. Toni Morrison's *Playing the in the Dark* and its discussion of early American texts sets a foundation for understanding the importance of blackness and people of African descent to the larger project of American literature. From Morrison's text, I have also borrowed the term "Africanism." Though this project makes awkward use of this vocabulary at times, the term flows throughout subsequent chapters ("Africanism" and its adjective form "Africanist") to divorce the reader from the black-white dichotomy that plagues

American discussions of race, particularly where whiteness and black Otherness are central. (Unfortunately, I could not achieve this same distance with the term “non-black” to describe my selected authors. The term does, however, decenter whiteness and more accurately describe my chosen writers’ shifting identities in the most practical sense.) My adoption of the term “Africanism” falls between Morrison’s use of the term and Joseph Holloway’s use of the same word in his work *Africanisms in America*. Holloway’s term refers to literal cultural practices and observances originating from established, traceable African cultural origins—for example, African-based, Caribbean Mesa Blanca religious practices that background Chapter IV’s discussion of Victor Hernández Cruz. Ultimately, my project speaks of Africanisms in this sense: images and literary elements (whether literal, historical, or figurative) that invoke the presence of racialized blackness and by default the presence of people of African descent, whether in a positive or negative fashion. At times, the selected writers’ uses of Africanisms (whether these Africanism are actual representations of people, symbols, or simply cultural references) hold a degree of accuracy similar to a gestalt or Rorschach blot—racialized allusions subject to perception and manipulation. These Africanisms celebrate blackness much like Langston Hughes’ infinite “Negro” persona who speaks of rivers, yet they sometimes intentionally mock like blackface.⁷ Of course, gestalts and Rorschach blots operate on basic principles of contrast. Likewise, no sound discussion of Africanist images can proceed without addressing an accompanying whiteness intimately tied to blackness.

Ann Kaplan notes that Africanist authors and scholars have long addressed the dynamics of blackness and whiteness in their works; only recently (relatively speaking) has European American scholarship begun to question whiteness as a material social fact

alongside blackness (again, a staple of the American literary imagination and letters) (Kaplan 318). Now, whiteness studies has been a tightly organized discipline for roughly twenty years. Many of its foundational texts (beyond Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*) inform this study: Theodore Allen's *The Invention of the White Race*, Peggy McIntosh's essay "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies," the many works of David Roediger, Eric Goldstein's *The Price of Whiteness*, George Lipsitz's *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, and Mike Hill's *After Whiteness: Unmaking an American Majority*. This newly-established body of criticism acknowledges whiteness (particularly white supremacist ideology) as a hegemonic system of authority and validation that produces undue privilege and social authority for those identified as such. In some fashion, each work examined in this study critiques and resists strongholds of white supremacy and privilege as much as each challenges perverted presentations of blackness. The two tasks are inseparable because, again, one cannot redress blackness without addressing its counterpart whiteness. They create each other, are part of a complex yet imbalanced yin yang racial matrix where even the slightest questioning or change in the status of one dictates questioning and change of the other. Chapters on Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* and Melinda Haynes' *Mother of Pearl* in particular fall in line with what Mike Hill describes as a "second wave" of whiteness studies. This latest trend explores the implications of scholars' own race investments in the work they are doing to uncover and redress whiteness as a hegemonic force (Hill, *Whiteness* 3). Both Bellow's and Haynes' white identities are subject to critique even as they aggressively question white subject-hood in relation to

blackness and very tangible historical contexts—American foreign politics in a rapidly changing Post-War II Africa and the 1955 Emmett Till murder, respectively. This focus on blackness and the effects of white authorial identity (especially within the context of historical interpretations) finds a forum in two additional works that have also shaped critical discussions about blackness and whiteness in American literary texts.

The conversation between Eric Sundquist's *To Wake the Nation* and Kenneth Warren's *Black and White Strangers* expands Morrison's ideas. Sundquist resituates black-authored and white authored texts into a shared cultural and political context from 1830 to 1930. He argues that American Literature and the Africanist writer are inseparable for three primary reasons: an American literary imagination's focus on race, white writers' preoccupations with Africanist subjects, and African American authors' responses to historical, cultural and political currents intimately tied to their beings. Occupying the opposite extreme, Kenneth Warren's *Black and White Strangers* explores how portrayals of blackness in the works of white realist writers fed segregationist ideologies from post Civil War America to the end of the nineteenth century. His study suggests that separatist-minded writers actually created contradictorily *interdependent* bodies of American and African American literatures—"two conflicting yet coalescing cultural traditions...that have together produced a sustained tradition of the most significant literature of race in America" (Warren 6). As Morrison, Sundquist, and especially Warren also suggest, this study does not seek a "racially integrated literary utopia" (Warren 10). This project investigates those literary intersections that rest on an Africanist presence in American culture. These aforementioned secondary sources do, however, follow two paths from which this project veers. They all examine earlier

American literary periods and limit their scopes to black and white-authored texts. In an approach spiritually kin to scholar William Luis', the following chapters address contemporary authors and expand this previous scholarship's inquiries beyond black-white racial boundaries.

William Luis's approach to studying blackness strikes a concurrent chord within this project. His study *Voices From Under: Black Narrative in Latin America and the Caribbean* examines obscured Africanist presences in earlier Latino and Caribbean literature. For Luis, understanding the buried prominence of blackness in Caribbean and Latino literature requires a complete picture of Africanist influences. As a result, he investigates a spectrum of texts, whether they present negative or positive images of blacks and Afro-Latino culture. He also pulls from writers, regardless of race or ethnicity. What results is a blend of racialized perspectives that collectively expose a more complete picture of Africanist undercurrents in Caribbean and Latino literature (Luis 14, 22). In a sense this project's core veers in the same direction. Although my study focuses exclusively upon non-black authors, I proceed from a similar desire to see a more complete picture of Africanist influences in American literature, a picture that takes into consideration all expressions of blackness. Over time, scholars (especially those of African descent and Others invested in African American studies) have begun a good work: re-introducing previously lost or silenced Africanist voices; significantly revising and augmenting historical accounts with the experiences of Africanist people; uncovering the ills of Other-authored texts and abuses of black identity. This work is still necessary and worthy of time, talents, and resources to combat ever present hegemonic forces as Gene Jarret has suggested (Jarret 2). Now, however, scholars must also assess the

influences these efforts have had on the imaginations and consciousnesses of more contemporary American writers of all racial and/or ethnic orientations. Such work is being done. One example, Matthew Guinn's book *After Southern Modernity: Fiction of the Contemporary South* traces Richard Wright and Zora Neale Hurston's authorial influences on contemporary white southern writers. More projects like Guinn's need to come forth. Timing is of the essence, so much so that *time* is also integral to this study's developing focus as well.

Bellow, Haynes, and Cruz have actively produced works well into the new millennium (or were producing in the late Bellow's case). In addition (with the exception of Bellow's 1959 *Rain King*) each published his or her included work(s) during the nineties. Moreover, a crucial fifteen year window from roughly 1955 until about 1970 connects each writer's work.⁸ This time span marks radical racial change within U.S. history—the establishment of the Civil Rights Movement and advent of the more radical Black Power Movement. Obviously, this country's laws and institutions underwent transformations in policy and protocol, but this epoch also immediately shaped our current, ever growing consciousness of race and ethnicity as social constructions. This period produced much of the theory and many of the revisionist works and reclaimed texts that are now canonical to twenty-first century scholarship. My project treats Bellow's, Haynes' and Cruz's writings as gauges. Their works measure the lingering effectiveness of earlier efforts to revise historically biased ideologies, the same bankrupt mindsets that under-girded discriminatory governmental policies as well as familiar, overtly racist literary representations. Traditional literary strongholds are particularly vicious and key to this study because the written word never leaves the printed page.

Literature occupies a tangible place that is timeless and ever reproducible. By no coincidence, this project also relies heavily on the concept of *place*, including but not limited to the influence of publishing, literal locations and corresponding culture.

Within this study, the literary page becomes the place where writers struggle to control and rewrite racial representations of blackness and whiteness. Each major work discussed in this project features some type of (re)invented setting that corresponds to actual pre-existing spaces. *Place* also becomes a point of identity or identifying (as in *placing* or recognizing a stranger's face within a familiar context). *Place* also refers to seats or positions of social authority, the cultural license a writer assumes to invent (as in knowing one's rightful *place*). In each case, these non-black writers' authority to imagine black figures and spaces has the potential to be overarching, invasive, or, in some cases, ill-received. After all, cross-racial contact implies a breeching of contemporary cultural or social borders where invested parties have already contrived or staked out territory. Where appropriate, this issue allows the study to inject bits of postcolonial theory on race and ethnicity (the works of Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon in particular). Postcolonial theory provides a means to discuss more levelly an extreme, measurable literary colonization of places, bodies and identities, especially those of African descent within the United States and its territories. As Frantz Fanon suggests, colonization involves as much the effects of domination on the mind and spirit as it does an actual impact on material land, resources, and social institutions, hence this study's metaphorical connection with colonization and evolving representations of blackness or Africanisms in American literary works.⁹ An additional concept of racial representation equally informs this study's theoretical frame—racial performance.

Of many theoretical frames that dissect race, racial performativity has proven most useful for this project. According to performance theories, neither biological criteria alone nor some sense of naturally innate being constitutes race. Instead, race becomes a set of agreed upon cultural cues and social acts performed both individually and collectively among members of a group or community. By extension, racial *difference* is also social phenomenon to a certain degree—comparative interpretations of flesh and culture between groups that creates tangible, experienced effects toward many ends. Martin Favor’s study *Authentic Blackness* examines black identity as racial performance in ways that have helped me articulate this study’s use of racial performativity as a theoretical backbone.¹⁰ Though Favor deals primarily with African American writers during the Harlem Renaissance period, particularly beneficial is his reading of blackness as a multifaceted racial performance used as a subversive instrument. For Favor, viewing race as a performance does not relegate race to pure “intellectual inquiry or social practice.” Instead race becomes a tool of resistance, a way of reconstituting identities to defy hegemonic, racist systems. As Favor further notes, racial performances of blackness expose “the politics of representation, the intricate workings of intersecting discourses of identity, community, and culture.” However, this same performativity does not “retreat” into an “overly deterministic ‘propagandistic positivism’” that perpetuates similar “prescriptive notions of identity” even as it reveals “misinterpretations” (150). In similar fashion, this study also suggests that non-black authors can constructively manipulate literary space to re-read blackness (and those marked by it) without perpetuating old racial schemas and creating new ones equally biased and un insightful.

In his study *The Appropriation of Blackness*, E. Patrick Johnson also relies heavily upon racial performance. For Johnson, “cross-cultural appropriation” or “human comingling” can lead to “fertile” reformulations of “new epistemologies of self and other,” new ways to think about self and others in terms of race and even beyond race (Johnson 6). This proves especially true for poet Victor Hernández Cruz, whose appropriation of blackness creates a personal opportunity for the writer to re-envision his own identity even as his presence troubles the dynamics of broader black identity, Latino identity, Puerto Rican heritage, and African-American descent. Johnson warns, however, that performance theory often implies a degree of control or agency over identity that does not always exist. For Johnson, blackness is an “inexpressible yet undeniable racial experience” (8). In other words, though race and ethnicity allow social play, scholars cannot explain the pair away as exclusively willing shows of identity that individuals produce. Greater social and political constraints have heavy hands that mold identities; we cannot ignore these forces. Werner Sollors’ concepts of descent (those indigestible influences of material existence) and consent (those social choices that shape being, marriage for example) come to mind, but Sollors’ categories could easily conflate where social order imposes force (especially upon those elements of life that seem freely given and decidable for the socially empowered, like Sollors’ concept of marriage). This tension is significant for Melinda Haynes as she confronts lynching in *Mother of Pearl*. As a white southern woman, Haynes touches a system of historical violence that her own historical identity and body often justified. Black subjects had little (if any) agency against this violence or the whiteness of southern womanhood. In reality, however, neither would Haynes as a woman to a certain degree, being subject to the same

patriarchal forces at work in southern culture. Blackness as a lived experience certainly exceeded performance in Jean Toomer's case as well. A slight digression to discuss his rebirth during the Black Arts Movement will shed further light on this notion of racial performance and provide a perfect literary object lesson useful for the chapters that follow this introduction.

The earlier portion of this introduction mentioned Toomer's racialized plight and his re-emergence during the Black Arts Movement as a prominent African American literary figure. His 1923 multi-genre *Cane* contains powerfully creative, complex images of black southern life that appealed to the revisionist black consciousness of the Black Arts Era. However, Jean Toomer never meant to promote the growth of any Africanist enclave. He wanted to archive a beautiful relic—what Toomer thought was a dying African American subculture extinguishing itself into a larger American culture (Fabre and Feith 19).¹¹ Despite what Byrd and Gates have confirmed as Toomer's tangible Africanist heritage, when Toomer did connect with his southern roots to write *Cane*, he articulated his relationship as “spiritual,” not racial or ethnic (Byrd and Gates, n.p.; Kerman and Eldridge 83). This spiritual connection was only part of Toomer's ambivalent performance. In his latter adult life, rarely did Toomer identify as black, let alone as a progenitor of Negro artistry. Beyond *Cane*'s powerful contributions to the advancement of the African American studies movement, neither Toomer's tangible biology nor his wavering cultural allegiances could have guaranteed the writer the reconciliation and prominence he now enjoys within the African American intellectual community. Essentially, African American institutions, literary outlets, and scholarly critics (notably Arna Bontemps and Nathan Huggins) established Toomer as an

acceptable member of the black community for *Cane*'s sake. Indeed, reprintings of *Cane* during the Black Arts Movement have had a major performative impact on the ways readers interpret the book.

Toomer initially insisted that publishers never reproduce *Cane* in parts. The book was to remain whole and its content in their original order to maintain the work's artistic integrity (Kerman and Eldrige 79). As Byrd and Gates note, Toomer would later permit partial reprintings, but only in predominantly white collections. When he had power over publishing matters, the writer outrightly disallowed excerpts of his works within so called race anthologies. He even objected when Alain Locke printed portions of *Cane* in the revolutionary and now prestigious collection, *The New Negro*. In 1964, historically black Fisk University archived Toomer's manuscripts and other personal effects (Kerman and Eldrige 333). Shortly after, scholars prompted *Cane*'s re-issue in 1969, during the growing thickness of the Black Arts Movement and its search for reaffirming, self-defined images of blackness. Ironically, ubiquitous 1960s and 1970s race anthologies not only reproduced Toomer's work in parts. They re-introduced *Cane* to reading audiences through a deliberately filtered, pro-black lens of excerpts.

Cane's most commonly anthologized selections, in many cases, are those pieces most replete with racialized blackness. For example, Abraham Chapman's literary collection *Black Voices* (one of the earliest major Black Arts anthologies) opens its Toomer section with the vignette "Karintha," a tribute to the tragically exploited dark beauty of black womanhood, "perfect as dusk when the sun goes down" (64). Following is homage to the archetypal southern laborer, the poem "Harvest Song." This poem's imagery draws from the black ideal of the rural southern "folks." Martin Favor argues

that this same form of “authentic blackness“ has caused an identity crisis within the African American literary tradition; narrowly drawn self-definitions of Africanist personhood and culture threaten to stanch the flow of alternative identities and new thought (Favor 4). Reliance on the “folk” continues in *Black Voices*. Soon after “Harvest Song,” the anthology shifts to “Sons of Songs,” a rich nod to the legacy of southern American slaves and their generations who like “dark purple ripen plums,” bust in “soft caroling souls” (lines 16, 23).

Other collections akin to Chapman’s follow similar patterns. Take, for example, Dudley Randall’s canonical *Black Poets*. Randall also anthologizes the often reprinted “Karintha,” the poem “Reaper” with its images of “Black” field hands in rhythm working “their black horses” (line 5), and the verse “Georgia Dusk,” a celebration of rich black culture and exquisite southern music emerging from the approach of a rural Georgia night. This widespread editorial synecdoche has laid such a strong pattern for reading blackness in *Cane* that one could easily overlook the radically diverse nature of blackness that Toomer actually develops. (Favor argues a similar point, but his discussion leads into an analysis of land and Toomer’s regional associations.) Revisiting *Cane*’s remnants, one rediscovers mulatto character Fern’s Semitic features, the curve of her profile riveting like a “Jewish cantor singing” (Toomer 14). The whiteness of character Becky lies crushed under the weight of an interracial relationship, biracial children, and an ambivalent southern culture. One could also easily overlook the intra-racial, class-based disdain character Kabnis wields in perfectly measured standardized English towards his black southern counterparts; conversely, his cohorts’ thoughts swim in

exaggerated southern dialect. Toomer's biases are clear as these southern race men, leaders no less, ignorantly bumble through *Cane's* final section.

Racial nuances fill *Cane* much like the racial strife that plagued *Cane's* author. The book is, at times, fairly critical of black culture and moves well beyond an elementary celebration of southern Africanist culture, yet *Cane's* questioning nature has never detracted from the wholly positive critical reception the work receives. Toomer's creation still fits squarely into the African American literary canon and has remained a mainstay in African American literary anthologies. Even now, premier scholar Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Rudolph P. Byrd have released a new 2011 edition of Toomer's *Cane*. According to Felicia Lee and William Andrews, this latest release could generate even more interest for Toomer and his work in our "Age of Obama," a supposedly new era of racial awareness redefining the "original racial pecking order" that insists "any black identity makes you black" (Lee). This new line of questioning dovetails nicely into my project as I evaluate the aforementioned non-black authors' alignments with the goals of the African American literary tradition, but how could such a controversial figure as Saul Bellow be included in this group of writers?

My earlier questioning implied that if Jean Toomer and his contemporary Carl Van Vechten were of different races, that the public might have received their works differently. Similar speculation unfolds for Americanist Saul Bellow, who laid claim to a universal American identity similarly to Toomer.¹² But, could one as contentious as Saul Bellow employ overtly racialized, stereotypical images in ways that deny traditionally racist readings of Africanist people? If we were discussing Saul Bellow's post-holocaust novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet*, the usual response would likely be "No." *Mr. Sammler's*

Planet contains questionable references to black savagery and sexuality, and an even more questionable Africanist character—an elegantly dressed, physically agile pickpocket with whom the novel’s protagonist Sammler develops an obsession. Critics have attacked Bellow in glorious fashion for his sexualized, beast-like depictions of this pickpocket who becomes the center of one of the most infamously elaborate descriptions of black male genitalia in American literature.¹³ He also takes center stage in a particularly brutal attack. Israeli character Eisen bludgeons the thief with a bag of coins midway the novel, but the effects of this character’s presence linger in the minds of readers and critics, alike. This study takes a practical, first-offerings approach to explore the racial controversy connected to the author and his sparse but curious literary uses of Africanisms: the discussion returns to an earlier work to shed light on Bellow’s representations of blackness.

Henderson the Rain King precedes *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*. The book contains Bellow’s most extensive depiction of blackness and Africanist characters. Set in an absurdly fictionalized Africa, the novel seems to bypass U.S. domestic Civil Rights tensions. In the process, *Rain King* also appears to colonize international black spaces and silence independence movements among African countries of the day. Could Bellow be intentionally using racially charged Africanisms in *Henderson the Rain King* to thwart stereotypical perceptions of black people? Could Bellow’s omissions of American racial tensions be intentional, a means to expose the self-seeking goals of an American imagination embodied in murkily WASP, anti-hero Eugene Henderson? To what degree does Bellow’s own embrace of a unified, nationalist identity influence his handling of blackness or Africanisms through the novel? Launching these inquiries, Chapter II

explores the first third of Bellow's novel set in the States. Central are influences from like-minded modernist Ralph Ellison, author of *Invisible Man*. Also key is Bellow's strong critique of white American identity and racial privilege, especially in light of a conspicuously absent Civil Rights Movement throughout *Rain King*'s initial domestic setting. Bellow's notorious reputation for racially offensive commentary also plays a major role in Chapter II's discussion, as does his character's complex identity performance as a white American and ethnic American Other of Jewish descent. *Rain King*'s opening critique of 1950s whiten American culture sets the tone for Bellow's reinterpretation of blackness in the latter, African portion of *Henderson the Rain King*. Chapter III enters to discuss how Bellow fabricates this *American African* space and its inhabitants. Chapter III also examines Bellow's reinvention of blackness and a stronger critique of the United States' questionable international dealings across racial lines. Ultimately, Bellow suggests that power is the chief actor in human relations, one often obscured by race and the ethnocentric gaze.

If Bellow's invention of Africanist spaces in *Rain King* is vital to Chapter III's message about power and raced perspectives, Bellow's creation also cuts a path of discussion to an even more significant invention of black spaces and critique of domestic racial politics. Melinda Haynes' novel *Mother of Pearl* enters into Chapter IV's analysis. Haynes invents black and white southern spaces that are as colonized as Bellow's fictional Africa. Hers is a fictionalized yet real Petal, Mississippi of the late 50s, early 60s Civil Rights Era. If this traditional southern context multiplies the complexity of whiteness and blackness within Haynes' novel, then additional gender issues explode whiteness, the erstwhile premium upon which traditional southern pride, racism, and

racialized violence rest. The book's added emphasis on lynching conjures up an old southern adage my father often recites—"the only free people in this world are the white man and black women. The black man and white woman will never be free." Civil Rights activist Virginia Foster Durr recalls the dangers for the southern white woman who chose to associate with blackness on any level of intimacy beyond those limitations the white southern patriarchy prescribed. She placed herself "outside the magic circle" of white female privilege, honor, expectations and decorum (Terkel xi). Melinda Haynes steps beyond this increasingly defunct social circle to redress the ills of racism and violence grounded in racialized, gendered bodies. Haynes ultimately sabotages a prominent southern white patriarchy by subversively superimposing lynching-victim imagery onto her white characters throughout the novel; in particular, she provocatively manipulates details of the 1955 Emmett Till murder throughout the book. In the process, she develops an Africanist counter-cultural norm centered on the novel's black southern community called The Quarters. Touching upon traditionally taboo associations between white women and black men, Haynes also develops fascinating ways to cope with her own historical white womanhood in light of the book's lynching motif, including her co-opting of male Jewish identity. This chapter will also explore attacks the author has received for writing from a black male character's perspective (particularly that of protagonist Even Grade and his fatherly foil, Canaan Mosley). Chapter IV will also address Haynes' somewhat questionable attempts to develop her characters' identities beyond typical stereotypical borders of race and sexuality.

Bellow's and Haynes' novels contest racial borders that depend on black-white difference; Victor Hernández Cruz's works dissolve those same borders in the

performance of ethnic identity. His is an identity of multiple magic circles. The poet's poems "Mesa Blanca" and "White Table" feature, not just the re-invention of tangible places, but the reinvention of historical spaces and people erased in time. His poems' settings are literally possessed with spirits and ethnic identities that converge and diverge in the person of Latino-hood and its ethnic trinity of *mestizaje*, which incorporates the complex melding of European (white), indigenous, and African influences. On one level, Cruz's earlier roots in the Black Arts Movement trouble the ways literary communities define membership. This is particularly crucial because Cruz uses his Latino identity as a source of shared blackness and community building within both the African American literary community and a more recently cohered Latino community. On another level, Cruz's poetry also reveals radical breaches, not just in black-white power dynamics, but in the very formation of blackness itself as a fixed ideal. Both whiteness and blackness fail as exclusive concepts of authentic racial identity in his poems' multi-dimensional spaces. These poetic openings expose, instead, alternate, multi-faceted forms of Africanist identity present even during the earlier Black Arts Movement. Cruz's African-American identity is defined in language, music, and history, not biology. This transformation takes place across three versions of "White Table"/"Mesa Blanca" published in three publications with radically different cultural orientations and audiences: the African American journal *Callaloo*, dedicated to black diaspora literature and culture; the universal Latino poetry anthology *Paper Dance*; and Cruz's own poetry collection *Panoramas*, steeped in indigenous Puerto Rican heritage.

As the conclusion to this project will later suggest, a need still exists to address the problematic thing called blackness ever circulating between the written page and the

tangible, manifold places where American lives unfold. However, this mandate cannot fall upon African American communities and their literary extensions alone (which are also constantly changing and evolving). The pages that follow will reveal just how these three writers—Bellow, Haynes and Cruz—have taken up that challenge, beginning with Saul Bellow and his quirky critique of America’s false hunger for racial purity and white privilege in *Henderson the Rain King*.

CHAPTER II

THE VISIBLE MAN: THE UNDOING OF WHITENESS IN

SAUL BELLOW'S *HENDERSON THE RAIN KING*

Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips—Isa 6:5, ASV.

In its earlier stages, this project was evaluative. I wanted to explore the African American literary tradition's revisionist impact (if any) on contemporary non-black American authors. I wanted to examine the ways that the African American tradition has influenced how contemporary writers constructively manipulate blackness as figurative tropes on one hand, and as actual representations of Africanist people on the other. After all, it would be disappointing to find that, after the birth of such a powerful literary movement, no change has occurred in ways American writers' have been rehearsing significantly negative representations of blackness for generations within a larger national literary tradition. Since my starting point, I have discovered a peculiar company of writers from varying backgrounds. These writers' works align with segments of the African American tradition to redress skewed portrayals of people of African descent as well as the proliferation of negative Africanist images. As my research has evolved and its scope expanded, trends have also surfaced—as my chosen writers have rethought racialized blackness, they have also challenged an opposing racialized whiteness and its baggage (white supremacy and privilege). I have come to a significant conclusion from the very beginning of this study. Given the great degree of interdependency, radical revision of blackness demands the radical dismantling of racialized whiteness. Saul Bellow and his novel *Henderson the Rain King* are no exception. Like many preceding

scholars, I would love have begun my analysis of Bellow's novel exploring the pungent Africanisms so prominent in the book's second half. Indeed, Bellow prepares an elaborate imaginary African setting for perusal; moreover, this space hosts Bellow's most extensive treatment of black characters, far more detailed than even his infamous black pickpocket in the novel *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. However, I cannot ignore Bellow's prominent staging of a prospering yet bankrupt 1950s American whiteness in the person of protagonist, Eugene Henderson. This social space occupies the first third of the novel. Here, through Eugene Henderson, Bellow not only critiques the blackness of the text's racialized and often racist images, but also the whiteness that produces them. Bellow thoroughly deconstructs whiteness throughout the first third of *Henderson the Rain King* to prepare the way for a reinterpretation of blackness in the novel's latter half. For Bellow, Henderson represents a 1950s white American mind that halts at a crossroad—one that recognizes the superficial workings of race and ethnicity, but that is not completely willing to forgo white privilege to embrace equality both on its home front and aboard. Conversely, a controversial Bellow represents the authorial mind willingly destroying racial divisions even as his novel's main character attempts to maintain undue racial license and social authority that were thorns in an early 1950s postwar era United States.

Critics consistently label Saul Bellow the “most American of writers” who masterfully captures quintessentially American life in his novels (Cronin and Siegel 242). Whatever that life might be, Bellow's characters are usually resilient individualists who constantly seek a higher good—power and freedom from an isolated, depressing modern American existence. These ideals conveniently mirror those national “characteristics”

white American writers have conventionally explored and often “championed” through what Toni Morrison calls “strangled” literary representations of blackness or “Africanisms” (Morrison 5).¹⁴ When one takes into account Bellow’s own national identification as an “American” writer and not a “Jewish” American author, his works become contemporary post-war American literature reified and ripe for racial analysis. After all, “national” literatures like Bellow’s not only *describe* their cultures, but also *inscribe* what is on the “national mind” (Morrison, *Playing* 14). Throughout *Rain King*, Bellow clearly inscribes a particular racial consciousness onto his American readership’s imagination, even if his novel’s greater message is not a racial statement (Singh 25).¹⁵ Among his fifteen novels, *Rain King*’s central character Eugene Henderson is Bellow’s only white protestant protagonist. Furthermore, as mentioned, Bellow sends Henderson to the dark continent as “an American Hero on a quest for rebirth” (Lawless 157). The novel’s black-white dynamics are undeniably deliberate, but Bellow’s novel does not rehash the typical racial exploitation historically present in American literature.

Anticipating whiteness studies by almost thirty-five years, Bellow does not establish whiteness as “the default sign of Americanness” as Carol Smith suggests in “The Jewish Atlantic—The Development of Blackness in Saul Bellow” (267). Rather, Bellow critiques whiteness as a default sign of Americanness. George Lipsitz observes that white is “very hard to see,” despite its ubiquitous nature. “It never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social or cultural relationships” (1). Bellow challenges the illusory status of white personage as non-raced race and of white privilege as its natural outgrowth, both issues that Richard Dyer takes up in the essay “The Matter of Whiteness.” Dyer also suggests that whiteness is insidious

because it presents itself as racelessness, as a natural given that escapes ethnic or racial marking (Dyer 10). This white invisibility underpinned Jim Crow laws and other restrictions that legally separated ethnic groups along a continuum: whiteness represented the benchmark, blackness the absolute nadir, and other identities gradations of purity or pollution between the two extremes.¹⁶ As much as this unseen force permeated 1950s American culture, the Civil Rights Movement began the process of making these racial dynamics and their effects on Africanist populations far more visible, but how visible was the movement's presence within *Henderson the Rain King*?

To be American in the late 1950s was to be aware of the American Negro question, even if that awareness extended only as far as a television screen or a newspaper headline. Racial strife played itself out as a sometimes collapsing, sometimes widening divide between black and white America throughout the decade. By the time Bellow had published *Henderson the Rain King* in 1959, the American Civil Rights Movement was well underway.¹⁷ One would expect our realist writer, dubbed the “imaginative historian” (Cronin and Siegel iix), to address the racial revolution as part of the American cultural landscape in *Rain King*. After all, in every other novel, Bellow has specialized in capturing the reality of American life coursing through its urban streets, nooks and crannies. Carol Smith takes to task Bellow's “significant and underscored omissions” of black American figures in three of his works including *Rain King* (C. Smith 264). She reads the combination of social absences and racialized stereotypes in *Rain King* as Bellow's attempt to establish a simplified white American identity. Bellow distances blackness from American-ness, claims Smith, and “deploys” it elsewhere (in Africa) away from the great white melting pot. Though astute, Smith's claims rely on

reading Saul Bellow personally as an American Jew with heavy investments in his white identity; Jewishness supposedly acts “as a sign of elective immigration” that affords access to racial privilege (C. Smith 257-8). Smith’s critique erroneously conflates Bellow’s status as a white man with that of his white characters and pretty much misreads his very different set of authorial aims within *Rain King*. As Toni Morrison suggests, readings like Smith’s have the potential to “rob” literature of the “difficult, arduous work writers do” to create art and “unhobble the imagination” from the demands of “racially inflicted” language (*Playing 9*, 13). We must tease out a distinction between Bellow and Henderson before we move deeper into our discussion of the *Rain King*. If the book’s audience reductively reads Bellow’s whiteness as shorthand for his work’s message, readers could altogether overlook or misinterpret Bellow’s critique of whiteness and simultaneous revamping of blackness.¹⁸

Admittedly, to misread Saul Bellow’s stances on race is not difficult. Many view Bellow himself as a partaker of undue social license to the point of racism. In fact, the writer’s legendary offensive bluntness on racial matters makes Bellow a most unlikely candidate for my study. During the latter half of his life, this man frequently bemoaned what he saw as nationally compromised freedom of opinion and lost social openness at the hands of correctness and “ethnic protection” (Cronin and Siegel 243). Bellow also made many fairly negative assessments of black-Jewish relations expressed in interview after interview, including David Remnick’s infamous 1994 *New Yorker* conversation with the author.¹⁹ Even as recently as 2007, Bellow’s reputation foiled a posthumous Chicago street renaming in the novelist’s honor. A city alderperson did not feel comfortable with what she felt were Bellow’s very public, potentially racist past

statements (Ahmed and Grossman). To what degree could such a man extend any goals of the African American literary tradition? Bellow's comments were and still are incendiary for many, but they are salient to this literary discussion and toward distinguishing Bellow's views.

To a certain degree, I cannot resolve certain peculiar aspects of Bellow's person. His understandings of and reactions toward race were at times messy, contradictory, and in short, human. I am not an apologist for the writer, but I also see in Bellow a transitional figure very much so willing to grapple with race on ground where the proverbial angels dare not tread, even if those attempts were not always successful. Most of us have not completely figured out race, nor have we resolved every racist tendency that often guides us, but to observe issues among a raced group as Bellow did in the notorious Hyde Park episode is not necessarily racist in nature. In this instance, Bellow accused "minorities and liberals with vested interests" of covering up escalating crime statistics in his beloved Hyde Park neighborhood. He complained, "a black administration doesn't want the crime rate known lest it be given a racial interpretation. I don't belong to the community of the blind" (Cronin and Siegel 234). On a blunt level, Bellow addresses a taboo—the very complex, still thoroughly unexplored connection between race, poverty, and crime that scholars Sampson and Wilson describe as mired "in an unproductive mix of controversy and silence." According to Sampson and Wilson, even crime experts are "loath to speak openly on race and crime for fear of being misunderstood or called racist" (177). In this case, Bellow avoids reducing his neighborhood phenomenon to a reductively racialized reading. Bellow's Hyde Park statement—"lest it be given a racial interpretation"—reveals a man whose view of race

is far more open than the typical racist fare. Two factors could shed light on Bellow's comments: Bellow's Jewish identity and his relationship with writer Ralph Ellison.²⁰

Saul Bellow of the 1950s was a man consciously negotiating the black-white spectrum as a liberal Jewish Other. He clearly identified with Others and Othering. Though one cannot simply dismiss a certain degree of privilege that Bellow's whiteness affords him, Bellow freely acknowledged that his Jewish ethnic difference was socially tangible even though his personal stance appears so invisible in the first half of *Rain King*. In one interview, he reported feeling the "effrontery" of announcing himself to the WASP world as a writer (Cronin and Siegel 62). He also cited the fear of being "put down as a foreigner...an interloper" who, as the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, was not expected to master the "right *feeling*" to produce Anglo Saxon English (Bloom 294). Judging from the novelist's personal letters and writings, again, Bellow emphasized his status as an "aristocratic pariah" among whites while forging associations and solidarity with other races. A prominent element of this study delves into what I have termed kinships between non-black authors and writers of the African American literary tradition. In this case Bellow maintained close ties to the renowned Ralph Ellison, author of the canonical work *Invisible Man* and influential lifelong friend of Bellow's until Ellison's death in 1994.

Though Bellow met Ellison much earlier, Bellow's relationship with Ellison intensified in the mid fifties, coincidentally a time of great collaboration between black and Jewish communities during the postwar Pre-Civil Rights Movement. Both Cheryl Greenberg's study *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish relations in the American Century* and Murray Friedman's *What Went Wrong?: The Creation & Collapse of the Black-*

Jewish Alliance suggest that the social ascendancy of Jews during this time and the similar historical struggles between African Americans and their Jewish counterparts facilitated cross cultural alliances between the two groups. This era of cooperation was so great that infamous Mississippi Senator and Governor Theodore Bilbo reportedly declared that the “niggers and Jews of New York” were “working hand in hand” (Friedman 131). Murray Friedman even suggests that the Civil Rights Era would never have bloomed if black leaders had not partnered with influential, liberal Northern Jewish groups composed of many former members of the Communist Party who had become disillusioned and were in need of a cause (158). Bellow appears to have been this model liberal northern Jew. He was a former member of the Communist Party and ever vocal about some cause. Nevertheless, though this political climate may have facilitated goodwill between the two groups, Bellow’s lifelong relationship with Ellison seems to have developed less from racial solidarity than from a shared love of writing.

In the preface to Ellison’s *Collected Essays*, Bellow reflects on his and Ellison’s status as ethnic outsiders in their then predominately white Protestant New York writers’ circle: “The presence of a Jew or Negro in any group is apt to promote a sense of superiority in those who—whoever else—are neither Jews nor Negroes” (Callahan x). Having a black friend is not a reasonable substitute for racial consciousness, but as Ralph Ellison himself writes, “People are connected by tastes and sensibility. An intellectual’s environment is shaped by other intellectuals” (Graham and Singh 106). A mutual respect for the writing craft bonded the two men well beyond both racial difference and Bellow’s latter, seemingly contradictory stances on race. Ellison crowned Bellow the “able successor” to “the supreme American novelist” William Faulkner (Rampersad 314).

Equally celebratory, Bellow declared that among the decade's writers only Ralph Ellison showed potential—Ellison “was not limited in his interest to the race problem. He was an artist” (Callahan xi).²¹ At times, Ellison's and Bellow's views were as intimately connected as the men and their families, who intermittently shared a “slummy mansion” in Dutchess County, New York, from the late 1950s until 1961. According to Ellison's biographer Arnold Rampersad, Bellow “fed aesthetically on the world he lived in “and often “mined, or plundered, the lives of friends for the sake of his stories” (512). Considering the two men's mutual esteem and personal proximity, Bellow likely absorbed much more from Ellison than the ability to brew good coffee as one of Bellow's favorite stories implies—“He had a great deal to teach me; I did my best to learn,” said Bellow (Rampersad 377). The same could be true of how Ellison potentially influenced Bellow's views on race and ethnicity. Years later Bellow still reminisced on being able to “say anything and just speak freely” with Ellison about race (Cronin and Sigel 295). These exchanges and Bellow's Jewishness could also have rendered an equally tangible influence on Ellison's authorial imagination: a wonderful case of serendipity arises between the two in the midst of an American WWII era. Ellison's first inspiration for a novel was not the now canonical *Invisible Man*'s plot, but rather the story of a black WWII soldier who, after being imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, becomes the spokesperson for his fellow white captives (Graham and Singh 338). These points of intersection warrant further exploration of Ellison's racial stances and of the possible impact on Bellow's character development within *Henderson the Rain King*.

Much like Bellow's, Ellison's perspective on race veered from the beaten path. For the writer, race was often tangent to greater national and artistic urges. Repeatedly,

Ellison writes of his “struggle to stare down the deadly and hypnotic temptation to interpret the world and all its devices in terms of race” (Graham and Singh 103). Ellison’s comment contains the same germ of Bellow’s Hyde Park statement—that American life’s realities, the good, bad and ugly so intimately connected to ethnicity, could be read both as race and beyond race. Even in his personal identity politics, Ralph Ellison often claimed a “mixed” background. He does not refer to racial miscegenation as one might assume, but to a mixed national and cultural identity as “American, Negro American,” and Oklahoman “pioneer” who grew up feeling he could be whomever he “would and could be” (Callahan 54-6)—the same sentiments Americanist Bellow expressed at several points throughout his life under the influence of his Russian, Jewish parents who had immigrated, first to Canada, and then to the United States in search of a better life.²²

If the two writers shared nationalist bearings, they also shared less than favorable receptions because of their views on race and culture. One critic suggested “American dream propaganda” and “individualism” had seduced a naïve Ellison” while another charged that an “unsatisfiable ‘great white master’ had taken up residence in Ellison’s black superego”—accusations similar to those leveled against Bellow, the supposed “apolitical” elitist, quasi-racist (Morel 23; Cronin and Siegel 129). Unfortunately, some critics have misjudged Ellison’s nonconformity and labeled Ellison a race betraying “Uncle Tom,” somehow “less black” than other Negro writers of his day (“Racial Politics” 46). Nevertheless, Bellow and Ellison strongly identified as patriots and genuinely believed that America was a place of self-determinism where one is free to succeed or, as Bellow’s father taught him, “run one’s self into the ground or improve your chances,” regardless of ethnic identity (Cronin and Siegel xiii).

Ellison's stance on race was no more a rejection of himself or of his own brown skin than Bellow's identification as a American was a rejection of his Jewishness. Ellison's position honored cultural richness and what he saw as human experience, the same gritty human experience Bellow celebrates in his antihero protagonists. As a result, Ellison refused to use the then popular label "black" in his discourse much like Bellow frequently insisted that he was not a Jewish American writer trying to write like a Jew, but rather was an American writer who happened to be of Jewish origin (Cronin and Siegel 90-1). Earlier, I mentioned Carol Smith's critique of Bellow's failure to validate the Civil Rights Movement. In a similar vein, Ellison also critiqued the Civil Rights movement. Eschewing an increasing emphasis on blackness during the Civil Rights era, in a *New York Times* Interview Ellison lamented over the

...attempts to define Negroes by their pigmentation, not their culture.

What makes you a Negro is having grown up under certain cultural conditions, of having undergone an experience that shapes your culture... a body of folklore, a certain sense of American history...our psychology and the peculiar circumstances under which we have lived...our cuisine...forms of expression. I speak certain idioms; this is also part of the concord that makes me Negro. (Graham and Singh 101)

Ellison's definition of African American identity closely reflects the redefinition of Jewish American identity during the postwar era as social practice and not as an exclusive physical given.²³ In both cases, ethnic identity becomes a flexible cue determined, not just biologically, but more so by cultural practice. For Ellison common idiosyncrasies, shared historical reception, and experience shaped "Negroness" more than

anything. This cultural contribution led Ellison to write about the cultural exploitation and importance of African American contributions to the development of an American identity some forty years before Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark*.²⁴ In the essay "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," Ellison describes "the whole of American life as a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant" (Callahan 85). The essay goes on to examine multiple offerings African Americans have made to American culture and arts. Though he is not the first to do so, he effectively becomes one of the earliest to critique the dependency of this country's culture upon blackness as an expressive outlet. A similar impulse spills into Ellison's critique of blackness as an American cultural phenomenon in his masterpiece *Invisible Man*. Bellow conveys like-minded sentiments through his critique of the United States' exploitive international policies towards African countries in *Rain King*. How, though, does Ellison's critique function on a textual level?

Russell Nash describes Ellison's master work *Invisible Man* as "a social protest novel and a complex work of modern art." The book acknowledges the falsity of "white-Negro stereotypes" in a way that "is neither conservative apology nor crusading pamphlet" (Nash 351).²⁵ On a textual level, realist Ellison strips racial cues and stereotypes of their value throughout *Invisible Man*, but not by avoiding these stereotypes. Neither does Ellison present saccharine alternatives. No romantic black or white ideals exist in *Invisible Man*—no idyllic Negro saviors, no great white hopes, no sacrificing martyrs, nor unmerited sufferers, not even in the person of the unnamed narrator whose status as a great orator of the masses develops by accident instead of as a noble calling.²⁶ Instead of the traditionally positive, socially acceptable credits-to-their-

race characters so often associated with revisionist texts, Ellison unleashes a spectrum of Africanist images from high to low. Many of them (if not all) are puns on the most egregious, racist American stereotypes. Readers meet black personas from the incestuous dirt poor farmer Trueblood and self-invested, upper-echelon college president Bledsoe, to the street hustling pimp Rinehart and idealist Afrocentric revolutionary Ras the Exhorter. These characters are distinct thumbprints of blackness, individuals with personal motives and states of being that resist being interpreted as a monolithic blackness or representative of all African American culture. In a surreal, “reefer” induced high, *Invisible Man*’s protagonist sums up these characters’ impact in a sermon on the “blackness of black.” Blackness is pretty much everything and nothing. Blackness “is” and it “ain’t.” Black will “git you...an’ black won’t,” and just the same, it will “make you...and un-make you” (Ellison 10-1). In other words, blackness is not one consistent thing or a singular human expression, but is rather a jumble of likenesses and contradictions, appearing identical at times, yet fundamentally different at other moments, much like the narrator and his street thug doppelganger Rinehart.²⁷

White characters fair no better in *Invisible Man*. As Ellison intentionally activates black and white extremes in his work, these Caucasian figures expose equally negative aspects of humanity tied to race, whiteness in particular—greed, racialized ignorance, self-investment, and political exploitation. In his youth, *Invisible Man*’s unnamed speaker quickly discovers that everything white is not what he expects it to be. As basic interpretations often point out, the drunken white racist pillars of the community in the “Battle Royal” section of *Invisible Man* are far from the dignified bunch the narrator anticipates when he arrives to deliver a scholarship speech at a supposedly prestigious

event. He enters to discover an orgy of strippers and a makeshift boxing tournament in which he must savagely fight. Ellison's corruption of whiteness finds a match in the intellectually inept white engineers of Liberty Paint. The protagonist comes to understand that this purportedly intellectually superior group cannot produce its signature symbolic optic white paint without blackness—the symbolic maintenance man Brockway in the paint factory's allegorical basement. The entire allegorically pressured, white producing enterprise teeters on the verge of explosion and ultimately self-destructs without proper black aid and cooperation.

Later in life, after becoming far more experienced and educated in the arbitrariness of race, Ellison's protagonist becomes a pawn to whiteness yet again. He acts as a token district spokesperson for the manipulative Brotherhood, a white communist group that plots to incite a deadly race riot and sacrifice both the narrator and black Harlem for a supposed greater struggle. The group overreaches its bounds to serve its own supposedly revolutionary purposes, not the (Africanist) people's moral or "emotional" good. The organization's a-racial, scientific structure degrades into nothing more than a masquerading whiteness that privileges itself over a communal black lamb to the slaughter (the same presumptive, antiquated views the group hypocritically vows to disrupt). Even Brother Jack, initially the protagonist's ally, proves to be an outright racist whose glass eye represents a lack of physical and social vision. All of these white characters' traits split into numerous examples of failed white supremacy and questionable privilege for Ellison's *Invisible Man*. These same slivers later coalesce in humorous but telling ways to shape protagonist Eugene Henderson's whiteness in

Bellow's *Rain King*. One of Ellison's characters, however, provides a more apt parallel to Henderson than the rest.

Bellow's protagonist Henderson and another of Ellison's white characters in *Invisible Man* share so many similarities that I am tempted to cite Mr. Norton, HBC college benefactor and trustee, as a potential influence for Henderson's character development.²⁸ Even among Ellison and Bellow's shared intellectual community, Norton struck a resounding chord. Kenneth Burke admitted that Ellison's work provoked Burke in his own thinking to "look for traces of unconscious Nortonism," which Kenneth Warren defines as the habit of white "allies" projecting "their individual pathologies onto blacks under the guise of helping them" (Warren 31). Both Norton's and Henderson's great quests to discover their fates among black people occur because loss and powerlessness confront these men. Neither can master these challenges through wealth and material goods alone, perks of white privilege. Norton in particular cannot save his daughter who has died of a sudden illness that he initially ignores. By financing the college's mission and taking on "the white man's burden" of uplifting the raced masses (Ellison 37), Norton assuages his guilt. Norton also gains the redemptive power he covets in the school's great black Founder, the "power of a king...of a god" who "had...tens of thousands of lives...dependent upon his ideas and upon his actions...your whole race" (44-5). Having lost hope for a continued lineage through his own child, Norton now reproduces himself through the fledgling Negro students to insure his own legacy, not theirs. He admits, "I am dependent upon you to learn my fate. Through you and your fellow students I become...and construct a living monument to my daughter" (45). Through Norton, Ellison provides one of many strong examples of how whites

“colonize” black minds through education. As bell hooks observes, the powers-that-be have little regard for the deeper well-being of the learning subjects in question (*Killing Rage* 109). Though Norton claims that the young black narrator is his destiny, the trustee does not even remember the young man by the novel’s end. Ellison’s protagonist becomes another indistinguishable Negro in the train station. H. William Rice reads Norton’s forgetfulness as a perfect example of one type of invisibility at play in Ellison’s novel—the invisibility of blackness to the white world that seeks itself (49). Bellow extends this invisibility in *Rain King* through his protagonist Eugene Henderson. Like Norton, Henderson casts himself as a type of great white benefactor to the masses to redeem himself and regain power he has lost. Eugene Henderson also embodies a larger metaphorical statement about a white American culture ever trying to extend itself through Others at the expense of the socially invisible.

Throughout *Rain King*, Bellow utilizes the same confrontational, racialized characterizations found in Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the same rhetorical uses of stereotypes that lead critics to misread Bellow’s intentions as racist. Bellow devotes the greatest measure of this technique to his development of *Rain King*’s protagonist, who is a larger than life, walking offense. Eugene Henderson embodies not just the tenacity of the American spirit but the ambivalence of a larger 1950s white American culture, especially towards ethnicity and race. Martin Halliwell paints the United States of the 1950s as caught “between past and future” in a great sense of “optimism along with gnawing fear of doomsday bombs, of great poverty in the midst of unprecedented prosperity.” In terms of race though, the decade’s culture spewed “flowery rhetoric about *equality* along with the practice of rampant *racism* and sexism” (Halliwell 4, italics added). Like

Halliwell's America, Henderson's thought processes show a strong investment in racist assumptions. A paradox, Henderson's disdain also crosses multiple identity categories—not just race, but also class, nationality, religion and gender—to slight anyone the *Rain King's* antihero encounters. His bigotry is complex.

In many ways Henderson is a perfect case study of Ellison's "Nortonism"—a white supremacist figure who projects his own concerns and sorrows upon others for his own sake. Henderson holds such widespread prejudices and disregard for so many around him that he seems almost liberal and unbiased, if such a thing is possible. In this regard, Henderson proves no better than Ellison's white characters, though unlike the culturally refined, more subtle Norton, Henderson is the deliberate epitome of white crudeness that Bellow projects for all to read. From *Rain King's* first line, Eugene Henderson's "disorderly," racist, ethnocentric mental "rush" assaults readers as he explains why he went to Africa, a traditional bastion of blackness. Throughout the novel, Henderson's thoughts flit from Eskimos "who would starve to death because it forbidden to eat fish during Caribou season" to a host of other belittled "slum people" like the Italians and immigrants his wife Lily helps (Bellow 3, 87, 12). Among his most curious offenses, Eugene intentionally takes up pig farming to slight his Jewish military "buddy" Nicky Goldstein (20).²⁹ He is an equal opportunity bigot who, by admission, intentionally provokes or eases others at his own will and for his own purposes. Ironically, not only does Henderson reflect America's ambivalent stances toward race; he also embodies an ambiguous American whiteness that insists upon a self-defined racial purity against racial mixture of Others, even as the integrity of its authenticity falls apart.

By no coincidence, *Rain King* is Bellow's only novel to feature a white, non-Jewish protagonist. Just as Ellison's trustee Norton embodies whiteness, Bellow's Henderson is a symbolic tool that sabotages American racial purity. However, Eugene Henderson's racially ambiguous state and animalistic physicality are, much like his bigotry, far more complex.³⁰ Indeed, Henderson is hardly ignorant of the arbitrariness of his own precarious physical status as a privileged white man. Henderson does not possess Trustee Norton's stereotypically fair Caucasian features so often held up as the hallmarks of white privilege and justification for racial superiority.³¹ Early on, Henderson willfully describes himself as having "hair like Persian lamb's fur," "suspicious eyes," "a great nose," and "color like a gipsy" (Bellow 4-5). Consistently from that point on, Henderson makes multiple references to himself as "dark" (16). His face fills "full of country color" and "blackness" with every mood swing (12, 29). Bellow, in essence, biologically ethnicizes Henderson and collapses the distinctions between whiteness and Otherness. This vital move sets up Bellow's critique of American's white difference and biased policies towards Africa in the latter portion of *Rain King*.

Eugene's traits deepen as he ventures deeper into *Rain King's* charted "uncharted" African territories. The character Prince Dahfu remarks that Henderson's upper torso "went from crimson to black starting from the sternum and rising into the face" during an animalistic growling exercise (268). In another of several potential examples, Henderson observes that he is "growing black curls, thicker than usual like merino sheep, black" and concludes that his mind is "stimulating the growth of a new man" (272). Ellen Pifer interprets Henderson's blackening curls as Henderson's altered conscience accepting previously unreceivable love (Pifer 108). Next to skin color,

however, hair is one of the most common biological tags associated with racial othering (Pati and Pati 206). Bellow uses it to blacken the white Henderson. Indeed, Bellow tags his WASP protagonist with so many protean ethnic signals—classic Jewish stereotypes, increasing degrees of blackness, and other common racial or ethnic figures—that by the time Henderson fully engages his African adventure, Henderson’s “face have [sic] many colors...so much flesh as a big monument” (Bellow 83), as the Arnewi Queen Willatale suggests. This monument, however, is really Bellow’s jab at a flawed American whiteness that still insists on its overbearing privilege and superiority despite its adulteration. Henderson’s ethnic status proves key.

As *Rain King* proceeds, on a character level, Henderson goes to greater lengths to salvage his whiteness; conversely, on an authorial level, Bellow goes to increasing lengths to degrade racial whiteness throughout the novel, particularly through Jewish identity. Many scholars have insisted Henderson is, indeed, a Jew.³² But in her pronouncement, L.H. Goldman conversely declares, “Bellow knows what a Jew is,” and identifies Henderson as a “*proster goy*—the uncouth gentile” (Goldman 88). However, much like Henderson shakes money out of his father’s books at the novel’s beginning, Bellow intentionally shakes the value out of readily interpreted racial symbols throughout the novel—including this “*proster goy*’s” whiteness. Henderson is not a practicing Jew, but he is of tangible Jewish descent, a Converso.

Marking Henderson’s whiteness throughout *Rain King*, Bellow exposes whiteness as ethnically tangible and as arbitrarily designated as any other race or ethnicity. When readers piece together Henderson’s odd ethnic details and family history, they discover that the greater threat to Henderson’s whiteness comes from the protagonist himself.

Bellow overtly displays Jewishness over Henderson's white face and body from the first page of the novel. Henderson has tried to manage his heritage by marrying Frances, a peer within his "social" class (Bellow 4). However, she is not necessarily of his same *ethnic* group. Curiously, Henderson willingly associates himself with a number of racially charged cues, including "merino" hair. This stereotypically Jewish racial feature is also a descriptor for sheep historically associated with Spain and the wool industry in Turkey. According to Joseph F. O'Callaghan's *A History of Medieval Spain*, these countries have a significant Jewish history and at various historical points have hosted large populations of Christianized Jews. Most of these "Conversos" were forced to convert to Catholicism under threat of exile or execution. The Spanish throne's Alhambra Decree of 1492 in particular sent droves of these refugees to Turkey and other countries. There, many continued to live, some continuing to practice their faith, all the while hiding their Jewish ancestry, even from their unsuspecting children who unknowingly adhered to loose Jewish rituals and cultural practices for generations. These same practices surface in Henderson's actions. For example, Henderson has a strong sexual aversion towards Lily on the grounds that she had her period (the refusal to interact with an unclean woman). Beyond these subtle practices, another detail throughout *Rain King's* first half lends weight to this study's reading of Henderson's Converso Jewish descent.

Historically, gentile populations and resistant Jewish observers often called Jewish Christian converts "Marranos." This Spanish word literally means "swine" or "pig" but developed a connotative meaning "pork eater" (Schloss 135).³³ The label became a pejorative term associated with Conversos and "secret Jews" who would, among other things, defy Jewish dietary restrictions and eat pork as an outward show of

devotion to Christianity. This defiance was especially important during times of intense persecution when distinctions between non-converting Jews and these Christianized Jews determined life itself. This historical information directly connects to the phrase “pigman” which Henderson uses throughout *Rain King* to describe himself. Furthermore, as mentioned, Henderson has adopted a radical pig raising hobby to distance himself from his closest Jewish acquaintance, Nicky Goldstein. This detail also reasonably explains Henderson’s hyper-Christian rhetoric that conforms to neither its Judaic or Christian foundations.

Scholars like L.H. Goldman who reject Henderson’s Jewishness often point to first to Henderson’s proud lineage of WASP patriarchs as definitive proof of his white protestant ancestry (Goldman 88). To my knowledge, no scholar has ever seriously examined Henderson’s family eccentrics from a *racial or ethnic* perspective nor, more importantly, from a gendered standpoint. Eugene mentions, for example, an ancestor who thinks he is “oriental” and becomes a Boxer Rebellion soldier. This Henderson family forerunner could easily have deemed himself Asian because of his dark skin color and not because of mental illness as Eugene Henderson implies when he describes this ancestor as “loony” (Bellow 86). Henderson’s mother is also a great cipher through the novel. *Rain King* contains scant accounts of the protagonist’s maternal lineage, the very ancestry used to determine Jewish identity.³⁴ Because Henderson, as a character, focuses on the workings of his white patriarchal power and influence throughout *Rain King*, readers could easily overlook Henderson’s mother’s presence. Though Henderson speaks fondly of her, he never even mentions her name.³⁵ Readers receive subtle snatches of information about this figure who lay prostrate on the floor before her husband’s

bedroom door for two weeks, yet who also wrote poetry in the “brick Cathedral of Albi” (13), a historical site of significant Jewish community and a great massacre. By no coincidence, she also toured Russia in 1905 (Bellow 25, 15, 263), a period of numerous anti-Jewish pogroms that resulted in thousands of Jewish deaths and massive waves of Jewish emigration from Russia into other nations, including the United States.³⁶

Ironically, Henderson’s mother even makes a joke about an encounter in Albi and goes about whispering “passez”(“You Pass”)—another allusion in *Rain King* to ethnic passing, the willful taking on of an alternate racial identity, usually for some perceived gain or privilege. The advantages that passing gains for her are the same wealth and unearned social standing that Henderson flaunts.

Henderson heavily invests in the gains from white social order. George Lipsitz calls this “possessive investment in whiteness,” a system in which white people are “encouraged to invest in whiteness, to remain true to an identity that provides them with resources, power and opportunity” (Lipsitz vii). In her canonical essay “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” McIntosh suggests that society does not teach most whites to see the advantages that whiteness affords them. However, much like the more reserved, wealthy Norton, the “uncouth gentile” Henderson is very much aware of his benefits.

