Themes of Blackness:

Commonality and Unity in Selected African Heritage Literature

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ABSTRACT

Themes of Blackness:
Representations of Commonality and Unity in Selected African Heritage Literature

Doctor of Letters Dissertation by

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This dissertation will compare three categories of African heritage literature: Afro-Caribbean which also includes a work written by a white Cuban, works written by white American authors about black life and culture, and African-American works. The African Diaspora has had a vast impact on political, social, and cultural fibers of countries around the world. The diaspora for peoples of African descent began with slave trading. As a result, Africans and their descendants were dispersed throughout the Caribbean and the Americas. This dispersion has created fragmentation and distancing from African culture in the communities of diasporic African descendants. Persons of African descent born outside of Africa have been and continue to be victims of a scattered and fragmented culture. Yet, remnants of Mother Africa are present in African Heritage literature. Thus, the question answered in this project is: How does African Heritage literature

depict the themes of the black diaspora experience and create unity and commonality in a fragmented culture?

This academic study uses selected fiction texts of African heritage. These works of fiction will be used for historical synthesis and reflection. Additionally, theme analysis is used to connect the common themes of racism, colonialism, as well as slavery and its effects on the African diasporic population. The diaspora theories of thirdspace, ethnography, hybridity, and the notion of *patrie* will be used in conjunction with literary analysis to formulate cultural correlations in Afro-Caribbean, African-American, and American fiction written by white authors about black life and culture.

I have analyzed seven fiction works by African-American, Afro-Caribbean, and white American authors, respectively. The goal of this analysis is to show the similarities in the culture of African diaspora descendants. These individuals share certain characteristics such as skin tone, body build, and hair texture, but the cultural fabric of each country is quite different. The works being used for analysis are Critina Garcia's *The Agüero Sisters (1998),* Dalma Llanos-Figueroa's *Daughters of the Stone (2009),* Elizabeth Nunez's *Boundaries (2011),* Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone (2001),* Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress (1990),* DuBose Heyward's *Porgy (1925),* and Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven (1926).* All of these works further the understanding of the diasporic struggle of Sub-Saharan people by giving literary voice to the experience.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my parents, the Rev. Dr. Lloyd Preston Terrell and Mrs. Marguerite Carter Terrell, who always encouraged and pushed me to strive for and to achieve excellence. It is also dedicated to my grandmothers, Mrs. Rebecca Terrell who earned a sixth-grade education and Mrs. Vivian Carter who attended a segregated two-room school house.

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Chapter One: Mislabeled People

Introduction

My dissertation will compare three categories of African heritage literature: Afro-Caribbean which also includes a work written by a white Cuban, African-American, and works written by white American authors about black life and culture. The African diaspora has had a vast impact on political, social, and cultural fibers of countries around the world. The diaspora for peoples of African descent began with slave trading. As a result, Africans and their descendants were dispersed throughout the Caribbean and the Americas. This dispersion has created fragmentation and distancing from African culture in the communities of diasporic African descendants. Nell Painter expounds upon this phenomenon in *Creating Black Americans.* She states, "reflecting their lack of freedom and their inability to forge an autonomous intellectual tradition, nineteenth-century black Americans often distanced themselves from Africa. They called themselves "colored people" or "Negroes" and ignored the continent whose poverty and powerlessness seemed little more than an embarrassment" (10). Because of the disconnect from Africa, which grew wider with each generation born outside of her lands, the association with her was diminished and the cultural connection was splintered.

The descendants of African slaves in the Caribbean and the United States have been and continue to be victims of a scattered and fragmented

culture. This victimization wields deep wounds to the cultural character of this demographic, as they have been severed from the origins of their progenitors. Yet, remnants of Mother Africa are present in African Heritage literature. Thus, the question to answer is: How does African Heritage literature depict the themes of the black diaspora experience and create unity and commonality in a fragmented culture by illuminating value of human life and the creation of shared meanings and experiences? It is a tall order to assert that all African Heritage literature unifies a culture, and I do not mean to give that impression nor will this study make that assertion. However, I posit that the common themes, which are woven throughout the three categories selected for this study, manifest common links that are unique to descendants of slaves.

This project interests me because I am an African-American woman, and though my complexion and hair texture link me to Africa, I have never seen her shores, nor do I know the names of my African ancestors who arrived in the new world as slaves. I do not know which African region or country my foremothers and fathers hailed from. I know that Africa is home, but I do not know which part to return to. Though I understand my black American culture, my African heritage is splintered and fragmented. Like millions of other sub-Saharan diaspora descendants, a piece of me is broken. This state of brokenness has led me to study the influence of African tradition in African heritage literature as it pertains to the diaspora. Pertinent to this

study, I define African heritage literature as literature written by or about persons who are of African lineage. Furthermore, I want to develop my own theories that link and cohere fragmented parts of Sub-Saharan diasporic cultures and communities.

This academic study will use selected fiction texts of African heritage. These works of fiction will be used for historical voice and reflection and will highlight themes, settings, and plots which are familiar to the culture of this demographic. Additionally, theme analysis will connect the common themes of racism, colonialism, as well as slavery and its effects on the African diasporic population. The diaspora theories of thirdspace, ethnography, hybridity, and the notion of *patrie* will be used in conjunction with literary analysis to formulate cultural correlations in Afro-Caribbean, African-American, and American fiction by white authors. For the purpose of clarity, I will define these terms now, as they will recur throughout this study. Thirdspace can be easily broken down into a definition of "in between spaces." Thirdspace represents a new interstice that has been created from two or more existing spaces. Ethnography is the study of cultures and groups of people belonging to specific civilizations or sharing similar experiences. This study will reference hybridity as the cultural mixing of the colonizer and colonized. Anthony Easthope defines hybridity as having access to two or more ethnic identities (342). According to Paul Meredith, hybridity is the process by which the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the

identity of the colonized (*the Other*) (2). The term *patrie* refers to a homeland or nation state that is identifiable by a group of people who claim emotional attachment and feel allegiance to the motherland.

African-American, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Puerto Rican, and most other African heritage cultures have not reached a point of equality in their dominant resident societies. They have existed in these regions for nearly five hundred years and much of that time has been spent denying and repressing their African heritage. However, some semblances of African culture and tradition have been preserved through music, religion, oral tradition, and literature. Religion in particular has survived the journey from Africa to the new world. Specifically, Afro-Cubans have battled and succeeded in preserving Santeria. Santeria is a way of life that reconciles the divine knowledge of the spirit world with secular knowledge. It is a coming together of the invisible and visible worlds (Vega 5). Santeria, in itself, is an example of hybridity. It is a blending of African deities with Christian saints. Gustavo Pérez-Firmat's assertion that no immigrant ever arrives with only the clothes on his or her back perfectly summarizes Santeria and its infusion in Caribbean culture (6). Many of the slaves arrived without clothes on their backs, but they did carry their religious beliefs with them. These religious practices helped to preserve pieces of Africa. According to Ronald Segal, "the traditional religion of black Africa was essentially the product of the interaction between people and their environment. Yet, if the slaves were

forced to leave the places behind, they took with them their beliefs, for the development of a more or less adapted spiritual geometry in the Diaspora" (430).

This study is relevant because it examines the challenges faced by African diaspora descendants in creating an identity that defines who they are and that is accepted by the dominant society. Edward Soja's theory of "thirdspace" is applicable in deconstructing their struggle. His theory identifies and challenges the significance and meanings of space in relation to social, historical, and spatial concepts. For hybridity and biculturation to fully root in non-African dominant cultures a thirdspace must continue to exist, thrive, and expand. This space allows for African awareness to exist openly. It makes it acceptable for the dominant culture to embrace a subculture that is different but that has melded into a new culture.

It is important to analyze literature of African heritage because much of the fiction written by members of the African diaspora still struggles to reach the mainstream. Michael Echeruo explains that like the Jewish diaspora population of Europe, it does not have the cohesive fact of territory to define its nationhood (545). African heritage does not point to a specific ethnicity or country, so it lacks the identifying force that other literatures may possess. This is disturbing because fiction is a powerful tool in understanding and deconstructing the experiences of these particular diaspora populations. Fiction consists of stories that are not true, yet they

reflect lived realities. African heritage fiction must be studied in order to draw connections that highlight similarities and promulgate culture in relation to African-American and Afro-Caribbean cultures. Most importantly, this study will give voice to sons and daughters of the African diaspora by recognizing and honoring the contributions of this literary genre.

Historical Overview

The United States of America has had an interesting and complex relationship with its African-American citizens from their initial arrival as a group in Virginia. It was clear that the British settlers saw the new world as an opportunity for religious freedom and equality for themselves but not for the Africans in the same setting. What would later be deemed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness eluded these darker skinned forced immigrants and their descendants.

The Africans endured several centuries of forced labor, brutality, and unspeakable indignities in the name of profit. Their role in the new world was to be the workforce. Their labor was mandatory and, for the slaveholder, it was free. These slaves worked primarily in the industries of tobacco, rice, indigo, sugar, and cotton. Perhaps slavery in America would have died out had it not been for the invention of the cotton gin. This invention proved to be a godsend for slaveholders and the industrial revolution but a nightmare

for slaves themselves. Thus, it could be argued that Eli Whitney's[1] invention unintentionally extended the life of slavery. According to Richard Long,

> Until the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, cotton had been a minor crop in the American South. The invention of the cotton gin, which separated the seeds from the fiber mechanically, was a revolutionary event in history of the United States. It changed slavery from a dying institution to the central economic and political issue in American life from the adoption of the Constitution to the Civil War. In 1793, the United States produced 10,000 bales of cotton; in 1800 production was 100,000 bales. As a result, the price of slaves doubled. By the time of the Civil War, 60% of the slave population of four million was engaged in cotton production–and cotton accounted for two thirds of the value of exports. (19)

The boon of the cotton industry created a need for more slave workers, which in turn created the need for the "moral" leaders of the country to justify the existence of slavery by using whatever literary resources available and thwarting the intended meanings. Thus, the Bible and the Declaration of Independence were both used to extol the benefits of slavery. Ephesians 6:5, *slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ* was a key verse used to uphold the institution.

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[1] Eli Whitney (December 8, 1765 – January 8, 1825) was an American inventor best known for his invention of the cotton gin that mechanically removed seeds from cotton.

Ministers scoured the Bible to find scriptures that indicated slavery was just and right in the eyes of the Lord. Rev. Fred Ross[2] of Huntsville, Alabama, presented the thesis "*that slavery is of God*, and to continue for the good of the slave, the good of the master, the good of the whole American family, until another and better destiny may be unfolded" (Frazier 43). A few years earlier, George Fitzhugh published *Sociology for the South; or the Failure of Free Society*. E. Franklin Frazier further expounds upon Fitzhugh's "moral" beliefs stating, "This book was not only a justification of legal slavery, but propounded a political philosophy directly opposed to the democratic theory of society. Fitzhugh declared that the Declaration of Independence was opposed to "all government, all support nation, all water" (42). He expresses that Fitzhugh's philosophy closely resembled fascist doctrines, and only in a society built upon slavery and Christianity, as the south was, could morality and discipline be maintained (43).

By no means did all Americans approve of slavery. Thus, many abolitionists sought to end human bondage. They condemned slavery in lectures, in newspapers, and in their actions, such as helping slaves escape through the Underground Railroad. The growing group of citizens who were against slavery forced this political issue, which in many ways was a major impetus of the Civil War. President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation into effect on January 1, 1863. In essence, this

[2] Rev. Fred A. Ross wrote *Slavery Ordained of God* in 1857. He was one of several authors to write religious books validating the institution of slavery.

freed all slaves in Confederate states. However, he did not free the slaves in Union States. Slaves in the Union states of Maryland and Missouri would not gain their freedom until April 1865. Slaves in Texas were freed on June 19, 1865, and the remaining slaves in Delaware and Kentucky were not freed until December 1865.

The plight of Africans in the Caribbean was no better than that of their countrymen in the Americas. These Africans were brought to the Caribbean intentionally to be workers. According to John Hope Franklin, in 1518 the king of Spain granted a trader the right to ship four thousand Negroes to the Spanish Islands (45). This influx of manpower was specifically to work the crops of tobacco first and then sugar. Initially tobacco was the cash cow of the Caribbean, but, as it was in easy supply, its value fell and the need for the cultivation of new crops was essential. Indigo and cotton were not financially successful in the region. Some heeded the suggestions of the Dutch merchant traders who suggested that they try sugar. A few went to Brazil to study firsthand the highly successful methods that the Portuguese had employed there for three generations (Franklin 47). Sugar was to Africans in the Caribbean as cotton was to Africans in the American South, a veritable nightmare as the production of sugar proved to be highly lucrative. Thus, the need for more labor was pressing. As explained by Franklin, the problem of labor became acute. The whites were both insufficient in number and unsatisfactory in conduct. The planters turned more and more to the use

of Negro slaves, and thus in the middle of the seventeenth century the importation of Negroes in the Caribbean islands began in earnest (Franklin 47).

The haciendas in the Caribbean were much like the plantations of the American South. The brutality encountered by slaves in the *haciendas* was unparalleled and contributed to the high mortality rate of slaves. Hugh Thomas gives the following account of circumstances faced by slaves in the Caribbean:

> Conditions on the plantations growing sugar were harsh. The condemnation can be made equally of Portuguese, English, Dutch, French, and later Spanish sugar plantations. …During the long eight-month sugar harvests, slaves were everywhere sometimes forced to work continuously from almost twenty-four hours. The length of the working "day" also increased the risk of accidents deriving from the primitive machinery. (Thomas 190)

The labor required of slaves was severe particularly when coupled with the intense heat of the region. Slaves were required to work and could rest only during a half-hour breakfast break and during a two-hour period in the hottest portion of the day, which was frequently the time set aside for doing light chores (Franklin 49). Even more disturbing is the fact that women were treated just as harshly as men. The driver or overseer did not distinguish between men and women in work requirements or in applying the lash for

dereliction of duty. Women maintained the same hours as men did in the fields and at the mills (Franklin 49).

The slaves of the Caribbean and the United States, though not necessarily related through genealogy, were related in suffering. Their shared experiences were equally horrific and detrimental to the moral conscious of the world. Their experiences are a reflection of greed, brutality, and humanity at its worse, and also the indomitable human spirit of survival.

Diaspora and Theories

Diaspora is grounded in the mass movement of particular groups of people. Diasporas are unique in that the genesis is caused by different events. Therefore, diaspora theory is not static, and the study of diaspora cannot be static. Diaspora and its theory are ever changing and new anthropological research methods continually emerge. Paul Zeleza describes this process of diaspora creation as a condition, a space and a discourse: the continuous process by which a diaspora is made, unmade and remade, the changing conditions in which it lives and expresses itself, the places where it is moulded and imagined, and the contentious ways in which it is studied (s41). In understanding diaspora and its theories, it is essential to dissect ethnography as it is important to understand that these displaced people bring not just luggage but their culture with them as well. We must also acknowledge that diasporas are usually born out of tragic and unhappy circumstances. Yet, they are able to spawn much joy, albeit one may have to

search for the joy that does not always appear on the surface. These positive instances often occupy "third space." Barbara Katz Rothman[3] indicates that diasporas usually happen for pretty awful reasons. People don't just pack up and leave home without a good—read: a pretty awful—reason. But diasporas are also mixed blessings; whatever evil might have impelled them, some beautiful things come out of them (164). The beauty of the African diaspora is the creation of a rainbow of black and brown people and the creation of new "black" cultures that have made significant contributions to the world outside of Africa.

This project will hone in on the specific theories related to the African Diaspora. By no means are other diaspora theories being dismissed. However, it is necessary to narrow the scope of theory and investigation in order to pay proper attention to theories distinct to the African Diasporic experience. Gay Wilentz defines the genesis of the word "diaspora." She states, "The term "diaspora" was originally coined to reflect the scattered colonies of exiled Jews outside of Palestine; it has come to mean the forced migration of other groups as well--most prominently, the dispersion of Africans throughout the Americas after the slave trade" (385).

Since this original definition of diaspora, the term has evolved and come to encompass all peoples of displacement regardless of race. For example, the relocated victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005

[3] Barbara Katz Rothman wrote *Weaving a Family*, a book that highlights her experiences as a Jewish woman and adoptive mother of children of different races.

and the present day Syrian refugees fleeing Syria are all diasporic communities and diasporic people groups. However, the term as it relates to black people came into existence during the middle of the twentieth century. Gordon and Anderson further George Shepperson's[4] research on this subject by concluding that "The African Diaspora as popularly conceived is a denotative label for the dispersed people removed/exiled from a common territorial origin, sub-Saharan Africa" (284). They go on to indicate that "The term *diaspora* itself was probably not used to refer to peoples of African descent until the mid-1950s, when it began to be employed by intellectuals involved in pan-Africanism and the effort to raise consciousness and create solidarity among Blacks across the globe" (284).

African diaspora theories are rooted in race, culture, and politics. In particular, descendants of the initial African diaspora relate not so much because of a common "culture" but because of the process in which people in this global community identify with one another. In attempting to identify the diaspora Gordon and Anderson "argue for a shift in focus that concentrates not so much on essential features common to various peoples of African descent as on the various processes to which commonalities in individuals identify with one another, highlighting the central importance of

[4] George Shepperson was born in England in 1922, and served in the British military during WWII. During that time, he became interested in the history of slavery and its impact on black citizens. He was a founder of African diaspora scholarship and contributed much to the foundation of African British Scholarship and African American scholarship.

race-racial constructions, racial oppression, racial identification-and culture in the making and remaking of diaspora" (284).

