Florida State University Libraries

Electronic Theses, Treatises and Dissertations | The Graduate School

2017

"What's Love Got to Do with It?": The Master-Slave Relationship in Black Women's Neo-Slave Narratives

Jodi L. Price

Follow this and additional works at the DigiNole: FSU's Digital Repository. For more information, please contact lib-ir@fsu.edu

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

"WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?": THE MASTER-SLAVE RELATIONSHIP IN BLACK WOMEN'S NEO-SLAVE NARRATIVES

By

JODI L. PRICE

A Dissertation submitted to the
Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

2017

Jodi L. Price defended this dissertation on March 10, 2017.

The members of the supervisory committee were:

Maxine L. Montgomery

Professor Directing Dissertation

Maxine Jones

University Representative

Dennis Moore

Committee Member

Susan Candace Ward

Committee Member

The Graduate School has verified and approved the above-named committee members, and certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the "chorus of women" that have supported me throughout this process and without whom it would not have been possible. You encouraged me to ask questions I didn't know needed asking and encouraged me to have conversations I didn't know I needed to have. I would like to especially thank Dr. Maxine Montgomery, whose question my first semester at Florida State about Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* generated this entire project. I would also like to thank Dr. Cassandra Jackson who also posed a question to me ten years ago about Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* that I have finally been able to answer. In addition, I could not have completed this project without the help, guidance, and dedication of Dr. Dennis Moore, Dr. Candace Ward, and Dr. Maxine Jones. Thank you all for you overwhelming support. I also want to thank my brother, Jason, for paving the way for this degree and for always listening. I want to thank my mother for always telling me that education would set me free and the rest of my family for all of their support and encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract v

INTRODUCTION 1

1.“A NEW SALLY HEMINGS”: HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION AND CANON-BUILDING IN BARBARA CHASE RIBOUD’S *SALLY HEMINGS* 16

2. “I SAID NOTHING”: UNSPOKEN SACRIFICES AND RESISTANCE IN OCTAVIA BUTLER’S *KINDRED* 46

3. “STILL THERE WAS WHAT THEY NEVER SPOKE”: SILENCE AND DESIRE IN GAYL JONES’S *CORREGIDORA* 76

4. “TRADITION IS FINE, BUT YOU GOTTA KNOW WHEN TO STOP BEING A FOOL”: DISMANTLING WESTERN AUTHORITY IN GLORIA NAYLOR’S *MAMA DAY* 106

EPILOGUE 140

WORKS CITED 148

Biographical Sketch 156

ABSTRACT

A growing impulse in American black female fiction is the reclamation of black female sexuality due to slavery's proliferation of sexual stereotypes about black women. Because of slave law's silencing of rape culture, issues of consent, will, and agency become problematized in a larger dilemma surrounding black humanity and the repression of black female sexuality. Since the enslaved female was always assumed to be willing, because she is legally unable to give consent or resist, locating black female desire within the confines of slavery becomes largely impossible. Yet, contemporary re-imaginings of desire in this context becomes an important point of departure for re-membering contemporary black female subjectivity.

"*What's Love Got to Do With It?*" is an alternative look at master-slave relationships, particularly those between white men and black women, featured in contemporary slave narratives by black women writers. Although black feminist critics have long considered love an unavailable, if not, unthinkable construct within the context of interracial relationships during slavery, this project locates this unexpected emotion within four neo-slave narratives. Finding moments of love and desire from, both, slaveholders and slaves, this study nuances monolithic historical players we are usually quick to adjudicate. Drawing on black feminist criticism, history, and critical race theory, this study outlines the importance of exhuming these historic relationships from silence, acknowledging the legacies they left for heterosexual love and race relations, and exploring what lessons we can take away from them. Recognizing the ongoing tension between remembering and forgetting and the inherent value in both, this study bridges the gap by delineating the importance of perspective and the stories we choose to tell. Rather than being forever haunted by traumatic memories of the past and proliferating stories of violence and abuse, Barbara Chase-Riboud, Octavia Butler, Gayle Jones, and Gloria Naylor's

novels reveal that there are ways to negotiate the past, use what you need, and come to a more holistic place where love is available.

INTRODUCTION

While the beginnings of colonialism led to notable European artists and poets conceptualizing the black female body through art and odes to the Sable Venus, the black woman as a sexual and desirable object was largely omitted from American representation (Honour 178). Despite the fact that there were more black women in America than Europe and anti-interracial sex laws were in the North American colonies since 1630, representations of the sexual black female didn't infiltrate American art and literature until the nineteenth century.[1]

In fact, if or when black female sexuality made its way into American discourse it was largely as a result of miscegenation anxiety. As Elise Lemire observes, from 1802 to the Civil War this anxiety revealed itself in three distinct waves: 1802's Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings scandal, the 1830s immediate abolitionists, and 1863's Emancipation Proclamation.[2] Black female sexuality largely wasn't described unless it was being coupled with white anxiety over black equality. For example, in these three waves that Lemire outlines, when black female sexuality was discussed it was as a political jab to indict white men for their preference for black women. By publicly shaming white male desire for black females, the Federalists and anti-abolitionists sought to quell discussions of black freedom and equality based on the assumption that abolitionists wanted emancipation only because of their desire for black females. Instead by heightening black women's association with slavery, dissenters could solidify the differences

---

[1] There is only one full nude of an African American woman from the nineteenth century that was created by a visiting Swiss artist, Frank Buchser. His 1867 piece, "Black Girl in a Stream" was exhibited in New York but failed to sell. African American artists also avoided the female nude, for it wasn't until the twentieth century that that black female body was considered an appropriate subject. While the black male nude was much more pervasive, and frequently used by abolitionists, Hugh Honour argues that this is because the black female body could never convey "philanthropic" thoughts because of her relationship with "libidinal" thoughts (Collins "Economies"102).

[2] Lemire's overview includes depictions of interracial coupling created in New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, but I am privileging these waves as national anxieties.

between whites and blacks and cite the naturalness of segregation and unnaturalness of interracial love. These originary associations of this body with slavery in the foundations of American discourse mark a difficulty in distinguishing black female sexuality from the context of slavery and even to fully understand it outside of the white imaginary.

Since "[t]he institution of slavery is now widely regarded as the source of stereotypes about the black woman" (Carby 20), a growing impulse in American black female fiction then is the reclamation of black female sexuality within novels about slavery. Akin to Carol Henderson who contends that in order for "African American [women] to reconstitute their humanity, they must return to the site of that violence" (*Scarring* 38), black women writers are returning to the source of stereotype and trauma—slavery—in order to disassociate the black female from her historical shackles and embrace an unencumbered sexual subjectivity. As Farah Jasmine Griffin notes in her 1996 article "Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women's Bodies, the Erotic and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery," "black women writers have started to explore female bodies as sites of healing, pleasure and resistance" (521). While this has become an important endeavor, Griffin also notes its challenges: "[T]he burden of a historical legacy that deems black women 'over-sexed' makes the reclamation of the erotic black female body difficult" (526). Not only does the stereotype of the "over-sexed" black female make this endeavor difficult, but since the enslaved female was always constructed as willing, given her legal status as a non-subject unable to give consent or resist (Hartman 81), the reconfiguration of pleasure in novels of slavery becomes challenging, particularly as it manifests in interracial relationships between masters and slaves. This study participates in this growing trend by mapping out moments of imagined pleasure between master and slave as they manifest in contemporary novels of slavery by black women writers.

Rethinking nineteenth-century slavery discourse, generally, has been a growing trend in African American literature. The neo-slave narrative, coined by Bernard Bell in 1987, gained mainstream attention in the late sixties and early seventies but has continued on for over forty years, from texts such as Ernest J. Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning, *Beloved* (1987), to James McBride's more recent *The Good Lord Bird* (2013) and Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* (2016). Frustrated with white control over history and black stories, particularly William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (1967), black writers began using the neo-slave narrative to rewrite the romanticized representations of slavery that largely dominated popular consciousness by using the literary form that voiced African American political subjectivity for the first time.[3] Knowing that a nostalgic representation of the era was only possible by excluding the first-hand perspectives given by slaves in the slave narrative tradition, contemporary black writers sought to dust off the pioneers of black radicalism and re-privilege the nineteenth-century voices of slave writers like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs.

Not only is the goal of the neo-slave narrative to, as Toni Morrison says, "put authority back into the hands of the slave" (McDowell "Negotiating" 160), but many scholars find that this genre also attempts to show how historical conditioning has shaped contemporary reality. Ashraf Rushdy's *Neo-Slave Narratives* notes that many of these novels are unified by the fact that they represent slavery's "lasting cultural meaning and enduring social consequences" (533). Similarly, Deborah McDowell and Arnold Rampersand's *Slavery and the Literary Imagination* argue that this genre is writing in response to "the persistence of social and economic conditions of neo-slavery in black American life" (xiii). By illustrating how slavery's past affects the

[3] For more information about neo-slave narratives see Ashraf H. A. Rushdy's *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form (1999)*

present, this genre doesn't attempt to merely present a bleak perspective on contemporary America, but by drawing the connection between these eras most neo-slave narratives promulgate a kind of corrective narrative. The often corrective impulse of the genre suggests the possibility for national healing and social transformation.

Finding balance between dismantling master narratives while embracing a shared history is witnessed in many of the neo-slave narratives written by black women. As Deborah E. McDowell contends, "these novels posit a female-gendered subjectivity, more complex in dimension, that dramatizes not what was *done* to slave women, but what they *did* with what was done to them" ("Negotiating" 146). Similarly, Angelyn Mitchell also notes this anti-victim impulse in recent fiction by black women. In *The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction* (2002), Mitchell notes the impulse to shift away from narratives of victimization to narratives of freedom and agency. In black women's neo-slave narratives, Mitchell finds what she terms a "liberatory narrative" or "a contemporary novel that engages in the historical period of chattel slavery in order to provide new models of liberation by problematizing the concept of freedom" (4). By rethinking slavery as a ripe site of possibility, Mitchell views these novels as having the power to heal the wounds of America's violent past.

The genre's liberatory impulse closely aligns with the "logic" of the political and social conditions of the era in which they are written (Rushdy, *Neo-slave* 5). Interestingly, liberation discourse closely aligned itself with sexuality when these novels were first being written in the late sixties and early seventies. As Pamela Barnett notes, "Sixties era Americans routinely conceptualized social change and sexual freedom on a continuum" (xvi). Although now reputed as naïve, Herbert Marcuse's theories on "liberated desire as resistance to social oppression"

became a popular mantra of this progressive period. The late sixties and early seventies in particular presented itself as exceptional for its "permissive cultural attitude" (Barnett xiii). Interracial sex then figured prominently as symbolic evidence of sexual and racial liberation: the overturning of anti-miscegenation laws in *Loving V. Virginia* (1967), and the portrayal of interracial couples on screen in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinnner?* (1967) and *The Jeffersons* (1975) all suggested that America had progressively welcomed black sexuality and racial harmony. Despite the growing cultural cachet of this sentiment, most black feminist writers—Angela Davis, bell hooks, Paula Giddings, and Deborah Gray White—refused to participate in this discourse, some directly challenging it (Barnett xviii). Black feminist critics found themselves particularly skeptical of this progressive enthusiasm, and black women scholars set out to remind readers that "white man/black woman relations in the post-1960s era are compromised (perhaps even poisoned) by their history" (Barnett xix). Black feminist critics didn't view the promotion of interracial relationships as a progressive moment that broke with a white supremacist past, but saw it as a mere re-branding of the past as an "evolutionary tale of repressed interracial intimacy maturing into an open declaration of desire for the other" (Sexton164).

Black feminists re-historization of interracial sex and skepticism of its liberatory possibilities, at first, appear to align their sentiments with the Black nationalist agenda of this era as well. The black power movement argued that the growth of black pride should be an important deterrent to interracial sex and marriage, for not only would interracial sex, particularly between black women and white men, perpetuate the abuse of black women, but interracial sex would also prevent black women from producing black revolutionaries (Verge 104). The reincarnation of black women as breeders for the revolution encouraged many black

feminists to read black liberation as black male control: the "black power movement made synonymous black liberation and the effort to create a social structure wherein black men could assert themselves as patriarch, controlling community, family, and kin" (hooks *Black Looks,* 98). Privileging the reconstruction of black masculinity, black men, unlike black women, were encouraged to engage in interracial relations because they had been emasculated and needed to exercise revenge.[4] Problematically, "many Black women perceived sexual liaisons between white women and black men not only as personally offensive but also as a threat to the integrity of the struggle" (Perkins 2000). Therefore, black women grew frustrated with the movement's argument that "the black man's access to white women [w]as a prerequisite of his freedom" (Wallace 27) and saw black male sexism as a mere reincarnation of white male patriarchy invested in the oppression of women.[5]

The promotion of interracial sex by white liberals and the restriction of interracial sex for black women by black men mark this site as a contradictory and contested space. By the 1980s, black feminist criticism grew as a reaction against sixties and seventies white progressive discourse, sexist black nationalism, and the omission of the enslaved female in the renewed interest in slavery scholarship.[6] This tripartite control over black women's bodies as ahistorically free, as revolutionary breeders, or ignored altogether encouraged black feminists to reclaim their bodies from outsiders. Since slavery functions as the originary source for most of this discourse, black feminists have largely been most vocal about the rehistoriticization of interracial sex in

[4] This is exemplified in Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* in which he purposely rapes white women as an act of revenge, after practicing rape on black women in his neighborhood.

[5] For more discussion on the sexism inherent in the black power movement, see Toni Cade Bambara's "On the Issue of Roles."

[6] Early black feminist criticism reveals itself to be more concerned with racial oppression than sexist oppression; as bell hooks notes "We clung to the hope that liberation from racial oppression would be all that was necessary for us to be free" (*Ain't I* 1). Later it would become more invested in intersectional politics.

America, particularly between black women and white men. As bell hooks argues in frustration, there is a "continuation of the notion that ending racist domination is really about issues of interracial sexual access, a myth that must be critiqued so that this society can confront the actual material, economic, and moral consequences of perpetuating white supremacy" (*Yearning* 61). Poignantly then, scholars such as Angela Davis, Hazel Carby, Saidiya Hartman, and Hortense Spillers have sought to challenge progressive discourse in its attempts to falsely liberate black female sexuality from its historical shackles. Davis was one of the first scholars to dismantle seventies slavery discourse, likely influenced by *Loving v. Virginia*, that began to rethink white slaveholders in love with their enslaved concubines. For example, in one of the most canonical slavery histories, *Roll, Jordan, Roll,* Eugene Genovese claims that most of the white men that had affairs with slave women did, in fact, love them:

> The tragedy of miscegenation lay, not in its collapse into lust and sexual exploitation, but in the terrible pressure to deny the delight, affection, and love that so often grew from tawdry beginnings…Many white men who began by taking a slave girl in an act of sexual exploitation ended by loving her and the children she bore. (Genovese 419, 415)

In her scathing indictment of Genovese's work, Davis is quick to point out that white men's "unlimited access to black women's bodies" makes their affections for their slaves irrelevant, for it was always as "oppressors…that white men approached Black women's bodies" (25-26). In the same vein, Carby set out to dismantle the continuing patriarchal notion that historical rape was in fact "sexual compliance" (22). While careful not to transhistoricize rape, Carby also reminds readers that despite slave emancipation, there remained "political and ideological limits imposed on [black women's] sexuality" (61). Hartman's scholarship helps solidify both Davis

and Carby's by exploring the master-slave relationship from a legal standpoint in which the slave's consent is ultimately moot. Thus, because the slave's submission is read in the white imagination as her willing participation, rape becomes conflated with her desire and ultimately her sexuality. Arguably, it is not until Suzette Spencer's 2006 work on the Sally Hemings/Thomas Jefferson relationship that we develop a name for the "legibility of coercion and submission in captive sexual relations" (508). By naming this phenomenon "coersubmission," Spencer offers us language for what Harriet Jacobs could only term as "something akin to freedom" almost one-hundred and fifty years later (465).

It seems no coincidence that amidst this budding scholarship, Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is re-released in 1973 after historian John Blassingame had argued that it wasn't authentic in 1972 because it didn't meet typical slave narrative conventions. Its third release in 1987 with comprehensive biography and archival research by Jean Fagan Yellin proved its authenticity and solidified its place and importance in the American canon as the ur-text of African American women's fiction. Thinking of Jacobs's text as a "moment of origins," many black women scholars began extending the dialogue about black female sexuality that Jacobs first began in 1861 (Rushdy, *Neo-slave* 5). Not only are these contemporary scholars rethinking black female sexuality, but they are thinking about it particularly as it manifests in interracial sexual encounters between masters and slaves.

Scholarship surrounding interracial sex in American literature almost always privileges the nineteenth century, for there is a surfeit of mulatto fiction and miscegenation propaganda surrounding the Civil War. Most scholarship on these topics notes the myriad uses of mulatto characters and miscegenation as tropes to comment on America's cultural, social, and political issues; for example, the breaking of social taboos, issues of sexual perversion, the anxiety of

collapsing social distinctions, as well as ways to engage sexual fantasies (Jackson 32).[7] As revealed by a survey of nineteenth-century literature on this topic, most black female characters suffer tragic fates. If sentimental or romantic love is posited successfully between masters and their slaves in antebellum literature the black female typically ends up dying, usually by suicide, as a result of her white suitor pursuing a more deserving and acceptable white wife. It is not until the postbellum era that authors like Lydia Maria Child begin to present successful interracial marriages, although this suggestion was radical and a rare phenomenon and has been critically dismissed for its perpetuation of white supremacy despite its progressive intent.[8]

Although most scholarship on interracial sex has been relegated to the nineteenth-century, Jared Sexton notes that despite black feminist criticism's important work done in the sixties, seventies, and eighties, contemporary scholarship on mulattoes and interracial sex, or multiracial discourse more generally, also reveals a continued investment in "the primal scene of sexual encounter between master and slave—white man, black woman—in order to find there not a tale of terror but a tale of romance" (Sexton 85). Sexton offers an overview of three recent texts engaging in this topic and their attempt to intervene "on the pessimistic reduction of historical complexity afoot in popular and scholarly culture" (85), or more specifically their attempt to disprove black feminist criticism's insistence that contemporary interracial intimacy is connected to America's slave past and the "no-possible-consent rule" (Gordon-Reed 319). Through an overview of Gregory Stephens's *On Racial Frontiers* (1999), Randall Kennedy's

---

[7] For other texts on 19th century interracial sex see Clymer, Jeffory A. *Family Money: Property, Race, and Literature in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford University Press, 2013. And Paulin, Diana Rebekkah. *Imperfect Unions: Staging Miscegenation in U.S. Drama and Fiction*. University of Minnesota, 2012.

[8] See Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), William Wells Brown's *Clotel* (1853), Lydia Maria Child's *A Romance of the Republic* (1867) and Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892).

Interracial Intimacies (2003), and Stephan Talty's *Mulatto America* (2004), Sexton offers a scathing indictment of these scholars' attempts to posit a utopian America in which interracial intimacy is displaced from the "structural dimensions of racial slavery" (111). Critical that this scholarships attempts to prove the "progressive liberalization of U.S. society," Sexton offers a counter-narrative, firmly rooted in black feminist criticism, of white supremacy and its investment in "interracial life" as a form of its own "maintenance" and "the extension of its violence" (100). As Sexton reveals, this seemingly progressive trend once again conveniently manifests itself as a utopian impulse that ultimately sets out to undermine the important scholarship done by black feminists.

With a surfeit of competing secondary scholarship surrounding master-slave relationships, it is important to explore the ways in which contemporary black women writers take up this topic in their novels. Using slavery as a backdrop, the context for these neo-slave narratives become contested spaces for black women as white supremacy runs rampant and the peculiar institution leaves little room for resistance. Yet, despite these difficulties, many of these authors also privilege interracial relationships, particularly those between white men and black women, as ripe sites of inquiry, possibility, and even love.

In Gayl Jones's groundbreaking neo-slave narrative *Corregidora* (1975), Martin, the husband of Mama, dares to ask Great Gram and Gram a question about their slavemaster that no one else had the nerve to, "How much was hate for Corregidora and how much was love?" (131). Despite Great Gram and Gram's excessive retellings of sexual violence at the hands of slavemaster Corregidora, Martin's suggestion that hate and love for one's slavemaster may exist simultaneously re-conceptualizes the rape victims of slavery in complex ways. While hate is an obvious emotional response to a slavemaster's physical, legal, social, and cultural oppression,

love is a tenuous emotion that opens up a more nuanced conception of slavery while also dangerously romanticizing the violence of slave abuse. Since slave laws dictated that consent was moot for the enslaved female, she was presumed to always be willing (Hartman 81). While presumability might translate as desirability under slave law and in the white imagination, this doesn't make it true for the slave. Since resistance to sexual advances might result in torture or death, the enslaved female had no choice in this context. Thus, Jones appears to be making a distinction between consent and love. suggesting that love may exist even when there is no consent. To present desire and love amidst conditions of coercion, Jones asks readers to rethink interracial sex during slavery; but why is it important that we find love in the context of slavery, a site of brutalized violence and abuse that was legally sanctioned? (Sexton 111).[9]

Interestingly, Jones's novel is not the only neo-slave narrative to pose this question. Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Sally Hemings* (1979) presents Thomas Jefferson's relationship with Sally as a slave-initiated love story and artist Kara Walker has similarly presents this relationship in her controversial silhouettes by featuring a slave girl fellate a figure that resembles a founding father, in the piece *An Abbreviated Emancipation* (2002). Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) also forces her contemporary character Dana Franklin to come to terms with her great-great-great grandfather's love and later rape of his slave, Alice: "I was beginning to realize that he loved the woman" (124), and, finally, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1988) also features contemporary characters that repeatedly question the relationship between their foremother, Sapphira, and her master, Bascombe Wade: "What really happened between her great-grandmother and Bascombe Wade?" (138, 308).

[9] In noting the same impulse to rethink slavemasters as affectionate toward their slaves in multicultural discourse, Sexton also asks"[w]hy…*must it be important* that we find 'genuine affection' at this site of extremity, amid this organized violence, under the terms of this institutionalized brutality?" (Sexton 111).

While one might think these novels would easily align themselves with the trends witnessed in black feminist criticism, or what Annette Gordon-Reed calls the "no-possible consent-rule" (319), a closer look reveals otherwise. These neo-slave narratives written by black women continually posit love as a possibility between masters and slaves. This impetus seemingly aligns these authors with scholars and critics that have been chastised for their white supremacist politics. While these novels appear to promote troubling ideologies that black feminist criticism was adamant about correcting, it would be naïve to think that Jones, Chase-Riboud, Walker, Butler, and Naylor are all dismissive or unaware of black feminist criticism and its concerns.

This study seeks to explore these authors' and artists' investment in finding love, or something akin to it, in a context where "violence and punishment were inexplicably tethered to 'loving' sentiment and submission" (Spencer 511), within a legal system that says consent is moot, and within a historical framework where love was sentimentalized in order to rationalize subjugation (McDowell, "Must" 97). While the discursive space surrounding interracial sex and love has been so hostile that there seems little room to raise the subject and has thus often resulted in monolithic perspectives, this study will reveal the literal and symbolic power of interracial contact as a locus for the perpetuation of racial erasure and white denial but also as fertile sites of reconciliation, whether it be communal or individual. My focus on contemporary representations of black female sexuality allows me to privilege this historically invisible body, while mediating against the power relations that it also evokes. These bodies present an important site in which to consider black female sexuality in a wider context that perhaps revises previous misunderstandings.

Chapter 1 focuses on Barbara Chase-Riboud's *Sally Hemings* (1979). Though it is marketed by many as a romance novel, this fictionalized first person account of the concubine of Thomas Jefferson reveals how this relationship came to be and last for thirty-eight years. The chapter explores how, for the fictional Hemings, slave training disavowed an alternative subjectivity unencumbered by scientific racism. Hemings must learn to confront her cultural erasure in order to bear witness to the delusions of an uncompromised relationship with Jefferson and claim her own identity. What liberates Chase-Riboud's Sally Hemings from silence and erasure is inexplicably tied to a collective and generational awareness of her fellow slaves' narratives. It is due to Hemings's canon-building of slave experiences and her dissemination of them within the novel that ultimately enables her and her progeny possibility outside their physical and psychic shackles.

Chapter 2 examines Octavia Butler's novel, *Kindred* (1979), and its negotiation of time travel not as an opportunity of change but for the restaging of violence. Similar to Chase-Riboud's Sally Hemings, Dana must also reconcile with the slavemaster's claims of love for his slave (124). While Dana soon learns that unrequited love in slavery may lead to rape, she is too late to prevent the sexual violation from happening to her ancestor, nor does she want to prevent it because of its effect on her existence. Because she is forced to participate in the staging of her foremother's rape, Dana learns the complicated webs of complicity and resistance in slavery. Whereas from a contemporary perspective it was easy for the protagonist to judge her slave family, instead, *Kindred* chronicles a contemporary journey toward understanding slave accomodationism in its full complexity in order to garner appreciation for ancestral sacrifice and survival.

Chapter 3 examines Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* (1975), arguing that oppression and desire, even love, may exist simultaneously in and outside the context of slavery and that it becomes important for the progeny of slaves to acknowledge the presence of these simultaneous emotions. By positing interracial desire in slavery, Jones forces readers to confront how slaves are taught and learn a distorted version of desire, love, and sexuality. Despite the silence that surrounds slave sexuality, it becomes important that granddaughter Ursa investigates and discovers these emotions so that she can be unencumbered by the limiting and traumatic narratives of sexual abuse that her grandmothers pass down to her. By realizing the intergenerational trauma that is being passed down in her family because they are only sharing stories of violence and abuse, Ursa must also locate love in these stories so that she does not deny her own ability to practice this emotion.

Chapter 4 argues that while Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* has often been noted for its subversion of Western written traditions and metaphysics, many have failed to consider how the relationship between slave master, Bascombe Wade, and slave, Sapphira Wade has created a problematic tradition that gets perpetuated by Sapphira's progeny. Consequently, the relationships of her progeny and their spouses destructively conflate possession and love thereby reinforcing the hierarchies typically associated with master and slave relationships. Yet, the novel's sympathetic treatment of controlling patriarchs offers a unique insight into figures we are quick to dismiss, and identifies the underlying pain of loss that encourages destructive behaviors and belief systems. This character analysis also allows the author to connect these individual behaviors to larger social and cultural systems that operate out of a similar source of lack. By embracing alternative belief systems that dismantle the illusion of separation, the Day family is

able to come to terms with the loss that plagues their family and ultimately break its cycles of trauma.

The epilogue of this dissertation explores artist Kara Walker's installation *An Abbreviated Emancipation* for its visual references to desire within the master-slave relationship. Like the novels above, this piece uses the context of slavery to force viewers to confront the legacies of the sexual master-slave relationship and its bearing on contemporary race relations. This piece leaves itself open to viewer interpretation through its ambiguous questioning of consent in the context of coercion. Presented as a kind of Rorschach test, this piece becomes a relevant and useful exploration of our nation's collective memory and its lingering anxieties surrounding interracial sex.

This study is an attempt to examine a trend in black women's fiction that has largely been underexplored. While a few of these novels have been examined individually for their investment in love between white male masters and black female slaves, there has yet to be a cohesive project that acknowledges all four of these texts in conversation. This examination considers these master-slave relationships as originary sites that unfold racial, gendered, and political ideas particularly as they sometimes birth mixed-race characters that challenged the very legitimacy of these ideas. Examining these relationships as foundational signs that have propelled significant and lasting narratives into the American imaginary, this study considers how writers attempt to expose and exorcise the fixed narratives surrounding them in favor of alternative ones that help liberate the imaginary from its shackles.

CHAPTER ONE

"A NEW SALLY HEMINGS": HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION AND CANON-BUILDING IN BARBARA CHASE-RIBOUD'S *SALLY HEMINGS*

In *Sally Hemings* (1979) Barbara Chase-Riboud uses the experience of Thomas Jefferson's slave mistress as a locus for rethinking black female sexuality and identity in the late twentieth century. Reclamation efforts in the 1970s by Jean Fagan Yellin and Henry Louis Gates Jr. expanded the presence of the black woman's experiences bringing it to the forefront of social concern.[10] Similarly, what liberates Chase-Riboud's Sally Hemings from silence and erasure is inexplicably tied to a collective, and generational, awareness of her fellow slaves' narratives. It is due to the novel's canon-building of slave experiences and the dissemination of them that ultimately allows this fictional Sally Hemings and her progeny possibility outside their physical and psychic shackles.

Using this famous master-slave relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Hemings as a site of origin for black female erasure and misrepresentation, Chase-Riboud extends the conversation surrounding the subject of master-slave relationships by exposing the psychologies of master and slave in a thirty-eight year relationship in order to understand how it is that a master and slave might come to love one another. The novel reveals how Hemings's lack of consciousness outside of her role as slave emboldens her affections for her master. Similarly, through "cultural erasure," Jefferson's slave becomes a more palatable (Gates *Signifying* 4). By exposing the dynamics that make this relationship possible, the novel then positions Hemings's

[10] Jean Fagan Yellin is cited as proving the authenticity of Harriet Jacob's slave narrative and Henry Louis Jr has been instrumental in discovering marginalized texts by black authors, such as Harriet E. Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859).

self-awakening as an antidote to her blind-complicity and her subsequent placement in "trash bin of History" ("Afterword" 356). Such a provocation occurs through Hemings's self-narratization, discovery of her family's history, and collective black activism as witnessed through Nat Turner's rebellion. The novel thus chronicles Heming's journey to self-discovery as counter-discourse to master narratives of slave-initiated relationships.

Sally Hemings, as "historiographic metafiction," fills in the gaps of Sally Hemings's life that have largely been suppressed, while also revealing the white supremacist ideology through which she was originally erected (Hutcheon *Poetics* 5). By pinpointing the ideological practice as erasure, Hemings's character is thus able to resist essentialist racist reduction and provide her own independent narrative. Yet, unlike the postmodern impulse that suggests identity and agency are illusory constructions, the novel reveals the ways in which non-agency makes Sally much more vulnerable to white supremacy's definitions. Consequently, by the end of the novel, Sally's newfound sense of self is closely linked to other African American shared experiences, such as her mother's narratives of rape in her matriarchal line, her brother, James's, resistant tactics, and also Nat Turner's collective activism. Ultimately, the novel suggests that without the knowledge of the shared black American experience it is easy to become complicit in the master narrative of blackness. Yet, with that knowledge, Sally's new self-definition is able to resist that impulse and instead offers methods of political action for her and her children.