Furthermore, Henderson acknowledges he has done nothing in and of himself to sustain this unmerited privilege. “I, the sole heir of this famous name and estate, am a bum,” he confesses (Bellow 6). Henderson suggests that he is simply born into his destiny as if it were a natural, biological given beyond even class and wealth—a falsely naturalized whiteness.³⁷ Nonetheless, Henderson also understands how money and lineage, his self-proclaimed status as “a man of wealth and an aristocrat...and an American citizen,”

benefit him in what bell hooks calls a “white supremacist capitalist patriarchal” system that promotes his myth of superiority (Bellow 131; hooks, *Killing Rage* 16).³⁸ Oddly enough, Eugene Henderson’s sense of white superiority operates differently from his literary predecessor, Norton. Self-righteous investments in Negro students (gratitude and indebtedness from the black masses) reproduced the earlier mentioned Norton’s authority and maintained the illusion of false distance between blackness and whiteness in *Invisible Man*. Henderson relies, oddly enough, upon other whites and racial proximity to bolster his own brand of false superiority. His sense of whiteness hides behind no true moral compass or sense of altruism in the first third of *Rain King*.

As Peggy McIntosh, bell hooks, and George Lipsitz have suggested, wealth and capitalism, as well as patriarchal power, are vital elements to white race privilege. True to this observation, Henderson’s heaviest, earliest social investment in whiteness materializes in his marriage ties. Early in the novel, Bellow introduces Henderson’s “big” and “beautiful” white lover Lily, who eventually becomes his second wife. This red head is physically the whitest character in the entire novel besides Henderson’s perfectly white, Protestant first wife Frances, who is a “handsome...elegant, sinewy” woman with “golden hair, slender arms, private, fertile and quiet” (4). Bellow constantly associates Lily with physical paleness and the words “pure” and “white” to the point of fetish (15, 17, 26). Although his words emerge from a postcolonial context, Frantz Fanon’s discussion of desire for the white woman is apropos here. He argues that “the quest for white flesh” stems from a desire to be “acknowledged” as white (*Black Skin* 81). “What else but a white woman can do this for me?” writes Fanon. “By loving her she proves...I am a white man.” For Fanon, that “man” not only marries the woman, but also “white

culture, white beauty, *white* whiteness. When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine” (63). In this case, Lily, who smells curiously of “fresh baking,” is consumable goods for Henderson (Bellow 10). Her very presence and physical availability to her lover and husband make Henderson whiter. Ironically, however, as much as Henderson obsesses over Lily’s whiteness, a conflict over her ethnic status also permits Bellow to expose whiteness even further as a sham, a social construction.

Throughout *Rain King*, Henderson spites his “Lily-white” wife every chance he gets, especially in front of other affluent whites, but why? In an exchange with his spouse over her ethnicity, Henderson explains, “Lily thought I had a prejudice about her social origins...I had no such prejudice. It was something else” (Bellow 34). This “something else” seems to be Lily’s desire, not for equal recognition and valuation of her German-Irish American identity, but for equal recognition as a *white* American with an equal share in the privilege that Henderson values yet ironically scorns. As a German, Lily is a representative enemy of the post-WWII United States. Moreover, as an Irish descendent, Lily falls short of the ethnic mark. She is in outright violation of WASP standards, in that, most obviously, the Irish have long represented the Catholic or religiously ethnic Other in an American Protestant culture. In addition, as works such as Theodore Allen’s *The Invention of Whiteness* have suggested, the Irish were also late additions into the coveted halls of whiteness. They were traditionally marked as racial Others from the earliest points of English history, along with other marked white populations including Scots, the Italian, the Polish, and Jews, to name a few.

As the novel continues, whiteness cannot even maintain its own internal racial standards within the novel. Lily's desire to attain a certain status even becomes a point of strife between Henderson and his son Edward, who roughly reminds Henderson of Lily's white Otherness during a disagreement. In a dispute about "family background" (125), Edward wields Lily's physically undetectable German-Irish ethnicity as ammunition, counterattacking with a simple but weighty question: "What about Lily?" (125). This one question equates stepmother Lily to Edward's Latina fiancée Maria, whom Henderson insinuates might be an illegal, in terms of ethnic acceptability and citizenship. Once more, Lily's contradictory position as the bearer of physical whiteness draws even greater attention to flawed reasoning behind racial designations and a contemporary American culture's elevation of whiteness. Though she bears the bodily presence of ideal whiteness, cultural association still categorizes Lily as an outsider; meanwhile, a visibly marked Henderson enjoys the full privileges of his social whiteness even though his physical appearance defies racial standards of whiteness. Whiteness (which forever tries to cast itself as a monolithic whole, impenetrable, all powerful and uncompromised) splinters. Left are false racial gradations that violate the pure difference upon which an entire hegemonic white American racial system depends to maintain privilege and exploit Others.

Lily's most overt move towards white acceptance occurs in a symbolic episode when she requests that Henderson hang her portrait in the family room among Henderson's respectable WASP ancestors. Lily eagerly tries to justify her whiteness and its corresponding privilege with this status symbol, this painting hung among a supposedly proven white lineage. Both she and Henderson understand, as Allan Johnson

notes in the “Paradox of Privilege,” that although the individual enjoys white privilege, the group confers its benefits. In response to Lily, Henderson complains that, “Nobody truly occupies a station in life any more. There are mostly people who feel they occupy the place that belongs to another by rights. There are displaced persons everywhere” (34). With this statement, Bellow taps into the contemporary racial climate and social reordering of the day that has been invisible throughout *Rain King*’s first third, in part because of Henderson’s limited ethnocentric gaze. Henderson’s statement is a direct slight, not only against the likes of Lily, but also against the Civil Rights Movement which he associates with two groups: those who want to effect equality by lowering others, and those people who, out of guilt, forfeit their coveted positions of racial authority. Ironically, Henderson symbolically drags other whites, Lily in particular, to his level but also abdicates his own position of privilege himself throughout *Rain King*. In an attempt to preserve his investment in the myth of his pure WASP ancestry yet satisfy his wife (whom he sees as lesser in status), Henderson opts to take his own portrait from the family’s wall rather than hang Lily’s and exalt her status through his white heritage. Little does he know, this one deed foreshadows his impending disassociation from his proverbial catbird seat of racial advantages.

As mentioned much earlier, within an economy of whiteness, difference is everything. Difference is the hinge upon which the system relies, especially in relationship to blackness, the socially construed antithesis of whiteness. In this regard, blackness is most valuable, even when it is virtually absent as it appears to be in the first portion of *Rain King*. Whiteness and blackness must remain separate, distinguishable, to maintain the hierarchy that gives whiteness its premium status above

all else. Although references to ethnically marked groups fill the first third of *Rain King*, Henderson's contact with various degrees of white Otherness has been so consistently favorable for him, that he has even taken great joy in flaunting his own contradictory difference. He is the very source of rowdiness and challenge against this same whiteness he values and upon which he depends. He revels in the liberty that his whiteness and wealth afford him. He is a volatile and erratic annoyance beyond reproach. For example, breaking bottles with a slingshot, Henderson intentionally antagonizes guests and staff in a luxury resort, "an elegant establishment where they accept no Jews" (7). He knows the staff will tolerate his uncouth behavior in light of his combined whiteness and social standing. Henderson constantly unpacks his "knapsack of white privileges," of "invisible...unearned assets" and "special provisions" so intimately tied to his equally demanding class privilege (McIntosh 76).

In light of Eugene Henderson's self destructive behavior, Peggy McIntosh's observation rings ironically true: white privilege can also act as a "license...for thoughtlessness" (83). Though Henderson never considers his careless behavior, racial privilege does have boundaries, as does the freedom to exploit those boundaries. Once again, on an authorial level, Bellow rhetorically manipulates racial identity and miscegenates whiteness so thoroughly in *Rain King* that not one white character remains unmarked in some way. In the same sense, Bellow also signals the waning of Henderson's white privilege. Gradually, Lily's "pure white color" darkens with the "intensity of love" (18), the threat of violence (15), and bewilderment over Henderson's mood shifts. As author, Bellow even spoils first wife Frances' whiteness with mental illness; she is schizophrenic. Bellow further taints Henderson's illustrious WASP lineage,

“a stock...damned and derided” with a feminized male suffragette “carried away in a balloon,” and, again, the previously mentioned relative who “got himself mixed up in the boxer rebellion, believing himself oriental” (86). Henderson eventually discovers that his “knapsack of white privileges,” as Peggy McIntosh would say, is running empty. He encounters a racialized presence that he cannot thoroughly contain. His experience with this entity escapes his control much like his *Invisible Man* predecessor Norton loses control in his run-in at the Golden Day social club. Just as Norton’s encounter threatens to bankrupt Norton’s special treatment as great white benefactor, Henderson’s encounter threatens his white well-being. This parallel is worth exploring.

Similar to Henderson’s social freedom, *Invisible Man*’s Norton revels in blackness for his own white superiority’s sake. The untouchable otherness of Norton’s impeccably Nordic physical whiteness and his wealth insure Norton’s privilege, even when he immerses himself as a father figure within the cultivated blackness of President Bledsoe’s Negro college world. This protection eventually fails Norton in a much analyzed scene when he imposes white privilege and power upon the driver (the narrator) to satisfy an appetite for black culture. During a ritualized sightseeing tour from campus, the white trustee desires to venture out into the nearby Negro community. He wants to see the flattering combination of black lowliness and racial upliftment that affirm his whiteness and monetary power. However, his demands eventually carry him into unknown territory. The book’s protagonist mistakenly drives beyond unspoken social borders. Blackness becomes too black in this new territory, the deeper recesses of the African American community. Here, Ellison splinters absolute blackness just as Bellow splinters absolute whiteness. The result is a power shift of great proportions.

Initially, Norton's experience in the uncharted black side of town affirms the white trustee's assumed superiority over blackness, particularly through Norton's encounter with the supposed salt-of-the-earth, dirt poor farmer Trueblood. Upon hearing the farmer's pitiful story of morally corrupting poverty and (more importantly) incest, Norton becomes overwhelmed in what many interpret as white guilt. In reality, Norton experiences patriarchal distress over a potential association with Trueblood's incestuous offenses against Trueblood's daughter. Could Trueblood and Norton be equally culpable in the demise of their daughters and under similar circumstances? This chance meeting brings about a potential parallel between the two that Norton's whiteness and wealth have prevented. At no other point within *Invisible Man* does Norton's actions or circumstances give reader the occasion to question his sentimental account of his daughter's death (an account just as rehearsed as Trueblood's story and Reverend Barbee's founder's speech). The farmer's corruption of fatherhood threatens to collapse the all important social positioning and racial difference that have hereto shielded Norton from accountability and potential accusations of incest.³⁹

Whiteness is inculpable in Norton's orchestrated world, generous, beneficial, helpful. However, another McIntosh observation speaks volumes about Norton's racial farce: white privilege can also masquerade as strength when in reality it serves as a means to escape and dominate. Exercising white privilege through his wealth and self-gratifying generosity, Norton gives Trueblood a sum of money, first to relieve Norton's own patriarchal guilt and, secondly, to reinforce Norton's class superiority over Trueblood. The trustee needs to emphasize yet ease (but not eliminate) the farmer's poor living conditions. Otherwise, the social gulf between the two might fail and expose

Norton's culpability hidden underneath Norton's campaign to uplift the black minority (purportedly in the trustee's daughter's memory). Hereafter, however, Norton's white otherness and dependency on black difference dig him deeper into yet another black cultural experience he can no longer control with his own supremacist bearings and resources.

After Norton's encounter with Trueblood, Norton's physical whiteness begins to falter; his supposedly delicate health turns. The white man passively rides farther and deeper into blackness to decrease his proximity to Trueblood until Norton and the narrator find themselves at the Golden Day Social Club. In this black space, the two experience a series of events that strip away the mystery and social distance surrounding Norton's racialized white body. In short, Norton and Ellison's narrator finally come face to face with racial reality. Club prostitutes and an educated but crazed veteran overwhelming disregard "white-folks," invade Norton's personal space, and verbally expose Norton's "false wisdom" of superiority and wealth (Ellison, *Invisible* 94). Shocked into a deeper stupor, Norton must flee back to the safe, manicured confines of the Negro college campus. There he can stand once again beyond the reproach of an uncontrolled, confrontational blackness that insists on revealing to him his sham, the truth of his self-serving motives under-girding his flawed white racial performance.

Ultimately, the white trustee Norton recovers his privilege and racial distance; he only suffers a temporary breach, much like the scar he receives when he scrapes his white forehead in a fall at the Golden Day. All will heal. Furthermore, Ellison's Africanist narrator suffers the consequences of Norton's infringements upon black space and social order. College President Bledsoe expels Ellison's protagonist from school for taking

Norton beyond the safety of the campus' artificial environment to see the more questionable portions of the black community that resist the gospel of whiteness and upliftment. Eugene Henderson's fate, however, proves far more complicated in *Rain King*. He must bear the cost of his own racial burdens and social infringements when the distance between his whiteness and Otherness collide in the person of his daughter and fatherhood. Though Henderson does not commit incest, he is just as responsible for his daughter's Ricey's downfall when race, ethnicity, and her own sexuality deal her a social blow as good as death. That same blow also damages Henderson's precious WASP lineage.

Henderson's liberal white privilege goes pretty much unchallenged for the first third of *Rain King*, that is until his daughter Ricey's "colored" child arrives. Henderson's daughter has allegedly found the infant in an abandoned car on her way to school. In reality, the baby is his daughter's illegitimate offspring. Only when Henderson discovers this small stowaway in his daughter's closet, do readers begin to see the full-blown effects of Henderson's WASP mindset, the depths of his investments in his Caucasian identity, and his willingness to maintain his privilege at the expense of others. Because the racial Other has been invisible to Henderson throughout *Rain King* thus far, Henderson has willfully ignored all signs of this child's presence in his home, despite the baby's presence filling the entire house: bottles in the kitchen, infant cries screeching through the vents, Ricey's abnormally upbeat behavior and recovery from an earlier sickly state. An infant's mere illegitimacy was a major social taboo for women of the 1950s. However, this baby's ethnicity intensifies matters.⁴⁰

Within this portion of *Rain King*, Bellow invokes Africanisms through Ricey's newborn. The writer strategically taps into the African American rhetorical tradition and what readers would have recognized as common Civil Rights rhetoric of the day.⁴¹ In sly fashion, Bellow also subtly celebrates the African American rhetorical tradition much like Ellison subversively incorporates Negro spirituals, Africanist biblical allusions, and African-American oratory rhetoric throughout *Invisible Man*. (Notable is the blind Rev. Barbee's Founder's Day sermon, a performance of blackness that restores traditional racial order after Norton's breach with Trueblood and the Golden Day). In *Rain King*, Henderson eventually "steals" up the stairs to see the child while Ricey is "away," an allusion to the Negro spiritual "Steal Away." Once he sees the Ricey's "colored" baby, Henderson describes it as a "child of sorrow."⁴² Here Bellow plays off of a traditional Africanist trope that dates back to slavery: Oppressed black people become symbolic children of Israel in a socio-political Egypt of persecution (in this case the United States' crumbling systems of racism and segregation).⁴³ Like many of the Africanist tropes Bellow uses, this reference moves beyond simple tales of suffering. It alludes, instead, to a 1950s hope for a symbolic savior-liberator figure to deliver "God's" people from trials and tribulations of a segregated Jim Crow world. In Henderson's world though, there is no savior. When we read Henderson as a symbol of 1950s white America, this sleeping "child of sorrow" becomes a representation of "colored" people and their contradictory status as "native sons" and daughters. Despite their claims to kinship and having been born into citizenship, they are still denied full rights much like Henderson denies the child's kinship. "Kinship" is a key word because Henderson's white hope indirectly hinges on disproving Ricey's role in this marked infant's birth.

Rickey literally embodies Eugene Henderson's hope for a continued WASP legacy. Henderson must affirm Rickey's continued standing in white society to see his legacy become a reality. Though Eugene has five children, his WASP "social equal" Frances has mothered only three of those children, and she has taken one (presumably daughter Alice) out of the country under foreign influences and out of Henderson's reach. Of the remaining, first born Edward has rejected his father's attempts to make Edward a respectable doctor. Moreover, even before Edward's engagement to the Honduran Maria Felucca, Bellow has intimated through Edward's associations with a bathhouse in California that Edward is gay and will not produce a suitable Henderson heir to continue the family line.⁴⁴ This point becomes even more significant if we consider Henderson's comment that he feels like "the Pharaoh at the sight of little Moses" when he sees the "child of sorrow"(36). This language is very similar to Ellison's description of the founder's *God-like* power that Norton desires to possess in *Invisible Man*. In one sense Henderson is a "pharaoh" or god-like white patriarch because he controls the child's fate. Like Norton, he needs to establish a legacy to continue his name and extend the heritage of great white men whose shadows constantly loom over him. Unlike the WASP Norton, Henderson cannot rely on a rigid, pre-established racial distinction Norton has through his relationship with the black college students and President Bledsoe. Neither can Henderson rely on a veil of altruism like Norton's self-motivated generosity. For all of Henderson's erratic, taboo breaking behavior throughout the first half of *Rain King*, Eugene Henderson must concede to social order to maintain the very privilege that allows him freedom to violate the rules. Henderson must sacrifice Rickey's child as a pawn to alleviate him of his daughter's social shame. Overtly mentioned no more after this point,

the child's racial identity lingers like a pink elephant, one that eventually transforms into a scapegoat that bears away the sins of a white daughter.

An old saying suggests “mama’s baby, papa’s maybe,” but the chief concern in *Rain King* immediately shifts to establishing the “colored” child’s *maternity*, not *paternity* (another ironic twist on Henderson’s own ethnic link to Judaism and the practice of determining Jewish identity through maternal lineage). Henderson forms an alternative narrative of parentage from the baby boy’s racial appearance, and the performative myth of separation between blackness and whiteness permit it. Bellow’s plot development at this moment in the novel shares crucial theoretical ground with critic Hortense Spillers’ essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” Spillers suggests that culture exerts influence through gender differentiation. Gender expectations, sexual roles and license allot people specific powers and authorities within traditional heterosexual social orderings of men and women, even if those power and authority are limited at times (particularly for women). Moreover, these powers are intimately tied to rights of motherhood and femininity for women and to the authority of fatherhood and masculinity for men. According to Spillers, racial oppression “conflates” gendered identities of Africanist people. Black womanhood in particular becomes masculinized and “promoted” over feminized black manhood. These shifts rob Africanist people of their gendered identities. As a result, they lack the traditional cultural power associated with gendering (power that white Others typically possess and utilize advantageously). The black body becomes a reduced “thing” at once sexualized yet separated from itself, “a territory of cultural and political maneuver not at all gender-related, gender specific...disrupted by externally imposed meanings and uses”(Spillers

5). In other words, black women (and men) and their sexuality become blank slates onto which a white patriarchy can write whatever it pleases according to its own desires and convenience. In terms of literary representation, black womanhood becomes a “defenseless target,” an “endless source of metaphors for physical and biological other” (Spillers 4-5). Henderson exploits this “captured” black female sexuality and even colonizes it for his own purposes.

Just as a patriarchal shadow obscures the influence of Henderson’s mother over his identity, Henderson exercises a symbiotic patriarchal privilege over female bodies and motherhood. At the height of conflict, Henderson denies that Ricey is the mother of her mystery child and conjures up the presence of an unidentified “colored” female body detached from *its* production. The baby’s “mama wants him back. She has changed her mind, dear,” he says (Bellow 37). As mentioned, both Peggy McIntosh and bell hooks suggest that patriarchal authority is interdependent upon *and* inextricable from systems of racial oppression and the effects of whiteness (McIntosh 76; hooks, *The Will to Change* 17-8). Henderson rewrites the baby’s very corporeal and ethnic existence as a problem among women that he, the white male power figure, has to clarify. By no coincidence, Bellow as author swaddles the child in Ricey’s clothes and introduces the baby into the plot during the Christmas season. Due to Henderson’s counter-narrative, the baby now has no clear origin of birth, a direct allusion to the Immaculate Conception. The text immediately launches into competing myths of parentage: did Ricey, reportedly a “virgin...fifty times more pure than you or I,” birth the child, or has Ricey really found the infant abandoned in a car and brought it home to keep like a pet as Henderson tells us? (Bellow 36). With one proverbial stone, Henderson effectively neutralizes two

privilege compromising threats: compromised womanhood and race. Even though the schoolmistress and Lily both corroborate Ricey's claims to motherhood, Henderson's myth eclipses the combined weight of all their testimonies with his patriarchal authority so intimately tied to his whiteness. The white patriarch intervenes to do "what any other daddy would do" when he gives Ricey's baby to the local authorities and whisks Ricey away against her stepmother's wishes.

Henderson's paternal power also overshadows another participant who never appears, the Africanist man. The myth of black motherhood that Henderson conjures up eclipses any notion of the baby's potential "colored" father. Black manhood or socially ethicized masculinity becomes less than a blank slate; "he" is a non-existent, unspeakable entity in light of Ricey's white womanhood. The one source of ethnicized paternity that Henderson cannot dominate, however, is his own. As author, Bellow is showcasing the ultimate problem of ethnic passing and the falsity of racial purity—the uncontrollable, material expression of genes that travel from generation to generation to expose the well-kept secrets of those who pass. Just as P.B.S. Pinchback's Negro legacy continued to resurface in writer Jean Toomer's life story, Henderson's ancestral influence, his hidden lineage, enters into this complicated racial equation to affect both Ricey's status and his own.

Most readers assume Ricey's colored founding is black as in African American (or *Negro* to use the vogue term of Bellow's day). After all, the term "colored" has been used since the 1800s with regulatory to refer to people of full or partial African decent according to the Oxford English Dictionary.⁴⁵ Bellow is cunning, however, and capitalizes on his readers' tendencies to read race as blackness. The term "colored" here

could also be a simple descriptor of the child's skin tone in much the same way that Henderson constantly refers to himself throughout *Rain King* as dark or as having "country" *color* (Bellow 12). This mentioning sets a precedent within in the novel for an alternative reading of the term "colored" as "complexion," a much older definition the OED dates as early as the 1400s ("colour | color, n.1"). Readers are not witnessing the "blackness of black" as Ralph Ellison labels Africanist descent in *Invisible Man*. The physical "color" of the child is the blackness of Henderson's Jewish ancestry passed along to Ricey, despite Ricey's perfectly WASP mother's biological influence.⁴⁶

Through Ricey's pregnancy and the Henderson family dilemma, Bellow's text finally connects to the issue of racial strife that seems to be missing until this point. The seemingly "unkillable" Henderson confronts his own ethnic reality he has flauntingly ridiculed by choice (by social consent) throughout the novel (Bellow 6). Unlike the Nordic Mr. Norton, Henderson now enjoys no degree of separation between his white personage and the ethnic Other. Ricey's colored child is his grandchild, his legacy and flesh and blood, a reality he does not choose or control (descent) as Norton does. This issue of agency heightens when Henderson's rage drives Ricey outside of her father's sphere of influence into the white public domain. When Ricey flees with her baby to her boarding school, the school mistress finds the child. Regardless of whether Ricey is the infant's biological mother or not, regardless of whether the "colored child" is of African or Jewish descent, Ricey commits social suicide two-fold. In terms of gender and ethnicity, Ricey openly claims the baby in question as her own. This female dependent of white privilege has intimately identified herself with a socially illegitimate, overtly raced infant. The school mistress promptly expels the girl from school in disgrace, effectively

ostracizing Ricey and crippling her white standing. Although Henderson appeals to the boarding school administrator for leniency, his white privilege and wealth finally find their limits. Much like Norton's fruitless appeals to the college's President Bledsoe to have leniency on *Invisible Man's* protagonist, Henderson's appeals cannot prevail over the head mistress, who embodies the social systems that define and enforce proper place or social positioning stemming from identity. Henderson has no choice but to seek out a font of whiteness that can somehow restore Ricey to her former status. He takes the girl to her maternal aunt's home, a reconnection to his first wife Frances, whose whiteness Henderson has also co-opted (in a Spilleresque manner much like the imagined "colored" mama) to maintain his status in white male society.

Henderson consciously gets rid of his daughter's child and sends Ricey away to alleviate his own present circumstances, not just his daughter's. Lipsitz suggests that a continued commitment or "investment" in whiteness is a choice that resides in a "Presence of Mind," an "abstract of the future and precise awareness of the present...that requires an understanding of the existence and destructive consequences of the possessive investment of whiteness" on one's life (Lipsitz viii, 2). Evidently, Henderson's decisions are the wrong choices according to Bellow as writer, especially when we weigh the negative sequence of events that unfold from this point on within *Henderson the Rain King*. When readers continue to track Bellow's reinterpreted Moses conceit, the extended metaphor marks the beginning of Eugene's awareness of a "curse" over the land that has existed all along. Just what is this curse? It is a crumbling investment in the power of white supremacy and its subsequent privileges gained for whiteness' sake—a direct reflection of the crumbling racist social systems in the United States of Bellow's day.

On prior occasions when Henderson behaves erratically, his actions are deliberate, controlled, and usually directed outwardly to spite others (for example, the previously discussed luxury resort episode and Henderson's delight in abusing Lily before their wealthy white friends). Yet, Henderson experiences a genuine *inner* failure of self during his breakdown on a train following the Ricey episode. This moment is very similar to Norton's collapse in the Golden Day (in the midst of what he perceives to be black chaos threatening his white superiority and power). In *Rain King's* case, however, Henderson mirrors 1950s American culture feeling the social impact of equal rights and battling questions about white privilege that produced unmerited favor and power, the same privilege Henderson has (until now) enjoyed and from which white America had openly benefited for generations. At this moment, Henderson's body and mind fall totally beyond his will: he becomes "fuddled" to the point that he needs an attendant's assistance to get off the train. His white privilege does, however, still function to a certain degree. It prevents officers from arresting him as the station master watches Henderson thrashing around on a bench. At this moment Henderson cries, "There is a curse on this land. There is something bad going on. Something is wrong" (38). Soon wife Lily (reified whiteness) once again arrives to collect him, but, again, Lipsitz suggests that an investment in whiteness and its system of white supremacy is a choice. Having unjustly sacrificed his grandchild to salvage his white identity, Henderson experiences what Werner Sollors calls a "tension" between descent (blood ties) and consent (socially constructed ties). This struggle defines American identity (Sollors 4-6). Henderson has willingly invested himself in his whiteness and now has to cope with a very real dose of corporal, racialized reality that he cannot change. His wife suggests he just "accept" reality, but she does not

realize that their raced realities are not the same. Henderson has not only betrayed Ricey and the child. He has betrayed himself. He has also broken his lineage with his own decision making. Moreover, he has rejected his own ethnic identity hidden in his immediate offspring Ricey yet fully visible in his “colored” grandchild. Bellow carries this biblical conceit of the “curse” further as his investments in whiteness for its privileges continue to fail.

Shortly after the “curse” begins, the Henderson’s elderly white housekeeper becomes another casualty of what Henderson describes as “pestilence” (40). Though she is white, this allusion reduces Miss Lennox (part of the servant class) to the status of Egyptian *cattle*.⁴⁷ She becomes, in one sense, a defunct perk of Henderson’s wealth and failing whiteness, an embodiment of the beginning of the end of the illusory white supremacy that “keeps house” for Henderson. He depends on her to feed him and to keep his affairs in order, but like his racialized whiteness, she has been in service to his family for some time and has succumbed to the wear and tear of serving him. The housekeeper’s physical death alone, however, does not send Henderson to Africa. Initially, when Henderson finds Miss Lennox’s allegorical white body, he continues in his usual inappropriate, irreverent behavior. He does not care. Unlike his counterpart Norton who fully understands the importance of the black college to his longevity and white well-being, Henderson does not understand the connection between this woman’s welfare and his own. He places a “do not disturb” note on the dead woman’s dress and “denies any blame” in her decline and subsequent death while in service to his comfort and wealth. Soon, an epiphany hits him, but it is not a reformative “presence of mind” as Lipsitz’s borrowed phrase suggests. His racial consciousness does not change.

When Eugene enters Miss Lennox's home, among the woman's "rubbish," he finds old baby buggies that "went back to the last century, so that mine might have been there, too" (39). These artifacts buzz with his recent betrayal and reconnect Henderson to his own precarious ethnic identity, the same precarious racial façade that a white American "melting pot" was trying to resuscitate in the 1950's, well before the Civil Rights Movement had made the brunt of its impact in the mid-sixties. To trace the beginnings of Henderson's fifty-five years of charmed life is to reverse his WASP ancestry even more. The date would place him in the largest wave of Jewish immigration in the history of the United States if readers reconsider the details of Henderson's mother's "tour" of Russia that just happens to coincide with the deadly Odessa pogrom of 1905 (Weinberg 164-173; Diner 44-6).⁴⁸ His fate could easily have been that of Ricey's baby—an ethnic other forcibly cast away from a rightful family and home into lands of strange authority. This new tie threatens to bind Henderson just a little closer to a grandchild he chooses to give away, yet a little further from the whiteness he so values. Bellow's advice to his son Edward echoes in this scene: "Slavery has never really been abolished," Eugene says. "More people are enslaved to different things than you can shake a stick at" (Bellow 124). He imparts this advice to his son out of obligation, but his words are truth. Henderson is a slave to his whiteness. As Peggy McIntosh suggests, "Power from unearned privilege can look like strength when it is...permission to escape or dominate" (83). Outside of it, the life Eugene Henderson knows does not exist, and he is unwilling to entertain anything that could disrupt his racial performance. At this moment he makes yet another decision out of white self-preservation—to flee to Africa.

Scholars have offered many reasons for Henderson's trip to Africa. Peter Hyland suggests that Henderson is fleeing the deathly condition of the alienated modern man who seeks meaning in life from a spiritual wasteland (Hyland 48-9). Ellen Pifer sites the tyranny of death brought on by an inability to accept love (Pifer 96-7). Still, L.H. Goldman blames Eugene's sin consciousness of not living up to his father's expectations after Henderson's brother Dick dies (Goldman 99). Henderson's flight occurs for none of these reasons, nor does he flee the threat "of miscegenation" from his daughter and the illegitimacy of her raced child as Carol Smith suggests. Ricey and the baby are victims, bystanders within a larger unfolding conflict. As a symbol of a 1950s United States, Henderson is more than aware of the importance of miscegenation: it purifies his whiteness, particularly through marriage, just as a larger white American culture has undergone a "purifying" white essentialism against a backdrop of its "coloreds" sufferings. Henderson has relied upon miscegenation and buttressed his access to a privileged white life with it. Henderson's problem is a deeper threat that resides within himself—his own Jewish descent from which he cannot opt out and fear of a life beyond charmed white Anglo-Saxon Protestant privilege. What he fails to consider, however, is how the very human price he has already paid to racial supremacy feeds the accompanying "pestilence" he detects. The consequences of Henderson's investments in whiteness threaten his very "annihilation" (40), the end of the Henderson legacy, but he cannot fathom this. As a result, he begins his exodus to Africa, lest his heritage drag him too far beyond the pale of his white identity, lest his ethnic identity socially exclude him from the whiteness he so desires, much like a very real Jean Toomer's Negro blood placed him beyond the racelessness he sought his entire life.

In her surface assessment of Henderson's actions, Carol Smith is right. Though Henderson claims Africa is a randomly chosen destination, Henderson deliberately travels to Africa to preserve his whiteness. As I have suggested, however, he is not fleeing miscegenation. Neither is he fleeing an infringing, external domestic blackness. As Bellow's has developed his character, Henderson is oblivious to black America's plight, to the threat of desegregation and race mingling beyond his own foray into whiteness that overshadows his Jewish decent. On the contrary, Henderson travels to a land that has consistently represented absolute difference in every sense of the word for the American consciousness, so that he himself can once against partake in the allusion of false white difference reified in his American-ness. Readers shall see in Chapter III how Bellow gleans from a contemporary 1950s American imagination to create a seemingly perfect haven where Henderson should encounter very little resistance to his authority and privilege as a wealthy white American. However, readers shall also see how problematic Henderson's move becomes for him. The myth of the radical black Other that Henderson seeks to restore himself is just that—a myth, the same lesson that Ellison's Mr. Norton learns when he falls into Jim Trueblood's manipulative story and the racially irreverent atmosphere of the Golden Day Social Club. Henderson's conflation of whiteness with universal power and privilege are doomed to fail in a cultural space where power does not flow along falsely drawn lines of racial difference or in accordance with the singular desires of the extraordinary individual who "wants" as Henderson does throughout the novel. Power in Bellow's Africa flows according to deeper traditions and an alternative power structure that turns privilege into bondage and superior status into servanthood. Henderson is no more invincible in Bellow's Africa than he was in his own

culture. He is subject to a larger governing power structure at play and is horribly unaware. In fact, his literal whiteness, his physical strength and difference, becomes as much a power generating tool for the novel's Africanist characters as his whiteness is a power generating tool for himself. Indeed, Henderson's whiteness actually becomes his undoing, a grave source of ethnic blindness that permits him to be used in the African characters' larger scheme operating unseen until the latter end of the novel. In this power reversal lies Bellow's subversive rendering of blackness in the novel's second half as well as Bellow's critique of The United States' involvement on the African continent. In this very real 1950s space and in Bellow's imagined setting dwell newly emerging power structures: people and cultures increasingly irreverent towards white colonizers and western, a familiar parallel leadership, educated and just as desirous of power as the United States and its fellow Western nations. This redefined blackness beyond race and a faltering counter whiteness are the meat of the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

BLACKNESS AND SAUL BELLOW'S AMERICAN AFRICA

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Saul Bellow goes to great length to discredit whiteness in the first third of *Henderson the Rain King*. The writer has made a farce of American white racial supremacy and its accompanying privilege in the form of Henderson's person. Bellow leaves readers with an overwhelming sense of Henderson's hollowness, in part, because Henderson is such an unreliable narrator in the most classic sense. He is detached from his own bankrupt reality that others around him can read like the proverbial handwriting on the wall (as wife Lily does in the novel's earlier phase when she asks him to accept reality). The reality reader enter in this next phase of the novel is no more sound. We are still trapped inside Henderson's perspective. Henderson's initial view of the continent is not the Africa of the 1959 world scene. It is an American invention—not just a figment of Bellow's imagination or even of Henderson's immediate character, but rather a reflection of a larger white American mindset that Bellow continues to represent and de-center through the person of Eugene Henderson. Here Bellow sets racial subversion afoot to reinterpret blackness beyond its racial box.

As mentioned in this study's introduction, any alteration in whiteness dictates a shift in the status of blackness as well. The decline of whiteness as a functioning social system, necessarily marks a decline in the false position of blackness as absolute difference, as the social nadir of being. Even as Henderson's allegorical positioning changes and his unseen racial status becomes visible throughout *Henderson the Rain King*, Bellow also suggests that the universal position of the black subject as the overtly seen must be interpreted beyond simple racial boundaries to expose blackness as an

equally valid subjectivity—an equal position of authority where alternate power functions and thrives, but, again, one that Henderson and his corresponding culture still struggle to acknowledge. However, Bellow does initially reveal his subversive hand as author.

The escape that Bellow creates for Henderson appears to be the perfect white affirming setting for our protagonist, “a bountiful life” in a fictitious Africa that caters to his character’s needs (Bellow 43). Daniel Fuchs even likens Henderson’s African experiences to therapeutic psychoanalytical treatments (114-5). Once settled, Henderson quickly begins to practice self-absorbed, Norton-like ethnocentric politics in this earliest encounter with the continent. He seems to trek the curiously open, seemingly “people-less” terrain with little resistance. Henderson may claim he has randomly chosen his destination, but Bellow as author has deliberately selected it.⁴⁹ “My object in coming here was to leave certain things behind” says Henderson. No doubt he leaves behind the chaos of his social bankruptcy whiteness and patriarchal betrayal (45). Once again, Henderson appears to be beyond reproach in the abandonment and strength of whiteness, the same racialized power source that provided *Invisible Man*’s Mr. Norton an outlet for escape and domination (McIntosh 83). Well on his way toward acting out both his own private escape and domination, Henderson’s African adventure begins with his attempt to exploit not only the novel’s Africanist figures, but yet another white racial associate, a wealthier white childhood friend *Charlie*, whose name is likely a pun on the racial slang term “Mr. Charlie,” as in *the man* or a white authority figure (“Charlie” 181).

Charlie transitions Bellow’s protagonist into this new African dwelling place and becomes yet another alternative source of the same white racial agency that Henderson has been exploiting throughout the novel. Charlie is a willing enabler much like Lily and

Frances, a fount of whiteness from which Henderson draws to restore his former supremacist glory, but one that Henderson can only enjoy by invitation, through a willing association and privilege that a real, previously mentioned Carl Vechten did not understand when he published *Nigger Heaven*. By no coincidence, the same Charlie and his newlywed wife have arranged their African excursion as means to honeymoon in Africa, to practice the ritualized reproduction of socially sanctioned whiteness in black space. Additionally, the trip is a photo shoot, an organized facilitation of the white gaze that blinds Henderson to the reality of his African setting and its people through the novel's very end. Ranging into the land, Charlie introduces Henderson to a world where these whites equally lump generic "Africans" and native guides with wild game, exotic flora and fauna, his friend's "jeeps," and modern camera equipment—all conveniences designated for the white Americans' uses and amusements (41-2). Two principles function in this scene: "thingification," the reduction of an *other's* identity to a function," and the "mark of the plural," an abstraction of individual identity into an indistinguishable collective (Césaire 42; Memmi 85). However, Henderson does not invent these constructions, as these are "Charlie's natives" and Charlie's expedition (Bellow 44). Charlie has effectively used his white entitlement to inscribe himself upon this land and its people, to colonize his own bit of Africa according the power invested in him. His self-proclaimed manifest destiny as a white man is to conquer. Now, he is initiating Henderson into the same system. However, an immediate problem develops. Henderson has no place to express his whiteness here. Again, everything is (Mr.) Charlie's. Besides, a small remnant of Henderson's past lingers, an old offense against Charlie's bride from one of Henderson's many social transgressions against white social

custom.⁵⁰ Henderson rectifies the situation the best way he knows how. He leaves. This time, however, he goes with the blessings of whiteness upon him and some of Charles' provisions—a vehicle and two natives, an exchange of shared privileges.

The farther Henderson goes from Charlie's camp, the more distance he thinks he gains from competing narratives of power and whiteness, especially the honeymooning couple's. Henderson is just as racially marked as before, but this absence of the *Same* leaves Eugene Henderson free to reinvent his own racial boundaries. He is under the pretense of going back to "the real past, no history or junk like that..." (46). Readers, of course, see his foolishness as he exercises blind disregard toward Others, even the African guide Romilayu who leads Henderson and upon whom Henderson depends for survival itself. This "past" Eugene seeks relies on a deeper racial erasure, on a believe that, "Whites are people and other colours[sic] are something else" (Dryer 10-12). Henderson searches for the "pre-human" as in pure white existentialism. From his own perspective, Henderson, the renewed white man, becomes original, de facto existence, endowed with the freedom to obliterate his own problematic past into seemingly unadulterated being. With no other whites to judge him, he even seems to regain what he had lost in his former life, "white innocence" or an assumed "purity of purpose and intent" and "sanctity of essence" that "provides self-absolution" for his previous actions against Ricey, his grandchild, and the any others he spends the first half of the novel insulting (White 2). He is becoming a "be-er" as he says on many occasions. Meanwhile, the African guide Romilayu continues to operate as invisible yet visible human support (much like Ellison's narrator and his fellow Negro college student operate as white-affirming support for white college trustee Mr. Norton). Henderson enjoys full benefits of

whiteness without sharing power or having to acknowledge whiteness at all. Whiteness is, once again, the unspoken standard, somehow naturally given. Henderson is, after all, the only Caucasian character from this point on in the novel until his return to the States, and this Africa appears to be his to have and to hold.

Ironically, the same way that Henderson launches out to express himself within the land is the same way whites were still attempting to maintain strongholds within a real African continent during this time. A review of random contemporary headlines reveals that during the mid fifties, cultural shifts brought slightly new African voices to the forefront, but not those of native black people. White South African writer Stuart Cloete still “Speaks for the African” in a *Life Magazine* special issue (*Africa: a Continent in Ferment*) that relates contradictory, self-absorbed Nortonist messages about race, white prominence, and power (111). Although *Life* dedicates the entire issue to the African continent, the magazine’s articles feature mostly whites and highlight many locations like the city of Tangier that were still “A Lure for Europeans” at the time (24). Another article details the “White Impact on Africa,” which, according to *Life*, “had virtually no recorded history before the white man came” (19). This notion of whites as the makers and markers of human existence surfaces repeatedly and is the same white, existentialist freedom Henderson invents for himself once he leaves Charlie’s expedition.

On a reader’s level, one begins to wonder. Does Bellow really expose the works of whiteness and revamp blackness as a racial trope, or does he continue to promote white supremacy through this overly accommodating, yielding image of Africa and his protagonist’s hedonist romping? In an infamous exchange, an interviewer asked the writer if he had ever gone to Africa. Bellow replied, “Why should I go to Africa?”

(Cronin and Sigel 7). In his usual offensive fashion, when challenged on his depictions of Africa, Bellow appeared to show disinterest (almost disdain) for the “real” continent and its people. Clearly Bellow felt no need to experience the land in order to write about it within *Rain King*. His attitude seems somewhat contradictory since most of his novels take place in neighborhoods Bellow vividly recreates from personal experience. Echoing Bellow’s own assertions, Peter Hyland suggests that *Rain King*’s setting is, “not an Africa that anyone might visit” (48). He credits the production to “Bellow’s fancy” and readings from Sir Richard Burton and anthropologist Melville Herskovits (Bellow’s former teacher). Reviewer Richard Stern counterclaims that “an original” like Bellow “did not use second-hand views of travellers [sic]” or pop cultural sources but moved beyond “the clichés which always threaten writing about the exotic” (Cronin and Siegel 58-60).⁵¹ Stern’s observation, however, seems to miss the proverbial mark. In a moment of bright humor, at first sight of the Arnewi Village, Henderson asks his guide Romilayu, “Isn’t that a picture?” (Bellow 47). Some external influence obviously motivates these exchanges, but what? What are these Africanisms, these American pictures, images, and ideas about Africa and blackness that Bellow is reproducing?

As the fifties began, many books and articles either donned generic, amalgamating titles on travel, safaris and exploration. Any more delivered sweeping, sensationalist ethnographies on native African “culture” (singular) that bore little resemblance to the real African continent, its nations, and their citizens as many scholars (Kuhne, Keim, and Balogun among others) have suggested. A casual scan of publications during the 1950s suggests that Africa was stuck between reality and racist fantasy as journalist Elspeth Huxley questions if the continent is “Tomorrow’s Hope or Yesterday’s

Dream?”⁵² More periodical abstracts and general literature indexes reveal some American awareness of how “Africa, Wakening, Challenges the World.”⁵³ Michael Leiris’ “African Negroes and the Arts of Carving and Sculpture” evidently marked a radical departure from typical African ethnography of the day. His piece acknowledges that African *peoples* did indeed have their own cultural expressions beyond European colonizers (Clifford 89-90). Unfortunately, his work appears to have been a rarity. *Rain King*’s protagonist also fails to achieve Leiris’ view.

Oddly enough, Henderson seems a bit put off by his initial African experience—(Mr.) Charlie’s Africa, evidently just one of many inventions. Eugene observes, “The expedition that Charlie organized had all new equipment and was modern in every respect. We had a portable generator, a shower, and hot water, and from the beginning I was critical of this...It wounded me to travel in Africa in this way” (Bellow 42). Again, he desired a primordial, existential experience, “roughing it.” Henderson’s complaint about his travel companion’s lavish accommodations mirror almost verbatim a contemporary 1950s *New York Times* article that exclaimed “an expensive jungle junket...with built-in bathtubs” was too “tamed” and disappointing because an American traveler lost “a lot of his pet illusions carefully nurtured by all those Tarzan pictures” (Joseph 12). As Curtis Keim suggests, Americans “have a romance with the exotic” and the hyperexotic is what proceeds from Henderson’s mind. Though he desires what he considers a more authentic experience, Henderson’s Africa is still not reality. His is an exotic misrepresentation gleaned from a well-documented entertainment industry. Let us take a moment to delve into this social context.

Before African nations had begun to seek independence more aggressively in the late 1950s, the African continent and its people had been virtually invisible to the American mindset except through popular culture that fed racist western stereotypes of the land and its people as “a dark, primitive, irrational, illogical, contradictory and savage society ruled by emotions and superstitions” (Balogun 25). Repeatedly, these blind spots point back to the self-serving American mind that refuses to see a more complete picture of humanity beyond its own familiar boundaries. In this regard, Henderson’s “pre-human” status as *the American* begins the work of exposing a certain ethnocentric blindness that the protagonist displays consistently throughout the remainder of *Rain King*. In his study, *Mistaking Africa*, Keim notes that even in contemporary times, Americans learn about Africa from television culture, print media, amusement parks and movies, museums, and host of other influences (Keim 14-18). By far, one of the most popular African figures remains the vine swinging, cannibal defeating hero Tarzan, white master of racialized black spaces. By the fifties, Americans were satiating their appetites for Tarzan and his fictitious collection of Hollywood Africanisms in every market possible from showings of old 1930s movies and newly filmed B-rate epics, to television series, comic books and collectible cards (Kuhne 7-8, 23).⁵⁴ These would have been the typical American’s guilty pleasures and obvious sources for Bellow’s satirical disdain. A return to the previously mentioned *Life*’s special Africa issues corroborates this obsession.

Oddly enough the featured editorial in *Life*’s special Africa edition focuses on *Americans* and Africa and actually acknowledges what this project’s chapter has suggested all along: “second hand information on Africa” was at the “Rider Haggard,

Tarzan, or Bwana Devil level” and that “American ignorance of African appalled its *European Rulers*” (178, italics added). A glaring problem surfaces in this observation. The article gives no consideration for the offended sensibilities of the Africanist populations. Of these inhabitants, the only spark of serious interest in the entire *Life* special issue rise with “Ethiopia's Durable Haile Sealsie,” who gets a nod for implementing western technology in his country and thus validating western interests. The “Painted Village” of Ndebele and “New Native Art” with its “gay views of the Congo” also enter the special issue for exotic color’s sake (and book sales most likely) (103, 173, 106). The most overt blackness within the magazine, however, is actually on the outside—the beautiful black face on its cover, an equally exotic, primitivist photo of a Masai warrior in full native gear. He is an Africanism of the first order who represents only a small fraction of African people on the continent at that time, but who obviously appealed to 1950s readers’ tastes. By association, Henderson shows similar fascination with the exotic physicality of the Africans he meets later in *Rain King*, from Queen Willatale’s girth, lion skin dress and cataracted eye, to Wariri Advisor Horoko’s “scarlet broadcloth” and “dozen furrows” in his scalp, and King Dahfu’s red lips and purple velvet hat encrusted with teeth (Bellow 147).

By the time Henderson reaches the livelier portion of his African adventure, the stereotypical black images that F. Ogun Balogun charts in his article “Radiance of the King” are in full view. Africanist figures flood *Rain King*. In similar fashion to the Ralph Ellison’s literary assault of stereotypical black characters in *Invisible Man*, Bellow introduces the coarsest montage of Tarzan-like “wild savages” from Henderson’s perspective (176). The subservient, Christianized Romilayu (more like a pet at this point

than a person) guides readers to the remote Africa interior. Bellow's audience meets a bare-breast wailing woman and a trail of naked African children. All gradually fade into images of the mammoth, fleshy queens Willatale and Mtalba, who head a starving, drought stricken tribe that frogs and superstition hold at bay. A wrestling buck of great size, Prince Itelo, also dominates much of the reader's racial gaze until Henderson leaves this village, only to have silent, menacing Wariri warriors ambush him. This grim group of what Henderson calls "worldly savages" takes readers and Bellow's party past a series of winding scenes and a dead black body to meet a purple clad Prince Dahfu, who spends most of the novel either reclining with his harem (also naked) or frolicking with skulls and ferocious lions. Also ever lurking about is Dahfu's cunning advisor, a red-tongued Horoko, wrapped in stereotypical African garb. Endless are these images of what Gloria Cronin calls "convenient" black bodies subject to Henderson's imagination (Cronin 137). Balogun reads *Rain King's* Africanist images as Bellow's attempt to expose "undesirable, fallacious racist myths about Africans" (Balogun 19).

A reflection of my previous observations, Gloria Cronin further points out that Bellow, "clearly intends us to understand that these tropes...represent not real Africans, but a popular white Western literary representation that resides in Henderson's white psyche" (139). For Cronin, Bellow purposefully activates various racial stereotypes to expose and explode the biased American imagination, presented as the default white imagination.⁵⁵ She is absolutely right. Indeed, Eugene Henderson's continued African journey becomes a more revealing reflection of the real-life circumstances of African nations and the United States' involvement on the continent. Not only does Henderson cast himself as pure existence itself. He also identifies himself as *the* essential

American—racially white and socially unfettered. By tacking on the label *American* to Henderson throughout the remainder of *Rain King*, Bellow calls attention to Eugene Henderson's every thought and action as allegorical of the nation he represents, of a national identity that operates throughout the novel as the illegitimate, unseen-seen functioning of whiteness in a pre-ordained Africanist space. Both Cronin and Balogun also read Bellow's use of these overtly extreme stereotypes as a move towards racial reconciliation that my interpretation does not acknowledge. Bellow forms no racial reconciliation within the *Rain King* but acts as the critic simply revealing to readers a discrepancy—in this case, the limitations of the previously mentioned “curse,” a race-dependent American mindset steeped in White supremacy. As Chapter II mentioned, Bellow focuses intensely on whiteness that produces racist black images, especially the white gaze that dominated popular print culture of his day, but he does so to contrast a Henderson's biased perceptions that refuse to acknowledge the reality of his surroundings with the soon-to-be unveiled, power-filled reality of those Africanist characters the protagonist misreads. Henderson ultimately fails to see the absurdity of his predicament, of a subject who would seek understanding and peace outside of himself from another whom he does not and cannot understand, from Others whose power he grossly discounts to the point of peril because of his own ethnocentric gaze. This was precisely the problem with American foreign politics in Africa. An understanding of this historical context through print media, once again, helps to shed light on Bellow's text.

Another scan of 1950s periodicals reveals that a larger self-reflexive American Nortonism began breaking enough during the decade to allow reality some entryway into the American consciousness. As Bellow's revised *Rain King* until its 1959 publication,

African nations had been moving toward independence but did not gain actual freedom from their colonizers until 1960 and beyond. Western financial investments in the African continent gained prominence, fueling more extensive investments in white privilege and an extended white control over African's people and resources. Many more articles reflect a "Struggle for African's Wealth"⁵⁶ as those with invested interests continued "Cashing in on Old Imperialisms."⁵⁷ Indeed, the most specific hardcore journalism throughout the entire decade still reported race relations, politics and economic development as these concerns related to *colonizers*—especially South Africa, officially recognized as a "white" African nation (White 94). Barely a wrinkle of criticism appears in American headlines over South Africa's 1948 implementation of Apartheid, sister system to the American South's Jim Crow laws. Articles on South African labor and industry, however, are ever present throughout the fifties, probably because South Africa represented the U.S.'s fourth largest supplier market at this time (White 95).⁵⁸ Evidently, U.S. interests within a social and economic arena were too great to risk alienating this friend among nations.

Eventually, Africans do begin to emerge as autonomous entities; simultaneously, headlines began to express white anxiety. A *Reader's Digest* article asks, "Is the White Man finished in Africa?"⁵⁹ Judging from the *Life* special issue and other headlines' general focus on western national powers, the white colonizer of this time period was not. Nevertheless, *Africa in the Modern World*⁶⁰ becomes a serious matter of discussion in headlines. By the late decade *The New York Times* reports "Clouds Over the Continent"⁶¹ as racial strife increases between Western "white meats" and those black Africans now struggling to secure their own governments. With inevitable revolutionary unrest in

Africa, conflicting views surface on the “White Impact upon Africa”⁶² and African nations’ desired sovereignty. As the 50s continue, tensions obviously grow in the media over colonial systems, as one article questions, “Can Africans Trust White Rulers?”⁶³ A better question is can *Rain King*’s readers trust Bellow?

Certain subversive features of *Rain King*’s African setting show Bellow beginning to turn subversively upon his protagonist just as power dynamics were beginning to shift on the African continent. As writer, Bellow had a choice: *Rain King* could have presented a much more overtly colonized Africa with pockets of black “savagery” in much the way Joseph Conrad depicted the African Congo in *The Heart of Darkness*. Instead, Bellow affirms black independence from white colonizers at a time when that independence was not yet guaranteed. He sends his protagonist into two autonomous African villages void of physical colonial control, though realistically teeming with colonial influences and western nuances. Each representative tribe has western educated leadership, various European customs and artifacts (for example, Arnewi Prince Itelo’s poet shirt, afternoon tea, and silk umbrellas from British controlled India). Even if colonial rule were in effect during the novel, each village’s relatively independent operating manner would indicate a lax British rule. Itelo mentions that the Arnewi village has had no European visitors in thirty years. The British practiced what Anthony Appiah and John Flint both characterized as a laissez-faire approach to colonialism. Native leadership governed locally, acting as the enforcing arm and liaison between colonial governors and the native people, providing a governor were even present in more remote areas (Appiah 7-8; Flint 343). Bellow’s decision to create an autonomous Africanist presence sets up a power system that greatly affects Henderson’s ability to exercise his

American whiteness in this African space. Though he has gained great distance from Charlie, the conquerable virgin territory Eugene Henderson seeks just does not materialize. The book's Africanist inhabitants control their own spaces.

By 1960, sixty percent of the continent's nations had gained independence from the previous colonial "scramble for Africa," only to enter a second scramble between the United States and the Soviet Union for Cold War allies. Judging from late 1950s headlines, one white impact the American government and press do not want is the Soviet Union's as *Look Magazine* queries "Can We Stop Communism in Africa?"⁶⁴ Another questionable presence that cannot go unmarked at this point is the United States itself, especially since our Henderson is so often read a symbol of American heroism. Throughout the fifties, long after Truman's term, the United States was a great white benefactor to Third World nations—Nortonism on a much grander, tangible scale to ensure a democratic American presence on the African continent. The United States government committed to an aggressive, longstanding platform of humanitarian help, technological aid and American business investments, supposedly to support democracy in newly independent countries like Ghana, the first African country to declare its independence under Kwame Nkrumah's leadership in 1957 (White 26-7). Most scholars of this period even attributed the rapid rate of African decolonization and independence to a "liberal-colonist" view, wherein increasingly radical African nationalists and American influencers pressure a post-WWII, financially dependent European West to surrender power over its African holdings (Flint 389-91).⁶⁵

In his study *Africa: Dispatches from a Fragile Continent*, Blaine Harden offers an alternative reading to the exploitation theories connected to US involvement in Africa.

He even proposes that Americans had become avid admirers of the African people's struggle, and headlines seem to mirror this to a certain extent. By the decade's end, Africans were no longer just extensions of their European colonizers in Americans' minds. Africa seems to have been somehow connected to American ideals of freedom and independence with the continent's drive towards revolutionary liberation. Discussing this awareness of African nations' push for independence, Harden notes that Africa had an "an intoxicating appeal" to Westerners because of its quick rise to self governance. He also notes that Americans in particular really connected with the continent and its people because, "The Africans were doing to assorted European colonialists what Americans had done to the British: kicking greedy interlopers out" (Harden 224). Harden suggested that with African independence would also come "democracy, the rule of law, and prosperity." Overly optimistically, Harden further writes in the same passage, "Leaders would be chosen to represent the will of the people. It was a twentieth-century re-enactment of John Locke's 'social contract.' It was progress. It was the way America had worked, the way God wanted all the world to work." Bellow actually mocks this same spirit of eager identification that Blaine promotes.

Through Henderson's early encounters with African people, Bellow suggests that this affinity Americans felt between themselves and the increasingly independent African people was ultimately myopic in scope. Again, this Africanist authority opens *Rain King's* message up for a weightier critique of American involvement in increasingly independent African nations of this time period, an American involvement symbolically carried out in the person of *the* American Henderson. As *the* American, Henderson holds an ambivalent admiration of the Arnewi and Wariri people. For better but more so worse,

he constantly empathizes with those Africans he meets, equating his own predicaments, his own experiences, his own cultural practices, to those of the Arnewi and Wariri people, but his associations frequently develop to point of self-centered blindness and misunderstanding. For example, during a session with Dahfu in the lion pit, he philosophizes, “maybe every guy has his own Africa...as I was a turbulent individual, I was having a turbulent Africa. This not to say, however, that I think the world exists for my sake. No, I really believe in reality. That’s a known fact” (276). Henderson, however, does not always know that he is not central; his world revolves around himself and the value he places on others is ultimately tied to their abilities to satisfy his desires and sooth his driving obsession—“I Want, I Want, I Want,” the desire to affirm his supposedly innate superiority and authority to Others. This is precisely the problem of the continued curse, the white supremacist bearings that continue to plague Henderson’s perception as he enters Bellow’s newly minted African expanse.

The presence of this anathema during Henderson’s African journey suggests that something is still “wrong” or problematic in his protagonist’s new, freed space. To reiterate, Henderson pretty much brings the same failing, supremacist racial politics into this new quest that we have already seen in action on American soil. Henderson’s ethnocentric vision continues as he responds much like a symbolic United States before newly emerging African nations struggling to make know their identities and concerns upon a politically dry world stage still recovering from World War II. Playing on an allusion to Egypt’s plague of dying cattle, Bellow places his protagonist before the Arnewi village where a severe drought has killed cherished livestock. Small children and a young weeping “virgin” (a new people or country) greet Henderson as he approaches.