Ethnography

The customs and culture of a people bind them together more so than their racial phenotype. Ethnography, in particular, examines the lifestyles and social conventions of racial groups. The ethnography of African-Americans is especially nuanced and complex even though slavery and the initial black diaspora triggered a chain reaction of grouping all black people into one category. Once Africans landed on American shores they were no longer Ibu, Zulu, or Mandingo. They were stripped of their ethnic identity and assigned *new* ethnic identities by their white captors. This identity was that of *slave, black,* and the especially pernicious *nigger*. In searching for definitions of identity, Gordon and Anderson raise several questions:

> In what sense are people whose ancestry is undeniably mixed-for example, Blacks in the United States, Nicaragua, and Honduras-more African than something else? Are there criteria other than continuities from Africa which can serve as the basis for diasporic identity? In sum, who are the members of the African Diaspora and what makes them members? (284)

Blacks in the new world, which consisted of the Caribbean, North America, Central and South America, and those enslaved in Europe, were

indoctrinated into a new culture which denigrated their African heritage and robbed them of their original cultural individualities. Let me be clear, Africans engaged in the slave trade. However, its nature was completely different than that of slavery in the Americas.

> Slavery had existed in Africa (as well as Europe and Asia) long before the organization of the Atlantic slave trade. By and large, slaves in Africa were captives of war who served as household laborers. African slavery was neither racial nor hereditary; the offspring of slaves could escape the stigma of slave origins. However, the Atlantic slave trade altered the scale of African slavery and transformed it into the export of masses of people. Slave trading grew into big business after European traders organized a huge transatlantic market. (Painter 29)

An essential difference in the two forms of slavery is that slavery in Africa allowed for social stratification whereas transatlantic slavery locked individuals into a caste system from which there was no escape or improvement in status. Thus, the transatlantic slave trade robbed individuals of their culture, but the greater tragedy is that it collectively stripped black slaves of hope. Countless individuals and generations existed in this visceral state of despair. They were joined in a culture of suffering and bondage. Blood lines and genealogy were not necessarily static; these

individuals may have had no blood ties, but their ethnographic bond was that of captives and bondsmen. This enslaved state of being created a new culture that was quite common whether one found herself or himself in a European controlled slave village on the African coast awaiting transport across the ocean, on a hacienda in the Caribbean, or on a plantation in the American Southern states.

A common trend of slave culture and ethnography was the stoppage of culture transmittance. Slaves brought their culture with them to the new world, but they rarely took new world culture back to their African country of origin. Herbert Klein sheds further light in *The Atlantic Slave Trade:*

> The overwhelming majority of Africans made a one-way journey. Unlike the European immigrants to the United States, Africans transported to the New World could not return home with hard-earned savings to buy property or start productive businesses. Not only could they not go home again, they could not send money home, for they earned no wages. ...Severed from their roots, African-Americans could not help build their old countries' national economies, as did so many immigrants from other lands. (Klein 128)

Thus, Gordon and Anderson take the stance that an analysis of who belongs to the African Diaspora cannot ignore race but must investigate

processes of identity formation, analyzing forms of racialized classification and subordination as well as the creative efforts of people living through such systems to formulate and reevaluate their own sense of self (289).

Hybridity

Homi K. Bhabha supported the concept and theory of hybridity in relation to cultural studies. He believed that hybridity was the result of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. He sees hybridity as a melding together of two cultures which spawns the creation of a new culture. According to Haj Yazdiha, "Among postcolonial theorists, there is a wide consensus that hybridity arose out of the culturally internalized interactions between "colonizers" and "colonized" and the dichotomous formation of these identities" (31).

The theory and concept of hybridity speaks very much to culture and identity. Regarding culture, hybridity requires one to ask several questions. *Which culture is more dominant and which culture is submissive*? *What makes one culture dominant and another submissive? If diaspora is not static, then why does hybridity take on a static role in assigning dominance to the culture of the colonizer?* In Yazdiha's view, "theories of hybridity, in clarifying the shifting and indefinite nature of culture, can serve as a tool that complicates the nationalist exclusionary practice of determining who does and does not have claim to a nation" (35).

In examining the journey and experiences of African diaspora descendants we must study Cuba. Fidel Castro's Cuba presented a dichotomous challenge to the idea of hybridity relative to black Cubans. Hybridity recognizes the melding or coming together of several cultures. John Tomlinson states the basic component of the idea of hybridity is that of simply *mixing,* intermingling, combining, fusion, mélange. On the face of it this is straightforward and unexceptionable – hybridity is the mingling of cultures from different territorial locations brought about by the increasing traffic amongst cultures (142).

Hybridity requires the mixing of cultures, yet Castro demanded a society that was completely Cuban and that did not challenge the ideology of the Revolution. His version blended all citizens into one culture at the expense of ancestral cultures. Essentially, Cubans had to accept their Cuban identity and denied the heritage of their progenitors. Embracing an Afro-Cuban identity was as an act against the government and classified as antisocial behavior. Segal states:

> In 1969, there emerged a *Movimiento Black Power* among Afro-Cuban intellectuals who adopted "Afro" hairstyles and met to discuss works of foreign black writers, in particular Franz Fanon. Subjected to the usual surveillance, almost all of them were arrested in 1971. Some recanted and were provided with employment that might be of use to the regime. Others

> conformed until at various times they left to live abroad. (Segal 241)

In *Socialism as the Main Soviet Legacy,* Yuri Pavlov states that political pluralism in Cuba is still taboo (237). This statement can be broadened to include religion as well. Afro-Cubans also faced discrimination and punishment from the regime for religious worship. The regime frowned upon organized religion in general. Additionally, they persecuted Christian churches and priests, which stopped the functioning of organized religion. Many priests and nuns were gathered and extradited to other countries. Similar treatment was directed towards Afro-Cuban religions and worshipers. Its treatment of the Afro-Cuban cults was more aggressively hostile. Increasingly, restrictions were placed on their functioning; their leaders were often arrested and sometimes imprisoned; their adherents encountered discrimination in employment (Segal 236). These religious leanings were not to be tolerated by Castro's regime. Again, the dichotomous nature of hybridity comes into play when considering that only one level of social commitment was acceptable. Hybridity was only to include Cuban ideology with no room allowed for Afro-Cuban heritage.

Segregation existed in Cuba as an after effect of slavery, but the American influence could be felt in the practice of Jim Crow segregation after a US occupation in 1912, which led to the discriminatory treatment of black Cubans. V.P. Franklin states, “Black Cubans organized and formed a

political party of resistance. Condemning its "racial exclusivity," the Cuban government banned the party, and in 1912 when PIC (Party of the Independents of Color) members organized an armed protest in Oriente province, they were slaughtered by the Cuban Army" (154). To his credit, Castro claimed to want a nation that was hybrid in the sense of racial equality. In 1959, he proclaimed that the revolution would confront racial discrimination in employment, education, and recreation. Prior to his administration, blacks faced segregation and discrimination in jobs and recreation. Cubans of color were, for instance, still segregated at swimming pools along the coast. Not least, economic differences effected their own forms of segregation. There were few state schools, while other ones discriminated, by fees, locality, or social attitudes, against children of color (Segal 225). For this stance, Castro won admiration and allegiance from many Cuban blacks.

Hybridity, though noble in thought and theory, has one great flaw. It inherently always creates a dominant and submissive culture. It seems impossible to create a new culture which has equity in recognizing the two cultures joined together. Michael Frenkel notes the power of control that colonizers wielded over the colonized. He maintains:

> As part of their historical and institutional justification for their rule over colonies and their mission to civilize the non—Western Other, the colonial superpowers sought to canonize in

> their colonies' text and practices that they identified with their own cultural superiority and to force colonial subjects to emulate a Western role model. Bhabha's work, which deals simultaneously with both the colonizers' efforts to impose their culture and the reaction of the colonized to these efforts, focuses on the process of cultural dissemination as a mechanism of control. (Frenkel 926)

Hybridity is a flawed but guaranteed by-product of the coming together of two cultures. Frazier concludes that this was the case involving African diasporic slaves who brought to America memories of their homeland and certain patterns of behavior and attitudes toward their fellow men and the physical world. He goes on to explain that "it was in the New World, particularly in what became the United States, that new conditions of life destroyed the significance of their African heritage and caused new habits and attitudes to develop to meet new situations" (Frazier 3). The white colonizers could ill afford to allow the slaves to continue to live their culture in the new world because that would make them equals. In order to maintain control and dominance, the colonizers had to denigrate African culture and create a racial underclass.

Mislabeled People

The "*new situations"* that Frazier spoke of were the bonds of forced servitude. Prior to being taken from Africa, Africans were kings and queens.

Some of the captives were of royal lineage while others held positions such as chief or village elder. They lived their lives on the African continent free and with dignity. They had social structures, systems of commerce, customs and mores that had existed for generations. The beginning of the Atlantic slave trade created a disconnect from the lives and customs that they had been used to. The financial system of slavery created a new label for people that had never existed before: slaves, negroes, niggers. These were all identities created by the white man. Cedric Robinson emphasizes, "the race science of the modern African slave era was in truth an American/ Atlantic/Western branch of prior racial dogma" (330). Benjamin Brawley, an early twentieth century black studies scholar, further elaborates on the labeling of black people and the creation of a racial underclass in the new world. He indicates, "The word *Negro* is the modern Spanish and Portuguese form of the Latin adjective *niger*, meaning *black*." This description of *black* was meant to include all dark-skinned people. He further elaborates, "As commonly used, the word is made to apply to any and all of the black and dark brown races of Africa. Such a usage is not strictly correct, the term having both a narrower and wider significance than this would imply (1). Thus, every person of African descent is stereotypically viewed and identified as "black," which supersedes actual geographical identity.

A residual effect of the African diaspora is the continued and continual mislabeling of a people. Nearly four hundred years after slavery was

introduced on the North American continent, people of African descent are still labeled as one group. Seldom is the distinction of African-American, Caribbean, European-African, Afro Puerto-Rican or Afro Brazilian made. Black people on the North American continent, specifically the American shores, are simply labeled as black. This is a direct result of slave legacy, and it is most unfortunate because it shows the continued differentiation between people of color, specifically brown and dark brown people, and Caucasians. Caucasian immigrants have been given the benefit and respect of acknowledging their backgrounds whether they are Spanish, Portuguese, British, German, Italian, or Slavic. Their nations of origin are acknowledged while black people have had their nation of origin permanently stripped and erased.

Though not a physical act of aggression, the denying of one's heritage is an act of violence. Categorically grouping all black people into one category is the monolithic way of thinking in Western culture as it relates to black people. It is a further tool to repress and suppress black self-awareness and pride. It is a tangible reinforcement of Frenkel's theory of colonial superpowers maintaining control of the colonized, and maintaining a role of perpetual submissiveness in culture for African diaspora descendants.

Chapter Two: Native Immigrants

Native immigrants is oxymoronic as it applies to slaves and their arrival and existence in the new world. By no means do I intend to imply that African slaves were immigrants. The cruelties of the slave experience and human trafficking are well documented. The arrival of this group of people into the new world was in no way like that of white European immigrants or immigrants of most other cultures. Hence, I must address this now, as this chapter will crash and burn before it begins if I do not clarify my position. In this chapter, I will argue that slaves arrived on the shores of the new world as prisoners and captives. It is their descendants who have become "native immigrants" and who live a "foreign like" existence. My argument and theory is strictly based upon African diaspora victims and their descendants in the United States.

Immigrant Arrival

British settlers founded Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, and the first Africans arrived twelve years later in 1619. These African women, men, and children arrived against their will and were prisoners, hostages, and victims of kidnapping. Their journey from Africa to the "new world" was horrific and filled with terrors. Their arrival created a dichotomy of existence and thought that deeply separated Africans from their white conquerors. For Africans, arrival in the *new world* represented bondage, oppression, violence,

and aggression at the hands of their conquerors. For the British settlers, the arrival of Africans represented great financial gain, a free source of labor, and a steady work force. Richard Long points out that, "By the end of the seventeenth century, the prosperity of the southern British settlements was totally tied to the institution of slavery" (7).

Black life and culture have been intertwined with mainstream American life and culture for nearly four hundred years. Yet, native-born African-Americans experience many aspects of daily life as "aliens" and, in many ways, exist as foreigners in the United States. From the arrival of the very first blacks on American soil, there was a clear message of separateness and inferiority of the darker skinned people. Africans were not greeted with open arms and well wishes. Emma Lazarus' words did not apply to them:

> "*Give me your tired, your poor,*
> *Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,*
> *The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.*
> *Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:*
> *I lift my lamp beside the golden door,"*[1].

During the years of legal slavery and segregation, America could not be a place where Africans and their descendants would or could "breathe free." The ideals of Emma Lazarus proved to be nearly non-existent for African diaspora descendants.

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[1] Emma Lazarus (1849-1887) was an American poet and writer. She is most famous for her work "The New Colossus" which is quoted at the base of the Statue of Liberty.

The existence of black Americans in the United States has been complex from the start. From their first arrival, blacks were instructed to conform to the ways of the new world. They were made to dress and to learn the language of their captors. The traditions of Africa were frowned upon, and the continuation of African customs was discouraged. They were denied the right to the most basic of desires and the freedom to worship the god of their choice. Richard Long states:

> However, the slaves were not to be allowed their own religion, which was not considered to be a religion at all by the Europeans. They were to be *Christianized*, sometimes grudgingly and largely in the hope of making them accept their place by learning the Christian precepts of meekness, temperance, and respect for those who gave the orders. (Long 10)

Slaves were indoctrinated with the belief that they must disassociate from the customs of their homeland. Essentially, they were told to forget about the past way of life in Africa, to forget the family and friends they knew and loved in Africa, to forget the persons that they were before, and to assume a new identity. Their African names were taken and they were assigned new European names. They were forced to take on a new colonial identity, but at the same time, they were constantly made aware of the fact that they were different from their colonial conquerors. Not only were they different, but

also this difference was perceived as inferiority. Slaves were not recognized as citizens or immigrants but merely as property. Benjamin Brawley observes, "As property then there was nothing to prevent a slave from being separated from his family" (19). He further reports that, "As a slave the Negro had none of the ordinary civil or personal rights of a citizen. In a criminal case he could be arrested, tried, and condemned with but one witness against him, and he could be sentenced without a jury (20). In essence, a slave had no rights, no citizenship, no value as a human being. Their value was that of a worker, and they were seen as equals to animals and other types of property.

Slaves were even denied freedom of religion, a premise that the United States was founded on. As it pertained to slaves, religion—Christian conversion— presented a conundrum. How does one enslave a *brother in Christ?* Brawley sheds light on the actions and motivations of the oppressors by indicating that "they made little attempt to convert Negroes in the earlier decades of the seventeenth century, there being a very general opinion that neither Christian brotherhood nor the law of England would justify the holding of Christians as slaves" (20). He further expounds, "In course of time, however, they lost their scruples, and it became generally understood that conversion and baptism did not make a slave free, Virginia in 1667 enacting a law to this effect (Brawley 21). It appears that even religious decency was to be extended only to white Christians, as black Christians were only to be

"Christianized" according to white standards. The condition of their souls was secondary to instructions of obedience and submissiveness.

Thus it is clear that black men, women, and children were in a precarious state. After the arrival of the initial captives from Africa, the offspring and their descendants were natives of the colonies. Although they were native-born in the colonies, which would become the United States of America, they were treated as aliens and were not afforded the rights of citizens. Generation after generation of black and brown skinned people were born on US soil and were never recognized as citizens. Yet these generations of offspring were always recognized as slaves. There was no uncertainty about their state of perpetual bondage. Even after the ratification of the Emancipation Proclamation and the thirteenth amendment, native born black people in the United States were not treated as full citizens. They were not afforded the same privileges as white citizens, and their realities were filled with terror, uncertainty, economic depression, and social ostracization.

Native Immigrants

I respectfully assert my theory of native immigrant existence because more than one hundred and fifty years after the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation, I, as an African-American woman, can attest to the precarious nature of black presence in the United States. Let me ask some basic questions. Have you ever engaged in conversation with a perfect

stranger, and at the conclusion the stranger says to you, “Oh my, you speak so well?” Or have you been driving home in your nice affluent neighborhood and been pulled over by the police for no reason? Have you ever been in a class and the professor stops, looks at you, and asks in slow speech, “Do you understand?” I can emphatically answer yes to all of the above. If I had a dollar for the times when people were amazed by my speaking abilities I would be able to redo my back yard. No, I am not a world-class orator. I simply speak the King’s English. I am a US citizen and have lived in the US my entire life. English is the only language that I speak, but time and time again, white Americans have been amazed by my ability to speak the language so well. Though ostensibly innocuous, these microagressions speak to the deep seated subconscious belief that native-born African-Americans are somehow foreigners and that they are inferior. This gives credence to my theory that African-Americans exist as native immigrants. After more than four hundred years of residency in America, black Americans continue to be seen and treated as foreigners in many instances.

Native born blacks experience a reality in America that is very much immigrant and “othered.” This is particularly true for African diaspora descendants residing outside of urban centers. For these individuals, finding places of cultural bonds and cultural necessities can be a struggle. Simply finding a restaurant serving cultural foods or finding a place of worship in the black cultural style is a challenge. What is more challenging is the

assertion by mainstream America that these are not valid or necessary concerns. The struggle becomes more visceral when one searches in a void attempting to locate a barbershop or hair salon or to find a black themed book in the local library. These are all reminders of the immigrant reality for the offspring of African slaves in America, and they are tangible examples showing that African Americans possess a foreign quality in the eyes of the mainstream dominant culture. African diaspora descendants are consistently looking for "home," but they struggle to find pieces of home.