The novel does not follow a linear progression of Hemings's self-discovery—from love to resistance—but instead begins on the cusp of her self-awakening. By beginning with this transformative moment, the novel makes Heming's later ruminations on love with her master more difficult to digest. Set in 1830 Monticello, Virginia after Thomas Jefferson has died, the novel opens with the fictional Sally meeting white census taker Nathan Langdon. Knowing the

local rumors surrounding this woman, Langdon begins a flirtatious affair with Hemings after their first meeting out of curiosity and lust. Upon getting to know Langdon after several visits, the ex-slave woman begins to tell this man her life story and in doing so recognizes a newfound sense of self: "She had lived a life; she was startled to perceive that life. As if it had been kept in a long underground passage which ascended now and again into the midst of tremendous events call History. History, which had left her alone in a vast, unfamiliar, unwanted wasteland" (47). By vocalizing her own narrative, Hemings begins to include herself in a discourse that had until this moment largely erased her from History. Upon transcending from an "unwanted wasteland," the ex-slave begins to uncover "a person she had never known from a life she had no sense of. From these afternoons emerged a new Sally Hemings" (39). The newness of this Sally Hemings not only comments on the character's self-awakening that occurs through narrating her own story, but also undermines the previous representations of her in the master narratives of American History. Starting the novel from Sally Hemings's perspective, one history could not supply and at a place where she has an epiphany about her subjectivity, aptly sets itself up as a rupture in cycles of unspeakability and also provides counter-discourse to over two hundred years of silence surrounding this historical figure.

While Sally's self-narratization is a poignant moment, it competes against multiple discourses that have already established the historical person of Sally Hemings. Through court documents like the census, property records, as well as racial epithets, poems, and even artwork, Jefferson's mistress has already been demarcated as a salacious character or merely dismissed in the white imaginary. Although there have been several attempts by African American writers, artists, and family members to rescue Hemings from marginalization and defamation, their efforts have largely been rejected by white scholars as insubstantial and/or historically

improbable.[11] Tangentially, in Chase-Riboud's novel, Nathan Langdon participates in this discourse by changing Sally Hemings's race to white in the 1831 census, which is not just a fictional maneuver by Chase-Riboud but also a historical reality. Attempting to decipher why this move might have been necessary, *Sally Hemings* reveals the root of white supremacy and its delusions. The fact that the census taker can change Sally's race to whatever he wishes reveals how the definitions of blackness are malleable in order to accommodate white needs. To recognize Sally as a black widow still living on Monticello land after the President's death would be unlawful[12] and would mean confronting a sexual relationship that would disrupt racist notions. In order to side-step this discomfort and make this ex-slave a more agreeable love-interest, it is easier for Langdon to mold Sally Hemings into a white woman.

Conceptually, Langdon notes that Hemings negates everything he was taught about slavery: "a white slave didn't exist" (8). Because Sally Hemings's light skin challenges easy definitions and because her relationship with Jefferson disrupts slavery and enlightenment thinking's theories on racism, Langdon must change her racial makeup in the census to validate the nation, the institution, and his desires. Langdon's questioning "how was it possible that, at the pinnacle of his power, Thomas Jefferson had chosen a slave when he could have chosen any white woman alive?" (8) reveals his inherent conceptions of black female undesirability. By changing Hemings's race to white, he authorizes his and Jefferson's romantic feelings for this woman. Although Hemings could still be had by Langdon, as a black woman in antebellum

[11] For example, although Madison Hemings, Sally's son with Jefferson, did in fact write a memoir in 1873 confirming his parent's relationship, Suzette Spencer notes that it was "consistently nullified or suppressed [as] a seminal piece of testimony" (511).

[12] According to the black laws of Virginia, "no negro, emancipated since the first day of May eighteen hundred and six, or hereafter, or claiming his right to freedom under a negro so emancipated, shall after being twenty-one years of age, remain in this state more than one year without lawful permission." See "Free Negroes." *The Code of Virginia.* Richmond: Ritchie, Dunnavant and Company, 1860.

America, his decision to make her white makes romantic feelings more palatable in accordance with his racist ideologies.

Interestingly, it is upon learning of this racial change that Sally's sense of self erupts once again. Frustrated that white men continually decide her life and fate, Hemings lays a scathing indictment on the census-taker's attempts to play God "with my flesh and spirit" (51). Langdon is confused by her frustration, for he viewed this racial switch as a favor: "Think how much easier it is for you now, staying in Virginia with all that's going on…not to have that sword of expulsion hanging over your head!" (50). Despite this seeming altruism, Hemings is quick to acknowledge how this move is really an attempt to dismiss her lived experiences as a black woman and a slave as well as exculpate Jefferson from blame and scandal. Langdon's ability to write Sally Hemings into legal existence by erasing her black past leaves the freedwoman with nothing, not even "her mind, her thoughts, her feelings, her history" (53). Upon realizing the continued attempts of erasure being enacted upon her and the ways in which she was previously complicit in this process, Sally Hemings begins to resist whites' attempts to define her and instead embrace a subjectivity all her own for the first time.

"The Death of the Other": Postmodernism and the Shared Black Experience

Sally Hemings offers new discursive space where the unspoken is made audible and where history can be reconceptualized. Because of this endeavor, the novel might be read as what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction" (5). Hutcheon defines this genre as "novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5). The self-reflexivity to which the phrase metafiction refers suggests that historiography calls into question the validity of history as a universal truth while

commenting on its own historical fictiveness. Reading history as discourse enables postmodern fiction to "unmask and denaturalize the processes by which such discourses are made" (Ryan 129). Through this unmasking, Hayden White notes that it becomes more obvious to see how "every representation of the past has specifiable ideological implications" (qtd in Hutcheon, *Poetics,* 120). Because history is debunked as a construct, the barrier between history and literature also collapses because both fields are considered discursive systems that are used for interpretation. This point therefore allows authors to rewrite history based on the consideration that no stories are false. Consequently, this genre becomes particularly useful to writers invested in revisionist efforts to restore or exhume previously marginalized figures and stories.

The scenes above reveal themselves invested in the postmodern concern of "whose truth gets told" (Hutcheon, *Poetics*, 123). By exposing the ways in which history is inherently biased with ideology and perspective, *Sally Hemings* also demonstrates its investment in the dismantling of the underlying assumptions of Eurocentric history. Chase-Riboud asks readers to think of the history of American slavery and Sally Hemings as discourse and to interrogate their cultural implications for the past and present. Not only does Chase-Riboud excavate Sally from marginalization, the novel also sets out to undermine the superficial existence Sally Hemings has long had in the American cultural imagination. Because representations of her largely circulated around scandal—James Callender's 1802 outing of Sally as Thomas Jefferson's mistress was an attempt to defame the president's character for his second Presidential election—information about dusky Sally is scarce and typically offers nothing more than a paper-like substance of her history. Thus, not only does *Sally Hemings* flesh out this mysterious woman's complex character, but the novel also tells the unspoken, untold narrative of her life. Through this project, Chase-Riboud rights the wrongs of the past while carving new territory for the representation of

Sally Hemings, slave women, and black women in general. While these points reveal the author's investment in postmodern issues, postmodernism as a whole has not gone without scrutiny in African American scholarship.

In *Crossing Borders Through Folklore,* Alma Jean Billingslea-Brown cites the Civil Rights and the Black Power Movements as events that enabled black Americans to "define, perhaps for the first time since the 1920s, a functional collective identity and to mobilize those definitions through the creation and control of cultural institutions" (10). This collective identity helped unearth the testimony of previously silenced African American voices and solidified black Americans' place in the national arena. Troublingly, this collective identity was "soon rendered irrelevant as militant protest was stifled by a powerful repressive 'postmodern' state" (hooks 25). While postmodernism and the postmodern novel became a useful device in its deconstruction of history as a unitary truth, revisionist efforts, and the privileging of difference, African American scholars and theorists also grew wary of its breakdown of all essentialist categories. Invested in dismantling the notion of a "coherent, autonomous subject," postmodernism positioned itself antithetically to the collective identity erected by African American radicals in the previous decade (Hutcheon, "Circling," 151). As a result, black scholars were suspicious. For example, in *Loose Canons,* Henry Louis Gates Jr. posits, "Consider the irony: precisely when we (and other third world peoples) obtain the complex wherewithal to define our black subjectivity in the republic of Western letters, our theoretical colleagues declare that there ain't no such thing as a subject" (36). Other scholars such as Toni Morrison and Nancy Hartsock[13] also align themselves with Gates' claims, and in a later essay even Hutcheon notes

[13] See Toni Morrison "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" *Michigan Quarterly Review* (Winter 1989): 1-34. and Nancy Hartsock "Rethinking Modernism: Minority vs. Majority Theories" in *The Nature and Context of Minority*

the ways in which postmodernism's deconstruction of the subject is somewhat "apolitical" and a "luxury" ("Circling" 150, 151).

In the essay "'Circling the Downspout of Empire': Postcolonialism and Postmodernism," Hutcheon argues that while postmodernism is often inescapable from the dominant culture within which it exists, postcolonial and feminist enterprises have "distinct political agendas and often a theory of agency that allow them to go beyond the postmodern limits of deconstructing existing orthodoxies into the realms of social and political action" (150). This issue of political and social action becomes pertinent for African American scholars so that the dismantling of authority and master narratives doesn't remain merely a theoretical enterprise. As bell hooks notes, "If radical postmodernist thinking is to have a transformative impact then a critical break with the notion of "authority" as "mastery over" must not simply be a rhetorical device, it must be reflected in habits of being, including styles of writing as well as chosen subject matter" (hooks "Postmodern", 25). Consequently, hooks finds postmodernism's critique of over-determined identities useful in deconstructing racists stereotypes, yet finds it important to also maintain some semblance of "the specific history and experience of African-Americans and the unique sensibilities and culture that arise from that experience" (hooks "Postmodern" 29). The awareness of a shared black experience becomes crucial to Sally Hemings' sense of self and consequent break with white supremacy in the novel.

Having received a complex version of Sally's humanity at the beginning of the novel, when Sally starts to recollect the beginnings of her affair with the President, readers become more aware of its perversion. Because of this initial Sally, readers become unable to accept an "erased" version of this character, one that is stripped down to signification. In effect, it becomes

---

Discourse. Ed. Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990: 17-36.

more difficult to view her relationship with Langdon, Jefferson, and other whites as void of force, coercion, and power. Rather, because the initial chapters offer readers a complicated and holistic portrait of Sally's humanity, it is Sally's naiveté and more importantly, Jefferson's delusions about his slave that become more obvious and revelatory.

Yet, while the novel opens with Sally's self-awakening, most critics have difficulty with the later scenes that describe the romantic nature of this master-slave relationship. After Sally's confrontation with Langdon she begins to reflect on the beginnings of her relationship with the President. Sally's initial ruminations of her love affair with this Founding Father are nothing short of uncomfortable, particularly considering that the initiation of the couple's first sexual encounter is seemingly attributed to the fifteen-year-old slave girl. After being beckoned by the President to his bedroom, Sally says,

> His presence for me was command enough; I took control of him. I bent forward and pressed a kiss on the trembling hands that encompassed mine, and the contact of my lips with his flesh was so violent that I lost all memory of what came afterward. I felt around me an exploding flower, not just of passion, but of long deprivation, a hunger for things forbidden, for darkness and unreason, the passion of rage against the death of the other I so resembled. For in this moment I became one with her, and it was not my name that sprang from him but that of my half-sister. (102)

This scene curiously complicates Sally's initial resistance by retelling the stereotypical narrative of black female slave lasciviousness. Despite an expectation of Jefferson as forceful and violent, Sally presents herself as in "control" and her lips as "violent." Although the President's beckoning of Sally to his bedroom suggests his initiation of the affair, his slave very much tries

to claim this moment as her own. In addition, the line "the passion of rage against the death of the [O]ther" plays on a reversal of the expected emotions of a white man's attempt to sexually exploit, conquer, and control his slave. This undermining of expectation, so much that the President appears to become the victim of his slave's uncontrollable sexuality—he succumbs to her sexual advances merely because he still mourns the loss of his deceased wife and her half-sister—problematizes Sally's victimization and absolves Jefferson of culpability. Why would the ex-slave be revise this event purposefully? Or as Suzette Spencer posits, are readers here intended to "consider the extent to which narrating the past merely restages trauma for romantic consumption if the audience to which the captive speaks is invested in repressing her trauma"? (524). Is this scene another instance of Chase-Riboud filling in silences, common in the nineteenth century slave narrative,[14] or since this event occurred before Hemings's realization that she "loved the enemy" is this how a slave without self-worth would have acted in this scenario (Chase-Riboud 53)?

These scenes that mark Sally as accountable for her sexual liaison with Jefferson have become the locus of contention for many scholars, for why would Chase-Riboud write the novel only to confirm the master narrative already told about this woman while exploiting her trauma in the process? In Kimberly Juanita Brown's reading of this scene as the "oft-told story of slave lust," she notes, "[h]istorians and image producers alike have *needed* the narrative safety of a Hemings-initiated sexual liaison, even as it rings with the familiar desire of a guilt-inflicted

[14] In her essay "The Site of Memory" Toni Morrison notes that in nineteenth century slave narratives "[w]henever there was an unusually violent incident, or a scatological one, or something 'excessive,' one finds the writer taking refuge in the literary conventions of the day….In shaping the experience to make it palatable to those who were in a position to alleviate it, they were silent about many things, and they 'forgot' many other things. There was a careful selection of the instances that they would record and a careful rendering of those that they chose to describe" (69-70).

national narrative (*emphasis mine* 54). The "need" Brown mentions resonates largely with the discourse surrounding the historical relationship as a way to exculpate the President from guilt. It also suggests that like Langdon there is an American inability to conceive of a Founding Father, or white man in general, desiring a black woman. If Americans must accept that these relationships happened, then the slave woman's initiation of it is the only way to make the relationship more palatable.

For example, in 1998, scientist Eugene Foster revealed through DNA results that Jefferson likely fathered at least one of Sally Hemings's children. Since then, scholars were forced not only to accept this relationship as legitimate but were required to rethink what the legacy of this relationship would mean. Before these results were published, many Jeffersonians were adamant that this relationship was historically improbable due to Jefferson's elite position, his politics, and his well-known racist sentiments.[15] Interestingly, after the results were published many scholars began to conceptualize the relationship as a progressive one. Jan Lewis and Peter Onuf suggest that "perhaps the story [of Jefferson and Hemings] can be the basis for a new narrative of racial reconciliation" (8). Likewise, Scott French and Edward Ayers position that the couple's descendants "spoke from a hopeful vision, one in which a white man and a black woman transcended the social and cultural boundaries that separated them and bequeathed a proud, if complex legacy to their progeny" (451). Although these sentiments largely side-step Sally's coerced conditions, this new positive outlook helped recover the President from scandal while also providing a primary model of interracial harmony. Annette Gordon-Reed—now considered the foremost expert on the relationship—solidified these sentiments by promulgating

[15] Chase-Riboud notes some of these scholars in the "Afterword" of the novel: the director of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, Gordon Wood, as well as historian and professor Joseph Ellis.

them through historical research in two expansive texts, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy (1997)* and *The Hemingses of Monticello (2008).* The numerous awards for her work, including the Pulitzer Prize for History and the National Humanities Medal, further confirmed the place of romance in historical memory.

While an adamant rejection of the relationship is easy to pinpoint as stemming from interracial anxieties and the racist propaganda of black women's undesirability, the paradigm of the master and slave in love is also rooted in troubling mythologies. *The Hemingses of Monticello* is Gordon-Reed's second account of the Jefferson/Hemings relationship, and the impetus for love in this text appears to be predicated on her first text's awareness of circulating racist discourse that assumed "a degree of force" in order to "make the situation looks as bad a possible, so that no one will believe, or want to believe, that the story could be true" (*Thomas* 164). Yet, Gordon-Reed's insistence on the absence of force as the only way this story could be believable is also one-dimensional. By setting up rape and love on a binary, that if the Jefferson/Hemings relationship wasn't rape then could it have been love, Gordon-Reed suggests that love is antithetical to the violent act of rape.[16] Similarly, *New York Times* columnist William Safire posed the question, "Was it lifelong love or heartless domination?" in his editorial "Sallygate" (A27). The notion that rape and love cannot exist simultaneously undermines the surfeit of black feminist criticism that has informed us that sex between a white master and his slave was always rape because consent was not available for the slave, for under slavery, "the

[16] This paradigm proves itself as a common one in interracial scholarship. Gregory Stephens makes this exact argument in his book, *On Racial Frontiers*: "A more balanced view would acknowledge that sexual relations between whites and blacks almost always took place under unequal power relations, but on a spectrum…And one must concede that, at the far end of the spectrum from rape, there were some interracial relationships that grew out of, or led to, love" (38).

rape of slave women…by white or black men, legally did not exist" (Sielke 22). Also, violence, rape, and love not only prove to be simultaneous constructs in *Corregidora*, but a general rule during slavery: "A master's will often manifested in the compliances of his slave, [for] the institution was grounded in threats of violence and punishment that were inexplicably tethered to 'loving' sentiment and submission" (Spencer 511). Because violence and love *performatively* went hand-in-hand in this context, it becomes interesting to note how and why these scholars attempt to define love as the antithesis to slave rape and insist on Sally's desire for the President.

Gordon-Reed explains that proving love in this master-slave relationship allows us to de-essentialize Hemings as another rape victim of slavery thereby rescuing her from a meaningless and associative existence (319, 361). More astutely, Suzette Spencer asks, "Can we permit ourselves as a nation to consider Hemings's humanity and the violence of slavery?" (Spencer 512). The association of love with humanity and rape with degradation and thus inhumanity marks our inability to see the rape of Sally Hemings as an expression of her humanity. Why does it become difficult for scholars like Gordon-Reed to see humanity as fundamentally tied to this violent act? Instead, why does Hemings's lovability by such a towering icon prove her humanity more for these scholars? For under that paradigm, her humanity continues to depend upon white affirmation of it. In order for Gordon-Reed's model to work, she asks her readers to move "for a time beyond the kind of discussion that…casts every enslaved woman who ever had sex with a white man during slavery in the United States as a rape victim" (312). Why do we need to move beyond that fact in order to understand Sally Hemings as an individual? While the author argues that it is because this thinking doesn't allow for "feelings, obsession, and strategies of females" (313), wouldn't it be more pertinent if we could ponder Hemings's feelings amidst the fact that

her sexual relations with Jefferson were rape? For what would it mean if a slave woman loved her rapist?

Remembering to Tell Somebody Something: The Ancestral Story

Because *Sally Hemings* engages with that very question, particularly in the scene illustrated above, critics such as Barbara Christian have noted the novel's shortcomings. In the essay, "Somebody Forgot to Tell Somebody Something," Christian compares Chase-Riboud's novel to William Wells Brown's nineteenth century text *Clotel* which also tells the story of Jefferson and Sally. Yet, while Brown constructs a scathing indictment of Jefferson's behavior, Christian views *Sally Hemings* as "censored as the slave narratives of the nineteenth century" (94). Similarly, Laura Dawkins also notes that because of these romantic moments, the novel has largely been marketed as a romance and ultimately has "minimized" the radical work the text sets out to perform (793). For example, Brown outlines that on one of the book jackets of Chase-Riboud's novel, Jefferson's participation in the scandal presents minimally while attention on Hemings's cleavage offers "an eagerness already assumed in the historical memory" and can even be "imagined as providing a home for [Jefferson's] legacy" (49). Yet, while these scholars think that Sally's romantic sentiments for her master and the subsequent marketing of the novel as such ultimately undermine the text's politics, this chapter is more interested in the cultural work that the depiction of the couple in love is doing.

Ironically, although Christian dismisses this novel as less successful than other historical revisionist texts like *Beloved*, the title of her essay reveals itself as the key issue for Chase-Riboud's fictional Hemings. Christian gets the title "Somebody Forgot to Tell Somebody Something" from the post-World War II impulse for black communities to keep "knowledge of

their history—one of enslavement, disenfranchisement, and racism" from their children so that it did not "deter the younger generations' hopes for the future" (86). Christian notes that this self-silencing problematizes the younger generation's identity politics. In order to prove the detrimental effects of this generational silencing, Christian juxtaposes it with similar slaveholder tactics. She says, "Slaveowners were aware of the power of memory, for they disrupted generational lines of slaves in such a way that many slaves did not know even their own parents or children" (92). Consequently, she overviews several historical novels written by black women that reclaim generational memory in their "characters' search for self-understanding" (92). Interestingly, as Chase-Riboud's Hemings works through her conflicted role as concubine she soon learns that her mother, Elizabeth Hemings, also forgot to tell her something.

Elizabeth notes that her training of her daughter as a good slave and her silence surrounding her own "secret plans and secret dreams" (28) didn't allow her to properly train Sally on what it means to be a white man's mistress: "She herself had trained her own daughter, her favorite child, to the triple bondage of slave, woman, and concubine, as one trains a blooded horse to its rider, never questioning the rights of the rider. If she hadn't done that, her daughter would never have come home from Paris" (33-34). Elizabeth's comments here reveal why Sally desires to be Jefferson's concubine and perhaps initiates their first encounter together. While it might be assumed that training her daughter to be a good slave would help protect her from potential punishment, Elizabeth's comment about never questioning the rights of the rider assumes that she forgot to also instill her daughter with a consciousness outside of her role as slave. Yet, the last line's connection between Elizabeth's training tactics and Sally's return to slavery in the United States, after a chance at freedom in Paris, reveals Elizabeth's awareness of

her missteps in raising her child. Despite her desire to "scream at her to run away," Elizabeth realizes that it was "[m]uch too late," for Sally had been "constituted for love" (34).

Sally Hemings was taught to think of the institution as a natural fact along with her servitude, her slave master's paternalism, and her inferiority. While Elizabeth has more awareness of the privileges of her concubinage, such as small freedoms, pride, and comfort and can thus use it to her advantage, Sally lacks this cognizance: "Sally had no worldly pride, no independence, no idea of justice. She was still childish, rancorless, detached, except for that which concerned what she loved. Sally was not even conscious of injuries inflicted upon her, and of the self-possession it took to forgive, she had not one grain of that" (34). Although Elizabeth admits that she often "pretend[ed]" in order to protect Sally, her daughter's ignorance to her mimicry and resistance seals Sally's fate (234).

Thus, if we accept the novel's notion that Sally's psyche is constructed by discourse, then we can understand how Sally's lustful desire for the President becomes culturally contingent on her education and environment. How could she have resisted Jefferson's advances if she was raised to welcome them? While the opening scene discussed Sally's self-awakening, it is important to remember that that moment doesn't happen until 1830. In 1788, when the sexual affair begins, Sally has no self-conception outside of her role as slave. And yet, the conflation of antithetical emotions, such as "passion" and "rage," in the earlier scene suggest her complicated emotions in the moment that perhaps remain misinterpreted and misplaced without knowledge of what her status as slave and concubine means from a non-hegemonic perspective. Similarly, the mentioning of her "passion and rage against the [O]ther" might also be read as a moment of double consciousness. In reflecting back on this moment, Sally doubles in this memory in order to condemn her previous self for playing the role of the Other, the same Other that Jefferson truly

desires. Consequently, before her self-actualization Hemings's desire is always going to be constructed for white men like Jefferson and Langdon because that is the only discourse she knows and it is presented to her as natural. It is only after Sally is informed of alternative discourse and perspectives that she becomes aware of how and why her desire for white men is ideologically constructed.

Because Sally Hemings lacks subjectivity outside of her role as slave, she not only pursues a relationship with Jefferson but "blossomed under his jealous power," refused to "use her power…to achieve her freedom," and thought that "love would make her free" (124). The slave mistress becomes so enamored in this relationship with the President that she loses all concept of personhood and learns to "overcome" any disgust their affair might have produced (208). Since Sally is granted many privileges because of the President—clothing, a private bedroom, control over Monticello, persuasive political power—, she even begins to excuse the need for freedom: "How could my brother speak of saving myself. I had no need to" (229).

The reference to "speak" in the above line is poignant, for not only does it suggest that Hemings doesn't need to be saved, but it also implies that she doesn't find a need to speak about being saved either. The association made between saving oneself and speaking as potentially intertwined reveals itself as a prominent theme throughout the novel. Since silence is "born and bred into every slave," it becomes incredibly difficult for slaves to have, let alone create, their own story (249). For example, not knowing one's biological family is a common occurrence among slaves.[17] In the novel, Sally is unsure about who her grandmother and father are, as well as what happened to her siblings that were sold to another plantation (249). Although her older

[17] This is also evident in Frederick Douglass's 1845 narrative. On the first page he reveals that he is uncertain who his father is; while his father is rumored to be his master, he was unsure of this claim's truthfulness as well as where the rumor came from (315).

brother James's attempts to fill in the gaps resists this trend, Sally perpetuates this silence with her own children. Madison Hemings notes that he is never told of his origins either. While eventually, "some old crone" tells him that Jefferson is his father, its revelation "intensified the shame without alleviating the burden" (23). Slave families and the lack thereof represent not only the dehumanization of slavery but also the unspeakable traumas that often concocted them. In terms of the latter point, many black women scholars have thus viewed silence as an effective coping strategy. By "shield[ing] the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors" (Hine 37) as well as creating an "anti-discourse" in order to "resist conscription" (Cognard-Black 42) these women effectively protected themselves. Since the retelling of trauma may in effect recreate it for the teller, silence becomes a useful mechanism of resistance. Similarly, Sally notes that the silence surrounding her relationship with Jefferson "kept her alive and sane in this world where everything had been taken from her except these last two sons…Not to speak was not to put into words the hopelessness of having no future and no past" (14). Yet, at the same time readers previously saw the transformation Hemings underwent in narrating her life story to Nathan Langdon.

Despite the impetus to protect oneself from reliving trauma, the novel positions ancestral memory as a combative and resistant practice. As Toni Morrison notes, "if we don't keep in touch with the ancestor…we are, in fact, lost" (64). Morrison adds, "It was the absence of an ancestor that was frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and disarray" (62). Upon receiving more and more information about her ancestral experiences from her mother and resistance tactics from her brother James, Sally begins to build a canon of her family's slave experiences, which proves to be crucial to her character development.

In 1807, nineteen years after Sally begins her relationship with the president, Elizabeth tells her daughter the history of her matriarchal line on her deathbed. Although it is too late to change the course of Sally's concubinage, Elizabeth laments "If only she had understood in the beginning that her daughter had been constituted for love the way some women are constituted for breeding" (34). Elizabeth feels that she could have offered her daughter an alternative life had she provided Sally with the legacy of master-slave relationships in their family. She tells Sally that her grandmother Bia Baye, an African, has four children with white sailor, Captain Hemings. Their daughter, Elizabeth Hemings, has six children with slave Abraham, but later became the concubine of white slaveholder John Wayles. Sally is the offspring of her mother and Wayles, and Jefferson's later marriage to Wayles's white daughter, Martha, makes Sally Jefferson's sister-in-law. Because of the normalcy of interracial relations, particularly within narrow family structures, Sally Hemings later postulates, "Perhaps I had always known that he would claim me. Had not the same thing happened to my mother and sisters?" (99). In reading this line as her present-day reflection, which non-coincidentally precedes the chapter of her first sexual encounter with Jefferson, Sally Hemings offers a lament for not having realized the legacy of her fate at the time of her first encounter with her master.

Similarly, James also informs his sister of the importance of reclaiming their black lineage. Sally's brother ruminates that their lineage "was the most precious thing they had lost" (93) and that if you could recover it, "it is as if part of you is recovered" (93). This perspective is due in part to the fact that while silence might protect black women from reliving their trauma, it also is protecting white men's repeated abuses. Under a veil of silence, white men could continue

to rape slaves and black women without repercussion.[18] The novel notes that these arrangements are so common and kept so hidden, that Jefferson's overwhelming publicity as President didn't even reveal his affair until his second term. Virginians continued silence after the scandal broke also allowed him to remain unscathed, which the novel attributes to their desires to continue relationships with "their *own* dusky partners" (158).

In addition, James's resistance tactics, such as trying to convince his sister to escape with him in Paris so that they could be free, begins to poke holes in Hemings's perceptions of slavery. Initially she is resistant to James's sentiments and instead insists that "[b]eing free isn't so important I'd die for it" (207). Yet, when James dies in 1801, his sister's outlook begins to change. Perhaps as a result of her brother's militant attitude and his failed attempts to coerce his sister to leave Jefferson, Hemings's regret transforms her. She says, "from this day on, I would live like the perfect slave, in perfect love…It would be the master who would be branded and bonded to me forever. I would turn love against the possessor and daze him into the everlasting hell of guilt!" (242). Considering that the novel positions the start of their relationship in 1788

[18] Although "there is no known conviction of a white man for raping a slave or free African American woman in the 18th century," there are a few exceptions of indictments against black men raping black women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Smith 180). Significantly, while some states' rape laws specifically excluded black women in a few places where the rape of a Black woman was technically criminalized, because of race-neutral jargon, common law prevented Black women from testifying about their abuse. While there is one known exception to this rule, generally information regarding rape prosecutions before 1930 are almost non-existent (Pokorak 23). In 1858 Edward B. Ledbetter of Sussex county, Virginia, was sentenced to ten years in the state penitentiary for the assault and rape of a twenty-four year old "free negress," but was later pardoned (Sommerville 117). This woman's race is debatable however, as her children's visual mixedness was attributed to her own. Despite this pardoning, he eventually ended up in jail three years later for raping another woman of color. While Ledbetter might have been the first if not the only white man indicted for the rape of a black woman, Diane Miller Sommerville notes that exceptions like these "have been overshadowed by the frequently cited court case of *George v. State of Mississippi [1859]*" where a male slave was found guilty for the rape of a female slave. The court ruled in favor of the male slave, found the statutory definition of rape to be race-specific, and reasoned that "The crime of rape does not exist in this State between African slaves" (265n31).

Paris, readers will note that it takes Jefferson's mistress thirteen years to use her relationship with him to her advantage. Yet, in 1801, this is the first instance of her awareness of its possibility. Through the influences of her family members, Hemings realizes the ways in which her love for her master could be used to her own advantage in its ability to sway his decisions, particularly as they affected the fate of her and her children.