Upon seeing the unknown girl's unexplained tears (hardships), *Rain King's* adventurer immediately turns inward to question his own actions (an American government's own political interests). In the same fashion that Henderson *sees* the girl, yet does not see *the girl*, likewise, a United States acknowledges freshly formed African nations, but does not truly acknowledge their cultural priorities or needs. Much like many countries on the African continent, the weeping girl is open to interpretation, a blank black slate upon which Henderson writes his own narrative. With no further assessment of the situation, Henderson begins to correct his own self-defined "wrongs" and lessen his own guilt, construing ridiculous punishments for himself such as "running back into the desert," and purging himself of his property to live on "worms" and "locusts...until all the bad is burned out" (49)—plans he obviously does not intend to carry out.⁶⁶ In a moment of false empathy, he himself is "ready to start bawling" and begins to think, "of Lily and the children and my father and the violin and the foundling and all the sorrows of *my* life." Obviously (for everyone but Henderson), Henderson's response has very little to do with the Arnewi people and their ritual mourning over their prized cattle, of which he is unaware. He is yet to communicate with the girl to any extent. He is absorbed with his own troubles and search for renewed control and power over his life from his "curse." Once again, readers witness a hallmark moment of "Nortonism" and Henderson's self-centered projection upon a black figure for Henderson's own sake, a "white racial subject" who projects his lack "outwards onto the nearest black body...to exorcise, heal, and reify him" (137). The people's grief ultimately becomes Henderson's own cathartic release and a means to prove himself against a perceived wrong that he as outsider has invented.

In a racial analysis, George White's *Holding the Line: Race, Racism, and American Foreign Policy toward Africa* paints a dark picture of American assistance in African's decolonization process. White interprets this interest as a "whiteness" preserving machine, a self-serving enterprise meant not just to halt Soviet inroads into the continent, but to "manage" black access to power and privilege that had been their white oppressors'. White quotes several governmental reports acknowledging that African nations provided a "sizeable portion of the critical commodities now required by the 'Free World'"(28). This would insure that "Africans would continue to supply the economic, political, strategic, and psychological needs of the west" (134). Surely Bellow understood this when he penned Henderson's description of King Dahfu's "fabulously strange" color as ""black as-as wealth" (Bellow 207), as if black flesh were solvent or a natural resource to be harvested like coal or oil from the earth. Not only was Dahfu's racial blackness valuable Otherness for Henderson's whiteness renewal project. Indeed, Africanist people and their resources were a major source of wealth for the United States and other Western nations. Moreover, African countries were also considered strategic pawns in an American anticommunism movement to stop the Soviet Union's expansion as a competing white world power.

Not everyone believed that U.S. involvement in Africa was genuine, and not every voice emerging during this time praised increased American involvement in the African decolonization process. For example, Kenyan author and activist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o called the United State's influence "neo-colonialism" (80). (Needless to say those voices do not appear as readily in American media.) Another protesting figure was Negritude writer and communist sympathizer Aimé Césaire. In his early work, *Discourse*

on Colonialism, Césaire issues a strong, almost apocalyptic warning about the “hour of the barbarian at hand,” which in this case referred to the growing influence of the United States among transitioning African nations after World War II. His critique rhetorically reverses racist terms often used to condemn the African continent and its people as inferior, somehow primitive, a similar reversal described earlier in Ellison’s animalistic depiction of trustee Norton as well as Bellow’s strapping physical descriptions of the mammoth Eugene Henderson Bellow often associates with animals and brute strength over intellect. The U.S. becomes “the modern barbarian” following the lineage of European barbarism (a Europe that Césaire claims Africa has created and that colonization has corrupted). Over two pages, he describes the impending “American hour” filled with “Violence, excess, waste, mercantilism, bluff, conformism, stupidity, vulgarity, disorder,” all terms in direct opposition to those core American ideals Henderson so often contemplates. Those representatives of African countries become “Dear friends,” as Césaire skeptically paints a picture of Truman “unfurling the banner of anti-colonialism” with promises of “Aid to disinherited countries.” Césaire suggests subterfuge while mocking Truman’s declaration that, “The Time of old colonialism has passed” (Césaire 76). Critiquing the States’ economic policies as exploitive, the poet statesman further insinuates, “American high finance considers the time has come to raid every colony in the world” by dangling proverbial carrots before developing African countries—“bulldozers! The massive investments of capital! The Roads! The ports!” He warns those nations “disgusted with Europe” who are “turning...towards America and getting used to looking upon that country as a possible liberator” to “Be careful!” Césaire points to “racism” and “domination” as key downfalls to association with the

United States as he pronounces the famous indictment of “American Domination” as “the only domination from which one never recovers...unscarred” (Césaire 76-7). For Césaire no great American hero like Henderson lurked about Africa to save the day, but an exploitive American presence lurked about for its own benefit and gratification.

For better or worse, the American hour that Césaire prophesied does occur. News articles also confirm shifting international alliances as the United States moors itself more closely to African nations throughout the decade. In *Wretched of the Earth*, nearly ten years after Césaire, Franz Fanon observes that the United States had excelled past Europe as a colonial power to the point that it “has become a monster in which the taints, sickness, and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions” (Fanon, *Wretched* 313). The *U. S. News* assesses that, “Africa is another place that needs U. S. Help,”⁶⁷ while “France Fumes over U.S. Arms to Tunisia”⁶⁸ Journalists appraise new possibilities and questions in *Newsweek*, “United States of Africa? The West’s Stake?”⁶⁹ By the decade’s end these new possibilities for Africa appear to have become a reality as “Africa Joins the World”⁷⁰ and the press plumbs deeper into relationships between American activism and the continent. Headlines tout “Africa and America: An Investment in Freedom,” even as the United States continues to meet *Africa’s Challenge to America*.⁷¹ Even lighter topics take on this American shift of consciousness as travel destinations and anthropological studies become almost as homey as Charlie’s Africa with its modern conveniences, but no more representative of the African people and their land than before. *Time* allows Americans to visit “With Pat and Dick in Africa”⁷² as then Vice President Richard Nixon and wife Patricia complete a comfy goodwill tour on the behalf of the United States to, in part, commemorate Ghana’s newly gained independence

as its own sovereign nation. Pat and Dick travel across the continent and show themselves quite friendly to the natives as they sample African culture, don native headgear, and speak “Tarzan” with prominent African leaders. The United States has established such a rapport with African nations by this point that in 1959 Africa appears to be the next little town (on paper at least): *The New York Times* gives American readers a choice, “Safari in Africa or is it the Poconos?”⁷³ and an *Evening Post* title declares, “We Crossed the Sahara on a Motor Scooter.”⁷⁴

With their overly casual tone and western projections onto African space, these publications bear a close resemblance to Henderson’s constant assumptions of unearned power at home and abroad. During his own trek into the African hinterlands, he constantly assumes mastery over the terrain in total disregard for the people he encounters. Africa becomes, again, a blank slate upon which an American (good) will can be projected. In fact, Henderson’s experience could have a real life model in the adventures of Richard Nixon.

The suspect nature of America’s international goodwill towards African nations surfaces so strongly in Richard Nixon’s 1957 “The Emergence of Africa,” that the document bears further examination. Nixon’s Department of State report to President Eisenhower resulted from the same goodwill tour “With Dick and Pat.” On a personal level, Bellow found Nixon politically “unattractive” (Rampersad 376). One could even question if, to a certain degree, Nixon were another source for Eugene Henderson’s character development, given frequent references in magazine articles to Nixon’s nickname “Richard the Lion Heart,” a close connection to Henderson’s participation in King Dahfu’s lion roaring exercises with Atti, the female lion Dahfu stores in his palace

basement. Moreover, descriptions of a young Nixon throughout 1950s *Time Magazine* articles are suspiciously close to those Henderson gives us of himself: *Time* celebrates the “husky 5 ft. 10 in. 180 lbs” dark, handsome frame of a “black-browed” Nixon, “with a fire in his eyes” who “typified an eager new generation of Republicans” (“Vice Presidency: A Bridgebuilder”). Even the language of these *Time* articles is quite close to Henderson’s comments; one report labels Nixon “a bridge builder” who constantly declares, “I can help,” a phrase Henderson uses often throughout *Rain King* right before he creates a catastrophe of grand proportion for some unsuspecting African (“Vice Presidency: In a Position to Help”). Moreover, statesmen also dubbed Nixon the “father” of America’s African foreign policy, a self-appointed role that Henderson takes upon himself as he travels from village to village in search of those who might need his aid. Henderson’s “helpfulness” echoes Curtiss Keim’s observation about American perceptions of Africa as “a primitive place full of trouble and wild animals and in need of our help” (Keim 4).

If anything, Henderson’s symbolic helpfulness and Nixon’s document also reveal arbitrary premiums Americans placed on blackness and people of African descent during this period. Though people of African descent were ill-esteemed in general, Africans could be held in much higher regard than their American counterparts because of Africa’s important to the United States’ Cold War pursuits. Thus, the United States could promote the independence efforts of African nations, but not its own people on its domestic front. From its earliest pages, Richard Nixon’s report describes “tremendous potentialities of this great continent.” Africa becomes a bastion of free space void of communist influence. The vice president suggests that the “Free World” (capitalized) has a “vital

interest” in helping African nations “develop governmental institutions which are based on principles of freedom and democracy” (635). Furthermore, the rising African people could “rightfully expect recognition” from the United States and other Western countries “of their dignity and equality as individuals and peoples” in what becomes a curious “family of nations.” Nixon’s language grows almost personal as he urges the United States government to “understand” African leaders’ “hopes and aspirations.” The United States was to “...support them in their plans and...encourage the greatest possible interchange” with diplomatic representation (634). The United States’ needed to “come to know” African leaders “better,” a burden Henderson expresses verbally at least, though his own concerns consume his inner being.

Certainly, many African leaders already knew the United States’ cultural politics well. Ghana’s President Kwame Nkrumah had experienced firsthand American racism as an student at Lincoln University, well before he had become a celebrated, sought after African Statesman. Our country’s courting of these African leaders underscored grand social inconsistency. Even as American officials grew more acquainted with African leaders and diplomats, evidently, our high officials knew very little of their own black Americans, judging from Kevin Gaines’ account of Nixon’s “failed attempt at small talk with African Americans he had mistaken for Ghanaians.” Contradictions abound here. During an event Nkrumah had arranged on Nixon’s behalf, the then vice-president “asked several bystanders, ‘How does it feel to be free?’ only to be taken aback by their response: ‘We wouldn’t know. We’re from Alabama’” (Gaines 5). According to Gaines, “Nixon’s faux pas captures the bittersweet meaning” of Ghana’s independence for African Americans. They witnessed all the possibilities of their African counterparts’

independence as their government denied them the same freedoms within the “impossibilities” of domestic American oppression. In similar fashion, Henderson shows abounding support and concern for the Africans he encounters on his trek but shows very little compassion for associates and even family prior to his leaving the States.

During his tenure as African policy czar, Nixon ultimately minimized the United States’ domestic tension to improve alliances with African nations whose resources and “friendship” the United States needed to maintain its one-pence on the Soviet Union’s communist threat. In his report, Nixon labels domestic unrest and America racism as nothing more than “skillful propaganda...a consistently distorted picture of the treatment of minority races in the United States” that had somehow been “blown up...to create a completely false impression” (634-6). Meanwhile, the state report’s contradictory, hypocritical constitutional rhetoric of equality and rights flows in marvelous opposition to the well-documented the historical domestic racial inequalities, violence and hatred that plagued the United States before, during, and after the Civil Rights era. Nixon remains silent about these events as does Henderson. As mentioned, the first third of *Rain King* contains veiled allusions to the Civil Rights movement, but no overt references to racial unrest, African Americans or African American culture within the context of then domestic race issues. The more subtle allusions reflect Bellow’s awareness as a writer, but the absences mark Henderson’s, and by extension, white America’s denial of the most obvious discrepancies. For example, while privileged black African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah had Washington DC’s ear and frequented the White House, black American leaders’ requests to meet with governing officials (Martin Luther King’s to be exact), fell on deaf ears, despite King’s nationally recognized, increasingly influential

position. At this historical point, the Civil Rights leader had already headed the 1954 yearlong Alabama boycott that paved way for federal desegregation well beyond Montgomery's city limits. Perhaps in a tit-for-tat moment on Bellow's part, in *Rain King* the Wariri guards deny the white American Henderson's request to see Dahfu. Bellow reverses real-world power dynamics that often demanded the acknowledgement of whiteness, especially in the form of a supposedly superior American political power and its privilege on both domestic and international soil.⁷⁵

In a conversation with Subhkir Singh, Bellow admitted that a great deal of *Rain King* is "caricature" of what he saw as "a false sense of superiority among Americans," under then President Harry Truman's Four Point program toward Asian and Africa (Singh 24-5).⁷⁶ True to Singh's ideas, Henderson constantly relies on his American-ness, "coming from the great outside" (Bellow 106), to justify automatically taking up burdens and unjustified license within the villages he encounters. He even daydreams about Prince Itelo and the Arnewi considering him "their very greatest benefactor" (61), another Nortonism of the Ellison kind. In a sense, Henderson the helper also discounts African culture. He consistently devalues the authority of African figures in particular as culturally and racially inferior throughout the text. Later on when the Wariri capture Henderson and his guide, Henderson immediately asks to be taken to the king and comments that being questioned makes his "hackles go up," especially "as an American citizen" in a "primitive place" (131). In fact, Henderson self-references his American-ness so much within the context of difference that readers can sense, as Toni Morrison notes, that "Deep within the word 'American' is its association with race... American means white" (47), and by default white supremacy.

Henderson's condescending attitude also directly reflects his tendencies throughout *Rain King* to seek out and gravitate towards persons of power, especially throughout his African adventure. As L.H. Goldman notes, "For Henderson, the importance is not what is said but who says it. He can only learn from kings and queens not from mere mortals at home" (Goldman 102). When Henderson meets Itelo, he pointedly inquires if Itelo is "royalty" and exclaims, "That was better. Owing to his size and appearance I thought from the beginning that he must be distinguished" (Bellow 54). Upon entering the Wariri village Henderson also feels entitled to an audience with headship by virtue of his American-ness and expresses his displeasure at every turn when his requests are denied. For King Dahfu, Henderson ultimately becomes a constant companion, but one constantly at odds with what he perceives to be lesser powers around the king, particularly Dahfu's advisor Horoko. Henderson views the novel's secondary power figures with a greater scorn as if they are less than human and incapable of managing the most basic tasks properly (dictating that he help, of course).

George White notes that once the decolonization process began, a latter Eisenhower administration "justified" the United States' forming what amounted to an "informal empire" on the continent of Africa because of American beliefs in African primitivism. American leaders believed that African blacks were "inherently inferior" and incapable of governing themselves. In the primary text, Henderson makes a great deal out of the Arnewi's "damned fool phenomenon"—their refusal both to drink from the village's frog-infested reservoir and destroy the frogs despite draught conditions in the Arnewi section of the text (60). Henderson claims the Arnewi have "developed unevenly," suggesting some innate lack or flawed mental capacity "When it came to

frogs they were helpless...Everything depends on values...where the Arnewi are irrational I'll help them and where I am irrational they will help me" (87). Most scholars interpret this as Henderson does: the Arnewi are run-of-the-mill, emotive primitives who harm themselves with their own irrational beliefs and superstitions and who, without outside intervention, will die for lack of water.⁷⁷

Ironically, the frog episode also extends even further the curse motif that engulfs Henderson prior to his flight. Unlike the original plague unleashed upon Egypt, however, the symbolic American "savior" figure (with his need to flex his whiteness and sense of superior ability) proves to be the village's undoing, not the frogs. In a subversive turnabout, Henderson has irrational, unfounded beliefs in his own superiority and overrated, mythical abilities. Upon review, the Arnewi's situation is not as dire. Itelo relates that a frog infestation of this type had never occurred in the village's history. It is an anomaly, likely temporary; Henderson's blowing up the cistern is not. The Arnewi's predicament seems to reflect prophetically what William Ackah maintains in his 1999 critique of colonial influence on Africa, that "Since the beginning of the independence process in Africa, thirty-five years of mainly Western Knowledge, technology, ideas and assumptions have failed to make a positive impact on the African reality" (Ackah 63). Henderson's intervention proves more fatal than any tradition the Arnewi honor. If left alone, the Arnewi might suffer, but Henderson's actions intensify the problem.⁷⁸

Bellow continues his judgment against American involvement, particularly the United State's influence over African leadership. In his study, White also notes that the American government and its allies believed that emerging African administrators were "incompetent" and that "America needed to choose their leaders...who could guide the

nation-building process in a manner satisfactory to the West...if America was going to do anything, it was going to save the Africans from themselves before they hurt anyone else” (White 135). Bellow parallels the incompetent Henderson with two equally questionable Africanist figures, Itelo and Dahfu, who prove equally incompetent as leaders of their respective people, the Arnewi and Wariri. They prove weak, however, not because they are African, but in part because of doomed associations with the symbolic Henderson, the default American, the default white man, and by extension, default white culture and western authority.

Though Bellow tells readers *Rain King*'s native tribes spring from the same source, the Wariri people are most dominant in the text, but not because they are simply “aggressive” as their Yoruba name suggests. They are more western than the passive Arnewi. Here lies Bellow's bias, and perhaps the world's, for the actual countries that came to Africa's forefront in the fifties and sixties were those that mastered Western institutions—federal government, school systems, religions, mercantilism and economics, patriarchal social ordering—and the ear of the United States. For example, unlike the more traditional Arnewi village, the Wariri village is a site of extreme hybridity and displays heavy western domestication. Especially “tamed” is the village's seat of government, King Dahfu's western palace, with its potted plants and western amenities set against the supposed harshness of the African landscape upon which the Arnewi subsist. The Wariri also have a greater ease of life and more material possessions. However, the Wariri's westernization proves superficial. Underneath lies symbolic, untamable African tradition in the form of Atti—another first rate Africanism, but unlike the Masai warrior on the cover of *Life*, this illegal female lioness whom Dahfu has

supposedly tamed and holds against his people's beliefs, is dangerous. At one point Henderson says "What do I fight for? Hell, for the truth. Yes that's it, the truth. Against falsehood. But most of the fighting is against myself" (24). Although he speaks of himself, his comments could easily be King Dahfu's, for Dahfu represents an unstable combination of warring western ideology and native traditions, of mixed truths that combine fatally within Dahfu's black being much like Henderson's cursed existence as an unstable site of American whiteness.

As Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests, "the French colonial policy was one of assimilation—of turning 'savage' Africans into 'evolved' black Frenchmen and women," whereas British colonial policy "was a good deal less interested" in producing "black Anglo-Saxons" (Appiah 4). In *Itelo and Dahfu*, Bellow combines the profiles of stereotypical English and French African intellectuals. From Henderson's perspective, Itelo is the prime physical specimen of black masculinity—he is an earthy champion wrestler whom Henderson admires for his prowess and strength. However, Bellow thwarts this image. He daintily wardrobe Itelo in poet shirts and positions him as a weak prince among queens, Bittah women who are sites of indeterminate gender. In other words, he is a secondary power figure in a matriarchal society that Bellow sets in opposition to American or by default white patriarchy. Readers witness the perfect example of Hortense Spillers' analysis: the black male is emasculated and set aside as impotent. Though sexist, Bellow's inferences are obvious. When Henderson concocts his plan to blow up the frogs with a flashlight bomb, Arnewi male leadership is not forceful enough, vocally or physically to stop him. Moreover, Itelo has seemingly lost a ritual wrestling match to Henderson earlier and has submitted himself to the American in the

ultimate act of defacement—Itelo places Henderson’s foot on his head.⁷⁹ Bellow’s message of weakness compounds even more when readers consider the issue of communication.

Recall that during Henderson’s “visit” with the Arnewi, Bellow gives readers fragmented communications between the Itelo and the protagonist, some filtered through a second party (the Christianized guide Romilayu, a symbolic type of missionary who brings Henderson to the Arnewi initially). At the crucial moment before Henderson destroys the village’s water supply, Bellow crafts Itelo’s dialogue in telling fashion: “‘Mistah Henderson, Sir. Watah is...’ Itelo could not find the words to describe how precious this element was, and he rubbed his fingers with his thumb as if feeling velvet” (106). As with other exchanges, Bellow cuts Itelo’s lines whenever the character attempts to confront Henderson or halt the protagonist’s actions. Literally, though western educated (as were many actual Africa leaders who rose to power in the fifties), Itelo has limited mastery of English which hampers verbal exchange and hence, effective communication necessary to protect his people’s interests. Fanon observes that, “To speak means to be in a position...to assume a culture” (*Black Skins* 17). The man who masters a language “possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his mastery of the language,” made “whiter” and thus endowed with privilege and, more importantly, western power (18). Because of language barriers, readers are never fully privy to the Arnewi’s beliefs, culture, or wishes. Neither is Henderson, who has a deaf right ear, symbolic of American deafness to any African concerns that do not serve American interests or align with the United States’ policies.

If Itelo's failure to master western communication dooms the Arnewi, then, conversely, the thoroughness with which Wariri leader King Dahfu appropriates western or American (or white) ideals destroys him. Unlike Prince Itelo, King Dahfu commands an extreme mastery of western patriarchal thought and language, both English and French, to such a point that he becomes more western or white than Henderson. Bellow likely used as his inspiration, a real life figure Nkrumah who, as mentioned was an U.S. educated African leader thoroughly invested in American leadership methods and technological progress. Though *Rain King* is Henderson's great white quest, the book also chronicles Dahfu's great return from his extensive western travels over nine years time, adventures with Itelo, his father's death, and required submission to the Wariri. Ironically, Henderson as American has fallen in relationship with Dahfu, his African doppelganger, the very marked reflection of his American self he flees—a man who has rejected his own in favor of foreign support and validation.

Henderson's relationship with Dahfu is the reversal of his relationship with Itelo. Dahfu is obviously dominant over Eugene Henderson. Henderson longs to be like King Dahfu, despite Dahfu's being a noble black "savage king": "You are a Be-er. I've just got to stop Becoming. Jesus Christ, when am I going to Be?" (191). In these moments of identification, Henderson tries to re-inscribe difference through racial labeling and stereotyping ("savage"); However, needless to say, Henderson's attraction to privilege and power immediately collapse the distance, revealing the falseness of these racist distinctions. After all, the equation is simple. If Dahfu *is* a marker of lowly black savagery, then Henderson's identification with and admiration for the king positions Bellow's protagonist as a lesser being—a significant blow to the myth of white

supremacy that has undergirded Henderson's perspective and actions up to this point. Moreover, a greater irony lies in Eugene Henderson's idolizing: Henderson admires the very qualities in Dahfu that have led to Henderson's downfall, the same "curse" or exploitive investment in elitist western supremacy and a resulting privilege. Recall in *Rain King*, at one point while contemplating why he left for Africa, Henderson states, again, "Nobody truly occupies a station in life any more. There are mostly people who feel that they occupy the place that belongs to another by rights. There are displaced persons everywhere" (34). Though the character refers to what he believes is social status in the United States, these lines truly define both Dahfu's and Henderson's status in Africa as ill-placed western influences.

Well beyond race, Dahfu does embody what Bellow at one point said Americans had become, "savage men who have been educated into believing there are no mysteries" (Cronin and Siegel 243). Furthermore, he appears to be the consummate leader, but the reader quickly discovers that Dahfu has been "schooled in the ideas of the West and in a sense brainwashed by its achievements" (Ackah 24). Physically, the king is disconnected from the western world he has come to value; mentally, he has completely disconnected himself from his traditional, African foundation. He is in limbo. The king effectively creates a cultural gulley between himself and his people, despite his physical return and willing submission to and participation in cultural rituals throughout the novel. Dahfu thoroughly believes in the power of western science and reasoning and uses it to reduce his native beliefs in fragmentary ways. Furthermore, as a leader, Dahfu's convictions have no true aims. Dahfu holds no nationalist or pan-Africanist ideologies as actual western educated leaders of *Rain King's* time. He also never applies his beliefs toward

any particular task to build new political or theoretical grounds from which to lead his village. He approaches the Wariri with little interest. Duty drives him and he resents it, for in his own homeland he lacks motivation altogether. Ironically, Dahfu is highly educated, having traveled and attended medical school. With his mastery of useful western knowledge, he has the potential to be a healer, a healthy site of hybridization, but instead has become a dangerous site of moping conflict.

Much like his western counterpart Henderson, Dahfu fatally lives in constant violation of cultural norms, yet in the constant lap of the culture's privileges. Beyond his lioness Atti (a dangerous animal whom he keeps against his people's wishes), Henderson becomes Dahfu's only loyal but problematic companion until Dahfu's death. The young king is aware of this as he confides in Henderson, "For I do not find it easy to express myself to my own people. Only Horoko has been in the world at all and with him I cannot freely exchange with him either. They are against me here," and he is right (212). Dahfu's status as a definite figure, as one who has already become, as one who does not change, as one who controls relationship dynamics with others in the village, is terminal. Leisure literally dominates his life throughout most of the novel as he lies about being passively massaged, fed, and bred like a lamb to the slaughter.

In *Rain King's* most symbolic passage, the reader finds Dahfu perched on the thin pole of a traditional lion trap, again dangerously isolated from his village subjects' beliefs and ways of life. Distracted by both his American companion (who truly is a hindrance as a pun on Henderson's name suggests) and his own careless handling of Wariri tradition, Dahfu falls prey to the allure of a "wild" search for his father's spirit lion, Gmilo. In an uproar, he falls to his death, an illegitimate king. In a sense Dahfu fails to balance not

only his physical body but also his investments in his worlds, both old and new. Ironically, here Bellow presents a too accurate, prophetic portrait of Ghana's Nkrumah, ousted in 1966. The people felt the "Great Father" had grown disconnected from their plights as he isolated himself and limited the people's governmental rights, among them the right to democratically elect another president (Smertin 129-30). Depending more heavily on iffy American-backed support, Nkrumah also added financial burdens on his people in the form of high taxation to pay for what he believed to be scientific advancements including the ill fated Askombo Dam project, so suspiciously similar to Henderson's frog scheme.

Assessing *Rain King*, it appears that no character successfully negotiates the space between this Africa's traditions and Western ideals, certainly not Henderson or the two prominent African leaders. However, one character does and benefits—Horoko, Dahfu's uncle and the village "magistrate." He is a type of invisible man waiting to emerge from abasement, from servanthood into agency. Bellow constantly associates Horoko with dog imagery that is not necessarily racist or stereotypical if we look past Henderson's point of view. Henderson describes, for example, Horoko's wagging red tongue and bobbing head, referencing, presumably, Horoko's service to his nephew, the king whom he counsels throughout the novel until Dahfu dies. Because of Eugene Henderson's investments in African stereotypes and his own false confidence in his superiority, only towards the novel's end does Henderson shift perspectives to see Horoko as a power figure.

Dahfu's uncle is a tangible threat and possible betrayer if one links Horoko to Dahfu's death. However, Horoko is not a betrayer in one sense: he remains loyal to that

which he has always valued—neither Dahfu, western perks, or racial kinship, but his culture. Tradition literally binds him: His clothes and jewelry, blood red, are as much a part of his identity as his role among his people. His dress and name—possibly the Czech word for “heat” or “fervidness”—are not just easily digestible symbols of communism and the red scare so rampant in Bellow’s day. They imply that Horoko possesses an aggressive passion or an investment in the Wariri, an intensity that Dahfu did not. He is a type of African leader thus absent in the novel, one connected to his community.

Moreover, whereas Dahfu possessed western thought and a high investment in whiteness, Horoko possesses western authority—a military regime armed subversively with the western weapons of a defeated English general. Those firearms translate into tangible material power for this hybrid Wariri tribe and a very real power that Bellow bestows upon this imaginary Africa. In fact, the more power Bellow reveals in his Africa, the less power westernized (or Americanized) figures have, including Henderson. Henderson’s supposed racial superiority masquerading as nationalism and his constant philosophizing have produced very little understanding of these people and of his own circumstances in this imaginary Africa. Indeed, the novel supplies a particularly unsatisfying resolution to Henderson’s supposed self-quest for renewed white power and privilege.

Henderson’s renewal stands much like *Invisible Man*’s Norton’s contrived sense of power. Ellison’s President Bledsoe controls Trustee Norton from the moment Ellison introduces the characters. Bledsoe’s manipulation and carefully orchestrated black experience lend Norton a false sense of importance. Likewise, Henderson has been a pawn to both the Arnewi’s and Wariri’s ulterior motives all along, a game that began long before he arrives in the Wariri village. Among the Wariri, Henderson’s lifting of the

statue Mummah and crowning as Sungo-King are in vain. The Wariri *intentionally* permit Henderson to rise to status in a dual deception. In one ruse, Dahfu and the elders trick Eugene into fulfilling the painfully rigorous but crucial rain ceremony that no one else wants to complete. Dahfu states at one point, “We could not refrain from making use of you. It was because of the circumstances”(216). Henderson has abandoned associations with his white community from which he gains his group-conferred privileges, attempting to obtain what he thinks is a greater position of authority as Rain King and companion to King Dahfu. He does not fully understand that to be a king in the Wariri culture is not a position of pure privilege or power as he understands it, but rather a place of abasement and servanthood (and even death as Dahfu suggests in a vivid scene when he holds the skulls of his ancestors in his hand). The Wariri control Henderson the entire time he acts as Rain King, a massive reversal of power. When Henderson moves the ritual statue Mummah, he picks up an allegorical re-interpretation of the white man’s burden to refine the primitive black savage. Ultimately, however, the novel’s Africanist characters resist re-definition and, instead, redefine Henderson. Ironically, even as Henderson flees the United States to avoid being subject to cultural restrictions and pressures, he becomes subject to the Wariri’s cultural practices and pressures. The tribe rushes him through the village in a wild chase and beats all the while to “keep the white man running,” as Ellison’s grandfather suggested in the Battle Royal section of *Invisible Man*.⁸⁰

The Africanist people within *Rain King* operate, not as raced beings, but as cultural beings invested in their own motives, social systems, and welfare. Henderson cannot comprehend it because he desires to see white-affirming, helpless black subjects

among all but the most exceptional. Readers see otherwise. Henderson's Norton-like attempts to regain power and white affirmation from the book's black subjects have failed. His supposed victories are not victories at all. Much like Norton's trip to the rural outskirts of the black community surrounding his beloved Negro college, the deeper Henderson has travelled into African territory, the less authority his whiteness and wealth have, and the less success he has had in exerting his supposed privilege. Once again, the Arnewi's and Wariri's hybrid existences between traditional and Western influences allow no untouched space for Henderson to establish himself and to project his, once again, increasingly worthless whiteness. Ultimately, in each tribe's hinterland, Eugene must assume the role each village community assigns him (whether that role be the Arnewi Bittah woman's spouse or the Wariri's Sungo-King) or leave unfulfilled. In both cases, incapable, Henderson leaves and exercises the one white privilege he maintains throughout *Rain King*, the ability to escape.

Even Henderson's ultimate act of redemption and undue appropriation fails. His stealing of the Wariri's ritual cub (a symbol of renewed life and power) is null: if we honor the exact protocol of Wariri tradition as Dahfu describes it, Henderson actually interrupts Dahfu's reincarnation cycle at a point in which Dahfu's spirit has yet to transfer to the cub. Dahfu by ritual standards is never legally proclaimed King. No transfer has occurred. Henderson's cub is just a cub, an animal. Beyond Henderson's own imagination and newly acquired superstitious beliefs, in no way possible does this pet serve as a source of supernatural human power. Neither is Henderson's cub a suitable substitute for Ricey's lost child as Henderson implies on his plane ride home.

F. Ogun Balogun suggests that ultimately Henderson achieves racial reconciliation by the novel's end, but Henderson achieves far from this. Indeed, Henderson's conflation of the cub Dahfu and Ricey's baby speaks volumes about his unrepentant views. The "colored" child weighing on Henderson's mind is barely human for him just as the cub is just an animal. However, the cub embodies instinctive danger waiting to mature into a greater problem in much the same way Bellow suggests that U.S. policy is an eminent danger, not just to African nations, but to the United States as well.

Leaving behind the new military order in Bellow's imaginary Africa, *Rain King's* final scene positions protagonist Henderson en route to the United States with his whiteness and its privileges appearing to be in working order. Curiously, however, on Henderson's return home, Bellow also sends with Henderson a small, dark-haired, pale-skinned Persian-American boy. He is another racially-mixed symbol of American whiteness who acts as a young foil or parallel to Henderson who describes himself from the novel's opening as having Persian lamb's fur for hair (Bellow 4). During this final portion of the novel, Henderson feels he has finally come full circle and found a purpose for being as he cares for the orphan child (a little boy who has been divorced from all he knows after his American parents die abroad, another reflection on Henderson's Diaspora birth origins). Could this child be a suitable white replacement for Ricey's colored baby, a suitable white heir for Henderson? Henderson romps around in Newfoundland—"New Found Land," a new place—with the child in his arms and declares that the boy is like "medicine" to him, something that heals him, makes him feel better. The boy is yet another being that Henderson can "help," but the child is also another source of whiteness Henderson can, once again, co-opt (340). But alas, Henderson's moment is a flop, a

temporary plane stop for fuel. Moreover, the child does not belong to him. Henderson will eventually leave this new found place and must surrender this lone orphan to authorities once the plane reaches Idlewild. In the meantime, Henderson must take pleasure in the absolute whiteness of the moment. His final play in the white ice of Newfoundland is just that—a temporary performance in an impermanent, fleeting whiteness (a lifeless, transitory, fading thing). When Henderson’s plane refuels, he will return to the same place where his journey started—in “Idle” “wild” where Lily awaits his arrival. This place is anything but new. The same chaos Henderson left awaits him. It is the same place of *idleness* or inactivity and *wildness* or disorder where “Lily” whiteness (a false embodiment of white racial purity) and a superficial understanding of raced personhood accompany Henderson. This allegorical American has nothing to show for himself in return but a potential danger that he has misread, a cub whose symbolic meaning is nothingness itself—a dangerous, self imagined predatory emptiness that will eventually mature to cause more problems than the Henderson’s of the land have anticipated. He is too consumed with this false freedom anyway to understand the impending ramifications of his deeds, but soon enough he will know the fate of pigs housed with a growing lion.

Henderson is not the only white figure who fails to change within this study. The same sense of social stagnation and impending doom strike a number of Melinda Haynes’ white characters in the novel *Mother of Pearl*, this project’s second case study. In Haynes’ case, however, the charmed life of a southern white patriarchy comes to a blunt end from which there is no recovery. Raised up instead is a host of Africanist characters

and redeemed white Others who redefine the southern socialscape Haynes painstakingly creates from a 1956 Petal, Mississippi.

CHAPTER IV

RE-MEMBERING EMMETT: LYNCH IMAGERY AND RACIAL IDENTITY

IN MELINDA HAYNES' *MOTHER OF PEARL*

As the larger scope of this project suggests, more contemporary non-black writers are questioning and even dismantling racist ideologies, especially false notions of racial purity that produce limited, often skewed images of blackness and whiteness in American literary texts. The authors examined in this project follow diverse paths toward disassembling race but share two likenesses: all deploy revisionist strategies akin to some aspect of the African American literary tradition and construct racialized images of blackness that disturb preconceived notions of racial purity on multiple ethnic fronts. The previous chapter examined how Jewish American Saul Bellow confronts a 1950s privileged, white supremacist mindset in his work *Henderson the Rain King*. Under the influence of writer Ralph Ellison, Bellow creates white and black characters who appear to reproduce racial stereotypes in *Rain King*'s invented African setting. The novel crushes these stereotypical associations as the novel's white supremacist, power producing mechanism collapses upon itself in racialized contradictions. A similar racial repositioning occurs in Melinda Haynes' novel *Mother of Pearl*, the focus of this chapter; however, Haynes does not rely exclusively on disruptive stereotypes to challenge racial hierarchies. She reconfigures southern community by manipulating historical details and racially stratified social roles.

Similar to Saul Bellow's invention of Africa, Melinda Haynes fictionalizes 1950s Petal, Mississippi as her setting for *Mother of Pearl*. Within this space she erects an Africanist community she called "The Quarters" where protagonist Even Grade, father

figure Canaan Mosley, friend Grace Johnson and obeah Joody Two Sun live, and where white stowaways Valuable Korner and Joleb Green find sanctuary. These Africanist personas and marked white Others gradually form a redeemed collective, what Haynes described in our recent interview as an unfulfilled image of her “wish” for a utopian harmony among people of different races and creeds (see Appendix for transcript of interview).⁸¹ However, this community functions as more than a simple ideal. Haynes juxtaposes The Quarters’ inhabitants alongside an externally stable white Petal township plagued with internal issues, including illness, incest and spiritual coldness. The course of events streaming between these racialized communities delivers the novel’s aim, a fatal indictment against a supposedly superior, racist white South. Much like Saul Bellow’s 1950s *Rain King* culture, Haynes’ southern white community fails to discern approaching social change—the decline of southern myths of absolute racial difference and social distance. As *Mother of Pearl* shifts through the 1950s early Civil Rights era, proverbial chickens come home to roost as the violence visited upon the historically desecrated black body is returned to its source, the white southern patriarch. Simultaneously, as the white patriarchy fails, Haynes also restructures the novel’s sense of community around an alternative center—a restored southern black manhood that resists traditional patriarchal bearings so prevalent among *Mother of Pearl*’s faltering white characters.

Haynes’ Manipulation of Historical Context

Domestic racial conflicts that barely grace the background of Saul Bellow’s 1959 *Rain King*, haunt southerner Haynes’ 1999 novel. She strategically sets *Mother of Pearl* in the thick of pre-Civil Rights racial unrest even though Petal’s township experiences limited direct racial commotion during the course of the novel. Judging from character

Canaan Mosley's newspaper reading, the book begins just days before early efforts to integrate Arkansas public schools (Haynes 26, 73).⁸² A year and a month after the book's start, the Little Rock Nine will integrate Central High school after countless death threats and foiled legal motions. In the meantime, just 244 miles from Petal, Mississippi, the Montgomery Bus Boycott is entering its final three months in Alabama. Haynes' most profound historical manipulation begins from the book's opening scene. She begins the novel's social repositioning and counter-positioning with a strong reliance on lynching imagery tied to the August 1955 Emmett Till murder. She deliberately places her blood covered protagonist Even Grade under the "two-week bake" of an August 1956 sun—the year-to-date anniversary of Emmett Till's lynching and just six months recovered from his killers' openly published *Look Magazine* confession (Haynes 1; Huie).⁸³

Haynes' allusions to both lynching and the South's racialized history draw attention to southern culture as both a contemporary entity and as an American historical fact (much like Bellow's invention of Africa subtly draws attention to the material presence of the African continent). On one hand, American national consciousness adores the mythic South. "Dixie" is a quaint enclave of "authentic" American culture—a romantic fiction of mint juleps, wraparound porches, and Scarlet O'Hara's lingering under majestic oaks that transform into pecan trees for Haynes (Karem 3; McPherson 13).⁸⁴ On the other hand, American national culture castigates its southern members as wayward: the South's supposed "backwardness" overwhelms the region, a land already *always* tainted with the legacy of American slavery, strange fruit, iconic colored-only water fountains, and poverty. Haynes laces her entire novel with bizarre possibilities, minute details that mimic the same 1950s American southern air that permitted Till's

death. In *Mother of Pearl's* contradictory South, an ordinary fourteen year old character Valuable Korner absentmindedly rummages through an old trunk to find what she thinks are ordinary love letters, only to discover a cache of lynching chronicles from a “serial killer” KKK member. In this version of the South, this klansman, William Dixon Korner, casually corresponds in much detail with his daughter Luvenia about how he murders local blacks because he feels God has called him to rid the earth of “Cain’s seed” (287). A naturally unnatural southern tension ebbs and tides throughout *Mother of Pearl* like the slight fleeting panic that seizes Valuable over the possibility that her then unidentified letter writer could still be alive to discover her discovery. Of course, in this South the same young girl who befriends a black father figure later within the novel also discovers that the killer in question is her great grandfather. Later still, similar uneasiness taints the ease of an ordinary, casual afternoon conversation between women who unknowingly reveal secrets of the dead in Haynes’ South—Grace Johnson’s murdered husband, the fondly remembered, once lively Tallyboy, is William Dixon Korner’s lynched “seed of Cain.” Much like Emmett Till’s memory, Tally Boy’s unnamed absence lingers after a simple gesture—Grace removes his clothing from a chest during a terrific southern storm. Like so many real lynching victims, Tally Boy’s life’s story remains unresolved through most of the novel’s second half, a subtle subplot whose details subversively flavor the novel’s atmosphere and point to a peculiar, life-wilting regional reality.

Donna Jo Smith channels this strange southern otherness in her literary discussion of Truman Capote and queer identity and the South. “The term southern queer is redundant” Smith observes, because, “the South is already an aberration” (Smith and Cohn 10). For some, this peculiar southern-ness embodies the very antithesis of the

American ideals of liberalism, freedom and equality. By no coincidence, these values resemble those same American principles mentioned in earlier chapters—the same ideals white American writers have traditionally (and hypocritically) explored in their writings through Africanisms (images of blackness), though seldom for the betterment of those Africanist people and cultures being depicted (Griffin and Doyle 22; Morrison, *Playing* 44). Smith's statement locates the perception of "perversion," not in gender and sexuality, but "already" in land and region—within the place and southern cultural context. A damaging facet of "southern exceptionalism" (separatism) emerges, wherein the South by virtue of just *being* the South is a site of abnormality or difference that negatively colors southerners' humanity. Smith's observation only begins to suggest the range and blend of identity tags that a southern lens could intimately complicate; however, within this regional context, no aspect of southern identities could be complicated more than race, especially in service to white supremacist ideologies. Race is the dominant hinge in the South's multi-faceted shame (a complex weave of difference combining race, sexuality, gender and class to bolster white supremacy), and lynching is this shame's highest expression.

Patriarchal systems of lynching and Jim Crow apartheid extended the South's past investments in American slavery as a racist system of human oppression. Shawn Michelle Smith notes that the spectacle of lynching in particular gave white participants a "sense of control over racial signification" since "whiteness" and "blackness" no longer represented "clear social positions" after slavery and the enfranchisement of black male voters (149). Based on black inferiority, racialized violence and segregation allowed the South to preserve its white supremacist orientation well into more contemporary eras, in

what David Carleton describes as “its more elaborate American forms basic to the ‘southern way of Life’” (Griffin and Doyle 33). By correlation, this same “southern way of life” filled the region’s traditionally segregated literary imagination well before Melinda Haynes’ day.

Haynes and Southern Literary Traditions

Prior to Melinda Haynes’ generation, modernism was the most influential literary movement of the early to mid-twentieth century. White southern authors were not just inventing literary representations of the South. These modernists were reinventing the South on the printed page to mask a less than glorious history of defeat, Northern control, and post-civil war poverty (Guinn xii). Michael Kreyling suggests that southern modernism “detoxified” history from the region’s literature as a “counter response” to ever evolving desegregation and the possibility of miscegenation (Kreyling xiii), foremost threats to southern tradition during *Mother of Pearl*’s early civil rights setting. As a result, these earlier writers’ works reinforced myths of a progressive, uninterrupted white male authority while exercising one of the greatest of white privileges: on creative and critical fronts, their works obliterated accountability to represent accurately those upon whose backs their advantages were founded. They erased from their accounts most semblances of the actual lives and experiences of African Americans and white women.

Kreyling cites controversial figure William Faulkner as the “Michelangelo around whose achievements” the old guard (older southern scholars and fellow writers) rallied to arrange often biased, untroubled representations of southern culture (Kreyling xiv). The realities of race and social change were rapidly becoming the “the historical slap that breaks the amnesia”(Kreyling 48). Nevertheless, modernists like Faulkner were content

painting “images” of blackness and womanhood devoid of human interest. Faulkner’s highly anthologized short story “Barn Burning” comes to mind with its dynamic southern rebel Abner Snopes who comes alive to commit every southern sin of etiquette imaginable, at times “without heat” and at times with great destruction and disrespect. Meanwhile, a nameless Negro servant opens doors and totes ruined rugs as the blank, “bovine” Snopes daughters occupy space like so many trees, houses and animals that fill Faulkner’s landscapes (Faulkner 7).⁸⁵ These later likenesses provide little more than static, unproblematic atmosphere for settings, a direct contrast to Haynes’ invoking of racialized violence and dynamic background figures like the lynched Tally Boy. Gone is the airbrushed agrarian Eden of the modernist writer’s South.

According to Matthew Guinn’s *After Southern Modernism*, contemporary southern writers like Haynes have drawn inspiration from earlier white male writers only to disrupt the older generation’s literary paradigms. Guinn urges readers to view these newer writers’ works as “not...seeking continuity but discontinuity” with “stock motifs of history, place and community” so dominant in earlier generations’ works (Guinn ix-x). Though Guinn portrays Haynes’ generation as “hostile” and “indifferent” towards the “nostalgia and elitism” of their elders (xxi), his strong introductory claims are too absolute, especially considering Haynes’ figurative Jeremiah Wright-style respect for Faulkner.⁸⁶ No doubt, if Faulkner were this project’s focus, many examples of his influences would emerge from *Mother of Pearl*. Haynes credits the same Faulkner as crucial to her development as a reader and writer. Ironically, she even quotes Faulkner in an epigraph for her Africanist centered novel.⁸⁷ Haynes’ positive identification with this literary elder highlights the first of two conflicts in generational interests: the glorious

grand narrative of the old South demands that we forget the sufferings inherent to southern history while Haynes chooses to remember. This same conflict of interests also defines the African American southern writer's position within and against the southern literary tradition.

Social remembrance and revisionist southern narratives have also traditionally emerged from the African American Literary tradition to expose the realities of southern life and its linchpin, blackness. In her work *Exorcising Blackness*, Trudier Harris identifies lynching in particular as a consistent concern within the works of African American writers for over a hundred years (Harris 6).⁸⁸ Laura Dawkins points to African American creative writers' uses of racialized violence as "sites of memory" in their works to promote what Dawkins calls "commemorative vigilance" (Dawkins 112). Similar to Haynes' goals, the retelling of brutal stories serves as a "witness" to the past and as a "corrective" to what she describes as "narrowly focused mainstream accounts" of history. According to Harris, at its height the social act of lynching reinforced "white solidarity against blacks" or what Dora Apel describes as "murder endorsed by community," condoned communal will to power over black victims that embodied white communities' "values of law and order, white masculine affirmation, family honor, and white supremacy" (Apel 14-15). For Harris, this racialized violence provided these same white communities with a ritual black scapegoat through which they purged their negativity, controlled black populations, and falsely elevated white supremacy. Apel further suggests that the success of lynching, this racialized affirmation of white community, depended on "looking" at the spectacle, this scapegoat. The white lynching crowd focused a communal gaze on the black victim (Apel 15). This "look" produced an

air of white power among its perpetrators that would spread as a terrifying sense of “white surveillance that ever threatened to break out in violence” against those Africanist people who witnessed the after effects of mob violence upon black victims’ mutilated bodies (S. Smith 149).

Conversely, African American authors’ literary portrayals of these same ritualized killings have helped to “consolidate for their black readers the threat” that white communities represent. In a sense, these writers are returning a revisionist communal gaze through the written word. Harris describes the *black* writer as a “ritual priest...keeping before the black audience” the “essence” of the violence and death that has “shaped their lives” historically even if not directly (Harris 70). Harris’ word “priest” is noteworthy. It implies the handling of sacred, spiritual experience that goes beyond just the physical effects of racial violence. This act of reproducing violence and injustice on the written page is an inner work meant to affect the very souls of folk. The rehearsing of these past atrocities systematically marks the conscious, guarantees that no one forgets what has happened—not the black audience for which these authors write, nor those outside of black communities who would rather forget, especially those descendents of historically white perpetrators.

Haynes, as a white southerner, muddies the clean cut binary between the black rememberer and the historical white oppressor. She consciously moves into a posture very similar to that of African American writers, both *writing* and *remembering* racialized violence for her audience. Indeed, Haynes’ parallels with the African American Literary Tradition are much stronger than one realizes. Faulkner is an earlier, problematic literary forefather, but Matthew Guinn also cites as contemporary influences on southern writers

the much older, more established African American authors Zora Neale Hurston and Richard Wright. Guinn lauds Hurston and Wright for their prominent development of “tightly bound communities of outsiders” and “the use of this outsider status as a form of protest,” respectively (xii). In similar fashion to Hurston, Haynes describes *Mother of Pearl*'s cast as “marginalized” characters, “misfits...looking for a tribe, a place to belong” (Haynes Personal Interview), a place that they obviously find within the confines of her novel like Hurston's characters who also repeatedly struggle to establish themselves within stable communities against external and internal conflict. To align Haynes with these writers however, opens up issues of experience, especially so for Richard Wright, whose kinship opens far more problematic but fruitful doors, given Wright's more dominant concerns with lynching and black manhood, Haynes' focus throughout *Mother of Pearl*.⁸⁹

Despite his success, Wright, as a son of Mississippi, spent a majority of his career writing himself and his characters *out of a southern homeland* with which he could never make peace.⁹⁰ Margaret Walker suggests that Wright's volatile, peaceless, placeless characters are an intense reflection of Wright's own “hellish” experiences grown out of anger, racial ambivalence, alienation, and aberration that “predestined him “ to be subject to the “crucible of racial suffering” (Walker 5). In an in-depth analysis of Wright's corpus, Trudier Harris notes that lynching, burning rituals, and the “historical and social connotations” surrounding these acts shaped Wright's core artistic outlook on American culture. “Metaphoric lynching, along with literal lynching, permeates his work,” Harris observes. “Together they set a pervasive tone of fear and apprehension” and become “the stimuli” that shape Wright's characters' actions. These black male

characters live, eat, and breathe the threats perpetually hanging over their heads” (Harris 95). These personal threats haunting Wright’s works do manifest themselves in Haynes’ work to some degree, but Haynes’ characters negotiate those threats differently. Whereas Wright’s characters are ever preoccupied with trying to escape the South, Haynes’ characters are more occupied, much like Hurston’s characters, with how to live within the South, despite the shadow of white supremacy and racially motivated violence.

Lynching, Black Manhood, and Africanist Community

Haynes’ literary investments in 1950s segregationist South first translate into *Mother of Pearl*’s physical description of landscape. Interestingly enough, she channels Richard Wright’s description of his divided Arkansas hometown in the essay “The Ethics of Living Jim Crow.” The dock weed lined roads, Even Grade’s bare yard where no grass will grow, the character Clothea’s leaning, “canterwalled” house (Haynes 231)—all naturally parallel Wright’s childhood home behind the tracks with “its skimpy yard...paved with black ciders” where “nothing green ever grew” except “where the whites lived” with their “the hard, sharp outlines of white houses surrounded by trees, lawns, and hedges” (Wright 3-5). Further along on an extended walk through Petal with Even Grade, readers begin to grasp the depth of the social climate. Even Grade has just picked up the severed face of James Evans, a fellow black laborer. Evans has been “splayed open” in a trench with “his arms spread out like Christ” when a dangerous pipeline breaches because of another killed worker’s inattentiveness (Haynes 3-4). Even Grade and father figure Canaan Mosley are a part of this same “Bull Gang” of twenty-seven black mechanics who have been given “every low- down shitty job” the whites do not want at Hercules Powder, a local explosives and chemical manufacturer.⁹¹ Typical of

a segregated South where black bodies are expendable, the black workers have no legal recourse. The “union wouldn’t let in the Negro in 1956,” exclaims Canaan (3). Exposing inequalities, Haynes presents the dead co-worker to readers in an act of commemoration. When Even “ties on” James Evans’ face out of compassion for the dead man’s mother, Haynes symbolically begins the process of restoring a face to black manhood. She reinstates identity to the archetypal southern black male who falls prey to racialized systems that doom him to be a target in both life and literature. Haynes’ characters refuse to be nameless victims of white racism or of black nihilism in her literary South.

As Even contemplates a white driver’s earlier assault on the older Canaan Mosley, the narrator notes that Canaan “*caught*” a thrown coke bottle “with his head”(1, italics added). Haynes subtly snatches the power of the deed away from the attacker with language. Within two weeks, Even notices that the sun has blended Canaan’s spilled blood on the bridge planks. The color of a “rusted girder,” this blood carries multiple meanings. It speaks of the weathered strength that Haynes associates with her black characters. It also symbolizes the deterioration of old support systems, of southern racial terrorism that begins to fail within the novel in much the same way that regionalist politics began to fail in actual history when Emmett Till’s body and his story rose from the Tallahatchie River to spur on the Civil Rights Movement. At this moment in the text, Haynes also reflects the horrors of racial violence—the lynching and burning of black flesh—in her description of the scene around Leaf River. Grade can smell the odor of grilling meat wafting pointedly from the white side of town while he is “spying out travel-blackened logs lying like sleepers” in the river. This imagery repeats throughout the novel as Even travels by foot along the river that turns into a major Emmett Till

Allusion: the curiously named “Baby Black Creek” with its “drowned groves of ironwoods ...steel-like limbs scattered like tossed bones, bleached by weather an time” (34). At the earliest point of the novel, from the town bridge Even contemplates the values of “browns” he sees in the river’s rotting leaves, an obvious reference to black skin and flesh. All the while, the recently deceased Willie Bracket’s blood dries on Even’s shirt, “turning stiff in a breeze...like a crusty leaf,” much like the strange fruit of a hanging victim suspended from leaning trees, “made curious by their reflection” (Haynes 2). Even, however, is not the dead. Neither is Canaan Mosley, though the narrator describes Canaan’s face as resembling a “dried up mummy...his mouth frozen open inside a face so lined,” when he hears news of Bracket’s and Evans’ deaths (2). Through the imagery, Haynes acknowledges the threat of social death these men meet, but she also affirms the value of black manhood and life itself.

When Even continues his walk home we find more of Canaan’s dried blood as Even travels through Petal’s white business. Even traces Canaan’s “blood pennies dribbled across half of Petal because some boy in a truck took a good aim at a wobbly old Negro” (5). Canaan’s bloodshed becomes currency here, has value despite its discounted worth. Once again, Haynes displaces the white attacker’s agency invested in the deed. The “boy” only took a “good aim,” an element of chance, luck on the part of an unskilled white agent who is not a man. Moreover, the target is a “wobbly *old* Negro.” The language Haynes uses is powerful. As Martin Favor observes, the invocation of an “old Negro” suggests the existence of a “new” Negro, in this case Even Grade (Favor 3, 149). In *The New Negro : Essays on Race, Representation, and African American Culture*, Henry Louis Gates and Jean Jarrett recount that black intellectuals have long used the

phrase “new Negro “ as “a sign of plenitude and regeneration, or a reconstructed presence” whereas the phrase “old Negro” has represented “lack, degeneration, or...negated absence,” a figment of the “popular American imagination devoid of all characteristics that supposed separated the lower forms of human life from higher forms” (Gates and Jarret 3). Haynes describes the healing scar on the older Canaan Mosley ’s forehead as a “question mark tilted to its side” as if to pose a query about the readings of race, inequality and hatred, not just among whites, but among her black characters as well (Haynes 2).

Haynes’ development of the character Canaan Mosley is crucial to her latter ultimate re-conception of black manhood through younger character Even Grade. As a type of southern black man, previously, the older Canaan’s focus rested on his fears and sheer desire for preservation against threats of impending racial violence. He had taken “comfort in the slow move” of the equality movement and reportedly complained that “high minded *Negroes*” (younger “new Negro” Civil Rights activists) would “get us niggers kilt” (Haynes 26). His caution clearly associates Canaan with the old black southern guard, one often attacked as overly conservative, accepting, and accommodating, particularly towards white controllers. The controversial figure of Booker T. Washington and his Tuskegee University project come to mind. However, instead of writing off Canaan as a relic of a *bygoing* era, with this tilted mark Haynes signals a pro-Civil Rights shift in Canaan’s own thinking and consciousness of himself as a black man —and thus hope for his growth and influence in a changing South. Haynes redeems Canaan from a potential role as the stereotypical “old Negro” stereotype (as in

Sambo or Uncle Tom figure) twofold: he acts as a valuable mentor for the newer generation and as an awakening intellectual figure.

Canaan's value to the younger Even is certainly not lost in *Mother of Pearl*, particularly through his mentoring and commemorative use of historical violence. Throughout *Mother of Pearl* Canaan invokes Emmett Till's memory in particular at critical moments when Haynes is acknowledging social taboos from southern social systems that permitted Tills' death and that bind her characters' lives. For example, in one instance Even prepares to shop at Lieberstein's Department Store in the white part of town where he previously followed Canaan's blood trail and is about to figuratively follow Canaan's lead once again. Even has ritualistically prepared himself for presentation in white society, but a re-centering is at play. Evidently, Even has never patronized the store, suggesting a certain black autonomy from white southern spaces. Even's dress shirt with starched creases "hard enough to slice medium cheese" is a sacrificial gesture (Haynes 97); he honors, not so much a larger white institution's expectations, but undertakes the ritual to honor his love interest Joody Two Sun with a gift. Nevertheless, unlike their young northern counterpart Emmett Till, Mosley and Even understand the dangers of the simplest, most mundane acts when one is black and "living Jim Crow."