Foreigners

In his book *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way,* Gustavo Pérez Firmat speaks of the shaping of Cuban-American culture. Specifically, he speaks of life on the hyphen, meaning that young Cubans coming of age in America are not solely Cuban or solely American. These immigrants left Cuba as young children and came of age in America. Thus, they did not have the benefit of taking in all of the indigenous Cuban culture, and as they were not natural born American citizens, they did not have the luxury of being truly American. These individuals account for a significant population of Cubans in America, and they have transformed into a new state of identity that is both recognized and respected as Cuban-American (Firmat 1-3).

Cuban sociologist Rubén Rumbaut furthers the theory of life on the hyphen with his theory of the one and a half (1.5) generation. He emphasizes that, "Children who were born abroad but are being educated and come of age

in the United States form what may be called the "1.5" generation. These refugee youth must cope with two crisis-producing and identity-defining transitions:

(1) adolescence and the task of managing the transition from childhood to adulthood, and (2) acculturation and the task of managing the transition from one socio-cultural environment to another" (Rumbaut 61). He goes on to note that:

> The "first" generation of their parents, who are fully part of the "old" world, face only the latter; the "second" generation of the children now being born and reared in the United States, who as such become fully part of the "new" world, will need to confront only the former. But members of the "1.5" generation form a distinctive cohort in that in many ways they are marginal to both the old and the new worlds, and are fully part of neither of them. (Rumbaut 61)

African-Americans are unique because, unlike Cuban-Americans, they have never achieved "1.5" generation status. The Cuban-American "1.5" generation serves as a bridge between the old (Cuba) and new (America) worlds. These individuals are conduits of cultural traditions. They bridge the gap between the older and younger generations, and they possess the ability to assimilate. To that end, America has been more tolerant of their

existence and has allowed them to assimilate more easily. However, African-Americans have not been afforded the opportunity to develop a "1.5" generation because their culture was not celebrated or embraced by white America. Furthermore, the *bridge* collapsed once the slaves left the shores of Africa.

African slaves were not permitted to maintain their culture or to fully assimilate. The languages from Africa were not to be spoken in the new world. Their religions were not to be observed, and their precious drums were to remain silent in America. The cultures of Africa were not to be cultivated here. The old world was denied, and the only ties to it were the color of skin and hair textures. The ability to assimilate and blend in to mainstream America is hindered by skin color which has glaringly been recognized as inherently different. The darker one is, the more "blackness" is attributed to that individual, which has spawned the desire in some to be "lighter" as lighter skinned blacks were historically better received by the white mainstream. Hence, African-Americans were continually the victims of xenophobia. The fear of "blackness" has forced African diaspora descendants into a prolonged existence of racial purgatory as they have sought to assimilate into mainstream American culture. However, it must be noted that not all African-Americans want to assimilate into the mainstream. This is proved through history by the sentiments of Marcus Garvey who encouraged black people to return to Africa and to leave America altogether.

W.E.B. DuBois

This xenophobia, however, even affected African-Americans who achieved prominence, academic excellence, or critical acclaim. The irrational dislike of African descendants marred, and continues to mar, the lives and experiences of generations of members of this demographic. For this reason, I find it necessary to highlight the experience of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois as he endeavored to study at Harvard University. This institution has produced eight United States Presidents, the last of whom is President Barack Hussein Obama; the nation's first and only African-American president. Certainly, the experiences of these distinguished gentlemen at Harvard are vastly different from that of DuBois, a stellar scholar and thinker who had to endure and overcome racism while matriculating at Harvard University.

Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, commonly referred to as W.E.B. Du Bois, was a prominent African-American scholar, philosopher, historian, and educator in the early 1900s. He dedicated his life to speaking out against the oppression that America directed towards its black citizens. In 1895, Du Bois became the first African-American to be awarded a doctorate degree in history from Harvard University[2]. While his time in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was not filled with the hateful actions and words of Klansmen, he did know that he was distinctly different from his

[2] Harvard University was founded in 1636 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and named after John Harvard. It is the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States and one of the most prestigious universities in the world.

classmates. Thus, his experiences at Harvard were vastly different from those of his mostly white classmates, and his narrative depicts the "foreign and native immigrant" experience of African diaspora descendants in one of America's finest institutions.

Du Bois wrote about his experiences at Harvard in *The Autobiography of W.E.B. DuBois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*. He speaks of having few friends at the university and understanding that his time at this prestigious institution was purely for academic pursuits. He knew that he would not be allowed to socialize or mingle with the other students. DuBois writes, "Of course I wanted friends, but I could not seek them. My class was large— some three hundred students. I doubt if I knew a dozen of them. I did not seek them and naturally they did not seek me" (134).

Du Bois understood that he was an American citizen yet his citizenship was different from that of his peers. He was born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and educated in New England during his elementary and secondary years. His classmates were predominantly white, yet he was accepted and treated well. Du Bois was spared the humiliations of segregation and prejudice that many African-Americans were experiencing in the South. His upbringing in the North was primarily genteel and civil. He faced little of the indignities that his counterparts in the South dealt with on a daily basis. His experience of life and race relations was greatly altered

after he enrolled at Fisk University[3] in Nashville, Tennessee. Fortuitously, it was this experience that prepared him for the lonely existence that he would encounter in his four years at Harvard. He indicates that he was happy at Harvard simply because he was able to accept racial segregation and the limitations it imposed. According to DuBois:

> Had I gone from Great Barrington High School directly to Harvard, I would have sought companionship with my white fellows and been disappointed and embittered by a discovery of social limitations to which I had not been used. But I came by way of Fisk and the South and there I had accepted color caste and embraced eagerly the companionship of those of my own color. (Du Bois 135)

As a result of his southern indoctrination, Du Bois was resigned to the social mores of American culture and made little attempt to fully engage in the social aspect of Harvard University. He stated, "In general, I asked nothing of Harvard but the tutelage of my teachers and the freedom of the laboratory and library. I was quite voluntarily and willingly outside its social life. I sought only such contacts with my white teachers as lay directly in the line of my work" (135). He understood that his place was not in the social fiber of the institution, but rather in Harvard's epistemology. His single misstep was in

[3] Fisk University is a historically black university and was founded in 1866 in Nashville, Tennessee. This institution was one of the first institutions of advanced learning opened to educate freed slaves. Most historically black colleges and universities were established in confederate states and served the purpose of educating black men and women since they could not seek admittance to nonblack institutions.

having the courage to try out for the college's glee club, an attempt that he would discover had been naïve and misguided on his part. He further elaborates:

> I made no attempt to contribute to the college periodicals since the editors were not interested in my major interests. But I did have a good singing voice and loved music, so I entered the competition for the Glee Club. I ought to have known that Harvard could not afford to have a Negro on its Glee Club traveling about the country. Quite naturally I was rejected. (Du Bois 134-135)

Du Bois was rejected from the glee club simply because of the color of his skin. Although Harvard University was forward enough in its thinking to admit black students, it was not willing to have a dark-skinned man represent its interests throughout the country. I would further assert that Harvard was ashamed to have a black man publicly represent it. They were not ashamed of his presence on campus, but those feelings did not extend outside of the hallowed halls of Cambridge.

Admittance into Harvard has long been recognized as a badge of scholarly honor. Matriculation at the institution is evidence of one's outstanding academic achievement and intellectual prowess. There is no doubt that Du Bois was a good student; however, his Ivy League experience was vastly different than that of his peers. His social life was built entirely

outside of the campus gates and was filled with other *colored* people. The possibility of residing on campus was out of the question for both financial and social reasons. He could not afford the cost of campus room and board, and the institution could and would not compel another student to room with him. Thus, he realized that he would have to create all social interactions off-campus and with black people like himself. Du Bois stated:

> When I arrived at Harvard, the question of board and lodging was of first importance. Naturally, I could not afford a room in the college yard in the old venerable buildings which housed most of the well-to-do students under the magnificent elms. Neither did I think of looking for lodgings among white families, where numbers of the ordinary students lived. I tried to find a colored home, and finally at 20 Flagg Street I came upon the neat home of a colored woman from Nova Scotia… For a very reasonable sum I rented the second story front room and for four years this was my home." (Du Bois 133-134)

Despite experiencing racial inequities, Du Bois was able to have an enjoyable four years at Harvard by creating his own world within the world of Cambridge. He says, "I was encased in a completely colored world, self-sufficient and provincial, and ignoring just as far as possible the white world which conditioned it. This was self-protective coloration, with perhaps an

inferiority complex, but with the belief in the ability and future of black folk (136). He continues:

> With my colored friends I carried on lively social intercourse, but necessarily one which involved little expenditure of money. I called at their homes and ate at their tables. We danced at private parties. We went on excursions down the Bay. Once, with a group of colored students gathered from surrounding institutions, we gave Aristophanes' *The Birds* in a Boston colored church. The rendition was good, but not outstanding, not quite appreciated by the colored audience, but well worth doing. Even though it worked me near to death, I was proud of it. (Du Bois 137)

Du Bois was an American citizen, attending one of the most prestigious colleges in the country, yet he knew and accepted that he could and would not have the same experience as his classmates. He and the other black students at Harvard resigned themselves to the fact that their lives would be different. They realized that they had to create a world within a world, a cocoon of sorts. They were Ivy-League scholars as well as American citizens, but they were the dark ones. They were sons and daughters of Africa, and somehow, they were perceived as inferior, as stains of shame, and unworthy of full admittance into the social fabric. DuBois' bachelors degree from Fisk was not recognized by Harvard as academically equal, forcing him to

complete two additional years as an undergrad when he arrived in Cambridge. Harvard University tolerated DuBois and the other black students more so than truly accepting them. In order for these African diaspora descendants to be successful in this environment, they had to create a self-protective barrier that allowed them a space of emotional safety.

Self-protective Coloration

The *self-protective coloration* that DuBois spoke of in the late 1800's has been a consistent mode of survival for generations of black Americans before and since he coined the term. Self-protective coloration is an action both subconsciously and consciously engaged in. It is the act of blending into the mainstream society and conversely vanishing from it. Black slaves quickly learned that they must be visible while performing their tasks in the fields, in the homes of their owners, or in the trades that they were taught. It was essential that slaves be highly productive and efficient in their jobs and that their white owners and overseers recognized them in this societal role. Not only did black slaves have to be seen as hard workers, but they had to be subservient as well. They in no means could appear to be self-assured or assertive. They had to limit the amount of knowledge they showed their masters and white society opting instead to appear knowledgeable only in tasks related to their bondage. Displaying book knowledge and the ability to read would certainly cause problems, possibly resulting in death. Black slaves, both African natives and native-born African-Americans, quickly

learned they had to be on guard in the presence of white people. In essence, they had to assume alter egos and the split personalities of *Sambo* and *Mammy*[4] that allowed them to survive. In the presence of white people, slaves became different beings. Simply put, they became exceptional actors. They were not just acting to put on a show; they were acting to save and preserve their lives and the lives of their loved ones. DuBois intellectually expresses this sentiment in his 1903 publication of *The Souls of Black Folk*:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (DuBois 10-11)

Most certainly slaves were not thinking as deeply as DuBois. Their concerns were geared toward basic daily survival, the desire to be viewed as human beings rather than objects, and the hope of humane treatment. The slave's thoughts were inherently directed to life during enslavement, while DuBois' thoughts were expressed decades after emancipation.

Black slaves could never truly be free to direct their lives as the fear of punishment and retribution from white society was ever present. However,

[4] Mammy and Sambo were names used to address black people during the slave and post slavery era. Mammy and Sambo were stereotypical caricatures of people of African descent that showed them in childlike, ignorant, and subservient roles.

they were able to establish a place of identity in the slave quarters. It was in these poorly constructed dwellings, and the aesthetically neglected areas of the plantations, where slaves found the opportunity to engage in camaraderie. Music, dance, and the rhythms of Mother Africa continued to flourish. The black church, the *invisible institution*, found its origins in the slave quarters.

Slaves found the ability to worship in their own unique way to be cathartic as well as a time of fellowship. In many cases, this was the only time when slaves were allowed to gather together. These weekly meetings allowed the "slave" preacher to bring forth a message of hope that encouraged the hearts of the residents. For example, "the Negro priest became an important figure on the plantation, and found his function as the interpreter of the supernatural, the comforter of the sorrowing, and as the one who expressed rudely, but picturesquely, the longing and disappointment and resentment of a stolen people" (Brawley 197). These meetings also served as secret codes for the Underground Railroad[5]. The singing of Negro Spirituals like "Soon and Very Soon," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," and "Wade in the Water" were signals that freedom workers were coming to help the slaves escape to the North and freedom.

African descendants recognized quite early on the need for self-protective coloration. They understood they would not be accepted in

[5] The Underground Railroad was a figurative description of the network used to spirit slaves to freedom. It was not a literal railroad but a system of people, places, and actions used to secretly help slaves to get to freedom.

mainstream America. These individuals possessed little materialistically and only had their music, stories, religion, and dance. These sustained them through the terrible trauma of being uprooted, transported clear across the world, and plunged into forced labor as slaves (Long 9). Slaves did not own their own bodies, and they were subject to the master's whims for labor, sexual favors, reproduction, and, not least of all, financial gain.

It was obvious that their presence was desired for the economic advancement of this country through free slave labor, but their presence was not desired in American schools, churches, banks or most other aspects of American life. Self-protective coloration is evidenced in the founding and continued existence of black religious denominations, colleges, businesses, and towns. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church[6] and the AMEZ (African Methodist Episcopal) Zion Church[7] are two of many denominations created to allow black people the opportunity to worship with dignity. Mary McLeod Bethune founded Bethune-Cookman College[8] in Daytona, Florida, to establish an institution of higher education for African-American students,

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[6] Richard Allen, a former slave, founded the AME Church after he and other black congregants were discriminated against in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. It was officially incorporated in 1816 and recognized as a separate denomination.

[7] A group of black churches near New York formed the AME Zion denomination in 1820. This church was an off shoot of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and was founded in order to maintain ties with Methodism but to break away from the overt discrimination faced in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

[8] In 1904, Mary McLeod Bethune opened the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls. In 1923 the school became a co-ed high school when it merged with Cookman Institute. It became a four-year accredited college in 1941 granting degrees in liberal arts and teacher education.

and Booker T. Washington founded the Tuskegee Institute[9] in Tuskegee, Alabama, to educate black people in the South.

African-Americans founded these institutions as a way to control their destiny. African-Americans were not seeking to be separatists; they were establishing environments that would provide safety. The official ending of slavery, in 1863, created freedom but not equality. As a result, African-Americans faced many challenges and the ever-present fear of violence.

Self-protective coloration created a means for African-Americans to have a continuation of their heritage. They were able to further their heritage by creating institutions where they could be free in expressing themselves and free to laud the accomplishments of their people. This concept allowed and continues to allow African-Americans to coexist with mainstream (white) America while existing separately in a black American world by creating physical spaces where African diaspora descendants can experience the basic privileges of American citizens.

Third Space

Third space and self-protective coloration are concepts that dovetail. Third space is the existence of a new space within an established society. In the case of African-Americans, there was the space occupied and controlled by white America, and there was the space that white America created for black

[9] Booker T. Washington founded The Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers in a one-room building with thirty adult students on July 4, 1881 in Tuskegee, Alabama. It is presently named Tuskegee University.

Americans. Third spaces were the areas that black Americans created for themselves that were separate from white influence. According to Paul Routledge, a key element in establishing third spaces is the belief that these sites can be inhabited, making each a space of relative comfort, which requires creative ways to cross perceived and real "borders" (406). In essence, third space is the melding together of yellow and green resulting in the creation of blue. It is taking two entities that already exist and combining them. This combination creates a new, almost hybrid version of what originally existed. Along with self-protective coloration, African-Americans have been foremost in the concept of third space in nearly every aspect of their existence in America.

Let us consider the black slaves who had to create nourishing meals to eat. Keep in mind that the best food went to the Master, and his family, in the big house. Slaves were given weekly rations of basic foods in meager amounts and often times had to find scraps for sustenance. The pig was skewered, seasoned, and choice meats were cut. The best cuts were used for bacon, roasts, ham, and spare ribs. The slaves were given the literal scraps of the pig. They received what was left after all the choice meats had been procured for the master and his family. What remained were the intestines, the head, feet, tail, and ears. The slaves took this carcass and the undesirable remnants of the pig and created foods that are known in the black community as delicacies. The intestines were cleaned, soaked, cooked,

and turned into chitterlings or *chitlins.* The head of the pig was boiled and used to create *hog's head cheese* which is a jellylike spread. Slaves used the feet of the pig, also known as *trotters,* to create cooked and pickled "pig feet," which could be eaten as a meal or a snack. They also used pig tails and pig ears for meals. We cannot forget the hambone, which in many cases was the prized possession. The hambone was passed from slave house to slave house and used to season and flavor foods such as collard greens, green beans, and soups and stews. Every part of the pig had a purpose and was essential to the survival of many slaves. Had it not been for the ingenious thinking of slaves, these foods would have never existed. Mankind would not have known the myriad of uses for livestock meat. Routledge defines this creation as a space within and between these locations, manifesting a strategic mobility that continually interweaves these sites, so that they become entangled, continually informing one another (412). Although third space may not occupy a specific location, it is a real and tangible entity. In Routledge's view, it becomes a fluid site of continual repositioning, of permanent oscillation and fluidity within and between enunciatory sites, physical locations, political positionings, effecting a web of interconnected conditions of possibility. Emotions, memories, life histories, bodily experiences emerge from this space and breathe life (412).

What is unique is that these dishes did not remain in the slave quarters. They found their way into the big house but also into mainstream

society. The pot liquor, remaining in the pot from collard greens and seasoned with the hambone, became a coveted soup. The cornbread that was made from the meager corn meal allotment given to the slaves became sweet cakes that were desired by many both black and white. The foods that were known as "slave cuisine" are now considered Southern American staples.