Later, Sally Hemings finds it imperative not only to tell her daughter, Harriet, of her past, but also to arm her against the present. Harriet is raised in close proximity to her white cousins, yet soon begins to become indoctrinated into the slave system. She notes that she felt pain after her "adored playmates turn[ed] into masters overnight" (312). Yet unlike her mother, who as a child might have internalized this moment as her own inferiority, Harriet is taught what this shift in behavior means. As a result of this incident, Sally Hemings "explained to her who she was and what would eventually happen to her" (312). As a result of this open dialogue, Harriet soon learns to play "the game" (313). Consequently, Harriet grows extremely aware of her vulnerable situation as a black female slave. Knowing that rape is a likely possibility, she carries around a knife in her pocket knowing that if she had to use it "she would die, but there would be one slave, or one master, who would never rape again" (314). Harriet's sense of self worth is obviously strong and she does not kowtow to the notions of slavedom. Perhaps as a result of her mother's new-found confidence, Harriet is even more brave than Sally for "[s]he would not throw away the gift of freedom as had her mother" (315). The generational legacy of rape and victimhood the Hemings's women have endured appears to be broken with Harriet and offers hope for a new future.

In a seemingly antithetical act to the collection and continued circulation of generational memory, Hemings burns all of her diaries that detail her stays with the President. Consequently,

this move ends up erasing any written discourse from Sally Hemings' perspective. Sally argues that these documents that mark her visits with her master—in the same way that Jefferson marked his slaves' comings-and-goings in his property records—are another way of "re-enslaving herself" (53). In order for the ex-slave to recreate herself, it becomes imperative that she distances herself from her past complacency with concubinage. Hemings's diaries that consist of all of her romantic ruminations of her affair must be burned in order to erase all of her delusions of love. Her burning of her diaries, that confirm her complicity to white acculturation, actively resists the erasure that has been endemic to her sense of self. Because she had never made a decision for herself nor acted on her own volition, this act of burning offers Sally Hemings her own erasure and tabula rasa; however, this time she could write her own script instead of having a white man do it for her.

Yet, having burned all of her diaries that buttressed the master narrative, Sally begins to fill in a new narrative by confronting the collective black activism that she had "denied and denied and denied" all of her life (55). Deciding to attend Nat Turner's trial in 1831, Hemings is forced to come to terms with the ways in which black radicalism invalidated her previous existence. To say that Turner was "the nullifier of her life" suggests that his activism marks her previous existence as meaningless (55). In addition to her own self-awareness, Sally also notes that, like her, other "[b]lacks, slave or free, all over Virginia, were hidden, crouched behind locked doors or plantation masters" watching Turner's trial (56). Yet, having burned that past Hemings comes to the realization of the possibility of her agency and will through Turner's paragon. In realizing that there was an alternative to being a good slave, "the power over [Sally's] life and death passed at last from her master's hands to her own" (56). It is upon confronting Turner's radical activism that Sally realizes the power she has over her own

narrative. Thus, Sally explains her attendance at his trial as a way to "force back invisibility forever" (56). For the first time, Sally is aware of her agency over her existence, yet it is important to note that her subjectivity here isn't individual or elusive as in the postmodern paradigm but is closely linked with the collectivity of Turner's rebellion. Sally notes, "This man had killed her enemies. For her! He had taken them on and fought them to his last breath. For her!" (57). Recognizing Turner's rebellion as a metonymy of rebellion for all African Americans helps Sally contextualize herself as part of a collective. This notion not only aligns the novel with African American criticism of postmodernism anti-essentialist impulses, but also provides Sally with a "deeper, more meaningful self-definition" (Collins "The Power", 106). As a result of this final encounter with an exemplary model of black pride Hemings choses to leave Monticello and asks God forgiveness "for ever loving [Jefferson]" (60). Now that she has developed a vocabulary of resistance, she is able to have an existence free of the shackles of Western discourse.

Throughout her life, Sally builds a coterie of the shared, collective black experiences in America,—her mother, James, and Nat Turner—which ultimately allows her to build self-pride and self-worth. Consequently, the narrative aligns itself with the postmodernist project of metafiction, or self-reflexivity. Hemings' discovering and scaffolding of individual and shared black experiences not only dismantles the master narrative of slavery but creates an alternative canon that promotes positive images of black men and women. This act is self-reflexive for its juxtaposition to Chase-Riboud's reclamation of Sally from the master narratives of history. Similar to Sally's canon, this novel also importantly includes itself in the canon building project of black women writers. In both circumstances, Sally's existence is void, invisible, or misconstrued if left to white discourses of History. Consequently, both the fictional Sally and

Chase-Riboud must create alternative narratives of resistance in order to invent a space for positive images of black woman.

"Did You Love Me?": White Need for Black Love

Although Chase-Riboud creates new discursive space for black women, she is careful not to leave white supremacy unchecked. To suggest that the institution only affects slaves would be to ignore the fact that African Americans were rational, thinking, human beings with a culture all their own. In order for whites to ignore their culpability in the deportation, dehumanization, and demoralization of a race of people, they too had to be trained through "self- delusion, lies, misinformation, guilt, mental acrobatics, and total amnesia—in order to render our American dream, the national image and the idea of a white man's country" ("Slavery as Problem" 826). Chase-Riboud illustrates this point throughout the novel in her depiction of Jefferson's desire for his slave. Jefferson views Sally as a kind of tabula rasa, in which he can create, mold, and shape her to his every whim. Through erasure, Jefferson can rewrite Sally's being and existence into whatever he wishes:

> He possessed something he had created from beginning to end, without interference or objections or corrections. In a way, he had birthed her. As much as he had his daughter. He had created her in his own image of womanly perfection, this speck of dust, this handful of clay from Monticello. (119)

Under this paradigm, Sally Hemings has no existence outside of Jefferson's imagination. Her presentation as an idea or an "image of womanly perfection" serves Jefferson's economic, ideological, and psychological needs (119). Representing Sally in his image allows the president to eschew notions of guilt and culpability for participating in the exchange and exploitation of

flesh in favor of privileging his worth, benevolence, and desirability. Since Hemings and Jefferson are both participants in her erasure, their relationship becomes more palatable in the ways that it side-steps the uncomfortability of slavery's reality. For to acknowledge Hemings as a complex human being, which the opening of the novel sets up, would render us unable to view this affair as love and instead confront its coercion and perversion.

Jefferson's desire to birth his own image of Sally closely aligns with what Henry Louis Gates Jr. in *The Signifying Monkey* describes as erasure (4). Notions of cultural erasure first emerged amidst twentieth century slavery studies, where white male scholars surmised that for the African that went through the Middle Passage, "much of his past was annihilated; nearly every prior connection had been severed" (Elkins 101). While this argument was initially predicated on African ineptitude, Stanley Elkins notes that African culture wasn't merely "forgotten" by Africa's diasporan descendants, but claims that in the New World the African way of life had no meaning and therefore the slave looked to his master for "new standards" (101). This point of view is troubling, for it is largely predicated on African's dismissal of their own culture rather than acknowledging the influence of white supremacy and power. More recent criticism critiques this tabula rasa model; for example, Gates argues that this prototype is "a fiction that has served several economic orders and their attendant ideologies" (2). Here, Gates acknowledges the ways in which this model is predicated on white interests and, like other recent scholars, sets out to reclaim the prevalence of African influences in modern society. Although Gates's project is profound, this chapter is more interested in how Middle Passage erasure becomes an origin moment of sorts for rewriting the black body; if, according to white rationale, African culture was erased, what was it replaced with? Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes that as abolition discourse began to grow in the eighteenth-century and as people began to

question the morality of the Slave Trade, race was invented and “emerged as the buffer between abolition and equality” (59). As a mediator between moral impropriety and the removal of hierarchy, race became a way to solidify difference while advocating the removal of the Slave Trade and later slavery. The invention of race and scientific racism, Marcus Wood argues, produced a black body that began to “obey a series of symbolic and narrative codes which deny the slave cultural representation” in order to “stimulate notions of guilt and culpability on the part of an educated English audience, while at the same time not frightening such an audience off through fear or disgust” (Wood 22-23). Using this originary moment as a springboard, it becomes easier to see the ways in which the invention of race and cultural erasure continues to manifest itself over time in the white imaginary.

This issue of erasure has figured predominantly in black scholarship as the foundation and sustenance of racism. For example, not only does Frederick Douglass note in the 1849 that “Negroes can never have impartial portraits at the hands of white artists”(“A Tribute”), but in 1953 Ralph Ellison positions that images of blacks in the white imaginary are “image[s] drained of humanity” (25), and in 1992 Toni Morrison names the “denotative and connotative presence that African peoples have come to signify” as the “Africanist presence” (6). The fact that erasure continues to plague black scholars for over one hundred and fifty years illustrates how foundational and effective scientific racism was and continues to be. Because the white imaginary, and the black imaginary to some extent, have been effectively colonized by this pseudo-science, they remain shackled to its legacies.

Interestingly, while readers are able to note the perversion of master-slave love her due to Sally’s humanity, the novel shows the ways in which cultural erasure clouds Jefferson and other whites’ perspectives so that the perceived love between master and slave seems like a reality.

White need for black love is evident in many of the black/white relationships in the novel. For example, although Sally initially feels empathy for Jefferson's daughter, Martha, and their similar plight as women, Martha soon reveals her belief in racial hierarchy. Sally makes a comparison between black and white women's oppression through the juxtaposition of herself and step-daughter: "My mistress. Had her life been so much different from mine? Or as happy, for that matter? Slave or free, white or black, women were women and they were indentured to husbands, fathers, brothers, children, in sickness and in health, in death and life, to pain and pregnancy, work exhaustion, grinding solitude, and waiting" (327). Despite this initial empathy Sally shares for her, when Martha manumits her father's mistress after his death, Sally does not buy into slave psychology, for she refuses to show this woman gratitude. After Martha requests Hemings's gratitude for her action Sally replies, "Martha, I have no thanks to give. You cannot free me" (329). Frustrated with Sally's resistance, Martha condemns her stepmother: "He loved me more than you!" and continues, "You were nothing to him! A convenient slave paramour, a… receptacle!" (329-330). Because Sally refuses to play slave any longer, Martha attempts to reenslave her by reminding her how the slave institution defines her. Her emphasis on her placement in her father's hierarchy of love also reveals her anxiety and lack of worth. Poignantly, right after this horrid condemnation of Hemings, Martha whispers, "Didn't you ever love me?" (330).

In this dialogue between the two women, Martha's desire to remind Hemings of her slave status is not only a way to psychically control her, but similar to Jefferson's desire to create his mistress in his own image, enacts an erasure on her. Sally's refusal of this script in this exchange reveals her growing consciousness and self-worth. Sally laments, "[W]hen would they understand this farce and this tragedy? I knew that only the one who stopped loving, who

stopped needing love, would survive" (330). Hemings's ability to recognize love between master and slave as a farce is emblematic of her growing psychological decolonization. By refusing to see herself through the colonizer's eyes but rather acknowledging herself as a thinking, feeling, rational human being, the titular character realizes the power dynamics at work amidst slavery and the inability of pure love to exist under these parameters. By not needing love from white people any longer, Sally frees herself from white supremacy's control over her. Tangentially, Martha's desire for love from this slave is predicated on her symbolic understanding of Sally as a slave birthed to serve her and her family. Her ability to think of Sally only in this way reveals her desire to maintain the illusion of white inculpabilty, which is only possible with Sally's compliance. Were she to think of Sally outside her role as slave, Martha would be forced to recognize her complicity in her stepmother's oppression.

Similar to Martha, on his deathbed Jefferson asks Hemings whether or not she loved him:

> "Did you love me?" he asked.
>
> After thirty-eight years he still had to ask.
>
> "*Lord keep me from sinking down…*
>
> "*Lord keep me from sinking down…*
>
> "*Lord keep me from sinking down…*," I repeated over and over again into that silence. A whole kingdom of silence. A whole world of silence. (326)

The question "did you love me?" as vocalized by both Sally's lover and mistress becomes a poignant reflection for readers and their similar impulse to find love in this context. The fact that this question has been hypothesized and mythologized by both scholarly and literary pursuits for over three hundred years reveals our indebtedness to its answer. Jefferson's and Martha's need for Sally's love in particular is resonant of the discourse circulating the 1998 DNA results and

promulgated by Gordon-Reed. Sally's non-answer here, but decision to sing a slave spiritual, reveals her attempt to cope with its enormous ramifications. Her notation on the "world of silence" here also insinuates the dominant desire to keep Jefferson and other white men's names clear of this salacious notion. While discourse surrounding this relationship has often privileged Sally's desire for Jefferson, Chase-Riboud reveals that it is instead whites that are desperate for black love. As the novel reveals, it is pertinent that blacks validate white supremacy through declarations of love in order for white supremacy to work. By confirming their love for whites, black peoples remain victim to their own erasure, which allows white supremacy to remain in power; Sally ruminates several times of an imaginary Jefferson that says to her "*Love me and remain a slave*" (269). Instead, black resistance dismantles racial erasure by poking cracks in white constructions of blackness. Black dissatisfaction and resistance reveals a humanity and subjectivity that the white imaginary cannot control.

Consequently, the emphasis on silence in this moment is indicative of the monologue that often surrounds master-slave relationships because of the often historical inaccessibility to dialogue; however, by offering readers a dialogue, albeit a fictional one, disavows cultural erasure. If Sally Hemings, as a thinking, feeling, rational human being, can talk back, then there is no way that the white imaginary can control her and her story any longer. It becomes important then that not only does Sally begin to resist her own erasure, but she breaks the cycle of generational silence among slaves so that future slaves are raised with a subjectivity and self worth all their own.

While both Sally's and Harriet's reconceptualization of subjectivity is radical for the ways it resists slave culture and white supremacy's definitions, as mentioned earlier, Dawkins notes that since the publication of this novel there have been several attempts to market it as

romance as well a subsequent films that have also promulgated that narrative. The notion that we are invested in a master-slave relationship as an origin story of transcendent potential suggests a continued investment in the paradigms of slavery that we have yet to burn. The marketed investment in upholding that narrative speaks to American desires of both racial and gendered behavior and how slavery continues to "structure how we feel, how we become acculturated, how we think" (Rushdy, *Neo-Slave* 759). It also suggests a psychological colonization that we have yet to undo for over four-hundred years. While the silence surrounding this relationship helped solidify that psychology, its unearthing only revealed what lay dormant in the white imaginary as revealed by the discourse laid out here. The cultural need to think of master-slave relationships as love reveals itself as a circumnavigation of culpability while maintaining certain racist and sexist expectations. What else could Sally's fate be without having her perspective to offer an alternative? The silencing of black voices and the continual erasure of black humanity solidifies white narratives and their place in history. We, like Sally, all become victim to the psychological hold of slavery through its legacies. Without counter-discourse to disrupt them, much like Chase-Riboud supplies in this novel, white supremacy's hold on our racial psychology remains firm.

CHAPTER TWO

"I SAID NOTHING": UNSPOKEN SACRIFICES AND RESISTANCE IN OCTAVIA BUTLER'S *KINDRED*

Like *Sally Hemings,* Octavia Butler's novel, *Kindred*, examines how a slave woman might come to accept a long-term sexual relationship with her slavemaster. That the possibility of sexual acquiescence in this context comes to be understood by a contemporary African American woman, Dana Franklin, calls into question contemporary judgments often made about this historical relationship. Dana's understanding of sexual acquiescence culminates in a final scene of the novel, in which she contemplates sex with her slavemaster and great-great-grandfather, Rufus Weylin. Most scholarship on *Kindred* overlooks this scene, and those that notice it tend to focus on Dana's refusal of sex and ultimate murder of him. For example, Angelo Rich Robinson argues that "Dana refuses to submit to Rufus's demand for sex because she does not desire him romantically or sexually" (52-53). Similarly, Angelyn Mitchell claims that "Dana cannot tolerate being violated by Rufus" (50). While Missy Dehn Kubitschek notes that Dana momentarily feels that she could forgive Rufus for raping her, "[t]hat thought inspires terror" (41). This chapter is interested in exploring why rape becomes an option for Dana in this moment, what it means that she entertains it, and its implication in understanding the historical master-slave relationship.

Although sex, and by implication, desire often constitute the legacy of master-slave relationships and subsequent black female stereotypes, *Kindred* undermines these misconceptions through contemporary awakening to the coercive context of these relationships, which ultimately make black female desire a moot point. Yet, locating black female desire within

these relationships also reveals the seduction of paternalism and the ubiquity of slave ideology in the nineteenth century American landscape. The metonymy of slave resistance, in which one's behavior can be substituted for another, also make notions of choice much more difficult to navigate due to the potential for collective punishment. Simultaneously, the novel also positions master-slave relationships as an unalterable fact and origin of current African American life, for Dana must encourage the rape of her ancestor in order to maintain her own existence. Thus, *Kindred* situates the understanding of ancestral slave rape and a subsequent appreciation of its sacrifice as a necessary component of a more holistic contemporary African American perspective.

Kindred follows Dana Franklin, as she time travels from 1976 California to early nineteenth-century Maryland, where she meets her ancestors and establishes an intimate rapport with them. In fact, one of Dana's main goals in the nineteenth century is to maintain the existence of her family line; Dana is, unexplainably, thrust back in time in order to save Rufus from near-death experiences. Troublingly, the protagonist soon learns that her lineage is predicated on the rape of her great great grandmother, Alice. In order to ensure her and her family's survival, Dana must continually save Rufus from death and encourage Alice to partake in a sexual relationship with him. While Dana's maneuvering is successful, in that her ancestor gives birth to the protagonist's great grandmother, Alice ends up committing suicide after enduring years of sexual assault. Now that Alice is no longer available to service her master sexually and having established an intimacy with Dana over time, Rufus finds solace in his great great-great-granddaughter and contemplates taking her as his new lover. Dana narrates,

> He pushed me back on the pallet, and for a few moments, we lay there, still. What was he waiting for? What was I waiting for?

> He lay with his head on my shoulder, his left arm around me, his right hand still holding my hand, and slowly, I realized how easy it would be for me to continue to be still and forgive him even this. So easy, in spite of all my talk. But it would be so hard to raise the knife, drive it into the flesh I had saved so many times. So hard to kill…
>
> He was not hurting me would not hurt me if I remained as I was. He was not his father, old and ugly, brutal and disgusting. He smelled of soap, as though he had bathed recently—for me? The red hair was neatly combed and a little damp. I would never be to him what Tess had been to his father—a thing passed around like the whiskey jug at a husking. He wouldn't do that to me or sell me or…
>
> No. (259)

After this internal monologue, Dana grabs the knife beside her and stabs the slaveholder twice: once in the side and again in the back. While this violent act ends up killing Rufus and sending Dana back to the present day, her having contemplated sex with him fundamentally complicates an easy reading. Rather than immediately murdering this man for raping her relative and for trying to rape her, Dana contemplates what it would be like to be his concubine, and even partially justifies it: she doesn't immediately get up after he pushes her down on the pallet, she knows that she would forgive him for raping her, she rationalizes that her role as concubine wouldn't be like other slaves, and even intimates her attraction to his cleanliness in this moment. It becomes unclear if Dana's rationale here is her naïveté or something else, for this incestuous scene between slaveholder and slave, ancestor and descendant, past and present is constructed by the author on wholly new terms. Dana's contemplation of this sexual encounter in the context of

coercion reveals her acceptance of slavery's power dynamics, if only momentarily, and suggests how influential slave ideology can be.

This chapter contends that *Kindred* exposes the narratives of the slaves most often misrepresented and misunderstood, the "complicit slaves." Uncle Toms, Mammies, the slaves that didn't leave their master's plantations, and those that were concubines are often silenced, shamed, or dismissed as tales of white romanticism or black hatred. The novel thus sets out to nuance the extant narratives of these figures in order to disrupt monolithic narratives about them. This aim is two-fold: first, it re-theorizes conceptions of resistance in acknowledging how resistance can include "more than an absolute oppositional stance" (Li 3). Secondly, it reclaims and repositions those slaves that have been dismissed as dishonorable or unworthy of remembrance. These two notions become particularly important in reconceptualizing the master-slave relationship because they offer possibilities for understanding this complex relationship as opposed to mere adjudication of it. Rather than validating or invalidating whether or not it was rape, love, or some combination of both, this novel is more concerned with reclaiming the sexually abused female slave from shame. By locating the truth of her resistance and the sometimes necessity of her compliance beneath the timber of master discourse, Butler reconfigures the concubine as heroic. While it might be more comfortable to forget that slave ancestors were raped, and choose to only remember those that heroically escaped, this novel reconceives this originary moment of African American heritage as one of honorable sacrifice.

Kindred offers an investigation into alternative modes of resistance, particularly those where modes of submission become necessary for survival. As witnessed in several slave narratives of the nineteenth century, individual resistance becomes particularly difficult in the peculiar institution for several reasons. For example, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* Linda

Brent informs readers "The secrets of slavery are concealed like those of the Inquisition. My master was, to my knowledge, the father of eleven slaves. But did the mothers dare to tell who was the father of their children? Did the other slaves dare to allude to it, except in whispers among themselves? No, indeed! They knew too well the terrible consequences" (443-444). The consequences Brent refers to are likely whippings, the auction block, and the subsequent break up of slave families. In order to preserve some semblance of humanity and avoid these dire consequences slaves needed to keep certain secrets for their slaveholders. Similarly, in Frederick Douglass's narrative when witnessing his Aunt Hester's whipping he mentions that he didn't dare leave the pantry from which he witnessed the beating in order to intervene for he "expected it would be my turn next" (320). The individual consequences for collective resistance are so great that it becomes incredibly difficult to offer aid and protection to others in the slave community. In addition, as Solomon Northup's narrative reveals, while sometimes there are opportunities to stealthily undermine master's orders, in other instances there are not. Northup's master often placed him in charge of whipping other slaves on the plantation. While Northup learns to manage the whip with great dexterity so as to mimic whippings, at other times "[u]npleasant as it was, I was compelled to obey him" (160). While all three of these narratives offer praiseworthy models for resistance in slavery, the scenes detailed above also reveal necessary levels of compliance within the institution.

Rethinking Resistance: A History of Shame

Recently, scholarship has begun to unearth how slave obedience, or so-called accommodation, may be re-conceptualized as resistance. In her groundbreaking work on "anti-intuitive modes of resistance," Stephanie Li explores how the site of bondage and the choice to

stay in bondage,[19] often offered a possibility of protection for slaves that would be unlikely outside of this context. Li notes that this protection was both individual, but also collective. She coins the term "intra-independence" to describe "a form of freedom that is grounded in the preservation and care of meaningful social networks" (Li 11). Outlining slaves' preservation of communities over individual autonomy, Li finds it imperative that we reconsider the agency of seemingly complicit slaves. Conceptually, this becomes a difficult project considering that the prototype for black resistance is often "the black slave in rebellion against white domination" (Keizer 9). Rebellion, in this sense, is often understood as either physical fight or flight to the North. These overt oppositional acts, most often define resistance thereby conceiving more subtle, and non-visible, behaviors as "accomodationist."[20] While fight or flight is perhaps the easiest way to identify resistance, Li notes that "the ease with which we may identify such opposition does not imply a lack of active insurgency among those who remained in and perhaps even choose captivity" (19). Significantly, there has been a surge in scholarship that has identified unexpected resistance tactics from slaves that remained on the plantation. Sharon Holt notes that the preservation of black families should be conceptualized as a "form of conscious resistance" because "organizing and behaving as families…frustrated white beliefs and desires" (195). Similarly, Wilma King outlines how slave parents taught children to "endure slavery by teaching them to work hard and pay deference to whites while maintaining self-respect. These lessons constituted a major act of resistance to the demoralizing effects of slavery" (143). Darlene Clark Hine looks specifically at gendered forms of resistance where "feigning illness [and] conscious laziness" were tactics used by men, and that sexual abstinence, abortion, and

[19] Li carefully uses the word choice here, for while acknowledging that choices are "severely limited" in the context of slavery, she notes that active decisions were made and negotiated nonetheless (6).

[20] See Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, 598.

infanticide were tactics used by women (27). This reconceptualization of behavior becomes an incredibly important endeavor, largely because it dismantles outsider perspectives of slave compliance and also unearths black psychological complexity often hidden under the guise of signifying practices.

These examples become particularly useful to put in conversation with the one-dimensional understandings of resistance that also grew out of the Black Nationalist Movement in the seventies, the same time this novel was written. As a result of the Second Great Migration, when African Americans moved from the south to urban areas in the Northeast, Midwest, and California after World War I, a major shift in black political consciousness and culture arose (Billingslea-Brown 22). From this shift emerged a gulf between modern black America and its Southern-based folk traditions. These new urban locales encouraged black Americans to disassociate from their folk roots and instead embrace a kind of cosmopolitan identity politics. This shift away from folk culture also aligned with the shift from Civil Rights values to Black Nationalist values: "In contrast to the civil rights movement, with its communal folk frame of mass meetings and nonviolent demonstrations, freedom songs, and spirituals, black nationalism… sought to establish solidarity with the independence movements in sub-Saharan Africa and the resistance to colonialism by other racially oppressed people in developing countries" (Billingslea-Brown 23). Frustrated that the black revolutionaries of the past were too passive and complicit with white perspectives of blacks, this new nationalist movement sought to expose the benefits of separatist and revolutionary politics. In both instances, African Americans rebranded themselves not as the happy-go-lucky and simple-minded ex-slaves of the south, but as cosmopolitan, and non-compromising global revolutionaries.

In order to solidify this new black American identity, scholars such as Hoyt Fuller and Addison Gayle found it imperative to construct a new black aesthetics to dismantle the image of African Americans in the past and define new parameters for black identity. Because image was key to this new identity, black scholars viewed art as the most effective mechanism for cementing this change in perspective. As Fuller says, "The creators of the new black literature…are about the business of destroying those images and myths that have crippled and degraded black people and the institution of new images and myths that will liberate them" (327). This shift from old image to new is best metaphorized through the dialectic between Uncle Tom and Nat Turner. For black nationals, the Uncle Tom figure adequately represented African American's folk roots because of his "passive-resistance tactics" and his desire to consistently placate his master. Thus, the "Nat Turner model" provided a more desirable image of black revolutionaries refusing to be complicit with white supremacy (Rushdy, *Neo-slave* 109). While this new aesthetic didn't throw away what they considered Uncle Toms, they did purport that this figure could be "cured" through "cultural reeducation" (Rushdy, *Neo-slave* 109).Troublingly, this mainstream discourse disavowed the past as a valuable foundation for black identity. If this new black aesthetics used the past, it could only do so from a revolutionary perspective. This problematically excluded a large subset of African Americans that never made it out of slavery, let alone those that remained share-croppers in the post-Civil War South. This corrective narrative thus silenced and casted shame on those slaves that didn't accomplish heroic feats like Nat Turner, Harriet Tubman, and others.

Thus, concessionists to this new aesthetic, like Ishmael Reed, sought to unearth the value in what his counterparts termed, Uncle Toms. Reed says that "lots can be said for Uncle Toms" and that "Uncle Tomism" is "what they call taking abuse from the outside by preserving your

inner light all along" (qtd in Rushdy, *Neo-slave* 104). Reed's insights here are poignant for they note that black frustration with Uncle Toms are a fear that this type of black consciousness is somehow real. To conceive of Uncle Toms as having no consciousness outside of his role as slave is in fact to dismiss the complexities of black thought. Instead, by viewing the Uncle Tom persona as a kind of mask, blacks might "acquire the psychic space and gather the resources needed to hold their own in their often one-sided and mismatched struggled to resist oppression" (Hine 41). Hine notes that it is important to recognize the ways black women, in particular, also created a façade, and were not merely reactants to white misrepresentations about them. Rather, similar to slave complicity discourse, black women, from the outside, were seemingly complicit with their roles as mammy figures. Hine argues that instead, black women created this misconception and acted it out so as to offer themselves psychological succor (37).

Thinking of so-called complicit blacks from this perspective reveals the narrowness of the Nat Turner model. In fact, Reed called this new black aesthetics the "goon squad aesthetic" because it only encouraged protest literature, which merely confirmed white expectations of African American literature. While this younger generation falsely believed themselves "the first generation to fight back," and therefore viewed "their ancestors with contempt," Ishmael Reed found value in the cultural formations of the past (qtd in Rushdy, *Neo-slave* 101). Reed wasn't the only critic of the new black aesthetic, for black artist, Faith Ringgold's famous collection *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima* (1983) also sought to reclaim the mammy figure from black anger: "Who was Aunt Jemima anyway—aside from her image on the pancake box? What did she do to attract so much hate?...Wasn't she the one who took care of the children, her own and everybody else's, and made something of her life too?...Is she a villain, or is she the ultimate female survivor?...Should we hate her for that?" (qtd in Billingslea-Brown 63). By re-privileging black

ancestors and their sacrifices, these authors and artists come to more complex understandings of black identity that allow for a larger cast of black characters.

It seems no coincidence then, that Butler cites black nationalist rhetoric as the impetus for *Kindred*. In an interview in *Callaloo* with Charles Rowell, Butler recalls her experiences with black nationalists in college:

> When I got into college, Pasadena City College, the black nationalist movement, the Black Power Movement, was really underway with the young people, and I heard some remarks from a young man who was the same age I was but who had apparently never made the connection with what his parents did to keep him alive. He was still blaming them for their humility and their acceptance of disgusting behavior on the part of employers and other people. He said, "I'd like to kill all these old people who have been holding us back for so long. But I can't because I'd have to start with my own parents." When he said us he meant black people, and when he said old people he meant older black people. That was actually the germ of the idea for *Kindred* (1979). I've carried that comment with me for thirty years. He felt so strongly ashamed of what the older generation had to do, without really putting it into the context of being necessary for not only their lives but his as well. ("Interview" 51)

Butler's comments here reveal the shame African Americans often associate with slavery and discrimination and their relationship to it. As Edward Baptist notes, "we tell slavery's story by heaping praise on those who escaped it through flight or death in rebellion, leaving the listener to wonder if those who didn't flee or die somehow 'accepted' slavery" (xix). The notion that some African Americans accepted slavery or discrimination is a common, yet one-dimensional,

understanding of black psychology. By acknowledging how certain behavior that was seemingly acquiescent was in fact resistant recasts these characters, and by acknowledging how some compliance was necessary for the survival and preservation of black families removes the shame surrounding these figures and re-honors all slaves as necessary, sacrificial elders of contemporary black Americans.