Canaan, the guide, conducts an exchange, a page directly out of that systematic code of unwritten etiquette for black and white behavior in the segregated South: "Lieberstein's a big-ass store that don't like niggers, Even Grade," declares Canaan, but that will "tolerate Negroes" (99). The difference here between "niggers" and "Negroes" is the same old-new dichotomy, a shift from an outwardly defined racial identity

(niggers) to one based on dignity or behavior (Negroes). As the bearer of Even's Jim Crow lesson, Canaan is well aware of his own self-value, yet he is also keenly aware of the values an outside, white supremacist world places on his blackness. He follows up with a Till reference that equates Even's first trip to Lieberstein's with the dare Emmett Till received to "Go whistle at the white woman inside the gas station." In the ritualized reproduction of violence for remembrance and safety's sake, Canaan reminds Even that Till, "ended up dead as a knob" for a harmless expression of adolescent sexuality. Canaan's comment illuminates not only Even's socialized dangers, but Emmet Till's circumstances. Till did not comprehend the dynamics of double consciousness and double vision that allowed southern blacks to navigate a socially ambivalent South. He did not know how to "have one mind fuh the white folk to see, 'another fuh what I know'," a subtle form of personal resistance through double consciousness (Bell xi).⁹² On the surface, these moments in the *Mother of Pearl* may not seem radical in action, but these exchanges de-center the classic, white-authored southern narrative. Haynes' Africanist characters refuse to act as mere filler images for atmosphere within the vacuum of an older modernist South. Readers experience the intimacy of personal Africanist spaces where concerns for life constantly hover. In another personal moment of black southern consciousness, Canaan gains a deeper revelation about his black manhood that changes his already heightened self awareness as a learned man.

Canaan Mosley is a thinker who has self-educated himself while working as a custodian in the whites-only Hattiesburg Library. "I just wanted a scholar in there," Haynes related. "I just wanted someone a truly smart man that had nothing to do with...institutional learning. I just wanted somebody who had a quest for knowledge that

was based on just the love of it and that's how he evolved" (Haynes Personal Interview). Haynes "kept seeing him" in the Hattiesburg Library, "in a position surrounded by books" and describes him as "someone who's just a contemplative by nature." She further labels him "a cynic" without "a lot of confidence in human kind, but a great deal of admiration for the written word" and what Haynes describes as the "ancient scholars."⁹³ The first half of the novel finds Canaan writing a rather large volume titled *The Reality of the Negro*, but he never finishes, and readers are never privy to the book's content. Haynes' character remains "in a constant state of editing" throughout the novel. "It was an indicator of what I felt like was going on racially in the South at the time," the writers explains. "Everything was changing almost daily and in a sense that's how his work was. He would get to one point and then the reality of the Negro would change into something else and it's a book that no one could ever finish because the reality is constantly shifting" (Haynes Personal Interview). Though the thought of a self-educated black man who contemplates reality is positive, Canaan's reliance on "ancient scholars" proves problematic. He realizes that his attempts to better himself, to rely on intellect, isolation, and a conservative, maintenance approach to race survival do not spare him the pain of racism's sting.

After the previously mentioned white assailant randomly assaults him with a bottle, Canaan reaches a critical point. His former maintenance mentality begins to give way to a new level of historical self awareness and tangible action that Haynes associates with newer Africanist manhood throughout *Mother of Pearl*. Repeatedly, Canaan ponders when "the business," in Birmingham, Montgomery and Arkansas (early Civil Rights activities) "will cause a wrinkle in Petal"(Haynes 73). The old man latter experiences a

dream visitation from a split sow, a reoccurring symbol of mindless, violent victimization throughout the novel. The sow challenges Canaan to act, and the thought lingers with Mosley until he takes meaningful first steps to challenge segregation laws. Violating segregation laws, Mosley enters Hattiesburg Library in broad daylight. After about two minutes, Canaan leaves with no incident but feels the weight of scrutinizing glares from both white patrons and his own seared consciousness. In a sense the old biblical adage proves true: Canaan's knowledge increases his sorrow.⁹⁴ Haynes writes, "All he thinks...is this: I wish I knew how...I ain't never gonna, but I wish I knew how it felt—(—to be free.)[sic]" (Haynes 297). Canaan sees the gap between his philosophical ideals and his position as a black object "just like everyone else." When Canaan catalogues this "everyone else," the list is telling. Among those mentioned are some of the book's other black characters who each represent specific challenges to social role southern racism impairs: Even Grade, Clorena Gravis (the mother and owner of the crooked house in the Quarters), and Grace Johnson. Canaan's list shifts as it lengthens. He begins to record the novel's fictitious black dead (Willie Bracket and James Evans) and finally settles upon the very real historical dead, Emmett Till. The progression of this list ritualistically represents the weight of black personage lived out in the 1950s South: to be a friend, parent or neighbor, lover or spouse, colleague or son, an educated citizen—for Canaan, to be a man—is to be under a constant, complex mixture of triumph and mortal threat that never part company.⁹⁵

As mentioned earlier, this threat is key to many African American writers' works, most notably Richard Wright's. Much like those writers of the African American tradition, Haynes provides insight into the dynamic nature of her Africanist characters'

lives and intimate thoughts, how they define themselves against the grain of a larger white southern culture. How legitimate are these characters' their responses and outcomes, given Haynes' status as a white woman fictionalizing southern violence against a fictionalized black manhood in comparison, for example, to an earlier mentioned Wright's first-hand experience driven fictionalizing? Where Haynes' presence begins to dissolve socially drawn boundaries, identity issues arise. Authority issues arise. Who is authorized to speak for whom? In an earlier conversation for Harper Collins publishing, an interviewer asked Haynes where she found "the authority to write from the viewpoint of a black male" ("Melinda Haynes Answers Questions"). Resisting the urge to justify her authorial license, Haynes replied, "I didn't know I needed the authority. All I know is that I didn't hesitate at all when it came to writing from Even Grade's point of view." Haynes' authorial role and identity as a white southern women instantly invoke bell hooks' discussion of whiteness and horror in the black imagination. As hooks argues, "to name that whiteness in the black imagination is often a representation of terror" (hooks 41). Ironically, this "terror," this threat, could potentially describe not just the old white southern guard and the more obvious, traditional sources of white terror: it could also describe Haynes' personal and literary self as a southern insider with good intentions of revising a grave injustice in favor of a better, more harmonious vision of southern society. hooks insists that "one must face written histories that erase and deny, that reinvent the past to make the present vision of racial harmony and pluralism more plausible" (41). The danger of erasing lives has always loomed large, even for contemporary writers like Haynes.

Throughout her interview, Haynes suggested that one can move *beyond* race and difference on many levels, but the concept is tricky. “In a way I just wanted to go back to a time before I knew anything,” Haynes suggests. “It’s what I would consider the time before anything was imprinted on me [about race], what should or should not be (Haynes Personal Interview).” She wanted to approach the racialized history of this southern past with what she calls, “fresh eyes...so it would feel like something I had never ever experienced.” Haynes’ inexperience with both the time period and its racial strife loosely translates into what she sees as a type of innocence about the time period and its dynamics; however, to what degree can one truly manage the impact of a culture’s past weight upon one’s own ways of seeing and being in the world? As Anne DuCille notes in *Skin Trade*, “Biases are ideologically inscribed and institutionally reproduced and are not easily put aside—not by the most sensitive and well-intentioned amongst us” (DuCille 106).

Furthermore, as Homi Bhabha suggests, moving “beyond” race also implies the leaving behind of some tangible entity for another substantial thing *beyond the borders of one’s current state*—an out-of-body experience that is essentially impossible. Though Bhabha speaks mainly of postcolonial condition, he offers valuable tools for seeing racial difference in his work *Location of Culture*. Identity becomes the play or performance of our different ways of being in the “in between” spaces where the various components that make up our identities overlap. These interaction points are sites where both the conflict Haynes explores and the unity that Haynes desires are produced, not *beyond* race. Instead of erasing or escaping difference, more fruitful is understanding how identity, power, and relationships form where ethnicity and race, gender, sexuality, class, and so many other

identity tags meet or collide. The most obvious contact zone between Haynes as a white southern woman and the black manhood she attempts to recreate is a common historical oppression at the hands of a white southern patriarchal system.

Though white women have historically wielded the power of race and gender over black subjects, their same whiteness and traditional feminine roles have rendered them *almost* as powerless as the historical black agent against white male authority, and equally as consumable as Africanist people within white male-dominated social and fiscal economies. In *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, Susan Donaldson and Anne Jones present a formal model of southern race and gender dynamics intimately tied to physically raced bodies. They observe that southern race relations have developed alongside and even from a model of gendered domination (2), the same argument scholars bell hooks and Peggy McIntosh have forwarded in a more general sense of American culture.⁹⁶ Marrying the wages of whiteness and *female* gender, Patricia Yeager points to “the reification...of the *white woman’s* exterior” as a “*racialized body* in social space” just as much marked by ethnic difference as black bodies, but towards a different end. For Yeager, this racialized white female body, the mythical, sexually pure, helpless white southern belle, is used to justify “southern modes” of what she calls “population control” or systems of racial domination. The effects of this bodily “control” produce three offshoots: false racial difference between black and white bodies of both genders, racial segregation of those same bodies, and internalized “categories of racism” that “do the work” of separating the races (Yeager 292-3).⁹⁷ Historically, lynching as “population control” did the external work of race separation, but Shawn Michelle Smith points out a conundrum: lynching “harness[ed]” white women’s sexuality yet punished

white women's perceived transgressions (namely cross racial fraternizing and sexual intimacy) against the white southern patriarchy upon the bodies of Africanist people (149). In this sense, as Randall Kennedy suggests, white men's "sexual anxieties" over interracial relationships spurred "intensive policing of the race line" between white women and black men (Randall 17). Of course, this same white patriarch did not express similar anxieties over his involvements with black women, the third consumable party in this race equation. In a turnabout, Haynes exercises authorial control over this common source of oppression in *Mother of Pearl*, leading white patriarchal figures to consume themselves in their own prejudices and self-destructive behaviors.

Destruction of the White Patriarch

Any revision of southern racial dynamics (and especially black male stereotypes) requires the reviser to address the white southern patriarchy. After all, the white southern male held the greater controlling interest in what George P. Cunningham describes a "triangulation" of body politics between white and black men "as adversaries in a contest over the bodies of women," a contest that often allowed black men's bodies to be "emptied by violence of the possibility of agency" (Blount and Cunningham 135, 33). The previous chapter extensively explored *Rain King's* Eugene Henderson's status as a failed white patriarch who manipulates his privileged position and those attached to him, all to maintain white privilege and, hence, power. As Saul Bellow goes to great lengths to sabotage whiteness and its traditional patriarchal bearings through Eugene Henderson, so Haynes also dislocates a white supremacist patriarchy from the center of power and normalcy in *Mother of Pearl*. Haynes admits that many of her white male characters are pretty much caricatures or place holders for concepts of a resistant southern whiteness

and flawed supremacist ideals. One such compromised, self absorbed white figure is Beryn Green.

Beryn Green is a “the[stereo]typical, ignorant White man” who cannot accept racial difference or change (Haynes Personal Interview). One of *Mother of Pearl*’s most profound power reversals occurs when Beryn travels to the *Other* side of town (The Quarters) in search of his son Joleb. This trip exposes Beryn’s inability to move beyond his own preconceived notions of blackness when he misinterprets shared human suffering. In this scene, Haynes also engages classic Afrocentric turnabout as she flows into a strong rhetorical vein of the African American literary tradition. Beryn sees the character Clorena’s home separated from its supports due to storm waters. Instead of recognizing the obvious signs of flood damage all around, Beryn assumes that the abnormal conditions are normal for “Niggerville.” He credits the scene to “nigger passions” of which he “wanted no part” and contemplates the faulty ingenuity and reasoning of “niggers” (Haynes 255-6). He finally asks the absurd: “The owner didn’t buy that house that way on purpose, did he?” Canaan Mosley, the novel’s African American scholar, takes advantage of Beryn’s racist blinders and morphs into a subversive trickster figure. Mosley is steeped in what Bernard Bell identifies as a three-fold chord of double consciousness, double vision and socialized ambivalence that all lend power to black literary figures.⁹⁸ This trickster leads gullible Beryn into a ridiculous story about an “off balanced woman,” who “likes to bite black men” (257). Racist Beryn wills himself to believe the story, “a part of him knowing it couldn’t possibly be true, but another part allowing it because he wanted it true.” Canaan extends the outrageous episode for two pages, flinging out multiple comments that feed Beryn’s willful racist

ideals. He concludes that Beryn is “dumb” and looks at the white man “level” or eye to eye on equal footing. In reality, Canaan’s actions would have been a major violation of Jim Crow ethics. A black man was never to eye a white southerner directly lest white retaliation occur, but Haynes orchestrates this rare moment outside of white space to level then southern power dynamics that were as damaged and skewed as Clorena’s house.

Beryn’s prejudices are so great that he allows them to interfere with the white patriarch’s duty to secure the well-being of his offspring. He all but refuses to enter a black house to see Joleb, who has been missing for the first third or better of the novel. Beryn’s openly racist views lead him to reject Joleb at an earlier point as well, in part because the African American housekeeper Grace breastfed Joleb as a newborn. Oddly enough, Beryn’s repulsion is in direct conflict with the very history of the racist ideals he believes, ideals that exploited the Africanist female in every sense of her being sexually, maternally, and economically. Nevertheless, as a now teenaged Joleb grows older, Beryn continues this buried hatred just as he continues in his blatant, unfounded, matter-of-supposed-inherent-fact white supremacy. In many ways, flat uncomplicated characterizations like Beryn rely heavily upon expectations associated with an assumed racist southern American mindset, what Haynes describes as “southern mystique,” (racist associations readers readily credit to southern culture but not to other regions). Haynes takes her sabotage of Beryn’s false superiority and valued manhood to the very heart of southern lineage and Beryn Green’s family.

Green’s eldest son Burris, upon whom the patriarch places his favor and hope, becomes mentally unstable and commits what amounts to suicide. In truth, Burris is dead even before his fatal fall from the trestle into the “Baby Black” Creek. He is asleep for a

majority of his time alive—unaware of life and sedated by living. Brother Joleb even describes Burris' snoring and coughing as that of "an eighty year old smoker" (92), one already aged before his time. Burris also contributes nothing to the household and wastes his nights dangerously dodging oncoming trains because he says he can see the face of God in the approaching engines. He spends his time pursuing something he can never have in the flesh, for as biblical scripture says, no man can see the face of God and live.⁹⁹ He drives himself toward inevitable destruction, a walking emblem of the southern patriarchy's unenlightened, self destructive desires. Even Burris' name and his father's are similar, easily confusable, because they connote a shared nature as the characters Grace and Joe Liberstein suggest when they refer to the Green men as "fools."¹⁰⁰ Burris is simply a continuation of an old guard soon extinct. By no coincidence, when Burris dies, Haynes draws a stark parallel to the historical white patriarchy's loss of balance and fall from a dangerous, absolute power throughout a perverted South. Burris jumps backwards from a rusted support trestle, that same dually charged symbol of a deteriorating southern patriarchy and weathered black strength that opens the novel. Upon these same trestles rides symbolic trains of change and social movement, constantly passing through the novel—the same trains with which Burris is obsessed to the point of death.

Symbolically, Haynes also re-members Emmett Till by dismembering Burris Green. Burris' grotesquely bloated "white" corpse becomes a stand-in, a doppelganger for the bloated, water logged black corpse of Emmett Till in Haynes' historical revision. After the town calls off an intense search for this southern son, Burris' body floats up between the legs of a drunken white fisherman, Gilbert Morris, who has gone to the river

to make a name for himself out of fishing competition. Ironically, Morris, who is physically stuck in the mud, is mentally stuck in a position where he is confronted with a dead, fetid racist past intimately connected to his manhood and sexuality. The fisherman's most immediate hope is also the source of his anguish. He calls for "niggers" on the symbolic "road above" him to help free him from his predicament. In the meantime, Burris' immovable body also marks the end of Beryn Green's complete family lineage just as Till's disfigured body marked the end for Mamie Till Mobley's hopes. However, in Burris Green's case, an internal dissatisfaction drives the younger from the dysfunctional Green household into self-destruction's arms.

When Burris' body arrives to Louise Green's home for his wake, no support stand is available for Burris' casket. The town mortician must prop up Burris' body on a couch. In much the same way, support for a continuing systemically racist South is beginning to fail in America's 1950s political and cultural climate. Moreover, Haynes as a stand-in for the new southern writer will no longer accommodate an old South's past thinking and actions in grand fashion through her novel. She highlights Beryn's failure in his son's death. He cannot even follow through on his promise to make a special frame to sustain his dead legacy. As Louise observes, Beryn is unable to see this "sentimental" project through (184). He lacks motivation and vision, but Haynes does have vision for this section's extended parallel between Emmett Till's and Burris' funerals.

Mamie Till-Mobley chose to have a highly publicized and politicized funeral for Emmett Till to commemorate the importance of his untimely and brutal death.¹⁰¹ She wanted to expose what white southerners had done, to show the tangible evidence of lynching and white hatred. On a historical level, an uncensored, unprecedented

presentation of racial violence filled the national media when Mamie Till-Mobley demanded an open casket funeral for her son. Images of Till's grossly mutilated, unrecognizable body, "the sacrificial lamb of the Civil Rights Movement," galvanized the Civil Rights Movement. As flocks of people and media members crowded into a local facility to see the young boy's body, the gravity of his murder took a heavy emotional toll on visitors. Vintage footage shows mourners being overcome with grief as they file through to witness the results of extreme violence visited upon Till's body. Haynes adopts and reverses this same imagery—though for every inch of importance Emmett Till's death held, Haynes multiplies the unimportance of Burris Green's death. Burris receives a procession of curious mourners, but he only garners casual interest. The parade of viewers file by "in a squat to get a closer look" at Burris, as if "looking for a pee spot in tall grass" (Haynes 192). The description renders Burris diminutive in physical and social positioning. The general air of irreverence continues as teenager Jackson fantasizes about Burris' spilling out of his precariously positioned coffin to clear the room of visitors who "milled around like tourists. Moved in about to blow smoke rings. Returned empty dessert bowls to their cars" (191-3).¹⁰² Even those who should mourn for Burris do not.

Borrowing details from Till's mangled appearance, Louise Green describes Burris' skin as having the appearance of cheese. His nose is bleached white from exposure to the sun and his ear is "swollen and jerked to twice its size," symbolic of a deaf white patriarchy that cannot hear or that refuses to listen to the approaching change coming to Petal. For Louise, her nephews' body is "an incomplete exam. An essay in the impractical. An assignment poorly researched and absent of theory" (Haynes 197). His

death means nothing, has no underlying message or passion, much like the music playing in the background of the wake, “a poorly executed version of ‘Fountain Filled with Blood’” full of “discord” (193). Aunt Louise repeatedly tries to muster up an emotional response, but Haynes will not allow her to mourn her nephew’s death. As a storm brews outside, “the sky will cry...a fitting tribute” because she cannot (198). Instead, Louise’s disappointment with her nephew hovers: “The door opened and let in more light and she’d seen him as a man...just pitiful, now. His growing up a bitter disappointing fruit, after all. Her love too high and vertical to overlook it” (198). The “vertical” nature of Louise’s love in this passage suggests more than a human judgment, but rather a divine judgment from God against the “bitter fruit” that Burris had become—one of many reversed allusions to the famous Billie Holiday song “Strange Fruit” describing the bodies of lynch victims hung from southern trees.

As mentioned earlier, proverbial chickens come home to roost as the violence visited upon the historically desecrated black body is returned to its source—the white southern patriarch, or in this case the cursed seed of Beryn. In a previously discussed *Rain King*, a curse plagues Saul Bellow’s protagonist Eugene Henderson and drives him out of his home and country. During Burris’ funeral scene, a curse of sorts befalls Beryn as the failed Green family patriarch. Not only does Beryn lose a son, but he also loses a wife whose death conveniently overshadows Burris’ wake. When Mary Green dies at this untimely moment, immediately Beryn too becomes a part of the less than spectacular display as mourners rush in from one staged funeral to view another symbolic death, Beryn’s breakdown. Haynes employs high irony as Beryn declares before spectators “Thousands of bushed baskets! God’s hard luck orchard is full of bitter, bitter fruit!”—a

more overt play on Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit." In a parallel to the now famous photo of Mamie Till-Mobley's emotional collapse during her son's funeral, Beryn's cries muster little permanent attention as they flow "Up and out like the wail of a train near a crossing" (190-1). "Several watchers...appeared ready to cry" as Beryn falls apart, but they never do. Furthermore, Haynes loads the wording of Louise Green's announcement to the crowd with more lynch imagery: "We'll be out after Beryn pulls his parts together." Beryn's own composure disintegrates, and he, too, becomes a truncated white patriarch whose "parts"—his son and wife, traditional sources of status and power—Haynes cuts off. To seal the allusion, as Beryn huddles under the covers in the bedroom, Louise pats what cannot be discerned, "what was either back or bony ass/ Covered as he was she couldn't be sure" (190). As if Beryn were himself the charred remnants of a lynch victim, Haynes reduces Beryn to a mere "bump." He lies on Louise's bed under the symbolic shadow of a "heritage piece at the center that had served its time in the Civil War" (191), a showpiece relic of the old South that Louise had gone to great expense to obtain and preserve in its useless glory, shelved. Ultimately, as Haynes writes, Beryn is "a man more dead than alive" (198), just as spiritually dead and mentally bloated as his son's corpse, just as overwhelmed and drowned in his own beliefs as dead wife Mary's lungs.

As if Beryn's lack of hope is not deep enough, Haynes further preempts Beryn's final traditional drop of patriarchal power, paternity itself. Though Beryn Green never accepts the news, readers discover mid-novel that Beryn's remaining son is not his biological offspring. Completed is Beryn's failure as a father and husband. Not only is Beryn a cuckold who has provided for a bastard child, but Haynes further marks Joleb (an

embodiment of illegitimate white privilege and lineage) as an ethnic Other. In this instance, Haynes' text strikes a remarkable parallel to the previous chapter's discussion of Jewish identity and Saul Bellow's *Converso* protagonist Eugene Henderson—Joleb's father is a far more accomplished, well-to-do Jewish business man, Joe Lieberstein, hence Joleb's first name, Jo-Leb(erstein). Once Mary dies, Lieberstein immediately steps into the disorder of Joleb's life to provide an alternate patriarchal figure, one of many replacements for the traditional white southern patriarchy throughout the novel.¹⁰³

Haynes' invoking of this "put together" paternal Jewish blackness is significant. Jewish identity has long served as an intermediate marker between the absolute black–white racial dichotomy so pervasive in a larger American culture, and especially within a racially stratified South. In this case, Lieberstein is a literal mediating figure; his department store serves both white and blacks. This fictional detail aligns with the historical social role Jewish Americans have played between racial community borders as merchants, ethnic Others, and religious Others in the American South (Whitfield 305).¹⁰⁴ Joe Lieberstein has also mediated racialized interaction elsewhere, covertly orchestrating and financially supplementing the Green household's sustaining help (Grace Johnson). In a Jewish-African American alliance, Lieberstein's presence further undermines Beryn Green's authority in his household. In as much as Grace's true employer is Lieberstein, and Joleb's birth occasions her entry into and command of the Green home, Beryn's earlier snide comments about working for a "colored" are truer than he suspects.¹⁰⁵ This arrangement further strengthens Lieberstein's ethnic connections with Joleb, whom Haynes describes as a symbol of redemption in the novel. However, Joleb's redemption comes at a price—the figurative death of the boy's standing in white southern society.

Joleb initially imitates his other brother's self-destructive behavior and appears to be yet another duplication of southern patriarchy. In Burris' earlier death scene, Joleb literally follows in Burris' footsteps. He joins Burris on a train track in a game of chicken with an approaching locomotive. As the two begin to argue, a symbolic train of impending social change barrels down the track. Digging into Joleb's flesh, older brother Burris breaks Joleb's finger to break Joleb's symbolic hold onto whiteness. Haynes then introduces lynch imagery throughout the dramatic scene as Joleb's experiences the sensations of being hanged. In an ambiguous act that could be betrayal or sacrifice, Burris kicks the younger brother Joleb behind the knees from the trestle with a "sudden feeling of the bottom dropping clean away," but gravity flings the older Burris' awkwardly crumpled body into the silent Black Baby River much like Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam cast Emmet Till's corpse into the Tallahatchie River in 1955 (202). Both brothers fall, but only Burris dies.

When Joleb gains full consciousness, more lynching imagery ensues. Brown shadows among the trees and his own badly broken, bruised body confront a dirt covered, stinking Joleb in a process that one could only describe as a Lazarus experience, the dead returning to life. However, the savior figures who resurrect Joleb are none other than Haynes' Africanist characters, not Beryn Green or the other whites of Petal—a massive power reversal. Seer Joody Two Sun initially finds and nurses Joleb, but the two later find themselves overcome in a second catastrophe. A flood of biblical proportions brings the remaining characters from the Quarters to a collective rescue and to a centered position of community throughout the remainder of the novel.

From this point, ethnic marking and Joleb's mental breakdown allow Joleb to disassociate himself from his white southern bearings and transition into this counter-community Haynes establishes on the black side of town, The Quarters. Briefly institutionalized, Joleb loses his inhibitions and takes on the role of yet another African American/southern trickster figure who exposes ethnic myths and breaks down cultural taboos with confessions and questions other characters dare not voice. Through his recovery process, Joleb also awkwardly embraces a new identity as "half Jewish," though he is unsure exactly what that identity entails. This instance reveals the performative nature of race and ethnicity, for after this point Joleb pointedly divorces himself and what amounts to a lifetime from Beryn and obligations as the last son of a white patriarch. Joleb also embraces a new devotion to the African American Grace as a mother figure and often reflects on her earlier role as his caretaker after mother Mary suffers a stroke during his birth. Pondering their connection through breastfeeding, Joleb notes, "Milk's personal...[a]s personal as blood. I owe it to her to act like it" (304). From this point forward, Joleb clearly identifies as a son within his new multiracial, synthesized extended family: Grace Johnson, her husband Canaan Mosley and daughter Sophie, Grace's older Aunt Persia as well as Even Grade, Joody Two Sun, and Even's adopted white son Pearl (child of the deceased Valuable Korner and the missing teenaged father Jackson). Moreover, by the novel's end Joleb is no longer a disturbed teenager. A newly minted young adult, he joins the military. As a Marine he would be the first deployed in war, but within this collective he is reminiscent of writer Jean Toomer's concept of the new, multi-racial "American"—a conglomeration of influences, the first son of a new breed of white man being sent into a cultural war of race and ethnicity.¹⁰⁶

Symbolically, Joleb's new found identity and recovered sanity render him "always faithful" to this new collective brought together through life's circumstances that bind them much like fleshly descent.

By no coincidence, Joleb is only one of two major instances of redeemed whiteness to survive Haynes' pen in the novel (Valuable Korner's son Pearl, the other). Joleb's role, however, is much deeper. No coincidence, Haynes admits that she personally identifies most closely with Joleb as a character. Returning to Burris' death in flashback, Joleb's interference on a train trestle partially causes Burris' demise and is the catalyst for Joleb's own ethnic transition. He is the sacrificer of the last white southern son twice to the same degree that Haynes figuratively kills the white patriarchy on the written page and ethnicizes the center of southern community with blackness. If readers accept Joleb as Haynes' writing herself into *Mother of Pearl*, Joleb further becomes, first, a reflection of Haynes' own self defined role as a new bred of white southern writer trying to break out of the fold of a racist southern literary tradition. Secondly, Joleb's Jewishness and masculinity combined with his brief mental incompetency are also Haynes' attempt to manage her own contradictory racialized privilege and gendered ties with the white southern matriarch. Through Joleb, her rational investments in white womanhood are displaced, undermined in his unassertive ethnic masculinity. His break down and newly discovered Jewishness give him an opportunity to trade an old mindset for a new one, for a new way of being. Joleb's characterization, however, is only one step towards Haynes' avenue of reconciling her own white womanhood to her project.

This positioning of white womanhood alongside blackness (and Haynes' invocation of Emmett Till) bring readers back to an acute awareness of Haynes' own

identity as a white woman rewriting a southern history that is, in sense, both hers and Others'.¹⁰⁷ Although Doris Betts notes that gender differences and regional distinctions are “blurring” among contemporary southern writers, Carolyn Perry forwards that among southern female authors, “the age-old list” of traditional southern literary themes are still prevalent. Indeed, family, community, responses to the past, relationship to the land, and race are all vastly important conventional elements within *Mother of Pearl* (Inge 7; Perry and Weaks-Baxter 426). However, Haynes’ “unconventional” use of these elements to address lynching, the Emmett Till murder case, and subvert the old southern guard’s authority is a form of literary suicide on her part, especially, again, since Haynes’ white womanhood would have been one of the chief culprits lurking behind the distortion of black manhood and the southern historical fact of lynching, especially the Emmett Till murder. In the words of Mamie Till, white womanhood was “at the very heart of it all, the accusation, the abduction, the acquittal” (Till-Mobley and Benson 190).

From a writer’s standpoint, white women’s true stories were also buried under this same cult of white womanhood, a ridiculously oppressive standard of white female femininity which many could not achieve or circumnavigate. Since many could not fulfill the requirements of the myth, contemporary women writers tore the myth down and recreated their own parallels to the myth. Likewise, Haynes’ ultimate reconstruction of blackness in *Mother of Pearl* also demands not only that she dismantle a white patriarchy but also her chief tool—mainstay white female images from her southern literary heritage, especially in Haynes’ address of lynching. In doing so, Haynes taps into an anti-lynching writing tradition alongside figures like Ida B. Wells. Wells and others understood that the extremely negative stereotypes of black men could only survive as

long as counter stereotypes of chivalrous white manhood and helpless white womanhood continued. Doing so, she makes room for her reinterpretations of cross racial relationships and black manhood so greatly marred by mythic white womanhood.

Subversion of Southern White Womanhood

The subversive bodies of white women resurface throughout *Mother of Pearl*. Just as Haynes' fellow female writers have performed liberating attacks on false representations of white female bodies, throughout *Mother of Pearl* Haynes derails the southern belle figure to further dismantle the white power system that has created her. For example, Beryn Green's wife Mary serves as a defunct place setting for the white female matriarch, for the traditional southern wife who would normally be found ordering her husband's domestic affairs and spurring on the protective and often racist actions of the southern white man for pride's sake. In a telling statement, writer Mary Chesnut suggests that the southern wife is the ultimate slave (Jones and Donaldson 3). Chesnut's comment begins to reveal the shared oppression and exploited functioning that marked white womanhood as supplier of services to white manhood in similar manner to blackness of any gender. A stroke victim, Mary Green is nothing more than a gnarled, withered white female body propped in a wheelchair for four-fifths of the novel. She is the hallmark of what Patricia Yeager describes as the female grotesque—a grave, intentional distortion of the stereotypical image of white womanhood (Yeager 294). Haynes' Mary Green is incapable of communicating or sustaining herself, let alone orchestrating a household and reproducing life. Moreover, the life she has produced exposes her body as a failed site of white patriarchal power, in that husband Beryn has failed to enforce Mary's white female virtue. Mary, mother of Joleb, is an adulterer—a

grave violation of southern white womanhood. She ultimately succumbs to her corporeality when she drowns in her own bodily fluids. In contrast, as mentioned in an earlier discussion of Joleb Green, Mary's foil character Grace Johnson assumes a great part of this white woman's authority over the Green household and other spheres of life throughout the entire novel.¹⁰⁸

The standings of other white women connected to white male power fare no better within *Mother of Pearl*, even when Haynes depicts them sympathetically. For example, though she does not share Beryn's views, Beryn's sister Louise Green is a barren, isolated spinster whom Haynes constantly associates with preserved antiques and an old lifeless house. Though she is outspoken and at times far more liberal, Louise is, nevertheless, still invested in an old southern guard and its decorum, despite the awakening she experiences in a romantic attachment. Her suitor is the town mortician, a preserver of the dead, and appropriately, Louise's parlor serves as the setting for her nephew Burris' wake within the novel so that the dead may bury the dead. Beyond Louise, however, Haynes' most obvious sabotage of false white womanhood is the character Enid, of whom Haynes was especially judgmental during our interview, bluntly labeling Enid the "town whore."¹⁰⁹

Haynes' development of Enid taps deeply into historical anti-lynching rhetoric. Jonathan Markovitz notes that anti-lynching crusaders challenged extreme depictions of black men as sexual miscreants by often addressing the deportment and sexuality of white women. Rumors of Enid's clap-infested body and sexual indiscretions float throughout *Mother of Pearl* until Enid eventually circulates out of sight altogether, having run away with a questionable "Cajun, dark and good looking" (Haynes 155), whom

we briefly meet in a black bar and hear about through Enid's sporadic letters home. One of the most overt borrowings from the Till story, Enid bears a striking parallel to Carolyn Bryant, the "dark haired" beauty for whom Emmett Tills' life was taken. Even Grade encounters Enid standing on her porch in a gown "the color of blood" looking as if she "were dressed for bed" midday (28-9). In a reversal of the alleged Till circumstances, Enid approaches Even, calling him by name from the road where he is traveling. Haynes openly exposes the sexual tension between the white woman and Even, a tension Enid creates in this case as she sizes up Even sexually throughout their entire exchange. In this moment a contrast emerges: Even's self-imposed constraints on his own sexual responses and Enid's lack of restraint over her white female corporeality.

As suggested, Haynes counters this myth by projecting the hypersexual nature of stereotypical black manhood onto Enid while casting Even as the epitome of physical restraint. The omniscient narrator tells us that Even had heard "stories" about the Enid. Moreover, he knows the potential danger Enid poses for him. In a second of reflection, the narrator notes, "the last thing he needed was a gin fan tied around his twenty-seven year old neck" (29)—an allusion to the seventy-pound fan Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam used to weigh down Emmett Till's body in the Tallahatchie River. In his study of Till's death, *Death in the Delta*, Stephen Whitfield notes that even the most innocent contact between a black man and white woman would have been read as sexually charged and used as justification to strike out against a black perpetrator, whether the woman in question were respectable or not (Whitfield, *Death* 6-7). Enid is anything but respectable as she crosses lines of southern decorum in broad daylight. Unlike a young Emmett Till, however, a mature Even alters his intended course and begins to create distance between

himself and the sexually aggressive woman who could at any point command the power of life and death over him with one alarming scream or false touch, especially in light of the missing Riley, the white “man of the house” whom Enid pointedly says is not at home.

Worth addressing here, some might argue that Haynes’ sexual suppressions are her inability to confront black male sexually as she reconfigures black manhood against white womanhood, as if the only way to address the socially constructed reality of the black male body seems to be to ignore or lessen sexual desire and functioning innate to it. However, Haynes does permit space for Even’s expression as a sexual being to a certain degree. He inwardly responds to Enid in this scene and on a few more occasions elsewhere in the novel thinks of “coursing long and hard ‘til he lost his breath and his face shed salt” (159), but for the most part sexual conservatism in action defines Even’s character. For example, while describing Even Grade’s sexual intimacies with character Joody, Haynes carefully avoids overly extended descriptions of both characters’ bodies and instead focuses more so on Even’s experience of Joody’s angular frame. In lieu of graphic details, Haynes gives us extended descriptions of emotional and spiritual elements of all of her male Africanist character’s romantic lives. For instance in Canaan’s home, readers see dishes, disheveled clothing and burned down candles, remnants of romantic evenings with Grace Johnson, but very little of the characters’ sexually active bodies.¹¹⁰ However, one encounters this same sexual constriction, particularly in works linked to Emmett Till’s murder and anti-lynching rhetoric as well.

In her autobiographical account of her son’s death, Mamie Till-Bradley presents both her son Emmett and herself in sexually guarded fashion. Till-Mobley makes a point

of stressing her own sexual inexperience and outright ignorance of her own body as a newly married virgin, as well as the fact that her first sexual encounter with husband Louis produced Emmett. Till-Mobley's account parallels Christopher Metress' reading of Till as a redemptive Christ figure in so many prominent projects that have taken up his death as subject matter, including Anne Moody's *Coming of Age* in Mississippi, Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* and Gwendolyn Brook's poem "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi" (Metress 16-30). As Mamie Till-Bradley's story develops, so does Emmett's saint image as a child of good heart and hardworking spirit. Oddly enough, Mobley-Till never addresses an obvious issue—that Emmett was a developing teenager whose awakening manhood and childish sexuality contributed to his becoming a historical cornerstone lynched in honor of white womanhood. Till was the epitome of a culture's inability to interpret black male sexuality in any balanced measure beyond gross stereotypes and overly drawn assumptions about black male desire for white women. Emmett fell to circumstances that "exclude[d] African-American males from any aspiration to visible manhood," yet conjure[d] up the most flagrantly hypersexual image of "the Negro" as a sexual predator, "a monster which the southern white man created through the myth of the sexually repressed body and sexuality of the southern woman (Jones and Donaldson 3; Markovitz 13). This conflict between white womanhood and black manhood reach their ultimate expression in *Mother of Pearl* between the teenager Valuable Korner and Even Grade. Valuable's death is the most profound sabotage of white woman as the white teen passes in childbirth. This fourteen year old girl's fate also delivers the last major yet subtle Emmett Till allusion Haynes carries out in *Mother of*

Pearl. The same age as Emmett Till, Valuable is a sacrificial offering, an innocent white female scapegoat bearing away the sins of her southern white community.

Despite Haynes' sympathetic rendering of the character and Valuable's acceptance and affirmation among The Quarter's community fold, Valuable Korner is similar to Burris Green—a last generation great granddaughter of the old guard, the previously mentioned klansman/killer William Dixon Korner. Throughout *Mother of Pearl* Haynes heaps all things perverted and southern upon the character. Valuable is Enid's daughter, the abandoned offspring of the town whore. Moreover, she is the product of Enid's secret adulterous affair with a town local, another flawed white patriarch quite similar to Beryn in thought and action and equally dead spiritually. In another reversal of Emmett Till's adolescent risk, Valuable also falls prey to her own budding sexuality and her previous generation's southern secrets. She innocently and unknowingly falls into an intimate first love relationship with her half brother Jackson. From this incestuous relationship, she mothers an illegitimate child, Pearl—the subversive culmination of southern-ness queerness mired in and cultural taboos and falsely pure white glory.

Haynes foreshadows Valuable's death with lynch imagery. In a key scene by Baby Black Creek, the girl begins her sacrificial journey, “carried with her fingernails bitten to the quick and bloody” to become “a six-sided woman. A completion not based on heritage, but something else...her words clear as a muddy pond” as she sits by a fire, “dying wood. Orange to blue to gray to nothing” (Haynes 66). Building in the intensity, the text links Valuable, “cold and stiff...her braid severed and burned, wiry and frizzed,” to her young lover and brother Jackson, “the lumped shaped boy” whose fears “beat him

up with heavy fists. Whittle him down to a sliver”(65-66). All the while the “whining” of a passing symbolic train of change drones in the background as the scene culminates with Jackson’s nightmare. Valuable’s body transforms into a slaughtered sow floating in the creek’s waters. At this moment, Haynes also suggests that Jackson is not just part of Valuable’s sacrifice but also a consumer, an lynching instrument of her demise as he falls asleep, “sniffing the air like a happy hound. Dreaming instantly of cigarette smoke and the smell of sand and sun on skin and the smell of Valuable” (68).

In a sense, much like Mary Green’s body, Valuable’s white womanhood cannot support the bloat of social burdens that a perverted southern culture casts upon this true first daughter. The proverbial final straw falls when Valuable discovers that “the big mouthed boy” her great grandfather lynched is none other than character Grace’s late husband Tally Boy. Haynes’ plot development from this point forward suggests that Valuable Korner must die as a type of penitence. The novel’s strained background (the perverted southern atmosphere mentioned in the chapter’s introduction), comes forward to claim budding life. The teen never discloses the truth, this last southern secret, to Grace or the others in their redeemed community. In an intimate flow of karma, Valuable bears the secret identity of Tally Boy’s killer away as she travels back to the Korner family home. Just as Grace miscarried earlier after learning of her husband’s death, shortly after arriving home Valuable goes into labor. She dies “white-blue” in childbirth as her pregnancy-swollen, unstable body turns cold and simply bleeds out (405).

Much like Emmett Till (and as Valuable’s name implies), Valuable’s life gains far greater significance or value in death although she remains a “K/corner,” a marginalized white figure and outcast, despite the book’s title. Out of her troubles comes the novel’s

only representation of pure southern whiteness reconciled to a southern past, her son Pearl—the same product of southern perversion.¹¹¹ A calculated detail, by no coincidence Joleb (the first “always faithful” symbol of redeemed whiteness and Haynes’ literary stand-in) clumsily midwifes the infant Pearl into the world. Haynes also associates this metaphorical Pearl (whiteness) with blackness, but this blackness is not the blackness of corruption. Pearl’s blackness is an emerging newness from the very point of Pearl’s crowning: “a black something” “fixed” in character Joleb’s mind, “a wet round black thing” that was “like something take shape out of river mud,” something birthed out of the blackness or trials of experience, a new Emmett, a new biblical Adam born from the very earth that has already consumed so much butchered black flesh (403). This child’s blackness also proves more literal than imagined. His ensuing life as the son of an African American man has no literary precedent in a larger white dominant American literary tradition, much like Haynes’ invention of her black male character Even Grade and her revamping of black masculinity that comes in part out of this euthanasia of white womanhood.

A Revisionary Black Southern Patriarch and Fatherhood

In their work *Representing Black Masculinity*, Marcellus Blount and George Cunningham note that representing and analyzing the complexity of Africanist male figures, even in our contemporary times, is a problematic feat. Critics typically reduce black manhood to issues of race, and when conversations do move beyond race to address other facets of black male identity, those alternate discussions tend to focus on the “collapse” of a normative, white patriarchy “in black face” (xi). Both scenarios negate the intersections of race, gender, class and sexuality that make the black man’s position

as subject and object complex, particularly as he attempts to fulfill the most mundane male roles like father or son. In terms of gender and sexuality, Hortense Spillers notes African Americans have been historically denied power associated with traditional gendering of the human body in direct contrast to the traditional southern white man and woman's source of gendered and racial power. Africanist people have historically experienced the literal and symbolic capture, mutilation, and even obliteration of black bodies and genitalia as well as the meaning attached to them, whether those meanings are read as "son" or "daughter," "mother" or "father," basic "male" and "female" or "man" and "woman" (Spillers 73, 76). The connection between physical destruction, lynching violence and Spillers' comments is obvious. In terms of manhood, however, as Haynes noted in her interview, she developed Even's character partially with thoughts of what Emmett Till would have become had he lived to mature into a fully functioning adult in every sense as father, husband, son (hence Even's older age compared to the fourteen year old Emmett Till). Nevertheless, as suggested in the earlier analysis of character Enid's exchange with Even Grade, Haynes grapples with an overarching sexualized image of this same blackness in her same efforts to restore other aspects of black manhood to Even's character, especially constructive images of power tied to fatherhood and Even's relationship with white female character Valuable Korner and her son Pearl.

Just like Valuable's white female body, the Africanist male body bears so many negative tags, that the only way to address its reality seems to be ignoring or lessening sexual desire and functioning innate to this black male body and those associated with it. Consider a moment within the text when Even Grade affectionately touches Valuable Korner's stomach. Haynes writes, "...they took back their hands like novice thieves"

(397) when they heard another character coming through the screen door. Caution is very necessary in this simple, innocent moment between this father-daughter pair. If misinterpreted the simplest “paternal statement” or gesture could cost Even his life (392). After all, as Shawn Smith suggested earlier, the white woman’s smallest transgression of intimacy is punishable through the body of the black man. Father figure Canaan rebuffs Even for drawing too closely to the young white girl on a number of occasions. At an earlier point, Canaan warns, “You foolin’ yourself, Even Grade. Grace said she saw you feelin’ that girl’s stomach...I said the Even Grade I knew won’t come close to doing such a damn-fool thing as laying his Negro hands on a white girl’s belly” (379). Canaan understands another harsh southern reality: unlike Grace’s relationship with Joleb, little to no room exists for alternate readings of relationships between black men and white women in the 1950s American South. A black woman could be a mother to a white child, but a black man could be little more than a distant, submissive servant to any white woman regardless of age, social standing, or the most benign circumstances.¹¹²

If Even’s role as father figure to Valuable is socially contested in the novel’s 1950s South, then his role as father to Valuable Korner’s child Pearl moves into the realm of nearly impossible. Grade’s character development as Pearl’s father parallels his lack of a historical past within the novel’s plot. Just as orphaned Even Grade has little knowledge of his past, Even’s role as an independent father of a white child corresponds to no predefined, commonly observed social or literary archetype that permits a black man autonomous authority over the physical, emotional and spiritual development of white figures, whether adult or child.¹¹³ Trudier Harris notes that literary images of black masculinity revolved around two extremes, the “raging beast” who “could be killed

without conscience” if he did display overt agency (images readers know too well) and a second extreme depiction of black male emasculation that created the “harmless old darky,” a cultured, subservient eunuch, who was, at best, the most favored image of black man from the earliest points in mainly white European American literature (Harris 29-30). These figures hold no power of their own beyond their relationships of service or difference to white Others. Grade, however, is different.

Contrary to the *Mother of Pearl*'s title, Even Grade's story is not explicitly introduced to undergird Valuable Korner's redemption or her child Pearl's salvation. As Haynes insisted in our interview, her novel is Even's story. “He was my focus.” During her invention stages, Haynes built the rest of *Mother of Pearl*'s community and plot around Even Grade, the book's genesis. The novel relies so much upon his character development that the original title of the novel was *Even Grade*. Haynes recalls objecting to the publisher's retitling her work. ¹¹⁴ “I just never saw that,” says Haynes, “because in my opinion it changed the focus of the book from a black man to a white teenager [Valuable Korner], and it was just one of the more upsetting parts of that whole experience for me because the book was all about Even. It was really *his* book” (Haynes Personal Interview). Her claims bear witness with the novel's closing.

When character Even Grade adopts the orphaned Pearl, he assumes role as father and mentor to what could represent, not just a redeemed whiteness, but a totally new regeneration of white southern male. But again, every traditional outlet of white male power must fail if this newness is to succeed. The author completely severs Pearl's ties to an old southern heritage and the Korner family founded upon the legacy of a Klan-affiliated patriarch. By the time Haynes takes Pearl's birth to its final conclusion, Pearl's

father Jackson has left Petal for good, thinking that the child has died along with Valuable. Grandmother Enid is non-existent. The child's only remaining family link, Aunt Neva, has absolutely rejected Pearl, leaving the helpless infant's fate entirely in Even Grade's hands.

As the decision making agent, Even Grade chooses the highly improbable option to keep the infant Pearl instead of abandoning the baby on the steps of an orphanage. When questioned about the possibility of this father-son pairing in the 1961 South, Haynes acknowledged that this relationship would be highly unlikely even in 2009 (the year of our interview), let alone during the novel's time period. In his study *Interracial Intimacies*, Randal Kennedy records numerous legal cases well into the 1990s across the United States involving interracial adoption that were geared towards "saving white children from multiracial households." Though Haynes mentions no legally sanctioned custody within *Mother of Pearl*, Kennedy notes that laws banning blacks from adopting white children were on some state books like Georgia's until the 1980s, and were based on the "assumption that blacks were inferior, the certainty that they could never have anything to offer a white child that would be equal (much less superior) to the minimum available from whites" (Kennedy, *Interracial* 389-90). Kennedy makes a particularly relevant comment on a peculiar case, a petition to change the white status of an orphan. He notes the message was clear: such an adoption "would be tantamount to turning [the white child] into a Negro—a tragic declension." In her fiction at least, Haynes begs to differ.

By the novel's end, Haynes attempts to balance the improbabilities by relocating Even and Pearl away from Petal, Mississippi. Haynes' novel closes in a time lapse and

change of location. Four to five years removed, Even stands on yet another a bridge just as he did in the book's opening. Now, however, he stands in Grand Bay, Alabama, a smaller "quieter" community where the people are too busy with life to pay attention to Even with the four year old Pearl on his shoulders. Gone is the lynching imagery connected to Leaf River and Baby Black Creek (darkness dominant throughout most of the book's development). Oddly enough, Even and Pearl have not left the South as one would expect, given the usual (and historically verified) "freedom" associations made between civil liberty and migration to the North or West. Haynes' decision indicates potential for southern renewal and not abandonment. If only in her text, a southern space exists where the play of race can sustain such a level of cross-cultural existence.

Furthermore, and most important, Haynes' South does not minimize the value of an Africanist or black presence in favor of a larger hegemonic white supremacist culture. In our conversation, Haynes admits that this particular scene is her only deliberate, overtly political statement within the text. She interprets the moment as a "retrospective" of advantages whites gained while on the shoulders of their black counterparts. Haynes also sees this moment as a "prophetic" gesture—"My wish would be that as Pearl grows up that they'll walk side by side without ever seeing the difference in color" (Haynes Personal Interview). Haynes' literary invention is certainly not without flaws. Her future desire for colorblindness is perhaps the point where her views most diverge from this study's stance. Failing to recognize difference does not necessarily minimize or eliminate difference, even when those distinctions results more so from social constructions and hegemonic biases than from actual skin color or other material variances.

Ultimately, the Even Grade readers experience at the novel's end is a stable, multifaceted site of Africanist manhood—a nod towards addressing tragedies like character Tally Boy's undisclosed fate, the real Emmet Till's death, and other sleeping sins that permeate southern culture. As Till's mother Mamie Till-Bradley often says, she never intended Emmett Till to be a martyr, but just a good man. Perhaps this was Haynes' attitude towards her character as well when she suggested that Even Grade “embraced the best of what a human being could be regardless of race” (Haynes Personal Interview). In a casual exchange on that same bridge, Pearl effortlessly calls Even “Daddy” while the boy chats about the random thoughts that consume a child's mind. Even easily replies “Son” while giving Pearl a fatherly lesson on why “Nobody likes to be bossed” (Haynes 441-2)—of the fairness or equality of treatment among people, specifically that same compact, eclectic Quarters group that now composes their tightly knit community, transplanted to Alabama. Unlike Emmett, Even has the opportunity to become a father, a lover, a son, a friend, a man of possibilities, even if only in fiction.

Though this summary may sound clichéd, Even Grade and the multi-cultural community gathered around him do offer the possibility of a people formed and bound, not exclusively on the basis of biological race, but by common experiences, context, and desires. This project embraces that fluidity birthed out of difference—not the complete absence of racial difference but the flexible, shifting nature of racial identity that allows realignments of allegiances and identity. The literary door is also open a little wider for this project to investigate yet another non-black writers' efforts to loose the skins of Africanist images and whiteness from their exclusive racial moorings without losing valuable distinctions. The next chapter will examine the Puerto Rican poet Victor

Hernández Cruz's development of poems "Mesa Blanca" and "White Table" and his subsequent explosion of the black-white racial divide. Cruz, the bilingual New York immigrant, ultimately claims African American identity as his own from his tribal heritage of African, European and Native American influences. In the process, he exposes the constructed nature of this thing called blackness and how abstracted that same heritage can be beyond racial moorings. His is a perspective on race and ethnicity that also forsakes the privilege of biology as the foundation of identity. Cruz favors language, and other far more flexible, protean cultural cues such as music and faith. As this study traces the poet's works from publication to publication, each poem connects to a different cultural site only to reinterpret and ethnically reinscribe, not just Latino identity, but African American identity as well.

CHAPTER V

DWELLING PLACES: AFRICANISMS AND LATINO IDENTITY IN VICTOR
HERNÁNDEZ CRUZ'S "WHITE TABLE" AND "MESA BLANCA"

Saul Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* and Melinda Haynes' *Mother of Pearl* devote significant energy toward dismantling American notions of racial purity, especially those dynamics that have pigeonholed blackness into a perverted relationship with its social antithesis, whiteness.¹¹⁵ As a result, preceding chapters have devoted great attention to each work's prominent critiques of whiteness as a false standard of power and superiority. Another tenet also emerges from these previous chapters: though racialized American power structures are anything but equally drawn, just as whiteness is a social construction loaded with connotative values that produce material effects, blackness is a social construction with connotative values that produce material effects. Through subject matter, rhetorical choices, and authorial messages, Bellow and Haynes defy racial boundaries established between African American writers and a larger American literary project. However, Puerto Rican poet Victor Hernández Cruz lays full claim to blackness as a literary and personal identity marker, eclipsing mere association towards full membership within the African American literary tradition. Cruz is significant to this project simply because he *is*. He stands as a witness of the varied nature of blackness during the Black Arts Movement, supposedly a period of intensely narrow self-definitions of blackness. Ultimately, Cruz proves through his sheer presence in the African American literary community that American definitions of Africanist identity (and race period, whether black, white, or Other) are anything but purely drawn and exclusive. Through three publications of his poem "Mesa Blanca" (translated as "White

Table” in the African American literary journal *Callaloo*), Cruz also exposes on a literary level the multiplicity of blackness as a literary racial construction, as equally protean and evolving as whiteness. The poems “White Table” and Cruz’s latter revisions of “Mesa Blanca,” position blackness (race and ethnicity in general) as a cultural entity created by and subject to manipulations wherein language, sound, cultural practice, and history trump biology to express descent. Furthermore, Cruz’s transformation of blackness and its binary whiteness expose race, and especially blackness, as both a flexible communal identity and alliance-building principle, particularly in connection with a now well-established, distinct Latino literary tradition and Cruz’s Puerto Rican heritage. In order to appreciate the shifts Cruz accomplishes in identity on the written page, one must first understand the depth of Cruz’s earlier involvement in the Black Arts Movement that grounds his literary claims to blackness.

Recall from the introduction, the racially ambivalent writer Jean Toomer whom Black Arts scholars rescued from near oblivion in the late 1960s (despite Toomer’s personal reluctance to be associated with the black community). The same black consciousness of the 1960s and 1970s Black Arts Movement that gave renewed credence to Toomer’s book *Cane* also introduced Victor Hernández Cruz as a serious literary figure among now prestigious (and at times controversial) African American poets: Gwendolyn Brooks and Haki Madhubuti (Don Lee), Nikki Giovanni, Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), and Sonia Sanchez, to name a few. Cruz’s inclusion defies a trend that frequently “wall[s] off” or counterpositions “Latino realities” in their most prevalent, “dominant” forms against blackness and Afro-diasporic cultural experience, even when the people in question are one and the same, as is the case with the Afroantillanos and

historical figures such as Arturo Schomburg, for example (Suarez-Orozco and Paez 68).¹¹⁶ Cruz identifies with a Black Arts literary era, a period when similar rigidly defined racial borders set blackness and whiteness in fierce opposition; however, the same was not as true for relations between a developing “Hispanic” community and black being. If anything Cruz reveals an ironic truth—African American community appears to have been far more inclusive and accepting of difference among its members at the height of the African American community’s most rigidly self-defined racial period than it appears to be currently at the height of American culture’s multicultural surge with its highly specialized, divided cultural studies divisions.

James Edward Smethurst labels various artistic Latino movements of the seventies as “analogues” or extensions of the Black Power, Black Arts Movement (Smethurst 1). Jeffery Ogbar notes that this late sixties, seventies period represented a pivotal time for the growth of what would have labeled ethnic nationalist literatures, and especially African American literature, Chicano literature and Nuyorican Poetry among Hispanic populations. Developing parallels from Black Arts models, Chicano nationalists in particular were exploring the freedoms of *calo* (slang) and “bastardized English” and constructing counter myths of a *Aztlán* motherland and *La Raza* to carve out a separate peace and identity for themselves (Ogbar 200-1). That same concrete, separatist level of nationalist identity did not translate in the same fashion into the Puerto Rican community. As Smethurst notes, when Puerto Rican artists did extol a nationalist fervor around myth making and “indio” or indigenous heritage it was usually invoked “in conjunction” with African heritage (175). The strongest Latino flow within the Puerto Rican community belonged to the Nuyorican Poets of which Cruz was a member, but the group’s outlets

were far more limited and shorter lived than those of African Americans and Chicanos. (Ogbar suggests that those outlets are still limited.) The greatest remaining fruit of the day was an anthology—Miguel Algarín and Miguel Piñero’s 1975 *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings* and the performance art forum The Nuyorican Café.

Although Cruz was active in the performance art scene affiliated with the original Nuyorican Café artists, in print Cruz more often staged his early voice within the auspices of the African American literary community. His works constantly appear in periodicals like *Black World* (the former *Negro Digest*) and popular race anthologies. Within these pages, he developed an eclectic, evolving relationship with language that reflects a strong Afrocentric and Latino reliance on orality and music combined with a keen sense of history and cultural events—a mixture that evolved, serving him well as a rhetorical, race morphing tool. Much like Jean Toomer’s play on a southern black heritage, these cultural practices, social experience and historical ties act as Cruz’s figurative drops of black blood that performatively tie him to a larger African American community throughout his poetry.

Repeatedly, Cruz’s Nuyorican school sentiments find their way into popular black literary anthologies of the sixties and seventies. For example, in Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal’s *Black Fire* (one of the earliest and most important collections), Cruz delivers the piece “white powder,” an exploration of urban drug culture against a backdrop of indifferent “politicians & their *grey* men” (line 2, italics added). Also included, the violently worded poem “O.K.” appears to promote a typical Black Power indictment of (white) corporate class America, “industrial men” who “rattle their false teeth/across golf

courses” (lines 16-17), but the poem’s message is multidimensional. The poem’s speaker (presumably Cruz) challenges, not white America, but rather his fellow black poets. He urges “you scat talking/simple ass,” “torpid and stupid being/without culture” (lines 2-3, 25-26), to move beyond flat, racialized jargon of the day, “rigid & cold negatives”(line 20). Instead, he urges his fellow poet to “open up” the “head” of (to reach, to change the perspective of) the corporate world, an equally “torpid and stupid being/without culture” with its own set of “rigid & cold negatives.”