Black slaves used third space in food preparation to create a better existence and survival for themselves. Rather than throw away the remnants of the pig, they found creative ways to use every part of the animal to feed themselves. Though this may appear trivial, it is a prime example of the concept of third space and using differences to permeate spaces. What is more noticeable is that the scraps that slaves used to form their menus eventually found their way into the *big house*. This represents a transmittance of culture from the slave quarters to the "big house." The impact of the culture exchange is important because the flow of culture was not completely one-sided. However, more culture flowed from the black slaves to their white owners than the opposite. I have created a chart that indicates the flow of culture from slaves to the mainstream (see figure 1). Less erudition flowed from the "big house" to the slave quarters. Black slaves influenced white culture much more than they are given credit for.

Foods that were in the slave quarters became foods that white slave owners came to enjoy and appreciate. Moreover, these foods that were perceived as *Negro* and *darkie* cuisine are now praised. Sylvia Woods is a

modern example of this transmission of culture and its crossover into the mainstream. Sylvia's Queen of Soul Food Restaurant[10] in Harlem, New York, is world famous attracting tour buses arriving weekly filled with patrons from around the world hoping to taste her delectable southern style cuisine. Furthermore, the reach of this food has been extended, as Sylvia's traditional *soul food* is now sold in grocery stores throughout the country.

Conclusion

The African diaspora experience in America has been one of self-protective coloration, of constant creation of third spaces, of existing as native immigrants, and of being perceived as foreign. It has a deep history of taking scraps, left-overs, and remnants and making something new, useful, and beautiful. Its past is also steeped in exclusion and isolation. The African-American experience in particular, though undeniably harsh and painful, is an experience of overcoming obstacles and finding a way to triumph in the most challenging of circumstances.

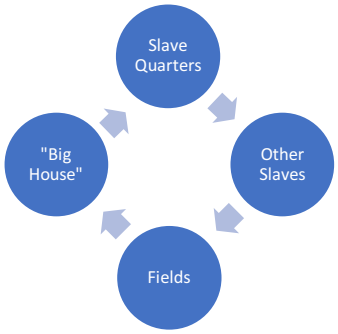

Figure 1: Culture Transmittance Flow Chart

[10] Sylvia Woods founded her soul food restaurant in Harlem, NY in 1962. She is known for her exceptional southern style cuisine.

Chapter Three: The Caribbean

Historical Overview

The cultures of the Caribbean Islands, Afro-Cuban, Afro-Dominicans, and Afro-Puerto Ricans, have not reached a point of balance in the dominant Caribbean societies. They have existed in these regions for more than five hundred years and have continually had their African heritage denied and repressed. However, some semblances of African culture and tradition have been preserved through music and religion. Specifically, this chapter will examine the diasporic culture of African descendants in the Caribbean and its influence on the Spanish speaking Caribbean and Caribbean Island societies as a whole using literature as a framework.

When examining the Spanish speaking Caribbean, it is essential to acknowledge the presence of peoples of African descent. The African diaspora has impacted political, cultural and social fibers of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and all of the other Caribbean nations. The initial Caribbean diaspora for peoples of African descent began with slave trading from the western coast of Africa. While the British, Dutch, and French focused on the Lesser Antilles, the Spanish settled the islands to the west. The island of Hispaniola, modern day Haiti and the Dominican Republic, was Spain's main focus. Spanish conquistadors were drawn to the natural resources the island possessed. However, after depleting those resources and depleting much of the

indigenous population, the Spaniards were forced to pay more attention to the islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Ronald Segal writes, “Upon arriving on the island in 1492, Columbus described it as “the most beautiful land human eyes have ever seen” (82). By the early 1500s, Spain subjugated the indigenous people and gave credit to settlers for establishing sugar mills. Cuba's esteem in the eyes of the Spanish was short lived as rumors of gold in South America spread. Settlers soon abandoned Cuba joining the rush for riches. Cuba became little more than a service station for passing ships, which loaded the salted meat raised from the cattle on the savannahs. Segal reveals that by 1544 the island had a population of fewer than 7,000, composed of some 5,000 surviving indigenous Indians, some 660 Spaniards and some 800 black slaves (82).

Spain had been settling the Caribbean and establishing the sugar industry since the 1500’s, and as Cuba was “the last frontier” in Spanish subjugation, it soon became prolific in its need for slave labor. Cattle ranching and tobacco production constituted much of Cuba's exports. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, the slave revolt on the Island of St. Dominique (modern day Haiti and The Dominican Republic) was the impetus for French refugees to settle in Cuba. The revolution disrupted sugar production in the Caribbean but created a boon in Cuba's economy. French colonial refugees quickly established a sugar production operation in Cuba. Thus, between 1790 and 1820, over two hundred thousand slaves were

delivered to the island. By 1855, sugar products were accounting for almost 84 percent of Cuba's exports, in what had become virtually a one-crop economy. In addition, 550,000 slaves were brought to Cuba between 1811 and 1870 (Segal 83).

Puerto Rico is the smallest of the Greater Antilles islands, and Spain's initial interest was in the gold found there. In contrast to Cuba, the largest of the Antilles, Puerto Rico comprises eight percent of Cuba's land mass. But, like Cuba, Puerto Rico was a contributor to the sugar industry, and the Haitian slave revolt from 1791 to 1804 increased its market for sugar production and its need for slave labor. Thus, the need for slave labor in order to meet supply and demand for the cash crop of sugar increased. Puerto Rico continued the slave culture of the Caribbean until abolishing slavery in 1873 and apprenticeship in 1876. These "freed" slaves were not totally free, as they were made to meet the prerequisite of purchasing their own freedom from their masters.

The conditions of slavery in American and the Caribbean were savage and harsh. However slaves in the Spanish controlled Caribbean were treated a bit more civilly than Southern American slaves because Spanish law was more tolerant and respective of the personhood of slaves allowing slaves recourse in court and respecting slave marriages. Yet, slavery, in itself, was still brutal. Slaves in the sugar industry were granted four hours of sleep and forced to work around the clock. Segal reports, "R.R. Madden, a British

abolitionist, observed that nowhere else in the hemisphere were slave conditions "so desperately wretched" as those to be seen on the plantations of inland Cuba" (Segal 85).

The brutality directed toward blacks and the disregard for their overall well-being is a common theme in Cuban and Puerto Rican politics and culture. Though the enslavement of Africans was formally abolished by the Spaniards in Cuba in 1886 and in Puerto Rico in 1873, the Spanish government turned a blind eye to those who continued to smuggle African slaves into their colonies well into the late eighteen hundreds. Marta Vega asserts that over a period of four centuries, more than fifteen million Africans of varied ethnic groups were brought as chattel slaves to the Americas, and they would leave their imprint on the New World (Vega 1). This influx of people was the catalyst for the financial success of the Spanish Caribbean, and it also inadvertently served to bring new cultural identities into these lands.

Descendants of the African diaspora have found it challenging to achieve full acceptance in the Latin Caribbean. Although they are acknowledged by the mainstream, their existence has been a balancing act. Acculturation and transculturation was thrust upon them in the form of slavery. Leaving Africa and coming to the Americas caused the involuntary passage from one culture to another. Yet, descendents of the African diaspora have struggled to achieve true biculturation. For biculturation

designates not only contact of cultures; in addition, it describes a situation where the two cultures achieve a balance that makes it difficult to distinguish between the dominant and the subordinate culture (Firmat 5). In the Latin Caribbean, there is an unspoken but practiced philosophy of acknowledging Spain as the motherland and not Africa. Yes, African traditions have sustained the test of time, but it is the Spanish traditions that are most recognized.

Fidel Castro did not acknowledge Spain or Africa as motherlands, nor was he particularly violent towards black Cubans, but he had been dismissive of their culture and heritage. His version of communism placed racial issues subservient to class struggles. In essence, it diminished the ethnic identity of black Cubans. Their African culture was mitigated, and the only ideology recognized was that of the Cuban Revolution. Thus, he was very harsh towards those who he felt went against the ideology of the Revolution.

> Castro's Communism was of the kind that used blacks as counters in a doctrinal class conflict rather than as a people with a plight and corresponding sense of identity all their own. A revolution that had begun in the commitment to freedom ended by denying the blacks of Cuba the right to be themselves. (Segal 243)

Biculturation through religion has been almost non-existent for the Afro-Cuban Santeria practitioner. Although Castro's regime was more tolerant, it was not acceptant of Santeria, nor did it view the religion equally with other religions. Santeria did, indeed, become more acceptable and its celebration more open with Cuban independence and the disestablishment of the Church. The revolutionary regime of Castro, however, became increasingly repressive in its views of the religion as socially deviant and divisive. Among those leaving the island, from one or other cause of disaffection, were priests and practitioners of Santeria, who took their religion with them, mainly to the United States and in particular to Miami and New York (Segal 432).

The clandestine nature of Santeria worship in the Spanish-controlled Caribbean is evident.

> The fiestas in the casas de Santo were good ones. Only Negroes went to them, the Spanish didn't approve of *Santeria*. But with time this changed, and now you see white high priests with red cheeks. *Santeria* used to be a religion for the Africans, and even the Civil Guards, the pure-blooded ones, would have nothing to do with it. They would make some remark in passing like, "What's going on here?", and the Negroes would say, "We're celebrating San Juan." But of course it was not San Juan but Oggun, the god of war. (Segal 432)

Although Santeria has been the reason for secrecy in the Afro-Cuban and Afro-Puerto Rican cultures, it has also been a source of some degree of hybridity with the mainstream society. Modern culture has become much more open to Santeria and its practice. The practice of Santeria is seen in movies and literature. Additionally, tourists to the region can take guided tours to Santeria priests and participate in ceremonies. In Puerto Rico, tourists can visit Espiritismo (the Puerto-Rican version of Santeria) priests and priestesses.

The role of Santeria, its practitioners, and its influence has gained prominence in mainstream mediums. This acceptance is important in working towards biculturation, because the gradual acceptance of Santeria serves to de-stigmatize people of African descent and to lessen long held stereotypes and prejudices; namely, the belief that all things black, including black religions, are bad.

The Agüero Sisters

Cristina Garcia is a white Cuban novelist who was born in Cuba and raised in America. She is a product of the Cuban diaspora to the United States in 1961. She came to America and settled in New York City with her family when she was two years old. In her novel, *The Agüero Sisters,* the underlying theme of disdain for Afro-Cubans is presented, and the role of Santeria in diasporic populations is examined. We are introduced to Reina

Agüero, a Cuban electrician. She is of mixed lineage and would be considered a mulatto, if not Afro-Cuban. Her character is self-aware and not influenced by the beauty whims of Cuban-Americans. She is free spirited and at one with her body, having no inhibitions regarding sexual liaisons. "By now, Reina is a familiar figure at her sister's yacht club by the bay. She's seduced a number of its more inspirited members. Other women's men, but Reina doesn't dwell on the unpleasant particulars (Garcia 197). Reina's character is hyper sexualized. She oozes sex appeal, constantly contemplates sexual relations, and engages in sex with married men. She is not concerned with morality or wholesome values and is depicted as one step away from a strumpet. Though it may not have been an intentional action by Garcia, it lends to the stereotype that women of African descent are "loose" and morally bankrupt. This, in turn, further perpetuates the notion that "black" people are abominable, morally vapid, and overly sexed.

Reina is the result of her mother's extramarital affair with a mulatto Cuban man. Again, the underlying stereotype of black moral depravity is present. Understandably, Reina is not accepted by Ignacio, her "father," because of the infidelity of his wife, Blanca, which is highlighted by Reina's brown skin. What is disturbing is the treatment directed at the young Reina. Garcia writes:

> In Havana, Blanca devoted herself to Reina's care,
> nursing the girl until she was ready for school. I

> heard the neighbors' whispering, noticed their eyes
> on her nutmeg skin. Reina used to climb the tulip
> tree in our backyard to escape their surveillance,
> happy amidst the shimmer of leaves and the
> boisterous songbirds. I cared for the girl in my way,
> but I never considered her mine. (265)

Reina is judged by others because of her darker skin tone. Ignacio tolerates her, but their relationship is distant and cold. When Ignacio confronts Blanca's lover, Reina's father, he has but one goal in mind. He wants to get rid of him. Ignacio offers him eight hundred dollars to never return. The mulatto man counts the money and returns it to Ignacio. This exchange shows Ignacio's desire to have no association with the adulterer, but it also reflects Ignacio's implicit bias against associating with an Afro-Cuban. Ignacio is so determined to get rid of the mulatto that he offers his life savings as a bribe to stay away. Ignacio would rather be broke than have any affiliation with a black man.

Although negative images of Afro-Cubans are portrayed in her novel, Garcia does promote positive images as well. Oscar Pinango, the santero (Santeria priest), is a figure of immense wisdom and knowledge of the spirit world. He is a guide for Constancia Agüero, and he helps to bridge the gap between her and the Cuba that she left thirty years earlier. She sees him not only as a spiritual guide, but as a friend and confidant. Perhaps his

immigration to Miami was facilitated by the Castro regime's views toward Santeria. Certainly, he has found a “space” for himself and his religion in South Florida.

Pinango brings his Afro-Cuban and Santeria culture with him. His house and car, almost completely bathed in yellow, are tributes to the orisha (God) Oshun or Ochun. Ochun, also known as Our Lady of Charity, is the Santeria goddess of love and beauty. Ochun is a fertility and river goddess and the lover of Chango, the god of thunder. The santero's rituals are derived from ancient African ceremonies. More importantly, Pinango is able to bridge the cultural divide between white and Afro-Cubans through the medium of Santeria. Constancia had not been acquainted with Santeria in Cuba or in America prior to her initial meeting with Pinango, but she connects with the spirituality. Garcia states:

> In Cuba, Constancia had heard of Oshun, of the goddess's fondness for rivers and gold and honey. She unclasps the pearls from around her neck and offers the necklace to the santero. Pinango motions for her to place it with Oshun’s other propitiations, between the ochinchin- the shrimp-and-watercress omelet- and a six-pack of orange soda. Then Constancia kneels before the altar, giddy with the mingled scents of urgent devotion. (Garcia 111)

Garcia weaves Pinango into various aspects of Constancia's life. He is summoned to her *Cuerpo de Cuba* factory to perform a ritualistic cleansing when her business experiences inexplicable mishaps. Desperate for his help, Constancia dismisses her employees at noon and gives them a day's pay so that the santero can perform a spiritual cleansing. Reina and Constancia run behind him following every instruction. Though Constancia has faith in the santero, she is hesitant to have her employees remain for the cleansing ritual. It does not appear that the hesitancy to expose the workers to Santeria and Pinango is malicious or driven by implicit bias. In this case, it is an issue of privacy, and extra people would only be a cumbersome hindrance to the process.

Magical Realism

Santeria can be expressed and defined in literary forms as magical realism. Very briefly, magical realism combines realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them (Faris 1). Elements of magical realism emerge in *The Agüero Sisters* and it becomes difficult to separate the spiritual element from the natural element. Constancia is consumed by the spirit of Oshun in the Santeria ritual that Pinango performs twelve days before Oshun's Yoruba Celebration and one week before the Catholic feast of la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre. Garcia expresses this phenomenon as Constancia participates in the Santeria ritual in the following excerpt:

> She touches Tio Damaso's letter in her jacket pocket, stares at the top of the santero's starched cap. Its whiteness seems to leak into the air like a poison.
>
> A breeze flutters through the low-ceilinged room. The forest of candle flames stutters. Constancia stands up and begins circling in place. The breeze turns to a strong wind, dry and funneling and scented with death. It thrusts open Constancia's mouth, scorches every passageway, blasts her dry lungs hot. Her tongue shrivels in place, unhooks from her like a dead lizard. Her ears roar with a harsh internal storm. (Garcia 259)

The boundary of reality and spirituality is blurred in this scene. Just as one begins to surmise that Constancia is dreaming or hallucinating, the sensory details of her body are used. She is smelling death, burning from hot air, her tongue is withering, and she is hearing a roar in her ears. Her senses are being assaulted, and these sensory details make it hard to discern if the experience is imagined or actually occurring. Magical realism is evident as it becomes difficult to discern if this is a real or imagined experience.

Daughters of the Stone

The element of magical realism is present in another Afro-Latin Caribbean work relevant to this study. It plays an integral role in Dahlma Llanos-Figueroa's *Daughters of the Stone.* Llanos-Figueroa is an Afro-Puerto Rican who was born in Puerto Rico and raised in New York. Like Cristina Garcia, she came of age in America. Presently, she resides in Bronx, New York and is a retired young adult librarian. She began writing because she felt that nothing represented her experience in literature. She is both black and Latina, and her cultural experience is steeped in stories, the oral tradition, which consisted of reality and fantasy. *Daughters of the Stone* was her way to pay homage to a culture that is ignored by the mainstream. *Daughters of the Stone* is set in Puerto Rico beginning in the mid 1800s and spans five generations of an Afro-Puerto Rican family. It follows the lives of five Afro-Puerto Rican women, Fela, Mati, Concha, Elena, and Carissa, all of whom are products of the African diaspora. Fela is the first to come to Puerto Rico, and she is responsible for their attachment to the stone and their introduction to Santeria.