"It was the Opposite of Slavery": Understanding the Past and Present

Because *Kindred* engages with a topic and character so often avoided in African American literature and fiction, it makes sense that much of the secondary scholarship exaggerates certain connections and themes common to the neo-slave narrative, so as to avoid confronting the uncomfortable reality of slave accommodation amidst the institution. Butler's bridging of the past and present through time travel prompts her to make a distinction between these two contexts, despite the neo-slave narrative's typical convention to draw similarities. Conflations of the past-present dichotomy are resonant within this literary genre particularly as they reveal concepts about slavery's "lasting cultural meaning and enduring social consequences" (Rushdy, *Neo-slave* 533). Because neo-slave narratives often reveal how slavery has negatively affected its descendants, protagonists in this genre are often featured as psychologically fractured persons struggling to overcome intergenerational traumas. Butler's fourth novel offers a revisioning of that tradition with the account of Dana Franklin's time travel to nineteenth century Maryland, which undoes much of her cultural knowledge of this setting. That she returns to the past to correct misconceptions or fill in gaps of knowledge about this era places her in a long line of neo-slave narrative protagonists struggling to understand the past to heal their present. Yet, considering that Dana isn't suffering from an identity crisis before her

journey and is engaged in a mutually loving interracial relationship re-theorizes this usual quest for understanding.

Due to this common narrative impulse within the genre, much of the scholarship on *Kindred* has been adamant about finding the moments in Dana's present life that seem conflicted with the resonances of slavery's legacies. For example, Kelly Wagers argues that "Butler uses Dana's configuration of historical events within familiar patterns not to *explain away* the trauma of slavery, but rather to expose its enduring presence" (29). Wagers outlines that the traumas of slavery do not merely exist in nineteenth century Maryland, but "continue to operate in [Dana's] modern life" (32). Similarly, in *Re-forming the Past*, Tim Spaulding claims that Franklin's reference to her place of employment in 1976 as a "slave market" "point[s] out how the legacy of slavery informs class issues and employment practices in contemporary America" (52). In addition, because the employees at the agency are disposable, or to use Dana's word "nonpeople" (Butler 53), Spauding situates this moment as an "explicit connection between the commodification of Africans as slaves and the exploitation of the underclass in contemporary America" (52). Furthermore, most scholars have noted the obvious connection between Dana's interracial relationship with her white husband, Kevin, and that of her many times great grandparents, Alice and Rufus. Valérie Loichot argues that the comments Dana and Kevin receive about their relationship, such as "the weirdest looking couple" and "chocolate and vanilla porn," reveal that "[c]ontemporary California is not different from the antebellum Southern racial stereotyping for which a loving interracial relationship is necessarily deviant and obscene" (49). While the context of slavery was certainly exploitative and Los Angeles in the seventies was certainly not without racism, the parallels between the two contexts appear to be grossly exaggerated in much of the scholarship on this novel.

Notably, Dana is careful not to conflate the agency with the antebellum South. In the same scene Spaulding mentions, Dana also says of her employer, "Actually, it was the opposite of slavery. The people who ran it couldn't have cared less whether or not you showed up to do the work they offered" (Butler 52-53). Here, Dana's note on the lack of force surrounding the agency directly contrasts it with the coercible institution. Tangentially, Loichot's claim is particularly curious considering that while slavery certainly provided a number of stereotypes that continue to resonate today, the antebellum interracial relationship Butler offers in this novel is, in fact, "deviant and obscene" and not consensual like Dana and Kevin's. Considering, Rufus repeatedly rapes Alice, owns her, and subjects her to his every whim, whereas Kevin does not, once again makes these two contexts decidedly different. Rather, if Dana's present is not overtly affected by slavery, then the novel appears to consciously be highlighting the "contrast between current freedom and past oppression" (Friend 50). In highlighting the differences between these two contexts makes it more difficult to understand why the protagonist's return to the past is even necessary.

Interestingly, despite this connection between the past and present that scholars are adamant about making, there is a lack of impetus for Dana's return to nineteenth century Maryland. The only narrative explanation for her time travel that can be extracted from the novel is that "[i]t is what Dana does not remember about her past (and America's past) that fuels her adventure" (Hampton 4). If Dana must travel back in time to remember her familial past because she knows very little about it, then *Kindred* suggests that the present isn't all that consumed with the legacies of slavery. Rather, the realities of slavery Dana begins to face in the institution make her earlier "slave market" comments that much more irreverent and inappropriate. Dana's contemporary perspective often limits her scope of antebellum politics and ideology when time-

travelling. Upon realizing that Alice and Rufus are her ancestors, Dana ponders, “Alice Greenwood. How would she marry this boy? Or would it be marriage? And why hadn’t someone in my family mentioned that Rufus Weylin was white? If they knew. Probably, they didn’t” (28). Dana’s suggestion that the interracial couple would perhaps marry reveals her naiveté about miscegenation laws in the nineteenth century. More importantly, in this passage Dana notes that her family never mentioned their white ancestor, or perhaps didn’t even know about him. This latter point becomes particularly poignant for it connotes a curious gap, or silence, that arises out of slavery’s genealogies and allows for speculation and misinformation, for did the family purposely silence this fact to prevent their own shame? Or, like Jacobs’s mentioned earlier, did they silence it to keep themselves protected?

Therefore, while the novel does illustrate that Dana’s life is predicated on her slave ancestor’s experience, the comparison isn’t made to show how slavery’s legacies are alive and well in her environment, but to show that Dana’s privileges in the present—her existence, her literacy, job as a writer, choice to marry a white man, etc—are all based on the suffering, sacrifices, and survival of her slave ancestors. Their suffering allowed her the existence and experience she now knows in 1976 California. While this point isn’t meant to negate the racial discrimination and violence faced by African Americans in the years after slavery, it does offer a memorial for one’s slave ancestors, no matter how they survived. This logic becomes somewhat complicated considering that this perspective suggests that Alice’s rape was necessary for Dana’s existence, which seems to temporarily sidestep white culpability. Dana’s participation in the orchestration of this rape also suggests that she is committed to keeping the past unaltered, in order to maintain her present existence. Troublingly then, the novel purports that “as bad a thing as slavery was for the people who experienced it, it was a good thing for their descendants”

(Benn Michaels 163). Michaels use of the word "good" here is questionable, for that would all too easily side-step the decades of racism, violence, and oppression that the descendants of slaves experienced. Rather, the novel's use of time travel ensures that the protagonist will never forget the heightened and horrific reality of her ancestor's sacrifice that allows for her current, relatively privileged, existence. As Gregory Hampton notes, "To read of such a peculiar institution in a history book is far from experiencing its horrific reality. Even to remember slavery firsthand as a participant cannot compare to reliving the actual experience" (Hampton 2). It is only through time travel that Dana can adequately comprehend the reality of her ancestors' slave past and garner an acute understanding and appreciation.

The notion that there exists a gap in the understanding of slavery, fillable only through time travel's access to oral witnesses, suggests an overall inaccessibility to cohesively knowing the nuances of this era. Yet, by using time travel to discuss the institution, Butler also blurs the boundaries of accurate cultural representation and fiction. Doing so allows the author to question the validity of history, in particular, the discourse surrounding the history of slavery and the propaganda created by its authors. By forcing readers to confront the constructedness of these narratives, it becomes difficult to discern if Dana's experience is any more "real" than our preconceived notions of slavery. Also, to suggest that time travel is the only effective way to gauge slavery, then suggests that other mediums that attempt to describe or reveal the institution are somehow inadequate.

In the novel, Dana learns that conventional discourse is ineffective to explain the context in which she finds herself, nor prepare her to survive in it. Several references to written slavery discourse prove ineffective for Dana's journey to the nineteenth century. For example, when the protagonist witnesses her first whipping, she recalls that while she had seen violence of this

caliber on television, “I hadn’t lain nearby and smelled their sweat or heard them pleading and praying, shamed before their families and themselves. I was probably less prepared for the reality than the child crying not far from me. In fact, she and I were reacting very much alike” (36). Once again, in this moment it becomes clear to Dana just how different her present day life in California is to nineteenth century Maryland, for even her familiarity with violence on television is hardly comparable to the reality of it. Therefore, the longer she remains amidst this era, the more ludicrous discourse about it becomes. When reading fiction and nonfiction about slavery to try to prepare herself in some way, Dana criticizes texts like *Gone With the Wind*: “its version of happy darkies in tender loving bondage was more than I could stand” (116). As a surveyor of slavery, the protagonist dismantles any preconceived notions she might have harbored about it while simultaneously correcting the narratives purported through media. In fact, the more Dana travels through time to slavery, the more she learns that there is no written discourse that could prepare her to successfully survive it, but rather finds wisdom amidst the oral stories of the slaves themselves. She says,

> Sometimes old people and children lounged there, or house servants or even field hands stealing a few moments of leisure. I liked to listen to them talk sometimes and fight my way through their accents to find out more about how they survived lives of slavery. Without knowing it, they prepared me to survive. (94)

In this scene, Butler reveals the unreliability of written discourse to accurately or adeptly explain slavery. It is only through the orality of the participants that Dana finds any useful information about survival.

By listening, one of the biggest lessons Dana learns throughout her time in the nineteenth century is, “how easily people could be trained to accept slavery” (101). Dana grows more and

more aware that resistance in slavery is not only difficult, but often has serious repercussions. Dana also learns that survival in slavery often means submission of some kind. When Dana is first confronted with the threat of rape by a white patroller in the nineteenth century, she has a small opportunity to retaliate by gouging out his eyes but fails to follow through with this violent revenge:

> I raised my hands to his face, my fingers partly covering his eyes. In that instant, I knew I could stop him, cripple him, in this primitive age, destroy him. His eyes. I had only to move my fingers a little and jab them into the soft tissues, gouge away his sight and give him more agony than he was giving me. But I couldn't do it. The thought sickened me, froze my hands where they were. I had to do it! But I couldn't…The man knocked my hands from his face and moved back from me—and I cursed myself for my utter stupidity. My chance was gone, and I'd done nothing. My squeamishness belonged in another age, but I'd brought it along with me. Now I would be sold into slavery because I didn't have the stomach to defend myself in the most effective way. Slavery! And there was the more immediate threat. (42).

The thought of hurting this man by gouging at his eyes is too unbearable for the protagonist. From her perspective, violence of this kind is to too gruesome to commit. Consequently, Dana realizes that her inability to violently retaliate has short-term and long-term consequences. She will likely be raped by this man and subsequently be sold into slavery. Thus, this scene reveals just how difficult it is to fight back. While Dana's ability to time travel saves her from the ramifications of this moment, she learns that resistance is easier in theory than in actuality. As a result of this event, Dana also becomes aware that resistance in slavery is going to mean

submission. She says, "[T]hey won't kill me. Not unless I'm silly enough to resist the other things they'd rather do—like raping me, throwing me in jail as a runaway, and then selling me to the highest bidder when they see that my owner isn't coming to claim me" (48). Dana learns that resistance isn't much of an option, for rape, jail, and being sold are necessary components of survival.

In addition to individual consequences, the novel also reveals the communal consequences of slave resistance. Dana realizes that her escape from the advances of the white patroller likely affects the circumstances of the other black females around her: "if they hadn't caught me, they would probably have gone after Alice's mother. They…they may have anyway. So either I would have died, or I would have caused another innocent person to die" (51). Once again, it becomes evident of the ways in which submission in slavery allows for, not only individual survival, but also communal survival. Individual resistance often has detrimental consequences for the slave community, thus it becomes easier to protect others by submitting yourself for the good of the group. By bringing these paradoxes to light, Butler complicates one-dimensional narratives about Uncle Toms, Mammies, and other "complicit" slaves by highlighting the extreme limitations of slave decisions.

Aside from her own individual experience with the difficulties of resistance, Dana also learns about the benefits of submission through Sarah, the Weylin's cook and house servant. At first, Dana is somewhat dismissive of Sarah's behavior, for she views her as uncomfortably complacent with her situation: Sarah runs the master's house efficiently, resents the slaves that avoid their daily tasks—so much that she calls them "lazy niggers" (144)—, and is dismissive of Dana's attempts to discuss running away. Dana often tries to reason with Sarah, asking her why she cares whether or not the slaves do their work, and once again it becomes clear that the threat

of violence forces Sarah to become not only submissive to her duties, but encouraging of them: “It’ll get them the cowhide if they don’t,” she snapped. “I ain’t goin’ to take the blame for what they don’t do. Are you?” (144). Dana realizes that she wouldn’t want to get implicated in a whipping for others’ behavior similar to Douglass’s anxiety while watching his Aunt Hester: another’s whipping could mean your own. Because slaves are disposable and therefore substitutable, slave behavior becomes metonymic on the plantation, where the part often stands for the whole. Therefore, compliance becomes that much more important since the consequences for one person’s behavior can be appropriated onto others.

Despite learning this lesson in the moment, Dana notes that she “looked down on [Sarah]…for awhile. Moral superiority. Here was someone even less courageous than I was. That comforted me somehow” (145). As an outsider looking in Dana makes many superficial judgments on the slaves she witnesses in the nineteenth century. It is only over time that the brutal scenes on the plantation begin to transform Dana’s initial sensibilities. For example, after Alice and her husband Isaac try to run away, get caught, and both get brutally beaten for their behavior, stories of resistance become almost too unbearable to hear: “I went away from him not wanting to hear anymore about running away—and being caught” (152). Like Sarah, Dana is haunted by stories of overt resistance, because those are the ones that are usually followed with stories of violence, murder, and the loss of loved ones.

It is no coincidence then that over time Dana grows more cautious for her own self-preservation. Interestingly, Dana’s initial experience as the hyper-resistant slave becomes self-referential once Alice develops amnesia after being beaten for her escape. Having forgotten all of her previous experiences as a slave, Alice begins to mimic the naïve confidence that Dana originally had when she first arrived at the plantation. When reintroducing themselves to one

another, Alice is baffled to discover that Dana was once a freewoman and became a slave. Alice says, “And you let yourself be made a slave? You should run away” (156). Realizing that the articulation of running away could get them in trouble, Dana tells Alice not to talk about resistance tactics out loud. Dana says, “Sometimes it’s better to keep the truth to yourself” (157). At this point, Dana has travelled back to nineteenth century Maryland four times and has sufficiently begun to adapt herself to slave culture for survival. Curiously, it is upon having to explain the benefits of submission to Alice that Dana becomes aware of her own acculturation and the naiveté of her initial sentiments.

“I Said Nothing” and the Politics of Self-Silencing

It should be noted that when Alice becomes amnesiac and does not remember her violent beating, not only does Dana try to silence Alice’s renewed articulations of resistance, but the more time she spends in the nineteenth century, the more Dana begins to also silence herself. As Dana’s trips to the past become more frequent, so does the phrase “I said nothing.” Interestingly, this phrase is repeated over twenty-five times and more in other variations such as, “he said nothing,” “I didn’t answer,” and others. Through this narrative device Butler reveals its necessity in understanding the politics of silence within slavery, which ultimately drives much of the novel. While Hine notes that the “culture of dissemblance” often involved a mask of openness, in *Kindred* the mask also reveals to be one of silence and submission (Hine 37).

Dana first narrates the phrase when she returns to the past for the second time to save Rufus from his burning bedroom. After Rufus recognizes Dana as the woman who, in her first visit, saved him from the river as a child he says, “No, I remember you now. I saw you.” Dana narrates, “I said nothing. I didn’t quite believe him. I wondered whether he was just telling me

what he thought I wanted to hear—though there was no reason for him to lie. He was clearly not afraid of me" (22). Similarly, Dana narrates the phrase again after talking back to a white patroller that later threatens to rape her:

> [H]e slapped me stunningly with one hand while he held me with the other. He spoke very softly. 'You got no manners, nigger, I'll teach you some!' I said nothing. My ears still rang from his blow, but I heard him say, 'You could be her sister, her twin sister, almost.' That seemed to be a good thing for him to think, so I kept silent. Silence seemed safest anyway. (41)

Through these two scenes it becomes clear that Dana is slowly learning the benefits of silence in the institution of slavery, particularly in the face of whiteness. Silence is often read as compliance, and, yet, compliance means safety and survival. Although Dana's silences begin to help her survive more efficiently in the institution, the black community on the plantation, as well as her many times great grandmother, begin to question her silences and her loyalties.

As mentioned earlier, Alice's amnesia due to her violent beating has resulted in her disremembering most of her slave experiences. Dana is thus forced to iterate to Alice how she became amnesiac. Dana narrates that after Isaac discovers that Rufus has raped Alice, he violently beats him. Dana happens to time travel from the present to this very moment in order to save Rufus from being beaten to death by Isaac. Dana convinces Isaac to stop so that white patrollers don't hurt Isaac and Alice and also because Dana needs Rufus to live, in order to later father her great grandmother, Hagar, with Alice. Dana's recommendation is successful, and although Isaac and Alice runaway together to avoid the repercussions of Isaac's actions, they are eventually caught and both Isaac and Alice are severely beaten, resulting in the latter's amnesia.

Once Alice begins to come to, she grows incredibly frustrated that Dana saved Rufus's life in that moment. Alice says,

> 'If you had any sense, you would have let him die!'
>
> 'If I had, it wouldn't have kept you and Isaac from being caught. It might have gotten you both killed though if anyone guessed what Isaac had done.'
>
> 'Doctor-nigger,' she said with contempt. 'Think you know so much. Reading-nigger. *White nigger!* Why didn't you know enough to let me die?'
>
> I said nothing. (160)

Whereas Dana, as an outsider, was initially critical of those slaves that seemingly complied with the system, here, Dana is the one complicit and Alice grows frustrated with her behavior. Dana's decision to save Rufus operates on many levels: she thought she was ultimately saving Isaac and Alice's life and she thought she was saving Rufus's life, which was a worthy cause because Hagar has yet to be born. If Dana let Rufus die she would ultimately be killing Issac, Alice, and herself in that moment. Thus, slavery sets up an interesting paradox: to survive is to be submissive, which collectively becomes a necessity in order for future generations to exist. Since Dana is dependent on this paradox to survive, she must be accepting of slavery and its brutalities on some level. Alice's point that she would rather die is poignant, for while it would certainly save her from her individual misery, there are collective ramifications for her death. Ultimately, Dana needs Alice's survival and sacrifice—her rape—in order to exist.

This point becomes an unbearable truth of the novel; however, Dana's response in this moment, "I said nothing," is telling. By utilizing rhetorical silences, the novel allows for a representation of a national history that is cognizant of the narratives that are unrepresentable. To appreciate rape as a kind of necessary sacrifice for future generations is not easily digestible, and

heartily problematizes the elements common in African American protest fiction. Butler seeks to represent African American history in this way not only to honor what was lost due to the master narrative of history and the dismantling of black families by white slaveholders and traders, but also to resist the monolithism, or privileging, of certain of slave experiences insisted on by black nationalists. The novel follows protagonist, Dana Franklin, as she struggles with the silences amidst her own genealogy and tries to piece them back together, if only to come to terms with their sometimes unspeakability. Accepting silence as a narrative allows Dana to negotiate a space of subjectivity in severely limited circumstances.

Despite the guidance Dana finds amidst some of the slaves, it should also be noted that she is accused of Uncle Tomism not only by Alice, but also by other slaves on the plantation. Towards the end of the novel, Dana meets a fellow slave named Sam James who wants her to teach his brother and sister to read. Worried that her close relationship with Rufus will ultimately get Sam in trouble—because of Rufus's jealousy—Dana advises Sam to set something up with Sarah instead. She says,

> "Maybe I'm too cautious, but I don't want you getting in trouble because of me"
>
> He gave me a long searching look. "You want to be with that white man, girl?"
>
> "If I were anywhere else, no black child on the place would be learning anything."
>
> "That ain't what I mean."
>
> "Yes it is. It's all part of the same thing."
>
> "Some folks say …"
>
> "Hold on." I was suddenly angry. "I don't want to hear what 'some folks' say. 'Some folks' let Fowler drive them into the fields every day and work them like mules."

> "*Let* him…?"
>
> "Let him! They do it to keep the skin on their backs and breath in their bodies. Well, they're not the only ones who have to do things they don't like to stay alive and whole. Now you tell me why that should be so hard for 'some folks' to understand?"
>
> He sighed. "That's what I told them. But you better off than they are, so they get jealous." (237)

This conversation between Dana and Sam reveals several key points about slave ideology. First, Sam's inquisition of whether or not Dana wants to be with a white man is curious for it suggests that as a female slave she has agency when it comes to choosing a sexual partner. While Dana tries to inform Sam that her intimacy with Rufus allows her to aid her community, Sam tries to separate the two issues by insisting on slave gossip that suggests Dana desires Rufus sexually. Although Dana is not sexually intimate with Rufus, it becomes important for her to analogize her situation with Rufus to those of field slaves. Through this juxtaposition she makes the point that her decision to have an intimate relationship with Rufus is as limited as a field slave's decision to work every day. Sexual intimacy with whites in this context is not exclusive of coercive conditions. Dana chooses to comply with Rufus as much as field slaves comply with the overseer. Both scenarios inhabit coercive conditions and there is little to no room for choice in either situation. The "folks" that gossip about Dana's desire in her relationship with the master, problematically perpetuate certain mythologies while simultaneously discrediting her psychological complexity. By reorienting master-slave relationships as victimizing and traumatic as field labor, Dana dismantles the notion that the existence of sexual desire can in any way minimize the power dynamics inherent in this context. While biological pleasure may certainly

be present in the master-slave sexual relationship, thus making it somewhat different from field labor, it is irrelevant to the conditions of coercion at play.

Therefore, in looking back to the opening scene outlined in this chapter, it becomes more evident how Dana's gradual acculturation into slavery, which ultimately makes her more complacent with certain hierarchies, makes a sexual encounter with Rufus, her ancestor, possible. The more time Dana spends in the nineteenth century, the more she is conditioned to be a slave. And since being a slave has taught her that submission is necessary for survival, Dana growingly becomes more tolerant of certain behavior. Because of the intimacy of Rufus and Dana's relationship, it becomes more difficult to adjudicate certain scenarios. As Dana notes, slaves seemed to

> like [Rufus], hold him in contempt, and fear him all at the same time. This confused me because I felt just about the same mixture of emotions for him myself. I had thought my feelings were complicated because he and I had such a strange relationship. But then, slavery fostered strange relationships. Only the overseer drew simple, unconflicting emotions of hatred and fear when he appeared briefly. But then, it was part of the overseer's job to be hated and feared while the master kept his hands clean. (229)

While from an outsider, or contemporary, perspective the roles inherent in slavery seem clearly drawn, the paternalism and sexual intimacy between the races in this context makes those lines much blurrier than one might assume. In fact, it becomes quite disturbing to Dana to realize the love Rufus holds for her and Alice, despite the latter's constant refusal of him.

When Dana first learns that Rufus rapes Alice they begin to argue about his rationale for the act. While it is obvious that Rufus is jealous of Alice's decision to choose Isaac, a black man,

over him, and therefore rapes her to reestablish his worth, curiously, it is her consent he really desires. He says, "I wouldn't have hurt her if she hadn't just kept saying no" (123) and again later, "'I begged her not to go with him,' he said quietly. 'Do you hear me, *I begged her!'*…"I didn't want to just drag her off into the bushes,' said Rufus. 'I never wanted it to be like that. But she kept saying no. I could have had her in the bushes years ago if that was all I wanted"(124). Interestingly, while Alice's consent is ultimately moot in the context of slavery, it is the very thing Rufus desires. Alice's decision to choose Isaac disrupts the foundations of slavery, for it suggests that a black man is more desirable than a white man. Her refusal to kowtow to Rufus's desires also undermines the system for a slave isn't supposed to have any agency. If Rufus can convince Alice to consent to intercourse, then he can legitimize his worth and the institution of slavery. Yet, simultaneously, Rufus's assault not only disavows Alice's individual act of resistance, but ultimately erases her resistance in historical memory considering that the documentation of her child will likely connote compliance from an outsider perspective. Similar to the field slaves that gossiped about Dana's desire for her master, Alice's resistance will be dismissed and misinterpreted as desire.

Interestingly, Dana characterizes this interaction with Rufus as evidence of his love for Alice. She ruminates, "I was beginning to realize that he loved the woman—to her misfortune. There was no shame in raping a black woman, but there may be shame in loving one" (124). Dana seems to express a kind of sympathy for Rufus, for in this moment she realizes the system against which Rufus's feelings are competing. The context of slavery makes white desire for blacks shameful. This scene is further romanticized when Rufus claims, "If I lived in your time, I would have married her. Or tried to" (124). While this moment seemingly attempts to blame the peculiar institution for Rufus's unrequited love, it shouldn't be forgotten that Alice has

repeatedly refused her master's advances and yet he raped her anyway, thus making his culpability insurmountable. Rufus's conflation of possession and love merely replaces one system of power under the guise of another assumedly uninfluenced by power. In the same way that the slaves gossiped that perhaps Dana's role as caretaker to Rufus was devoid of coercion because it existed in the context of pleasure, so too is Rufus trying to convince Dana that his relationship with Alice could have been devoid of coercion since he was seeking her consent in a context that disavowed it.

Although Rufus's love is essentially moot, due to the context and his physical abuse, the fact that Dana would characterize his feelings for Alice as love intimates her sympathy for him. If we compare this scene to the one first mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in which Dana contemplates sex with Rufus, then it seems important for Dana to come to an understanding of her slavemaster's motivations. If she can understand the unrequited love Rufus has for Alice and if she can understand how sex with one's master might become a possibility, then Dana appears to be fostering some kind of understanding for him despite his brutal behavior in other scenarios. As Walter Benn Michaels claims of this novel, "casual gratitude to the brutal white slaveowner who raped your great-grandmother more or less inevitably trumps moral disapproval of him" (163). While this gratitude for Rufus seems unreasonable due to his moral improprieties, perhaps the necessity for it is comparable to the necessity of gratitude for one's ancestors despite their supposed accommodation. Although this point is not meant to exculpate Rufus from rape or downplay the severity of that action, the novel points to the importance of honoring all ancestors for giving you existence, despite their behavior. Thus, not only is Butler advocating for the appreciation for one's slave ancestors whether or not they escaped heroically, she is also advocating for the appreciation of one's white ancestors. Both were necessary parts to

contemporary African American life, despite their egregious origins. Having been so far removed from slavery, it is easy for Dana to mythologize what this era was like. Yet, once she experiences it, she realizes the naiveté of her sentiments, for Dana's life is initially not dictated by survival in the way slave lives are. Therefore, to judge slaves for their behavior from such a distant perspective is an affront to her ancestors' lives. *Kindred* thus positions that while many African American families originate from rape, it shouldn't be viewed from a place of judgment, but from a place of appreciation because it allowed for their current existence.

"Evidence that Those People Existed": Legacies of Loss

Over the course of the novel, Dana learns that extant discourse is unreliable, she learns that what she knew from family lore was missing major pieces, she learns that there is power in silence, and, by the end of the novel, she learns that not all truth is knowable. For example, there continue to be many silences that continue to pervade the novel despite time travel's capabilities. We are told that Dana's real name is Edana, but we don't know why she changed it. We know Dana and her husband, Kevin, are both orphans but we never learn what happened to their parents. Also, when Dana time travels back to the present without Kevin and he is stranded in the nineteenth century for five years, once they reunite, we never learn of his experiences. We are only told of a large scar that appears on his forehead. Finally, the loss of Dana's arm on her last transition into the present is never explained or rationalized. Thus, if the novel is revealing a legacy of slavery in the present it is the legacy of loss, absence, and silence.

The silences that continue to resonate from slavery become most obvious in the epilogue, when Dana and Kevin travel to Maryland to see what became of the slaves on the plantation, there is little to no documentation of them: a farmer they meet on the land "knew nothing" and

“said nothing” (262). From various newspaper clippings the couple only know that Rufus’s house is gone because it was burned in a fire, some of the slaves are missing from the bills of sale, and there is no insinuation that Rufus was murdered (262-63). Dana hypothesizes that one of the slaves likely covered up her murder of Rufus by burning Rufus’s house down, which once again reveals a kind of invisible resistance. Although there is no documentation of this, thus constructing the slaves of this plantation in very unassuming ways to the unknowing observer, the possibility of this resistant act undermines any easy reading of slave complicity. Yet, despite these suppositions, the novel concludes with the understanding that “[y]ou’ll probably never know” what happened (264). This sentiment touches on a key question that plagues many contemporary African Americans: if discourse has erased and replaced African and African American genealogies and histories, and if your own family partakes in silencing certain, and unpleasant, realities, then how do you access a past that is unarticulated and likely unknowable?

As Cheryl Wall notes in *Worrying the Line*, it is when “the quest for answers to the genealogical search is thwarted, when the only access to the past comes from what Morrison described in “Rootedness” as “another way of knowing,” that these texts are most likely to subvert the conventions of literary tradition that the connection to the past can be forged nevertheless” (9). Time travel becomes an effective medium for reclaiming kinship in this novel, for it allows Dana access to an inaccessible world. While critics might view this medium as an impractical device for readers, if we use Dana and Kevin as meta-fictional devices, since they, like us, are “observers watching a show,” then perhaps the novel reveals a useful application for those of us without time travel capabilities (98). As contemporary witnesses to this era, Dana and Kevin, to an extent, maintain freedom from telling the definitive narrative of slavery, by failing to write their experience down. Although they are writers, both characters embrace the void of

silence by acknowledging the force that encourages it and also the possibilities it allows for. By emphasizing rhetorical silence and gaps in plot, the novel, itself, also compels readers to examine the power structures behind the act of telling and what remains unspoken. Thus, while the novel fills in an historical void, it does so differently by creating space for a void, a blank page that remains unwritten but exists nonetheless. While contemporary scholarship has informed us of the commonality of slave rape in master-slave relationships, there is only supposition when it comes to understanding the emotional currency of them. While it might be more comfortable to adjudicate, dismiss, or silence this origin story, Dana comes to learn that it is more important to "[t]ry to understand" (264). By moving into a place of understanding and out of judgment, Dana can be grateful for her ancestors' sacrifice for it allowed for her current existence and privileges.