Assessing contributions like Cruz’s, Baraka and Neal describe the collection’s contributors as a “new breed” of *black* writers who somehow reflect an internal “consciousness of black people” (Jones and Neal 647-8). By virtue of his inclusion, Cruz is one of those “new breed.” As James Smethurst notes, this black consciousness (the Black Arts Movement’s poetics and driving ideologies) did not rally around a mythic, whole blackness, but was rather a “series of debates linked to multiple ideological and institutional conflicts and conversations” over the fact of blackness, how to define it, how to address it, to what degree to politicize it (57). Representative blackness like Cruz’s is not so much skin and hair as it is exchanged cultural views, practices, and experience packaged in an aggressive, innovative register of languages. However, Cruz’s skinless blackness is not exclusively his, nor can it be attributed exclusively to his Latino heritage.

Neal and Baraka also depict black people as a unified yet diverse community beyond skin ties in this same anthology: “We are presenting. Your *various selves*...from God, a tone, your own” (xviii), writes Amiri Baraka in his preface poem. The word “tone” is interesting. Similar to moves Cruz will make in his latter works, Baraka is playing on skin tone, but “tone” also suggests a conflation of race with sound and poetic

music, a distinct orality rising from the strongly vernacular nature of the collection and its originating Africanist cultures that must “Go on. Now.” This might be hard interpretation to accept of figures like the erstwhile Leroi Jones (Amiri Baraka), whose words I recall finding in my young age in Dudley Randall’s *Black Poets*, “S.O.S.-ing” black people along color lines in terms that clearly called for “Black Poems” and a “Black Art” that often violently glorify, justify, and avenge black flesh through the written word” (Randal 181, 223-4). Nevertheless, there is more to this blackness. In his foreword to the same volume, Neal also describes blackness functioning within the larger Africanist community as “sound,” “energy meaningful to our people,” a “living reality” for Neal that accomplishes “that same sense of collective ritual” as black writers build a unified community, “destroy a “weaker spiritual self for a more perfect self” (654-7). Neal’s essentialized yet fluid “sound” no doubt, evolved by the late seventies and eighties into prominent African American theoretical works that posed orality, black vernacular, and music forms as valid approaches to understanding African American culture, writing and artistry: Geneva Smitherman’s *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, and Houston Baker’s *Blues Ideology* (a small sampling of many more major works). Revealed, again, is the multifaceted, communal nature of this “perfect” self, a black identity not entirely racialized but grounded in an innate sense of cultural practice and history that brings about communal cohesiveness. A similar sense of fluid community beyond flesh develops in even more publications, including Adam David Miller’s 1970 collection *Dices or Black Bones: Black Voices of the Seventies* and Abraham Chapman’s 1972 *New Black Voices*.

In neither Adam Miller's anthology nor Abraham Chapman's does stereotypically militant blackness speak for sheer blackness' sake as readers typically assume of poets during this era. Cruz's poems, for example, focus on artistry and fellowship through culture and history. *Dices or Black Bones* features eight of Cruz's works, a substantial sampling that places Cruz alongside Lucille Clifton, Etheridge Knight and Ishmael Reed, among others. Poems like "The Story of Zeros" deliver Cruz's expected critiques of whiteness and a vapid "zero" mainstream culture. However, sound (or more aptly, music) and alternative interpretations of history and cultural events once again invade the poet's contributions. In one selection, Cruz declares "poems are song" that "cry and laugh" and center on "EXPERIENCE" (lines 1, 8). The "Poetry Lesson" continues as Cruz plays with brutal imagery, musical sound and rhythm to craft "kicking ass/jitter, jitter, jitter...knocking down/building poems" (lines 6-8, 42-32). Other sound-filled, language twisting poems like "Mellow" explore the numbing, drug-like "black emptiness" of racialized violence, class inequalities associated with urban life and shocking 1960s events (the assassinations of Kennedy and Malcom X, unrest in New York's Lower East Side and other ensuing race riots). The same poetic ear finds a mouthpiece within *New Black Voices* to reveal a sense of artistic community and aesthetic concern scholars often discount in analyses of this era. "First Claims Poem" with its "hand clappings" and acknowledgments for Ishmael Reed reveal Cruz's biases among the "new" black voices while "urban dream" with its description of "silence" that "comes after noise" (line 17) leads into fellow Latina Jayne Cortez's works. Chapman also positions the Puerto Rican poet within a far deeper, now canonical African American poetic tradition that Chapman performatively establishes through the editor's two volumes that begin with his preceding

1968 *Black Voices*. On paper Cruz becomes the “new” literary offspring of founding elders Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison, Margaret Walker, Frances Harper, Sterling Brown, and many more poets who relied heavily on black vernacular and music to shape their works.

In his preface to *New Black Voices*, though “black is” still “beautiful” and essentialized to some degree, Chapman invokes the previously mentioned concept of “new breed” black writers. For Chapman, these poets “accept their Blackness thoroughly, organically, and naturally,” yet also “reject any prescribed definition of Blackness...dogmatism and attempts at the institutionalization of Blackness” that would dictate the Black writer’s style or subject matter. In lieu of an extreme, politically charged racial campaign, Chapman promotes “individuality and originality” (31), similar sentiments that surface in Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal’s *Black Fire*. The sounds of Cruz’s historical voice and social perspectives even resonant among his fellow poets when Cruz’s own works do not appear. In Dudley Randall’s now canonical anthology *Black Poets*, June Jordan invokes the Cruz’s presence in her contribution “Poem for My Family Hazel Griffin and Victor Hernández Cruz.” Jordan’s poem acknowledges the “multiplicity of black identities and the richness of practices connected to slavery, segregation and protest” in the United States (Kinloch 77). Reminiscent of Robert Hayden’s “Middle Passage,” Jordan’s work explores a Black Atlantic experience, that diasporic network of Middle Passage kinships and Africanist cultural influences that Paul Gilroy charts in his work *The Black Atlantic*.¹¹⁷ This same kinship continues Cruz’s affirming path within the African American literary community, even in more contemporary contexts, including the African American journal *Callaloo*.

Cruz's Performance of Blackness in *Callaloo*'s "White Table"

Cruz's relatively prominent and consistent appearances within Black Arts era race anthologies call attention to far more catholic notions of blackness that resurface years later in a 1994 issue of the well-respected African American Academic literary journal *Callaloo*. In their introduction to *Callaloo*'s special Puerto Rican literature edition, Martín Espada and Juan Flores affirm that "The Puerto Rican community and the African-American community in the United States have always shared a number of ...affinities. In essence, the Puerto Rican experience is part of the African Diaspora" (941). A nod to the African presence in Latino culture (and vice-versa), the journal's special edition acts as a bridge builder, a vehicle of socio-cultural exchange between two groups in U.S. culture who by this point had begun to be viewed as separate entities and at odds over political tensions.¹¹⁸ More so than other Latino groups, mainland Puerto Ricans have historically been subsumed into the African American community prior to the establishment of Latino Studies. The opposite had not been as true or as possible, in part because of the role of whiteness and racial privilege in the formation of Latino identity. In her analysis "Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets*: Writing as a Nuyorican /Puerto Rican Strategy for Survival," Asela Rodriguez de Laguna suggests that for Puerto Ricans in the United States, "the very place of identification... creates a splitting into opposite directions: one, opting for a supposedly blind Puerto Rican color that inclines more toward whiteness, and another that chooses blackness as a dwelling space" (25). Carmen Hernández adds that Puerto Ricans, aware of U.S. social pressures to "choose" race, have never totally assimilated into the American mainstream, often

rejecting racial categories, and especially “blackness” given the stigmas attached to the tag (Hernández 16).

This tension finds its way into a number of Puerto Rican writers’ identifications; for instance, previously mentioned Latino Piri Thomas and poet Tato Laviera identify themselves as black. Both would be (and have been) readily accepted as African American writers in the traditional sense of the label because of their darker skin tones. These writers, however, are not part of *Callaloo*’s special Puerto Rican literature project. Editors chose Cruz, the self-identified Jibaro poet, as the model Puerto Rican writer for *Callaloo*’s audience. Positioning Cruz as the seasoned veteran in their showcase, Espada and Flores provide build Cruz’s ethos. He is the “honored,” accomplished Latino writer among the younger and lesser known due, no doubt, to his role in the Black Arts Movement. In a sense, Cruz’s inclusion in the African American journal years later returns a literary son home to address the same elastic Africanist heritage that permitted his literary presence almost thirty years before in the pages of those countless African American publications. Within this printed dwelling space, Cruz begins his process, one again, of redefining the concept of African American literature altogether. He stands, after all, as a writer of African ancestry who is, indeed, an American. Particularly revealing are the ways Cruz performs blackness in his contribution to the journal, the poem “White Table.”

Within his *Callaloo* contribution “White Table,” Cruz’s authorial choices reveal a very conscious and conscientious bridge builder working between worlds. Cruz’s poetic language is crucial to his endeavor. Obviously to accommodate its readership, *Callaloo*’s guest editors Flores and Espada present their special selections in English. According to

the journal's credits, most pieces are second-hand translations, except Cruz's "White Table" which Cruz penned in English and artistically controlled.¹¹⁹ This translating back and forth is not unusual for Cruz. For Carmelo Esterrich, bilingual code switching in Cruz's predominantly English works is a way of creating "poetry from the ruins of language" or supplementing inadequacies of individual languages to "do" and "say" according to the Puerto Rican poet's purpose (51). The most obvious example of this practice is Cruz's literal translation of the Latin phrase "Mesa Blanca" into "White Table," an immediate connection with Cruz's audience whose language experiences are mediated predominantly through English vernaculars.

Mesa Blanca or White Table alludes to a set of widely varying Africanist religious practices found throughout the Caribbean and the United States among Latinos as well as non-Latino black Caribbean populations. The practice is a prominent Africanism, what Joseph Holloway would describe as an "enduring enclave and derivative of African culture" black captives brought to the Caribbean during slavery (Holloway 19). In its most common forms, especially in the United States (whether a part of Santeria, Espritismo, or other "syncretistic" rituals), Mesa Blanca mixes (in varying degrees) predominately African and, at times, Native American deity worship with Catholicism and European Spiritism in high impact worship ceremonies often featuring music and dance.¹²⁰ Many studies of Latin faith rituals (for example Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert of *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*) suggest that Cruz mistakenly mingles multiple Caribbean and Latin practices containing discernable variations. However, accuracy does not matter as much as the essence of the ritual—possession. In an interview, Cruz reports being "fascinated by that situation of being possessed by a

spirit...To me it's the same as being possessed by language" (Hernández 73). Indeed, Mesa Blanca's dominant material expression is language, a fascinating kinship with Larry Neal's previously mentioned focus on "sound" and its role in building black consciousness. Within the Mesa Blanca/White Table ritual, as spirits manifest, they literally possess or overwhelm ceremonial hosts, often speaking and singing through these human mediums to communicate, to heal observers of "pruebas"—physical, mental or spiritual trials. The ceremony's appeal as a literary conceit heightens in the rite's intimate, fluid identity exchange. A spirit can inhabit a host regardless of the spirit's or host's gender or race. Shared communication partners with the physical body to unify the identities of the spirit and the host—to imbue participants with agency beyond human ability yet within human ability. For Cruz, this phenomenon becomes the perfect vehicle through which he explores the *pruebas* of race and miscegenation.

In many ways Cruz's use of Mesa Blanca as an extended conceit brings this project full circle as a direct contrast to Jean Toomer; both men present on the written page what they see as the essence, the spirit of an Africanist people, but unlike the dying embers of Toomer's black southern culture, Cruz's is a literal spirit, an Africanist presence of enduring, sustained force secured within the rhythmic lining of a more universal black diaspora community. "White Table" opens with a description of a spirit, "Malaka" possessing a host. "Malaka" is an Africanized orisha (deity), possibly Obatala, the chief orisha in many Santeria and Santerismo practices that practitioners often associate with white cloth (Karade 24-9; Owusu and Lasting 34). He is the creator and creative energy of humankind, similar to Neal's "energy" of the sound that motivates black consciousness. Cruz's naming of this spirit is tricky because Cruz often infuses

multiple messages into the slightest word. “Malaka” means “to possess” in Arabic (Steingass 1057).¹²¹ Setting a duality into play, Cruz alludes to the historical possessor (slave owner or colonizer) and the historically possessed or owned (the African slave). In *Malaka*, Cruz conflates the Arabic Moorish ancestry of the conquering Spanish with the influence of the African slave, who both enter into Puerto Rican history at the same point, but on vastly different levels of society and across a gulf of power differences. This one point reveals an already splintered blackness approaching. Moreover, this spirit’s arrival is a flashback to Cruz’s Black Arts days: Cruz describes *Malaka* as a “consciousness extended” into the land and life of the people (line 6). Cruz’s language is similar to the same phrasing Larry Neal uses to describe his concept of black consciousness or awareness in *Black Fire*. So begins Cruz’s performing of blackness for his *Callaloo* audience as a means of establishing an even stronger common investment in identity.

Cruz’s simple recognition of Africanist culture and influence is a radical step according to William Luis in his work *Voices from Under: Black Narrative in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Blackness as a unifying principle in Latino culture is a relatively new, subversive trend among Latino and Caribbean scholars. On social, artistic and academic levels, Latino culture tends to downplay the import of racial difference, a move that often suppresses African ancestry in favor of whiteness and more culturally valued Spanish-European ancestry.¹²² Similarly, even within the actual practice of *Mesa Blanca*, colonial elitism drives upper class practitioners to deny the full ethnic foundations of *Mesa Blanca* in order to distance themselves from supposedly lesser African and/or Native American cultural associations.¹²³ Cruz stages *Malaka*’s appearance in such a way that neither his fellow Puerto Ricans nor his *Callaloo* audience

can suppress or ignore this Africanist presence's influence: "When Malaka came/It was through rhythmic gourd/Erasing all doubt/like a rocket/out of proportion" (lines 1-5). No "doubt" exists because the arrival portion of this poem is literally a "rocket out of proportion"—this one section of "White Table" spans five stanzas on its own, the longest of the poem's seven major divisions. On a more practical level, Malaka's literal arrival "erases all doubt" of this Africanist influence because the impact of Africans and American slavery upon Latin America is well-documented history, especially in contrast to the nearly lost history of previous indigenous inhabitants.¹²⁴

Malaka represents a oneness of ancestry, a common spirit that a great portion of the journal's readership shares. As speaker, Cruz further suggests that "Where love is ready," where recognition of this shared ancestry exists, the richness of this shared ancestry reveals its "secrets" or influences, "is opening" to show itself in the very lines of Cruz's poem (lines 51-3). The poet goes on to manifest this shared Africanist spirit in the most mundane items from "plantains" (food) to "flesh" (lines 11-2). Associated with the most minute African and Arabic details throughout the poem, Malaka's presence travels from stanza to stanza with a greater spiritual intensity and resonance more clearly read from stanza to stanza than even a wired message ("copper conduits/ Wires that have burnt before"[lines 46-7]). A curious critique of whiteness also develops through Malaka's manifestations: like blackness, no pure expression of whiteness or European ancestry exists among Cruz's Puerto Ricans either. The Moorish Malaka manifests in even the very design details colonizing Spaniards incorporated into their buildings, "a moving/ Star through Arabic balconies" (line 130), an allusion to the already existing racial or ethnic miscegenation of Puerto Rico's European colonizers.

At one point, Cruz's very writing, "This finger," acts as the wire conduit of this mixture, this blackness, his blackness "sending the messages" to his audience (line 139) like "tambourines, the Moorish Turban of Mohama (Mohammed) praying on the rhythms" (lines 120-130). The word "rhythm" is important. From the poem's beginning, Cruz deeply associates this Africanist Malaka with sound, the "rhythmic gourd" and later "the beat" of this same finger, his poetry's rhythm, "bone light" (lines 162-3). Cruz conflates language (or sound) with Africanist flesh as the spirit takes on form. He writes that the spirit's "fragrance produced Sound in Aguas Buenas plaza/That swayed hamaca between /The backstairs of the eye and /The ear/ Till it sinfonic the melodies Of an image" (lines 133-8). In this case, the poet also plays on Africanized percussion rhythms and instruments (bones or claves) integral to both Latin music and to his own poetic structure (created by his "finger") in much of his writing from the earliest to the most contemporary. In this particular poem, this spirit and its rhythm drive the host to dance much like the frenzied possession that takes place in the real life religious ceremonies: "Malaka wants her feet" (line 29), but the feet in question are not just La Minerva's feet dancing in the trance of a Mesa Blanca ritual possession. The feet are, again, literally Cruz's improvisational Latin rhythm throughout the "White Table." The poem plays out on the white page *Callaloo's* editors have prepared to host Cruz's poem similar to a ritual white table prepared with offerings to entice spiritual visitors into a fresh way of seeing African American literature.

By the fifth stanza, the spirit Malaka realizes his desire to possess his host. He takes control over narration and becomes material as the poem's active speaker. Cruz's desire to resurrect an even deeper ancestral link materializes as well. As mentioned, this

presence is hybrid—part spirit, part host. The host is important. Malaka possesses the feminine figure *La Minerva*, a partial reference to the Roman goddess Minerva, a western symbol of wisdom, knowledge, poetry and music, of sound. However, she is “*La*” *Minerva*, already hybridized beyond English through Hispanic influence. Malaka, the rhythm, dominates his host *La Minerva*, language itself—specifically the European languages so prominent to Latino identity and Cruz’s poetic identity, Spanish and English. The dual meaning of the word “Malaka” also now reflects a dual nature, a symbiotic relationship between black and white, African and western. Keep in mind, however, that the literary carriage for this duality is still the pages of *Callaloo*, an African American review that reflects African American culture, of which Cruz is an established part.

As Cruz merges the two entities, he carefully prioritizes the African influence within the *Callaloo* context, but he also reveals a conundrum. Malaka the possessor, the rhythm, has overwhelming power but needs an outlet, a voice or language beyond himself to express that power. Otherwise, he cannot fully narrate the poem or articulate his thoughts beyond the beats of his rhythm. The spirit transitions from the pure auditory into a more tangible, visible “image” system or words that the human ear and eye can detect. Through the poem’s hybrid English, he begins to speak as the poem itself to “You” in the perfect marriage between culture and its vehicle of expression. The actual body or material proof of physical blackness also appears; in some instances, Cruz overtly marks flesh with the visual imagery of racialized language. Yukiylus, Taino deity of the mountain, has broad features, “big lips” that play “you” (the shared spirit of the Puerto Rican people and *Callaloo*’s readership) as the “utterance of lingual *bluish* lips”

open “as if the sky.” Cruz also connects the reproductive fleshiness of sound with literal land from which the racially mixed, yet Africanized Puerto Rican generations have come. The physical earthy form of female genitalia and pregnancy rise from the poem— “Resounding cocolabia the House temple held by mountain Bellies” (lines 106-20). The brown land itself comes alive, birthing populations out of this spiritual presence, populations that could easily be the new American author Jean Toomer envisioned.

This merging introduces a high moment of racial performance through poetic language for Cruz. Cruz more intimately joins the physical body and sound of the island in a symbolic, literary miscegenation. The poem emphasizes the physicality of the Malaka spirit as it enters its host. This spiritual union seems more like a literal sexual or reproductive connection “below the stove” (alluding to the physical, biological mixture of the Puerto Rican people), yet “Brains” are actively “cooking” in the poem “above the stove.” Even as the people physically merge and mix, their thoughts and the intellectual life, knowledge and consciousness of themselves also change in response to Malaka’s “messages,” that manifest as a sound from those “bluish lips” and as a whistle that “raises” Minerva’s “hair” (lines 141-3). Continuing his focus on sound, Cruz allows Malaka, this African heritage, to give physical life to language. Words move like flesh: “Sentences...walk up” Minerva’s “arms/like sensations of pins” and actively engage the senses of the whole being, of language and the thought life with the power of rhythm (144). Again, Completely overtaken this La Minerva (Western expression, wisdom) and Malaka become one as Malaka now offers gifts of their combined own— African and Western—to the land: “Here take this /*These* are languages...these are secrets...I hang my glory upon / The Christology of the sound” (lines 57-70). This conflation of race and

sound demands a sacredness, reverence, for the spirit is revealing “secrets” as it bestows its gifts—a new language, music and sound.

Through these offerings to the land, Cruz’s poem extends its miscegenation beyond its merging of blackness (African rhythm) and whiteness (European language). Already in possession of Western culture and language, Malaka asks permission to find a place in the island as a servant to another presence, the Native Taino spirit of the Puerto Rican island once known as Borikén. In the portion of “White Table” Cruz pays homage to the original inhabitants of the island. The poet’s subversive use of blackness and whiteness also continues. Malaka willingly makes himself subject to the Native spirits, but not to La Minerva. Cruz’s sense of relationship among Puerto Rico’s cultural influences is calculated. Not only does La Minerva—western knowledge, language, wisdom—host the dominating African Malaka, but her “throat” (the European language) also becomes the Taino God Yukiyu’s “flute” (Line 113). The two become three as language gains both rhythm and melody. The hierarchy Cruz establishes presents a radically different power structure in comparison to the island’s history in which the Spanish dominated and enslaved Native populations and then imported African slaves to work the land. In reality the native Taino people and African slaves had very little control over their fates at the hands of the Spanish. In Cruz’s poem, however, Malaka and the spirits of the land assume full control, much like the beat and melody of a song control the performance that arises. “White Table” becomes a literal blank slate upon which Cruz completely revises all assumed power dynamics that would relegate African heritage and Native influence to lower positions of authority.

Cruz as poet enters into a creationist myth loosely tied to Puerto Rican history. Ultimately, this combined Malaka-Minerva continues increasing in ongoing miscegenation with the native Taino spirit to produce a “daughter of Aqueybanex” (line 95), an offspring of tribal Puerto Rican ancestry.¹²⁵ She embodies the spirit of *mestizaje*, the highest combined expression of the three ancestral influences: the African, the Western, and the Taino, peacefully abiding as one in the land of history and the poem’s fiction. “This plane of roses/this wild enchant” is a fertile place, symbolically reproductive just as the flower offers hope for a plant’s reproduction and marks a place of honor and beauty; however, much like a rose, the beauty of the moment quickly fades, exposing thorns. A “hint” foreshadows the destructive nature of the reality to come, of the “life riding the sounds” that “no ‘I’ could see—that no one culture could have predicted or produced on its own.” Cruz begins to write of “what’s coming invented in the going” (line 82-85). In other words, Cruz writes of a Puerto Rican people birthed from a series of cultural losses and gains. What begins as a combination of willing exchanges transmutes into a forced imperialism based on economic exigencies and racist, ethnocentric ideologies.

In a shift, Cruz alludes to an impending historical bondage that allowed Spanish exploitation of Natives and African slaves as resources. He describes a brutal metaphorical rape of this “daughter.” A revisionist recount of European exploitation quickly escalates after an initially peaceful encounter. Malaka loses his narrative control over the poem in a linguistically violent, brutally figurative tonal assault—a harsh sound, a Spanish guitar. The foreign “melody” of Spanish imperialism (a forceful metaphorical strum) strips, “every/Fiber of cloth that/Hid her body” which has now become a part of

the land: “Her legs like the bark of/A tree/Her back the scales of/A lizard/ Her breast the fins of a fish” (lines 176-83). If one bears the metaphor of language out, the stripping in question is multiple: the combined lost material value of the Borikén island; the documented brutalizing, raping and killing of the Taino people; and the theft, brutalizing and exploitation of African people. This strum, the colonizing influence of language, also destroys or erases the language (and hence identity) that “clothed” the people and their land—the stripping away of indigenous names associated with the island down to its most essential parts. Recall that this daughter, this culture is, in part, birthed out of Minerva as well. This being is hybrid, a conflation of three identities into one. In sense, it is as if the Spanish have exploited themselves, their own, in an act of incest. In an extended allusion, Cruz introduces Spanish conquistadors, “the swords/ That destroyed a race,” “foreign soldiers” sent out to occupy newly discovered land and nations claimed under the auspices of the Spanish Castilian Monarchy and the government endorsed Catholic church, “the dragon priests” for whom “the lands resources (“gold nuggets”)” were “shipped / to Cadiz/ To make candelabrum/...To illuminate the Virgin/ Who blessed the swords/ That destroyed a race” (lines 184-200), who condoned the monstrous violence. In this section Cruz sharply contrasts the image of an earlier, innocent Minerva—a western culture whose “voice is still the sweet virginal resonoto/ of speech” with this desecrated, spiritual “daughter” who bears physical assault and cultural dis-ease to become an instrument of her own purification, yet of her own destruction. She violently rejects “something recoiled” in her being.¹²⁶ She historically rids herself of imperialist exploitation that sought to “illuminate,” to protect and promote the false or

contradictory purity of European or western beliefs and culture sustained at the expense of the island's combined inhabitants.

Despite the brutality of this cultural stripping and the poem's play on brutal language and sounds, as Cruz suggests, this "stench," the atrocities of the past, actually "advance" the age. In other words, these past experiences have shaped this mixed diaspora culture that Cruz now celebrates in his poem, a culture that is, by default and publication, just as African American in identity as it is Latino, as it is European. Cruz sums up the trinity he has created in "White Table" with the following lines of acceptance: "She is from every thing [sic] the one/The motion of her hands came/To place a flower in my language." Again, Cruz refers literally to the combined or miscegenated influence this history has had, and especially on language and on the poet's imagination. The flowers are, once again, the literal words, names of things, of plants, birds, rivers, cities, the very foundation upon which Cruz's Mestizo poetry depends for its existence—the African spirit of Malaka and the native spirits of the land that still somehow survive within a westernized cultural expression despite all. Cruz leaves readers with a parting reminder in the final stanza of those original gifts that still survive—"what the folk have," the very words and African rhythm of the poem and its communal music and distinct rhythm of life, "the manner of their shoes walking the fashion of my hands writing the pen of Plumas doing the measurements" or the Africanized rhythms that "danza in" or dance within the poem's Spanglish verse (lines 201-3). In the very mundane elements of daily life from the hybrid language to Cruz's very recording of culture with the poet's pen, the people still feel the influences of this Westernized Afrocentric-Native heritage.

Worth noting, though not as prominent throughout the rest of the poem, the influence of Spanish enters most strongly towards the end of “White Table.” On one hand, Cruz’s introduction of the newer language element coincides with the chronological introduction of the European aggression into the poem. On the other hand, Cruz also seems to have strategically calculated when he could most afford to take a certain risk in exposing his *Callaloo* audience to a greater representation of this newly purified mixture, this new flower now found in this Puerto Rican culture he has painted on the journal’s white page. Nonetheless, this same Spanish tinted mixture that finds limited expression in “White Table” finds a greater, far more universal expression in another space, the Latino anthology *Paper Dance*. To understand Cruz’s shift in ethnic identity and racial performance in this second version of “White Table,” aptly translated “Mesa Blanca,” is to understand basic principles underlying a contemporary, Afrocentric Latino identity and the abstraction of biological race to create a greater, universal community.

Puerto Rican Identity and the “Mesa Blanca” of *Panoramas*

For J. Martin Favor, the performance of identity, especially of race and ethnicity, has its most profound agency not on the level of the individual, but on the level of the community, for the community more often assumes the authority to define its members (Favor 137). Favor employs this principle in his discussion of “authentic” blackness within the Africa American community, and, indeed, a large part of this chapter’s efforts have focused on placing Cruz as a member of the African American literary community. Certainly, this communal influence was a prime factor in Cruz’s widely accepted status as an African American poet during the Black Arts Movement. Corporately formed

identity just as easily applies to the larger Latino American populations who share “deep cultural heritages” and “deeply racialized social histories” with African Americans (Suarez-Orozco and Pàez 68).

To define Latino identity is tricky since Latinos are supposedly not a biologically defined racial group. The study *Multiple Origins, Uncertain Destinies* suggests that generational shifts and even bureaucratic labels (such as the very monikers “Hispanic” and “Latino” invented for government use to categorize ethnic groups on forms and in documents) have and are still affecting Latino ethnic self-representations of themselves to the point that even now, younger American Latinos have begun to identify themselves as a distinct race set apart from other traditionally acknowledged racial groups—blacks, whites, Asians, for example (Tienda and Mitchell 39, 50). Juan Flores and George Yudice argue, however, that Latino Americans “do not comprise even a relatively homogeneous” ethnic group, let alone a unified race as other racial groups have historically presented themselves to be. Flores and Yudice go on to list various races and ethnicities subsumed under the label “Latino,” including every group commonly recognized as a separate race in and of itself, including “native-born U.S. citizens...and Latin American immigrants of all racial and national combinations: *white*—including a range of different European nationalities—Native-American, *black*, Arabic, and Asian” (Flores and Yudice 57). In short Latino identity is everything and nothing, or rather, everyone and no(t) one. For Flores and Yudice, difference itself coheres Latin Americans. This very mixture leads the scholars to call the Latino American population a “living border” within the nation, a constantly shifting “practice” of identity and not a

“representation” of one race—a direct alignment with the notion of race as performative rather than a tangible biological reality.

This “practice” of racial identity is a challenging enterprise since, as described above, Latinos often represent themselves as an internally divergent group, embracing multiplicity in almost every way that other socially constructed groups like whites and blacks have often performatively unified themselves as a collective: skin color, religion, political views, socioeconomic status, social history, and legal status—all except one, language (Tienda and Mitchell 38). By no coincidence, scholars Flores and Yudice also privilege the same commonality of language among Latinos in their study (Flores and Yudice 61). Ed Morales takes this marriage of identity and language much further in his tongue and cheek study *Spanglish: The Search for Latino Identity*. Morales develops an entire phenomenology of Latinos from a combined linguistic heritage of Spanish and English, but a curious trend develops as the book unfolds. Throughout his entire conversation about Spanglish and Latino existence, Morales conflates language with race. Cruz relies on this same conflation throughout “White Table.” Morales offers a “Spanglish manifesto,” an invitation “to deny racial purity and find relief in the cool waters of miscegenation,” to “liberate” one’s self “from the black-white dichotomy” (Morales 5). “Spanglish,” he insists, is more than language. Spanglish “is about not having to identify with either black or white, while having the capacity to be both.” Elsewhere Morales also tries to shift away from commonly accepted notions of race or phenotype as defining principles, but Latino identity still culminates as a racialized story of black, white, and *brown*, a third wheel constantly “fighting for turf” between false extremes. As Morales explains, Spanglish (Latino identity) truly is a contradictory a way

of being. Spanglish desires to move beyond the physical body yet grounds itself in the very biology of the historical figure Malinche who “gave birth to...Spanglish reality of the twenty-first century” (Morales 32), the same woman who brought together the three fold identity chord of African, Native American and Spanish (or a broader European ancestry acknowledging the roles of both English and Portuguese ancestry as well). Spanglish becomes the ultimate *mestizaje* (miscegenation or race mixing) among Latino populations (González 13).¹²⁷

At the root of this racial jungle gym lies an often mentioned (though not necessarily concrete) assumption: Latinos supposedly take such great pride in *mestizaje* or racial superiority through miscegenation that they feel biological race as a distinct category of both personal and group identity is no longer relevant. Many critics attribute this attitude to a combination of influences, such as the continued impact of Spanish, miscegenation itself, or nationalist movements in Latin America that produce a sense of racial indistinction among Latinos. This last nationalist theory applies to Cruz’s *Paper Dance* editorial and to his personal contribution in that same *Paper Dance* anthology. In both pieces, Cruz feeds from this nationalist trend towards a less distinct, universal Latino-ism. However, this indistinction creates a mixed pot of blessings and curses for Latino people. As Morales boasts, an exuberant, optimistic racial freedom flowers among the Latino people, but some find this liberty highly improbable. In her essay “Home,” Morrison suggests to escape categorical race is impossible. She laments, “I have never lived, nor has any of us, in a world in which race did not matter.” She describes such a state as “imagined” or utopian, “Edenesque...so remote are the possibilities of its achievement” (Morrison 3).

Beyond Morrison's skepticism, this racial denial among Latinos also ignores the negative influences of racial difference as well as the damaging potency of racism within Latino cultures. Two studies in particular (Anani Dzidzienyo and Suzanne Oboler's *Neither Enemies Nor Friends* and William Luis' *Voices from Under*) point out that Latinos often ignore racial injustices (especially those black or Afro-Latinos have experienced) due to this "unifying racial myth" that even now denies continued discrimination against darker populations in many Latin communities and nations (Dzidziebyo and Oboler 8-9). Ironically, this same belief also facilitates overtly supremacist aims to "improve" Latin America by whitening populations in nations such as Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Victor Hernández Cruz's native Puerto Rico (Tienda and Mitchell 41-45). As mentioned, in Morales' case, language mediates racial difference, but that expression has not always affirmed every Latino cultural influence as Cruz does through the language of his poems.

Conflations of Language and Race in the Earlier Spanish Empire

Among Latinos a historical precedence of racial difference *as* language existed well before Morales' generation and Cruz's time. As the Spanish empire stretched its authority from the old world into the new, formal Spanish played a major role in securing Spain's "transatlantic integrity." The government's sanctioned language became the chief unifying mechanism to inspire loyalty or nationalism among a widely varied people. For José Piedra, the Spanish language was "a centralized, self-consistent, and self-righteous textuality which...glossed over potential differences—such as origin, faith, social standing, reason, and race" (Piedra 270-1). Piedra notes that blacks or Afro-Latinos represented a distinct challenge to this race erasing brand of Hispanic

identification. These darker Hispanic subjects embodied a tangible difference that violated established, yet false, white European norms within an already miscegenated Spain—"the dark child of Europe and the light child of Africa."¹²⁸ Putting his proverbial finger on an inherent racial tension in this system, Piedra points to the historical, "theoretical welcoming, on paper, of black newcomers" into the Spanish empire under the assumption that "knowledge and practice of Hispanic ways would dissipate the more blatant differences" (273). Both Morales and González note a major split in racial thought between the Spanish and their English imperial counterparts who would also influence Latin America. According to González, any "black blood" disqualified one from white status in English culture whereas "Mestizos and mulatos, no matter how dark, were regarded as part of white society" among Spaniards (González 20). Both powers established their imperial authority by radically different means—the English by creating an illusion of radical difference and separation from their colonized, and the Spanish by consuming their subjects in an illusion of likeness and proximity. Even today, as Morales notes, "in North America, one drop of black blood makes you black, while in Latin America, one drop of white blood makes you white" (Morales 15). One of the more telling historical notes in Piedra's study, Spanish long served as a form of literary whiteness, as a means of assimilation that all racially marked citizens could obtain through legal maneuverings and mastery of the lingua franca. From the earliest point, "A light colored nobody or an exceptional Moor, Jew, or Afro-Hispanic could...swear off [racial] impurities and gain a fictional genealogy and grammatical standing." Officials could literally declare a subject Caucasian and grant that citizen a "certificate of whiteness" regardless of visible appearance (Piedra 275). For Piedra, this

“elasticity” of the “official” language and legal system marked the beginning of Spanish literary fiction. This historical cultural tie rumbles in the distance behind Cruz’s poetry but towards a different end. If one can write whiteness into existence with disregard to overt racial cues like skin color, could the same be true for blackness? Subversive communal ties to ritual, the writing act and language and music reveal answers in the first of two poems titled “Mesa Blanca.”

Language, Music, and Universal Latino Identity in *Paper Dance*

Martín Espada and Juan Flores have suggested that “Every community is ultimately the best and final arbiter of its own literature” (Espada and Flores 942). In other words, though others may speak to the lives of communities, the best people to articulate an existence within that same community are those who live collectively within it. The same sentiments hold among the Latino contributors of this anthology. Yet another community building project, *Paper Dance* deliberately constructs a pan-nationalist Latino identity. The overt Afro-Puerto Rican identity that Cruz celebrates through “White Table,” appears to be subordinated in the name of communal cohesiveness in the 1995 universal Latino anthology *Paper Dance: 55 Latino Poets*, edited by Cruz, Leroy Quintana, and Virgil Suarez. In *Paper Dance*, Cruz emphasizes a blanket Latino identity that leaves little room for the poet to express a more personal standing as “the” representative Puerto Rican of three Latino editors (one Cuban, the other Chicano). After all, from its start, *Paper Dance’s* editors express a goal to move beyond the typical separatist Chicano or Puerto Rican literary groupings. They want to gather the best Latino/a poets within the United States from all backgrounds: in their introduction to the volume, the editors describe *Paper Dance* as an “inclusive,

representative work” of Latino poets born of “diverse origins” in a heritage “developed at the center of” a continental America which is also a center “of blending, conflicting, melting of cultures endlessly transforming” (Cruz, Quintana and Suarez xii). The swirling, blending phrasing of this statement lures readers into a racialized sense of *mestizaje*, but the introduction identifies language as the collection’s default unifier. Indeed, common language facilitates this identity performance, void of overt racial references but not of racialized influences. According to Cruz et al., as a “quiet pact,” the *Paper Dance* poets have used English “enriched” by “an occasional Spanish word” (xi). This hybridity supposedly reflects “a multilingualism,” but this polyglossia moves well beyond the boundaries of language to behave much like racialized flesh and blood, the same conflation present in earlier Black Arts anthologies.¹²⁹ This same cloaked or re-interpreted racial presence in the editors’ configuration of Latino identity mirrors the same spirit of race in Cruz’s contribution to the anthology. This version of Cruz’s “Mesa Blanca” (chronologically second of his three publications) is marvelously void of overt references to racialized blackness in contrast to “White Table’s” much earlier appropriation of blackness. However, Cruz’s work still subtly injects an Africanist presence into the anthology’s universalist Latino appeal.

Within the *Paper Dance* anthology, “Mesa Blanca” is an unacknowledged Africanism set into play, a Trojan horse that carries with itself a celebration of African heritage.¹³⁰ Like “White Table,” this version of “Mesa Blanca” opens in medias res with spirit possession. Cruz’s poetic ritual, however, moves beyond religious ancestral worship. The poet plays off of the celebratory tradition of Mesa Blanca with references to music and dance to suggest the possibility of a cohesive Latino unity, an artistic

synergy intimately connected to language. He writes, “If a kiss left the mental dimension,/ Entering the bone of dance hall,/ My ears would reclaim the sound/ of your intended love” (lines 1-4). Malaka’s concreteness disappears and leaves room for doubt—the line begins with “if.” The speaker (Cruz) contemplates a “kiss,” an intimate physical exchange or act of endearment that has not come to fruition. This conditional thought has not left the “mental dimension” to become a corporal or bodily reality. If it were realized, Cruz suggests it would be found in the sound of dance hall, a literal public meeting place that also serves as a platform for an eclectic, distinct Latin musical tradition.¹³¹ The “kiss,” an act of acceptance or sharing, penetrates to the very “bone.” On one level “bone” alludes, as before, to claves, actual musical instruments and African rhythms that compose Latin music (another unacknowledged Africanism at play in the poem). By extension Cruz also alludes to the poetic tradition closely aligned with this music, both supported through the flesh and blood people who create and sustain the tradition.

In this case, the dance hall is the poem itself, the platform or space Cruz provides for this spiritual melding of Latino culture on paper. From the poem’s first line and its three-two clave meter, Cruz mimics Latin percussions in a free flow of Afro-Amerindian rhythms, the “bone” or structure of the poem’s first stanza. In this sense, African heritage lies at the heart of the poem’s appeal, and “your” love that captures Cruz’s ear, is the audience’s historical cultural bond. Music is also the “bone” of ancestry, the marrow of cultural tradition that produces connections similar to bloodline heritage. As Cruz’s poem mirrors this music, a traditional source of “empowerment” for Latino communities

(Aparicio and Cruz 55), this cultural strand of sound begins the process of uniting Cruz's audience.

This earlier "sound" that Cruz "reclaims" for his audience has meaning for all its readers, according to the poem at least. However, this language performance has limitations. Cruz writes,

mostly it would be lost.

Both the poetry and the music

But to this side of things only,

Cause flashing in joy

is the lord of the station,

so immediate as to almost be your tongue. (lines 6-11)

In other words, Cruz's poetic act of communion and communication is not absolute; "it" (this sound, the music of the poem) cannot express everything, all that connects Cruz and his audience. Nevertheless, the "poetry and music" of the moment still suffice as a type of vehicle. This expression compensates just enough for affiliations "lost ...to this side of things"—individual identifications (whether Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, Dominican or another) of the many subcultures whose unique experiences and identities do not translate beyond personal boundaries and homelands. Cruz's audience, nevertheless, finds common ground in this spiritual translation of a universal love, a collective identity grounded in this Afro-Latin "sound" or music (or the rhythm of the written word in Cruz's case). Cruz assures his audience members that during this communal moment of his poem, on some level they would all still understand each other as they all join together. The connective beat or sound of this communicative spiritual moment would

mediate between them, “almost be your tongue” on “This side of things,” in the observable, concrete world where people live, where political and cultural expediencies matter, where difference matters. The spirit of the verse will speak for “you” the individual even as its beat syncs together the shared, possessed body of a greater Latino community through its artistic demonstration. In concert with the body, this spiritual language (the Africanist music of this poetic artistry) becomes “the lord of the station,” the determining force shaping this cultural gathering in this linguistic dance hall, Cruz’s poem.

Cruz continues his Mesa Blanca metaphor to explore a universal, yet Africanized Latino identity. Anticipating when Latino identity would finally cohere or “truth together” as a recognizable entity, the poet continues writing,

that moment when decisions are over
 And the motion is the only thought
 accomplished I hear the buttons
 Slipping through the grooves of Your finger tips
 Out through the ether of the
 hole slice,
 Now the back opens
 As onto a land. (lines 14-22)

These lines convey the actual point of Mesa Blanca possession, which operates on multiple levels: the poem describes a body being physically freed from clothing, being released into its natural, corporal state. This body is naked, freely moving to this all important sound through spiritual rapture where there is no awareness of one’s self.¹³²

Possession also becomes a freedom from constructed identities with which readers binds themselves, including racial identities based on phenotype. As in the actual Mesa Blanca ritual where mediums need not be of the same gender or visible race as the spirits they host, readers can freely take on new identities within this alternate, enabling Africanist space, a free-flowing, poetic Mesa Blanca ritual. Cruz describes “buttons slipping through the grooves of your fingers,” a willful act in which the possessed subject disrobes from literal clothing on one hand and limitations based on physical boundaries (gender, racial labels, physical location, nationalist identifications) on the other hand. This freedom is also tangible autonomy from a black-white dichotomy. Unlike Malaka who relies on La Minerva, this Africanist presence does not depend on a Western vehicle for its expression or operate in any specific or defined relationship to whiteness. However, this liberated Africanist space does clear room for Cruz to recover a Native American identity in no way oppositional to Latino African heritage.

In proceeding lines, Cruz posits that once Latinos liberate themselves from their local politics, from their provincial spaces, they will expand into unexplored territory, “land curving into a cave.” Here Cruz alludes to the flooded ritual caves of *La Aleta* and the Arawak-Taino creation myth suggesting that the larger expanse of humankind came from great caves on the island of Hispanola, modern day Haiti and the Dominican Republic.¹³³ With this return to *La Aleta*, Cruz proposes a rebirth, the advent of a new people. The poem suggests that many promising, fruitful things exist in this renewed yet new place: “Most a moist is there” Cruz writes (lines 24-26). In other words, this universalized, hybrid state is conducive for social growth, the development of this new identity, yet salvaging of Native heritage. A latter reference within “Mesa Blanca”

confirms and affirms this newly freed, broadened Latino audience that begins to take hold of its common native ancestry. Cruz's poem brings the "sensational things coming together, / of the Arowakian-Taino" (line 60). This reference alludes to earlier Native Arawak nations whose tribes spread from modern day Florida down to the northern portion of the South American continent, including not just Cruz's Puerto Rico Taino subculture but other contemporary Latin American domains as well (Waldman 22), a collective heritage.

The editors' goal in the *Paper Dance* introduction is to form an anthology that speaks to collective expressions of Latino culture beyond nationalist borders. This shedding of exteriors is also a disrobing of a deeper kind. The freed physical body itself becomes a portable homeland rather than fixed national soil as "backs" stretch out "as onto" or like "land"(5). This passage privileges a precise kairos moment of acceptance when one gives in to this pure "bi-spiritual" state—neither one thing nor another, not Chicano, not Cuban, not Puerto Rican. Cruz's move here is significant. Unlike Haynes' colorblind comments from the previous chapter, this bodily state does not dismiss the physicality of the body but rather frees its material existence. For Cruz, this freedom "even fries darkness" which gets "Hot enough to eat" under language's influence. This word nurtures. The poem's unfettered freedom facilitates the readers' growth into one people. The poem dispels, not a racialized "darkness," but ignorance and misunderstandings born in difference, disconnections in understanding or ignorance between individuals so that they might ascend to a higher state.

The potential of this new higher state of being, this "ether," heaven, firmament, new beginning, is so great that Cruz eventually reaches a spiritual consciousness where

even the ultimate ethnic or racial mediator, language itself, transforms. Cruz's last line in this stanza, "Ah Ha," is an utterance of discovery, an interjection that expresses pure emotion and knowledge even as the grammar and formal syntax of language climax and then fall away. The Africanist rhythm of the poem, the music, however, remains. In essence, Cruz leaves this introductory excerpt of "Mesa Blanca" open: ironically, a white table, a tabula rasa onto which many possibilities could be laid, but only once he and his fellow Latinos enter into a particular spiritual unity through the poem's sound. This state is possible only if they allow this common spirit of the music, this performed bilingualism, to possess them wholly and transport them to this place where the most overt blackness represented in this poem is the black print on the literal white page (the words themselves). As Cruz's poem continues, the poet extends the Mesa Blanca conceit even further. Just as ancestral spirits often communicate through human hosts in the Mesa Blanca ritual, Cruz's words become a horse or platform for new communal possibilities. These possibilities are, in turn, founded upon a shared, resurrected history that Cruz recounts chronologically, a history shared even with an Africanist context.

Cruz's next stanza journeys into a history of the collective Arawakian-Taino people throughout the Caribbean, a heritage that Cruz begins to lay out upon this same white table, a poetic "banquet" celebrating a common native ancestry among Caribbean Latinos, especially (line 42). Stanza two begins with a proposition:

If I were writing on rock,
 It would be the wind of the year
 That caressing me will make
 Me aware of the shadows on

A distant stone—
 that signifies an eclipse

On some unseen roof,

From where in the form of

A kite a diamond leaves for heaven. (lines 31-9)

Lines thirty-one and thirty-five allude to the Puerto Rican monument *La Piedra Escrita* (literally “the Written Rock”), a large stone bearing 900 year old native Taino carvings.

In one sense, the “shadows” here allude to the mystery of *La Piedra Escrita* and a greater Amerindian history. Beyond literal references to animals, food and other mundane objects, the meanings of the Taino petroglyphs engraved on *La Piedra Escrita* have been lost or seemingly shrouded over time. However, the poem’s shadow is also like a literal shadow. This mystery is the result of a greater presence that somehow blocks light or in this case knowledge or recognition of this shared Latino ancestry. Cruz’s awareness of this presence develops from the “wind of the year” that reveals to him the “eclipse” or blocking out of Native American life that has supposedly become extinct. The “wind” in question could be a number of Taino deities; however, the invoked “eclipse” takes us to the site of modern day Jamaica. This is not the current Jamaica of British and African ancestry. Rather, this is Jamaica before the advent of American slavery, during the island’s first encounters with colonizers. Cruz’s plays on an historical account of Christopher Columbus who, while on this island among earlier Taino aboriginals, made his celebrated prediction of a lunar eclipse on February 29, in the “year” 1504 (Saunders 78).¹³⁴ Aided by an almanac’s astrological calculations, Columbus coerced the then island natives into believing that he had divine

communication with the Gods and could thereby blot out the moon. Often disregarded is Columbus' immediate dependence on the Jamaican Tainos for his crews' survival, as well as the Europeans' rape, murder, and exploitation of those same natives. In this sense, the idealized mythology surrounding Columbus' adventures in a new world has eclipsed the Taino people's historically verifiable degradation. However, like a kite flown into the sky, this aboriginal heritage remains within sight.¹³⁵ It remains secured by the slimmest thread to a living people, the same Latino readers Cruz brings together through poetic fellowship and historical witnessing.

In stanza four, Cruz begins a critique of western influence or white supremacy. He gradually turns his focus away from the European colonizers who have dominated Latino history (and to a certain degree his poem as well). Cruz returns to the written "letter" of his text, which he "would/ Make into a face," a recognized identity for his native ancestors who haunt the poem's verses in this Africanist Mesa Blanca reincarnation (lines 40-1). Another allusion then materializes: the historical banquets Taino caciques (chiefs) threw in the honor of the newly arrived Europeans. Cruz reverses these honors in restitution. He hosts through words a "banquet" for those natives "...amazed at the arrival / of boats," of the Spanish imperialists (lines 42-4). However, even at this moment of restored honor, Cruz himself questions, "but for what door?"—for what purpose does he open this space of the poem? For what purpose does he entertain the history of these Amerindians and of his fellow Latino participants in this ritualized Africanist space?¹³⁶ His answer unfolds in stanza five where he first acknowledges the influences of this shared Amerindian-European history.

Invoking European exploration once more, Cruz writes, “trousers have come out/of there,” out of the European arrival by water to the Americans (line 48). On one plane, “trousers” speaks of changing native cultural systems, the wearing of western clothing in this example. However, “trousers” also alludes to the male torso, to the arrival of a distinct European male presence and sexuality. Historical record notes that from their beginnings with Columbus’ voyages, subsequent explorers and conquistadors did not bring women with them on expeditions. They would either rape native women or take wives and partners (Marder and Tice 84-5; Haslip-Viera 131). The results were mestizo populations that now dominate Latin America. Cruz plays off of this idea of miscegenation through cooking metaphor, a mixed dish of European and native foods: “bacalao” (a salted European cod fish) “fricasseed with calabasa (a squash indigenous to the Americas)” (lines 50-1). Cruz accomplishes a great deal on a writer’s level within these few words. He seasons or tropicalizes his poem with Spanish terms. “Bacalao,” “calabaza,” and “fricasseed” not only refer to a hybrid food culture, but also merge physiology and language to mimic a bodily *Mestizo* identity on the written page. In the proceeding lines, Cruz says “we,” (his fellow Latinos) must “church” hybrid Latino identity, “Mestizo, Mezo/Half and Half” (52-4). The word “church” is a verb, a spiritual and political action. Latinos must canonize miscegenation, sanctify it, set it apart for reverent preservation, “So that the text books claiming total/ Taino vanishment/Should four pages later erase/ burundangala” (55-8). In other words, Latinos must acknowledge this cultural and physical mixture to preserve native Latino heritage, to prevent a Europeanized establishment’s myth of a pure culture from erasing “burundangala,” “the amorphous mix up of heterogeneous things” or the “sensational things coming together

of the Arowakian-Taino” in Cruz’s words (Delgado and Muñoz 222; line 60). From mid-stanza through Line 122, Cruz proceeds to trace this “burundangala,” this mixed lineage, through images of a merged linguistic and material world—another instance of the conflation of physical identity and language discussed earlier. As he did in “White Table,” Cruz once again points out “What is not gone” of aboriginal culture, those things that still retain traces of Taino influence, whether by name, resemblances, or practice:

The looks,

The gestures,

The thoughts,

The dreams,

The intuitions,

The memories,

The names of fruits,

Rivers,

The names of towns,

Vegetables,

Certain fish,

The gourd making music

In the mountains,

The maraca making feet,

Areyto Dance,

And this cigar between my fingers. (lines 62-78)

This time, Cruz summons stronger, more specific evidence of a native influence for the remainder of the poem in the similar mundane elements of Latino life, from Coquis (frogs) and cucubanos (beetles) to tobacco. Even the poem itself comes alive in readers' imaginations through this now combined animist tradition of the Tainos and Africanist Mesa Blanca ceremony: "This paper which was a tree /Is Crying for its leaves/That's the route of your mind" (83-5). Personified, alive, this place, this black print on the literal white page (Cruz's poem) hosts new communal possibilities as it reclaims a scattered, fleeting Latino history ("The past in the smoke of the cigar"). Cruz literally manifests this heritage and greater unity by reinventing it on the page, "Bringing the future into formation," into the tangible world from the written word (lines 125-6).

Obviously, the greatest difference between "White Table" and *Paper Dance's* "Mesa Blanca" is the degree to which Cruz openly acknowledges race and emphasizes African and Native ancestry integral to Latino/Puerto Rican identity. The presence of Malaka in "White Table" is readily traced, whereas the role of Africanisms in the *Paper Dance* is far more subtle but present nevertheless. In fact, one could argue that Cruz's presentation of Africanisms in the *Paper Dance* anthology reveals a blackness that moves completely beyond a reliance upon physiology to make itself known. Instead, Cruz's chosen vehicles are music and the Mesa Blanca ritual. Cruz's handling of ethnicity and race in his third poem offers even more revision of the black presence within the self-controlled environment of his own publication *Panoramas*. This publication of "Mesa Blanca" especially begs examination given Cruz's heavy investments in Puerto Rican island culture and his identification with Puerto Rico's national figurehead, the country jibaros so often hidden behind a European mask of whiteness.

Cruz's Panoramas

Cruz's longing for Puerto Rico might have inspired the poet to return to the physical island of Puerto Rico in 1989, but he is constantly returning to Puerto Rico on the written page in his personal poetry collections, especially the 1997 *Panoramas* where one finds the poem "Mesa Blanca." Allusions to popular Puerto Rican culture and history touch all of Cruz's writings to some degree; Sergio Waisman suggests that Cruz's "strong allegiance to the island," his filial devotion to Puerto Rico, can be "felt in all his words" (189). Waisman describes this tendency as a vivid, "tropicalized" language that "migrates" through Cruz's hybridized poems, filled with greater mixture of English, Spanish and Taino (Native American) terms. Once again, the poet focuses on sound or language facilitating identity formation. Waisman's choice of the words "tropical" and "migrate" are telling here. They suggest an exoticism of Cruz's works and Latino identity on the scholar's part; however, Waisman borrows these terms directly from Cruz. Carmello Estrich suggests that the exoticism on the verge of stereotype is the poet's—a deliberate use of the popular ethnic associations towards a subversive end, a similar strategy emerging earlier in this project's discussion of Ralph Ellison and Saul Bellow uses of Africanist stereotypes. For Estrich, many Nyourican poets like Cruz construct "fantasy" representations of a homeland born out of their positions in "critical crossfire" between the United States and Puerto Rico (Estrich 43-4). What, however, is the nature of this crossfire?

Zilkia Janer pinpoints a colonial nationalism that pervades Puerto Rico because of the island's status as a United States territory or protectorate. This odd relationship with the greater United States produces a multifaceted consciousness for Puerto Ricans, who

are a community of citizens yet aliens within their own country. They diverge culturally because of limited legal rights, arrested economic development, language differences, higher rates of miscegenation, and differing attitudes on race resulting from an influential imperialist Spanish heritage (Janer 76). Cruz's relationship to a larger Puerto Rican population complicates matters further. Cruz carries close associations with the Nuyorican poets, but he is not a native New Yorker. He is a Nuyorican emigrant who settled from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States (New York) at age five, part of the 135,000 colonia who migrated after world war II to become a million strong by 1960 (González 81). Cruz's mainland relocation is a perfect example of what Estrich calls "interruptions" that cause the Nuyorican poet to reconstruct a fictional home through a violently bastardized language as he deconstructs the mainland perspective that dominates representations of Puerto Rico (Estrich 45). Cruz enters the literary space of *Panoramas* to accomplish what Acosta-Belen has identified as the poet's more personal motive, an agenda that could not be fully expressed in either *Callaloo* or *Paper Dance*—the construction of a refuge, a communal space where the Nuyorican poet gains acceptance and a sense of authentic identity that Puerto Rican islanders traditionally have denied mainlanders on the grounds of American assimilation (Acosta-Belen 980). This tension between the mainland and island creates a radically altered ethnic performance on Cruz's part as he feeds into a community building project whose center is not an overtly Afrocentric core as in *Callaloo* or an abstracted Latino appeal steeped in Taino recovery and subtle Africanist cues of the *Paper Dance* anthology.

Many of Cruz's poems in the *Panorama*'s initial segment subtitled "The Age of Sea Shells Revisited," were written either while Cruz still lived on the mainland or very

shortly after his return to Puerto Rico. As the sub-title suggests, poems such as “The Lower East Side of Manhattan” and “Invisibility 0” (zero) recount the movements of a pseudo-immigrant life. Similar to seashells migrating, Cruz’s experiences shift between a very vivid New York landscape and a desired destination—the lush, mountainous interior of Puerto Rico invoked in the poem “Islandis” and this study’s main text, “Mesa Blanca.” These works offer the “panoramas”—slices of Puerto Rican life from the perspective of Cruz, the islander who returns to his birth home of Aguas Buenas, not the New York Latino writer alienated from Puerto Rican Island culture. Carmen Hernández sees Cruz as the poet of the spaces between the mainland and island, as one who has the ability to “help the nascent community to re-imagine itself through new perspectives” and whose “close contact with other cultures” has afforded him “a breadth of experience” that enables him “to take from many and give back” (Hernández 15). What Cruz brings back with him onto the printed page, however, is a familiar figurative conflation of physical being, sound and (increasing more so) language that become just as much race as the physical marking of a people. Quoting Michael Unomunno in *Panoramas*’ introduction (“Home is Where the Music Is”), Cruz declares that “language is the blood of the spirit” and describes Puerto Rican Spanish as “the first sound” his “body heard and felt... a language which has the Taino, Arabic-Gypsy-Berber, and African words” (Cruz, *Panoramas* 22). In these lines, language gathers multicultural flesh and human sensitivity. This personified sound can be “felt” and, like racial identity, functions as a part of a larger, historical communal identity that the collective people establish and maintain beyond the mere individual.