Fela was stolen from Africa and brought to Puerto Rico in chains and shackles on a slave ship. Sugar was to the Caribbean slave what cotton was to the American southern slave. Thus, Fela, the first of five protagonists, finds herself in a Puerto Rican *batey* which is the Spanish word that describes the town built around a sugar mill. The *batey* of Hacienda las

Mercedes, a sugar plantation near the north coast of Puerto Rico, was her second experience as a slave in the Caribbean. Fela's arrival was met with rage from Romero, the overseer. He states:

> "*Vamos, muevete,"* Tia Josefa heard Romero command. "*Que? No me oyes?* Are you deaf as well as dumb, or just another stupid *negra sucia?"*
>
> Fela examined him as though he were an unreliable animal. She didn't move. Romero stood directly in front of her and shouted his command into her face. But the woman Fela held her ground.
>
> Never known for patience, Romero snatched his whip and swung it overhead. But his hand froze in midair, the whip swinging impotently in the morning breeze.
>
> Fela still hadn't moved. She showed no sign of fear or even apprehension. Romero's arm remained frozen in position. He looked from his arm to the whip and back to his arm. Confusion and then rage twisted his face. (Llanos-Figueroa 6)

At this point the irreducible element of magical realism is first introduced. Wendy Faris describes this as "something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated in Western empirically based discourse, that is, according to "logic, familiar knowledge, or received belief," as David Young and Keith Hollaman describe it (7). The logicical explanation for Romero's inability to use his arm is nonexistent. It cannot be

explained. Faris further states, "Therefore, the reader has difficulty marshaling evidence to settle questions about the status of events and characters in such fictions" (7). This is true as the reader must try to decipher if this experience is an actual event, a figment of Fela's imagination, or a literary device used by the author to add further intrigue to the story. Romero cannot understand why his arm has lost the ability to wield the whip, and the reader must decipher the implication of his loss of dexterity. The reader must discern if this reprieve from cruelty was caused by a change of heart in Romero or if it was caused by the spirit of the Yoruba goddess, Oshun.

Fela's experience in Puerto Rico is filled with loss, pain, and sorrow. She has lost her homeland, her language, her customs, her husband, and the promise of her future. She experiences the displacement and rupture of diasporic people. Her only material possession is a stone that she has brought with her from Africa. In the hopes of making her womb fertile, she and her husband Imu, performed a fertility ritual and poured the spirit of their unborn child into a stone. When she was captured by slave traders, the only possession that she had been able to keep was the stone. For Fela and her descendants, the stone possessed magical powers. Fela and her descendants also possessed spiritual powers and gifts given to them from the Santeria goddess, Oshun.

The stone is passed from generation to generation, and it represents the life-giving force and the soul of each woman. At times, the women and the stone manifest characteristics that challenge the realm of reality. Mati, Fela's daughter, was born into slavery and later freed by the master, who was her biological father. Mati possessed the spiritual gift of healing and, its opposite, the gift of causing great harm. Her spiritual gifts seem fantastical and the reader must again wrestle with the irreducible element of magical realism as Mati and Chieto, her male friend come face to face with her powers. Llanos-Figueroa writes:

> Mati saw his mouth moving but heard nothing. Soon she was aware only of the mounting heat. Her head pounded. Her skin became a coat of fire. The heat blinded her to everything else.
>
> She never knew exactly what happened during those few lost moments but when she focused on Chieto again, he lay on the ground, his right leg twisted under him. She rushed to help him but he cursed her and cried out at every move. When she finally got close enough, she could see the thighbone pushing out at an unnatural angle. The agony in his face and fear in his eyes told her all she needed to know. This was the first time her gift had gotten

> away from her, the first time she had ever hurt anyone. (Llanos-Figueroa 72-3)

Our inability to decide just where an event belongs on the spectrum from actual to impossible contributes to a central component of much magical realism (Faris 117). Mati possessed the spiritual gift of healing and, its opposite, the gift of causing great harm. Thus, her spiritual gifts seem unreal. It is not unnatural or illogical for the reader to question the probability of her control of powers that are supernatural as well as superhuman.

Throughout *Daughters of the Stone,* there are numerous events that are hard to place on the spectrum of actual and factual. The factual practices and powers of Santeria challenge the initial urge to dismiss these supernatural occurrences as impossibilities. However, Santeria is rooted in the spiritual world and many of its powers are inexplicable. When Carissa, Fela's great great granddaughter takes the stone to her New York City public school, she too, is met with disbelief and incredulity from both her classmates and teacher as she displays the stone for show and tell. Her classmates and teacher are not impressed by her generations old stone. Fela states:

> I stood in front of the room feeling quite proud of myself. I would have the best show-and tell of any of my classmates. I waited until the class was absolutely quiet and then held out my hand. I

> opened one finger at a time to add to the mystery. The students snaked their necks to see what I was holding. Then, there it was, the black pebble in my hand.
>
> "Oh, come on!"
>
> "Big deal, it's just a rock."
>
> "No, it isn't," I protested, "It's a magical stone."
>
> The room was quiet for a moment and then exploded into laughter and loud voices.
>
> "Get outta here."
>
> "There ain't no such thing as magic." (Llanos-Figueroa 249)

For Fela and her ancestors, the stone possess life giving power. It has carried their family on a five-generation journey. It possesses healing qualities. It heals them from emotional hurts caused by the African diaspora and it binds them together. It is a symbol that keeps the power of Santeria alive though they have been removed from Africa for one hundred years.

Boundaries

Elizabeth Nunez paints a different picture of Caribbean life in her novel *Boundaries.* Nunez holds a PhD in English from New York University and is the author of eight novels. She immigrated from Trinidad to the United States in 1963, and currently she is a professor of English at Hunter College in New York City.

Boundaries tells the story of Anna Sinclair who is a native of an unnamed Caribbean Island. Anna immigrated to the United States as a college student and has built a life and career for herself in New York. She is an accomplished publishing company executive who faces challenges as a black Caribbean woman in America. This novel is different from the others in that much of it takes place in the United States. Certainly, there are references to the Caribbean, but Anna lives her life as a naturalized American citizen.

Both Anna and her boyfriend, Dr. Paul Bishop, respect their present countries but maintain great allegiance to the *patrie*. Simply stated, a *patrie* is a homeland or country of origin. Anna and Paul are members of a diasporic community who have migrated and assimilated into the fabric of America. However, they possess tremendous allegiance to their homeland. Anna and Paul are respectful and appreciative of the opportunities America has presented, but they are very much bound in spirit to their Caribbean

nation of origin. Ernest Renan indicates that a nation is a spiritual principle… it is a spiritual family not a group determined by the shape of the earth. Though Anna and Paul are separated from the "land," nothing can separate their spiritual connections. (Renan 18-19)

Identity and identification within a group are ancient concepts deeply rooted in human nature. In the book of Genesis, Joseph commands his relatives to take up his bones and carry them out of Egypt. Though he has lived in Egypt for nearly one hundred years, he is not an Egyptian. He identifies with the Israelites and wishes to return to his homeland even if it is in death. Anna Sinclair, the protagonist, is a naturalized American citizen, but she very much identifies as a native Caribbean. She lives in this country yet her allegiance is to the motherland. Thus, the concept of *patrie* is evident in this literary work.

Boundaries shows the struggles of black Caribbean immigrants in the United States. Although Anna is a black woman, she is not an African-American woman, which causes frustration in her work environment. She is seen as not being fully "black" and not fully understanding what African-American readers will relate to. Anna's "blackness" is othered and even seen as "foreign" when compared to the white ideals and images of what a "true" black American is. Tanya, a white editor and Anna's supervisor, questions Anna'a ability to relate to the publishing trends and needs of black American readers: She says:

> "I've given B. Benton to Tim also," Tanya says. "Tim has a feel for those books, if you know what I mean."
>
> Anna tells her that she does not know what she means.
>
> "He's African-American," Tanya said.
>
> "And?"
>
> "And you are from the Caribbean."
>
> "What difference does that make?"
>
> "Tim understands African-American readers. He knows what they want." (Nunez 67)

Anna is living a hyphenated existence in the United States. She is not totally American and she is no longer totally Caribbean. In his book, *Life on the Hyphen,* Gustavo Pérez Firmat states that he is writing from the perspective of someone who is neither old enough to be Cuban nor young enough to be American, but who is exactly old and young enough to be Cuban-American (13). *Patrie* is palpable in this statement as it recognizes a connection to his dual motherlands. Firmat, like many other Cuban-Americans, came to the United States at a young age. He and his compatriots live on the hyphen. They are in the middle of two cultures. Rubén Rumbaut calls them the 1.5 or one and a half generation. They lived

their childhoods in Cuba but became adults in America. They were born in Cuba but made in the USA (3). Anna represents the 1.5 generation because she arrived in the United States as a teenage college student, has remained and become a citizen, and her "coming of age experiences" occurred in America. Her foundation of life and culture began in the Caribbean, but most of her life has now been spent away from her home.

As Anna struggles to gain acceptance from her American colleagues. She is filled with regret from having left the Caribbean.

> It isn't that she has not had regrets, that in the cold, dark, drab, leafless winter months she has not berated herself for turning her back on blue skies, turquoise waters, sun-filled days, and green-leaved trees. She sometimes wonders if she had been foolhardy to sever herself from the comfort of people with whom she shares a history, culture, myths. What or who she would have been had she never emigrated is a question that keeps immigrants tossing and turning in their beds at night. (Nunez 190)

Members of the Caribbean community are somewhat leery of Anna. Her friend Paula says, "You choose to live outside of the Caribbean immigrant

community, Anna. If not for me, you wouldn't know where to shop for West Indian food" (Nunez 190). Anna is disconnected from her Caribbean roots as well as her new American culture.

We know that Renan identifies a nation as a spiritual principle, the outcome of the profound complications of history; it is a spiritual family, not a group determined by the shape of the earth (18-19). Spatially Anna is in New York, but her mind and soul are tied to the Caribbean. Her emigration to the United States does not make her any less Caribbean or more American. If a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle, then Anna is imbued with the spirit of the Caribbean and residing in New York cannot diminish her Caribbean nationality (Bhabha 19).

In his article, *What is a Nation* from the 1990 publication of *Nation and Narration,* Renan speaks of race and language not forming a nation. This idea is evidenced in Anna when she feels that she is capable of selecting literature for an African-American audience. After seventeen years of working in the United States, she considers herself to be a citizen. Yes, she was Caribbean, but she now is an American citizen. Her mastery of the language and gainful employment does nothing to sway the opinion of African-Americans or of other Caribbean immigrants. Through her work and daily life, she assimilates into the American society, but she is not recognized as a citizen. Her fellow Caribbean friend tells her, "Don't ever forget that you're a Caribbean immigrant. Stick to your own people. You can rely on

them" (Nunez 191). In a sense, this is self-protective coloration with an "intra" focus. Anna is being urged not just to stay with other black people, but to specifically socialize with one black—Caribbean— demographic. This "intra" self-protective coloration is a deeper layer of identity preservation, and represents divisions in the black community as a whole.

Anna's case is indicative of the Janus-faced nature of *patrie*. Her existence in New York challenges the established boundaries of national identity and space. The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside or beyond it (Bhabha 6). Hence, Anna is outside the boundary of comfortably fitting into one national category. When examining her "identity," we see the two-faced makeup of using *patrie* to define oneness with a culture. Anna struggles with this as choosing one over the other would be a denial and insulting to the denied culture.

If a *patrie* is a homeland or country that occupies an actual geographical space, how does one classify the spirit of *patrie*? The idea of *patrie* leads to deeper thought and causes reflection on the notion of transnational cultures. Arjun Appaduri created the concept of ethnoscape, which deals with the movement of people and cultures beyond their original borders. Ethnoscape is intertwined with *patrie* in that "borders" are no longer static. Hence, ethnoscape plays a large role in the Sinclair family as she and her parents come to New York. Anna assimilates, but her parents

are proud of their Caribbean heritage and view themselves as Caribbean, not American. Thus, they decide to return to their Caribbean island and express no desire to assimilate into American culture.

In examining ethnoscape and *patrie* we acknowledge that physical land borders and the movement of people are not static. This movement across borders has been accelerated by technoscape. Technology has made it possible for people to cross borders, both physically and virtually, in record time. Airplanes, trains, buses, cars, and ships have made intercontinental travel accessible to nearly all areas of the globe. The internet, computer, phone, video conferencing and digital media are at the world's fingertips making communication swift. Thus, it is possible to live in the Caribbean and connect with America through movies or to cross the ocean on a boat and enter the United States through the Port of Miami. Though individuals have physically left their native lands, *patrie* is connected and maintained through technoscape, and new idealized spaces are created. What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated (Bhabha 4).

When examining Afro-Caribbean literature and searching for common threads, the themes of colonialism, slavery, African influenced religions, and cultural pride are glaringly obvious. The effects of the black Atlantic diaspora transcend time, as we are able to see the struggles of characters'

hundreds of years later. The diaspora itself is transcendent as it stretches far beyond the normal time range for movement among populations. Yogita Goyal further explains, "At the mythical level, the diaspora does not exist in time; it exists outside of time. It is worth considering why this representation of diaspora as mythic memory requires a turn away from the literal or the realistic or the historical, towards fantasy, legend, and fable" (401). When deconstructing the Afro-Caribbean experience, it is necessary to acknowledge that "time" for the slave was "transcendent." Time for slaves and their decedents was comparable to a state of suspended animation; the slave was in a perpetual state of servitude with little hope of freedom or a better existence.

Llanos-Figueroa's *Daughters of the Stone* tells the family experiences of five generations of Afro-Puerto Rican women who were poor and abused, while Nunez's *Boundaries* is a story of opportunity, affluence, and social mobility of the brown skinned educated Sinclair family. Although these works of fiction are different in scope, there are common threads of slavery and its effect on the culture of both stories settings; Puerto Rico and the unnamed Caribbean island.

Both works indirectly acknowledge the presence of Anglo conquerors, colonialism, and the effects of their occupation. The voice of Llanos-Figueroa's character, Tia Josefa, speaks to the reality that larger acquisitions of land are both blessings and curses. It is a blessing to the white plantation

owners and their families but a bane in the lives of the dark-skinned workers. It is understood that black people who were born slaves or persons taken from Africa would labor in the sugar cane fields. White hands would not endure the harsh rays of the sun or the oppressive Caribbean heat. The fortunes of the slave owners would increase on the backs of the children of Africa, while the misfortune of slavery, suffering, and despair would continue in the lives of the black slaves. *Daughters of the Stone* begins with Tia Josefa looking out the window and observing the arrival of newly acquired slaves. Llanos-Figueroa writes:

> In her day, Tia had seen many black people come and go, but there had been no new ones in a long time. She knew Don Tomas had recently acquired a new *parcela* and needed more hands to work it into cane fields. One thing Tia Josefa knew for sure, where there was more work to be done, it would be black hands that would do it. (1)

This elderly slave woman had witnessed countless scenes like this, and she knew that a new set of unfortunate souls would be forced to endure the hardships of life on the *batey*. These suffering souls would most assuredly be other black people.

Nunez addresses Spanish and English colonial slave influences in a more sanitized way. The narrator gives a historical explanation of the reason

behind the varying shades of complexion of the island citizens. She highlights the genealogy of the island from the indigenous to the conquistadors.

> …they have the same skin color, a rich butterscotch brown that tells the tale of the island's history, the peaceful Arawaks almost decimated by the war-loving Carib Indians who in turn were almost decimated by smallpox and other diseases the Spanish conquistadors brought with them. Then came the Africans in chains to plant sugarcane and cocoa under the lash of French planters who had already established slave holdings in Martinique and Guadelope. By the time the English had won their wars with Spain and colonized the island, the range of skin color there was already on its way to varying from pitch black to mocha, chocolate, and coffee-noir and au lait. (Nunez 19-20)

Conclusion

Caribbeans, Afro-Cubans and Afro-Puerto Ricans have faced challenges in creating an identity that defines who they are and that is accepted and fully embraced by the dominant respective societies. The fiction

selected for this study shares the common theme of magical realism, also known as the element of fantasy. This element is present in *Boundaries,* though I did not highlight it in this study, which can be seen as Anna's mother performs healing rituals in an attempt to be cured from breast cancer. This is illuminated by the practice of Santeria, and African religion. The depictions of Santeria and its practitioners in these texts shows the lasting African influence on Caribbean culture. These texts are also bound in commonality by the description of colonialism and its indelible marks that have been stamped upon the Caribbean islands. Lastly, all three-works referenced in this study depict struggles faced by black characters of African descent. These characters struggled to find peace, acceptance, a sense of belonging, and understanding of the real and inexplicable realities surrounding them. Thus, African heritage literature of the Caribbean adds a layer of "thirdspace" to the dialogue of diaspora studies in that it creates "conceptual identity" and common identities for a population that lacks a *patrie* or homeland.

Chapter Four: African-American Literature

Letters and the black person, particularly the African-American, have had a dangerous relationship. *Book knowledge* was not a granted right for enslaved people. During the time of legal servitude, it was more advantageous to hide any inkling of learning. An educated slave was a threat, as he or she would no longer be content working for nothing, and education might ignite in that individual the desire to rebel. Thus, it was more advantageous for slave owners and slaveholders to deny most book learning for slaves. However, it was permissible to allow slaves to learn to read the Bible, as it instructed slaves how to be good servants and how to heed their masters. Slaveholders believed that he Bible was the "good book" and was innocuous and non-threatening.

African heritage literature has existed in the Americas as early as the eighteenth century. Writers such as Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano expressed their thoughts and feelings in poetic and autobiographical form, respectively. Painter indicates that writing in English allowed men and women like Olaudah Equiano and the poet Phillis Wheatley to join the discussion reaching across the Western world on the wisdom and morality of abolishing the Atlantic slave trade and slavery (53). Knowledge of the written word gave African descendants a voice and afforded them a greater audience to express the egregious nature of slavery and to showcase their literary talents.

The creative voices of African heritage literature tell a story that is often left out of mainstream history. While all African heritage literature does not focus on the challenges of living in the diaspora, all of the stories included in this study in some way shed light upon the struggle of black people once they were forcibly removed from Africa. In these fictitious works, the reader is able to feel and to examine what is not always or necessarily shown in history. Beyond that, these works of fiction create a thematic bond that transcends time, geographic locations, and socioeconomic stratification, thereby bridging the gap created by the African Diaspora.