CHAPTER THREE

"STILL THERE WAS WHAT THEY NEVER SPOKE": SILENCE AND DESIRE IN GAYL JONES'S *CORREGIDORA*

Like the previous chapters, Gayl Jones's *Corregidora (1975)* privileges the dissemination of ancestral stories, particularly those of rape and victimization, as revelatory. In fact, the novel's preservation of these narratives has been used as evidence by black feminist critics to counter white slavery scholarship that attempts to promulgate romantic and loving master-slave relationships. For example, in *Women, Race and Class* (1981), Angela Davis outlines that the renewed interest in slavery scholarship in the 1970s procured a distorted version of the peculiar institution largely through a white male lens. In what is now a somewhat famous criticism, Davis lays heavy condemnation on Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1976) in the ways that it problematically presents a paternalistic vision of slavery by positing that the tragedy of sex between master and slave was not rape, but the denial of affection. Genovese argues that

> [t]he tragedy of miscegenation lay, not in its collapse into lust and sexual exploitation, but in the terrible pressure to deny the delight, affection, and love that so often grew from tawdry beginnings…Many white men who began by taking a slave girl in an act of sexual exploitation ended by loving her and the children she bore. (419, 415)

Davis is quick to point out that white men's "unlimited access to black women's bodies" leaves no "basis" for their affections, for it was always as "oppressors…that white men approached Black women's bodies" (25-26). As a follow-up to her criticism, Davis encourages Genovese to read Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* because of its illustration of "the attempts of several generations

of women to 'preserve the evidence' of the sexual crimes committed during slavery" (Davis 26). This is the only reference to Jones' novel throughout Davis's text and this passing comment presents as self-evident. Davis's contention seems to be that master-slave sex is always rape because of the power dynamics inherent within it. By placing rape and love on opposite ends of a spectrum, a slavemaster and slave's affection, desire, and even love become inaccessible, if not irrelevant. Throughout the novel, the Corregidora women's iterations of rape without mention of affection help prove Davis's point; yet, troublingly, there are key instances within the text that she overlooks.

In an often ignored scene, Martin, the husband of Mama, dares to ask Great Gram and Gram a question about their slavemaster that no one else had the nerve to, "How much was hate for Corregidora and how much was love?" (131). The novel's suggestion that hate and love for one's slavemaster may exist simultaneously re-conceptualizes the rape victims of slavery in complex ways, while dismantling the rape/love binary often untilized. While hate is an obvious emotional response to a slavemaster's physical, legal, social, and cultural oppression, love is a more tenuous emotion that opens up a nuanced conception of slavery while also dangerously romanticizing the violence of slave abuse, the latter point being Davis's main criticism of Genovese. In this novel, not only are the enslaved depicted as possibly in love with their master, but by the end of it, Ursa also notes Simon Corregidora's desire for his concubines: "What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he wont to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and cant get her out of his mind the next?" (173). While the word love is omitted here, Davis's definitive understanding that a slavemaster's affection is irrelevant appears to be contested with Ursa's question. Thus is *Corregidora* then more aligned with Genovese's insistence on finding humanity in miscegenation than Davis expected?

What seems at the heart of the Davis/Genovese's debate is the ways in which slavery is conceptualized in collective memory and history. While Davis's adamancy that master-slave sex is always rape speaks to the ways in which black female sexual abuse and victimization is largely silenced, Genovese's positioning of love speaks to the white liberal impulse to remember the past just as a peg in the linear progression of history and privilege a progressive America that, at the time his book was published, now legally recognizes interracial sex as legitimate. To further the divide, rape often figures as the center of collective memory for black women, while in history the rape of black women was largely ignored and/or replaced with a narrative of black female hypersexuality and lasciviousness. Jones's novel then becomes a useful mediator for the ways in which it, too, is also invested in slavery and its legacies in memory and history. Like Davis, Chase-Riboud and Butler's novels presented the discovery of black women's history as all that is required for self-awakening, understanding, and appreciation, but Jones's text problematizes the circulation of narratives of victimization for the psychological burdens they produce on their listeners. Great Gram and Gram's testimonies throughout the novel attempt to preserve their sexual abuse despite historical erasure while the younger generations' discovery of hidden desire in their ancestors' experiences directly engages with these seemingly antithetical debates in new ways.

Most of the more recent scholarship surrounding this novel has a more thorough understanding of the effects of Great Gram and Gram's stories of rape and incest not just as testament to these abuses' existence, but also its oppressive nature as the origin of Mama and Ursa's inability to have healthy heterosexual relationships. For example, Stella Setka coins the term "traumatic rememory" to encompass how Ursa's grandmothers' memories trap her "in the past by reanimating the sexual violence experienced by her foremothers during slavery in her

own intimate relationships" (129). Keeping this in mind, most scholarship has viewed the blues as a positive outlet for Ursa to create her own sexual identity in correspondence and in conflict with her foremothers, while others such as Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg have pessimistically argued that the novel situates "the traumatic impossibility of female desire, and therefore of full female subjectivity, resulting from torture's legacy" (446). While Goldberg's notion of impossibility seems extreme, it does bring up an important issue about the silence surrounding desire in the novel. Stephanie Li is one of the few critics to locate desire in the context of slavery in the text. She views its inclusion and association with abuse and bondage as "challeng[ing] the notion of any simplistic or singularly directed conception of resistance" (131). This essay closely aligns itself to Li's claims, while also adding why locating desire in the context of slavery becomes crucial for Ursa's attempts at healing. While scholars have either cited Ursa's miscarriage or the blues as the break in cycles of abuse and ultimate catalyst to her self-expression, I contend that both of these instances had manifested themselves before Ursa has an epiphanal moment by the end of the novel and so cannot be positioned as pivotal as they have been made out to be. Akin to Jennifer Cognard-Black, I am more interested in "the rhetoric of silence" that the novel purports through its repetition of the phrase "I said nothing," and other "mute, missed, detained, and stifled moments" in the text (41). Because Ursa's epiphanal moment surrounding her Great Gram's silence occurs while she imagines a sexual encounter between her and her slavemaster and allows Ursa to vocalize her desire for a man that won't "hurt me neither" for the first time, I reason that it is the speculation of desire in the context of slavery that ultimately proves liberating for Ursa (185).

This chapter then is not interested in siding with Davis or Genovese, but in reconsidering how oppression and desire, even love, may exist simultaneously in and outside the context of

slavery and why it becomes important for the progeny of slaves to acknowledge its presence. By positing desire in slavery, Jones forces readers to confront how slaves are taught and learn a distorted version of desire, love, and sexuality. Problematically, desire is largely silenced by Ursa's grandmothers, and instead replaced with the more familiar slave narrative of violence, trauma, and abuse. The silence surrounding their desire enacts a legacy for their daughter and granddaughter that leaves little room for sexual pleasure and female agency in heterosexual relationships. By discovering desire's existence during slavery along with its perversions, Ursa becomes more adept at seeing how silence and abuse associated with black female desire manifests itself intergenerationally. By recognizing the source of her trauma, she becomes able to break the cycle of silence and denial while also using her grandmother's past expressions of it to reconcile her present relationship with her husband. Thus while Jones's figuring of desire here serves a different end than Genovese, in that her concern is with the slave and the simultaneous existence of love and abuse, it becomes imperative for Ursa to "listen for truth in timbre" of these stories and make a space for black female desire (*The Bluest* 15). It becomes imperative that although Ursa has learned how to hate, she also learns how to love.

Memory Studies and Testimony as History

The master narratives of history have long been understood in African American studies as corrupt. With the rise of memory studies, scholars such as Jacques LeGoff argue that "history has been and still is, in some places, subject to conscious manipulation on the part of political regimes that oppose the truth. Nationalism and prejudices of all kinds have an impact on the way history is written" (xi). In this way, history is most successful in its manipulation when it transforms collective memory: "things forgotten or not mentioned by history reveal these

mechanisms for the manipulation of collective memory" (LeGroff 54). The manipulation of America's memory of slavery has often been victim to these systems of power. Nineteenth and twentieth century scholars of the peculiar institution have been credited with the warping of history and our collective memory of this particular period of time. Often presenting the institution as paternalistic and benevolent, it has been the impetus of most African American scholars to correct this history, often through the discovery and/or revival of black testimony. This conflict between history and testimony was of particular concern when Jones was writing her novel. With the publication of the Moynihan Report in 1965, William Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* in 1967, and a dearth of paternalistic slavery scholarship abounding, African American scholars sought to correct these narratives of power by re-popularizing the slave narratives of the nineteenth century, digging into the archives, as well as writing their own neo-slave narratives. In this way, black testimony began to emerge as the preferred means of accessing history, particularly slavery. Because of this trend, Dominick LaCapra notes that "So great has been the preoccupation with testimony and witnessing that they have in some quarters almost displaced or been equated with history itself" (11). By privileging the literary form that voiced the political subjectivity of blacks for the first time and put, as Toni Morrison says, "authority back into the hands of the slave," (McDowell "Negotiating" 160), testimony, witnessing, and memory became the "fashionable, politically correct version" of history (Mallot 85)

It seems no coincidence then that amidst this budding trend, Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is re-released in 1973, two years before the publication of Jones' novel. Significantly, its re-release was predicated on the fact that in 1972 historian John Blassingame argued that it wasn't authentic because it didn't meet typical slave narrative conventions. Its third

release in 1987 with comprehensive biography and archival research by Jean Fagan Yellin proved its authenticity and solidified its place and importance in the American canon as the ur-text of African American women's literature. The debate surrounding Jacobs's authenticity not only epitomizes the new investment in testimony as a more accurate version of history, but this trend also manifests itself as a major theme in *Corregidora* through the matrilineal preservation of oral history.

The narrativization of Brazilian slavery as experienced by a slave mother and daughter becomes the focal point of Jones's novel. Worried that the historical erasure of slavery in Brazil, through the burning of documents, will erase their lived experiences, Great Gram and Gram Corregidora repetitively tell their progeny the stories of their brutal victimization so they might "leave evidence" of these atrocities (14). Leaving evidence is predicated on "making generations," so that current and future generations of these slave women "have evidence to hold up against them" (14). Their privileging of living history through testimony positions a counter narrative to the master narratives of slavery. Amy Gottfried argues that this call for generations also supplants the "sexual commodification" of women's bodies and reproductive rights during slavery with a "deliberate, political self-definition" (559). By now having the choice to reproduce and to reproduce for a political end, the Corregidora women's decision to make generations is arguably a defiant act of unchained subjectivity.

While this favoring of testimony at first appears liberatory for its authoritative possibilities, it soon becomes evident that their narratives perpetuate intergenerational trauma through the "objectification and production" of black women's bodies (Li 132). As Tadpole notes of the Corregidora impulse to make generations, "Procreation. That could also be a slave-breeder's way of thinking" (22). Tadpole's observation makes the connection between slavery's

commodification of a woman's body as breeder and these women's impulse to position the womb as the locus for a woman's worth. In both paradigms, women's bodies are "reduced to a physical function and alienated from any notion of personal desire or sexual pleasure" (Li 133).

Similarly, while the re-privileging of Jacobs's authentic slave narrative also commands more authority in its portrayal of slave life, it is important to remember that narratives like hers "carried a black message inside a white envelope" (Gates, *Norton Anthology* 158). Because ex-slave authors still needed to pander to white audiences in order to garner abolitionist support, there has been significant scholarship surrounding certain gaps and omissions in these texts. Notably, one of the gaps most frequently cited in Jacobs's narrative is the lack of sexual desire and lack of rhetoric for her resistance. Forced to present herself as a part of the Cult of Domesticity in order to establish her personhood, Jacobs's paradox lies in her inability to maintain purity standards while her body is continually sexually exploited. While her insistence that her master never touched her helps reinforce her personhood as a woman in the nineteenth century (Sabine 23), her resistance to him by having sex with another man complicates both simplistic understanding of her desire and agency, and can only be described as "something akin to freedom" (Jacobs 465). Noting these gaps, *Corregidora* is careful to acknowledge the ways in which this testimony may be just as unreliable despite the impulse to position testimony as a more accurate rendition of slavery. In addition to slave narratives' propaganda for whites, there is something to be said about the need for the survival and circulation of stories about black female rape and slave torture. While white scholars were distorting the legacy of slavery, by silencing stories of rape and torture, keeping them alive also teeters the line of evoking horror and outrage over past racism while also perpetuating and catering to the legacy of black victimization. Sabine Sielke notes that the slave narrative enacted a tradition in which "up to this

very day African American literary texts privilege the pain of struggle, trauma, and survival over the pleasures of desire and sexuality" (Sielke 25). Consequently, Sielke "resist[s] readings that celebrate black women's act of telling their pain ridden story as a claim of subjectivity…even if Brent's experiences were finally empowering, the very telling of them was immensely painful" (21). Therefore while the testimony of slaves can be a useful device in helping audiences remember horrors we'd rather forget, re-privileging slave narratives becomes complicated when thinking about audiences. It then becomes important to consider the ways in which this testimony might be complicit in the oppression of the tellers as well as the oppression of its listeners.

The latter point becomes most poignant for Jones, as her novel reveals that by keeping this narrative of victimization alive, Great Gram and Gram as well as their listeners remain locked in a history of anger. As Ursa relates, "It was as if the words were helping her, as if the words repeated again and again could be a substitute for memory, were somehow more than the memory. As if it were only the words that kept her anger" (11). While at first it appears that the telling is therapeutic for the grandmothers, considering the words are "helping her," it soon becomes obvious that the retelling of these narratives of victimization aren't helping these women heal, but rather are helping them keep their anger. Similar to Sielke's observation about the pain Jacobs must have gone through to tell her narrative, the survival of these stories doesn't seem to liberate the grandmothers but rather keeps them in a place of pain. By remaining angry Great Gram and Gram aren't overcoming their oppression, but remain locked in conflict with it. This comingling of personhood and sexual violation resonates with Harriet Jacobs's narrative and gives rise to what Sielke argues is "black women's supposed invulnerability, 'an ability,' as Michael Awkward underlines, "not to conquer oppression but to negotiate it successfully" (qtd in

Siekle 16). Because these women are depicted not as conquering their oppression but remaining strong within it, their trauma remains unreconciled and problematically begins to manifest itself onto their descendants.

Great Gram and Gram's retention of pain and anger as well as their trauma begins to be projected onto their daughter and granddaughter which makes it difficult for these women to "forg[e] loving heterosexual relationships" (Li 132). By only knowing stories of rape, Mama and Ursa find it difficult to see female/male relationships outside of the dichotomy of victim/victimizer. Interestingly, this fact has often led to readings that claim that the Corregidora women associate desire with violence, such as Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg who posits that Mama and Ursa are part of "an incestuous line of women unable to conceive of sexuality apart from the men who "dug up" their genitals" (451). Considering that desire and pleasure are largely absent from the grandmothers' narratives, the correlation between desire and violence for Mama and Ursa is less clear. Although Great Gram and Gram's stories reveal the association these women make between sex and abuse, the novel suggests that Mama and Ursa struggle with allowing for desire's existence as well as vocalizing it—Mama regularly refuses to have sex with Martin after their first sexual encounter and Ursa has difficulty vocalizing her desires to Mutt (130, 64). Therefore, while these women demonstrate their inability to embrace or speak desire, to say that these women only associate sex with violence and therefore find no pleasure is dubious.

These slippages in interpretation can be attributed to the fact that Corregidora women's memories aren't entirely cohesive despite the impulse to think of testimony as a more accurate form of history:

> He wanted to keep me, the bastard. But it's hard to always remember what you were feeling when you ain't feeling it exactly that way no more. But when she came back for me, I was so happy I didn't know what to do, and was glad to get away from there. (79)

Interestingly, Gram's statement that it is "hard to always remember what you were feeling" comes at a peculiar place between these two lines. Acknowledging that her slavemaster, father, and lover wanted to keep her and that she was happy when she left, leaves space for what she felt while she was with her master before she left the plantation. Forgetting what she felt while she was with him leaves the reader to speculate whether this omission is a symptom of traumatic repression or a purposeful denial of feeling. Nonetheless, Gram's forgetting here is poignant for it makes readers aware of the unreliability of memory.

Forgetting then becomes important in dismantling testimony as a more accurate form of history, for Gram's omission here appropriates a biased narrative in the same way history is often criticized: knowing becomes unstable in the interpretation of history and memory. As David Lowenthal posits, "History and memory are distinguishable less as types of knowledge than in attitudes toward that knowledge" (213). By interpreting Great Gram and Gram's narratives then as attitudes instead of Truths, it becomes easier to analyze the ideologies and beliefs being projected in their memories. This becomes a particularly important exercise considering that as J. Edward Mallot concludes, "what we learn as 'history' will, over time, form part of what we consider our own 'memory'" (85). Therefore, the stories that Great Gram and Gram tell their progeny ultimately become part of their progeny's, Irene and Ursa's, memory. Because the grandmothers' memory isn't projecting Truth, but attitudes, these attitudes become internalized by Irene and Ursa since their grandmothers' history begins to become part of their own: their

“veins are centuries meeting” (46). This becomes particularly evident for Mama, so much that her memory is almost completely supplanted with her mother and grandmother’s history. As Ursa expresses about her mother, “she passed the other [memories] down, the monstrous ones, but she wouldn’t give me her own terrible ones” (101). By adopting her mother and grandmother’s memory as her own, Irene fails to claim any subjectivity for herself and in fact her life begins to mirror the history being projected on her through her ancestor’s memories.

Irene becomes so invested in the legitimization of this memory that she begins to perform it despite its consequences on others. When she concedes to sleep with a man for the first time, she tells Ursa that she refused to allow herself to feel anything, she pushed him out once she felt him inside of her, but “it was like my whole body wanted you” (117). Irene’s refusal to feel anything speaks to the omission of desire in Gram and Great Gram’s narratives. Because their memory becomes her own and desire is absent from that memory, Irene fails to have a distinct memory for herself acknowledge desire here. Since the Corregidora women’s narrative has not created a space for desire or even reciprocated male love, despite it being predicated on having a child, Ursa concludes: “it was almost…as if she wanted only the memory to keep for her own but not his fussy body, not the man himself. Almost as if she’s gone out to get that man to have me and then didn’t need him, because they’d been telling her so often what she should do” (101). By internalizing their history as her own memory, Irene’s life is already mapped out for her, for the “the ancestral stories shape immutable versions of memory” (Harb 117). In order to validate the memory, Irene must compromise her own subjectivity and desires. Not only does this history eschew her own identity, but Irene becomes complicit in the oppression of others—Martin—for the sake of preserving this history. In this way, collective memory becomes manipulative by fusing itself with individual memory, thereby making it difficult to discern where one’s life story

ends and another begins. In order to meet the parameters of collective memory, individual memory must be compromised for the greater goal.

What is curious then about Irene's sexual encounter with Martin are her pauses or gaps about how it happened; omissions that are purposeful in validating her grandmothers' memory:

> And then all of a sudden it was like I felt the whole man in me, just felt the whole man in there. I pushed him out, it was like it was just that feeling of him in there. And nothing else. I hadn't even given myself time to feel anything else before I pushed him out. But he must have…I… still that memory, feeling of him in me. I wouldn't let myself feel anything. It was like a surprise. (117-118)

Here, Irene argues that as soon as she feels Martin inside of her she pushes him out and while she credits this encounter to the conception of Ursa, she has difficulty remembering him ejaculating, "But he must have." Also, the fact that she associates the "feeling of him" inside her with having no feeling is rather ambiguous. Thus, while it becomes obvious that she is denying herself sexual pleasure here it also becomes difficult to discern whether she is purposefully repressing the desire she did feel in her telling, or if she actually did feel nothing. The elusive "I" surrounding by ellipses also suggests the possibility of something more. The overwhelming influence of her grandmothers' collective memory distorts her own individual memory. This point becomes significant because later Ursa finds it pertinent to distinguish between knowing and feeling: "Sometimes I wonder about their desire, you know. Grandmama's and Great Grams's. Corregidora was theirs more than hers. Mama could only know, but they could feel. They were with him. What did they feel?" (102). In this example, Ursa expresses that knowing is elusory, for Irene could never really know what Great Gram and Gram felt with Corregidora. If this is the case, then it suggests that as readers we will also never know what Irene really felt with Martin

in this sexual encounter and therefore our knowing is also elusive; like Mama and Ursa we can only know what we are being told. While perhaps this is Jones' nod to us that we will never know how slaves actually felt about their masters, it becomes an important exercise to look for the gaps and omissions. The novel argues that the discovery of what is not being said, Great Gram and Gram's feelings, become important conjecture for descendants like Ursa.

"What I Knew I'd Keep Doing": Patterns of Collective Memory

While her mother's participation in their memories leave her with little of her own, "Ursa's realization of completed individuation depends upon her release from the dominating centrality of the historical experiences of her Great Gram and Gram"(Pettis 797). In order to rid herself of "what all of us Corregidora women want" (22), Ursa must make a break with their history. Most critics attribute to the loss of her womb in the opening scene of the novel as a moment that forces Ursa to confront that she "cannot replicate their acts of rememory" (Setka 130). There has been little nuance regarding the opening scene of the novel, where Ursa and Mutt's violent altercation leads to the subsequent loss of Ursa's womb and unborn child. Yet, in noting how Mama's individual memory incorporates omissions in order to meet the parameters of collective memory, then it is interesting to subject Ursa's memory to the same interrogation.

Before an interrogation of Ursa, it is first important to note the ways in which Mama is complicit in the manipulation of certain events in order to ultimately legitimize the collective memory of Gram and Great Gram. Mama's omission of desire in her initial sexual encounter with Martin reveals itself as a larger symptom of Mama's inability to express herself sexually, for later scenes in the novel reveal that Mama is reluctant to have sex with her husband, so much that their first encounter is the only one readers are made aware of: "just that one time" (118).

Mama's refusal to be intimate with Martin increasingly incenses him to the point of violence. Yet, while his brutal beating of her casts Martin as an obvious villain, Mama notes her own complicity in his violent behavior: "I carried him to the point where he ended up hating me, Ursa. And that's what I knew I'd keep doing. That's what I knew I'd do with any man" (121). In this way, it becomes questionable whether Martin's violence should be viewed as coerced for Mama seems to suggest here that she had brought him to this aggressive place. While we should be careful to indict Mama for provoking Martin's abuse, her insistence on it requires speculation. If we read her as complicit, then we might read her refusal to give herself to Martin as predicated on the idea, consciously or unconsciously, that she would lead him to act out thus legitimizing the narrative of male victimizers that her mother and grandmother gave her. By carrying him to this point, Mama confirms the victim/victimizer narrative that was passed down to her. By noting that it was not just Martin but that she would do this "with any man," is indicative of the larger pathology about men as victimizers being passed down to her.

If Mama is able to coerce events in order to ultimately prove the legitimacy of her ancestors' narrative, it is important to speculate to what extent Ursa might be doing the same. Most critics position the opening scene as the break in the cycle of trauma that allows Ursa to interrogate the history being passed down to her; for example, Setka argues that "Ursa's infertility forces her to confront the damaging consequences of her foremothers' traumatic rememory and helps her understand the ways in which their history of abuse has impacted her own heterosexual relationships" (130). While this moment is certainly poignant for the ways in which it forces Ursa to confront her self-worth if she can't make generations, few have noticed the ambiguous rhetoric surrounding this moment. In the first mentioning of the altercation Ursa

narrates, "That was when I *fell*" (*emphasis added* 4). Later, when reiterating the story to Cat Lawson, Ursa says,

> '…From the day he *throwed* me down those stairs we not together, and we not coming back together.
>
> 'It was an *accident*.'
>
> 'You sound like if he was sitting here what he be saying. 'Aw, honey, I was drunk. Aw, honey, it was an accident. I didn't mean to do it. You know I wouldn't've done it. You know I'm sorry.' (*emphasis added* 25)

Here, Ursa's narrating of the event—that she was "throwed'—sounds very different from her initial "I fell." Also, Cat's insistence that the incident was an accident is peculiar, despite her not being there, and because of her later insistence that, "'I know niggers love you do worse than that" (37). Not only does Cat's comment reveal the pervasiveness of male abuse in heterosexual relationships, but her normalization of it is curious. While Ursa continues the "throwed" narrative after her encounter with Cat (58), the fluid understandings of what really happened that night speaks to the way stories can be manipulated to preserve collective memory; by being "throwed" Ursa continues the victim/victimizer narrative of her foremothers. Yet, what if it was an accident or what if Ursa fell, or even fell on purpose? Considering that we have seen the ways in which making generations can be oppressive, Ursa's complicity in her miscarriage and infertility could be viewed as an act of resistance; however, if this is the case then why is Ursa silent about it?

The silence surrounding Ursa's possible resistance resonates with Great Gram's silence surrounding what she did to Corregidora "that made him wont to kill her" (79). This question that repeats itself several times throughout the novel, figures itself as a key to unlocking the

legacy of trauma for the Corregidora women: "What is it a woman can do to a man that make him hate her so bad he wont to kill her one minute and keep thinking about her and can't get her out of his mind the next?" (173). By the end of the novel, when Ursa is performing fellatio on Mutt she realizes what it was:

> It had to be sexual, I was thinking… In a split second I knew what it was, in a split second of hate and love I knew what it was. . . . A moment of pleasure and excruciating pain at the same time, a moment of broken skin but not sexlessness, a moment just before sexlessness, a moment that stops before it breaks the skin. (184)

Ursa realizes while performing fellatio on her husband that her great grandmother bit her slavemaster's phallus, thereby reasserting her power in a seemingly servile act. Why then would she silence this moment of agency in slavery? Li posits that this act of resistance ultimately forces Great Gram to leave the plantation so that she doesn't get killed, but therefore also forces her to leave her daughter behind. Great Gram's absence leads Corregidora to take Gram on as a sexual slave. Because Great Gram's act of resistance led to the oppression of her daughter, she "strikes it from memory" (Li 134). Because her act of resistance is too difficult to reconcile with its disastrous consequence for her daughter, Li argues that Great Gram's call to make generations is an

> attempt to compensate for this severance by uniting the Corregidora women into a single narrative voice, a unitary identity that perceives all experiences through the same historical lens. By privileging victimization over aggression, submission over desire, Great Gram bequeaths a legacy that emphasizes common bonds among women. Their shared experience of oppression comes to be more

> important than moments of individual distinction. Because subjection and abuse act as the foundation of their unification, any departure from a narrative of victimization is perceived as a threat to their social unit. (134)

Using Li's claims about the silence surrounding Great Gram's resistance as a lens, we might then better understand the ambiguity surrounding Ursa's opening fall. Similar to the ways in which Mama must enact her own victimization with Martin, or any man, to keep the bond of the Corregidora women intact, Ursa might also orchestrate her own victimization by creating a scenario of male abuse. Yet, if Ursa is complicit in this moment, then her self-silencing, like Great Gram's, might be viewed similarly as a coping mechanism because the act of resistance resulted in the oppression, and ultimate death, of her unborn child as well. Ursa's self-silencing might then be understood as a way to preserve her unification with her foremothers by enacting a scenario that perpetuates her status as a victim to male violence. Her manipulation of the details of this narrative over time proves this point. In this way, the shared collective experience of male abuse in this matriarchal line isn't empowering nor does it lead to growth, but instead leaves these women shackled to its legacy.

Like the self-silencing of Great Gram and possibly Ursa's resistance, there is another deafening silence that prohibits the Corregidora women from having healthy heterosexual relationships, love and desire. As mentioned earlier both Mama and Ursa struggle with vocalizing their desire for sex, but rather often perform submission for their male partners whether they want the sexual encounter or not. The voicelessness surrounding these women's sexuality arguably stems from their foremother's silence surrounding their own sexuality. As property and prostitutes, Great Gram and Gram's sexual desires are not something we can lightly consider. As Hortense Spillers reminds us, "whether or not the captive female and/or her sexual

oppressor derived ‘pleasure’ from their seductions and couplings is not a question we can politely ask. Whether or not ‘pleasure’ is possible at all under conditions that I would aver as nonfreedom for both or either of the parties has not been settled” (473). The notion of desire in a master-slave relationship becomes complicated particularly since under slave law enslaved consent is moot. Since “property” cannot offer consent, the slave is presumed to be always willing (Hartman 81). Because a slave cannot legally consent or resist—especially since resistance usually ended in death—most black feminist critics have acknowledged that sex between a master and a slave is always rape. Understanding that master-slave sex is always rape makes it easier to see Davis’s frustration with Genovese’s positioning of love in this context, particularly because of the consequences of resistance. For example, Ursa’s grandmothers tell of a story in which an enslaved woman castrates her master so as to resist rape. As a consequence, the woman’s husband’s phallus is also castrated, stuffed in her mouth, and the couple is hanged (Jones 67). Thus, since resistance to rape often ends with traumatic consequences submission often allows for survival.

The complexities surrounding submission also speak back to Jacobs’s *Incidents*. In this text, she outlines the nuances of sex during slavery as what she can only describe as “something akin to freedom” (501). This phrase, and lack of rhetoric, for submission in the context of coercion reveals its un-representability. For instance, Jacobs discusses her decision to have sex with a free white man, Mr. Sands, in the hopes of getting pregnant in order to ward off the sexual advances of her master, Mr. Flint. She says, “it seems less degrading to give one’s self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment” (465). Here, Jacobs’s boldly iterates her consent to have sex with Mr. Sands, despite legally having none, by using the phrase

"give one's self." Because she is not the property of Mr. Sands and because of her offering up her body, Jacobs's feels a kind of freedom in sleeping with this white man. Yet, despite her acknowledgement that she is giving herself to him, since her consent is legally moot, wouldn't her sexual experience with this free man be considered rape? If you legally cannot offer consent aren't all of your sexual experiences considered rape? Under this logic, should we ignore Jacobs's claim that she gave herself to Sands? Does her decision help humanize her by showcasing her agency in an institution that fails to allot her any? Or does the acknowledgement that she made a choice minimize the reality that this is in fact rape?

The lack of language for submission in the context of coercion speaks to the complexity of these questions. Jones, too, notes the legacy of this absence, when Ursa lacks adequate words while having what seems to be a painful sexual experience. When having intercourse with Tadpole McCormick, her second husband, Ursa struggles to feel aroused. When he continues to provoke her to talk dirty to him, "'What am I doing to you, Ursa? What am I doing to you?'" She says, "I kept struggling with him. I made a sound in my throat. I didn't know what he wanted me to say. What I felt didn't have words…it was painful now" (75). While this sexual encounter doesn't occur during slavery, Ursa's difficulty in arousal and ultimate pain during this sexual encounter speaks to the potential issues of consent. While Ursa doesn't express overt aversion to this sexual experience, her uncomfortability, silence, and ultimate pain suggests a potential connection between the legibility of consent and desire for women past and present. Although marital rape laws are anachronistic with the publication of this novel and so issues of consent are absent from popular conceptions of sex in marriage, Ursa's notation that she hardly refuses her first husband's sexual advances also bespeaks this issue: "Whenever he wanted it and I didn't,

he'd take me, because he knew that I wouldn't say, No, Mutt, or even if I had, sometimes I wonder if whether he would have taken me anyway" (156).