This third publishing of “Mesa Blanca,” the most personal representation of the poet himself, begins with a focus on language and history, but unlike the openings of previous publications, the written word takes precedence in the first lines of Panoramas’ “Mesa Blanca,” not fleshly sound. As Juan Flores notes, “Historical memory is an active, creative force...associated, since its earliest usages, with the act of inscribing, engraving... ‘recording’” (Flores 274). For Flores, the account itself is not paramount, but rather the action of writing. “The putting –on-record, the gathering and sorting of materials from the past” matters. True to Flores’ words, Cruz acknowledges the duty of poets to chronicle the island’s history. His first attempts begin with a repeat allusion from *Paper Dance*—La Peitra Escrita, the symbol covered Taino monument located in Jayuya, Puerto Rico. This opening, “If I were writing on rock,” once again stalls the immediate spiritual possession that began the *Callaloo* contribution “White Table.” The speaker’s “writing on rock” takes on a metaphysical quality as if to contemplate the value of the writing process itself beyond the petroglyphs of La Pietra Escrita. This start immediately exposes Cruz as the poem’s speaker, the self-invested poet entertaining a different supposition through the same words: a revised history of Puerto Rico or Borikén, Land of the Almighty Lord, and not a universal history of the entire native populations of Caribbean Latin America (Saunders 227). Cruz repositions this poem’s center first by relocating the European “eclipse” of the same larger Jamaican Taino culture over an “unseen *distant* roof,” farther away and indirectly experienced (line 7). Moreover, instead of the definite “letter” or visual symbol becoming the face of a reclaimed native heritage, Cruz resurrects a vague sound similar to the same living sound he previously associated with Africanist heritage. He writes, “It would be that sound/ I would make into a face”

(lines 9-10). On one level this sound is, one again, the poem itself, its words, its language. However, in a more practical, historical sense, just what that sound is, is not clear yet. In this regard, the loss of native life and culture under Spanish colonialism come to the poem's foreground. Cruz emphasizes this loss even more as he begins to render the poem's haunting sound into flesh and bone, into a tangible Mesa Blanca experience. Another element of the poem surfaces as well—this version of “Mesa Blanca” is far more critical of European or white influence than the Paper Dance publication.

As Cruz continues his conflation of sound or language and tangible bodily existence, this “face” begins to make visible the native Taino people of a past Puerto Rico, but they manifest in parts and specific functions. The Tainos are seers, not the spectacles to be seen: “a coco-net of cybernetic eyes/transmitting from the beach” that witness the physical arrival of “those who came lost on boats” (11-12). The poem begins to leverage this more stable, fixed representation of the Tainos against yet another allusion to Columbus and crew who were “lost,” having mistaken modern day San Salvador for Asia.¹³⁷ A power reversal begins to develop at this “banquet,” of words and remembrance (Cruz's literal poem, that same Mesa Blanca or White Table prepared as a spiritual invitation to a Native presence Cruz invokes as he begins to strip away even more of the celebratory view of the Americas' European discovery and its supposed discoverers).

Cruz treads deeper waters as he writes, “The sea a rush of mists,/Christ carrying the cross of Castile/Soldiers laundering heads of crushed guava” (lines 18-9). The Castilian cross alludes most overtly to the Christian emblems traditionally depicted on Columbus's sails as well as the Spanish monarchy supported by the Roman Catholic

church, the same church that supplanted native beliefs and traditions on the island and ultimately sanctioned the near decimation of the indigenous people. Cruz's statement is more aggressive here. In an ironic reversal, he associates the sea faring Spanish with washed "guava heads." Not only did the Tainos associate water with the world of the dead, but they also believed that the dead were pale or white, faceless, navel-less spirits or "opias" who emerged at night to eat guava fruit (Poviones-Bishop). Moreover, these spirits could take on human form to seduce wanderers. While the natives regain a face through this "sound" (the poem's words), the Spanish implicitly lose their faces as the living dead.¹³⁸ Their traditional identities as bringers of life and advancement fail. The Spaniards become the living dead who violently prey on the seduced living, "crushing" and consuming natives and their resources.

Within this same stanza, Cruz develops a familiar merging of physiology and language to re-claim the native element of *Mestizo* identity. As before, the poet addresses the generations of biracial Puerto Ricans, descendents of the Spanish who have now actively "popped out" of the sea, "Salty like bacalao [fish].../fricasseed with calabaza [squash]" (lines 21-2). Although Cruz still tropicalizes the poem with terms of Spanish etymology, a definite European presence now reveals itself in the form of deadly, visible "soldiers" who occupy the poetic space—again, the womanless conquistadors inhabiting the poem to miscegenate the native populations. The stanza literally quotes "Webster's" sanctioned definition of *Mestizo* as "a person of mixed European and Indian ancestry" (lines 31-33), a fracture of Puerto Rico's ancestral tribune into two of three dominant elements thus far. As "Mesa Blanca" continues, Cruz once again preaches, "So we have to church the word *Mestizo*/ Half and Half" (lines 23-26). However, additional lines

strengthen Cruz's resolve and place the Taino "Indians" into a far more reverential context alongside a hereto now more dominant Spanish cultural influence. Cruz not only calls for Puerto Ricans to reverence miscegenation. He makes a more radical move to acknowledge the performative nature of identity. Cruz urges his fellow Puerto Ricans to "practice" Mestizo identity religiously as resistance against those whose same "textbooks claiming total Taino vanishment/Should four pages later erase/The word *Mestizo*/ With the same mouth they say we are" (lines 31-3). In this particular line, the term "Mestizo" replaces the earlier, more generalized term "burundangala." Moreover, human mouths mentioned here become identifiable mouthpieces that represent a false establishment, those same westernized historians who claim to have written the island's "official" neutered history, a record that omits the native presence. Pointing to biased social hierarchies, Cruz yet again exposes those who have "with the same mouths they say we are," denied the legacy of Native American heritage. From stanzas four to the poem's end, Cruz commits to his stance more heartily as he continues to "church" Mestizo identity. He worships this hybrid identity which becomes even more complex and as the poem moves deeper into its conceit of the Mesa Blanca worship ritual.

Beginning with stanza four, "Mesa Blanca" issues a clarion call to Puerto Ricans to acknowledge their multi-cultural heritage founded upon a lingering, "definite perfume" of the Taino spirit found most overtly in language (142). Taino heritage becomes a "voice," a surviving indigenous trace of linguistic remnants that dwell and intermingle among Spanish cultural influences: "Designs of Greek Pillars" contrasting with "wooden mountain house[s]" and "Catalan balconies" (lines 136-40) all found among the Puerto Rican landscape. Cruz recaptures through poetry the actively moving spirit of the land

and people—the “sensational things coming together/ of the Arawak-Taino/...not gone. (35-6). Cruz’s more specific tracing of the native spirit of the land is significant.

Cruz tropicalizes this version of “Mesa Blanca” with far more words whose etymology reflect indigenous ancestry and European miscegenation than in the previous poems. This lineage flows through a merged linguistic and material world—a similar conflation of physical identity and language discussed earlier in similar items: “criollo curls” (the physical bodies of the people), the “Ford Granada” and “hamacas” (the names of commercial goods) to the music of Latin music artist Felipe “Don Felo” Goyco, common street slang and plays of words like “cucha” and “chucha,” and popular pastimes like dominoes, to name a few examples.¹³⁹ This native spirit literally tours the island in space and time shifting from an interior “rain forest” to Ponce to the Sumidiero Basin in Aguas Buenas and beyond. Cruz even extends this spirit into his portrayal of the land itself, but in ways that allude more deeply to Taino culture: “Caciques” (ancient chiefs believed to be of divine origins) who are “descendants of hydrogen” (of the sun) pass “singing through/ Mavi Trees and rock--/...migrate with the blood” (lines 165-70). As in “White Table” the land itself becomes a living breathing being united with the people (“the blood”) who live upon it, but in this case, the land forms more overtly after the tradition of the Taino God Yukiyú, often portrayed as the Island’s central barrier mountain, El Yunque. The prevalence of such Taino mythology and language throughout this version reveals another concerted effort on Cruz’s part to restore literal Native history and culture. As mentioned earlier, of the three dominant ethnic influences upon Puerto Rican culture, Taino culture is the least known, but this particular version of

“Mesa Blanca” Cruz seeks a different balance as he introduces another familiar progenitor who has also returned to make its presence known in the stanzas of this poem.

In this third version of “Mesa Blanca,” Cruz’s recapturing of Taino culture and history also opens a gate for a recovery of a previously discussed African ancestry as well, which, in turn, returns this study to its opening focus on Africanist presence in Cruz’s “White Table.” The most significant instance occurs in these lines:

The Castilians were coming
 out of the mouth of a volcano
 falling as ash unto red dirt
 ...it is that subtle/
 of a music
 What silence for cadence split
 Coffee people to enter you
 Tobacco people to enter you
 Sugar cane to enter you
 ...to enroll your finger
 Vegetable craft. (lines 228-243)

Cruz subtly highlights an Africanist presence with a play on skin color and pun on labor—these “coffee” and “tobacco” people are African slaves whose cultures, whose spirits also enter into the poem’s land. Through plantation allusions to tobacco, sugar cane and coffee in particular, Cruz simultaneously exposes the Spanish exploitation of island resources, native Tainos and African slaves, all used to sustain massive plantation crops of coffee, tobacco, and sugar cane (the island’s major exports for which native

populations had already been nearly decimated).¹⁴⁰ The reader can distinguish the African presence from the native Tainos by the distinct sounds introduced in lines 234-5: “that subtle/of a music/What silence for cadence split.” Cruz associates with these “coffee” and “tobacco” people with the introduction of a new rhythm into the land, the African bomba and pleana which scholars attribute most often to African slaves and immigrating blacks from nearby French Caribbean and English controlled territories (Candelaria et al. 80-2; Saunders 193). The bomba in particular features a “split” cadence as Cruz suggests, a polyrhythmic beat composed of multiple, simultaneously played rhythms, hence the term “split.” Metaphorically, in the same way that drummers layer bomba drum beat patterns in Latin music, the island’s people, their heritages, and their experiences overlap in this section of “Mesa Blanca” to form what Cruz identifies collectively as Puerto Rico’s rich heritage. These allusions to African heritage and musical influences also surface much earlier when Cruz describes, “...the pleana tambourines/ The Moorish turban of Mahoma/Folding onto the rhythms” (155-6).

Worth noting, Cruz takes great pains to vary his representations of blackness much like Neal and Baraka’s “tones” of Africanist people, united but individually distinct. The Africanist spirits inhabiting the poem are not a monolithic lump sum of humanity. The terms “coffee” and “tobacco” and reference to sugar cane suggest distinctions among these Africanist people, from variations in skin tone to differences in work duties and cultural expressions. The Moorish tambour’s sound and pleana are not the resonance of the bomba’s split rhythm, nor are any of these the exact sound of the Senegalese Africanist presence that surfaces most overtly towards the poem’s end as the definitive rhythm of Cruz’s Mestizo spirit. This last nation-conscious Senegalese

presence also becomes another example of living sound masquerading in flesh throughout the poem. Cruz personifies this spiritual influence with “feet” that have a beat or rhythm. Moreover, the curiously nationalized phrase “Senegal feet” associated with Cruz’s church-ed Mestizo presence circumvents the typical racialized associations with blackness just as Cruz’s naming of the Spanish colonizers focuses on a specific “Castilian” heritage, the acknowledged dominant or upper echelon that sets the standard of Spanish language and lineage. In a restorative move, Cruz gives this *Senegalese* Africanism a concrete, knowable origin—this rhythm is not a generic, racialized blackness floating unidentified. This small move also conjures up a subtly subversive moment that hinges on a strategic connection between African ancestry and Cruz’s self-identification with the archetypal Jibaro.

Cruz often associates himself with the Jibaros—rural Puerto Rican peasants from the commonwealth’s interior mountain region. According to Zilkia Janer, the now mythic image of the salt-of-the-earth island laborer originated with Puerto Rico’s elite “intermediary” Creole population. This class rose to power by first claiming blood ancestry with their Spanish overseers. These creoles forged this alliance to ease differences between themselves and the then ruling Spanish. Simultaneously (and contradictorily), these same Creoles also appropriated the image of the poorer, less powerful Jibaros. This move legitimized bonds with the lower classes, whom the ruling party needed both to secure further power against their colonizers and to establish a culture distinguishable from more formal, imperial Spanish customs; unfortunately, as Janer notes, the Creoles’ investments in “Hispanicism,” what amounts to a form of cultural white supremacy, acknowledged the existence of non-Hispanic people in Puerto

Rican society, only to immediately erase them” (Janer 12). The Creoles were highly aware of the contradictions lower class associations admitted into the ruling class’ scheme. These lower castes were Others whose racial states, language practices, daily cultural practices, and living conditions disrupted the Creole identity performance, exposing the falsity of socially crafted acculturation the Creoles had carefully fashioned from their Spanish models. This contradiction was especially true among those African descendents whose bodies and lives had already been abstracted as the extreme black Other in European circles, particularly to justify darker Africans’ exploitation as slaves. Cadelaera notes that traditionally “Puerto Ricans of mixed Ancestry did not widely accept the culture of African slaves because, indeed, they “recognized the social stigma placed on Africans because of slavery” (634). As a result, over time this upper class refined the image of these domestic laborers in its historical and literary accounts, extracting the Jibaros’ quaint “rural essence” while erasing the harsh realities of this lower class’ existence. The Jibaros became the idealized image of the authentic Puerto Rican, void of any traits “that could be used to justify colonization” (Janer 74-5), namely marked ethnicity and especially blackness.

Sharing the biases of those earlier Spanish imperialists, the same Creoles portrayed the Jibaros—the now representative national image of the “authentic” Puerto Rican—as racially white and culturally Hispanic (a representation still enduring in contradiction to the Puerto Rico’s complex cultural ancestries Cruz highlights throughout “Mesa Blanca”). In terms of blackness, Janer cites “an eloquent silence” surrounding the “African component of Puerto Rican society and culture” (Janer 71). Afro-Puerto Ricans and mulattos were deemed “culturally and spiritually Spanish in spite of their dark skin,

and the dark skins expected to eventually disappear” as “temporary imperfections” within the greater Puerto Rican community’s overall make up (Janer 72). These politics drip with racism; however, after U.S. involvement in Puerto Rico began, the same Creoles argued that racism did not exist on the island, suggesting what little “there was resulted from the bad influence of the United States” (76). Even more recent signs of cultural acceptance are questionable. Scholar Mariam Jimenez-Roman argues that current revivals of Taino culture (similar to Cruz’s pro-Taino sentiments in the *Paper Dance* version of “Mesa Blanca”) are a “backlash,” as she describes it, against increasing interests in both the “African foundations” of the island’s society and the impact of race and racism (Jimenez-Roman 102). With its “tobacco” and “coffee” people, Cruz’s personal *Panoramas* printing of “Mesa Blanca” counterbalances this “backlash” against Africanist culture and brings this chapter full circle back to the performed black presence, but far more balanced than that of “Malaka,” the rocket out of proportion. Again, instead *Panoramas’* readers share Cruz’s personal vision of a far more multi-faceted Puerto Rico.

As Cruz’s worship of the mestizo spirit comes to a climax, the spirit of miscegenation so overwhelms the poem’s wording that the work itself becomes a personified “church”—not a building, but a spiritual body, a collective host for worship that produces enough lingual “heat” to produce “sweat,” that becomes “ink,” the very indelible material with which Cruz records the Island’s history (317-18). In the ultimate Mesa Blanca experience, this “church,” this poem, “runs/Down Avenida Piel de Canela.” Two meanings develop here. One hand, the poem in its Mestizo glory literally “runs down,” destroys or overtakes our “Avenida,” the typical avenues or means of racial distinction. Cruz invents a racialized existence or identity of his very own creation, one

that defies definition with its “piel de canela” or “cinnamon skin” a reference to physiology that cannot be contained or categorized in a traditional black-white dualism or sense of western racial identity. In another sense, the poem also runs along to its own beat, its own sense of meter, its own rules. In its furious celebration, this unique, multifaceted being, this poem, takes on true flesh and bone--literal “flesh of bamboo” (printed page), “Senegal force of feet” (the poem’s rhythm), and voice of “the mountain *trovador*,” Cruz the mountain peasant, the Jabario speaker. The poem soars like a “Rhythm golden bird/Inventing itself on the /spot,” a type of literary phoenix in the form of the Taino figure “Inriri Cahubabayael,” the golden woodpecker who created women from genderless beings (Saunders 278). In this moment, Cruz makes an appeal similar to an earlier Black Arts era’s cry for a literal “new breed” of poet and people crafted from the poem’s cultural content on one hand, and the poet’s ability to create on the other. Like Inriri Cahubabayael, the poem constantly tears down its content yet recreates from new, productive/*reproductive* meanings through reinvented language relationships, spinning themselves out like impromptu folk yarns in the ultimate performance of identity and self determination (lines 404-409).

Cruz again addresses a “you” in the final stanza:

What choice do you have:
 might as well, jump toward
 land like seed...
 To lick the invisible
 Generations. (lines 341-48)

At once “you” can be interpreted as an invitation from Cruz as well as the now tri-fold Mestizo spirit of the poem to its readers who have “churched” or revered Mestizo identity or mixture. Cruz is urging readers to return to the land to touch the future generations, to plant themselves like seed to multiply. With “tongue” or language “in moisture” with “green mountain light”—the necessary ingredients for proper growth of words, of language—Cruz suggests that the poem can feed future generations from this hybridity, a thriving, new, sustainable entity crafted from the fragment of its progenitors. Once again, Cruz leaves his audience with a fresh start, another white table or renewed opportunity upon which many possibilities could rest, a blank slate upon which to create and recreate the notion of self out of many influences.

This concept of the crafted self, of self-determined identity, is critical for each rendition of blackness Cruz presents in his three poems. Whether Cruz develops Africanist identity in terms of more traditional visual cues, or sound, or pure cultural practice, each expression of blackness is valid and holds no greater, inherent value in and of itself—the distinct rhythms of the visible tobacco and coffee people is just as valid as the contagious unmarked, rhythmic sound of the dancehall, yet this abstraction of Africanist influence is just as authentic as the spiritually tangible Malaka who coaxes his host into a hybrid stream of language and reproductive sound. If anything, Cruz challenges readers to re-think the dynamics of blackness (and whiteness) beyond the expected flesh-and-bone, oppositional norms.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: RENDER UNTO CAESAR WHAT HE IS DUE

“And he saith unto them, whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's”—Matthew 22:20-21 (ASV Bible).

This project's opening epigraph reads, “Every literature must seek the things that belong unto its peace” (Achebe 1193), but peace is subjective. Chinua Achebe's words, though inspiring, assume a singular mode of cultural cohesiveness not found in American literature and its corresponding cultures. From a heterogeneous American standpoint, our *bodies* of literature “speak” of multiple places, develop out of the “necessities” of histories, and from the aspirations and destinies of so many American *peoples*. Representations of racialized blackness in particular are simultaneously evolving to reflect greater levels of complexity among Africanist people and their cultures. Moreover, previous hindrances, namely black-white distinctions and racial privilege, are gradually eroding from positions of power and authority to allow room for this fresh racial reinterpretation to thrive. Still, as the introduction suggests, in our supposedly post-racial United States, a black racial plumb line anchors this multiplication of identities, communal affiliations, and cultural cues along a spectrum. Though (African) Americans are culturally stratified people, an ongoing American fascination with racialized blackness still threatens to pigeonhole Africanist people into a collective state of absolute racial difference, into a rigid state of Otherness against which other groups have and continue to build social leverage for themselves. Bellow, Haynes, and Cruz do converge on this black plumb line, this standard, to make radical statements about the pliable nature of blackness, its multiple functions, and shifting boundaries. Indeed, by way of

conclusion, these authors and their works also demonstrate the constructed nature of racial divisions between literary traditions. A sense of community need not be monolithic, based exclusively on race, ethnicity, gender, or location to seek a common peace—attempted resolutions between Africanist representations and an American literature that has not always been as conscious or conscientious of racial difference as it should. However, one thing is certain. No magical solutions bring writers together across socially constructed boundaries. This unity becomes possible through respectful awareness and interaction, a willing and deliberate decision on each writer's part to believe that people of varying orientations could share a common investment in history, places, time, and experiences.¹⁴¹ As literary communities begin to address this very real yet imagined plumb line, the larger American community must also address what American culture has made of black identity in the most practical ways. Moreover, this address must break through a continued exclusivity surrounding blackness as the property and responsibility of the black subject to somehow fix, especially since our twenty-first century culture is experiencing an almost viral dissemination of racialized blackness across multiple cultural boundaries.

In her article "When the First Voice I Hear Is Not My Own," Jacqueline Jones-Royster describes sitting as a "well-mannered Other," listening to colleagues discuss her ethnic group and their perceptions of her people's struggles as they "claimed authority to engage in the construction of knowledge and meaning about me and mine" (Jones Royster 30-1). Jones-Royster uses the scenario to highlight the need for far more productive cross-cultural engagement informed by a keen awareness of subjectivity which she associates with context, ways of knowing, language abilities, and experiences.

Most useful, the scholar also calls for the understanding of personal agency, not just as having the ability to speak or to assume an authorial voice, but as “being a thing heard, perceived and reconstructed” (30). In a sense this study is about the hearers, perceivers, engagers of African American subjectivity, those who seemingly stand outside of black communities yet dare to imagine black people and the reality of the spaces we all inhabit. However, as bell hooks so genuinely expresses, our openness, willingness to allow others to enter into personal spaces hard fought for, is not an issue of choosing to share, but a question of survival in the process (hooks, *Talking Back* 2-3). As Jones-Royster suggests, “Subject position is everything” (Jones-Royster 29).

Historically, African Americans have sought crucial self-determined communication even in the earliest stages of literary production. Such was poet Phillis Wheatley’s experience when, in an effort to publish her works, she faced an eighteen member jury of white men.¹⁴² Moreover, confronted with the demands of slavery and “a mass refusal to see blacks as human” (Andrews 17), more of the earliest writers (namely slave narrators such as Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass) understood that they also had to become “speaking subjects” who were seen and heard beyond their “status as object, as commodity” (Gates, *Signifying* 129). Freedom itself depended on early narrative writers showing themselves “qualified as the moral, spiritual, or intellectual peers” to whites (Andrews 2). All were working in opposition to what William Andrews identifies as a systematic “black-white discourse” that upheld key facets of black denigration: the authority of slavery, the illegitimacy of black identity through racist images and stereotypes, and Africanist people’s supposedly limited “capacity” to communicate reliably their own realities (17).

Black writers gained little recognition until the 1960s during the Civil Rights Era amidst demands to include black works in postsecondary academic studies and the tireless efforts of a handful of black scholars who pressed their way into white institutions (McKay 19). This project's introduction mentioned the historical span from 1955 to 1970 as a time of great racial change. This period also gave black communities long overdue legal and social authority for self-definition, and that definition was developed in great part along racial lines as African American studies. Revisionist historical accounts, emerging organizations and leadership on multiple fronts, canonical works and journals, the theoretical honing of a black aesthetic, and greater political aims—through these very outlets African American studies has become a well-respected knowledge making field, a desirable garrison ever increasing in clout and thus the capacity for both offense and defense, but also self-destruction.¹⁴³ Growth in particular has set a conundrum in motion. African American studies and its literary arm have made certain revisionist forms of blackness, as well as those cultural cues we associate with the discipline and culture, more identifiable, and thus seemingly more brandable, more own-able, more policeable against encroachments from Others. Ironically, this same emergence never moved (and cannot move) African American communities and their interests outside of the province of mainstream white supremacist culture, a historically distrusted venue that maintains intimacy with racial bias and that still co-opts the very identities Africanist people desire to revamp. I am reminded of the late Nellie McKay who even in 1998 was still asking if critical academic machines were ready to “disband the Wheatley court,” those scholarly attitudes that continue to question and denigrate the value of African American literary production among other American literatures.

This study takes a stand similar to those of scholars Hazel Carby and Gene Jarrett. Both maintain a defined African American literary tradition is still necessary and apropos to combat bias and inequality (Carby 42-5; Jarret 5-6). Nonetheless, Carby calls African American scholars to reconsider how they validate authors and works. She warns that exclusive claims of cultural ownership are pretty much doomed because, first (and mentioned earlier), no whole, authentic, autonomous black culture exists in a mythically pure state untouched by “relationships of...power and domination” with other groups (Carby 43). Denial of cultural mixture does not erase the evidence of Other people’s thumbprints. Secondly, strategies that rely on an absolute, immutable black identity only mimic those same racialized (and often racist) methods European Americans have used to exclude certain populations from the life of the American literary cannon. In other words, not only should Africanist people not utilize hegemonic tools to dismantle a racist culture, but they should not use hegemonic tools to build their own cultures. Otherwise, the oppressed become oppressors. Nevertheless, “The struggle between groups” is key for both Carby and performative theorist Homi BhaBha. In line with Royster’s thinking, Carby suggests to evolve, developing culture requires interactions with others, requires new ideas, even though, according to Bhabha, those performative interactions could be “antagonistic or affiliative” (BhaBha 2).

Though he speaks from a different orientation, Frantz Fanon appeals profoundly for a shared accountability over the matter of blackness in particular, an appeal quite germane to this project’s views. In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon writes, “I sincerely believe that a subjective experience can be understood by others; and it would give me no pleasure to announce that the black problem is my problem and mine alone and that it is

up to me to study it” (Fanon, Markmann 86). If culture is a product of interaction as Hazel Carby and Homi Bhabha have suggested, then Fanon establishes key principles. First, those deemed outsiders to Africanist communities can somehow know (on some level) Africanist subjectivity and what the populace commonly calls black experience. Secondly, the same outside company does not have permission but rather a responsibility to address the consequences of race, and particularly blackness.

Fanon predates our contemporary understanding of race by some sixty years when he suggests that blackness is a fabrication, an “existential deviation” from the literal beings and lives of Africanist people. The “black soul,” says Fanon, is not the original product of Africanist (or then “Negro”) communities, but rather a “construction by white folk” (Fanon, Philcox 2). The 1968 Markmann edition translates Fanon’s words as a “white man’s artifact.” By definition, an *artifact* is a man-made object, unnatural, full of human effort. In this sense, blackness is distinguishable from the Africanist personage or subject it marks. “Artifact” also means relic, left over, the remains of an erstwhile thing or bygone era. In the most literal fashion, social history corroborates this idea of blackness as a byproduct of “white” or Western thinking. Racialized concepts of blackness link back to fourteenth century European exploration when Europeans made their first significant contact with darker skinned people. Kim Hall describes Europeans’ fantastically elaborate, biased travel accounts of Africa and its people(s), how these accounts perverted skin color and deformed black bodies into inhuman figures radically different from white Europeans’ positive, normative concepts of themselves. These descriptions provided seeds for our contemporary black-white dualisms that continue to essentialize both the black and white subjects in unequal ways that need not be

explained.¹⁴⁴ During this time, the literal word on the page became race as we know it. In this manner, Fanon's "artifact" also predates (by about seventeen years) Michael Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge* and the philosopher's notion of the artifact as a cultural object produced by and through discursive power relationships (through words, in this case exaggerated, more often false written accounts).¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the same discursive black-white binary limits Fanon's analysis even as he dissects race. Fanon could not have anticipated the greater degree to which multiple groups, not just whites, would craft, package, and repackage blackness in the service of the many racial narratives that flood the American consciousness. Even among *black* communities, blackness has many expressions. The discussion of Jean Toomer from this study's introduction is just one example. Fanon's own work provides another.

Critics of Fanon's works often complain that translator Charles Markmann erased the black Antillean orientation of Fanon's original 1952 francophone edition of *Black Skin White Masks*.¹⁴⁶ In his 1968 American English translation (the primary edition used in this project), Markmann supposedly transforms Fanon's voice into an "archetypal Negro from the deep south" (Silverman 2). Coincidentally (or maybe not), Markmann's "archetypal" black southerner is also Martin Favor's rural "folk," the same widely authorized, authentic blackness Favor links to identity stagnation within the African American Literary tradition.¹⁴⁷ This recasting to Fanon's ideas supposedly allowed African American critics to co-opt Fanon's ideas (and might be facilitating this very study's reliance on Fanon as well). Interestingly, publishers printed the 1968 edition of *Black Skin White Mask* only after the Black Arts Movement revived interest in Fanon's race theories. As mentioned in this project's previous chapters, this movement also

produced the blackness that reclaimed Jean Toomer and prompted the pro-black reading of Toomer's reissued *Cane* (contrary to the author's will). Recall that this same movement also introduced Victor Hernández Cruz to the world as a black (arts) poet during time when the production and expression of blackness was high on all levels of (African) American culture from music and blacksploitation cinema to hair styles. Similar to Toomer's work, Fanon's *Black Skin White Mask* produces dissonance between the pro-black agenda. Fanon's calls for the end of the "Negro mission" he portrays as equally biased but opposite to the "white burden" (Fanon 228). If anything, again, these connections reveal more than one fabrication of blackness. However, there is also more than one racial fabricator (the same message Ralph Ellison promoted in his depictions of blackness and whiteness in *Invisible man*, the same message that Saul Bellow promoted in *Henderson the Rain King*, and the same impression delivered through Victor Hernández Cruz's literary manipulation of Africanisms in the poems "White Table" and "Mesa Blanca"). This black artifact be credited solely to and completely policed by African American culture at large; the African American text cannot contain the black artifact in its multiple forms and its additional baggage. Henry Louis Gates' foundational concept of the black "pretext" proves useful in tracing this artifact's travels.

In an earlier formulation of contemporary race theory, Henry Louis Gates suggested that blackness as an entity had moved beyond the material, physical state. It had somehow been distilled into a "metaphysical concept," a falsely assumed, black essence that supposedly defined the black writer's nature ("Pretext" 238). As Gates observes, the writer becomes a "point" or source of "consciousness of his language," one who embodies a "Black Aesthetic," not by "content," but by "a complex structure of

meanings,” or what Gates describes as “a network of relations that form a particular aesthetic unity.” In other words, the writer’s words and sociopolitical relationships make the writer and textual creation identifiably “black.” As Martin Favor suggests, on both social and academic levels “There is something out there we call (and believe we ‘know’ to be) blackness, even if it is difficult to say exactly what it is” (2). We are ever seeking to define this black “pretext,” to know it, and the assumption is that seekers will find all answers within an originary black-authored text, and by association, an originary black community. This same assumption drove Saul Bellow’s fictional character Eugene Henderson to trek farther into the African landscape and further into the social workings of a 1950s American invention of blackness. This same assumption drove writer Jean Toomer to an originary Negro South to record what he thought was a dying black culture that could not somehow survive the onslaught of modern life beyond Africanist communal boundaries. (Ironically, this assumption also drove readers to Toomer.) This impulse to discover and preserve authenticity also motivates assumptions of absolute authority that shape racial culture in the academy and beyond. If there is an authentic being, then someone must be it and have it. However, the “pretext” of blackness and all of its relationships are now the authentic thing itself, and the boundaries of blackness have extended far more generously beyond Africanist people since Fanon’s work and even Gates’ 1978 essay.

To re-iterate my introduction, more and more, racialized blackness is akin to a viral video hitting the internet. It plays from cultural cyberveneue to cultural cyberveneue, carrying only remnants of its historical Africanist targets as it steadily passes along.¹⁴⁸ AS suggested, with this circulation of blackness also lies greater levels of accountability

among all people for what blackness has become, from the printed page to mundane life with its often analyzed, ever updated Aunt Jemimas and Uncle Bens, joined by ambiguously subversive Uncle Ruckus' or this world.¹⁴⁹ After all, within a cultural studies soaked academy, more than ever scholars are realizing that fiction played out on the printed page begins with the fiction beyond the printed page. In another sense, this artifact also operates much like Victor Hernández Cruz's Mesa Blanca spiritualism; certain forms of blackness move about like loosed spirits in our contemporary new millennium culture, ever trying (and succeeding) at re-inscribing themselves onto a wider array of material hosts and circumstances beyond the usual Africanist object of the past. A recent news headline comes to mind as a perfect example of this ever present artifact's nine lives that have extended its tenure.

Recently, thief Conrad Zdzierak alluded police for weeks as he committed a string of bank robberies. Initially, police failed to capture the thirty year old white man because they were searching for an African American suspect. Unlike the Susan Smith's of the world who only discursively accused the black subject, Zdzierak wore a mask that made him appear to be a black man during his robberies (Goldwert).¹⁵⁰ Most interesting are the descriptions of his disguise: a "realistic," "movie quality," "Hollywood" mask called "The Player." One thing, however, is not new. Blackness is still being enlisted in a type of twenty-first century ideological servitude, and in this case, for the oldest reason—financial gain. bell hook's mantra of the "white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchy" is written all over this incident. One need only consider the tie between money and blackness to recognize the survival of similar financial motivations that, in part, permitted the historical exploitation and dehumanization of black bodies in slavery, sharecropping,

urban manufacturing, domestic services, and countless other avenues. Zdzierak, however, played on a more specific, commonly circulated notion of blackness as criminal deviance, a trope that translates into tangible capital gains, providing that one has the means and privilege to invest in it. Zdzierak had both—the mask’s base price of \$689.00 and the whiteness to distance himself from the effects of this racialized criminal production.

One could also cull an even deeper new millennium connection between the Zdzierak case and Trudier Harris’ discussion of scapegoating and lynching practices. Recall that, according to Harris, frenzied white crowds would murder black victims, releasing perversion onto the human host and then collecting human remains as mementoes (Harris 69-71). In Zdzierak’s case, however, the thief eliminates the middle(hu)man, the actual Africanist body onto which blackness would traditionally have been written and literally burned. The player mask becomes a spectacle token of release onto which the white other’s own deviance is cast—only, the greater the financial investment, the greater portion of blackness obtained, the greater the release. Life-like hair and hands are available at additional costs to “complete the illusion” (SPFXMask.com) that temporarily obscured Zdzierak’s role in his crimes.¹⁵¹

Within the context of this study, Zdzierak’s twentieth century blackface robberies point to a continued need to dismantle the works of exploitive black racial tropes. This conclusion need not be so theoretically bound that the ideas expressed are of no social good. There are many other tangible, unaddressed results accompanying social inventions of blackness, and one need not revert to slavery or a civil rights struggle to find examples. Those unacknowledged, nameless African American men, for example, whom police likely questioned and/or arrested as suspects in the Zdzierak case would surely attest to

the effects of Zdzierak's racial masquerading, as would the many more who occupy prison cells across the United States at disproportionate rates at the hands of black tropes of criminality. Worth mentioning, the police involved in the Zdzierak case had initially given a suspect description for a black male who looked like rap star Young Jeezy (Jay Jenkins)—yet another well-explored fabrication of black manhood from music culture that pitches black masculinity as violent, criminal, hypersexual, and detrimental for those who would try to reproduce Jenkins' persona beyond his album tracks, music videos, and the stage. Oddly enough, as an aside, according to statistics, the financiers of this often examined rap image are white teens who purchase rap music at much higher rates than any other group (Kitswana 85). Again, there are many fabrications and many fabricators of blackness, and the politics behind those productions are complex. However, a far more subtle, problematic dissemination of blackness trumps Zdzierak's actions—SPFXMasks' manufacturing and distribution of the masks.

If Zdzierak's actions appear deviant, what label would SPFX Masks warrant for its production of this artifact? The manufacturer distributes the hand-made "Player" mask as a part of a horror mask line that includes (among many more) demons, emaciated monsters with rotting flesh, deformed humanoids like "The Imbred," brutally violent personas like "Thug" and "Sarg," and ethnicized, criminalized whiteness like the "Boss" (an Italian gangster).¹⁵² (Oddly enough, the only other mask image unmarked by grotesque physical distortion or not implicitly associated with criminal deviance is a newer white male character. The "Handsome Guy," whose profession is appropriately listed as an actor, is a master fiction maker with agency to choose his mode of being.) The company's webpage profile for the black mask sounds deceptively revisionist, like

an attempt to shatter black male stereotypes. The Player persona is a Wall Street stockbroker and entrepreneur who enjoys “reading and socializing with all sorts of people from all walks of life.” He also dislikes “Ignorance and disrespect of others” (SPFXMask.com). If taken at face value, the “Player” mask’s politically correct, aracial profile rhetoric aligns intellectualized black masculinity with the grotesque, the disfigured, and the morally corrupt. Unadorned, mundane blackness becomes innately horrific, disgustingly freakish, and deviant. However, suspicion says the mask’s creators and marketers are playing on words, either to avoid charges of bigotry or to capitalize on drug culture slang associated with the ultimate investor and entrepreneur—the neighborhood street pharmacist (drug dealer). Furthermore, the mask’s benign description clashes with its name and the SPFXMasks actor’s depiction in the company’s official Player Christmas greeting: a camouflaged *Player* bops in a Santa hat as he gives a stereotypical homeboy shout out to viewers, “Yo, Ho, Ho.” Oddly enough, no objections to the mask seem forthcoming. The company’s web page boasts about its television features and implicit endorsements from *Good Morning America*, *Inside Edition*, and *The Today Show*.

Hovering over the player mask is bell hook’s often quoted essay “Eating the Other” and her reading of blackness as a consumable commodity. The mask becomes, on one level, an artifact or possess-able form of blackness from an earlier, less problematic era where blackness could be had without consideration for the human being upon whom this blackness was typically thrust. The mask allows its owner to gratify the desire for exoticized blackness. Meanwhile, the actual Africanist subject who demands be acknowledged (on some level at least), stands on the outside, a non-participant whose

claims to identity ownership are easily bypassed by the mask wearer. To boot, the manufacturer's website also features footage from Tom Savini, famous Hollywood makeup artist, who gleefully gives testimony to the realness or authenticity of the mask's illusion. This moment is a throwback to the notary white public of bygone days who legitimized the blackness of the writing subject, only now the contemporary authenticator qualifies the illusion as fit for exchange with anyone who desires the experience of becoming an-Other, and the purchaser need not be white or male. The circulation of the black artifact is complex.

Episodes like these often lead the most vocal critics of race like Anthony Appiah to call for a complete elimination of race as a category of identity, not just within the academy but across all arenas and all racial groups. For Appiah this abandonment is a moral imperative, an "ethical conclusion" on the grounds that race is fiction or what amounts to a denial of the common humanity of all people. He also suggest that this fiction threatens the integrity of the academic work and greater social good at hand. Though Appiah's desire to do away with race on moral grounds is righteous, his suggestion does not eliminate the continuing immoral components of human nature driven to create, use, and abuse this fiction of race, nor does his solution address tangible effects of race that still resound in the real world where people live—both negative results as well as healthy cultural distinctions that develop among people. Mike Hill has even suggested that the erasure of race produces a false amelioration of racial problems that, in turn, allows abusers to abdicate responsibilities for abuses and inequalities resulting from their practices (Hill 23). The Zdzierak case is a mixed bag of responses and responsibilities. The robber's legal punishment results more so from his thievery than

from his attempted hijacking of a black identity. However, the apparent falseness of Zdzierak's scheme was egregious enough to make a strong impression on a social level. In mug shot after mug shot, the media paraded Zdzierak's delinquent white subjectivity after he was captured and exposed as a racial fraud. Can these subtle abuses be more thoroughly addressed through public humiliation? Is the erasure of race the only abiding ethical choice?

Taking cues from Hazel Carby, Kenneth Warren rightly highlights the threat of loss that accompanies a radical, absolute departure from race and its historical shaping. "To give up the particularity of individual and specific group histories" writes Warren, "would seem to leave one with no possibility of resisting the steamroller of current hegemonic practices" (Warren 135). There are, however, outlets for response. Though some would see the written word as an elitist effort that barely registers within the real world, the efforts of writers like those included in this study can still address these dilemmas to some degree. For example, compare Zdzierak's actual putting on of blackness to Melinda Haynes' literary reversal of racialized experience. Thought not without flaws, Haynes' manipulation of 1955 race issues within *Mother of Pearl* effectively challenges a contemporary 1999 reading audience. Recall that in the novel, the black subject's severed face (identity itself) is returned to its tangible humanity even as her white characters literally put on the experience of the black lynching victim, an exchange of identity that these white characters cannot simply take off like a mask and thus control. In a figurative sense, Haynes forces her white characters either to live through their othering experiences (as character Joleb does) or die by them. This holds true in the physical for character Burriss when he dies from a fall from a bridge, and in the

spirit as racist father Beryn dies a spiritual death even before he loses his wife and only son. As an aside, a certain coincidence touches Haynes' race reversing work among the masses even more. Her appropriation of blackness is authorized, not by a white notary public like Tom Savini, but by a notable black public figure, Oprah Wynfrey, who chose *Mother of Pearl* as part of her book-of-the-month club.

Reversals of this nature between the black artifact and whiteness are provocative, especially given the traditional, biased dependency between blackness and whiteness. Whiteness still enjoys its charmed status. However, a growing critique of white privilege and supremacy opens doors for a subversive flow of the black artifact. This subversion does not always directly involve Africanist people or issues that directly impact Africanist communities. In fact, this last example points away from Africanist communities and involves Larry Whitten, a white hotel owner in Taos, New Mexico (which incidentally served as home for modernist writer Jean Toomer discussed in this project's introduction). No substantial Africanist community exists in Taos, a "landmine of Anglos versus Spanish versus Mexicans versus Indians versus everybody" (Dabovich). Nevertheless, the black artifact plays an integral role within this exchange; in fact, it is the vehicle of exchange much like the Mesa Blanca ritual served as a vehicle for Victor Hernández Cruz's reconciliation with Native Taino heritage against a historical European colonizer. The Taos, New Mexico community picketed Whitten's local hotel when he instituted questionable practices. The newly arrived owner anglicized Latino employees' names and barred the staff from speaking Spanish in his presence. When the employees and local community leaders began to protest the Hotel's policies in the media, Whitten

made claims of racial discrimination. “Hispanic” workers had called Whitten a “white nigger.” In response, Whitten fired the employees.

In the Taos case, the Latino employees exercised the power of the word “nigger” over Whitten’s whiteness. On one hand, a white man (exercising hegemonic authority to rename and silence others) is subjected to renaming. He then adopts discrimination rhetoric to relate his injury. On the other hand, Latino workers resist cultural absorption by appropriating and repurposing the most egregious racial slur in American culture (Kennedy 3, 176). The employees and Whitten all perpetuate (on some level) the black artifact and extend to themselves the responsibility for its use. As Randall Kennedy suggests, much could be accomplished when other groups “yank ‘nigger’ away from white supremacists, to subvert its ugliest denotation” (175), and certainly, the term’s use falls into a somewhat different context from the racist norm in the Taos conflict. Nonetheless, the racialized power of “nigger” still lives, despite context and intent. Carl Van Vechten certainly discovered this fact when he attempted to subvert the term by naming his novel *Nigger Heaven* to capitalized on the ironic devaluing of his contemporary Harlem’s rich cultural life.¹⁵³ In this case, the story’s journalist would have little need to obliterate the “N-word” in her report if “nigger” really connoted just “ignorance.” The hotel’s marginalized Chicano employees would have little gratifying retaliation if the word “nigger” no longer contained power to offend Whitten’s white sensibilities—sensibilities shaped so intimately within a racist and racialized tradition of black-white difference collapsed inside the insult. Whitten would also have much less of the little justification he gains for firing the same employees if the word “nigger” did not hold the power of the racialized scapegoat. (Oddly enough, Whitten also finds release,

not by victimizing the traditional black object of the word, but by identifying with Africanist victimization.)

The Taos report also brings to mind Z.Z. Packer's short story "Brownies" and Packer's statement on "echolalia" and racism. Racist thoughts and deeds repeat much like the echolalic mute in Packer's work who can only repeat what she has heard others say (Packer 6-8).¹⁵⁴ The original intent of the term is seemingly lost in the speech act and seemingly diminished in the social translation of the term. Racism echoes out from its source so subtly that one wonders if "it" (both the racism and the source) is there or not. Is this resonating power growing fainter with each successive generational challenge? Oddly enough, in news reports protesters even argued that Whitten himself was being passively racist, ignorance, that he did not know the demands he placed on Latino employees were racially and culturally insensitive. There is a third presence here as well, but one that lacks an overt vehicle of expression.

The imagined Africanist spectator observes the Taos episode from a distance, but not a safe distance. To quote authors Ralph Ellison and Octavia Butler, a "boomerang" looms, "the violent nature of the spiraling of history," whose "pains of racism...are ever-present and continue" (Allen 1354). From its earliest Latin etymology through its current social evolution, the word "nigger" has invoked a "black" presence, an association most would like to deny but cannot.¹⁵⁵ A gnawing past hovers; the Otherness power of denigrated blackness lingers on the term. The very need for the Chicano workers to specify "white" suggests a pre-established norm, and whiteness is not it. The Africanist subject immediately comes under a historical threat of labeling (a discursive hegemonic power)—the same "nigger" that empowers the Chicanos against their white adversary

could easily turn against the supposedly self-willed, autonomous Africanist subject. At any moment the Africanist subject might be pulled into a cultural mire of racism and social fabrication that attempts to create a denigrated reality. For me as reader, scholar, and potential Africanist target, these circumstances conjure up an informative parallel with Octavia Butler's novel *Kindred* and its protagonist LaDana Franklin, an African American woman unwillingly transported to an antebellum past to save the life of a slave owner.

As Lauren Lacy notes, Octavia Butler's works explore the "complexities of power" and the potential for both "productive and destructive" symbiotic relationships (Lacy 379). At various turns in the novel, Dana constantly and unexpectedly faces associations with an all too familiar historical relationship between white master and black slave. This intimacy with race is at once false, yet tangibly real for her, much like the Africanist experience with black artifacts in contemporary culture. Even when she returns to her own time, Dana is so scarred and bruised from her current past experience that she literally has to recuperate and equip herself in order to handle what she could face in returning to the past. These physical signs of the past point to Butler's tendency to develop through her characters "speculative subjectivity," one that acknowledges the give-take reality of human life as "symbiogenesis," an existence that cannot separate the physical, material existence of the person from a more abstract metaphysical self (Bollinger 327). Dana's surreal time travel to a past produces lasting effects on her physical and emotional well-being. Though a slightly different concept, one cannot separate the material effects of black artifacts from the artifact itself.

Unfortunately, during her final return, Dana suffers the ultimate symbiogenesis—an amputated arm lost to a past that literally refuses to loose its grip until its last breath.¹⁵⁶ In a reversal, Fanon, however, calls black subjects to “resist” amputation, to resist the hold of the past, the reduction of Africanist personhood to the level of essentialized object, the black artifact (Fanon, *Black Skin* 14). But how does one fight the damaging associations of a racialized past even as it threatens the present measure of peace black interests have garnered? How must we equip ourselves for what we have faced and might face in the future? My project’s discussion leads to an obvious question—If non-black authors are being called forth to address “the black artifact,” what are the Africanist writer’s status and role (and by extension the continuing role of the African American literary tradition)? Octavia Butler’s writings (and her sheer presence as a rare African American science fiction writer) supply answers that truly demand more attention than this project can devote to her work at this juncture, but this brief closing analysis must impart basic observations from the aptly named *Kindred* and Butler’s *Parable* series.

Throughout, this study has pointed to cross-cultural community as a potential source for solutions towards a more equitable representation of Africanist people and culture in American literature. In *Kindred*, LaDana Franklin relies on shifting alliances within multiple communities. In fact, most of Butler’s protagonists find themselves in an assortment of relationships with Others (some beyond human in her more strongly science fiction-oriented works). In this case, once transported Dana relies on her immediate community—the Weylin slaves and even white slave owner Rufus Weylin (when his capricious whims subside long enough to allow him to aid her). In this case, however, blackness and whiteness are also literally joined as one, a direct reflection and

reversal of supremacist hegemonic systems operating within in the United States. Franklin marries otherness, her white husband Kevin who accompanies her (when possible) to help her survive her bizarre time travel. This racialized white Other acknowledges and maintains intimate ties to Dana, the Africanist subject, and willingly and actively partners with Dana in responsibility for her well being and continuance. Dana's battles are hers to fight, but Kevin's role as form of counter-whiteness within the novel is key. However, he is also only as effective as his presence and his understanding of the social systems that govern the constructed, warped South Dana partially inhabits yet depends upon for her very existence. When Kevin is detained or left behind (most of the novel), or fails to read social cues, he leaves Dana open to attacks and damage that ultimately affect him as well, not just emotionally, but materially. Toward the novel's end police accuse Kevin of mutilating Dana after her final return home and arrest him. Only Dana's word and presence keep him free. In like manner, cross cultural cooperation has been vital in combating racism and addressing hegemonic systems of oppression, but this partnering is only as effective as its reinterpreted material existence and the understanding upon which its participants build it. After all, this same relationship has potential to be just as destructive as constructive. Butler's novel also points to another element of resistance missing from Dana's eclectic community—the written record.

Literacy plays a major role in *Kindred* just as it has assumed a major role in redressing the Africanist presence in this country. Both Dana and husband Kevin are writers and pose as school master and assistant during their travels. Dana's "school" for slaves is the most overt challenge Dana levies against a white supremacist system of slavery—in a sense the Africanist writer and Others must partner, must become those

who empower Others both within and outside black communities. Repeatedly Dana also finds herself journaling profusely to cope with her slavery experiences. She also toys with idea of using her experiences as inspiration for fictional works. However, after she permanently resumes her 1976 life, she and husband Kevin ultimately choose to remain silent when faced with an impossible task—the telling of a seemingly improbable encounter with the past. The only hope for the unspeakable is the written record.

Seeking resolution Dana and husband travel to the former site of the Weylin home, only to discover few traces of this past. Neither do Dana and Kevin find sufficient documentation or written accounts of Dana's ancestors or their own experiences. The solace and affirmation the written word could have given Dana and Kevin appear non-existent.¹⁵⁷ The two can only assume what has taken place. Dana's sheer continuing existence is the only concrete evidence of *their* shared past. As a result, the couple never gains full-fledged peace. If anything, Butler points to three responsibilities. First, there must be a recovery of the past personal narrative—in this case, not just Dana's journals and Kevin's story, but the life stories of the literate slaves and slave masters Dana leaves behind. If these ancestors have left behind some record, Butler charges a generation to search them out. Secondly, Butler points to the need to recreate the lives of those lost who have no record—in this case, Dana's fiction is crucial. Reminiscent of Victor Hernández Cruz's recovery of Puerto Rican ancestry and Haynes' restoration of black male identity (Even's "tying on" of James Evan's face), someone must imagine and thus reclaim the lost, reinstate the dignity of identity to them. Equally important is the third. Butler points to the need to address the absences, the gaps in a persisting, official record that remains beyond the inner works of the protagonist's community.

Without revision and the revisionists, the official record remains incomplete. However, the Africanist writer is not the only one to continue as a chronicler and challenger of twenty-first century race lines that all seem to lead to blackness. There must also be Others in place to restore the record for integrity and knowledge's sake. *Kindred*'s protagonist never taps into the full potential of the written record. However, where Dana and Kevin fail to produce and preserve the word in *Kindred*, Butler's character Lauren Oya Olamina from the *Parable* series succeeds. Olamina's ties to writing also deserve a much more detailed examination than this conclusion offers, but Butler's heroine supplies a more specific writing strategy for the Africanist writer worth briefly exploring. Lauren Olamina's characterization and Butler's plot developments speak volumes about the value of both community and the written word in addressing the social fact of blackness.

Olamina begins as a young girl who grows up over the course of two books, *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. Both are set after an extended American catastrophe that renders the country practically lawless and unpredictable, yet severely restricted and closed to significant portions of the population who are destitute and in various bondages, seemingly without hope. Lauren's tale, however, is one of a survivor who masters change through community and the writing act. Butler's heroine compulsively records her life's narrative and Earthseed teachings in journals throughout *Parable of the Sower*. By the time she reaches adulthood in *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren develops a deeper sustaining habit of storing copies of her writings with caches of life preserving provisions and weapons in alternate locations well beyond her local boundaries. In doing so, she ensures her own bodily survival as well as the preservation

of the written word and Earthseed philosophy. Her actions are those of a visionary far more mature and strategic than the younger girl of fifteen in *Sower*.

The Lauren of *Talents* no longer just captures life and thoughts on the page. She recognizes a greater value in what she writes. She desires to use life and her system of philosophy to change a world beyond her own immediate self. The same must be so for the African American tradition as it matures from its current state. There must be a duplication of valuable narratives beyond inner “places” of authority—our thoughts, our ideas, our experiences must be dispersed among Others to ensure the continuation of the written record, to insure that we pass on the very written lives of those long gone. Even if those receiving are beyond our immediate boundaries, we must make use of every avenue, every means of dissemination for the survival of the community.

Comparing Olamina to slave narrator Harriet Jacobs, Marlene Allen notes that Butler’s protagonist is a “community reliant individual” who emphasizes the “Afrocentric idea” that community is “crucial for survival”—a historical, cultural truth well beyond the fictional page (Allen 1359). Even the structure of Lauren’s narrative is profoundly communal in *Parable of the Talents*. What begins as Lauren’s self-narrated journal entries in *Parable of the Sower* becomes an eclectic mixture of various character’s personal narratives and philosophical passages in *Talents*. Bits and pieces of various characters’ words weave in and out on the printed page so intricately that they risk merging together, barely separated by dates and varying fonts on the physical page. Lauren’s story is a collaborative expression, just as a continuing African American writing tradition of letters must be a collaborative effort—a collection of voices that blend to give a full picture of a life and a cause, a pulling from pieces and ruins to create

cultural expression similar to Cruz's burundangala, the "sensational things coming together."

A key point, Butler reserves a particular place for Olamina's daughter Larkin, who tells Lauren's story of bricolage. Larkin represents a successive generation who weaves her mother's and father's accounts, the heritage of the Acorn commune, and her own narrative from remnants into a new narrative with the potential for further growth. Also important, Larkin does not glorify Olamina's life story and philosophy for their charisma—Larkin tells Lauren Olamina's story with raw honesty from a love-hate relationship. At every turn, the daughter questions past experiences, actions, and ideals that she ultimately embraces, not for the sake of sentimental attachment. She continues the work of the legacy for the sake of her mother's message, for the truth of change Larkin sees in it, and for the other lives invested in it. Moreover, Larkin also creates "dreamscapes" throughout *Parable of the Talents*. These are alternative fictions that allow participants to experience different lives beyond their current states. What kinds of "dreamscapes" or visions have contemporary African American writers supplied to Africanist communities (and beyond) to challenge us from our current states into alternative possibilities? Like the ambivalent dreamscapes in Larkin's world, are contemporary Africanist works superficial escapes for the elite, the bored, and the black artifact addicted, or are our narratives empowering tales that show us who we are and what agency we could possess?

Ultimately, Butler suggests that a continuing African American literary tradition cannot protect blackness for blackness' sake, for the survival of the artifact. The tradition must protect the lived life—record for posterity's sake the tangible experiences of those

before us and with us and to pass along the same desire to the future. Throughout *Sower* and *Talents* Lauren reclaims people along her path and keeps records of those who will not or cannot write for themselves; as a result, she reclaims an entire community's voices, sum of which she passes on to a succession of adaptable generations who will also learn to understand that "All that you touch/You Change. /All that you Change /Changes you" (Butler 8). We cannot, however, touch others if we never encourage the touch. Butler's development of Olamina's community is a perfect map for the African American literary community's development.

As Peter Stillman notes, Butler's communities operate under "the conscious interdependence and agreement of its members, who must know, trust, and be able to work with each other for shared purposes" (Nigles 1335). Moreover, they understand the dangers they willingly take upon themselves for the greater good. As a community in *Talents*, Lauren and her companions garrison themselves off for protection, developing everything needed to sustain them from within. They venture out to scavenge for those valuable, useable effects found in the rubble of their destroyed society and, occasionally, to save a life that becomes part of their trusted group's sparse growth. In this way the group maintains. However, Lauren never spreads her philosophy as long as the commune exists within its enclosed compound. Thus, her impact on a desperate world is minimal.

Between *Sower* and *Talents*, when marauders destroy the first of Lauren's family communities (Robledo), the protagonist strives to rebuild another. She ventures forth for the good of self and others, attracting followers along the way who build this second shared commune, Acorn (a seed). All the while they live with the knowledge that their walled communities and way of life are under constant threat of attack, even destruction.

(Certainly, many cries and warnings have come forth as paradigm shifts in the academy have killed authors and decentered authority.) In *Parable of the Talents*, Olamina's fear is realized, but she also realizes that closed, isolated communities that do not address activities outside their borders, that do not venture forth, are destined to be temporary, to fail, in much the same way that a literary tradition that tries to operate as an exclusive, self-sustaining ostrich is destined to fail.