In deconstructing the African-American diasporic experience, it is essential to acknowledge the impact of slavery on this demographic. Ronald Segal explains, "The passage from Africa to America became more costly of black lives and more terrible in its torments than it had been. …The slave trade had always been a market for turning misery into money" (27). The inhumane nature of slavery caused many to speak against it. The abolition of slavery was a movement that gained much support during the mid through late nineteenth century in the United States and in other parts of the Americas. The quest for equality, better treatment of black people, and the emancipation of slaves in America came to a head during Abraham Lincoln's presidency and was one of the reasons for the Civil War. The desire to end the war and to unite the union led to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Segal explains that on the first day of 1863, Lincoln signed the

proclamation that freed the slave territory controlled by the Confederate South (245). Though many supported the ending of this reprehensible practice, all were not pleased by President Lincoln's order. Segal also tells us that anti-black rioting broke out in Detroit and then spread to other Northern cities (245). Slavery had been effectively ended, but the road leading to black equality would prove to be elusive. Fionnghuala Sweeney, senior Lecturer in American Literature at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom, emphasizes that in the United States as elsewhere across the diaspora, e/Emancipation marks the beginning of struggle as well as the end: the emergence of imperatives that required the meaningful expression of liberty in social, economic, political, artistic, legal, cultural and often territorial terms (228).

Though the oppression of slavery had ended, black people had a new journey of overcoming to embark upon. The prospect of reuniting a nation that had been divided was not fully extended to or inclusive of the darker citizens. Walt Whitman[1] speaks of an America filled with hope and promise in his poem *I Hear America Singing*.

> I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear, … The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
>
> Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,

[1] Walter "Walt" Whitman (May 31, 1819 – March 26, 1892) was an American writer known for poetry, essays, and journalistic pieces.

The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,

Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

His poem alludes to the freedom and promise that Americans have to set their courses and choose their destinies. Langston Hughes[2] answers this poem with his *I, Too, Sing America,* but his view of American life is starkly different.

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.
Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.
Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed--

[2] James Mercer Langston Hughes (February 1, 1902 – May 22, 1967) was an American writer known for poetry, plays, and social activism. He is credited as being a leader of the Harlem Renaissance in New York.

I, too, am America.

These poetic works depict American life from different perspectives. One, Whitman's poem, speaks of promise and opportunity that already exists. The other, Hughes' poem, alludes to hope for a future with promise, opportunity and recognition of African-Americans as equals by mainstream America. It also alludes to a veiled threat of growing stronger and one day sitting at the table as equals with white folks. Whitman's work embraces industrious Americans, but one must ask *does his work include black Americans?* Hughes is overt in expressing the struggle of being diminished, hidden, shamed, and deemed unfit by white America. Both of these works are important because they speak the truths of their respective authors and the communities that they represent. *I, Too, Sing America* gives credence to the need for African heritage literature because, in these short lines, he shows the complete opposite experience of the "*other."* Hughes' poem polarizes the inequities of American life for black people.

African heritage literature evens the historical playing field as it gives a voice to the *other,* the marginalized and oft overlooked population. African heritage literature presents a counter narrative to mainstream history. These works of fiction challenge the status quo and ask who controls history. These stories chip away at the hegemonic microaggressions that African diaspora descendants endure in the white washed and sanitized versions of history that have been told throughout America's history.

In this chapter, I will review two works by African-American writers, and I will use themes of the diaspora and diaspora theory to examine the stories woven together by these authors. These stories, written by different authors, will show commonality by depicting racial separation and self-protective coloration. *The Wind Done Gone,* by Alice Randall and *Devil in a Blue Dress,* by Walter Mosley are the texts being analyzed. I selected these texts because they represent distinct time periods and settings, the antebellum South and mid-century Los Angeles. They are written by a female and male author which portrays voice in unique and nuanced ways.

The Wind Done Gone

The Wind Done Gone is Alice Randall's first novel, and it is a literary work with historical implications. Randall leans heavily on characters from Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel, *Gone with the Wind,*[3] to create a new story that "explodes the mythology perpetuated by a southern classic" which is stated on the cover of the book. *The Wind Done Gone* references at least twelve characters or places that are directly linked to *Gone with the Wind*. I have created the chart below, which highlights some of the paralleled characters and places (see figure 2). Though Randall does not use the same names, the parallels are evident, and she and her publisher, Houghton Mifflin, never denied this connection.

[3] Gone with the Wind was written by Margaret Mitchell in 1936 and received critical acclaim. It was turned into a major motion picture in 1939. The book and film feature antebellum Atlanta, Georgia, and in many ways glorified the institution of slavery. It told the story of southern life from a white perspective.

The Wind Done Gone	***Gone with the Wind***
Other	Scarlett O'Hara
Planter	Gerald O'Hara
Tata (plantation)	Tara (plantation)
Lady	Ellen O'Hara
Miss Priss	Prissy
Mammy (Pallas)	Mammy
Garlic	Pork
R, later referred to as Debt Chauffer	Rhett Butler
Beauty	Belle Watling
The Dreamy Gentleman	Ashley Wilkes
Mealy Mouth	Melanie Wilkes
Cynara "Cinnamon" (daughter of Mammy)	Not referenced in *Gone with the Wind*
Twelve Slaves Strong as Trees (Plantation)	Twelve Oaks (Plantation)

Figure 2: Parallel Characters Chart

The controversy arose when Margaret Mitchell's trust sued Alice Randall's publishing company for copyright infringement.

> The trust believed that if Houghton Mifflin promoted and published *The Wind Done Gone,* the publisher would be illegally

> infringing on the copyright of *Gone with the Wind*. Houghton Mifflin ignored the trust's demands and proceeded with its plans for the novel. In response, SunTrust Bank (which as the plaintiff, represented the trust) filed a complaint in March 2001 against Houghton Mifflin in the District Court for northern Georgia, urging the court to enjoin the release of *The Wind Done Gone* and punish the publisher with a payment of $10 million to the trust. (Jarrett 437)

Ultimately, Randall was allowed to publish her book with the caveat that she place a sticker stating "The Unauthorized Parody" on the book's cover. Randall had to make this concession in order to have an injunction lifted and to settle her suit with SunTrust Bank, the plaintiff representing Margaret Mitchell's estate.

Alice Randall's The *Wind Done Gone* is important for diaspora studies and literary studies because this work of fiction tells the story that history cannot tell. Theoretically, history should be neutral, but this neutrality tends to become clouded by the lens of the teller. In examining America's nefarious past of slavery, history has usually neglected the thoughts and feelings of the slaves. It has overwhelmingly told the story of the masters and slave holders, the individuals who profited and benefitted in other ways from the practice of slavery. History is selective and while fiction can be selective, it has the

ability to introduce the perspectives of vast demographics in a way that entertains, educates, and informs.

A great difference between Randall's *The Wind Done Gone* and Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* is the perspective from which the stories are told. Most notable is the title itself, *The Wind Done Gone* which is in slave vernacular and says a great deal about Randall's perspective from the very beginning. Quite simply, *The Wind Done Gone* is narrated by Cynara, a former slave and daughter of Planter (parallel to Gerald O'Hara) and Mammy. Cynara is sent away from Tata (Parallel to Tara) by Planter, her father, at the age of thirteen and sold to a "good family" in Charleston for one dollar.

The Wind Done Gone directly addresses America's history with miscegenation in its many forms. The main character, Cynara, is the daughter of Planter, the plantation owner, and *Mammy,* the black slave. Her half-sister, Other (parallel to Scarlett O'Hara) is Planter's daughter with his white wife, Lady (parallel to Ellen O'Hara). The sisters are the same age and have the same father. It is open knowledge among the plantation's residents, both white and black, that Planter is Cynara's father. However, the girls are treated differently by all.

This difference in treatment causes Cynara to harbor a lifelong resentment for her mother, Mammy, who she believes shows more affection and love towards Other. Cynara longs for her mother's affection and does not

understand why she does not get it but Other does. "*Mammy always called me Chile. She never called me soft or to her softness. She called me to do things, usually for Other, who she called Lamb. It was, "Get dressed, Chile!" and "What's mah Lamb gwanna wear?"* (Randall 5). Cynara "Cinnamon" is still conflicted and guilt ridden because of her own feelings for Mammy. *"It hurts not to love her. And it hurts more when I didn't—I still don't—believe she ever loved me" (*Randall 43).

Alice Randall shows how Cynara is treated like a stepchild and is "othered" under the guise of black white relations and social mores of the time. Mammy is guilty of neglecting her own offspring for the benefit of Other, but she had no choice in the matter. Mammy was a slave and as such had to follow the rules and customs of plantation life. She could not dote on her own child so perhaps she doted on the master's other daughter the way that she would like to have doted on Cynara.

More disturbing is Planter's undisturbed demeanor regarding the treatment of Cinnamon. He does not insist that the girls be raised as sisters, nor does he make provisions for Cinnamon's education, and he does not allow Cinnamon to live in the main house. However, he knows that she is his offspring and she looks, as he says, "like his mother." He is content to have her exist as a slave. He does not feel compelled to give her his last name and the privileges that come along with it. Perhaps it is lofty and certainly unrealistic to expect this slaveholder to have paternal feelings towards a

child sired with a slave woman. In an act of supposed kindness and discretion, he sells her off to spare her from the miseries of slave life. It is implied that the Thomas plantation would be the best place to send Cinnamon to live. Her status as a mulatto might allow her gentler treatment under the ownership of this master and mistress. Planter writes the following letter to Thomas:

> Dear Thomas,
>
> I hope this letter finds you prospering. …I have a fancy girl I want to settle on you, at a price, a good price. Her name is Cindy.
>
> This is a delicate situation, a delicate situation I know you will understand. The girl is no longer a child and she's getting in the way of our Mammy's work. A matter of divided loyalties. …But I have a certain tender concern for this child.
>
> …In her day to come, Cindy will be a trusted Mammy in your great house… I will sell you the girl for a dollar. …Feed her well and use her kindly. (Randall 36-37)

In his letter, Planter references his paternity and a desire to see Cinnamon treated kindly. He also alludes to a conflict of interest between Mammy and himself (the master). Planter recognized that Other viewed Cinnamon as a nuisance, yet he did nothing to quell this sibling rivalry; hence, the need for Cinnamon's departure. Maybe Planter is to be

commended for writing this letter and wanting Cynara to be well fed and kindly used. On the other hand, this could be a gesture presented from the perspective of a black author who is attempting to show some modicum of decency in a white father towards his black daughter.

Racism and social mores of the time dictated that blacks and whites be separated in social and public settings. However, miscegenation proved that this separation was certainly not complete and transpired behind closed doors in the bedroom. White and black interactions were to be that of servant and master, owner and slave, powerful and submissive with the blacks remaining on the submissive and subservient end. It is deeply disturbing that Planter would sell his child rather than have her grow up with her family. It speaks volumes that a white thirteen-year-old girl's whims are to be valued over those of a bi-racial thirteen-year-old girl. Most disturbing is that Cinnamon is never consulted or asked how she feels about Other, Mammy, or the prospect of leaving the only home she has ever known. As such, Cynara is a double victim of the diaspora. First, she is an African diaspora descendant and secondly, she is the victim of diaspora initiated by her father, which forces her to be removed from the fabric of her white and black families. Cynara is not human to her father. She is a slave which means that she is property, and she is expendable. Planter has no loyalty or familial allegiance to Cynara and showing anything to the contrary would have been the exception to societal rules.

The Wind Done Gone gives voice to the theme of invisibility that African Diaspora descendants encountered. To be invisible is to be hidden from view or concealed from sight. One might ask, *"How are African Diaspora descendants invisible when one can clearly identify them by their features, complexion, and hair?"* The answer to the query is that being present does not mean that one is seen. And to be seen is more than acknowledging one's presence.

Mammy is an essential figure not just in *The Wind Done Gone* but also in the antebellum period. The role of "*mammy"* was that of a maid whose duties included scrubbing, cleaning, caring for children, and maintaining the domestic responsibilities of the plantation. Mammy was a noticeable figure in southern plantation life, but she was only known in the role of servant. Mammy was not *seen* as a woman with a name, or feelings, or desires. In *The Wind Done Gone,* Cinnamon states:

> They call her Mammy. Always. Some ways I like that. Some days when it is kind of like we– she and me –had a secret against them, the planting people, I like it. Different days, when it feels she wasn't big enough to have a name, I hate it. I heard tell down the years they compared her to an elephant. They shouted down to their ancestors: She was big as an elephant with tiny dark brown eyes. But she wasn't big enough to own a name. (Randall 6)

After Mammy's death Cinnamon is amazed to learn her mother's name. For even she knew her only as Mammy. Garlic (parallel to Pork) tells Cinnamon, "Together we found Pallas. That was your mother's name." Cinnamon was about twenty-eight years old when she learns this. "Pallas. My mother's name is Pallas. Not Mammy. Pallas" (Randall 60). The identity of *mammy* signified a loss of personhood and a permanent relegation to servant status. It robbed Cynara's mother of an existence as a full woman. She became *othered* as she was seen explicitly as Mammy by anyone whom she encountered. Worthy of note is the fact that Mammy is the only character that Alice Randall calls directly by the name used in *Gone With the Wind.* This can be attributed to the historical role of black women as house servants and to the labeling of these women as Mammy.

We learn that Cinnamon's given name is Cynara. However, we never know her to have a surname. She is always referred to as Cinnamon. When she decides to leave R. (later referred to as Debt Chauffeur), it is because he knows her, but he has never seen her. She has been a kept woman and sexually intimate with him since she was fifteen years old, but in the span of those years he has not shown interest in her black culture. He encourages her to live as white. "It unsettles R. that I chose to build my house in the middle of the colored—he would say "section" I will write "community" (Randall 26). R. is interested in Cynara's beauty and charms, but he is unwilling to fully embrace her culture, which causes Cynara emotional

distress. "Don't bring your past into this house. … Every day it gets harder to see why he can bring his history in my house, but I can't bring my past (Randall 27). He does marry her, which was quite unconventional and risqué, but as Cinnamon interacts with cultured, learned, black people outside of Atlanta, she begins to question her value. R. says, "I gave you my name," and she replies, "I never told you mine" (Randall 193).

African Heritage literature also brings to light the theme of lack and loss of hope experienced by enslaved African diaspora descendants. Randall, through her characters, shows the collective loss of hope that slaves felt. Slaves experienced a fear of optimism because of their trauma-filled existence, which led to a loss of expectations. Cinnamon states, "Everything now is expectation, hope, waiting for Christmas to come but we don't know when" (Randall 113). This alludes to a sense of despair and uncertainty. African diaspora descendants wanted to hope but did not know if or when they should. Lack of hope extended beyond the desire for freedom; it extended into all areas of life. When Cinnamon was asked if she ever thought she would marry, she stated, "Long ago. Long ago. How long ago? I don't even know. I stopped letting myself want anything I could not have" (Randall 69). Not only did Cinnamon give up on the desire to get married, but her statement indicates that she has given up on far more, countless dreams that somehow seemed unattainable for a black woman. This fictitious character's thoughts and feelings speak to the realities of millions of enslaved people and

freedmen during this time period. "Much lethargy there was, for many Southerners were depressed. They had no reason to hope for a better future. It seemed always to have been so" (Painter 88).

Devil in a Blue Dress

Walter Mosley[4] has written a book that developed into a series with a black male hero. *Devil in a Blue Dress,* published in 1990, was Mosley's first novel. He has indicated his commitment to writing strong black male lead characters because they are underrepresented in the literary canon. Therefore, the majority of his works feature African-American males as heroes. His fiction includes themes of racial inequity and black urban life. W. Russel Gray agrees that Mosley revives an African-American literary strategy of adapting popular cultural forms to critique racial hypocrisy (489).

Denzel Washington, the academy award winning actor portrayed the protagonist in the 1995 screenplay adaptation of the book. *Devil in a Blue Dress* is set in 1948 Los Angeles. Much of the story takes place in the black community, and the story chronicles the adventures and exploits of an inadvertent, young, black private detective. Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins is a twenty-eight-year-old mechanic and World War II veteran. He works as a

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[4] Walter Ellis Mosley (January 12, 1952) is an African-American writer of fiction, science-fiction, mystery. He is African-American and Jewish American. His most notable works are the Easy Rawlins Mysteries.

mechanic for Champion, an airplane construction company, assembling the parts of new aircrafts. Easy has recently been fired for refusing to work an extra shift after a long day's work. His friend, Joppy Shag, invites him to his bar where he introduces Easy to a white man, Mr. DeWitt Albright. Albright offers Easy a job involving finding a young white lady named Daphne Monet. The job itself seems innocuous and an opportunity for Easy to make enough money to pay his mortgage. His acceptance of Albright's offer leads to a path of surprises, violence, adventure, and death.

The black residents of Los Angeles have come to this desert paradise in hopes of a new and better life. They have come from the southern states of Texas and Louisiana after having heard of the benefits of California. What is striking is that their existence in LA is very much southern. They have brought their culture with them. From references of pig's feet and black eyed peas to references of plantation life, the black southern experience is evident.

What is also evident is the struggle with racism, discrimination, police brutality, and poverty that the black residents of Los Angeles face. There is a blatant and subtle feel of bigotry and its effect on these denizens of Los Angeles. There is the "*other"* phenomenon that is evident. Black residents, along with Mexican and Chinese residents, represent the other and they occupy a *"third space."* These are the spaces that they have created for themselves in the midst of mainstream Los Angeles society. The illegal club,

the black church, Joppy Shag's one room bar, the pool hall; all of these are spaces that the minority residents have created for themselves.