Although Jones might be drawing a connection between the similarity of past and present conditions of coercion for women, for submission to turn into desire, and even love, becomes a notion that most of us don't want to consider. Jones, however, makes it clear that desire in slavery is *taught* through the manipulation of sexuality. When Great Gram shows interest in a black man on the plantation, Corregidora becomes jealous and angry that she will become intimate with another slave. In order to convince Great Gram that she shouldn't desire this black man,

> Corregidora would grab hold of me down there between my legs and said he didn't want nothing black down there. He said if he catch me fucking something black, they wouldn't have no pussy, and he wouldn't have none neither. And then he was squeezing me all up on my pussy and then digging his hands up in there. We was up in his room. That's where he always bring me when he wont to scold me about something, or fuck with me…Then he was just digging all up in me till he got me where he wonted me and then he just laid me down on that big bed of his and started fucking me. (125)

By sexually arousing Great Gram while scolding her, Corregidora is able to teach Ursa's grandmother whom to desire. By getting her "where he wonted," assumes that he is able to arouse her desire for sex, ultimately redirecting it towards him instead of the slave. Through this education, Great Gram and Gram become tricked into want for their master. Consequently, her original hate for her master becomes mixed with feelings of desire over time because of his continual sexual manipulation.

The Pleasure/Pain Paradox

Interestingly, in the same way that the grandmother's desire in the context of coercion is manipulated and taught, Jones includes the character of May Alice to also show how younger girls are soon taught that with pleasure comes pain. Ursa's childhood friend May Alice is older than the protagonist and since May Alice becomes sexually active before Ursa, she shares her experiences:

> 'Does it hurt?'
>
> 'It does for a little while, and then it feels good.'
>
> 'Naw it don't.'
>
> 'Yes, it does.'
>
> How can it feel good if it hurts.'
>
> 'I said it hurts for a little while, and then all the hurting goes, and then it feels good.'
>
> 'I don't believe you.' (136-137)

Here, Ursa's inability to conceptualize how something that hurts can feel good at the same time illustrates her childhood naiveté and the education she has received from her grandmothers about binary emotions and their inability to coexist. Therefore, May Alice's discussion of pleasure during sex becomes "a striking contrast to the litany of rape and abuse that Ursa's 'mothers' taught to her" (Streeter 782). Interestingly, May Alice expresses the same sentiment after having a baby, "It's a hurt that feels good too. I mean afterwards" (144). While May Alice's focus on pleasure is poignant, it becomes difficult to discern how we are supposed to feel about the juxtaposition of pleasure and pain since sex and childbirth are both natural phenomenon for

women. This becomes even more difficult considering the novel's suggestion of female desire in abusive scenarios in which slavery and patriarchy are key players. Here, pleasure and pain prove a natural paradox for women; however, how are we to understand when slavery and patriarchy manipulate women by presenting abuse and sexuality as a natural association also?

This comingling of pleasure and pain is continually witnessed in the grandmothers' constant retelling of Corregidora's abuses. When these stories are told by these women, uncomfortable erotic moments often arise. For instance, in one of Ursa's first memories of her grandmother's stories, she says,

> I was on her lap. She told the same story over and over again. She had her hands around my waist, and I had my back to her…She didn't need her hands around me to keep me in her lap, and sometimes I'd see the sweat in her palms…Once when she was talking, she started rubbing my thighs with her hands, and I could feel the sweat on my legs. Then she caught herself, and stopped, and held my waist again. (11)

Through the telling of her master's sexual abuse, Great Gram becomes aroused as evidenced through her touching, sweating, and rubbing on Ursa. While Great Gram tells these stories to keep evidence of the horrors of slavery alive, they also have the effect of arousal which enables her to keep her sexual desires alive despite her post-slavery refusal of men. In a way, it becomes unclear whether Great Gram is more invested in the repetition of the stories to legitimize her existence and/or to keep a suppressed sexuality alive.

Perhaps to situate the legacies of the hate/love relationship during slavery in contemporary relationships, Jones positions both Ursa and her mother, Irene, in abusive relationships. In fact when the violent altercation between Ursa and her husband Mutt happens in

the opening of the novel, Ursa is so angry over this incident that she believes there is no way her husband could actually love her, "If that nigger loved me he wouldn't've throwed me down the steps" (36). Interestingly, Ursa abides by the same logic that Davis makes in her essay; if one is the victim of abuse and is being oppressed there is no "basis for 'delight, affection and love'" (26). While it might be argued that to compare abuse during slavery to domestic abuse in the 1950s would be anachronistic, it does become important for Ursa to recognize the ways in which her abusive relationship with her husband is a manifestation of the legacies of slavery. For it is Cat Lawson that reminds us and Ursa that, "I know niggers love you do worse than that"(37). Cat's reminder that abuse and love are often "[t]wo humps on the same camel" dismisses Ursa's insistence on the one-dimensional victim/victimizer narrative (102). While it is somewhat unclear why it is necessary to accept abuse and love as corollaries, Cat's contention that Mutt loves Ursa, forces the latter to question her own accountability for this abusive relationship. Ursa says, "Is it more his fault than *mine*? Naw, when you start thinking that way. Naw, that nigger's to blame. What's bothering me? Great Gram, because I can't make generations" (*emphasis added* 41). Ursa's uncertainty about what is bothering her suggests that it is something beyond her barrenness, and the questioning of her own culpability seems to take precedent. Here, Ursa continues to refuse how she might be involved in the abuse, yet the fact that she questions herself is poignant. By making herself accountable for her own abuse in this relationship, similar to Mama's insistence that it was her fault Martin became violent, Ursa becomes aware of the ways in which she becomes her own oppressor as well as the oppressor of others.

Ursa's suggestion that she might be accountable for her own trauma isn't meant to suggest that her grandmothers are also accountable for their rape by their master for the institution of slavery leaves these women utterly powerless. For example, by the end of the novel

Ursa posits, “But was what Corregidora had done to her, to them, any worse that what Mutt had done to me, than, what we had done to each other, than what Mama had done to Daddy, or what he had done to her in return, making her walk down the street looking like a whore?” (184). Here, it is clear that Ursa is careful not to indict her grandmothers for their acts, but is more critical of her and her mother as complicit in their own oppression as well as the men they chose to be intimate with.

By the end of the novel, both Mutt and Ursa are adamant that they don’t want pleasure and pain to exist simultaneously in their relationship; they both insist, “I don’t want a kind of (wo)man that hurt me” (185). The silence surrounding desire in her grandmothers’ narratives amidst their abusive situations and Ursa’s discovery of it seems to suggest that Jones wants us to acknowledge that these dichotomous emotions are natural in the same way that May Alice positions them and that we must recognize the ways in which they can exist simultaneously. Yet, perhaps Ursa and Mutt’s vocalization that they don’t want hurt suggests that this natural paradox can be negotiated, and that it does not have to be a mere fact of life in all instances. Once again, this notion reveals itself through May Alice:

> ‘May Alice, you better quit.’
>
> She said nothing.
>
> ‘ He ought to quit if you won’t,’ I said
>
> ‘You know a boy won’t quit.’
>
> ‘Why not?’
>
> She laughed. ‘Anyway,’ she said, ‘they be after it till you tell them to stop. But then after you start giving them some, you wouldn’t feel right to tell them to stop. I mean, you wouldn’t feel you had any right to tell them to stop.’

'I would.' (139-140)

May Alice's silence surrounding her desire here speaks to the silencing of black female desire as a larger cultural phenomenon, and her redirecting of the problem as Harold's insatiability makes her desire and consent even less intelligible. Her dismissive laugh that boys don't have the ability to stop having sex once they've started illustrates that her gender education has already been cemented. Her acknowledgement that she wouldn't feel right to stop now that she had started also illustrates her internalization of hegemonic gender roles, in which women's submission, irrelevant of desire, is of utmost importance. Therefore, May Alice's silence surrounding her desire here makes her sexual experiences with Harold appear coerced.

Without the vocalization of female desire the intelligibility of consent becomes extremely difficult to decipher. And yet, as seen in the scenes of slavery, female desire doesn't make consent irrelevant. While Ursa's claim that she feels she has the right to resist a man is promising, as we witness later with her husband Mutt her resistance proves futile if not entirely nonexistent. In both instances May Alice and Ursa's later submission illustrates how female silence allows for the perpetuation and acceptability of rape. If women cannot vocalize their desire then how will their partners know if sex is consensual? For under that paradigm, consent remains moot if submission usurps desire and thus enacts a legacy where male prowess supersedes female desire. Also, in that case, men will always be the victimizers if consent is unspoken. Thus, Jones's novel makes the argument that one of the problematic legacies of slavery is the intelligibility of consent in the context of coercion. Whereas, consent under slavery was moot, and so slave vocalization of desire became irrelevant, the same later holds true for contemporary marriage. The repetitive question throughout the novel, "What's a husband for?" is indicative of this point (55, 65). Yet, if Ursa can discover desire in the context of slavery and

vocalize its existence then she can undermine the origin of the legacy that consent is irrelevant, recognize its value, and begin to vocalize desire for herself for the first time.

Consequently, the novel's silence surrounding female desire and Ursa's subsequent discovery of it in her grandmother's narratives become foundational to her self-empowerment and self-expression. While slavery has enacted a legacy of silence surrounding black female desire and individual resistance because of its negative associations with violence and oppression, it is these two issues that black women need to reclaim from slavery's shackles for themselves. While stories of trauma help these women to negotiate hate, how do Mama and Ursa learn how to negotiate love? For example, when Martin pleas with Irene that she "could've let me," Irene's silence speaks volumes about her inability to be emotionally vulnerable with him:

> "What was you afraid of?' he asked.
>
> 'I said nothing.
>
> 'You could've let me. I know you could have let me. What were you afraid of, Correy?' He always called me Correy, you know.
>
> I still wouldn't say nothing. I never did tell him. I never would. I think he just thought I was just afraid of him being a man, or being too big, or too much for me or something. I never would tell him.' (120).

Martin's claim that "you could've let me" speaks to his desire for reciprocated love and Irene's "I said nothing" speaks to her inability to love this man. Since she was never educated in what love looked like and was only taught to know "who to hate" (10), she lacks the capability to reciprocate vulnerability in return. While Li argues that it is important for Ursa to hear her mother's experience to know that "it is possible for a Corregidora woman to experience emotions and states of being outside Great Gram and Gram's dominating narrative," Irene offers limited

space for alternative emotions here (136). Although her emotions might be suggestive, she remains silent and so I argue that it becomes Martin's desire for female love that makes a break in the grandmother's narrative. Irene's story about Martin creates a space for men to be loving and affectionate towards women rather than just victimizers and rapists. Yet, Irene's immutability becomes further solidified in her refusal of her neighbor Mr. Lloyd. While Ursa is hopeful that the telling of her mother's story will open her up to the possibilities of "some man" (132), she soon learns that desire is something her mother gave up a long time ago: "she had written to me something about having left a certain world behind her" (182). Despite her mother's inability for growth, the positioning of a loving man in her story becomes useful corrective narrative for Ursa in her reconciliation with her own husband, Mutt.

In the same way that Ursa's family slave narrative becomes debilitating for her, Mutt's own familial past haunts him as well. Although Mutt has been persistent in his iterations to Ursa that "we ain't them" throughout the text, later he reveals that his great grandfather's experiences with his wife also dominate his feelings towards Ursa (151). At times, Mutt is revealed to engage in patterns of behavior that also position women as objects to be had. When he asks his wife, "Are you mine, Ursa, or theirs?" (45), he "highlights a binary mode of thought that prevents Mutt from recognizing Ursa as a free and independent agent" (Li 141). While these comments make it more difficult to sympathize with his character, his story about his great grandfather helps to put it into perspective. After his great grandfather is married, a troop of white men come to reclaim his wife as their property. As a result, Mutt's great grandfather "went crazy he wouldn't eat nothing but onions and peppermint" (183). Perhaps in identifying with his grandfather after he feels the eyes of the men at Happys take Ursa away from him, Mutt tries eating onions and peppermint, but as he notes "it didn't do nothing but make me sick" (184).

Having reconciled himself with and against the legacy of this great grandfather, Ursa notes that Mutt's eyes "were different now. I can't explain how. I felt that now he wouldn't demand the same things" (183). Considering that Mutt has had significant growth and Ursa has begun to enact her own growth and distance from her past, the ending scene between her and Mutt becomes a climactic moment for both of them.

The final scene of the novel, in which Ursa performs fellatio on her husband, allegorizes the pleasure/pain paradox that Jones uses throughout the novel. Yet whereas this metaphor had largely been used in regards to women, Jones flips the script by enacting this dueling emotive on a man. As Li points out, when Ursa has the epiphanal moment of what Great Gram did to Corregidora, she notes "I think he might have known too" (184). By enacting a "joint epiphany between men and women," Ursa forces her male partner to confront the pleasure/pain paradox that women undergo both biologically, through sex and childbirth, as well as socially, through slavery and patriarchy (Li 184). This act offers Great Gram and Ursa a position of power that they generally don't get to have otherwise and forces the men to confront the kind of victimization that these women are regularly subject to, but it is also significant that the novel does not end here.

A mere binary reversal, while allowing Ursa a kind of power she didn't have before, doesn't enact the healing work that Jones's novel sets out to perform. In fact, Ursa's acknowledgment that "I wanted it too," suggests that her desire is being evoked and vocalized for the first time in the novel (184). While her acknowledgement that "I could kill you" also demonstrates her ability to resist like her Great Gram did, the goal for Ursa is not to continue to align herself with her foremothers and perpetuate their narrative, for that narrative has proven to have tragic consequences for herself and her mother (184). Instead, Ursa's refusal to castrate

Mutt illustrates the possibility of women's resistance while simultaneously refusing it. Rather, Mutt and Ursa's claim that "I don't want a (wo)man that hurt me" forces both parties to recognize their complicity in each other's pain (185). By both taking responsibility for each other's pain, Mutt and Ursa present a healthy and reciprocated loving relationship, one that not only breaks the cycle of trauma but one that has yet to exist in the Corregidora line. While each has seen the ways in which pain and pleasure may exist simultaneously, they both make the choice to negotiate the pain by not using it against the other, a freedom that wasn't available to their slave ancestors. Ultimately, Ursa uses the power of the present to make decisions and choices about her life that Great Gram didn't have access to in the past. Although they perhaps lack the affirmative language to state that they want love and can only say they don't want hurt, there is a space for it. This final moment of vocalizing desire and choosing love suggests that despite her foremothers' silence about its possibilities, Ursa has come to a place where "I feel satisfied that I could have loved" (103).

CHAPTER FOUR

"TRADITION IS FINE, BUT YOU GOTTA KNOW WHEN TO STOP BEING A FOOL": DISMANTLING WESTERN AUTHORITY IN GLORIA NAYLOR'S *MAMA DAY*

While the previous chapters were largely concerned with negotiating black identity within the colonialist systems that created it, Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* dismantles hierarchal epistemologies in order to empower contemporary African Americans in their quest for healing, love, and identity. Uniquely, this novel operates outside of Western understanding of time, space, and knowledge, which allows for an alternative vantage point. Yet, despite all of the possibilities the mystical space of Willow Springs offers, the family tree of the island's native inhabitants reveals an intergenerational pattern: female suicide. Using the relationship between master and slave, Bascombe Wade and Sapphira Day, as the originary source of this trauma, *Mama Day* becomes an investigative tale into generations of black female pain and its counterpart, masculine possessiveness. Naylor's third novel extends the conversation surrounding the subject of master-slave relations, largely through a narrative focus on the dangers associated with possessive love. The author includes an assortment of relationships that serve as catalysts for the critique of gender roles inscribed in historic representations of the relationship between the white slave master and the black female.

What is new to Naylor's discussion of the master-slave relationship is her attention to "broken-hearted men." Her sympathetic treatment of controlling patriarchs offers a unique insight into figures we are quick to dismiss, and that has been overlooked in much of the secondary scholarship on the novel. Through the character analysis of these men and their refusal to let go of the women they love, *Mama Day* identifies the underlying pain that

encourages destructive behaviors and belief systems: loss. This characterization also allows the author to connect these individual behaviors to larger social and cultural systems that operate out of a similar source of lack. By recognizing the limiting beliefs that also underpin Western epistemology, master discourse, and patriarchy, the novel delineates how knowledge is contingent on an individual's sense of self. By understanding the nature of possession and its relationship to the systems that allowed for it, the characters within the novel are able to utilize alternative perspectives that disavow loss and offer healing capabilities.

In order to ultimately garner sympathy for possessive men that will help to break the cycle of trauma in the Day family, it becomes important that readers surrender all certainty and ways of knowing. This is first accomplished with the novel's prefatory documents, then again with competing narratives surrounding the island's matriarch, Sapphira Wade, and finally with the realization that the entirety of the novel is a dialogue between Cocoa and her deceased husband, George. References to authoritative texts regarding Western reason, logic, as well as slavery become immediately evident in the prefatory documents at the beginning of the novel which serve to simultaneously legitimize and delegitimize ways of knowing. A map, a bill of sale, and a family tree all appear to signify on the authenticating texts that preface most American slave narratives of the nineteenth century. Written by renowned white men and women, the authenticating texts that prefaced the slave narrative served to attest to the reliability and authenticity of the slave narrator. While Naylor's prefatory documents are not literally a written testament accounting for the authenticity of the novel, the prefatory documents do legitimize Willow Springs and Sapphira Wade as real entities. Yet, juxtaposed with the prologue that will later dismiss right/wrong and truth/lies, the realness, or perhaps authority, these documents is also brought under question. For example, a map of Willow Springs is included to

authenticate where this story takes place; however, the narrative proper illustrates how this space is mythical, in that it does not belong to a particular state nor is it given accurate geographical coordinates. In the prologue we are made aware that “Willow Springs ain’t in no state” (4) because the island resides parallel with Georgia and South Carolina, and the bridge connecting the island to the mainland sits on the dividing line of both states; unable to reconcile which state this island belongs to, the island remains un-owned (Naylor 4). We also learn that the idiom of the town “18 & 23” is misappropriated; the longitude and latitude that marks Willow Springs on the map is in fact “81 & 32” (Naylor 7-8). Despite the inability to demarcate the land, when asked, “So who it belong to?” the community’s reply is “[i]t belongs to us” (Naylor 5). As ambiguous as Willow Springs is geographically, so is that answer, considering the reader is not told who is speaking during the prologue. By offering ambiguous notions of place, rather than fixed definitions, Naylor creates space that offers possibilities beyond reason or logic.

The novel then opens with contradictory claims about the foremother of Willow Springs, Sapphira Wade, in order to dismantle any assumptions that readers might bring in to the novel. The narrator says, “It ain’t about right or wrong, truth or lies; it’s about a slave woman who brought a whole new meaning to both them words, soon as you cross over here from beyond the bridge” (3). This line immediately introduces readers into the uncertainty of the novel while also establishing a curious paradigm for remembering slavery. To suggest that it isn’t about right or wrong when it comes to remembering slavery is jarring. By refusing to affix blame to those that participated in slavery or profited from it potentially allows for compromised and troubling perspectives, particularly those that attempt to assuage historical culpability and guilt from white participants. Yet, simultaneously, if this narrative isn’t about truth or lies, then the Western, written, and legal documentation that defines slaves and African Americans with racist

assumptions is also debunked. Consequently, this opening line sets up a tension between both discourses, if only to dismiss them.

Although the novel informs readers that this story is about a slave woman, it is curious that she is disremembered by her descendants and community: although "[e]verybody knows" that Sapphira murdered her slavemaster, Bascombe Wade, married him, bore him seven sons, managed to convince him to deed his slaves the land, and lived to tell about it, "nobody talks about the legend" (3). Why would this community forget and/or choose not to talk about their ancestor that bequeathed freedom and property in 1823? Also, what does it mean that every story told about her is conflicting? For example, she is described as having skin that is "satin black, biscuit cream, red as Georgia clay" and we are told that she "smothered Bascombe Wade," "put a dagger in his kidney," and "poisoned him for his trouble" "depending upon which of us takes a mind to her" (3). Interestingly, then, Sapphira's "new meaning" to the terms "slave" and "woman"—referenced in the line above—seemingly defies meaning if they are understood to embody more than one definitive narrative. In addition to these ambiguities outlined at the beginning of this chapter, readers are also told that Sapphira bore her master seven sons in a thousand days, and/or persuaded him in a thousand days to deed his slaves all the land.

Curiously, although we are told several times that she bore her master seven sons, knowing that she was purchased in 1819 by her bill of sale and that he and/or she dies in 1823 leaves only four years to birth seven children. These confusing and contradictory narratives immediately initiate the reader into the novel's uncertainty, and fulfills the warning that the novel "ain't about right or wrong, truth or lies" (3). Not only does the introduction usher the reader into an alternative reality, but the novel's failure to ever confirm or deny one or all of these narratives offers permanent teleological suspension. Thus the motive of the novel hinges

on a letting go of right/wrong and truth/lies and therefore a relinquishing of authority and judgment. Since judgment is likely based in "cultural and/or racial superiority" (Lamothe 165) and determined by those in power, if judgment is surrendered, then the possibility of new meanings, definitions, and, therefore, the overall re-conception of slavery and its legacies become available.

The reader plays an important role in *Mama* Day considering that the text breaks the fourth wall and talks back. In the prologue, the narrator also asks the reader to relinquish his or her authority and "really listen" (10). Using the college-educated Reema's boy as a cautionary tale of someone who never learns to hear without words, the narrator says: "Uh, huh, listen. Really listen this time: the only voice is your own. But you done just heard about the legend of Sapphira Wade, though nobody here breathes her name…you done heard it without a single living soul really saying a word…Pity, though, Reema's boy couldn't listen, like you, to Cocoa and George down by them oaks" (10). In this scene, readers become aware that they are privy to a story that Reema's boy wasn't able to discern due to his college-learning. Readers are also informed that there is a fantastical way they are hearing the story also, for not a "single living soul [is] really saying a word" (10). How is it that readers can hear a story without words? The narrator's mentioning of hearing Cocoa and George down by the oaks resonates with the prologue's earlier notation that although Cocoa is currently living near Charleston with her husband and two boys, she sometimes comes back to Willow Springs, puts moss in her shoes, goes near the oak grove—where the Day family graveyard is located—and talks to her deceased husband, George. Yet, this couple doesn't exactly talk, for the narrator says, "And as her and George are there together for a good two hours or so—neither one saying a word—Reema's boy coulda heard from them everything there was to tell" (10). Thus, the novel puts forward the

notion that there is a way of hearing without words, and from this scene with Cocoa and George the prologue suggests that it is by communicating with the dead. Because the rest of the novel presents as a dialogue between George and Cocoa, readers become participants in or witnesses to this other-wordly form of communication. The notion that no words are needed not only dismantles discursive epistemology but also oral epistemology. Later in the novel, Mama Day reminds readers that "some things can be known without words" (267). The suggestion that there is a domain of experience beyond words provides space for the "unspeakable things unspoken." Knowing that language is corrupt or limited in what it can express, makes it necessary to embrace other-wordly, sensory, or imaginative ways of knowing that potentially leads to more holistic conceptions of knowledge.

Naylor's renegotiation of the historical accounts of slavery is likely predicated on the fact that, historically, those in power construct African American identity and the memories and folk culture of this group of people is suppressed. This novel therefore serves as an opportunity to revisit the past in order to reconcile the ways in which imposed definitions influence identity construction. Troublingly, because this renegotiation of identity politics, or new meanings that Sapphira provides, only happens when "you cross over here from beyond the bridge" (3), then the novel suggests the futility of this project outside of Willow Springs. Since time, geography, and truth are elusive in Willow Springs, the novel also potentially suggests the futility of this project in the Western world. For example, if Sapphira brings new meaning to the words slave and woman only across the bridge, then what resonance does this novel have outside of itself? Similarly, in Keith Byerman's *Remembering the Past in Contemporary African American Fiction*, he notes that *Mama Day* attempts to imagine a "golden age of black power and freedom," but because this "black utopia"—that exists in a liminal space—is the only place to

escape the racism on the other side of the bridge, then this novel also purports that "black power is an imaginary condition" (67).Byerman's frustration with Naylor's "beautiful dream" (67) is perhaps indebted to the African American novel's long relationship with social realism.

Social Realism and African American Literary Aesthetics

Since the nineteenth century, social realism was considered the most effective genre for promoting black writers' anti-racist struggles. As a political act, black writing required literal and straightforward engagement with social reality, so as not to alienate the writer and/or reader. This aesthetic proved more suitable to ensure ideological and political change for black Americans, or more particularly, to challenge black inferiority. Because this inferiority was predicated on black communities' non-Western beliefs and practices, "public figures such as Douglass, Delaney, and others with advanced education believed that disavowing folk beliefs about sympathetic magic and the supernatural was the first necessary step toward racial uplift" (Martin 121-122). Although writers like Douglass and Delany were among the first to champion propagandist literature, there were also writers like Charles Chesnutt, whose *The Conjure Woman* (1899) embraced not only political resistance through "signifyin(g)" but also embraced West African based spirituality as a mode of political resistance (Gates 51). Despite the popularity of Chesnutt's collection of short stories, experimental writing, and engagement with African spirituality systems, this style was largely dismissed as ineffective until after the Civil Rights era.

The tendency to avoid experimentalism became a pragmatic choice, for genres outside of realism might evade the harsh reality of the social and economic inequities African Americans were facing. For example, although twentieth century writers like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston experimented with black vernacular and folklore, these two authors were largely

ostracized for it during the era in which they were writing. As Kameelah L. Martin argues, it was not until the Black Power Movement and the Black Arts Movement of the sixties that attention to African cosmology revived (126). Bernard Bell also acknowledges that in the late sixties many Afro-Americans shifted away from Eurocentric models and instead, turned "to non-Western, nonwhite communities and Afrocentric models to discover or create possibilities for autonomous selves and communities" (136). As a consequence of moving away from Eurocentric models, African American literature also began to incorporate more Afrocentric ideologies, such as the inclusion of "vernacular and folk traditions" (Martin 127). Martin also points out that it wasn't until this shift in the post-Civil Rights Era that reception and scholarly attention was redirected "toward the vernacular, which resulted in the rediscovery of Hurston's genius and a conscious move to privilege folk belief and vernacular traditions in African American literature" (127). It was then that the black aesthetic began to shift from social realism to more experimental writing that often privileged African-based ways of knowing.

Tangentially, Gloria Hull also notes in *Soul Talk* that the social climate of the seventies demanded an alternative perspective from black women writers in particular. Not only do black women writers begin to have a renaissance of sorts, but their literature returned to an important black female figure as a source of empowerment: the conjure woman. The conjure woman not only functioned as a source that defied domination and hegemonic ideology, but she also operated as a protective figure that interrogated the generational tensions of the past in the present. Under the seventies' conservatism of the Reagan administration, the demonization of black women through the advent of the "welfare queen," the quieting of civil rights and feminist activism, and black assimilation tactics, black women writers used the conjure woman to rejuvenate black folk culture and empower black women. In an attempt not to forget a distinct

folk culture utilized by all-black communities of the past, black women writers sought to bring their culture into the majority by placing Africanist spirituality systems at the center of their work. Writers such as Toni Cade Bambara, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker present African cosmologies as the center of healing needed for survival amidst racism, sexism, and other social injustices. The discovery of folk culture and privileging the quotidian details of life also emphasized individual experience, particularly black women's experience, often neglected by social realism's politically-minded literature.

Byerman's frustration that the enchanted island of Willow Springs, as a space of black resistance and power, is imaginary suggests not only his disbelief in Africanist cosmology but also its irreconcilablity with Western epistemology. Similar to his sentiments, the more black women writers began to experiment and incorporate non-Western epistemologies in their writings, the more their works began to be marginalized and labeled under genres like magical realism. While the name of this genre positively attests to the blending of both the reliance on African cosmology and faithfulness to the socio-political context in which they were writing, magical realism has continued to have troubling Eurocentric connotations for most of these writers. In an 1986 interview with Christina Davis, Toni Morrison expresses her irritation with the term "magical": "If you could apply the word 'magical' then that *dilutes* the realism but it seemed legitimate because there were these supernatural and unrealistic things, surreal things, going on in the text" (226). Although this genre suggests its attempt to reconcile the divide between African tradition with Western rationalism, as Morrison's comment suggests, the term "magical" discredits African traditions as imaginary or fake. Morrison notes that these sentiments are rooted in racial and cultural hierarchy and that, ironically, despite Western rationalism's supposed truthfulness, its objectivity has proven to be just as fraudulent (227).

Rather, Morrison prefers the term enchantment for it does not seem to discredit African-based epistemologies, but rather embrace the very real ways of knowing that Morrison and other black women experience first-hand. As Morrison claims, "it seemed impossible for *me* to write about black people and eliminate that simply because it was 'unbelievable'"(226). She notes that not only was magic a real part of her every day experiences, but "it was an enormous resource for the solution of certain kinds of problems" (226-27).

While enchanted literature certainly challenges Western epistemology's premise, more importantly, it reveals Western rationalism as "merely a culturally contingent philosophical stance" (Chassot 19). By knocking rationalism off its tower of authority, enchanted literature doesn't replace Western thought with Africanist epistemology but allows both to exist simultaneously.[21] In this light, *Mama Day*'s use of alternative belief systems should be read less as a counternarrative to the master narrative of slavery, and more as a deconstruction of the epistemological and discursive strategies that have allowed a master narrative to exist and remain in authority (Chassot 20). Africanist cosmologies amid Naylor's novel offer a model for relinquishing Western authority, which thereby allows for the confluence of seemingly anti-thetical categories: right and wrong, truth and lies, past and present. This elusivity of definitions is "not presented as limited, but on the contrary as empowering and liberating, because it allows for a more dynamic and therefore more sustaining dialogue between past and present" (Chassot 19). Consequently, this narrative technique is well-suited to tackle the issues of the neo-slave narrative in general; namely, it reconstitutes the present in spite and despite the slave legacies of

[21]The simultaneous allowance for both cultural epistemologies is an important endeavor for as Wendy Belcher notes, "the easy alignment of magic and the indigenous means that magic realism is increasingly read and, I argue, produced to support exotic and nostalgic notions of immigrant communities that are no more than racist reductions" (36).

racism, violence, and oppression. The psychological consequences of this endeavor, in particular, are paramount. As Mama Day mentions throughout the novel, "the mind is everything" (90). The psychological escape from the limitations of the Western world offers infinite possibilities for renegotiating contemporary black identity.