After marauders destroy Acorn in a brutal, extended siege, Lauren begins to conceive of community not just as a single, controlled enclave against an outside world, but as a network of diverse people scattered throughout various locations. Hers becomes a diverse community of mobile, willing agents who embrace principles of both change and multiplication through discipleship. In this manner she re-establishes her Earthseed community, traveling with small groups of diverse companions, teaching those who open up to her along the way. Others from every walk of life, ethnicity, gender, age, and orientation. Over time, she establishes alternate pockets of resistance that she leaves behind, with the expectation that those followers would, in turn, teach others in an ever expanding matrix. In this manner she establishes an effective resistance that ultimately leads to cultural revolution (over time and with a great deal of patience). Could this concept of discipleship laid out so fantastically be applied to the tangible world where invested parties labor to expand the principles that under gird the African American literary tradition?

In a sense, the African American literary tradition must embrace change, must preach change, even as we make constructive use of a past and present, but we cannot preach to the proverbial choir. The representation needed to challenge poisonous, racist

images of Africanist people will not come entirely from writers of African descent, but from others who occupy vastly different cultural spaces (some of which are the exact places where the derogatory black artifact still thrives). The new frontier is to find those who would help build a sturdier racialized house of identity that reveals a more complete truth about who people of African descent are and who they have been. This house must also become one that can accommodate *who and what* people of African descent are becoming. It cannot be rigid, unmovable. The greatest problem is discerning how much of ourselves we can afford to give away in the process without giving to the point of amputation. If we can find the right balance, we will have peace.

APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTION OF MELINDA HAYNES PERSONAL INTERVIEW

30 AUGUST 2009

L: Thank You for allowing me to interview you. I actually wanted to ask you just questions about your book *Mother of Pearl* and about some of the race issues in the book. I became interested in the issue when you did a presentation at Bishop State and you mentioned...

H: Are you talking about the comments regarding race?

L: Yes

H: The main ones I had were not from anybody I'd consider a book reviewer... They were from family members. As far as the public, I really didn't receive any criticisms on the race issue. But the comments were mainly from a family member on my husband's side who grew up in Mississippi.... [To Husband] Is it okay if I tell about Harley?...his comments about *Mother of Pearl*? He's no longer living so I don't think it would matter. He was the one who ...just said he read the book and liked the book, but his question was why in the world did I write a book about and he used the "N" word. That was the main question he had. Some of the other people who took issue with it were local people I believe who had personal problems with me. They were out in Grand Bay and we were out in Grand bay and they just couldn't seem to accept the idea that I wrote the book.

L: No? Why?

H: I have no idea. It just seemed like the question was well this is your first book and it's been published and selected by Oprah and this seems too good to be true. Published when you were just working at a newspaper and didn't seem to have any educational

background as far as writing was concerned. So, it was that type of thing. But no one...had any question about the race issue...Hyperion changed the name. I believe we talked about that once before. I was pretty upset about it, but they also did it to my second book, but it had nothing to do with the focus of the book being on Even Grade or anything like that... it went down to, I guess, a test group. The way I understood it they would put the book out with the title even grade to see how many people wanted to read it, and people didn't want to because it was too industrial sounding...like a road work manual. But I was very upset when they changed the name of the book. That was Martha Levin's decision at Hyperion. And the day she called me at work and told me that it was going to have to be changed I think I was so upset that I left and went home....because I just always felt like, you know, it's a subjective form of criticism. And it was based solely on whether or not the book was going to sell which I've always felt like that should not have had anything to do with whether or not a book gets published. I understand their point—they have to make money but...

L: Who chose the name for the book then?

H: *Mother of Pearl*? Martha Levins.

L: Did she ever explain *why* she chose that title?

H: She said she was reading it and already knew that the book title needed to be changed and she said she got to the chapter where Valuable Korner's headstone was being set in place and she came across the words "Mother of Pearl" and she just knew that was it.. Well, *I* just never saw that because in my opinion it changed the focus of the book from a black man to a white teenager, and it was just one of the more upsetting parts of that whole experience for me because the book was all about Even. It was really *his* book. So

she just felt like in the long run it wouldn't affect the focus of the book, but I did. I was upset

L: So do you think it *did* change the focus of the book for readers after all?

H: I don't know. I think the Oprah selection did. You know...it's...I don't know...it's hard to say what would've happened if... The one's who read it before Oprah made her decision...they felt like it was wonderful and there were more comments about Even grade, believe it or not, before the Oprah selection. Afterwards, it was more mainstream...it was considered mainstream. If anything changed that was it. Because...it threw it into the pond of mainstream readers. As opposed to people who read...you know... they want to read something and they aren't looking at it and thinking okay "I'm gonna read this because it's an Oprah selection, I'm gonna read this because by word of mouth and because of the book's appeal.

L: So you're saying that the Oprah influence also shifted the focus of the book.

H: I don't know. I guess I'll never know that..I just know that thanks to Oprah more people read it of course...I just didn't hear very many negative comments about it as far as the content of the book. in fact, I never did other than , you know, old school family members who just grew up in another era and who never seemed to embrace the present.

L: Okay.

H: You See, my focus for the book was Even Grade. I know that was where I saw it. That was the heart of the book for me. I believe, if I'm remembering correctly, I believe that most of the comments from the people who read it ...*he* was the focus...[Readers] were more taken with Even Grade than they were the white characters.

L: Why do you think so?

Time: 08:52

H:...I think there's a mystique that people in the South have...I don't know if you want to call it guilt from the past...I don't know what contributes to it, but I believe there's a fascination, an interest and...without really becoming a part of it. Does that make sense to you? It's almost like. "Okay I can read about this but I don't really have to do anything about my own personal race relations." That's just how I saw it. I just saw it that way and in a way I think it's a shame.

L: I think that's interesting...a mystique

H: Well, I just think that, In my case...and this is what's funny. I don't want to insult anyone...I told people this earlier on. My mother and father....my father was in graduate school and my mother was in college. I was raised, and my brother who's eighteen months younger than I am, by a black woman named Grace...I was not aware of the difference. I grew up that way... I'm sure she was, looking back on it. But my brother...we just weren't aware of it...you know, the difference in color. I did not become aware of it until I moved to Alabama.

L: Oh so this wasn't in Alabama?

H: No, this was in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. And it was not until I moved rural part of Alabama, Mobile County That I even sensed the separated.

L: About when was this?

H: 1963. We were going to move to mobile. And we were going to Snug Harbor school and it was the first time I'd been on a bus and they were busing us through Prichard to Snug harbor and that's when I became aware of it.

L: Let's think about the book itself and your depiction of race. Why a character like Even Grade? Why a black male character for this book? What's your inspiration for using him as a character?

H: Well, the name appeared before the character did and you know what. It's just one of those things. I don't know if other writers go through this, but the first thing that usually appears to me is the name. Then after a while I see the individual behind the name and in this case it was a black man. And I didn't/I don't work with an outline, so I never know where I'm going from one chapter to the next, so I was surprised by what he did and the turns that he took. And I was surprised by some of *his* prejudices and... how hesitant he was in some cases. I don't know. Because it's one of those things and people have asked me this before as far as the inspiration and I just think it was meant to be. I don't know.

L : So all of a sudden you just thought...this has to be a black man?

H: Yes, I wanted it to be...now why, I don't know. I have no idea. Before I started writing the story, I was reading an article about Emmett Till and I was just so upset by that. I was so young when that happened that I never really read the account of it. I was never really exposed to any type of racial prejudice growing up and not even in Alabama other than stupid redneck talk ...I was never really exposed to anything other than what I read in print and when I read about Emmitt Till it was just...very upsetting...I also had a friend who lived in Philadelphia, Mississippi, when everything happened up there. And you know it in one sense it was like about reading about some foreign country because I didn't have that in my family. I didn't have that type of I guess it's hatred or anything like that. But, because of it, It just made me want this character to be, I believe, what I

would imagine a grownup Emmitt Till would have been. Probably was the motivation or inspiration for it....

L: Okay, When did you read the accounts of Emmitt Till? Was this coming back to this as an adult?

H: Yes...I was working for the Catholic Week and I was at the library doing research for something. I don't even remember what it was...and I ran across it. Couldn't believe it...I'd never heard about it. Just...I don't know if it's because when I was growing up we didn't have a television. We didn't have a newspaper... so you know I was pretty isolated from everything that was going on even though I was in the South in the middle of all this the march in Selma..everything. I was not aware of it.

L: Not at all?

H: Really. My dad was a minister and... for as far back as I can remember there were always black people in the congregation..then later he moved from out Lot Road to the new location. It became a Full Gospel, non denominational church. It was always like...I was just never was *aware* of the problem...and then when I did become aware of it and everything that happened , I couldn't get it off my mind. I could not get it off my mind. Then I just started reading. You know there were cross references to other things that happened ...and it's not that I was trying to make a statement or anything like that. it's just that the story became something that just ...really just firmed up in my mind and happened. And the more Even spoke, the more I realized what his character was and how I wanted him to be, the kind of person I wanted him to be...I just felt like he embraced the best of what a human being could be regardless of race.

L: Okay...but he's not the only black character in the book. There actually is a whole community.

H: Yeah...Grace...Joody...

L: I think it's interesting because it seems very much to me as a reader that you're depicting a community divided along racial lines...in light of your saying that you grew up in this environment where there was...

H: ...where there was no division? And then for me to turn around and write about it?

L: Yeah...why depict that?...Why the division in the book then?

H: I don't know. Some writers say write about what you know, but in my case I tend to write about what I don't know...because I'm drawn to that. I think that one of white characters...like Even grade, I felt like he's a composite of what I hope would be the best of a man. One of the white character's Joleb's father is what I consider the worst

L: The father by marriage?

H: ...Burriss. He's just the typical, ignorant White man and I have to admit that I do remember a neighbor of my grandfather's in Mississippi who would not allow anyone black to come to the front door and I was always puzzled by this...It just seemed so stupid. It didn't make sense. I guess that's where I pulled that character from.

H: But you know...I think being from a family and seeing our own differences because I'm Catholic but being from a Baptist family. I converted, and There are the same differences. They're not along racial lines, but they're along religious lines, cultural lines. It's like a microcosm of what is at work in the world, I believe. When I wrote the book, it just seemed very *real* to me. That this is the way it could be. The differences as well as the unity. I don't think it could be all one and not without the other.

Time 20:08

L: Why Reach back into the 1950s? ...because I'm interested in what you just said. You said that , "The way it *could* be." It strikes me as a piece that's embedded in its timeframe , too.

H: When I was writing the book I went back to Petal because my Dad's first church was there. This was before I wrote the book. He took us back to Petal [Interruption—phone]
In a way I just wanted to go back to a time before I knew anything. It's what I would consider the time before anything was imprinted on me, what should or should not be and that was about as far back as I could go. I was born in '54. And I really wanted to approach it with fresh eyes and the only way I could do that at the time would be to set it in this timeline and *have to* do research and *have to* read about it so it would feel fresh, so it would feel like something I had never ever experienced and a lot of people I believe would want to write about what they *have* experienced but in my case I feel like the creativity involved in writing requires a leap of faith and for me setting it during that time frame did that because I didn't know. I was too young at that time to remember what actually happened, so I just had to rely on research.

L: What kind of research did you use?

H: Well it started with the Emmett Till thing before the book began...and then just talking to people...about produce [Petal]? What was going on in the country. What petal was like at the time. I talked to the people who lived there. My great grandmother lived there. I went to see her house. The house of Luvenia is actually my grandmother's house in Petal and that was her name, Luvenia. So I just kind of built it around that...and

hearing stories from Dad about how it grandfather built onto the house and it started as one thing and turned into something else. That was how I established the setting.

L: Okay just a few more questions. I don't want to take up too much of your time. I...was getting ready to go into a couple of different direction but I'll just kind of flow with it.

You have one Character Canaan who's writing this book *The Reality of the Negro*.

Where'd you get the inspiration for that? ..the same as...

H: Well, I just felt like Even, not having parents that he would rely on would seek out an older man that he looked up to and that's how Canaan evolved. And Canaan... I just wanted a scholar in there. I just wanted someone a truly smart man that had nothing to do with...institutional learning . I just wanted somebody who had a quest for knowledge that was based on just the love of it and that's how he evolved...and I do remember the Hattiesburg library...I kept seeing him there. I just kept seeing him in a position surrounded by books. And yet someone who's just a contemplative by nature, a cynic, not a lot of confidence in human kind, but a great deal of admiration for the written word...and the ancient scholars and that's how he happened... of all the characters he was my favorite, Canaan and Joleb.

L: Really?

H: Yeah Joleb. I just felt like Joleb was the redemptive character. He represented me.

L: I think I did read that in another interview you'd given that you most identified with him. Here's a question. I know we've been talking mostly about images of blackness in the book, but Joleb, as it turns out, becomes a Jewish character

H: Right

L: So how do we go from the black-white dichotomy?

H: Black-white culture into Jewish culture?

L: Yeah

H: You know, of all the prejudices that I've run across, that I really remember growing up. It was a prejudice against Jews. And I don't know if it was because I grew up in a Baptist household and the Jews killed Jesus...you know all that hard line stuff. I just felt like I just wanted to do it. What's the most outrageous thing I could do? You know I've addressed everything...I, so why not put a Jewish character in . I don't know. It just happened. It seems to me that Mary, his mother, would be attracted or drawn to culture, to someone opposite her husband and that's every Jewish person I knew growing up. They were cultured, they were educated and they seemed to have their act together... Now whether or not they did, I don't know. That was just my impression.

L: That is interesting..that really is. Oh...going back to Canaan...Why does he never finish his book?

H: Well, for one thing, he's a perfectionist. He's his worst critic. When Even picks it up and he sees all the red...He's in a constant state of editing, (No one picked up on this, but in a way it was an indicator of what I felt like was going on racially in the South at the time.. Everything was changing. Everything was changing almost daily and in a sense that's how his work was. He would get to one point and then the reality of the negro would change into something else and it's a book that no one could ever finish because the reality is constantly shifting.

L: The women characters? I'm finding out a lot as we're talking. You mentioned that Grace was inspired by the woman who took care of you growing up... but what about this character Joody Tuscon? And she came from where?

H: She really came from my grandmother....The way I described her bears a great physical resemblance to my Grandmother who was Indian. And very different ...didn't really care a lot about what people thought of her...was superstitious...did the whole get rid of a wart by throwing a dishrag under the steps routine ... had a home remedy for everything and was very quiet. So that's where she came from, part of her, but another place she came fromwhen we first moved out to Grand Bay, my husband was there working out clearing property and a black woman came up and just started telling him all these stories about people who lived on the property..and in a sense she was like...the historian of that part of the road...is the way I saw her. I never met her, but he did. And I love the river...at the time we had a boat and would go up the Escatawba. I love the color of the river,...we'd see people camping there...people who were living there and of course most were living in really run down houses...but way way up the river there's a whole culture of people up there and I thought, This is something mystical, magical, and I was intrigued by it...so that's where she came from ...She just evolved. When I first began writing her, I had to go back and take some stuff out, because...she was much crazier than she appeared in the book in the final thing because there's a wisdom to Joody that's almost divine but at the same time there's a recklessness. She's not very responsible because she clearly saw what was going to happen to Valuable yet she stood the center of the road... and did nothing. And I've always wondered about that...I've always wondered why she didn't do something to prevent that because she saw what was going to happen. She knew that valuable was going to die and she did nothing. So her actions kind of surprised me there. But now I *love* Louise...I just really admire her. And again, it's like I wrote about something that I have no firsthand knowledge of ...I don't even know people

like this. I wish I did. I think that's where part of this whole community came from...different people that I would want to know. Those people are out there somewhere.

L: Louise? She's Joleb's aunt. Right?

H: Right, ...hard headed, industrious, cynical ...has given up on love. Has no use for it.

Hates her brother. Sees him as a he is...is kind of the strong woman in the family. And then Neva...I did know someone like Neva who had been in a lifelong relationship with someone like Bea. I didn't understand what that relationship was until I got older.

But...looking back on it I wonder...I have to consider what a hard road those two women had, growing up in the South at a time when a lesbian relationship was really *really* some type of torment.

L: Do you think that As lesbians they're more outsiders than the black characters are?

H: I think all the people in the book were all marginalized in one way or the other. I think Valuable was because she had no idea who her father was, her mother was a whore. I think Even was because of the nature of the color of his skin and Canaan was because of white society, Grace was because did not read. Joody was because of her own oddity. Louise was because of her own awkwardness and basically lacking social skills. All the people were misfits. There's not one single character in the book that I would consider an average, normal character, including the undertaker. It's like they were all misfits...looking for a tribe, a place to belong and they were willing to cross the color line to do it. That's the way I saw the book.

L: Why does Valuable have to die?

H: I didn't know she was going to die until she did die. It was like I was writing it and I got to the part where Joleb was saying "Look at the baby" and he noticed that she was

looking in another direction. And it like “Oh my God! She’s dying.” I didn’t want it to happen. I don’t know why it happened....When I’m in the middle of writing I’m *there* but the characters hopefully become large enough and their voices become loud enough that I’ll listen to them and not what I want them to do. And that’s what happened. And when she died I had it all plotted to go another direction and then it’s like shit. What Am I going to do? How is this going to play out?

L: What was the original direction?

H: Oh, just something similar to what it was...only Valuable would be there. She would find her family with Even and with Joody and she would raise the child and then it’s like no, that’s not going to happen. She has no one. The baby has no one. So I was really surprised. I didn’t tell anyone that’s the way it happened....and my daughter was reading the book and called me...guess it must have been about 11:30 at night and she was crying and said I can’t believe Val died . Well see, I have a best friend named Val . And I said Oh my god when did she die? She said, mom, you wrote the book! You should know! I said, *Oh Val! Valuable!*

L: Well, that’s a credit to you...that character was a real person for her!

H: Yeah...

L: By the end of the book, the child ends up with Even and the rest of the group. ...Do you think that was a realistic ... occurrence?

H: No. I wish it was. And I guess if the book could be summed up in any one sentence for me it would be I wish something like this could happen. ...I wrote the book from the longing of my heart...that people could see each other the way they really are, instead of the way society has programmed them to see other people. No, it’s not realistic.

L: Why do you think it couldn't happen though? Or could not have happened?

H: I don't know....I guess considering a remark I got when I wrote the book from someone out in Grand bay and looking back on the way things were when I was going to schoolWe had to be careful going through Prichard... I felt like we were in an alarmist state. We were in a place where no one trusted anyone. Everyone was willing to believe the worst. We look at Emmett Till. I wish it would happen. I think in a better world...something like that could. I believe it *could happen* now.

L: When you say everyone, you're saying black people? White people? Everyone in between? When you said people were in an alarmist state and not rally trusting?

H: Honestly, I felt like the black people, my friends were not alarmed. Looking back on it...even Grace. I remember Grace....I loved her so much but she was reserved. When Mother walked in she quickly would "Yes ma'am." It was a way that made me uncomfortable. She...

L: But she wasn't like that with you?

H: No, she wasn't . She would spank us. We felt like *she* was our Mother. Then to see this person become someone else when my mother and my father were around ...it was just upsetting to me. I couldn't understand it. I just couldn't understand it. And they fired her. I just couldn't believe it.

L: Why?

H: They never told me. Mother just said it was just time. See, not only did Grace raise us. She raised my dad. She'd been a part of our family for 25 years and I've never been able to get over the way they just dismissed her.

L:But you were never told why?

H: No, we came home around second grade. Grace wasn't there. My grandmother was there. I said, "Where's Grace?" They said, she not here anymore. Well, I thought she'd died, but no.

L: So you never asked, even in Adulthood, what happened?

H: I asked Mother once, and she said something about a problem in Grace's family. So I said, "Oh, so Grace quit?" She said, "No. We let her go." I probably need to pursue that but they don't like to talk about that now that you mention it.

L: From a cultural standpoint, do you think that your depiction of your black characters is just as valid as a black writer's depictions would be?

H: When I wrote the book I have a friend in Auburn and I sent it to her and I asked her the same thing and her comment was the same as what I said earlier....I wish it was like that. So I don't know . I think a black person would have to answer that question. I just don't know. I just think that writing takes a person to a place...representative of the world we know and at other times it's not. And I think it just depends on the story. I hoped it would be that way. I hoped it would be true to what a black person would think and say and feel, but I don't know. I've never had anyone tell me. I did get a letter from a person out in California who is a Black Scholar...still got the letter here and he felt like it was just a wonderful depiction of the black culture that he grew up in, but he grew up in New York City. There was not the...didn't seem to be the dividing line in the bigger cities like we had down here and he was really pretty amazed by it.

L: But he's from New York though . Does that compare to southern culture?

H: No.. no it's a mystery to them. It's like I had to tone down reality for it to be credible... Seriously, I would tell my agent certain things that were going on and she would say, "Come on!"

L: What do you mean...you'd have to tone down southern Reality for them?

H: I come from a very odd family. There are a lot of eccentric characters...The dialogue in the book was... something that would take place around our table. Wendy would say, "That's just really outrageous" and I'd say, Well, you know it actually happened last Thanksgiving." She'd say, "You're kidding me." And I said "No."

L: You wouldn't be talking about the scenes with Joleb, Bea and Neva? When he comes over to dinner?

H: Yeah, pretty much...and the scene in the church with the priest... Yeah... Joleb was just such a...he said everything he thought he said, Whatever came out.

L: That's... Russ...the minister?

H: Yeah... One thing I'd found out is People in the north, especially New York City...have no idea what it's like. Their trip to the South involves going to New Orleans, Bourbon Street or maybe Savannah. That's not the real South. It's like that stupid book Nicholas Sparks wrote. I watched the movie. I can't stand it. I would never read one of his books. What's that one, *Nights in Rodanthe*. Obviously he's never been in a hurricane. He's just stupid... Sorry about that.

L: It's okay. He's not one of my favorites.

H: A plastic surgeon is going to go through some crisis because he killed somebody? I don't think so...No they really don't know the South.

L: If you had to sum up your book in just a few sentences in terms of race...what would those sentences or *words even* be?

H: Like I said, this is my wish. This is the way I wish it would be and a part of me believes this about all my books... that the characters I come up with always find me. That sounds weird, but they always have. I would love to believe and I continue to believe that at some point in time I would find these characters and they would be real. They would react the way they do in the book...the good, the bad, whatever...but that inside each of them would be the desire to know another person...to really know them. I think it's obvious that I loved the black characters more than the whites. A lot of people felt like I was too hard on the white characters, but the white characters were caricatures of one form or another...My answer to them was Sorry. I didn't mean it to be that way. That's just the way it happened.

L: The desire to know each other? Do you think that sums up the relationship between Even and Valuable?

H: Yeah. I think Even Grade was a man who was very responsible emotionally. Sometimes people go overboard in areas in their lives that they did not experience. He never had family, so his quest for family instead of making him an outsider and someone who didn't like peopleHe really really liked people. He loved Canaan. HE felt responsible for Valuable.He didn't have the heart to turn her out, yet he couldn't really accept her the way Joody did, but see Joody accepted Valuable, but didn't really *love* her. Even's treatment and acceptance of Valuable was the flip side of Joody. Joody was pretty ambivalent. It was what is was. She wasn't going to go out of her way to change it. She just was pretty aloof...Even felt things ...For everyone he came across, he

felt. Even Ened. He was hesitant...how to get away from this woman who's stalking him across the yard without appearing mean. He was just not a mean person.

L: How does he compare to other black male characters that you've run across in literature?

H: Well I read *Invisible Man*. I was intrigued by that. Early on I felt like...He had a true innocence in the beginning until he realized what he was up against. ... I'm offended by some images in literature of black males. I didn't want to make him a cartoon. I didn't want to make him... just your stereotypical male. Flannery O'Connor's images of blacks in literature was offensive. She didn't really try *not* to be. There's always a measure of redemption in her work, but I didn't want him to be like that. I wanted him to be unique and different. So I really can't think of any that I can compare him to. Can you?

L: No actually, and I think that's interesting for me, too because he, for me as a reader, represents a different kind of character. I agree.

H: I think he's more evolved than any of us. ...most of the characters in the book...a couple of them, Canaan...just have reached a higher plain of sensibility than most of us have...That was a comment that somebody made. The book went to...Knopf first and the guy in charge at the time came back with the comment that these characters are more evolved than anyone he'd had met. He didn't feel like they were realistic. He rejected it. I guess in his opinion...I guess it all worked out the way it was supposed to, I'm guessing. You know, one thing that was funny. I wish I'd asked her this. I would love to know what Oprah thought about it. I probably need to go back and look at that tape. I was so panicked at the time. I didn't have much chance to interact or anything.

L: So you don't have open lines of communication with Ms. Winfrey?

H: Are you kidding? Nooooo...A lot of people thought [that]. When the Junior Miss program in Mobile was in trouble a lot of people called me and they wanted me to call her and get her to do something. I said, You're kidding! You're kidding , aren't you? " Even when I went to tape the show, I didn't see her until I went out on the stage. Do you think we're friends?

L: Really? No interaction whatsoever?

H: No. She called me when we were in Grand Bay, but she didn't tell me who she was. I just finished reading *Mother of Pearl* and loved it. How'd you do it? I started telling her and then it's like "Shit, I didn't even ask your name," and she said, "This is Oprah Winfrey," and I said, "You're shitting me." And she said, "No, I'm not shitting you" And then from that point on I was just...

L: Did she ask you anything about eh book?...the characters? ...

H: The only thing she asked me was (on the phone before I knew who she was) as to tell her how I did it and she basically told her what I told you...that these characters appeared and I saw them and I wanted to know them...I was going on and on and she said " I really loved Grace," and I said, "Yesss.. I loved Grace." Of course I had a little story to go along with each of them and that's when it dawned on me, I'd been talking for ten minutes and I don't know who this person is *And* we have an unlisted number. It dawned on me, "How'd she get my number?"

L: So her readings, everything she had to say about the book's just Oprah's opinion as a reader?

H: Yeah

L: I remember her being fascinated with the concept of the six-sided woman.

H: Oh yeah, she was...you know one interesting thing she told me...I know if this is in the show or not. I don't know if they edited it out. She said, "I've run into some criticism for selecting you." I said, "Really?" I wish I had pursued that because I want to know who it was.

L: She never said ?

H: No. I was so intimidated, I never asked.

L: ..never said who it was or anything?

H: No.

L: I suppose if I were to shoot her an email, I don't think she'd respond to me for sure

H: I don't know if she would or not. Its' kind of like go for it if you want to, but I saw her twice and that was it. She changed a lot of things for us and I'll be eternally grateful. And everyone thought, "yeah, you know Oprah" and I was like, No, I don't . I don't know her."

L: But you know your characters.

H: Yeah, I sure do

L: That's good.

H: Like I said, I would love to think that some place, at some time I'll find these people and they'll be as true to what I wrote.

L: But you're suggesting for now, they still don't exist?

H: Not as completely as I wrote it. I have some really wonderful friends...different races, different religions and when we're together we don't even think about that. It's not a part of our friendship. It's just something beyond it...I don't know how to describe it. It's just I've never seen color lines. I've never seen religion lines... I've just never been that way.

I just don't think of it. The thing that is the most offensive to me in any person is stupidity. That is really the truth. I am extremely prejudice against stupidity. People who don't read.

L: That's a good one. Let's see. I think I've asked enough questions. I'm sure I've taken up a lot of your time. Do you have any questions for me?

H: I would just like to know if you felt like it was a realistic depiction? Do you have friends like this? If you do, I'd like to meet them...especially black men. I haven't had any experience on that front.

L: Well, funny enough when I read the book, I think that's why I asked you about the ending, because when I started reading I thought, "Hmmm. We have an interesting character here. He's a little different from the usual literary black man. Like I said, I'm thinking about Bigger Thomas from *Native Son*, and to a certain degree Ralph Ellison's works all of those. I guess I actually did think at one point Is this really the heart of a 'quote un quote' black man...not all of them of course, because you can't depict every single one of them in one person. Yeah, I do know some people who have those kind of textures to them. I do..."

H: I remember David saying...weird thing about it, he's working on a book. It's not called the *Reality of the Negro*.

L: Who is this?

H (To Husband): "Ray, can you remember David's last name? Wendy's friend? I met him through Wendy? Yeah! David Bradley?"

L: And who's he?

H: You can Google him. He came out with a book recently and he has been working on it for ten years and Wendy sent him a copy of it... and she said I don't think he's going to read it. He never reads anything about black people. He always so thoroughly disgusted by them [books about black people]. And then I got a personal letter and a phone call. It was before Oprah. And even after Oprah it was a highlight, just one of those things you'll always remember. And I'll always feel like...it validates the job I did because (he's black)...He felt like it was wonderful. It was a completely different character that definitely had a place in our world and there should be more of them., so I think that was part of the appeal at the time. A lot of the reviewers said, Here's some really different southern characters. This is not what I'm expecting...and it turned out to be something that really made people see *other* people in a different way. I was really glad about that.

L: I guess as a reader...I will admit that I was actually more *concerned* for him ...

H: You thought he was going to be killed.

L : Yeah. At every turn of the book I was thinking, "Oh God, Somebody's going to get him. Somebody's going to get him." I remember vividly the image of his walking down the road at the end with this little boy on his shoulders. That's what really made me think. By the time the novel ends, it's like 1960-1961?

H: Yeah

L: I'm looking at this image of this black man walking down the road with this little kid on his shoulders and I'm thinking, "How would people have really responded to that? Would he have been stopped on that road Several times and asked questions? What would have been the assumption of the relationship?"

H: One thing I found out doing some research is that society based on agriculture, and farming and produce are so busy surviving and trying to live that they don't really get involving in race relations. My grandfather on my father's side was a sharecropper and it was like there was more unity I can remember with him and the people who worked side by side with him who were also in that same situation..than what you'd find in the city.

L: They were black? A lot of the people he worked with?

H: Yeah. They were all in the same position and they were all poor. They were all out there trying to make a living. And I guess the image that kept coming to me was in the movie *Places in the Heart*.

L: What image was that?

H: The black man...Danny Glover. The first time he showed up he was trying to steal their silver and Sally fields, her character, hires him. He really becomes the backbone of that family. He helped her get the crop in. I believe she saw him as a human being, instead of a black man. The image of Even with Pearl on his shoulders is probably the only deliberate thing I did. I felt like it was almost prophetic I felt like it was prophetic and a retrospective look....How did white people get the job done? They were lifted up basically by the hard work of the black person and it wasn't balanced and it wasn't fair. It was just something that was a part of our history and a part of our culture that's still...I just felt like it wasn't a fair thing.

L: So how are we to re-read this image? ...if it's that retrospective burden –on-the-shoulders type of image? How are we to read it, say, from your *wish*?

H: My wish would be that as Pearl grows up that they'll walk side by side without ever seeing the difference in color. That's *my* wish. That color and religion...and I've heard

the same thing from some of my...you know, when 911 happened...everyone became so suspicious of the Muslim religion and you see the same thing directed in that way I think back in the 60's we saw towards the black race and I just don't know if it's just the nature of man to *always* point the finger. I think it's a terrible thing and to be that suspicious.

But anyway, that's my wish. That these people are real somewhere.

L: One last question: At the end of the book, everyone's joking about and a question's tossed out asking who's the boss and the little one says, "Grace is." Why Grace?

H: From the time she showed up she was telling Even Grade how to buy a dress...she just ran the show. She knew who she was. It was a bluff a lot of the time. She didn't like Joody one bit. She was suspicious of Joody. I think the way she called herself just plain Grace...she certainly did not see herself that way. And I think that's why she called herself that. Because she obviously was not just plain Grace...She was the only one who stood up to Joleb's father and would tell his the truth. Here he is surrounded by books and yet he's ignoring the one thing he needs to do. She had guts about most things, and yet she would not admit she couldn't read. That whole game she played with Even when she brought the letters down there.... It broke my heart when I wrote that. I didn't even know she couldn't read until then and I know it sounds crazy. And Wendy's always told me, 'Be careful when you talk to people about your method. Because you end up sounding like a crazy person,' but it is the truth. ...that whole scene, walking down with the letters. ...it's like 'Oh God, She can't read' and for her to end up with a man who lives in words ...was another test. Could you love this person? Are you willing to be *with* this person? Are you ashamed of this person? So you are more about yourself than this person? Really, that the question that all the characters have to ask at one point.

L: Okay, I think I've taken up enough of your time.

H: Well, thank you. I love to relive it because it's been gosh nine years?

L: Yeah...has it been that long?

H: 99?

H: Somebody asked me about the new book. if it's about race relations? Really looking back on it, *Mother of Pearl* was really the only one that was about that. *Chalktown* was different. *Willem's Field* was different. The new book is different. It's not southern. It's set in Houston.

L: Oh, so Texas isn't the South?

H: You know, one reoccurring theme is that I think that I'll always be drawn to characters who don't feel like they fit in anywhere else...and that's the name of that tune.

L: Well, thank you so much. Again, thank you for allowing me to borrow some of your time.

H: Well, If you have any more questions, just feel free, or if you think of something you'd like to know, just call me. I'm here all the time. I have Lanier's Disease, so I'm pretty much in the house.

L: What's that?

H: It's the balance of the fluid in the inner ear. I can't drive. I can't walk or stand for long.

L: If you need to contact me...Do you have my number?

[Exchange of contact info and other conversation]

NOTES

¹ Byrd and Gates note Toomer's often acknowledged grandfather and former Reconstruction Era governor of Louisiana, P.B.S. Pinchback, the first and only black elected to the states' gubernatorial office. Byrd and Gates' genealogical inquiries have also unearthed multiple documents—mainly census records, marriage certificates, and draft registrations along with Toomer's own words from correspondences with various figures. Within these documents and records, Toomer's reported racial identity and self-identified race vacillate between Negro and white.

² Van Vetchen's relationship with Alfred Knopf was integral to the publication of key Harlem Renaissance writers, including Langston Hughes and Nella Larsen among others. His knack for correspondence, collecting literature and art, and photography also led to Yale's James Weldon Johnson Collection, one of the first archives of African American works held by a non-HBCU American institution. Interestingly, when Van Vechten established the collection, he noted that it would contain the works of African American writers and artists and noteworthy white contributors.

³ Noted scholar Charles S. Johnson reportedly wished that an African American writer would have written the book and hoped that one would eventually pen a novel of the same quality (Coleman 129).

⁴ autonomy, authority, newness, difference and absolute power.

⁵ The epigraph for this introduction is from African Author Chinua Achebe. Achebe is discussing the then newly forming body of African literature, He suggests that any literature that represents a body of people should be distinct and grow out of that particular, seeking a certain unity and reconciliation among its people who create it.

⁶ Toni Morrison discusses a similar point in *Playing in the Dark*—that literary critics often hinder the work writers do to liberate language from the crippling effects of race (8-10).

⁷ Langston Hughes' poem "Negro Speaks of Rivers" (Hughes 23)

⁸ Haynes' novel *Mother of Pearl* investigates the 1955 murder of Emmett Till and spans from 1956-1961. Published in 1959, Bellow's *Henderson the Rain King* is set in contemporary late 1950s. Cruz began his career as a Black Arts poet in the later 1960s and was cemented as fixture among the Black Arts poets with his publication in popular magazines like *Negro Digest* (renamed *Black World*) and the 1968 Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal literary anthology *Black Fire*.

⁹ Fanon's *Black Skins White Masks* plays a crucial, reoccurring role in throughout this project. A more extensive discussion of Fanon appears in this project's conclusion.

¹⁰ Favor reads figures like the previously mentioned Toomer as internal challenges to absolute definitions of "authentic" blackness that promote certain modes of black expression while silencing others.

¹¹ Fellow writer Waldo Frank had challenged Toomer and other modernist writers to capture a number of supposedly dying national subcultures throughout the country, not just the black South.

¹² Though he did not reject Jewish identity, similar to Jean Toomer, Bellow often announced that he was not a "Jewish writer" but rather an "American" writer who happened also to be Jewish.

¹³ "He was never to hear the black man's voice. He no more spoke than a puma would. What he did was to force Sammler into a corner beside the long blackish carved

table, a sort of Renaissance piece, a thing which added to the lobby melancholy, by the buckling canvas of the old wall, by the red-eyed lights of the brass double fixture. There the man held Sammler against the wall with his forearm. The umbrella fell to the floor with a sharp crack of the ferrule on the tile. It was ignored. The pickpocket unbuttoned himself. Sammler heard the zipper descend. Then the smoked glasses were removed from Sammler's face and dropped on the table. He was directed, silently, to look downward. The black man had opened his fly and taken out his penis. It was displayed to Sammler with great oval testicles, a large tan-and-purple uncircumcised thing—a tube, a snake; metallic hairs bristled at the thick base and the tip curled beyond the supporting, demonstrating hand, suggesting the fleshly mobility of an elephant's trunk, though the skin was somewhat iridescent rather than thick or rough. Over the forearm and fist that held him Sammler was required to gaze at this organ. No compulsion would have been necessary. He would in any case have looked. The interval was long. The man's expression was not directly menacing but oddly, serenely masterful. The thing was shown with mystifying certitude. Lordliness. Then it was returned to the trousers. Quod erat demonstrandum. Sammler was released. The fly was closed, the coat buttoned, the marvelous streaming silk salmon necktie smoothed with a powerful hand on the powerful chest. The black eyes with a light of super candor moved softly, concluding the session, the lesson, the warning, the encounter, the transmission. He picked up Sammler's dark glasses and returned them to his nose. He then unfolded and mounted his own, circular, of gentian violet gently banded with the lovely Dior gold" (*Mr. Sammler's* 40).

¹⁴ These values include "individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematic of innocence

coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell.” Morrison also lists individualism, innocence, difference, heroism, virility, and the problematics of wielding absolute power (*Playing in the Dark* 44).

¹⁵ In an interview with Singh, Bellow claims “the race question” does not enter into the book’s overall message.

¹⁶ Many have acknowledged this concept of racial hierarchies, most notably W.E.B. Dubois’ famous discussion of the seven sons of races ranked by gradations of social acceptability in his chapter “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” from the canonical *The Souls of Black Folks*.

¹⁷ Many early major civil right events had already taken place, including the 1955 Montgomery Bus Boycott, the 1954 Brown versus Topeka Board of Education ruling, and President Harry Truman’s much earlier 1948 desegregation of U.S. Armed Forces (Brunner and Haney).

¹⁸ Werner Sollors presents an interesting discussion about reading authors’ ethnic identities, which he describes as “a very partial, temporal, and insufficient characterization” that obscures connections writers may have with those of dissimilar backgrounds (14). This will be of particular interest for us in our discussion of Bellow and his connections with Ralph Ellison.

¹⁹ Bellow suggests in this interview that blacks, compared to other “immigrants” in the country, have made fewer strides and are playing the blame game to excuse their lack of progress (Cronin and Siegel 293-99).

²⁰ In my introduction I proposed to investigate the ways that a writer’s own identity would factor into revisionist readings of race. Scholar Carol Smith is accurate in

one sense: Saul Bellow more than explores the weight of his Jewish identity in his works. Except for *Rain King*, all of his novels feature a Jewish protagonist. As L.H. Goldman notes in her study *Saul Bellow's Moral Vision: a Critical Study of the Jewish Experience*, despite critics' attempts to prove otherwise, Bellow's perspective is "essentially Jewish." Though void of most religious ritual, Bellow's writings affirm Jewish belief in the worthiness of all life and its enjoyment. His works also promote the divine origins and inherent goodness of man, and the ability of the individual to triumph over hardships regardless of status or condition (Goldman viii).

In *Whiteness of a Different Color*, Matthew Jacobson also confirms this shift towards an amalgamated white identity among Caucasian groups. Jacobson further suggests that civil rights rhetoric was an additional identity shaping factor. Rights rhetoric reduced race conversations into terms of black and white to create solidarity among black groups, but conversely created white unity among Caucasian ethnicities as well, which included Jews. As the "Negro question" became more prominent, the importance of less tangible differences between whites diminished (Jacobson 95, 247). The influence of these shifts in Jewish identity could account for Bellow's liberal view in the previously mentioned Hyde Park statement. Though naive perhaps, Bellow's comments suggest that race is a malleable, separable category of identity that one must "read" or interpret, and not an automatically pre-determined, innate category of being already invested with particular meanings.

Goldstein's research further suggests that the Jewish middle ground on the American black-white social continuum has been more fluid and multidirectional than the earlier mentioned Smith article acknowledges. At times, Jews did distance themselves

from their black counterparts to facilitate assimilation and acquired and/or enhanced their white privilege. Goldstein points to earlier, strategic times, particularly the periods of increased immigration before and during the turn of the twentieth century, the heightened times of racial terror during the Reconstruction era, and eras of progressive industrialism

However, Jews just as often positioned themselves in familiar associations and political alliances with black Americans. These deliberate moves were often “detrimental” to this same Jewish white privilege as Michael Staub suggests in his study *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America*. For Goldstein, over time Jewish consciousness developed an awareness of the Jew as both a cultural insider and outsider. The resulting ability to pass between ethnic boundaries became a fact of Jewish life that Jews celebrate. One also gets the impression of simultaneous streams of social influence affecting the racial views of Jewish American culture. A mainstream WASP culture promotes the circulation and mastery of pre-existing, racist American ideals as prerequisites to full American integration, while a Jewish heritage demands adherence to a deeper moral imperative of justice inherent to the practice of Judaism, an imperative that cuts against the grain of the same pre-existing American racism. In terms of the literary imagination, however, there is also a sense that a Jewish consciousness such as Bellow’s would equally employ race in all its glory and in all of its degradation. Bellow would read blackness much like he would Jewishness or whiteness—as a protean identity subject just as much to choice as to determinism. Again, race becomes a flexible marker.

²¹ Ellison and Bellow often also complained about “lesser” authors producing political dogma rather than good writing with moral vision and spared no one in critiques,

regardless of color, including the likes of communist supporter Richard Wright and similar writers who used their works as overt platforms to promote a variety of causes and organizations.

²² Bellow's parents emigrated from St. Petersburg, Russia. Leaving behind a fairly affluent life as merchants, they re-established themselves in a poor area of Montreal, Canada, where Bellow's father became a bootlegger and his mother took on odd domestic jobs to support their family. Seeking a better life, Bellow's family relocated once again to Chicago.

²³ It is also no coincidence that these literary features reflect the rise of 1950s Jewish culture. In his study *The Price of Whiteness*, Eric L. Goldstein notes that by the time Bellow had written and published *Rain King*, Jewish integration into U.S. society had evolved significantly. During this prosperous postwar time, Jews were excelling in virtually every arena of American life and transforming themselves into the epitome of the realized American dream, yet Jews were still *Other*. Jewish identity was conditional. During the WWII era, perceptions of Jews as a biologically defined race had become associated with fascist Nazi rhetoric and, for the most part, rejected as un-American. As a result, other more mainstream Caucasian groups began to accept Jewish Americans as completely white. By our book's publication date, Jewish America had, to a certain degree, become a religious ethnic group defined by cultural practices more so than by fleshy difference.

²⁴ In her review of *Playing in the Dark*, Ann Hubert criticizes Toni Morrison's failure to mention other scholarly works with similar scopes and topics. Hubert cites

Ellison's essay, "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity" as one of those chief unacknowledged precursors.

²⁵ Ellison "resolutely resisted the obligation to make his art explicitly political," particularly where race was concerned (King 103). Richard H. King notes that Ellison addresses the "political" in his works, "but not in the programmatic way demanded by others" (103).

²⁶ The unnamed narrator stumbles upon an eviction scene turned near riot. White movers are throwing an older black couple and their possession out on the streets as black neighbors become incensed. Ellison's protagonist quells the situation with a clumsy, impromptu speech that grabs the attention of local political figures who ultimately exploit his speaking gift.

²⁷ Rice has a strong analysis of the protagonist's likeness to the street thug Rinehart and the "fluidity" of the two characters' identities and self-serving motives. Rice interprets the narrator's investments in his political oration as a self-serving performance and not a grand gesture for the cause of equality and justice (11, 102-6).

²⁸ HBC--historically black college.

²⁹ F. Ogun Balogun delivers an extensive reading of Henderson's anti-Semitic interactions with Nicky Goldstein (22).

³⁰ Within *Invisible Man* Ellison disfigures Norton's perfectly white Nordic features and image. Nevertheless, Ellison's character Norton remains a static representation of physical whiteness, "white death" as the unnamed protagonist describes the college trustee (84).

³¹ Theodore Allen's *The Invention of Whiteness* has an excellent discussion of social constructions of race that defy the phenotype theory that presupposes physical features as the determining factor of racialized identity.

³² Goldman acknowledges readings of Henderson as Jewish (88). Steven Axlerod's "The Jewishness of Bellow's Henderson" is one such reading, but Axlerod's reading interprets Henderson's Jewishness primarily through the character's tendencies and perspectives. Axlerod does not propose or trace the possibility of a tangible Jewish lineage in the same manner as this project.

³³ Though there are many more recent accounts of Converso history in Spain—for example, Joseph Pérez and Janet Lloyd's *The Spanish Inquisition: A History* and B. Netanyahu's *The Marranos of Spain*—the foundational, most often referenced text still appears to be Cecil Roth's much older volume, *A History of the Marranos*.

³⁴ Henderson mentions one ancestor, a "Billy Waters" who served alongside Ulysses S. Grant. The irony of this is rich in light of my reading. Grant is legendary for his anti-Semitism and even issued an order for all Jews in territories he had subdued to be expelled (Michael 93).

³⁵ Many critics point to Bellow's personal ills with relationships to explain the absences and/or ill representations of women in his works.

³⁶ David Nirenberg gives a detailed account of the 1320 Shepherd's Crusade in which mobs massacred local Jews at Albi and in nearby areas (45-56). Robert Weinberg's *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps* gives an extensive account of deadly Jewish pogroms in Odessa, Russia. These attacks left hundreds of Russian Jews dead, thousands injured, and property destroyed after a political clash over

Nicholas II's October Manifesto promised greater rights to the Russian people. The time period for this particular wave of violence coincides with Henderson's mother's trip. The Odessa massacres led to massive Jewish immigration to the United States, many of whom were children (Weinberg 164-173; Diner 44-6).

³⁷ Lipsitz discusses in detail how inherited wealth stems from white privilege (107-8).

³⁸ bell hooks uses this phrase throughout her many publications to describe culture in the United States. In several works, she suggests that our problem is not really racism (the devaluing of a person because of ethnic difference). Instead our core problem is really white supremacy, the belief and active promotion of whiteness as somehow better, more desirable, or more valuable.

³⁹ Norton's distress could be motivated by a fear of the collapse in distance between fatherly associations, between Trueblood's raping of his daughter and Norton's own obsession over the memory of his deceased daughter, who was a constant companion of his during their many European travels. Both men tell rehearsed narratives that likely obscure the truths about their daughters' downfalls. However, Ellison emphasizes the rehearsed nature of the black farmer's story as Trueblood recounts how he "mistakenly" rapes his daughter one night in the bed that he must share with his entire family because of their poor, cramped living conditions in their farmhouse. Needless to say, Trueblood's daughter suffers a social death that no one acknowledges beyond Trueblood's concocted story. Likewise, in an equally rehearsed narrative, Norton relates how his daughter dies when he neglects to get her proper treatment in time. Because his generous contributions to the college supposedly honor her memory, and because Norton

is white, no one questions the validity of his story. His interaction with Trueblood perverts the bond of fatherhood the two *men* share despite their racial and socioeconomic differences.

⁴⁰ Henderson's behavior is oddly similar to the "denial" that bell hooks says is "a cornerstone" of white culture and its privilege (*Killing Rage* 4).

⁴¹ In chapter two of his book *Black and White Strangers: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America*, Sundquist explains the foundational biblical rhetoric associated with rights movements in black communities.

⁴² Scripturally there is no direct reference to Moses or Jesus as a "child of sorrow." The closest reference would be Jabez, whose name means "sorrow" (1 Chron 4:9-10) or the biblical figure Benjamin whose original name meant "Son of Sorrow" (Ben-Oni). See Genesis 3:16 for another scriptural source.

⁴³ Within Wimbush and Rodman's anthology, *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*, Keith Miller's article, "City called Freedom: Biblical Metaphor in Scriptures, Gospel Lyrics and the Civil Rights Movement," and Keith Gilyard's article, "The Bible and African American Poetry," both examine the common uses and influences of biblical allusions as social and political metaphors for African Americans' struggles. According to both, parallels between the hardships of biblical characters and nations are often expressed in African American religious worship, songs and creative literature. Particularly common are references and analogies to the plights of Jesus and Moses, as well as the "Children of Israel" (Israelites) and subsequent Jewish nation.

⁴⁴ In his study Timothy F. Murray notes that bathhouses “occupy a central (albeit contested) location within gay history and politics” (Murray 78). Barbara Chisholm gives a thorough overview of Allan Bérubé’s “History of Gay Bathhouses” and notes that bathhouses were the earliest public social spaces for gays and became the heart of gay community where homosexuality could be openly explored (Chisholm 66).

⁴⁵ Randal Kennedy’s work, *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word* gives an extensive history of racial names associated with Americans of African descent from “African,” to “Colored,” to “Negro” to variations on the contemporary label African American.

⁴⁶ Another rhetorical move, Bellow’s allusion to the Judeo-Christian figure Moses, also connects Henderson to Jewish ethnic identity. Much like Ricey’s baby hidden away in a suitcase, Moses was wrapped in cloth and cast out in a basket upon the waters to escape death under the Pharaoh of Egypt’s edict. (Chapter 2 of the book of Exodus gives an account of Moses’ birth, adoption and rearing.) Oddly enough, Bellow draws on biblical scripture as well as the popular 1956 Charlton Heston movie *The Ten Commandments* to connect the child to Henderson. In this Hollywood adaptation, pharaoh’s daughter and her servant immediately identify Moses’ mother’s ethnicity by the Hebrew cloth in which she has wrapped Moses. Neither the Jewish Bible, Christian Old Testament, or the Quran records this information. Though small quirky details, the child’s Turkish towel and suitcase allude to Henderson’s previously discussed Converso heritage and Diaspora movement, Henderson’s mother’s Jewish descent that muddies his white social consent. Though Henderson flaunts his Semitic features, much like his

mother, he never anticipates the expression of those same physical cues across generational and genetic lines.

⁴⁷ Exodus 9:15, KJV

⁴⁸ Approximately two – four million Eastern European Jews fled deadly Russian pogroms (ethnic cleanings of Jews). Many who emigrated from Russia were young adults and children, a direct parallel to Henderson’s plight. Many of these Jews immigrated to the US. (Weinberg 164-173; Diner 44-6). Many more, like author Saul Bellow’s parents, went to Canada.

⁴⁹ In James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Johnson’s protagonist, a fair skinned black man, decides to pass for white after he witnesses the racially motivated murder of another black man.

⁵⁰ Henderson failed to greet Charlie’s bride properly.

⁵¹ One source Hyland cites, anthropologists, is an obvious influence, for Bellow was an anthropology scholar before becoming a writer. Throughout the novel, *Rain King’s* westernized characters, and especially King Dahfu fall into anthropological urges to contemplate the physiology of man and the cultural practices of the people about.

⁵² (Huxley SM7)

⁵³ (Readers’ Guide Retrospective)

⁵⁴ This invented setting seems to make Henderson’s transition too easy and his problems too easily resolved. In *African Settings in Contemporary American Novels*, David Khune places Africa’s literary “appeal” in its “otherness” or difference from the contemporary United States.⁵⁴ The African continent is a timeless “place of mystery” with harsh landscape, severe climate and pestilence, dangerous animal life, and hostile,

primitive people. All of this stands in binary opposition to a supposedly tamed, technologically advanced, wealthy, rational West (Kuhne 1-3). Africa becomes an ideal site of imagination for American writers who more often use the continent as source of challenge, or as Kuhne describes, “a testing zone” where characters, “experience epiphanies or gain rewards” or “break away from the dull, regimented, sanitized life of western culture” (Kuhne 27, 3). This is the case for *Rain King*’s setting, but Bellow’s creation has yet to address the real continent and the real people who inhabit its spaces.

⁵⁵ Others have made this observation. For example, Morrison declares in *Playing in the Dark* that Americanness by default is assumed to be whiteness.

⁵⁶ (“Struggle for Africa’s Wealth” 32-4)

⁵⁷ (Davidson 209-10)

⁵⁸ George White notes that, “In South Africa, as in the United States, race rights, and racial privileges, and national identity were inextricably linked” (93-5).

⁵⁹ (Gunther 91-6)

⁶⁰ Calvin W. Stillman’s *Africa in the Modern World*

⁶¹ (Huxley 5+)

⁶² (*Africa: A Continent in Ferment* 19+)

⁶³ (“Can Africans Trust White Rulers?” 549)

⁶⁴ (“Can we stop communism in Africa?”)

⁶⁵ Flint gives an extended discussion of theories of African decolonization from the social sciences perspective. He argues for a “dependentista” view in which colonists, western-educated natives, and traditional leaders master western methods of trade and

government, thereby gaining *power* to dictate a transfer of governing authority from ruling colonizers (389-91).

⁶⁶ Bellow alludes to biblical figure John the Baptist here who goes into the wilderness as a herald for the New Testament messiah, Jesus.

⁶⁷ (“Africa Is Another Place” 76-7)

⁶⁸ (“While France Fumes” 70-1)

⁶⁹ (“United States of Africa?” 37-8)

⁷⁰ (“Africa Joins the World” 124-35)

⁷¹ Chester Bowles’ *Africa’s Challenge to America*.

⁷² (“The Vice-Presidency: With Pat & Dick in Africa”)

⁷³ (Palmer SM51)

⁷⁴ (Seaver and Engh 26-7)

⁷⁵ On a historical side note, Martin Luther King and company did eventually meet Vice President Nixon, but the meeting was on African soil during the Ghanaian independence celebration which King and other cultural delegates attended by Nkrumah’s invitation. King met President Eisenhower a year later in June 1958—four years after the Montgomery boycott had ended and after King had appeared on several national television appearances and a *Time Magazine* cover.

⁷⁶ In the article “Political Satire in *Henderson the Rain King*,” Singh divides *Rain King* into three distinct parts to reflect three major tenets of Truman’s Plan. The American third of the novel lampoons the United States’ overconfidence in itself as a model of economic stability and social health. The Arnewi Section mocks America’s

faith in its scientific and technological advancement. The latter Waririland section parodies the States' flawed role as "savior of sick and suffering humanity" (Singh 28).

⁷⁷ This reading possibly takes precedence from American rhetorical tropes associated with the depiction of African Americans in the U.S., most notably in Booker T. Washington's "Cast Down Your Buckets" reference in his Atlanta Exposition speech from his book *Up From Slavery*.

⁷⁸ On a historical level, I cannot help but notice the similarities of Bellow's frog episode and a very really Akosombo Dam project being negotiated between U.S. backers and Kwame Nkrumah during *Rain King's* writing and subsequent publication. American dollars eventually funded the project but the investment also allowed Americans to limit what could be done with the power the dam would generate (White 78-86). Ironically, the dam was dedicated on the evening of Nkrumah's ousting from power. Though the dam did produce extreme amounts of power at time of its completion, the project left the country in massive debt and led to the displacement of almost 80,000 people when the Volta river basin was intentionally flooded to form Lake Volta, the largest man-made body of water on the planet.

⁷⁹ This act becomes quite subversive if the reader accepts Itelo's defeat as a staged event that allows Queen Mtalba to claim Henderson as her mate without Henderson's consent. As prince, Itelo ever acts on the Queen's behalf, but in this scenario, Henderson becomes subject to female power as well.

⁸⁰ In light of the Wariri's subterfuge, readers cannot help but reflect suspiciously on Henderson's previous experiences among the Arnewi as well. Did Henderson truly lose his match to the physically superior Itelo, supposedly weak and ineffective in his

leadership, or was this too part of the plot that sent Henderson from the Arnewi village to the domain of Itelo's friend? After all, unlike earlier moments of misunderstanding with Henderson, Itelo does effectively communicate with his former companion, Dahfu. Was Henderson's presence a convenience already announced long before he ventured towards the Wariri? Did Henderson also misjudge the Arnewi's strength as weakness or helplessness, and by default, misguide readers with his overarching narration? After all, Henderson fails to master the Arnewi's communication equally as much as the Arnewi fail to master his. He must rely on Romilayu, whose loyalties lie in material wealth. He is a hired servant who Henderson has promised a jeep in exchange for guidance through a fresh adventure. Furthermore, Did Henderson falsely disregard Mtalba's advances out of his ignorance? When the Arnewi's Queen Mtalba makes her midnight presentation and supposed advances towards Henderson, she obviously acts independently, proactively deciding Henderson's relationship to her and the village out of her own privileged status and wealth among the Arnewi even though Henderson thinks that his own supremacy lends him control over the situation.

⁸¹ For a transcript of that interview, see the appendix at the end of the study.

⁸² *Aaron vs. Cooper* was a failed lawsuit Daisy Bates and the Arkansas NAACP filed to force the integration of Arkansas schools. According to Grief Stockley, to hasten the integration of Arkansas schools, Daisy Bates head of the local NAACP, filed the lawsuit against the Arkansas School System after twenty-seven students tried to register for classes in white schools and were rejected. This was two years after the *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* ruling. Bates and others felt that the State has been stalling compliance. Bates and the NAACP filed the case in February of 1956. Litigation began

on August 15, around the time that Haynes' novel begins. Bates & the NAACP lost, but as Stockley suggests, the case launched Bates and the Arkansas School integration issue into the national view and Bates emerged as the key face of the Arkansas NAACP (Stockley 84; "The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott").