The *other* phenomenon is represented in the form of the power structures constructed between whites and blacks with whites holding a monopoly of this power. Ruíz-Velasco states that when Easy declares himself as a black man or black subject he must momentarily *assume* the position of object, or Other. Easy's actions arise out of his understanding of power relations between blacks and whites, and it results in Easy's own reaction to each of the situations in which he finds himself (146).

Mosley also conveys the feelings of distrust towards white people in general. There is a sense that white people, particularly law enforcement, bring danger and violence towards the black community. Self-protective coloration exists as a way of insulation from the violence of white interactions. Easy has traveled the world as a soldier during WWII, worked closely with white soldiers, and had romantic liaisons with white women, but he is still leery of going into completely white settings in Los Angeles. When De Witt Albright asks Easy to meet him at the merry-go-round in Santa Monica, Easy is reluctant to leave his black neighborhood in Watts to venture into the unknown and potentially unwelcoming white neighborhood. He thinks to himself: "I was unhappy about going to meet Mr. Albright because I wasn't used to going into white communities, like Santa Monica, to conduct business. …I never loitered anywhere except among my own people, in my

own neighborhood" (Mosley 97). Easy is a confident black man when he is in his own black setting, but the thought of crossing into a white environment causes him consternation, as he is afraid of the unknown and unspoken threat of danger.

After reflecting on the text, I posit that Mosley uses language as a device to further expound the *other* phenomenon. Easy's use of black vernacular shows the character's versatility in moving between social, cultural, and physical locations and adeptly adjusting to the circumstances that each demands. Easy begins to stutter when confronted by a white security guard outside of DeWitt Albright's office. "It was a habit I had developed in Texas when I was a boy. Sometimes, when a white man of authority would catch me off guard, I'd empty my head of everything so I was unable to say anything" (Mosley 58). In this instance, Easy does not explicitly employ black vernacular language, but he does use a black cultural communication technique that allows him to appear harmless and unthreatening to the white man of authority. Genie Giaimo informs that Mosley aptly summarizes the experience of the Othered detective who confronts fragmented and conflicted modes of existence as he ultimately moves toward an active role in society (238). Giaimo uses the terms Standard American English(SAE) and African American English (AAE) to establish a difference in spoken communication between characters in *Devil in a Blue Dress*. She recognizes that this literary form is a reflection of

situational realities for African-American existence in America. She remarks:

> If the typical hard-boiled detective speaks in two voices, then the ethnic detective speaks in four. In ethnic detective fiction, the split in linguistic tone and affect is not simply between dialogue and narration as it is in earlier hard-boiled fiction. Language is halved twice—split once in the dialogic voice, quite literally the voice that the protagonist uses in his dialogues with other characters, and split again in narrative voice. Language models, then, can be broken into four distinct quarters: the Other speaking to minorities, the Other speaking to Whites, the Other's internal monologue, and the Other's external narration. (Giaimo 236)

Easy is denied access to Albright's office by the white guard who then asks him if he has a "note," which would allow entrance into the building. In disgust, Easy decides to leave and replies, "You tell him that the next time he better give me a note because you cain't be lettin' no street niggas comin' in yo' place wit' no notes" (Mosley 59). Giamo further expounds, "Easy is aware of the stigmatization attached to marked varieties of English; however, despite his shame, he acknowledges that AAE is his main mode of conveying complex expressions and constructing his identity; it may be 'uneducated' but it is also his 'natural' mode of expression" (239).

Easy's character code switches with an ease almost akin to breathing. This is representative of the black experience in America and the internal double consciousness that blacks must constantly grapple with. It speaks to the self-protective coloration that W.E.B. Dubois enacted at Harvard. Unlike DuBois, Easy acts out his self-protective coloration by use of his words. Easy is "learned" by way of the streets. Yet, he has an understanding of race dynamics, and he knows when to use his *internal* voice, his *white* voice, his *black* voice, and his *narrator's* voice. Like DuBois, Easy realizes that his survival depends on correctly acting on these self-defense mechanisms.

In *Devil in a Blue Dress,* Walter Mosley depicts an authentic American version of black life and culture from a black perspective. What is unique is that Walter Mosley is a black man of biracial heritage. He is both black and Jewish. His mother was Jewish with Russian heritage, and his father was African-American with southern roots. His parents wanted to marry but were denied a marriage license, even though interracial marriage was legal in California. However, bigotry proved more powerful than the law even in California. Though Jim Crow practices were known to be southern ideology, Mosley shows its unspoken but practiced reaches in California. This fictitious work reveals America's legacy of slavery, racism, racial oppression of blacks, and its effects on black life. Although California was the new frontier, Mosley shows its effects on the West Coast through his characters. Easy compares his former factory job to a plantation. Both vocations capture

the essence of struggle in black American life. Easy correlates the two, saying, "A job in a factory is an awful lot like working on a plantation in the South. The bosses see all the workers like they're children, and everyone knows how lazy children are. So Benny thought he'd teach me a little something about responsibility because he was the boss and I was the child" (108).

Mosely intentionally created a black male hero character because it is not one that is seen frequently in literature. This unseen figure in literature reinforces the theme of invisibility that attaches itself to black African diaspora descendants. Mosley acknowledges Easy's struggle and fight against being imperceptible.

> The thought of paying my mortgage reminded me of my front yard and the shade of my fruit trees in the summer heat. I felt that I was just as good as any white man, but if I didn't even own my front door then people would look at me like just another poor beggar, with his hand outstretched. (Mosley 53)

The desire to be "seen" as an upstanding productive citizen leads Easy to take the job offered by DeWitt Albright, even though Easy has misgivings. His acute need to meet the mortgage drives his decision to take a job from a stranger. The promise of having money, which he lacks, forces him into an uncertain employment agreement. Easy's concept of money and its power motivates him. He says, "I didn't' believe that there was justice for Negroes.

I thought that there might be some justice for a black man if he had the money to grease it. Money isn't a sure bet but it's the closest to God I've ever seen in this world" (Mosley 168). Thus, he would rather take a risk with an unknown white man, than risk not meeting the mortgage and losing his home.

Additionally, African heritage literature clearly depicts the struggle to overcome the stigma of being seen as threatening and alarming in some way. When Easy is waiting for Albright on the boardwalk in Santa Monica, a chubby white teenage girl begins to chat with him. Her white male teenage friends take exception to this and respond to Easy with anger. "Hey you! Black boy! What's happening here?" It was a pimply-faced-boy. He couldn't have been more than twenty years and five and a half feet but he came up to me like a full-grown soldier. He wasn't afraid; a regular fool of a youth (Mosley 99). Hegemony is ever present in this interaction as the white young man demonstrates his authority to question and attempt to bully Easy who happens to be older and bigger than the youth. In this incident, Easy finds himself both powerful and powerless. Ruíz-Velasco tells us that Easy understands his strength, yet also recognizes, as a black man confronted by these white boys, his relative lack of power in relation to them and white hegemonic culture (139). Ruíz-Velasco further asserts, "Easy's restraint implies an understanding on his part that despite his strength and his ability to enact a violent response to the aggression of the white boy's power, true

power, remains beyond his reach" (139). This is an unstated reminder of white domination over black people regardless of the black's age or station in life. This white domination, though not explicitly stated, is a reference to slavery and white possession and ownership of black people. When Easy tells DeWitt Albright that he'll return the money paid to him if Albright is unsatisfied with the results of his work, Albright responds, "Too late for that, Mr. Rawlins. You take my money and you belong to me" (Mosley 147). Albright does not care that Easy has satisfied his contractual obligation, and he asserts his power by "moving the goal line." He changes the terms of the contract without informing Easy, and he expects easy to accept and work within the new terms. Easy has unwittingly entered into a modern form of bondage with Albright; his business relationship will never end until Albright decides that Easy is free. Albright views Easy as his property, his object (Ruíz-Velasco 144). In this position, Easy remains a pawn and subject of white hegemony.

Conclusion

The common themes of self-protective coloration, racial separation, and invisibility are present in *The Wind Done Gone* and *Devil in a Blue Dress*. Cynara and Easy experience white oppression and are "othered" by white people. In both works there is a desire to be seen as human beings rather than to be seen as inferior because of their race. Michelle Stephens indicates that racial consciousness unites a racial group historically over different

geographic territories and the collective impact of their combined struggles against oppression and freedom (27). These themes of struggle transcend the settings of antebellum Atlanta and mid-century Los Angeles and gender to show the shared experience of struggle of African-Americans in the United states.

Chapter Five: White American Literature

Black presence has long been acknowledged in American life and in its literature. The first organized group of slaves arrived on American soil in 1619, and from that point the black influence on American culture began. Blacks were different from their European conquerors in ways of culture and expression. In previous chapters, we have examined Black culture through a Caribbean, Afro-Puerto Rican, and African-American lens. Now we will study African-American life and culture through a white American lens.

White authors are inherently disadvantaged when writing about black identity because they are not black. Their experiences with black people can help in their attempts to authenticate black life and culture, but they will never be able to fully capture the essence of blackness because they are outsiders. According to Paul Zeleza, diaspora is a mode of naming, remembering, living and feeling group identity moulded out experiences, positionings, struggles and imaginings of the past and the present, and at times the unpredictable future (41). White authors are observers but they are not members of the "group." Thus, they are unable to "remember and mold experiences" from a "grounded" perspective. To some degree, their interpretation of black life is imagined. So, why include this "imagined" black reality in this study? Though these writers wrote stories that, perhaps unintentionally, denigrated black culture, their works must be included

because they controlled the mainstream audience and readership. These writers had "access" that black authors were not privy to. This access allowed white authors to advance black life and culture, positively and negatively, to a wider audience. Furthermore, it serves as a contrast to the authenticity the fiction by black authors portrays.

White authors have depicted the black experience in literature to great acclaim through various historical periods. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*[1] was critically acclaimed and depicted happy childlike slaves. Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*[2] featured the friendship of Huck and a black slave named Jim. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*[3] was an iconic replication of the antebellum period and its embodiment of slavery and race relations in the south. Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven* was a depiction of African-American life in early twentieth century Harlem, and DuBose Heyward's *Porgy* depicted southern life during the Jim Crow era in Charleston, South Carolina. These white authors wrote about life in the South, and they placed substantial emphasis on black life and culture. Their

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[1] *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe was published in 1852. It depicted a sanitized cheerful version of slavery and depicted Tom, the protagonist, as a devoted and loving slave who bore no ill will to other slaves or his white master. Tom was devoted to his master so completely that it was to his own detriment. The book was the subject of much debate over the ills of slavery.

[2] Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain was published in 1884 and was the sequel to *Tom Sawyer*. The story is set in the American South and portrays the customs of the South. Particularly noticeable is the use of racial slurs directed at blacks. The book has received criticism for its portrayal of a docile black slave.

[3] *Gone with the Wind* was written by Margaret Mitchell in 1938 and was an iconic portrayal of slavery during the antebellum period. It was set in Georgia, and it idealized the institution of slavery and its impact on Southern American culture.

depiction of black life led to financial gains, fame, and critically acclaimed works. I posit that these gains and accomplishments served to benefit the white writers and worked to the detriment of black people as these works continued to perpetuate racial injustice, stereotypes, and a view of black life that was unauthentic.

The altruism of a select group of white Americans towards its black citizens after the Emancipation Proclamation spawned institutions of higher education, voting rights, and financial opportunities that blacks had never had before. This altruism proved to be short-lived as the Reconstruction era ended and the Jim Crow era began. The Jim Crow era was another iteration of slavery and oppression that was designed to keep black citizens in a subservient and substandard way of life. In this era, black oppression, segregation, and violence were acceptable and encouraged practices.

The early twentieth century created a renewed interest in African-American life and culture. Whereas white America's previous interest in black Americans had been limited to keeping them in a place of second class citizenship, the 1920s created somewhat of a fascination with the exoticism of the darker citizens. Now the music, art, dances, foods, and *negro* way of life were in vogue. The culture of the black community was now looked upon with a genuine curiosity which manifested itself with white people venturing into black communities and engaging with its offerings. The sights, sounds, smells, and tastes of certain black communities were embraced as what the

hip-hop generation defines as the *new hotness.* In other words, the black community, its citizens, and its culture were now *en vogue*.

Blaxploitation

Arguably, this early twentieth century interest in African-American life and culture was the original *Blaxploitation era*[4]. Early twentieth century black literature centered around black characters, black issues, and was set in black communities. While *Blaxploitation* is a term usually associated with film, it can be used interchangeably in its relationship to black literature. Ed Guerrero indicates that blaxploitation films focused on black narratives, featured black casts in action-adventures in an urban setting, and were released roughly between 1969 and 1974 (69). These films were an acknowledgement of the black urban viewing audience, and their financial power at the box office. These movies were made quickly, with low budgets, and swift editing. The primary goal was to produce a work that would create a huge profit for the studio with secondary or tertiary goals to promote black culture.

White people appropriated the culture of the black community for financial gain with no intentions of investing in the black community. This initial *Blaxploitation* did further damage to the black community by inflicting another act of violence through the use of the word *nigger,* the furthering of

[4] Blaxploitation refers to the motion picture industry period of the late 1960s to the mid to late 1970s. This movement within the industry produced large quantities of low budget, quickly produced, and low quality movies about black urban life. The purpose of these movies was to draw a black audience to the box office. There was no true commitment to the quality of the product but rather to the box office numbers.

stereotypes, and the unauthentic use of black dialect. These white authors wrote fiction about black life to and for a white audience; an audience that had limited dealings with black people, and thus took the settings, plots, themes, and actions of the characters as truth. Therefore, I posit that though these works achieved accurate descriptions of geographical locations and some customs and mores, there can be no true sense of authenticity as it pertains to black life. This is because the authors are outsiders and unable to wholly grasp the space of black life. These appropriations of black life and culture simply heightened the fascination with the *other* but did little to create a legitimate literary presentation of black life and culture.

Porgy

DuBose Heyward was a white author of books that featured black life in poor southern communities. He was born in Charleston, S.C., a setting that provided the background for his novels. In his first novel, *Porgy* (1925), set on the Charleston waterfront, Heyward made effective use of the local Gullah dialect. His other novels are *Angel* (1926), *Mamba's Daughters* (1929), *Peter Ashley* (1932), *Lost Morning* (1936), and *Star Spangled Virgin* (1939). With his wife, Dorothy Heyward (1890–1961), he wrote a dramatization of his novel *Porgy*, which was produced in New York City in 1927 and made into the folk opera *Porgy and Bess* (1935), by George

Gershwin. Also in collaboration with his wife, Heyward dramatized *Mamba's Daughters*, which was produced in New York City in 1939.[5]

Porgy was his first novel, and it was well received. Heyward's protagonist is Porgy, a crippled black man who begs for a living in the business district of Charleston. He is seen as a figure of pity by the white citizens who drop coins into his can as they pass along their daily routes. Porgy resides in "Catfish Row," a Negro tenement, built in a U formation, near the waterfront. All of the tenants are black and poor, although there is stratification in the depths of their poverty. The building is sturdily constructed, but it has seen better days. Porgy occupies a one room ground floor flat and is cordial and well-liked by his neighbors. Heyward captures early twentieth century southern life, but he captures it through the lens of a privileged white man who can never truly know or understand the existence of black people. This is evidenced in his description of Porgy and his mendicant practices. Heyward adds to the stereotype that *Negroes* or blacks are somehow in possession of different supernatural abilities to adapt to certain meteorological conditions. He writes, "When the morning advanced, and the sun poured its semi-tropical heat between the twin rows of brick, to lie impounded there, like a stagnant pool of flame, he would experience a pleasant atavistic calm, and would doze lightly under the terrific heat, as only a full-blooded negro can (14).

[5] "Heyward, (Edwin) Dubose." *Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia* (2016): 1p.

Furthermore, Heyward's novel perpetuates the American practice of ignoring black people and diminishing their roles in society, or creating the *invisible phenomenon.* The *invisible phenomenon* is a term which I have coined that alludes to ignoring what is present. This can be likened to telling children that they are to be seen and not heard. Mainstream American society enacted this phenomenon in its interactions with black people. White America acknowledged that blacks were present, but they had no desire to engage. Blacks were recognized as being present, but deeper exploration into their lives was unthinkable by whites. This can be seen as Porgy is the main character of the novel, but he is not worthy enough to have an age or even a full name. He is known only as Porgy—the man who is crippled and begs.

> No one knew Porgy's age. No one remembers when he first made his appearance among the ranks of the local beggars. A woman who had married twenty years before remembered him because he had been seated on the church steps, and had given her a turn when she went in.
>
> Once a child saw Porgy, and said suddenly, "What is he waiting for?" That expressed him better than anything else. He was waiting, waiting with the concentrating intensity of a burning glass. (Heyward 13)

Porgy is the protagonist of the novel and there are many layers to his character. He is crippled, a beggar, and an expert gambler. When he rolls

the dice in the nightly craps game, he is equal to the other men in the game, as his disability is not a factor. He is no longer seen as "the cripple" but as a skilled craftsman who is the master of the game. This equality only relates to his status as a craps player. In the eyes of the white world, he is still a lowly, black indigent cripple.

Heyward is inaccurate in capturing the essence of black culture but he is able to accurately convey the theme of black distrust and suspicion towards whites. Jeffrey Strickland alludes to the separation between the races when he states that white southerners as an ethnic group, in the main, remained committed to white supremacy pre- and postemancipation, and that commitment created tension between whites and blacks (52-53). This tension is evidenced several times in the novel. The residents of *Catfish Row,* a black inhabited apartment complex, are unsure of how to best help Bess, Porgy's live-in lover, to recover from her illness. She languishes in Porgy's studio apartment for a week without showing any improvement despite the ministrations of the other female residents. When Peter, an elder of the complex, suggests taking her to *de w'ite folk' hospital,* he is rebuked heavily. "*Fuh Gawd sake, Daddy Peter!"an awed voice said at last. "Ain't yuh know dey lets nigger die dey, so dey kin gib um tuh de student?" (*Heyward 98). There is a glaring mistrust of white authority, which makes the black residents feel that they are better off utilizing their own primitive methods of

medical aid rather than seeking treatment at the white hospital, which is viewed as a death trap for blacks.