Dismantling the Master's House

Through Cocoa and George's early interactions, *Mama Day* reveals the naiveté of stereotypes, fixed definitions, and even language. Perhaps like the reader's own biases that the prologue seeks to dismantle, George and Cocoa's preconceived notions of identity are specific to fixed understandings of region, race, and gender. Their clash of cultures causes a tenuous relationship between the two, ultimately revealing the limitations of both upbringings as well as the lasting effects of one-dimensional narratives and perspectives. George notes that he has "the same myths" about southern women that Cocoa has about northern men (33). While the South for George conjures up images of "jasmine-scented nights, warms biscuits and honey being brought to me on flowered china plates as you sat at my feet and rubbed your cheek against my knee," the north, for Cocoa, meant "giv[ing] him what he wants" (33). While both perspectives are predicated on patriarchal notions, George also claims that Cocoa came to New York "following a myth" and that in fact she "understood nothing" about it (61). Through the couple's encounters it becomes more and more obvious that Cocoa harbors racial expectations that are essentialized and sometimes wholly inaccurate. Cocoa struggles with finding employment in New York which she attributes to the covert racism rampant in the North. Because corporations are no longer allowed to advertise to specific race groups, she must begin to decipher whether or not the employers would be willing to hire a black woman: "New York racism moved

underground like most people did" (18). When she voices this frustration, listeners are shocked at her desire for segregation, but she remains firm that it would at least bring back clarity about racialized spaces. While these thoughts might suggest a romanticized notion of a segregated or Afro-centric space, Cocoa's racial politics soon reveal themselves in troubling ways. Since New York is full of an array of multicultural groups in opposition to the black or white South near Willow Springs, Cocoa compartmentalizes certain groups of people based on food associations: bagels with Jewish people and tacos with Puerto Ricans (62). Frustrated with these essentialist notions George calls his girlfriend a "bigot" and "ignorant" because her food associations aren't even accurate: "tacos aren't from Puerto Rico" (62). Both George and Cocoa's comments here reveal their problematic internalization of certain mythologies, particularly those that attempt to identify groups of people.

The couple's disconnect as a result of mythologies surrounding racialized and gendered expectations proves most tenuous for their relationship. This tension is evident when Cocoa finds herself particularly conflicted with George's past relationship with a white woman named Shawn. In her frustration of having to listen to George talk about his relationship with his white ex-girlfriend—for she feels it was not a legitimate relationship but more fetishistic—Cocoa imagines what her black friend Selma, "with a bad accent and bad attitude" would have said to George:

> Did she meet you in her anthropology course? I hear ya'll are a lot easier for them to housebreak than chimpanzees. Or did her shrink tell her that the only way to get you out of her nightmares was to screw you? Maybe she's one of those affirmative action nymphomaniacs—running through you like water, looking for that ever elusive nine-inch thrill? (103).

Cocoa constructs Shawn's interest in George stereotypically, in that George is constructed as the hypersexual exotic "Other" that Shawn wants to conquest. The reference to George's "nine inch" phallus also plays on black male stereotypes. Similarly, George also struggles in understanding black women's attempts to uphold purity standards: "Come right out and tell her what you were both thinking half an hour after meeting someone…and you're a pig. No, you had to join her in fantasy land…She wanted to be anything but a skinned-down poster on Mrs. Jackson's blackboard" (105). Cocoa and George's interior monologue highlights the problematic effects of slavery and these characters' indoctrination of racialized ideology, where black men are stereotypically constructed as hypersexual, yet embrace that hypersexuality in order to reaffirm their humanity, and black females are somewhat complicit with nineteenth-century notions of white womanhood, such as purity, so as to challenge the stereotypical role as hypersexual Jezebel or breeder. Because both Cocoa and George revert to stereotypes to categorize the other, this tension reveals how they have both internalized dominant constructions of their identities. This accusatory rhetoric also reinforces a sort of erasure of their established humanity. Neither can see the other gender as capable of embodying a complex subjectivity, but only in one-dimensional and essentialist terms.

The conflict between this black couple is indicative of slavery's mythologies that promulgated certain narratives about black men and women. Francis Smith Foster outlines how the power dynamics internalized in slavery proved debilitating to black heterosexual relationships post-emancipation. She states "after the Emancipation Proclamation…people of African descent still could not love and cherish one another" (122). Foster argues that this tension between black men and women was a consequence of trying to reclaim their humanity:

> The men, overpowered by the combined assaults of white people outside and the black women inside their communities, simply could not survive by being loyal and tender. The women, traumatized by regular rape but empowered by greater access to money and work, could not or would not accept masculine authority or protection; thereby not allowing black men to behave like real men. (122)

Hegemonic gender roles post-emancipation were confining for black peoples and their attempts to resituate their humanity. Psychological colonization beginning in slavery and the resistive attempts to correct those narratives after cemented myths about black men and women by 1985, when the crux of the novel is set.

Since these myths about black men's sexual virility and black women's objectification are couched in implicit ontological arguments, it becomes difficult for George and Cocoa to see each other outside of that scope. For example, when George reveals himself as a true gentleman, Cocoa's immediate instinct is to think he is a "married whimp" or a "closet gay" (99). It is difficult for her to conceive of a man that doesn't have sexual expectations or isn't perverse because he does not. She says, "I wasn't ready to believe. Nothing I had met in the world had prepared me for your possibility…I felt what I saw was impossible" (99). This scene is indicative of the ways in which mythologies, particularly those dictated during slavery, are continuing to define and dictate contemporary black life.

"Something More, and Something Deeper than the Old Historical Line": Uncovering the Curse

By opening the novel with several competing narratives that are ultimately never confirmed speaks to the over-determined mythologies, evinced by Cocoa and George, that

continue to circulate around the peculiar institution. Slavery has become hyper-politicized and theorized over time so much that what really happened is largely unknowable, which explains why Mama Day asks "What really happened between Bascombe and Sapphira" twice throughout the novel (138, 308). While, like Cocoa, it becomes easy to make sweeping statements about slavery in the same way she essentializes groups of people, this essay has also revealed the problems of that kind of reasoning and thus makes it more difficult to answer how it is that a slave woman could manage to convince her slavemaster to deed all his land to his slaves and "murder Wade with impunity" (Montgomery 46). As George notes, there seemed to be "something more, and something deeper than the old historical line about slave women and their white masters" (225). Yet, while George posits that there was something deeper than either of those understandings, the novel is careful to leave clues.

The novel provides clues that the reader must discover and collect throughout the novel along with Mama Day. At first, all that remains from Bascombe and Sapphira's tenuous relationship is competing stories and a trace: a local folk colloquium and perhaps a kind of curse, nicknamed 18 & 23. At first glance, it remains unclear whether this trace is indicative of previous discourse related to Bascombe and Sapphira or whether it is used to deconstruct the purpose of ever fully discovering their story. For example, through various references to 18 & 23 its meaning remains elusive despite its ubiquity on the island. From girls that have their hair braided up with their "18 & 23's coming down," boys "breathing 18 & 23," mothers refusing to rock early "18 & 23's," and the manager at the Sheraton trying to "18 & 23" Winky Browne for his crawdaddies by only offering him twelve dollars, this local phrase serves multiple definitions in multiple scenarios for the people of Willow Springs (4). The novel does suggest the 18 & 23'ing that went down between Bascombe and Sapphira was the origin of this colloquialism—

due to the year 1823 in which several events between the couple transpired—yet the fact that readers are unsure of what ever happened between the two signifies on the simultaneously knowing/unknowing that the text tensions (5). Therefore, what can be ascertained is that this original relationship has woven itself into the fabric of the present community's memory, but for what end remains undiscovered.

At Candle Walk, a yearly and local ritual that honors Willow Springs' foremother, Sapphira, Mama Day, the island's matriarch, has an epiphany about her foremother's legend. In this community tradition, members of Willow Springs create gifts of their own making, congregate in the streets with candles, and commemorate Sapphira Wade's flight from her slavemaster back to Africa by lighting her way (206). It is upon walking to the Candle Walk in the dark, guided by her candle, that Mama day, or Miranda, notes how "the light from her candle is playing tricks with the dark, making branches seem longer and bringing up shadows to look like rocks" (117). Miranda says that these shadows were not real, but that as she goes to step over the shadows that look like rocks she finds "she's only stepping on air" (117). Margaret Earley Whitt notes that "Naylor uses the Candle Walk ceremony to let the reader know that any certainty is fragile" (123). It is upon confronting these trickster shadows in a ritual that remembers Sapphira, that Miranda realizes for the first time that the purpose of the Candle Walk was not in fact to commemorate Sapphira. After carefully listening "under the wind" Miranda begins to hear the shuffle of a wool skirt and stomping of leather boots (118). She says, "Oh, precious Jesus, the light wasn't for her—it was for him. The tombstone out by Chevy's Pass. How long did he search for her? Up and down this path…Up and down this path, somehow, a man dies from a broken heart" (118). By realizing that the community ritual was in fact commemorating Bascombe's search for Sapphira, and that he was broken-hearted at her leaving

forces Miranda to rethink their relationship. It is only upon confronting her family's shadows that Miranda begins to question her knowledge about the relationship between Bascombe and Sapphira: "What really happened between her great grandmother and Bascombe Wade? How many—if any—of them seven sons were his?" (138).

This scene begins to unravel many assumptions the Willow Springs community makes about their foremother and her master. Not only does Miranda's questioning of Bascombe's paternity begin to explain Sapphira birthing seven children in four years, but it also forces us to rethink her sexuality outside of her relationship with Bascombe. In addition, to think of Bascombe as a broken-hearted man undermines all preconceived notions of slavery and paints him as a victim to Sapphira's will and desire. These reimaginings of slave and slavemaster outside of conventional representations and understandings marks an interesting point of departure from most neo-slave narratives.

While conventionally in a master-slave relationship Bascombe would be constructed as victimizer and Sapphira as victim, Naylor flips this script: Sapphira's murder of Bascombe reconfigures her as perpetrator and Bascombe's broken-heartedness marks him a victim. Sapphira's role as agent also becomes problematic because of the stereotype of the Sapphire, to which her name suggests, also locks her in a stereotypical identity. In both instances as victim and aggressor Saphhira is enslaved in stereotypical identities. By positing master and slave as both victim and abuser, Naylor posits love as a source of destruction as well as healing. When talking about Sapphira and Bascombe, Miranda says, "And what she gave of her own will, she took away (308). In recognizing that Sapphira has a will, it is important to consider that Sapphira garners a sense of agency in an institution that fails to allot her one. Hartman posits that "the notion of the will connotes more than simply the capacity to act and to do; rather, it distinguishes

the autonomous agent from the enslaved, the encumbered, and the constrained" (Hartman 81). In recognizing Sapphira's sense of agency, Miranda also recognizes her great grandmother's subversion of the institutional laws of slavery. By acknowledging a will, and thus humanity in Sapphira, Naylor concedes Miranda's argument that "she'd never been a slave" (308). Recognizing Sapphira's will and humanity defies reality under slave law and also problematizes notions of complicity for the master-slave relationship. Whereas under slave law, rape and sexuality are conflated because "'consent' is intelligible only as submission," Sapphira is able to embody a sexuality distinct from master-slave rape hinted at by Miranda's questioning about her children's father (Hartman 85). In finding alternative ways to express her sexual desire, Sapphira finds "something akin to freedom" that defies reason in the early nineteenth century.

In considering the ways in which Sapphira's agency is configured it is also important to recognize how Bascombe loses agency through, what seems to be presented as, love. George also constructs Bascombe as romantically in love with his slave. George says, "Had he built it so he could come out here and be with her? Sit on that verandah and watch her pruning roses…It was a nice image but it didn't feel that way" (225). While at first George is somewhat skeptical of acknowledging Bascombe's love for Sapphira, later he becomes even more sympathetic: "Just look at that poor slob buried there—he gave her a whole island, and she still cut out on him" (247)[22]. Consequently, criticism surrounding Bascombe's broken-heart appropriates this point of view. Whitt argues that Miranda's realization that Candle Walk was to assist Bascombe in his search for Sapphira allows us to think of Bascombe as really in love: "Bascombe was not conjured, but he gave the island willingly out of his love for [her]" (123). While Bascombe's conjuring is debatable, Helene Christol similarly argues that "The real victim seems, finally, to

[22] Susan Meisenhelder challenges George's portrayal of Bascombe's love for Sapphira as an effect of his white influences, but this is not the only instance of a sympathetic Bascombe.

have been Wade himself, who lost everything—his land, his love, and his life" (352). In addition, Byerman also views Wade as a victim, so much that he removes all culpability from him: "Why [Bascombe's] death was necessary is never made clear; certainly it is not established that he failed in any of his commitments to her or that he was violent and domineering" (68). These investments in absolving Wade from blame problematically appear to erase any culpability he may have despite his participation in slavery. Interestingly, not only are critics invested in promoting this narrative, but in an interview, Naylor expresses similar sentiments. She says, "I know that I'm fascinated with him, I know that I feel for him. I think it's very sad to be such a gentle, gentle soul in the world in which he must move. That's all I know about Bascombe. We have to get to know each other more. I have to show him that I mean him no harm" ("A Conversation" 131).

Bascombe becomes a much more sympathetic character when we think of him as a yearning and broken-hearted man. The coterie of Bascombe-sympathizers—Miranda, George, critics, and Naylor—confirms that Bascombe shouldn't be read a typical, villainous slavemaster. Yet, despite the portrayal of Bascombe's love for Sapphira in this novel, it is important to note that while Sapphira is constructed as having a will in their sexual relationship, this does not necessarily mean that she loved Bascombe reciprocally. Recognizing Sapphira's love for Bascombe would be to "sidestep all too smoothly questions of white supremacy, patriarchy, and misogyny to which…untold numbers of black men and women were subjected during slavery" (Spencer 514). While Sapphira's love remains unanswerable, Bascombe's presentation as a sympathetic figure resonates with the dynamics of the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings. The positioning of love in this master-slave relationship has largely been read as an easy way to side-step the president's culpability in the oppression of Hemings. It

remains unclear why Naylor would want us to recognize humanity in a white man that is already established, and, instead, not direct her focus on reclaiming the humanity of the female slave.

In order to parse out this peculiarity, it becomes poignant to note the multiple references to broken-hearted men. When Mama Day is sewing a quilt for Cocoa and her husband, George she incorporates pieces of cloth of many of the Day Family members: John Paul's Sunday shirt, Abigail's lace slip, and Grace's baptismal gloves. Upon finding a old piece of homespun, that is older than her mother's gingham and a color worn only by a woman, Miranda is reminded that "[t]he woman who wore it broke a man's heart" (138). The intimation that this homespun is Sapphira's once again confirms the sympathetic narrative about Bascombe. Later, it is also evident that Cocoa, or Ophelia, is named after her great grandmother. Her mother, Grace, says, "I gave the first and only baby my grandmother's name. Ophelia. I did it out of vengeance. Let this be another one, I told God, who could break a man's heart" (151). Interestingly then, Ophelia becomes another Day family member that is capable of breaking a man's heart. Although Grace adds that "My grandmother only softly broke a heart. My great-great-great grandmother tore one wide open," it becomes interesting in noting the ways in which John Paul begins to be juxtaposed with Bascombe Wade as a broken hearted man (151). In addition, when Cocoa puts moss in her shoes and goes to the family graveyard, she begins to hear whispers, likely from her ancestors, that she will break her husband's heart: "I wanted to scream at all those silent whispers—how would I break his heart?...Over and over: *you'll break his heart*" (223-24). Significantly, Naylor aligns Bascombe, John Paul, and George as men with broken hearts and Sapphira, Ophelia, and Cocoa as the women who break them.

Not only does Naylor force readers to conceive of a slavemaster as a sympathetic figure, but her juxtaposition of him with other black men in the Day family is curious. While thinking of

a slavemaster as sympathetic potentially perpetuates romanticized notions of the paternalistic nature of slavery, it certainly adds a layer of complexity to a figure we are usually quick to dismiss. His alignment with black men further complicates his character, for it suggests that the relationship between John Paul and Ophelia as well as the one between George and Cocoa are somehow reincarnations of the original master-slave relationship. The association of these three men hints at a legacy that filters through the Day Family.

The family tree offered as a prefatory document sheds light on an intergenerational legacy. At first glance, it becomes noticeable that the family tree makes a distinction between the males and females in the Day family. Not one member has a spouse in the family tree, so that Jonah Day's wife, John Paul's wife, Abigail's husband, and Grace's husband are all absent. These absences allude to problematic relationships that notably stem from the original relationship, Sapphira and Bascombe. Once again, Naylor alludes to black men and women's difficulty forming loving and healthy relationships. Throughout the novel it becomes even more evident of the silences amidst this family tree, for readers learn the loss suffered by each generation. We are told nothing of Jonah Day's wife, and he tells us that he knows nothing of his father except for the fact that he and his brothers might not have had the same one. Once again, Sapphira's sexuality outside of the master-slave relationship is confirmed: "Some of my brothers looked like me and some didn't. But it wasn't for me to ask Mama. In them times it was common to have a blue-eyed child playing next to his dark sister" (151). In addition to this loss, John Paul's wife, Ophelia, commits suicide in The Sound after her daughter, Peace, falls in a well and dies; Abigail names her daughter after her dead sister, Peace, but that child dies in infancy; Grace, Cocoa's mother, dies young, although we are unsure how; we are told that Cocoa's father

leaves while Grace is still pregnant (151); and Hope, Grace's sister, dies along with her husband Ben Prescott as well as their daughter Willa and her husband in a fire (31).

While this family tree certainly proves Miranda's claim that "[w]e ain't had much luck with the girls in this family," it is interesting that the men are constructed sympathetically despite the obvious trauma suffered by the Day women (39). Later, while at the Other Place, Miranda thinks of Ophelia "who left by water" and Sapphira "who left by wind" and laments that she "smells the blood from the broken hearts of the men who they cursed for not letting them go" (262-63). Despite the curses left on these men because of their possessiveness, Miranda continues to look at them sympathetically. Later, while at the well where her sister, Peace, died, Miranda attempts to uncover the meaning behind the intergenerational loss that plagues her family:

And then she opens her eyes on her own hands. Hands that look like John-Paul's. Hands that would not let the woman in gingham go with Peace. Before him, other hands that would not let the woman in apricot homespun go with peace. No, *could* not let her go. In all this time, she ain't never really thought about what it musta done to him. Or him either. It had to tear him up inside, knowing he was willing to give her anything in the world but that. And maybe he shoulda' cause he lost her anyway…looking past the losing was to feel for the man who built this house and he one who nailed this well shut. It was to feel the hope in them that the work of their hands could wipe away all that had never gone before. (285)

Here, Miranda notes that it is important to feel sympathetically for both John Paul and Bascombe because they were trying to comfort the women they loved that were in pain—Ophelia because she lost her daughter and Sapphira likely because she lost everything once she becomes a slave. Troublingly, these men would not let their women leave them, which ultimately

prolonged their pain and projected pain onto their children despite both women ultimately leaving them in the end anyway.

It should be noted that this possessive love is not only evident in the Day family, but, throughout the community, locals are suffering from similar sentiments. Bernice fears that Ambush will leave her if she can't get pregnant, Ambush's mother Pearl finds Bernice unworthy of her son until she gets pregnant, Bernice is extremely overprotective of her son, Caesar, out of fear she will lose him, Frances goes mad after Junior Lee decides to leave her for Ruby, Ruby conjures all of the women in the community she fears want to take Junior Lee away from her, so much that May Ellen, a woman that went looking for oysters with Junior Lee, mysteriously dies from Ruby's conjure. Mama Day's advice to Frances about her loss of Junior Lee becomes not only foreshadowing but also poignant when it comes to the Day family curse: "A man don't leave you unless he wants to go, Frances. And if he's made up his mind to go, there ain't nothing you, me, or anybody else can do about that" (90).

Since George is conflated with John Paul and Bascombe, then it is important to note how he also might have a possessive love for Cocoa. The more George gets to know Cocoa, the more he takes comfort in that knowing. After having spent significant time being married to Cocoa, George reflects that her body "held no more secrets as we went on together. A comfortable form of possessiveness. Only I owned the codes to a certain turn of her head, a slight narrowing of her eyes, the varying textures of her silences" (159). Here, George correlates knowing Cocoa with having control over her body; the more he knows about her, the more he can control her body's responses to him. George feels comfortable with this form of possessiveness and would even prefer for Cocoa to reciprocate it. He says, "it's sort of flattering when a woman is jealous of her husband" (182). It seems no coincidence that these sentiments sound similar to slavery's

institutionalization of the ownership and control of bodies, particularly considering that when George is introduced to the narrative of Sapphira and Bascombe he, like the men before him, finds Sapphira's leaving as the most troubling part of the story. He thinks, "But she got away from him and headed over here toward the east bluff on her way back to Africa. And she made that trip—some say in body, others in mind. But the point is he lost her" (206). Here, George side-steps any understanding as to why Sapphira might have wanted to leave Bascombe and instead focuses on the loss the slavemaster must have felt upon losing his lover. Yet, if we are to feel for these men, as Miranda encourages us to do, then it becomes important to hypothesize where this possessive love comes from.

Because the story of George's background is privileged more than that of the others makes an analysis of his predilections for this possessive behavior become a useful springboard in understanding all three of the men. George tells Cocoa that he grew up an orphan, and that his mother was a fifteen-year-old prostitute who left him in front of Bailey's Café on a stack of newspapers (131). The man that owned the café called the local shelter and George was taken in at three months old. George also informs her that his mother's body later washed up in the Hudson River. It seems no coincidence that like Ophelia and Sapphira, George's mother also drowns[23]. Interestingly, George reveals this information to Cocoa after he secretly follows her to

[23] This pattern of drowning resonates perhaps as a symbolic reference to the Middle Passage and the loss of Mother Africa; however, few scholars have noted its presence. Although Kathryn M. Paterson traces the Middle Passage as a symbol in the novel she views Willow Springs instead as a symbolic Africa for George: "This process of spiritual grafting metaphorically reverse the Middle Passage, providing an authentic, rich, and heteroglossic past for George that replaces the provisional, narrow, and monoglossic rule of rationality that has hitherto existed for him as a surrogate heritage" (89). Rather, considering that George ends up dying anyway, I would argue that the Middle Passage and the subsequent loss of many drowning mothers becomes an elusive loss that fails to be reconciled throughout several African American generations. I only touch on this point briefly due to the conflation of George, John Paul, and

another man's apartment where she spends the night. Upon leaving in the morning, Cocoa walks out only to meet George in the street where he begins to slap "the living daylights out of [her]" (130). Perhaps upon fearing that Cocoa would leave him for another man—something Sapphira likely did to Bascombe—George beats her into submission quite literally, for Cocoa asks George to marry her after this beating and confession about his mother's backstory. Cocoa's marriage proposal here is irrational, while George's abandonment issues, likely as a result of his absent mother, help explain his possessive attachment to Cocoa and the feminine security and comfort she offers him.

For instance, in a later scene when Bernice is defending her choice not to give her son a pet name she remarks to George, "My own mama never gave me no outside name but the one I was born with. And your mama didn't either, did she, George?" (201). This comment forces George to once again confront the loss of his mother and her abandonment; consequently, he becomes distraught and later takes comfort in Cocoa's embrace. Cocoa says, "[y]ou slipped under the covers, cradled your head between my breasts, and we never spoke about the tears" (202). By offering a possible reasoning for George's possessive love for Cocoa, readers are able to empathize with his complex character, despite his obvious violent and jealous tendencies.

Through this example it becomes clear that Naylor is trying to evoke the same sympathy for both John Paul and Bascombe Wade and their inability to let go of the woman in their life. By realizing that these men's refusal to let go is also due to a previous, perhaps maternal, pain and loss, then their behaviors become much more understandable. These men can't let go of these women because if they do it reiterates the original loss which they are trying to disremember. Although these men's original stories of loss are largley silenced or absent, it

---

Bascombe Wade and the ineffectiveness of the Middle Passage symbolism for Bascombe's character and its ineffective explanation for his issues with possessiveness.

becomes clear through their later actions that they have internalized these stories as evidence of their unworthiness. Sapphira, Ophelia, and Cocoa's decision to leave Bascombe, John Paul, and George translates as them not finding these men worth living for. In order to protect their sense of self, it becomes imperative for these men to cling on to the women they love as evidence of worthiness. Viewing their behavior from this perspective seems like a particularly important endeavor for Bascombe Wade, a likely candidate for stereotyping owing to his role as slavemaster. Like George, Wade's possessive love for Sapphira likely masks a kind of self-loathing or lack of worth that he internalizes from some original loss or pain. His attempts to control this woman and make her love him as her slaveowner further illustrates his need for her, for her decision to be with him would ultimately help to solidify his worth and desirability.[24]

In Toni Morrison's scholarship on whiteness in *Playing in the Dark*, she delineates a similar perspective as the one outlined above. In her attempt to make sense of how black characters functioned and were formulated in the white literary imaginary, she began to view the writerly endeavor of creating the Other as a reflexive act:

> As a writer reading, I came to realize the obvious: the subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. (17)

---

[24] As Walter Johnson notes in *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (1999), "Behind the shroud of partriarchal prerogative, some slaveholders hid fantasies of domination that could be seen only by their slaves…[B]y hiding their private desires from everyone but their slaves, they recapitulated the ultimate logic of the slave market: their phantasms of independent agency were built out of practical dependence upon people bought in the market—*their selves were built out of their slaves*" (*emphasis mine* 115).

Morrison's claims become revelatory in understanding the male characters in *Mama Day*. By viewing their behavior—not letting the women go—as a reflexive act of their own fears and desires makes it easier to empathize with Bascombe, John Paul, and George and understand their perspectives, like Miranda encourages readers to do. On a larger scale, Morrison's lens also becomes useful to also understand the master narratives of history and a similar reluctance to let them go.

The understanding that Wade's desire for Sapphira is predicated on fear symbolically amplifies the ways in which the master narratives of history are also functioning. Considering what the master narratives of history say about their writers is a task few scholars have commented on. While Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism* claims that "colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts," thus privileging the act of colonization as controlling the colonizer, *Mama Day* puts forward the notion that it is the emotional pain already within the colonizer that ultimately allows them to rationalize and act out colonialism (35). Thus, Naylor pinpoints emotion as the origin of the production of knowledge and history due to its effect on perception and reasoning. By *feeling* for the master writers of history in similar ways to Bascombe, or if we view the master narratives as reflexive acts, then we might also come to a more complex conclusion about its writers' fears and desires. With this lens, it becomes easier to hypothesize that those in power that constructed the master narratives of history minimalized and degraded minority groups in order to redeem something in themselves. The inability to let go of the Enlightenment's pseudo-scientific racism speaks to the service it is providing them. White people's desire to demonize others through racist, sexist, and epistemological discourse reveals an underlying fragile personality. By viewing master narratives as ultimately an attempt to

relieve whites of their own self-loathing, loss, or pain by exerting dominion over another easily dismantles their authority. From this perspective, master narratives become easier to demythologize as just another "culturally contingent philosophical stance" (Chassot 19).

Because George and Cocoa are aligned with Bascombe and Sapphira and due to Cocoa's fatedness to break her husband's heart, we might think of Mama Day's intervention in their relationship as an attempt orchestrate an alternative narrative, one that is not rooted in conquest, possession, or individual determination. In the earlier scene where Miranda begins to understand why it is necessary to feel for Bascombe and John Paul, she notes that their selfishness in keeping their women with them was driven by their belief in the power of themselves (285). Significantly, she recognizes that George also believes in himself, but that "she needs that belief buried in George. Of his own accord he has to *hand* it over to her" (285). By giving up his egotistic belief in himself and his determination to keep Cocoa alive, George can serve as the "missing piece," or peace, that the Day family is so desperately seeking (285).

Peace from Broken Pieces

When George fails to meet this reimagined selfless standard of love, the loss first witnessed throughout the Day family tree continues with the loss of Cocoa's husband. Upon his death, Mama Day begins to hint to Cocoa that her loss of George is more than what it seems. For example, when he first dies Mama Day is insistent that her great niece's grief is selfish. Cocoa says "she was saving her comfort for the day when I had stopped crying for myself and would have that one final cry—for you. God, I thought her cruel. How could my grief be about anything but you?" (304). Mama Day's notion that grief is selfish resonates with the possessive love the men in the novel suffer from. Cocoa's mourning and the subsequent pain that she feels as a result

of George's death is really about her loss of him and not about her husband's own loss of material existence. Therefore, Cocoa must come to understand that her grief is about her and what she is missing now that her husband is dead. Later, it becomes evident that Cocoa's loss is indicative of a more collective loss: "So she's gotta get past the grieving for what she lost, to go on to the grieving for *what* was lost, before the child of Grace lives up to her name" (*emphasis mine* 307-308). While it becomes evident that Cocoa's initial grief was for herself, and that perhaps it has shifted to pain surrounding the loss of George, the novel then positions that grief and loss are functioning on an even larger, more collective, scale. When Cocoa's son, George, asks where his namesake comes from, Cocoa looks for a photograph of her deceased husband but soon realizes she cannot find any. Realizing she has no documentation of George's life, Cocoa has an epiphany:

> All the painful adjustment during those eleven years had been for my life without you—the emphasis on my loss, my life—while a missing photograph shifted it over to a loss that was more than me, more than even you…And to think of what was lost brought on the final tears. They were, as she had warned me, the most bitter. And with all I had built around me, I felt that I was in danger of being swallowed up inside the pain of the growing awareness that *it* was no more" (309-10).

Here, Cocoa experiences the most grief and pain in shifting her focus on a more collective loss. Yet, the "*it*" mentioned in this scene is ambiguous. The pronoun "it" implies not a person, but something larger. Because Cocoa is most distraught over the fact that "I had to show my son" (310), implies that the "*it*" is functioning like a family heirloom.

Cocoa's reference to "being swallowed up inside the pain" resonates with Mama Day's need to "look past the pain" (284) not only to feel for the men that refused to let their women go, but also in order to decipher what really happened in family's ancestral relationships. Like Miranda, Cocoa struggles with how "she is ever gonna look past this kind of pain" but soon realizes the power lies in her own hands to release it (284). While the legacy of Bascombe and John Paul was that they held on to the pain and loss of their wives, it becomes important that their pain is exorcised out of this family tree. If Cocoa can let go of her loss, let go of her grief and desire to hold on to George, then she ultimately can release her pain, his pain, as well as the collective pain of the Day family.