⁸³ Emmett Till was a fourteen year old Chicago teenager lynched while visiting family for summer vacation in Money, Mississippi. Till reportedly flirted with Carolyn Bryant, a young white woman tending a community package store where a group of young boys and Till had gone to buy snacks the night of a church gathering. A few days after the incident, locals took the teen from his uncle's home, tortured and killed him. Searchers eventually fished the adolescent's mutilated corpse from the Tallahatchie River where killers had thrown Till's body, weighed down with a seventy-five pound industrial gin fan. Area law enforcement sought to hush the situation and quickly bury Till in Mississippi. However, under courts orders officials reluctantly shipped the boy's body back home to mother Mamie Till-Mobley, who staged a public funeral that would generate national attention for the Civil Rights Movement. Soon after, an all white jury cleared two of the identified killers, Carolyn Bryant's husband Roy and brother-in-law J.W. Milam, of all charges. Six months later in January of 1956, the two white men, under the safety of the double jeopardy rule, admitted to Till's murder in *Look Magazine*. No legal actions resulted. The pair were paid a little over four thousand dollars for the confession (Huie).

⁸⁴ Mcpherson's study is an excellent study of media based production and re-production of southern culture and race. She moves beyond literature to discuss similar

ambivalent, racially charged messages in every medium from product advertisements to film and television.

⁸⁵ Faulkner is an ambivalent figure whose stances on race and the South's black populations are at times quite progressive and other times racist and white supremacist in nature given information found in Hamblin and Charles' *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia*. Useful were Richard H. King's article "Race" and Charles Fort and Charles Peeks' article "African American," along with other entries on "Women" and related topics. In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Haynes states, "The biggest influence on my life is the writing of William Faulkner. I keep two paperbacks with me at all times. *As I Lay Dying* is one of them. Perhaps it is the way Faulkner's 'common' man takes on a beauty and language all his own. Perhaps it is the complexity of sentence structure, or the contemplative nature of his characters. All I know is that—without fail—I cannot read one of Faulkner's novels without being driven to write" ("Mother of Pearl"). In another interview with Lewis Frumkes, Haynes states, "I believe that the last three pages of Faulkner's *The Mansion* are the most beautiful words ever" Haynes also uses the line "Memory believes before knowing remembers Believes longer that recollects, longer than knowing even wonders" from chapter six of Faulkner's novel *A Light in August* (Frumkes 16).

⁸⁶ The "Jeremiah Wright" allusion refers to the problematic association between then presidential candidate Barack Obama and former mentor Rev. Jeremiah Wright, whose radical Afrocentric views spurred cries of racism from media and drove Obama to deliver his famous address on generational differences in attitudes towards race (Obama).

⁸⁷ In his article “Song of Solomon, Narrative Identity, and the Faulknerian Intertext,” John N. Duvall discusses Faulkner’s influence on Morrison’s writing, Morrison’s influence on reading of Faulkner, and the Intertextuality between the two writers’ works.

⁸⁸ The topic is still relevant as evident from works like Harriet Pollack and Christopher Metress’ 2008 essay collection, *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination*.

⁸⁹ Self-imposed limitations on this study’s scope preclude an extended discussion of Hurston and Haynes’ similarities, particularly the contrast of their views on black womanhood and black manhood (portrayed far more negatively in Hurston’s works) as well as each woman’s experiences as differently raced others.

⁹⁰ Hazel Rowley and Michel Fabre’s biographical works, as well as Kenneth Kinnamon and Michel Fabre’s collected conversations and interviews, all confirm Wright’s lack of peace with his Southern heritage and inability to reconcile himself with his childhood experiences through his life choices and writings.

⁹¹ Hercules Powder Company, explosives manufacturing plant in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. It is worth noting that The University of Southern Mississippi Libraries Special Collections holds a collection in its Unprocessed Manuscript Collection: Jeffrey Kaufmann, “Remembering Hercules: Oral Histories of Life with Hercules Powder Company (Hercules Hattiesburg Plant) in the Mobile-Bouie Street Neighborhood of Hattiesburg, Mississippi.” December 2004.

⁹² In her account of Till's death, *Death of Innocence*, Maime Till-Bradley laments that she had not properly prepared her son to function in southern culture and to weigh the surface value of his equality with the value of his life.

⁹³ By founding Canaan's learning on the classic heritage, Haynes unintentionally privileges the very legacy of biased, Western institutional learning that she seeks to avoid, despite developing Canaan's life of the mind beyond traditional halls of education. In an odd way, this very dependency on Western knowledge is quite similar to James Baldwin's argument about Richard Wright's characters and their doomed adoption of the larger white culture's terrorist methods of influence and power.

⁹⁴ Ecclesiastes 1:18

⁹⁵ Haynes' answer to this dilemma leaves Mosley's life's thesis, *The Reality of the Negro*, on his floor next to a pie safe after Canaan finds Grace, a literal woman but also (as her name suggests) a new release or extension on life. Haynes suggests that the reality and validation Canaan is trying to capture on paper as a black man must be lived, experienced in the flesh. However, his abandonment of his life's thesis also carries an inadvertent anti-intellectual reduction of black life into pure lived experience apart from intellectual pursuits, as character Grace suggests when she notes that "it's a cryin' shame" Canaan "wasting [his] big old brain writin' 'bout something" to avoid living (141). Haynes never gives this self-educated man an opportunity to engage his thesis with new meaning in light of his new experiences and thoughts. He masters tying his daughter's shoe as a wonderful father, clearly opens his heart to love Grace and become a strong husband, and remains a constant friend to Even and the other characters, but the reader never hears another word about Canaan's writings or the library. Canaan can be a

happy lover, husband, father and friend, or be a lonely thinker, but seemingly not a functioning combination. In reality, *The Reality of the Negro* would have been more important than ever as a voice in light of Canaan's new found roles in a rapidly changing world. By the novel's end, Canaan and his fellow characters find themselves in the 1961 South, a heated period of the Civil Rights struggle when equality still had not been guaranteed in any significant measure. Safety and opportunity for Canaan's wife and child would still have been in limbo as would Canaan's ability to act as protector and provider in a still legally racist, traditional American culture. Indeed, the reality of Africanist people was (and still is) ever changing, particularly for the man of African descent. These shifting experiences are the very missing historical account Haynes helps to reconstruct through her novel. How much more powerful a work this would be if Haynes' character could have participated in this chronicling process of understanding how blackness and black manhood are changing as concepts. On the other hand, Canaan's silent pen is also Haynes' silence as writer. Haynes respectfully acquiesces. Though she can know the subjective experiences of Others, Others will always inhabit certain personal spaces she cannot enter. Her white womanhood, no matter how much she defers its privileges and trappings, cannot completely imagine every facet of this Africanist character's his life.

⁹⁶ For more in depth information, read Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies" and bell hooks' book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* and hooks' essay "Overcoming White Supremacy" in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*.

⁹⁷ In terms of lynching, activist Ida Wells' anti-lynching editorials and pamphlets (particularly "Southern Horrors" and "A Red Record") are well known examples of non-fiction that spoke out against the brutal killing of the innocent while white southerners excused racialized violence as a means to control race riots, prevent Negro domination, and the rape of white women (Wells 77-8). Wells also makes the same argument of shared oppression throughout most her works, but she especially notes in "A Red Record" that the white southern man adopted extreme codes of "chivalry" toward white women "to justify [his] own barbarism"—namely the rape of black women and fathering of mulatto children, the disrespect of white women, and false lynching of black men because of the "old thread bare lie" that black men rape white women. In contrast to the civil treatment Afro-Americans gave white women, Wells further documents white men's contradictory physical abuse of white women, especially those northern white women who traveled South to start schools for Afro-American people (79-81).

⁹⁸ Bell suggests that the three elements grow from the African American's position as both insider and outsider to a larger white culture. African American subjects grow to be aware of the differences between their self-defined identities and external identities among Others, especially whites (Double consciousness). Moreover, they are capable of seeing or discerning the material and social differences that result (Double Visions). They also grow to embrace a love-hate stance toward life and act out of an understanding of their precarious cultural standing (socialized ambivalence). The trickster figure is a common African American character who masters all of these elements to negotiate power within, between and outside of white culture, often through the skillful, subversive manipulation of spoken word and at the expense of Others, especially whites.

Henry Louis Gates Jr, also discusses in detail the trickster figure in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*.

⁹⁹ Exodus 33:20

¹⁰⁰ Even Haynes mixed up the characters' names in our interview.

¹⁰¹ See Till-Mobley and Benson. Another earlier but flawed critical source for Till's story is Stephen J Whitfield's *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till*.

¹⁰² This scene bears potential influence from Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Haynes also alludes to another event as well—the too many festive lynching scenes that were photographed for posterity's sake, wherein white crowds of men, women and children would gather around mutilated lynched black victims with picnic baskets to socialize and bond as a community.

¹⁰³ Curiously, Haynes suggests that the decision to make Joe Liberstein a Jew was the most outrageous move she could have made within the novel, as if, in the words of Joleb Green, “the big news is he's a Jew and not that he's my daddy” (Haynes 355). Haynes admitted that the most virulent hatred she knew as a child was not racially motivated hatred towards African Americans but religious hatred towards “Christ killer” Jews whom, she adds, always seemed to be more refined and cultured than most whites she encountered in her childhood. “They just seemed to have it together” (Haynes Personal Interview).

¹⁰⁴ Eric Goldstein delivers an in depth discussion of racial associations of blackness and Jewishness in the chapter, “The Unstable Other: Locating Jews in Progressive Era American Racial Discourse,” from his work *The Price of Whiteness*.

¹⁰⁵ When Beryn hires Grace he tells her to use the backdoor. When she refuses, he backs down and sarcastically remarks suggests that he knows what it is like to work for a colored person.

¹⁰⁶ See page 2 of this study's introduction for a discussion of Toomer's racial ideology and invention of the American race.

¹⁰⁷ Referencing Anne Jones' earlier scholarship, Michael Kreyling notes that white women, as "honorees" of the South who "embodied" southern culture, were not permitted to help define that same southern culture, particularly as acknowledged participants within southern literature dominated by "gentlemen" (100-1). Their numbers provide a great irony now given the fact that female writers of all backgrounds and ethnicities have dominated southern literature since the post WWII era (Inge ii). Guinn admits later in his study that rather than launching "open assault on the cannon," (Guinn 57-8), many female writers like Bobbie Mason and Kaye Gibbons use unconventional perspectives and include elements from an increasingly present reality as means of challenging an old southern literary guard.

¹⁰⁸ Haynes novel offers so much information about black womanhood to analyze, but the scope of this project focuses more so on black manhood. Ironically, Grace, an extreme violation of womanhood according to old guard southern standards, comes closest to fulfilling the standards of white womanhood. She is a non-traditional, self-possessed woman who occupies a social position located far from the white southern belle's pedestal, yet she successfully masters domestic space throughout the novel and wields the ultimate power ascribed to the traditionally defined female body. She mothers

forth life by the novel's end, sustaining white character Joleb's life on multiple occasions and birthing a precocious baby girl Sophie with character Canaan Mosley.

¹⁰⁹ Oddly enough Haynes does not extend this same judgment toward Mary Green who, as an adulterer, is just a guilty of violating southern mores. I sense that in Haynes' eyes, Mary's sufferings and tolerance of Beryn are excusable because Haynes sees Beryn as a negative figure.

¹¹⁰ Oddly enough, The writer does allow the women around her black male figures to affirm the worth and esteem of these men. In that sense, Africanist women have a degree of liberty in their expressions of sexuality. Grace affirms Even's manhood in Lieberstein's through her counter flirtation as she sassily circles him. In one of the more unique celebrations of black manhood, Joody Tuscon carves a gift pipe for Even in the form of Even's buttocks.

¹¹¹ Pearl also becomes a stand-in for Grace's lost child.

¹¹² Though Haynes does not avoid addressing the realities of Even's racial identity, she does attempt to establish Even and Valuable's relationship on another basis (and later Even and Pearl's) beyond race. Haynes brings Even Grade and Valuable Korner (and later her son Pearl) together through shared orphan experiences. Earlier in Haynes' novel, the narrator discloses that Even has been abandoned as a child in a Memphis children's home and has very little knowledge of his parents or of childhood love. Race nevertheless factors into the equation. In a flashback, Haynes places Even at a table among older, larger white boys —the beginnings of his status as a black male figure placed on an "even grade" with his white male counterparts, symbolically called to fend for himself in a world where, figuratively and literally, whiteness attempts to

overshadows him. Valuable Korner's circumstances are similar; she also grows up in the shadow of whiteness. An emotionally cold grandmother Luvenia raises her. Mother Enid only returns after Luvenia's death and provides less than ideal parental support as she cavorts with men throughout the novel and insists on being "like friends" with Valuable because she (Enid) is too young to be a mother. Aunts Neva and Bea initially appear to provide a more stable environment but ultimately behave in controlling fashion similar to the white patriarchy instead of delivering on the promise of alternate, revisionist forms of white womanhood as their lesbian status initially suggests. They share a similar void that character Canaan later label "orphanitis."

¹¹³ The only black male character I can recall who is remotely similar to Even Grade is Walter Mosley's Louisiana born detective Ezekiel Rollins. Like Even, Ezekiel Rawlings has no true peer. However, Mosley's character is plagued with much darker fears and moments that at times resemble Richard Wright's development of his protagonists, notably Bigger Thomas of *Native Son*. Rollins faces racist challenges, falls into shady, almost criminal dealings, suffers the loss of a stable home life on more than one occasion, and falls victim to interactions with women. Nevertheless, Rollins' character also has redeeming hope. He is a veteran who strives to be a successful property owner much like Even, is self-educated much like Canaan, holds the respect of his community, and becomes a father to four children, three of varying races whom he has adopted over the course of an approximately eleven book series.

¹¹⁴ Haynes credits Hyperion's Martha Levins with penning the title of the book. The executive had concerns over poor focus group reactions to the title. Group members thought the title sounded too "industrial" and "didn't want to read it" (Haynes Personal

Interview). Levins obtained the title from the character Valuable's headstone, "Mother of Pearl." Curiously, in an early interview after the book's release, "Haynes Answers Questions," Haynes, perhaps in a bit of inventive performance, explained that the book's title was really a symbolic reference to the substance formed on the inside of an oyster's shell as a response to irritation.

¹¹⁵ In Saul Bellow's case, the Jewish American writer shares aesthetic vision with Ralph Ellison and a connection that lays the foundations for a strong critique of whiteness and American foreign policy in *Henderson the Rain King*. In Melinda Haynes' case, the southern writer aligns herself with the African American tradition as she appropriates African American history and particularly addresses the disfiguring physical violence associated with lynching and racial supremacy.

¹¹⁶ Afroantillanos are Caribbean blacks of predominately African descent discussed in Suarez-Orozco and Paez's *Latinos: Remaking America*. A prime example noted is Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, for whom the famous Harlem library is named. He was dubbed a founding father of African American history and one of the most prolific archivists of African American history and documents. He was also of Puerto Rican decent and referred to himself as a "Boricuan," a black Latino. Nevertheless, he primarily identified as black or African American and is usually recognized as such.

¹¹⁷ In his work, Gilroy discusses the dispersal of Africanist people and their cultural influences throughout the nations on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Key to these Black Diaspora cultures is the shared influence of double consciousness within the various expressions of literature, music, and art that Gilroy traces through the metaphor

of a ship navigating the actual triangular shipping path used during slavery to transport slaves and goods between Africa, Europe and the Americas.

¹¹⁸ This separation could be attributed to a number of trends including the growing sense of competition between African Americans and a more general Latino population over political influences. At this point, Latinos as a larger community of various origins had begun to increase in population, political organization, and power as African American communities began to experience a decentralization of leadership and political organization, factors that acted as points of cohesion during the Civil Rights and Black Power Eras. Another source of separation could be the garrisoning off of cultural enclaves as more distinct disciplines of study develop and separate within cultural studies dominated social and educational American institutions.

¹¹⁹ In its credits, *Callaloo* lists Carol F. Coates as translator for a number of the poetry selections from the special Puerto Rican literature feature. Cruz's poem bears no such translation credits.

¹²⁰ (Brandon 148, Olmos and Parqavisini-Gebert 188-9) Though the Spanish "Mesa Blanca" is essentially the same practice, the English phrase "White Table" also associates Cruz's poem more heavily with non-Latino practices, notably Santeria and Voodoo worship stronger in West African Yoruba influence, and more widespread in the French and English Caribbean and certain mainland African American spiritual enclaves, New Orleans most notably.

¹²¹ According to Steingass' definition, the word "malaka" is a form of the verb "to possess" but is also a form of the noun "possession." In the proper context, phonetically the word also means "messenger of God" or "angel."

¹²² This same dichotomous tension has plagued African American existence in the United States from the throws of slavery to the throws of contemporary life. I need not expound upon that tension here. It is well known in great part because of the efforts of those who have labored in the African American literary tradition to shape more fully and fairly depictions of black American life. Publications like the black diaspora journal *Callaloo* have also been instrumental in this revisionist pursuit, providing the larger black scholarly community an outlet for political and cultural concerns, a tangible voice within a larger national community. The publication is another form of community for us, but *Callaloo*'s focus has shifted quite a bit over time. It began as a southern African American mouthpiece yet gradually expanded to include a greater communal expression of blackness, hence the phrase "black diaspora" in the journal's mission statement—a reference to a collective black community composed of varying communities scattered throughout the world and whose shared experiences in racism and historical ties to slavery link them in a common unity. It is no surprise then, that Cruz's original English version of "Mesa Blanca" should be published here as a part of a special Puerto Rican literature issue.

¹²³ Olmos and Paravisini-Gilbert, 182, 188; In Mesa Blanca or White Table rituals, participants perform readings, prayers, and songs to invoke honored ancestral spirits or deities. These invoked spirits are most often African or indigenous in origin though sometimes cloaked with names of Catholic saints and Christian figures of worship.

¹²⁴ African slaves were introduced to the island upon the recommendation of the priest Bartoleme La Casas after the Spanish had established themselves on the island and

nearly decimated the Taino populations. La Casas thought the African slaves would be a hardier labor substitute and would spare the remaining native population.

¹²⁵ *Abeyanex* is an allusion to a Native American Taino figure.

¹²⁶ Cruz plays on Taino ritual here. Part of Native worship involved the use of ceremonial sticks to produce vomiting, purification, in preparation for possession.

¹²⁷ *Malinche* or Dona Marina, is said to be the first Native in the new world to intermarry with a Spaniard conquistador.

¹²⁸ In *Empire of Harvest*, Juan González notes that well before this period of Spanish Imperialism, the earlier period of Arab or African Moorish occupation in Spanish history “left an indelible legacy of racial and cultural mixing that the Spanish immigrants carried to the new world. By marrying Spanish wives, these Moorish occupiers set “off an era of miscegenation so extensive that ‘by the fifteenth century there were...hybrids of every shape and complexion in Castille’”(18).

¹²⁹ In her work *Borderlands: La Frontera*, Gloria Anzaldúa stresses the importance of “a language which [Latinos] can connect themselves, their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves” (Anzaldúa as quoted in hooks *Talking Back* 12). This issue of race and Latino representations is rich in thought that I cannot fully pursue here. On a basic, common sense level, this is a literary publication. A focus on language is expected. However, this emphasis on language is far more than the mere spoken or written word. The editors in this anthology claim to “*speak directly*” of a tangible Latino “*bicultural experience*” (a language based-relationship between English and Spanish) that somehow becomes relevant to “*all human experience*”(xii italics added). It is as if language has become a part of the biological

being much like race pretends to be tangible, natural. Even the dualistic black-white dichotomies could be so easily superimposed on the “bicultural” tag Cruz uses here, a term that hardly suffices to describe the cultural mixture and experiences that make up Latino existence. *Paper Dance*’s editors list among the anthology’s themes a number of Latino “realities” here hashed out through this broad concept of language—“the ‘Americanization’ process, the struggle to define, redefine, and attain the American dream,” cultural [folk] myths, language and memory; gender; religion and spirituality, and rural versus urban (the barrio) life; ideals and values; the role of Latino and Latina poets; the question of universality and specificity” (xii). I am struck with the expansiveness of these themes and how many of themes are so intimately tied to discussions of race, particularly for those Latinos who live in the United States where Latinos *are* forced to adopt concepts of race that may be foreign to their self concepts (Tienda and Mitchell 41), concepts so integral to many of the anthology’s listed themes, especially the Americanization process and the “American dream.” As Howard Winant suggests, *race* has created “the politics and culture of today,” and is a foundational national force shaping “all identities” (Omi and Winant 86-8).

¹³⁰ In Mesa Blanca or White Table rituals, participants perform readings, prayers, and songs to invoke honored ancestral spirits or deities. These invoked spirits are most often African or indigenous in origin though sometimes cloaked with names of Catholic saints and Christian figures of worship (Olmos and Paravisini-Gilbert 182, 188).

¹³¹“Dance hall” could also refer to a hybrid Latin American music form transplanted from Panama and Jamaica (another Africanism from the black Caribbean).

¹³² I find it interesting that Cruz conjures up an image very similar to the one Ralph Ellison's narrator uses in the closing of *Invisible Man*. After playing on a Louis Armstrong song, he becomes enraptured in musical sound and declares, "I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the hole" (568). He resolves that he will be no less invisible, but commits to ending his hibernation and moving into action.

¹³³ Taino people supposedly emerged from Cacibajagua whereas non-Tainos emerged from Amayaúna. (Beeker, Conrad and Foster 3; Rouse 16; Saunders 153, 278).

¹³⁴ Wind here could be the spirit of the wind Goddess Guabancex or her messenger Guataba responsible for gathering together other wind gods or it could be the supreme god Yucahú Bagua Maorocotí who is often show as an invisible element of the sky (Turner and Coulter 197).

¹³⁵ Cruz most likely uses imagery from kite flying tradition near El Morro, an old Spanish fort in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

¹³⁶ "Door" alludes to the Taino belief that bodies of water acted as a gateway between the spirit world and the world of the living.

¹³⁷ Cruz alludes to Columbus' initial arrival. When Columbus landed in modern day San Salvador, he and crew were literally lost and had no clue where they had landed. History records that when Columbus' directionally lost ship (the Santa Maria) ran aground, the local Tainos helped the crew salvage its remains. Taino Chief Guacanagrí's banquet in the Europeans' honor often and exchanged gifts with the Europeans in an alliance that paved the way for the establishment of the European strong hold in the New World (Saunders 119).

¹³⁸ This corresponds with prophecies from the ancient Taino priests who predicted that later period they called the “fifth era...the Tainos would be destroyed by a ‘clothed’ people, ghosts from the land of the dead” (Flores 16).

¹³⁹ (lines 140-143; 255, 257, 271, 283-4, 280-287)

¹⁴⁰ Historical accounts note that the priest La Casa suggested the move towards African slavery to save Taino populations that had been wiped out under the harsh conditions of plantation laboring. Richard M. Juang,, and Anne Noelle Morrisette, "Bartolome De Las Casas," *Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History : a Multidisciplinary Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008. 243-44.

¹⁴¹ This is play on sociologists McMillan and Chavis’ canonical definition of sense of community: Community speaks of relational connections between people who feel a sense of membership, who somehow belong to each other, who wield influence and a “commitment and belief that members have shared...history, common places, time together, and similar experiences.” Simply put, within any group, “there are people who belong and people who do not” (McMillan and Chavis 9).

¹⁴² These men gathered to verify that she had written her poems. In 1786, her work would become the first widely recognized African American publication in the United States.

¹⁴³ Compositionist Stephen North observes that a discipline becomes established only when it develops certain elements: an official history, gatherings of scholars and meeting places, its own publications, theoretical principles and methodologies (North, 13-9).

¹⁴⁴ Historical proof even places blackness resolutely outside of the Africanist community's creation. Kim Hall's work *Things of Blackness* traces the racialized concept of "blackness" and black-white difference back to white or rather early modern Western roots as early as the late 1400s. As white Europeans began to encounter darker skinned people of newly explored lands, the African terrain, the color, and the customs of native people were conflated as "signs of disorder" against what explorers saw as the normative order of European or white society. Citing Mary Douglas, Hall notes that this black disorder represented "danger and power," the "destructive potential of strangeness" that had to be contained by European order. England in particular, justified its eventual "exercise of power," that would become a systematic European imperialism and human slave trafficking out of Africa (Hall 28).

¹⁴⁵ Michael Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*

¹⁴⁶ The book was originally titled *Peau Noire*.

¹⁴⁷ Favor and others have labeled this version of authentic black identity the folk, the play on the rural black southern as the real expression of black culture among African Americans.

¹⁴⁸ A connection could be drawn here with Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum.

¹⁴⁹ An elderly African American Boondocks character who hates black people.

¹⁵⁰ I am thinking here of Susan Smith, the woman who claimed a black man had carjacked her and kidnapped her children. Later police discovered that Smith had deliberately drowned her children by driving her car into a local lake.

¹⁵¹The mask was convincing enough that Zdzierak was only caught when he accidentally exploded a dye pack in his vehicle, a Volvo.

¹⁵²Latino personhood fares slightly better in its representative called “Latino Scarface,” another stereotypical gangster figure named such because of a gaping scar running down the mask’s cheek. Womanhood and female sexuality do not fare as well. “Old Woman” is a decrepit cougar.

¹⁵³Van Vechten’s reception is discussed in this project’s introduction.

¹⁵⁴In Packer’s story, Arnetta, a young girl from an all African American “Brownies” Troop, thinks she hears a white girl from another troop call her nigger. Later, she (as her troop’s very vocal ring leader) and the remaining friends stage an ambush against the white troop. After adults foil their plot, Arnetta’s troop is unable to properly identify the offender. Arnetta and company discover that the white girls in question are a troop of frightened special needs children. Moreover, Arnetta’s group is left uncertain if anyone had ever said anything.

¹⁵⁵Randall Kennedy traces the etymology of the word “nigger” from its neutral Latin origins as a term for “black” to its current weight as a derogatory reference to people of Africanist decent (*Nigger* 4-6, 135-6).

¹⁵⁶In Octavia Butler’s novel *Kindred*, Butler’s African American protagonist LaDana Franklin is repeatedly transported back into time to save the life of a white slave owner, Rufus Weylin. Ironically, Rufus is Dana’s ancestor. He fathers the child Hagar with his slave Alice, one of Dana’s immediate foreparents. Just as Dana’s existence depends on Weylin and Alice, Weylin’s life depends on Dana. She returns to the past when she must save Rufus from some life threatening situation. During her last trip, she

has to kill Rufus to protect herself; however, in his last moments, Rufus grabs Dana just as she is departing to her own time period. As a result, she loses her arm.

¹⁵⁷ The Weylin home has been destroyed in a fire set by the slave Nigel to cover up Rufus Weylin's death.

WORKS CITED

- Achebe, Chinua. "Colonialist Criticism." *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Revised ed. Ed. Hazard Adams. Australia: Heinle & Heinle, 1992. 1190-8. Print.
- Ackah, William B. *Pan-Africanism: Exploring the Contradictions: Politics, Identity and Development in the African Diaspora*. England: Ashgate Publishing, 1999. Print.
- Acosta-Belen, Edna. "Beyond Island Boundaries: Ethnicity, Gender, and Cultural revitalization in Nuyorican Literature." *Callaloo* 15:4 (1992). 979-998. Print.
- Africa: A Continent in Ferment. Spec. Issue of Life* 4 May 1953. Print.
- "Africa Is Another Place That Needs U.S. Help: Nixon's Tour." *U.S. News* 29 Mar 1957:76-7. Print.
- "Africa Joins the World." *Fortune* Mar 1958: 124-35. Print.
- Ahmed, Azam, and Ron Grossman. "Bellow's Remarks on Race Haunt Legacy in Hyde Park." *Chicago Tribune*. Chicago Tribune, 5 Oct 2007. Web. 25 July 2009. <<http://archives.chicagotribune.com/2007/oct/05/image/chi-bellow05oct05>>.
- Algarín, Miguel, and Miguel Piñero. *Nuyorican Poetry: An Anthology of Puerto Rican Words and Feelings*. New York: Morrow, 1975. Print.
- Allen, Marlene D. "Octavia Butler's Parable Novels and the 'Boomerang' of African American History." *Callaloo* 32:4 (2009). 1353-65. Print.
- Allen, Theodore. *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control*. Vol. 1. London: Verso, 1994. Print.
- American Standard Version Bible*. *Biblegateway.com*. Biblegateway, n.d. Web. 23 May 2011.

- Andrews, William L. *To Tell A Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography 1760-1865*. Urbana, IL: U of Illinois Press, 1986. Print.
- Aparico, Frances R, and Victor Hernández Cruz. "Salsa, Maracas, and Baile: Latin Popular Music in the Poetry of Victor Hernández Cruz." *Melus* 16:1 (1989). 43-58. Print.
- Aparico, Frances R. "On Sub-verse Signifiers:U.S. Latina/O Writers Tropicalize English." *Callaloo* 66:4 (1994). 795-801. Print.
- Apel, Dora. *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women, and the Mob*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2004. Print.
- Appiah, Anthony, and Amy Gutmann. *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1996. Print.
- Appiah, Kwame. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992. Print.
- Axlerod, Steven. "The Jewishness of Bellow's Henderson." *American Literature* 47.3 (1975), 439-43. Print.
- Baker, Houston A. *Blues Ideology and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1984. Print.
- Baldwin, James. "Everybody's Protest Novel." *Notes of a Native Son*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1955. 13-23. Print.
- Balogun, F. Odun. "Mythopoeic Quest for the Racial Bridge: The Radiance of the King and Henderson the Rain King." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 12.4 (1985): 19-34. Print.

- Beeker, Charles D. *Geoffrey W. Conrad and John W. Foster*. "Taíno Use of Flooded Caverns in the East National Park Region, Dominican Republic." *Journal of Caribbean Archaeology* 3(2002): 1-26. Web. 13 Oct 2010.
<<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/jca/current.htm>>.
- Bell, Bernard. *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1989. Print.
- Bellow, Saul. *Henderson the Rain King*. New York: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.
- . *Mr. Sammler's Planet*. New York: Penguin Books, 2004. Print.
- Betts, Doris. Introduction. *The History of Southern Women's Literature*. Eds. Carolyn Perry and Mary Weeks-Baxter. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002. 1-4. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Bloom, Alexander. *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals & Their World*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.
- Blount, Marcellus, and George P. Cunningham. *Representing Black Men*. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.
- Bollinger, Laurel. "Placental Economy: Octavia Butler, Luce Irigaray, and Speculative Subjectivity." *Literature Interpretation Theory* 18 (2007): 325–52. Print.
- Book Review Digest Retrospective*. 78 Vols. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1905-1982. Web. 3 June 2011.
- Bowles Chester. *Africa's Challenge to America*. Berkley: U of California P, 1956. Print.

- Brandon, George. "Sacrificial Practices in Santeria: An African-Cuban Religion in the United States." *Africanisms in American Culture*. Ed. Joseph E. Holloway. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. 119-147. Print.
- Brunner, Borgna, and Elissa Haney. "Civil Rights Timeline: Milestones in the Modern Civil Rights Movement." *Infoplease*. Pearson Education, 2007. Web 24 Aug 2009. <<http://www.infoplease.com/spot/civilrightstimeline1.html>>.
- Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1988. Print.
- . *Parable of the Sower*. New York: Warner Books, 1993. Print.
- . *Parable of the Talents*. New York: Warner Books, 1998. Print.
- Byrd, Rudolph P., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Afterword. "'Song of the Son': The Emergence and Passing of Jean Toomer." *Cane: Authoritative Text*. By Jean Toomer. New York: Liveright and WW Norton, 2001. 164-237. Print.
- . "Jean Toomer's Conflicted Racial Identity." *The Chronicle Review*. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 6 Feb 2011. Web. 13 Apr 2011.
- Callahan, John F., Ed. *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison*. New York: Modern Library, 1995. Print.
- Candelaria, Cordelia, Peter J. García, and Arturo J. Aldama. *Encyclopedia of Latino Popular Culture in the United States*. Vol.1. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. Print.
- Carby, Hazel. "The Canon: Civil War and Reconstruction." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28.1 (1989): 35-43. Print.
- Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism*. Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000. Print.

- Chapman, Abraham. *Black Voices: An Anthology of Afro-American Literature*. New York: Mentor, 1968. Print.
- . *New Black Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Afro-American Literature*. New York: Mentor, 1972. Print.
- “Charlie.” *The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang and Unconventional English*. Ed. Tom Dazell. New York: Routledge, 2008. 181. Print.
- Chishom, Dianne. *Queer Constellations: Subcultural Space in the Wake of the City*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2005. Print.
- Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1998. Print.
- Cloete, Stuart. “I Speak for the African.” *Africa: A Continent in Ferment*. Spec. issue of *Life* 4 May 1953: 111. Print.
- Coleman, Leon. *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Critical Assessment*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1998. Print.
- “colour | color, n.1.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, 2011. Web. 17 June 2011.
- Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. *Heart of Darkness and the Secret Sharer*. New York: Signet, 1997. 63-164. Print.
- Cronin, Gloria, and Ben Siegel, Eds. *Conversations with Saul Bellows*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1994. Print.
- Cronin, Gloria. “A Disrupting Darkness Before His Eyes: The Racial Subject In Saul Bellow's Henderson the Rain King.” *American Literary Dimensions: Poems and Essays in Honor of Melvin Friedman*. Eds. Melvin J. Friedman et al. Newark: U of Delaware P, 1999. Print.

- Cruz, Victor Hernández, Leroy V. Quintana, and Virgil Suarez, Eds. *Paper Dance: 55 Latino Poets*. New York: Persea, 1995. Print.
- Cruz, Victor Hernández. *Panoramas*. Minnesota: Coffee House Press, 1997. Print.
- . "White Table." *Callaloo*. 15:4 (1992). 952-7. Print.
- Dabovich, Melanie. "Larry Whitten, Hotel Owner, Orders Hispanic Workers To Change Names." *The Huffington Post Online*. HPMG News, 26 Oct. 2009. Web. 13 Nov. 2009. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/10/26/larry-whitten-hotel-owner_n_333817.html>.
- Davidson, Basil. "Chasing in on Old Imperialisms." *Nation* 13 Sept 1952: 209-10. Print.
- Dawkins, Laura. "It Could have Been My Son: Maternal Empathy in Gwendolyn Brooks' and Audre Lorde's Till Poems." *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination*. *Southern Literary Studies Series*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008. 112-27. Print.
- Delgado, Celeste Fraser Delgado, and José Esteban Muñoz. *Everynight Life: Culture and Dance in Latin/o America*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997. Print.
- Diner, Hasia. *A New Promised Land: A History of Jews in American*. New York: Oxford up, 2003. Print.
- Dyer, Richard. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.
- Dubois, W.E.B. "Of Our Spiritual Strivings." *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Signet, 1995. 43-53. Print.
- DuCille, Ann. *Skin Trade*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1996. Print.

Duvall, John N. "Song of Solomon, Narrative Identity, and the Faulknerian Intertext."

The Identifying Fictions of Toni Morrison: Modernist Authenticity and

Postmodern Blackness. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000. 71-118.

Dzidzienyo, Anani, and Suzanne Oboler. *Neither Enemies Nor Friends : Latinos, Blacks,*

Afro- Latinos. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Print.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage Books, 1972. Print.

---. "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity" *The Collected Essays*

of Ralph Ellison. Ed. John F. Callahan. New York: The Modern Library, 2003.

81-99. Print.

Espada, Martín, and Juan Flores. Introduction. *Callaloo* 15:4 (1992). 941-2. Print.

Esterrich, Carmelo. "Home and the Ruins of Language: Victor Hernández Cruz and

Miguel Algarín's Nuyorican Poetry." *Melus* 23:3 (1998). 43-59. Print.

Fabre, Geneviève, and Michel Feith. *Jean Toomer and the Harlem Renaissance*. New

Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001. Print.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York:

Grove Press, 1967. Print.

---. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2008.

Print.

---. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1963. Print.

Faulkner, William. *As I Lay Dying: The Corrected Text*. New York: Modern Library,

2000. Print.

---. "Barn Burning." *Selected Stories of William Faulkner*. New York: Modern Library,

1993. 1-25. Print.

- Favor, J. Martin. *Authentic Blackness: The Folk in New Negro Renaissance*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1999. Print.
- Flint, John. "Planned Decolonization and Its Failure in British Africa." *African Nationalism and Independence*. Vol. 3. Ed. Timothy Welliver. *Colonialism and Nationalism in Africa*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1993. 339-411. Print.
- Flores, Juan, and George Yudice. "Living Borders/Buscando America: Languages of Latino Self-Formation." *Social Text* 24 (1990). 57-84. Print.
- Flores, Lisa Pierce. *The History of Puerto Rico. Greenwood Histories of the Modern Nations Series*. Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Press, 2010. Print.
- Ford, Karen Jackson. *Split-gut Song: Jean Toomer and the Poetics of Modernity*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2005. Print.
- Foucault, Michael. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon, 1982. Print.
- Frumkes, Lewis Burke. "Conversation with Melinda Haynes." *Writer* 5(2000). 16. Print.
- Fuchs, Daniel. *Saul Bellow: Vision and Revision*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1984. Print.
- Gaines, Kevin Kelly. *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*. Chapel Hill: U of North Caroline P, 2006. Print.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., and Gene Andrew Jarrett. *The New Negro: Essays on Race, Representation, and African American Culture, 1892-1938*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 2007. Print.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext." *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*. Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. Durham: Duke UP, 1994. 234-54. Print.

- . *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988. Print.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993. Print.
- Goldman, L.H. *Saul Bellow's Moral Vision: A Critical Study of Jewish Experience*. New York: Irving Publishers, Inc., 1983. Print.
- Goldstein, Eric. *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006. Print.
- Goldwert, Lindsay. "White Robber Nabbed Wearing African-American 'Hollywood' Mask." *NYDailyNews.com*. NY Daily News, 22 Apr 2010. Web. 15 Nov 2010. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/2010/04/22/2010-04-22_white_crook_robbed_banks_in_expensive_africanamerican_mask.html#ixzz15QByrmox>.
- González, Juan. *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America*. New York: Penguin, 2000. Print.
- Graham, Maryemma, and Amritjit Singh, Eds. *Conversations with Ralph Ellison*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1995. Print.
- Grant, Nathan. *Masculinist Impulses: Toomer, Hurston, Black Writing, and Modernity*. Columbia: U of Missouri P, 2004. Print.
- Griffin, Larry, and Don Harrison Doyle, Eds. *The South As an American Problem*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995. Print.
- Guinn, Matthew. *After Southern Modernity: Fiction of the Contemporary South*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2000. Print.

- Gunther, John. "Can We Stop Communism in Africa?" *Look Magazine* 5 Oct 1954: 49-50. Print.
- . "Is the White Man Finished in Africa?" *Reader's Digest* Jan 1954: 91-6. Print.
- Guterl, Matthew Pratt. "The Hypnotic Division of America." *The Color of Race in America: 1900-1940*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001. 154-183. Print
- Hall, Kim F. *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1995. Print.
- Halliwell, Martin. *American Culture in the 1950s. Twentieth-Century American Culture Series*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2007. Print.
- Hamblin, Robert W., and Charles A. Peek, Eds. *A William Faulkner Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. Print.
- Harden, Blaine. *Africa: Dispatches from a Fragile Continent*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1991. Print.
- Harris, Trudier. *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1984. Print.
- Haynes, Melinda. *Mother of Pearl*. New York: Hyperion, 1999. Print.
- . Personal Interview. 30 Aug 2009.
- Helbling, Mark. "'Worlds of Shadow-Panes and Solids Silently Moving': Jean Toomer, Alfred Steiglitz, Georgia O'Keffe, and Waldo Frank." *The Harlem Renaissance: The One and the Many*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 129. Print.
- Hernández, Carmen Dolores. *Puerto Rican Voices in English*. Westport, CT: Preager Publishers, 1997. Print.

- Hill, Mike. *After Whiteness: Unmaking an American Majority*. New York: New York UP, 2004. Print
- . "Introduction: Vipers in Shangra La." *Whiteness: A Reader*. New York: New York UP, 1997. 1-18. Print.
- Holloway, Joseph. *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990. Print.
- hooks, bell. "Eating the Other." *Feminist Approaches to Theory and Methodology: An Interdisciplinary Reader*. Eds. Sharlene Hesse-Biber, Christina Gilmartin, and Robin Lydenberg. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. 179-93. Print.
- . *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1995. Print.
- . *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1989. Print.
- . *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. New York: Atria Books, 2004. Print.
- Houck, Davis W., and Matthew A Grindy. *Emmett Till and the Mississippi Press*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 2008. Print.
- Hughes, Langston. "Negro Speaks of Rivers." *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. Ed. Arnold Rampersad. Alfred A. Knopf, 1993. 23. Print.
- Huie, William Bradford. "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi." *The American Experience: The Murder of Emmett Till*. PBS, 1996-2009. Web. 11 Nov 2009 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/sfeature/sf_look_confession.html>.
- Hulbert, Ann. "Review." *New Republic* 206.20 (1992) 43-48. Print.

- Huxley, Elspeth. "Clouds Over the Black Continent; Are the White Meat's Days in Africa Numbered?" *New York Times* 1 Sept 1957, Sunday ed., *New York Times Magazine* sec.: 5+. Web 3 June 2011.
- . "Tomorrow's Hope or Yesterday's Dream?: African, the Last Undeveloped Continent, Can Be Converted into a Virile Partner of the West." *New York Times* 4 June 1950, Sunday ed., *New York Times Magazine* sec.: SM7. Web. 3 June 2011.
- Hyland, Peter. *Saul Bellow*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992. Print.
- Inge, Tonette Bond. *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1990. Print.
- Jacobson, Matthew. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Print.
- Janer, Zilkia. *Puerto Rican Nation-Building Literature: Impossible Romance*. *New Directions in Puerto Rican Studies*. Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 2005. Print.
- Jarrett, Gene Andrew. "Introduction: Not Necessarily Race Matter." *African American Literature Beyond Race: An Alternative Reader*. New York: New York UP, 2006. 1-22. Print.
- Jimenez-Roman, Mariam. "The Indians Are Coming! The Indians Are Coming! The Taino and Puerto Rican Identity." *Taino Revival: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Identity and Cultural Politics*. Ed. Gabriel Haslip-Viera. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001. Print.
- Johnson, E. Patrick. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2003. Print.

- Johnson, James Weldon. *The Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man. Three Negro Classics: Up from Slavery, The Souls of Black Folk and The Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man*. New York: Avon Books, 1966. 391-508. Print.
- Jones, Anne Goodwyn, and Susan V. Donaldson, Eds. *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*. Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, 1997. Print.
- Jones, Leroi, and Larry Neal, Eds. *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*. New York: William Morrow & Co, Inc., 1968. Print.
- Jones-Royster, Jacqueline. "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own." *CCC* 47.1 (1996): 29-40. Print.
- Joseph, Richard. "Safari Life Slightly Tamed in Africa; An Expensive Jungle Junket Is Modified By Tents With Built-In Bathtubs." *New York Times* 12 Nov 1950:12-3. Print.
- Juan-Navarro, Santiago. *Archival Reflections: Postmodern Fiction of the Americas (Self-reflexivity, Historical Revisionism, Utopia)*. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell UP, 2000. Print.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. "The Look Returned: Knowledge Production and the Construction of Whiteness in Humanities Scholarship and Independent Films." *Whiteness: a Critical Reader*. Ed. Mike Hill. New York: New York UP, 1997. 316-28. Print.
- Karade, Ifa. *The Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts*. York Beach, ME: S. Weiser, 1994. Print.
- Karem, Jeff. *The Romance of Authenticity: The Cultural Politics of Regional and Ethnic Literatures*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2004. Print.

- Kennedy, Randall. *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2003. Print.
- . *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*. New York: Vintage Books, 2003. Print.
- Kerman, Cynthia Earl, and Richard Eldridge. *The Lives of Jean Toomer: A Hunger for Wholeness*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989. Print.
- King, Richard H. "The Uncreated Conscience of My Race/The Uncreated Features of His Face: The Strange Career of Ralph Ellison." *Journal of American Studies*. 34.2 (2000): 303-10. Print.
- Kinloch, Valerie. *June Jordan: Her Life and Letters*. Westport, CT: Praeger 2006. Print.
- Kinnamon, Kenneth, and Michel Fabre, Eds. *Conversations with Richard Wright*. Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 1993. Print.
- Kreyling, Michael. *Inventing Southern Literature*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1998. Print.
- Kuhne, Dave. *African Settings in Contemporary American Novels*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999. Print.
- Larson, Charles. *Invisible Darkness: Jean Toomer & Nella Larsen*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1993. Print.
- Lawless, Kimberly J. "Henderson the Rain King: A Study of the American Hero" *Bulletin of the West Virginia Association of College English Teachers* 13.2 (1991): 153-64. Print.

- Lee, Felicia R. "Scholars Say Chronicler of Black Life Passed for White." *New York Times Reprints*. New York Times, 26 Dec 2010. Web. 13 Apr 2010.
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/27/.../27cane.htm>>.
- Leris, Michael. "African Negroes and the Arts of Carving and Sculpture." *Interrelations of Cultures: Their Contribution to International Understanding*. Westport, CT: UNESCO, 1953. 316-51. Print.
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1998. Print.
- Locke, Alain. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. Print.
- Long, Lisa, Ed. *White Scholars/African American Texts*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2005. Print.
- Luis, William. *Voices from Under: Black Narrative in Latin America and the Caribbean. Contributions in Afro-American and African Studies Series*. Vol. 76. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984. Print.
- Marder, William, and Paul Tice. *Indians in the Americas: The Untold Story*. San Diego: Book Tree, 2004. Print.
- Markovitz, Jonathan. *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004. Print.
- McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies." *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. 2nd ed. Eds. Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1995. 76-87. Print.

- McKay, Nellie. "Naming the Problem that Led to the Question: 'Who Shall Teach African American Literature,' or Are We Really Ready to Disband the Wheatley Court?" *White Scholars/African American Texts*. Ed. Lisa Long. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2005. 17-28. Print.
- McMillan, D.W., & Chavis, D.M. "Sense of Community: A Definition and Theory." *Journal of Community Psychology* 14.1 (1986): 6-23. Print.
- McPherson, Tara. *Reconstructing Dixie: Race Nostalgia*. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. Print.
- "Melinda Haynes Answers Questions." *Harper Collins Australia*. n.d. Web. 12 Nov. 2009. <http://www.harpercollins.com.au/authors/50000776/Melinda_Haynes/index.aspx>.
- Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1967. Print.
- Metress, Christopher. "On That Third Day He Rose: Sacramental Memory and the Lynching of Emmett Till," *Emmett Till and the Literary Memory and Imagination*. Eds. Harriet Pollack and Christopher Metress. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008. 16-30. Print.
- Michael, Robert. *A Concise History of American Anti-Semitism*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005. Print.
- Miller, Adam David, Ed. *Dices or Black Bones: Black Voices of the Seventies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970. Print.
- "Mother of Pearl." *Oprah.com*. Harpo, 15 June 1999. Web. 17 June 2011.
- Morales, Ed. *Living in Spanglish: The Search for Latino Identity in America*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002. Print.

- Morel, Lucas E. *Ralph Ellison and the Raft of Hope*. Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 2004. Print.
- Morrison, Toni. "Home." *The House That Race Built: Black Americans, U.S. Terrain*. Ed. Wahneema Lubiano. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997. 3-12. Print.
- . *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992. Print.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington, IL: Indiana UP, 1988. Print.
- Murray, Timothy F. "Bath Houses." *A Reader's Guide to Lesbian and Gay Studies*. New York: Routledge, 2000. 78-80. Print.
- Nash, Russell W. "Stereotypes and Social Types in Ellison's Invisible Man." *The Sociological Quarterly* 6.4 (1965): 349-60. Print.
- Netanyahu, B. *The Marranos of Spain: From the late 14th to the Early 16th Century According to Contemporary Hebrew Sources*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1999. Print.
- Nigles, Mathias. "'We Need the Stars': Change, Community, and the Absent Father in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*." *Callaloo* 32.4(2009): 1332-52. Print.
- Nixon, Richard. "The Emergence of Africa, Report to President Eisenhower by Vice President Nixon." *Department of State Bulletin* 36.3 (1957): 635-40. Print.
- North, Steven. *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field*. Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton Cook Publishers, 1987. Print.

- Obama, Barack. "Transcript of Speech." *CNN.com*. CNN, 18 AMr 2008. Web. 28 Dec 2009. <<http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/03/18/obama.transcript>>.
- Ogbar, Jeffery O.G. "Rainbow Radicalism: The Rise of Radical Ethnic Nationalism." *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*. Ed. Peniel E. Joseph. New York: Routledge, 2006. 193-228. Print.
- Olmos, Margarite Fernández, and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*. New York: New York UP, 2003. Print.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Owusu, Heike, and Inge Lasting. *Voodoo Rituals*. New York: Sterling Publishing, 2002. Print.
- Packer, Z.Z. *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2003. Print.
- Palmer, C.B. "Safari in Africa or Is It the Poconos? The Jungle Is Still There, and the Wildlife But All the Comforts Are Just Like Home." *New York Times* 8 Sept 1957, Sunday ed., *New York Times Magazine* sec.: SM51. Web. 14 Nov 2009.
- Paton, Alan. "Africa, Wakening, Challenges the World; Nationalism vs. Settler Interests Presage a Social Conflict We Will Ignore at Our Peril." *New York Times* 6 July 1952. Sunday ed., *New York Times Magazine* sec.: SM6. Web. 3 June 2011.
- Pérez, Joseph, and Janet Lloyd. *The Spanish Inquisition: A History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2006. Print.
- Perry, Carolyn, and Mary Weeks-Baxter, Eds. *The History of Southern Women's Literature*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2002. Print.

Pfeiffer, Kathleen. Introduction. *Nigger Heaven*. By Carl Van Vechten. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000. Print.

Piedra, José. "Literary Whiteness and the Afro-Hispanic Difference." *Spanish American Literature: A Collection of Essays. Theoretical Debates in Spanish American Literature*. Eds. David William Foster and Daniel Altamiranda. Vol.1. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1997. 269-298. Print.

Pifer, Ellen. *Saul Bellow: Against the Grain*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990. Print.

Pollack, Harriet, and Christopher Metress, Eds. *Emmett Till in Literary Memory and Imagination*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008. Print.

Poviones-Bishop, Maria. "The Bat and the Guava: Life and Death in the Taino Worldview." *Jay I. Kislak Foundation.Org*. Kislak Foundation, 30 Jul 2001. Web. 20 Oct 2010. <<http://www.kislakfoundation.org/prize/200103.html#34>>.

"The Racial Politics of Ralph Ellison." *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 38 (2002-2003):46. Print.

Rampersad, Arnold. *Ralph Ellison: A Biography*. New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2007. Print.

Randall, Dudley, Ed. *The Black Poets*. New York: Bantam Books, 1988. Print.

Readers' Guide Retrospective. 44 Vols. New York: H.W. Wilson, 1890-1982. Web. 3 June 2011.

Rice, H. William. *Ralph Ellison and the Politics of the Novel*. Lanam, MA: Lexington Books, 2003. Print.

- Rodriguez de Laguna, Asela. "Pri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets: Writing as a Nuyorican/Puerto Rican Strategy of Survival*." *U.S. Latino Literature: A Critical Guide for Students and Teachers*. Eds. Harold Augenbraum and Marguerite Fernandez Olmos. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000. 21-29. Print.
- Roth, Cecil. *A History of the Marranos*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1932. Print.
- Rouse, Irving. *The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1992. Print.
- Rowley, Hazel. *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*. New York: Holt, 2002. Print.
- Saunders, Nicholas J. *The Peoples of the Caribbean: An Encyclopedia of Caribbean Archeology and Traditional Culture*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005. Print.
- Seaver, Robert, and Rohn Engh. "We Crossed the Sahara on a Motor Scooter." *Saturday Evening Post* 20 Dec 1958: 26-7. Print.
- Silverman, Max. *Frantz Fanon's "Black Skin, White Masks": New Interdisciplinary Essays*. *Texts in Culture Series*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2005. Print.
- Singh, Sukhbir. "Political Satire Henderson the Rain King." *Saul Bellow Journal* 18.2 (2002): 23-39. Print.
- Smethurst, James Edward. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2005. Print.
- Smith, Carol R. "The Jewish Atlantic—The Development of Blackness in Saul Bellow." *Saul Bellow Journal* 17.2 (2001): 253–79. Print.
- Smith, Jon, and Deborah Cohn, Eds. *Look Away!: The U.S. South in New World Studies*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004. Print.

Smith, Shawn Mitchell. *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*.

Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999. Print.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*. Detroit:

Wayne State UP, 1977. Print.

Sollors, Werner. *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Decent in American Culture*. New

York: Oxford UP, 1986. Print.

SPFXMasks Original Silicone Masks Movie Quality Halloween Masks." *SPFXMasks*

Original Silicone Masks Movie Quality Halloween Masks. n.d. Web. 12 Nov.

2010. <<http://www.spfxmasks.com/>>.

Spillers, Hortense. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book."

Diacritics 17.2 (1987): 64-81. Print.

Staub, Michael E. *Torn at the Roots: the Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar*

America. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Print.

Steingass, Francis Joseph. *Arabic-English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Asian Educational

Services, 2005. Print.

Stillman, Calvin W., Ed. *Africa in the Modern World*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1955.

Print.

Stockley, Grief. *Daisy Bates: Civil Rights Crusader from Arkansas Jackson. Margaret*

Walker Alexander Series in African American Studies. Jackson: UP of

Mississippi, 2005. Print.

"The Story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott." *MontgomeryAdvertiser.Com*. Montgomery

Advertiser, June 2005. Web. 2 Nov 2009. <<http://www.montgomeryboycott.com>

/frontpage.htm>.

“Struggle for Africa’s Wealth.” *US News* 12 Sept. 1952: 32-4. Print.

Suárez-Orozco, Marcelo M., and Mariela Páez. *Latinos: Remaking America*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002. Print.

Sundquist, Eric J.” The Black Nation Israel.” *Black and White Strangers: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2008. 95-169. Print.

---. *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Bellnap Press, 1993. Print.

The Ten Commandments. Dir Cecil B. DeMille. 1956. Film.

Terkel, Studs. Foreword. *Outside the Magic Circle: the Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr*. By Virginia Foster Durr. Ed. Hollinger F. Barnard. Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 1985. Print.

Tienda, Marta, and Faith Mitchell. *Multiple Origins, Uncertain Destinies: Hispanics and the American Future*. National Research Council (U.S.). Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2006. Print.

Till-Mobley, Maime, and Christopher Benson. *Death of Innocence: The Story of the Hate Crime That Changed America*. New York: Random House, 2003. Print.

Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. New York: Liveright, 1993. Print.

Turner, Patricia, and Charles Russell Coulter. *Dictionary of Ancient Deities*. New York: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.

“United States of Africa? The West’s Stake?” *Newsweek* 8 Dec 1958: 37-8.

Van Vechten, Carl. *Nigger Heaven*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2000. Print.

- “Vice Presidency: A Bridge Builder.” *Time Magazine* 18 Jan 1954. Web. 3 Mar 2009.
<<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,819395-3,00.html>>.
- “Vice Presidency: In a Position to Help” *Time Magazine* Dec. 9, 1957. Web. 17 Sep, 2009. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,810116,00.html>>.
- Wa Thiong’o, Ngugi. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Portsmouth, NH: James Currey/Heinemann, 1997. Print.
- Waisman, Sergio. “The Body As Migration.” *Bilingual Review* 19:2 (1994). 188-93.
Print.
- Waldman, Carl. *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes*. 3rd ed. New York: Checkmark Books, 2006. Print.
- Walker, Alice. “The Black Writer and Southern Community.” *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. 15-21.
Print.
- Walker, Margaret. *Richard Wright, Daemoniac Genius: A Portrait of the Man*. New York: Amistad Book, 1985. Print.
- Warren, Kenneth. *Black and Blue: Ralph Ellison and the Occasion of Criticism*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2003. Print.
- . *Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism*. Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1995. Print.
- Weinberg, Robert. *The Revolution of 1905 in Odessa: Blood on the Steps*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993. Print.

- Wells, Ida B. *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892-1900. The Bedford Series in History and Culture*. Ed. Jacqueline Jones Royster. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1996. Print.
- “While France Fumes over U.S. Arms to Tunisia.” *US News* 29 Nov 1957: 70-1.
- White, George. *Holding the Line: Race, Racism, and American Foreign Policy Toward Africa*. Lanham, MA: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005. Print.
- Whitfield, Stephen J. *A Death in the Delta: the Story of Emmett Till*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991. Print.
- . “Jewish States, Altered States.” *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*. Eds. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg. Waltham, MA: Brandeis UP, 2006. Print.
- Wimbush, Vincent L., and Rosamond C. Rodman, Eds. *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*. New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2001. Print.
- Yarborough, Richard. “Race, Violence, and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass’s ‘The Heroic Slave’.” *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*. Eds. Anne Jones and Susan V. Donaldson. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997. 159-84. Print.
- Yeager, Patricia. “Beyond the Humming Bird: Southern Writers and the Southern Gargantua.” *Haunted Bodies: Gender and southern Texts*. Eds. Anne Jones and Susan Donaldson. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1997. 287-318. Print.