It is interesting that Cocoa's letting go of George is largely due to the realization that she no longer has any documentation of his existence. The missing photograph and her subsequent decision to tell her son that George was a man that looked like love, symbolically, speaks to the novel's attempts to dismiss Western epistemology's authority (310). As an alternative to the photograph, Miranda tells Cocoa that "children need the simple truth" (310). Similar to the opening of the novel, Cocoa reflects that there is no truth, because "you change as I change" and "our versions will be different" since there are "too many sides to the whole story" (310-311). Similar to the multiple versions of Sapphira's skin color and murderous plots, similar to the way Candle Walk was different for each generation, similar to the way we can't trace back to slavery and know exactly what happened, Cocoa notes that the story of her marriage is also multiplicitous. In accepting that there are too many sides to a whole story, it becomes less important to discern truth from lies and more important to use what is needed and what might foster positive energy in the future. Thus, the novel posits individual interpretation as a powerful and transformative act. Similar to the community's use of 18 & 23 for different scenarios and

different definitions, in which each individual uses the phrase as they see fit, Cocoa decides to use the word "love" to tell her son about the man after whom the son is named.

To say that George is "a man who looked just like love" is confusing, particularly considering that he died because he refused to let go of Cocoa and his possessive love for her (310). Yet, to look like love allows George to live on despite his death. Love is an indefinable, elusive feeling, for it often goes beyond knowledge, reason, and understanding. Therefore, if George looks like love, his memory, his identity, and his story has positive resonance. Cocoa's son doesn't have to know George to understand him, but by feeling him instead—like the center of marshmallows, the top of a Ferris wheel, and the way water and sand feels between his toes—allows his presence to remain (310). Not only that, but it also privileges a way of knowing that defies Western rationalism and doesn't perpetuate destructive patterns.

When her son asks her what the man that he was named after looks like, Cocoa realizes that she is in a position of power to define her first husband and leave a legacy for him. Unlike the master narratives of slavery that have proven and damning consequences for the definitions it promulgates and unlike the narratives of loss that plagued Bascombe, John Paul, and George, it becomes pertinent that Cocoa doesn't misuse her power in the way she represents and defines her husband. Because *Mama Day* reveals how negative stories of loss can have the negative consequence of possessiveness, it becomes important that Cocoa does not define George from a place of pain, but from one of wholeness. Because "the mind is everything" it becomes important that Cocoa's son can think of his namesake as positive and self-affirming, as well as open to multiple possibilities and interpretations (90). Rather than using culturally loaded terms like black, man, orphan, etc., Cocoa instead informs her son that his namesake embodies a powerful and positive feeling.

This moment resonates with a similar instance when Mama Day revives Saphhira's bill of sale with new meaning. While her bill of sale in the prefatory documents informed readers of the slave woman's monetary worth, her bilious nature, and mischevious ways, water damage allows Miranda an alternative perspective for she can only make out the words: "Law. Knowledge. Witness. Inflicted. Nurse. Conditions. Tender. Kind" (280). Consequently, scholars like Cheryl A. Wall view this moment as indicative of Sapphira's "ethical legacy in which healing, nurturing, and kindness are values to be passed on" ("Extending" 1460). Thus both Sapphira and her great great great granddaughter both bequeath the Day family with positive and transformative legacies. As feelings of loss and subsequent abandonment no longer need to be passed on, replacement narratives of love offer succor and peace back to the pain-inflicted Day family and African American community. As slavery becomes further and further away with each generation, the material loss of documents and testimony become harder and harder to recover, even remember. The shame associated with the institution, due to the racist mythologies produced by it and the continued silence surrounding it, also makes it desirable to forget. As Mama Day laments by the end of the novel, "Tradition is fine, but you gotta know when to stop being a fool" (307). Instead, the novel purports that remembering only the positive elements of the past is a useful endeavor. Similar to the silence surrounding Sapphira's name, the missing ledger, and her bill of sale there is a way of knowing her story that doesn't rely on how she is defined by the Western world, stereotype, or even language.

In addition to choosing to remember positive accounts of the dead, the novel also positions communication beyond the grave as another valuable way to combat possessive love. This is evident in Bernice and her obsessive desire for a child. Bernice wants a child more than anything in the whole world: she takes hormone injections as well as herbal remedies, and finally

goes to a conjure woman who practices voodoo to impregnate herself. While it does end up working, when she has the child, Caesar, she becomes hyper vigilant about him, obsessing about his safety and well-being for fear that she could lose him—her greatest wish—at any moment. Despite her efforts, her son ends up dying at a young age, which leaves this woman in incredible pain. Yet, interestingly at his funeral, George notices that each member of the community talks to the young boy in his coffin as if he never passed. Bernice even says, "When I first saw you, you were so very glad to be alive—new and declaring it to everyone. And when I see you again, you'll be forgiving of your old mama, who didn't remember for a moment that you were still here" (269). While her son is physically dead, Bernice takes comfort in knowing that he is still alive in a sense. Since she is still talking to him even though he has died, the novel suggests that communication with the other side is possible. In this moment, she corrects her earlier fears of losing him while he was with her, now realizing that she can never lose him and that her fear of loss was about herself and not her son.

By recognizing that grief is largely selfish, that it is a choice to remember the positive qualities of a person, and that there is no such thing as loss if communication with the other side is possible disallows for possessive love. If there is no such thing as loss because alternative communication is possible then there is no need for possession. Similarly, Cocoa's communication with George from beyond the grave—that takes place throughout the entirety of the novel—disallows her to wallow in the illusion of separation. Therefore, Africanist belief systems in life after death reveal their "utility in the contemporary world" (Wall, *Worrying* 164). Perhaps if Bascombe Wade, John Paul, or even George had believed in the afterlife, then they would have been able to let go of Sapphira, Ophelia, and Cocoa, for the men would have found comfort in the notion that they could communicate with their wives beyond the grave.

By communicating with ancestors on the other side listeners can take comfort in knowing that there is no such thing as loss, and by remembering only the positive elements of the past self-worth becomes unwavering and possessiveness becomes unnecessary. What really happened in the past remains unknowable similar to the way that by the end of the novel which version of Sapphira and Bascombe's story is true is unknowable. But if we allows ourselves to participate in the African cosmologies and belief systems the slaves originally brought to America there is a truth, beyond words, that still can be reclaimed. This isn't to privilege an Africanist perspective as the only way, but it offers another way outside of hierarchal representative systems. Those that are gone haven't really left, and if unlike Reema's boy, we can learn to listen and give up assumptions of racial, cultural, or gendered superiority we will find everything we *need* to know.

EPILOGUE

In Toni Morrison's second novel *Sula* (1973), when the townspeople gossip about Sula Peace's escapades outside of their Ohio community, they are horrified at the rumor that she may have slept with a white man. The narrator says, "They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable" (113). Although the "they" mentioned in this line is a small black community in the sixties, as this dissertation has revealed its sentiment has traversed throughout American history. Interestingly, this comment does not bring into question white desire for black women, for although this fact has been silenced and mocked throughout our culture it has certainly proven itself true. Nor does it bring into question black male desire for white women, for as the Black Nationalist Movement revealed, that was an appropriate and available avenue of revenge for black oppression. Rather, it is of more concern that a black woman could desire a white man sexually. As the historical overview of this dissertation has revealed, sex between a white man and a black woman is inherently corrupt due to the power dynamics of colonialism, American slavery, and miscegenation laws. Therefore, the concept of a black female desiring a white male is not only considered irrational, but it also brings up questions about the availability and freedom of sexual desire, or lack thereof, for black women. The phrase "literally unthinkable" also makes the notion of interracial sex here seem hyperbolic, in that the adverb "literally" exaggerates the inconceivability of the thought. Yet, if it is also actually unthinkable, what prevents one from being able to have the thought? What is it that makes the thought of consensual interracial sex between a white man and a black not an available construct? Displays of romantic love between masters and slaves have proven controversial: the power dynamics inherent within slavery make love, desire, and consent between slaves and non-slaves almost impossible to identify. Therefore,

when novelists in this dissertation suggest these feelings, it is not without complexity and contradiction. Yet, why does love and desire between black women and white men continue to foster the same feelings as those promulgated during slavery? And should this relationship foster these feelings?

Contemporary artist Kara Walker's silhouette installations become useful in answering the question above due to her focus on sexuality in slavery and her work's dependence on viewer participation. For example, Figure 1 from Walker's *An Abbreviated Emancipation* features silhouette cut-outs of what appears to be a white man that resembles an American forefather, receiving fellatio from what appears to be a kneeling black female slave mistress. Underneath the forefather figure is a naked boy, who is arguably black, in an Atlas-like pose as he holds up the white man on his shoulders. The Atlas figure's hand is also curiously placed to suggest that he is also holding up the white man's erection. In the top right corner, Walker includes cupid-like figures kissing and a young boy with an abnormally large phallus that appears to be falling. The silhouettes are all black and the three main figures in the center of this image blend into one another; it is difficult to discern where one figure ends and another begins. What is interesting about the representation of the slave mistress is that her hair is neatly pulled back in a bun and she is wearing an ornate dress. While Walker's representations of female slaves often depict them naked with braided hair, this slave mistress's hairstyle and attire are not indicative of her status as a slave, or at least a field slave.

There is much debate in discerning levels of complicity in Walker's images; critics either argue that the artist is problematically pandering to white fantasies about black bodies or that black female desire for white men is a radical gesture.[25] For example, Simon Drake argues that

Figure 1. Kara Walker, detail of *An Abbreviated Emancipation*, 2002. Cut paper and adhesive on wall. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins & Co.

in the scene above the rendering of the slave mistress in this attire insinuates her complicity in "maintaining white supremacy" (247). While her dress might also be indicative of her status as a house slave, a role that would mark her as worthy of providing sexual favors, it is significant that Drake notes that she does not appear to be "particularly opposed to the service she provides her

[25] Betye Saar, Faith Ringgold, and Juliette Bowles argue that Walker's portrayal of sexual intimacy between masters and slaves merely reinforces hegemonic renderings of these bodies.

master" (247). Drake's reading here is somewhat troubling considering that the female slave's complicity in this scene cannot be easily defined as unopposed. Arguing that the slave is unopposed dangerously side-steps the master's culpability, in that her desire seemingly makes this moment less criminal. Rather, in noting the difference between being unopposed and resignation, it becomes much more difficult to discern the female slave's desires, for how would a slave show their coercion in this moment? Yet, similar to Drake, Arlene Keizer also argues that this image, "dare[s] to imagine that enslaved black women may have experienced sexual desire for the white men who dominated them" (1666). Although discerning consent and desire in this context seems improbable, the consensus of thought in its possibility warrants further investigation.

Whereas the novels in this study provide internal monologue and dialogue to analyze character motivations and feelings particularly as they relate to sexual desire, is it possible for a silhouette to offer enough evidence? Although Walker's image most clearly resonates with Chase-Riboud's reimagining of the sexual relationship between Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson—due to the status of the white male silhouette—it remains unclear if Walker's slave girl has the same motivations as Chase-Riboud's Sally. Is the slave girl performing fellatio in the same way Chase-Riboud's Sally lusts after Jefferson? And if so, should we surmise that it is due to her social conditioning? Is this act similar to the one between Great Gram and Corregidora? Might she also castrate this man? Or does it propose reconciliation like the act between Mutt and Ursa? Does Walker want viewers to find love between these two figures or is she aiming to incite hate from it? And if the latter, doesn't that only encourage contemporary frustration with one's African American ancestors' complicity as witnessed in *Kindred*? Or, should we be more sympathetic for the slaveholder in this image, as Naylor asks of us in *Mama Day*?

In noting these tenuous questions it is still important that Walker leaves the image open for possibility. The suggestive appropriation of white supremacy is what makes Walker's work controversial for many; however, Anne M. Wagner notes that Walker is purposely playing on these notions of complicity. She describes how Walker's process in creating these silhouettes illustrates their overwhelming influence: "Walker had not sitters; thus they cast no shadows, they had no bodies. Each of her characters is both an invention and a citation: each is cut from a freehand drawing into shapes whose sheer vitality and obscenity reanimate and darken racial stereotypes" (95). Noting that Walker cuts these silhouettes by free hand demonstrates how these images of black and white bodies are imbedded not only in her psyche, but their recognizability also shows their familiarity in the larger American psyche. Robert Reid-Pharr has also noted how Walker's work is predicated on the discursive and aesthetic appropriations of historical memory, rather than its reality: "Walker clearly sees it as made up of rather suspect cultural artifacts produced more efficiently in Hollywood than within any black freedom struggle" (38). Because these figures are identifiable not only in terms of race, but because the white male figure is identifiable as a forefather, illustrates how these characters are functioning as the legacies of scripted identities in current American consciousness. Yet, while Walker is playing on Hollywood-esque stereotypes and seemingly fulfilling white fantasies about black desires, her ambiguous portrayals of black female desire calls for a more multivalent reading.

In thinking of Hollywood stereotypes, it seems no mistake that the couple in this image seems to reference Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings's liaison. In analyzing this relaionship, Suzette Spencer coins the term "coersubmission" in order to emphasize the ambivalent tensions in understanding Hemings's sexual desire for Jefferson (508). Many critics, such as Hortense Spillers, have noted that these sites of desire can never be historically confirmed: "whether or not

the captive female and/or her sexual oppressor derived ‘pleasure’ from their seductions and couplings is not a question we can politely ask. Whether or not ‘pleasure’ is possible at all under conditions that I would aver as nonfreedom for both or either of the parties has not been settled” (473).

In Spencer’s discussion on the Jefferson/Hemings relationship, she also makes the comparison between Jefferson’s role as a founding father and this relationship as emblematic of a founding violence:

> If, as a nation, we regard Jefferson as a founding father, then what might it mean if we permitted ourselves likewise to consider the relation between Jefferson and Hemings as a founding violence, an inaugural racial and sexual encounter, complicated to be sure, but suggestive of the violent subject formation of blacks in the American republic? (Spencer 508).

If we think of the sexual act in *An Abbreviated Emancipation* as coerced, then this piece becomes indicative of Spencer’s point; Walker uses early American stereotypes in order to insinuate how the complicated power dynamics of master-slave relationships foreground the complicated subject formation of blacks, not only in early America, but also today. For this image appears to be indelibly connected to Sula’s unthinkable desire for white men and her community’s disdain for it. Similarly, Keizer suggests that because “the question of whether mutual love and desire between white male masters and black females slaves cannot be answered…[t]he more pressing question for these contemporary narratives of slavery is what crossracial desire *means* in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries” (1667). Thus for Walker, this image gains possibility when it is viewed by contemporary audiences. If the viewers of Walker’s exhibit are the ones casting the troubling shadows on the walls, then we can begin to

interrogate why we know these shadows, why we are casting this narrative, and how we should feel about it. Walker has stated about her installations that the purpose is for "[t]he audience…to deal with their own prejudices or fear or desires when they look at these images" (qtd. in Shaw 103). Similar to the aim of the neo-slave narrative, Walker's installations thus become meaningful in their legacy for contemporary black and white viewers.

Black women novelists' and artists' preoccupation with discovering romantic love in the master-slave relationship reveals a departure from critical and historical understandings of this relationship. As these novels show, love is often an inevitable consequence of the physical and, sometimes, emotional intimacy between white plantation owners and their slaves despite and, sometimes, in spite of the power constructs in play. Thus to recognize love in this context often reveals the humanity beneath the labels, ideologies, and ontologies proscribed to these historical players. While the exhuming of this emotion helps us to wade through the muck of slavery, it isn't for the purpose of reclaiming a kind of Eden, of removing culpability, nor of rewriting history; rather, locating love in this unlikely context offers possibilities in identifying love's corruption and the destructive generational patterns it manifests over time. Recognizing how love can simultaneously exist with ownership, violence, and hate allows us to see how our understanding of this pure emotion has become warped in contradictory narratives we now have come to accept due to their historic and systemic proliferation. Yet, by locating love in a context of hate, these black women writers also pinpoint underlying desire, and thus potential, for interracial communion and healing as well as the healing of generations of black female sexuality and desire.

Interestingly, these novelists do not privilege the black female slave's love of her master over a master's love for his slave, but different authors find value in privileging love from both

perspectives. As the arc of this study reveals, the romantic master-slave relationship, as violent as it was, has various and multiple legacies for its participants and their descendants. So while Sally Hemings might realize that her love for Thomas Jefferson was largely a delusion based on her slave conditioning, Great Gram's erotic retellings of sexual exploitation make it much more difficult to discern between her hate and desire for her slavemaster. If anything, these novels reveal the complex webs of emotion that slavery fostered, not only for slaves but for their masters as well. While it might be expected that black female authors would only privilege the untold stories of black female victimization, both Octavia Butler and Gloria Naylor privilege sympathetic slavemasters in order to more fully understand behaviors that we might be quick to adjudicate. Using love as a locus for understanding the complexities of slavery, race, and gender, the novels in this study reveal love's rampant possibilities for growth. What these novels, Walker's art, and this dissertation reveal is the need to unearth black female sexuality from the histories of violence and abuse and begin to free black female sexuality unto itself. Perhaps the following line from Toni Morrison's famous neo-slave narrative *Beloved* gets more closely to the truth of these writers' investments in interracial love: "to get to a place where you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire—well now, *that* was freedom" (14).

WORKS CITED

Baptist, Edward E. The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism. Basic, 2014.

Barnett, Pamela E.Dangerous Desire: Sexual Freedom and Sexual Violence since the Sixties. Routledge, 2004.

Belcher, Wendy. "Conjuring the Colonizer: Alternative Readings of Magic Realism in Sherman Alexie's Reservation Blues." American Indian Culture and Research Journal 31.2 (2007): 25-39.

Bell, Bernard W. The Contemporary African American Novel: Its Folk Roots and Modern Literary Branches. Amherst: U of Massachusetts, 2004.

Benn Michaels, Walter. The Shape of the Signifier:1967 to the End of History. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Billingslea-Brown, Alma Jean. Crossing Borders through Folklore: African American Women's Fiction and Art. Columbia: U of Missouri, 1999..

Blassingame, John. The Slave Community. Oxford UP, 1979.

Brown, Kimberly Juanita . "Black Rapture: Salling Hemings, Chica Da Silva, and the Slave Body of Sexuals." Women's Studies Quarterly; Spring 35. 1/2 (2007): 45- 66.

Butler, Octavia E. Kindred. Boston: Beacon, 1979.

---. "An Interview with Octavia E. Butler." By Charles H. Rowell. Callaloo 20.1 (1997): 47-66.

Byerman, Keith. "Troubling the Water: Subversive Women's Voices in Dessa Rose and Mama Day." Remembering the Past in Contemporary African American Fiction. UNC Press, 2005. 54-74.

Carby, Hazel V. Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987. Print.

Césaire, Aimé. Discourse on Colonialism. Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review, 1972.

Chase-Riboud, Barbara. Sally Hemings: A Novel. New York: Viking, 1979.

---. "Afterword." Sally Hemings: A Novel. New York: Viking, 1979. Print. 349-363.

---. “Slavery as a Problem in Public History: Or Sally Hemings and the “One Drop Rule of Public History.” Callaloo 32.3 (Summer 2009): 826-831.

Chassot, Joanne. “Black Women’s Ghostly Re-visions of History.” Afterimages of Slavery: Essays on Appearances in Recent American Films, Literature, Television and Other Media. Ed. Marlene D. Allen and Seretha D Williams. Macfarland, 2012.18-34.

Christian, Barbara. “Somebody Forgot To Tell Somebody Something: African American Women’s Historical Novels.” New Black Feminist Criticism, 1985-2000. Ed. Gloria Bowles, M. Giulia Fabi, and Arlene R. Keizer. Urbana: U of Illinois, 2007. Print. 86-98.

Cognard-Black, Jennifer. “‘I said Nothing’: The Rhetoric of Silence in Gayl Jones’s Corregidora.” NWSA Journal 13.1 (Spring 2001): 40-60.

Collins, Lisa. “Economies of Flesh: Representing the Black Female Body in Art.” *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture*. Ed. Kimberly Wallace-Sanders. University of Michigan, 2002. 99-127..

Collins, Patricia Hill. “The Power of Self-Definition.” Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2000. 97-122.

Davis, Angela. Women, Race, and Class. New York: Vintage, 1981.

Davis, Christina. “An Interview with Toni Morrison.” Conversations with Toni Morrison. Ed. Danielle Taylor-Guthrie. Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Miss., 1992. 223-233.

Dawkins, Laura. “A Sleeping Invisibility”:Maternal Dispossession and Resistance in Barbara Chase-Riboud’s Sally Hemings and The President’s Daughter.” Callaloo 32.3 (Summer 2009): 792-808.

Douglass, Frederick. Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave. 1845. The Classic Slave Narratives. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Signet Classics, 2012. 299-404.

---. “A Tribute for the Negro”. The North Star [Rochester] 6 Apr. 1849: 2. African American Newspapers, 1827-1998.

Drake, Simon. “Craig Brewer and Kara Walker: Sexing the Difference and Rebuilding the South.” Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society11.3 (2009): 230-252.

Elkins, Stanley M. Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life. Chicago, IL: U of Chicago, 1968.

Ellison, Ralph. "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity." Shadow and Act. New York: Random House, 1964. 24-44.

Foster, Frances Smith. 'Til Death or Distance Do Us Part: Love and Marriage in African America. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.

French, Scot and Edward L. Ayers. "The Strange Career of Thomas Jefferson: Race and Slavery in American Memory, 1943-1993." Jeffersonian Legacies. Ed. Peter S. Onuf. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1993. 418-56.

Friend, Beverly. "Time Travel as a Feminist Didactic in Works by Phyllis Eisenstein, Marlys Millhiser, and Octavia Butler." Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy 23.1 (1982): 50-55.

Fuller, Hoyt. "The New Black Literature: Protest or Affirmation." The Black Aesthetic. Ed. Addison Gayle, Jr. New York: (1972): 326-348.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr., ed. The Classic Slave Narratives. New York: New American Library, 1987.

---. Loose Canons: Notes on the Culture Wars. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

---. The Norton Anthology of African American Literature. Editor. Third ed. Vol. 1. New York: Norton, 2014.

---. The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.

Gayle Jr., Addison. Editor. The Black Aesthetic. New York, 1972.

Genovese, Eugene. Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made. New York: Vintage, 1976.

Goldberg, Elizabeth Swanson. "Living the Legacy: Pain, Desire, and Narrative Time in Gayl Jones' Corregidora." Callaloo 26 (2003): 446–72.

Gordon-Reed, Annette. The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008.

---. Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1998.

Gottfried, Amy. "Angry Arts: Silence, Speech, and Song in Gayl Jones's Corregidora." African American Review 28 (1994): 559–70.

Griffin, Farah Jasmine. "Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women's Bodies, the Erotic and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery." *Callaloo* Emerging Women Writers: A Special Issue 19.2 (Spring 2006): 519-36.

Hampton, Gregory Jerome. Changing Bodies in the Fiction of Octavia Butler: Slaves, Aliens, and Vampires. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010.

Harb, Sirène. "Memory, History and Self-Reconstruction in Gayl Jones's Corregidora." Journal of Modern Literature 31.3 (2008): 116. Web.

Hartman, Saidiya V. Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-Century America. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

Henderson, Carol. Scarring the Black Body: Race and Representation in African American Literature. Columbia: University of Missouri, 2002.

Hine, Darlene Clark. Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-construction of American History. Brooklyn, NY: Carlson Pub., 1994.

Holt, Sharon Ann. "Symbol, Memory, and Service: Resistance and Family Formation In Nineteenth-Century African America." Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South. Ed. Larry E. Hudson Jr. Rochester: University of Rochester Press (1994): 192-210.

Honour, Hugh. Black Models and White Myth*s*. Part 2 ed. Vol. IV. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989. Print. The Image of the Black in Western Art: From the American Revolution to World War I.

hooks, bell. Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism. Boston, MA: South End, 1981. Print

---.Black Looks: Race and Representation. Boston: South End Press, 1992. Print.

---. "Postmodern Blackness." Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics. Boston, MA: South End, 1990. 23-31.

---. Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics. Boston, MA: South End, 1990. Print.

Hull, Gloria T. Soul Talk: The New Spirituality of African American Women. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2001.

Hutcheon, Linda. A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction. New York: Routledge, 1988.

---. "'Circling the Downspout of Empire': Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism." ARIEL 20.4 (1989): 149-175.

Jackson, Cassandra. Barriers Between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth Century American Literature. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Jacobs, Harriet. Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. 1861. The Classic Slave Narratives. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Signet Classics, 2012. 405-617.

Jones, Gayl. Corregidora. Beacon Press, 1975.

Keizer, Arlene R. Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004.

King, Wilma. "Raise your children up rite": Parental Guidance and Child Rearing Practices among Slaves in the Nineteenth-Century South." Working Toward Freedom: Slave Society and Domestic Economy in the American South. Ed. Larry E. Hudson Jr. Rochester: University of Rochester Press (1994): 143-162.

Kubitschek, Missy Dehn. Claiming the Heritage. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1991.

LaCapra, Dominick. History and Memory after Auschwitz, Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1998.

Lamothe, Daphne. "Gloria Naylor's Mama Day: Bridging Roots and Routes." African American Review 39.1/2 (Spring-Summer 2005): 155-169.

LeGoff, Jacques . History and Memory, trans. Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman, New York: Columbia UP, 1992

Lemire, Elise. "Miscegentation": Making Race in America, University of Pennsylvania, 2002.

Lewis, Jan Ellen, and Peter S. Onuf, eds. Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1999.

Li, Stephanie. Something Akin to Freedom: The Choice of Bondage in Narratives by African American Women. Albany: SUNY Press, 2010.

Lowenthal, David. The Past is a Foreign Country, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985

Loichot, Valérie. "'We are all related': Edouard Glissant Meets Octavia Butler." Small Axe 13.3 (November 2009): 37-50.

Martin, Kameelah L. "Hoodoo Ladies and High Conjurers: New Directions for an Old Archetype." Literary Expressions of African Spirituality. Ed. Carol P. Marsh-Lockett and Elizabeth J. West. Maryland: Lexington, 2013. 119-44.

McDowell, Deborah E. and Arnold Rampersand. Slavery and the Literary Imagination. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989. Print.

---. ""Must Have Been Love": Sexualities Attachments in Faulkner." Faulkner's Sexualities: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 2007. Ed. Annette Trefzer and Ann J. Abadie. Jackson: U of Mississippi, 2010. 94-114. Print.

--."Negotiating Between Tenses: Witnessing Slavery after Freedom in *Dessa Rose.*" McDowell and Rampersand. 144-163.

Meisenhelder, Susan. ""The Whole Picture" in Gloria Naylor's Mama Day." African American Review 27.3 (Autumn 1993): 405-19. JSTOR.

Mitchell, Angelyn. The Freedom to Remember: Narrative, Slavery, and Gender in Contemporary Black Women's Fiction. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2002.

Montgomery, Maxine Lavon. The Fiction of Gloria Naylor: Houses and Spaces of Resistance. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2010.

Morrison, Toni. Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. New York: Vintage, 1992.

---."Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation." What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction. Ed. Carolyn C. Denard. Jackson: U of Mississippi, 2008. 56-64.

---. "The Site of Memory." What Moves at the Margin: Selected Nonfiction. Ed. Carolyn C. Denard. Jackson, MS: U of Mississippi, 2008.

---. Sula. New York: Vintage, 1973.

Naylor, Gloria. Mama Day. New York: Vintage, 1993.

---. "A Conversation with Gloria Naylor." By Virginia Fowler. Conversations with Gloria Naylor. 123-137.

Northup, Solomon. Twelve Years a Slave. 1853. Barnes & Noble, 2007.

Paterson, Kathryn M. "Gloria Naylor's North/South Dichotomy and the Reversal of the Middle Passage." Middle Passages and the Healing Place of History: Migration and Identity in Black Women's Literature. Ed. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory. Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2006. 76-95.

Perkins, Margo V. Autobiography as Activism: Three Black Women of the Sixties. Jackson: U of Mississippi, 2000. Print.

Pettis, Joyce. "'She Sung Back in Return': Literary (Re)Vision and Transformtion in Gayl Jones's Corregidora," College English 52.7 (1990): 787-799.

Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.

Reid-Pharr, Robert. "Black Girl Lost." Kara Walker: Pictures from Another Time. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Museum of Art, 2002. 27-41.

Robinson, Angelo Rich. “Why Does the Slave Ever Love?: The Subject of Romance Revisited in the Neoslave Narrative.” The Southern Literary Love 40.1 (Fall 2007): 39-57.

Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

Ryan, Tim A. Calls and Responses: The American Novel of Slavery since Gone with the Wind. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 2008.

Safire, William. “Sallygate.” New York Times, 2 November 1998, A27.

Setka, Stella. "Haunted by the past: traumatic rememory and black feminism in Gayl Jones's Corregidora." Mosaic 47.1 (2014): 129-144. General OneFile. Web. 11 Nov. 2015.

Sexton, Jared. Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiracialism. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 2008. Print.

Shaw, Gwendolyn DuBois. Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker. Durham: Duke UP, 2004. Print.

Sielke, Sabine. Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2002.

Spaulding, A. Timothy. Re-forming the Past: History, the Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2005.

Spencer, Suzette. “Historical Memory, Romantic Narrative, and Sally Hemings.” African American Review 40.3 (Fall 2006): 507-531.

Spillers, Hortense J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book (1987)." Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present. Ed. Angelyn Mitchell. Durham: Duke UP, 1994. 454-81.

Stephens, Gregory. On Racial Frontiers: The New Culture of Frederick Douglass, Ralph Ellison, and Bob Marley. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.

Streeter, Caroline. “Was Your Mama Mulatto? Notes Towards a Theory of racialized Sexuality in Gayl Jones’s Corregidora and Julie Dash’s Daughters of the Dust.” Callaloo 27.3 (Summer 2004): 768-787. Project Muse.

Verge, Shane Trudell. “Revolutionary Vision: Black Women Writers, Black Nationalist Ideology, and Interracial Sexuality.” Meridians 2.2 (2002): 101-125. JSTOR.

Wagers, Kelly. “Seeing ‘From the Far Side of the Hill’: Narrative, History, and Understanding in Kindred and The Chaneysville Incident.” MELUS 34.1 (Spring 2009): 23-45.

Wagner, Anne M. “Kara Walker: ‘ The Black-White Relation’” Walker, Kara Elizabeth. Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress. Ed. Ian Berry. Saratoga Springs, NY: Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, 2003.

Wall, Cheryl A. "Extending the Line: From Sula to Mama Day." Callaloo 23.4 (Autumn 2000): 1449-1463. JSTOR.

---. Worrying the Line: Black Women Writers, Lineage, and Literary Tradition. Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2005.

Wallace, Michele. Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman. London: Verso, 1990.

Whitt, Margaret Earley. Understanding Gloria Naylor. Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1999.

Wood, Marcus. Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America. New York, NY: Routledge, 2000.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jodi Price was born and raised in New Jersey. She holds a Ph.D. in English from Florida State University (2017), MA in English from Seton Hall University (2012), and a BA in English and Journalism from The College of New Jersey (2010).