This mistrust of white people ties directly to the theory of self-protective coloration referenced in chapter two. Self-protective coloration is an action both subconsciously and consciously engaged in. It is the act of blending into the mainstream society and conversely vanishing from it. Bess's character is nuanced and complex. She is a woman who was known to drink to excess, indulge in drug use, and carouse with men of low caliber like Crown. Bess is immersed in a black world, and there is no textual evidence of her attempting to blend into the mainstream white society. Yet, she meets Porgy and begins to walk the straight and narrow, surprising the residents of *Catfish Row* with her decent qualities. It is in this environment that she blends into the fabric of everyday black life and culture. She keeps a clean house, drives a hard bargain in the fish market, and genuinely makes Porgy happy. It appears that Bess has left her old ways behind until she takes the *Happy dus* from Sportin' Life (Heyward 83). She is reintroduced to drugs and sinks into her addiction which results in her arrest for *"Bein' under the influence of dope, an' creatin' a disturbance in Catfish Row"* (Heyward 88). Bess refuses to tell the judge who sold her the dope even though it would mean being released. She wants the respect of the black community, and that means more to her than the "deal" given to her by a white judge if she turns in Sportin' Life.

> "After all, it's the man who sold her the poison we want. I was kept here three hours yesterday by dope cases. I want it put a stop to."
>
> "Who sold you that dope?"
>
> She met his eyes squarely.
>
> "I don't t'ink I know um again," she said in a low, even tone. "I but from um in de dark, las' night, an' he gone off right away."
>
> "It's no use, Your Honor," put in the policeman. "They won't give each other away." (Heyward 89)

Bess is sentenced to a fine of ten dollars, which Porgy pays, and ten days in jail with the caveat that she can leave at any time if she only gives the name of the drug peddler. She refuses and serves her sentence in its entirety. When visited by Maria, a respected resident of *Catfish Row,* Bess says:

> "I's a 'oman grown. Ef I tek dope, dat muh own business. Ef I ebber gits muh han' on dat nigger, I goin' fix um so he own mammy ain't know um! But I ain't goin' gib um 'way tuh de w'ite folks" …
>
> "I gots tuh be decent 'bout somet'ing… . (Heyward 95)

Self-protective coloration dictates that Bess will deal with Sportin' Life her way, not with the white man's laws and courts. She holds true to this conviction though it causes her additional hardship.

Nigger Heaven

DuBose Heyward wrote about impoverished black southern life. Robert Worth reveals, "*Porgy,* published in 1925, had received almost universal praise. But all these novels were set in the South, the Negro's traditional literary backdrop. No one had yet written about black urban life" (462). Carl Van Vechten wrote the opposite. He focused his *Nigger Heaven* on the burgeoning professional, educated, upper class set of citizens in Harlem, New York. This text focused on black northern customs and mores. David Holmes describes Carl Van Vechten as a white critic and patron of Harlem Renaissance writers (140). Van Vechten was truly drawn to the culture, sights, sounds, customs, and people of Harlem, and he wanted to engage and interact with them. He goes on to state, "Van Vechten deemed himself more than a patron to many of these artists; rather, he considered himself a confidant, attempting—almost obsessively at times – to participate in the professional and personal aspects of their lives (Holmes 140). Van Vechten achieved great success with his novel, but hegemony was in play as white publishers selected what would make it into print. Holmes observes that Van Vechten's great accomplishment was to serve as a historical case study between visible black authorship and invisible white control over that authorship (140).

Van Vechten's fascination with the black race is both genuine and patronizing. His attempt to capture black Harlem life is a case study of

Blaxploitation, anthropology, history, and ethnography. It both succeeds and fails to accurately portray black culture and thought. He has a great interest in the ways of negro life and he seems to be quite taken, if not amazed, by the *new negro.*[6] It appears that white America in general seemed to be surprised by the existence of a group of blacks who were educated, polished, and cosmopolitan. In defining DuBois' definition of the New Negro, Shadi Neimah describes this individual as proud, progressive, and above all militant in self-defense (153). This sense of militancy was probably developed by soldiers in WWI. This experience prompted these Negroes to leave the racially hostile South to succeed in Northern cities where they became more self-assertive with a renewed sense of their manliness— thus embodying the ideals already posited by DuBois regarding the new negro mentality (Neimah 153).

Van Vechten's headlong determination to capture early twentieth century black life is to be commended in that it added to the American canon of literature and gave voice to a culture oft ignored by the white mainstream. To a certain degree, *Nigger Heaven* is a sociological case study of the black professional and educated class that manifested itself in the early 1900s. E. Franklin Frasier gives further insight:

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[6] New Negro refers to the educated professional class of African-Americans that began to emerge as a recognizable number in the early 20th century. These individuals thrived academically and in professions such as medicine, law, business, and accounting to name a few. They represented a departure from the roles and positions usually held by black people.

> While the mass migrations to northern cities were regarded as a second emancipation and gave birth to a "new Negro" literary renaissance in the 1920s, the less dramatic but steady migration of Negroes to southern cities was effecting fundamental changes in the Negro. But on the whole the urbanized Negro, like the European immigrants, slowly acquired American manners and customs and as these have become a part of his family heritage he has been transformed into a new person. (Frazier 689)

Though Van Vechten was bold in his choice of title for this text, one must not ignore the hegemonic forces at play. Admittedly, hegemony may have been unintentional; nevertheless, it is present. This is evidenced in the notion that the term *nigger* is offensive in the black community particularly when used by a white person. Van Vechten references this truth in a footnote in the novel. He writes, "While this informal epithet is freely used by Negroes among themselves, not only as a term of opprobrium, but also actually as a term of endearment, its employment by a white person is always fiercely resented. The word Negress is forbidden under all circumstances" (26). Also, it must be noted that few if any black authors of the Harlem Renaissance placed the word *nigger* in the title of their published works. Holmes indicates:

> The phrase "Nigger Heaven" speaks to a geographical space in the construction of black voice. For racist America, "Nigger

> Heaven" signified derogatorily the balconies where blacks were segregated in the predominantly white churches and theatres. Later, whites used this descriptor to objectify Harlem, a place into which Southern black migrants were redlined in droves. (Holmes 297)

Furthermore, during this time, Van Vechten had been a writer for the *New Yorker* magazine writing his Harlem tales primarily for a white audience. Robert Worth states that after publicizing his insider's knowledge of Harlem for nearly two years, Van Vechten was pretty well assured of a white readership for his "Harlem novel" (463). The implicit understanding is that by using *nigger* in the title, he sought to create controversy and to pique the interest of his white literary following. The black community held mixed views regarding this title, but most black citizens objected to the use of the word *nigger*. Worth explains that *Nigger Heaven's* title alone was widely considered to be a terrible insult (Worth 463).

Emily Bernard elaborates on the mixed feelings of black intellectuals toward *Nigger Heaven:*

> Among Harlem Renaissance intellectuals, Van Vechten had as many detractors as supporters, however. Perhaps his most vocal critics were intellectuals and journalists like Benjamin Brawley, Floyd Calvin, Allison Davis, Hubert Harrison, and W.E.B. DuBois. These critics held very different social and political

> views–ranging from Brawley's assimilationist emphasis on black uplift to Harrison's socialism and Du Bois incipient Marxism. But most were older and more established than Van Vechten and his supporters, and most had more genteel taste that had been shaped by the late-Victorian culture of their childhoods. Even during the early stages of Van Vechten's career in Harlem, these critics registered their suspicions of this white man; and after the appearance of his infamous 1926 novel, *Nigger Heaven*, their suspicions evolved into outright antagonism and disdain. (Bernard 531-532)

Van Vechten is to be commended for writing about a part of American life and culture that had not been explored deeply. He added a layer of multiculturalism, which had been limited, in the canon of American literature. However, like Heyward, he fell prey to exoticising black Harlem life. It is evident that his interest in Harlem and its denizens is real, but he is also misguided in his depictions of African-Americans. Gareth Johns, a successful white author in the novel, endeavors to give Byron Kasson, an aspiring black author, advice on what to write about.

> *Well to be frank, I've always thought that the best way to go about writing was to write. You have plenty to write about. Gareth swept his eyes around the room.*

> *I don't see any sense in writing about this, Byron protested, rather hotly, Mary thought. It's too much like Edith Wharton's set.*
>
> *Well, the low life of your people is exotic. It has a splendid fantastic quality. And the humor.* (Van Vechten 107)

Later in the novel, another successful white writer questions Byron as they are having drinks in a cabaret.

> *Well, it's wonderful up here, Baldwin exclaimed. I had no idea it would be like this. It's as wild as a jungle. Look at that waiter dancing the Charleston up the floor.*
>
> *I don't see how he holds that tray of glasses, the novelist said. He doesn't spill a drop.*
>
> *…Can you Charleston, Mr. Kasson? Baldwin inquired.*
>
> *Not very well, Byron responded.*
>
> *McKain regarded him with unfeigned amazement. Why, he asserts, I thought all colored people could dance the Charleston, didn't you Dick?* (Van Vechten 209)

Baldwin, the novelist, is amazed by the energy in the cabaret. The music, atmosphere, dances, and clientele are contrary to anything that he has experienced and to anything that he has heard about black life. Van Vechten, through his character, makes the assumption that black people are one. Perhaps unintentionally, the *monolith* philosophy is applied to black

people. Since one waiter sensationally dances while carrying a tray filled with drinks, all black people should be able to Charleston.

The monolithic practice of grouping all blacks into one category is both unfair and limits the scope of black individuality. In this regard, it furthers the perception of black exoticism and "jungle" wildness that is attributed to people of African descent. In *The Ebony Flute*, a monthly column in *Opportunity*[7], Gwendolyn Bennett coins the term "Van Vechtening around" as it relates to white visitors now making their way into Harlem's cabarets and night spots (1926). Intrigued by the portrayal of the Negro in the book, whites from downtown and elsewhere temporarily neglected Greenwich Village in order to explore Harlem and enjoy the Negro. During this time the Cotton Club became one of the most celebrated clubs in the country (Gloster 312). This white exploration of Harlem is an example of culture transmittance referenced in chapter two. The black influence on white culture is seen to the point of drawing white revelers out of their neighborhoods into the chocolate mecca of Harlem. While they are well received in Harlem, blacks are not well received or permitted in some parts of lower Manhattan.

Van Vechten, with his *Vanity Fair* articles and *Nigger Heaven,* introduced Harlem to a new demographic. His publications made Harlem more than just a black ghetto. They made it alluring and exciting to white people who now found it necessary to explore this *subculture* that was so

[7] Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life was published monthly by the Urban League from 1924-1942. After 1942, it was published quarterly.

close yet so far from their existences. Worth explains that white reconnaissance missions into the black world, no matter how careful or conscientious, would always smell of sensationalism (Worth 463). The dancing was wild, the living was savage, and the rhythms were jungle-like to the white observer. But to the black participant, it was normal, everyday life. These actions were "natural." The white spectators and new patrons of Harlem life equated the culture and everyday life of black Harlem to a fantastic, exotic menagerie.

Through this white menagerie lens, Black life is more unauthentic than authentically real. Though well-intentioned at its core, the depiction of black life is sensationalized in such a way that white authorship is promulgated and monetized in a way that black authorship was not. With his *Vanity Fair* column and *Nigger Heaven,* Van Vechten created a doorway for white people to cross into Harlem and connect with its residents without losing their respectability for *race mixing*. The literary Harlem Renaissance was burgeoning, and Van Vechten's floodlight illuminated this black mecca to an audience that otherwise had no desire to see black people in spaces outside of societal norms of the time. His writings were instrumental in breaking invisible but tangible customs that barred whites and blacks from socializing as equals.

White fascination with black literati is on display in this novel. Van Vechten's white characters are quite taken with black intelligence and the

existence of a black middle and upper class. "...the white people they meet will regard them as geniuses, in other words, exceptions" (Van Vechten 50.) There is an unstated comfort with all blacks occupying a space of poverty, ignorance, and menial labor. The idea of blacks attaining some degree of prominence and intellectual advancement causes white discomfort. Thus, it is easier and more comfortable for the white characters and author to relegate black life and culture to Neanderthal status. In this state, blacks remain nonthreatening and the social structure of racial discrimination and separatism can remain in place. Poor and uneducated blacks are not portentous, but educated blacks challenge white *spaces* and *whiteness.* Richard Fort Sill, an educated white looking black man, who is Mary's friend, states, "*Any time one of us saves a little money, the white world becomes green- eyed with jealousy… And it's true that in the South the poor whites are envious if we get on"* (Van Vechten 51).

The main characters in *Nigger Heaven* were African-Americans of means. The majority of these characters were formally educated and held college degrees. Even with these degrees, they could not advance beyond limitations placed upon them by societal discrimination that their white counterparts did not encounter. The chart that follows, which I devised, illustrates the challenges that these characters faced (see figure 3). Mary's roommate questions this as it relates to Mary's position as a librarian. "Why, Mary, she protested. Do you get along? Don't you get less salary than white

girls and aren't white girls without half your experience or ability promoted over you" (Van Vechten 119). This sentiment is raised by Byron as he laments his inability to find employment suitable to his skill-set. "Pretty slow, Byron groaned. …To go from college directly to an elevator! I guess that'll lift me alright" (Van Vecten 196).

Mary Love	College not stated, but education is implied; "The walls were brightened by framed reproductions of paintings by Bellini and Carpaccio which Mary had collected during a journey through Italy" (Van Vechten 40).	Librarian
Byron Kasson	University of Pennsylvania	Writer, Elevator Operator (Elevator Boy)
Olive Hamilton	College not stated, but training is implied as the profession requires a specific skill set.	Secretary-Stenographer
Howard Allison	Harvard, Columbia Law School	Lawyer (Destitute of clients)

Figure 3: Nigger Heaven Character Profession and Education Chart

Harlem, the setting of *Nigger Heaven,* was an ethnoscape for black people. It was a physical space that created a *home* for a race of people who were displaced from their roots by the diaspora initiated by the slave trade. This ethnoscape created a space where black people felt physically safe, culturally proud, and it created a phenotypical unity not found elsewhere. Denizens valued its capacity to bring into existence a locale where blackness was celebrated and whiteness was not glorified. As white interest burgeoned, it brought more interactions with white people into this black ethnoscape, which caused consternation and disrupted the haven. *"I don't know that we even have Harlem, Olive argued, so many white people come up here now to*

cabarets. Why, in one or two places they've actually tried to do a little jim crowing" (Van Vechten 45). This white intrusion was viewed as another form of oppression designed to keep the black race in a position of powerlessness.

> *"Think of it! Howard replied. It isn't, he went on, that we want to mingle with the whites—I mean that we don't want to much more than we are already compelled to—but it is a bore to have them all over our places while we are excluded from their theatres and restaurants merely on account of our colour. … Why, a white prostitute can go places where a coloured preacher would be refused admittance."* (Van Vechten 45-46).

White interest in Harlem and the New Negro was steeped in curiosity and those seeking adventure. White presence in Harlem was Blaxploitation on many levels. Carl Van Vechten, though a patron of the Harlem Renaissance, was a white adventurer in a black world. He exploited the everyday routines of a people for financial gain. He alludes to this in *Nigger Heaven:*

> I find that Negroes don't write about these matters; they continue to employ all the old clichés and formulas that have been worried to death by Nordic blonds who, after all, never did know anything about the subject from the inside. Well, if you young Negro intellectuals don't get busy, a new crop of Nordics is going to spring up who will take the trouble to become better

> informed and will exploit this material before the Negro gets around to it. (Van Vechten 223).

While his interest in black life and culture was most probably genuine, his attitude about performing a literary service for black authors falls somewhere on the spectrum between courage and arrogance.

Conclusion

Carl Van Vechten and DuBose Heyward illuminated and exposed black life to a broader audience than black authors were capable of. These white authors had access to resources that black authors did not have. Therefore, their gains were greater than those of black authors. According to David Samuels, "*Nigger Heaven* probably sold more than all the books by black authors of the Harlem Renaissance combined" (Samuels 29). While DuBose Heyward's *Porgy* was not as successful as *Nigger Heaven,* he achieved greater sustained fame and acclaim as his book became an opera and a Broadway play, *Porgy and Bess.* Although Harlem and Charleston experienced a boon in interest, it benefitted white citizens more than the black residents. The writing about black life in these communities was a plundering of culture that is immeasurable in misrepresentation.

Chapter Six: Unity and Cohesion

Basket of Unity

The plundering of Africa's human resources began in the 1400s and caused a multiple century diaspora that ruptured the course of black life and culture. As a result, Africans and their descendants were dispersed throughout the world but were centralized in the Caribbean and North and South America. This scattering of people has resulted in a long lasting and far reaching schism among African diaspora descendants. Each generation born outside of Africa has become more detached from the motherland, and the connection to cultural origins has weakened. Tiffany Patterson and Robin Kelley argue that the concept of diaspora has been extracted from peoples' lived experiences and molded into metaphors for alienation, outsiderness, home, and various binary relationships such as alien/native (20). This group, though lacking a *patrie* and having no nation state to call home, is bound by the common themes of shared experiences. Though the connection to Africa was diminished, I posit that it was not completely lost and that the fictional literature of and about African diaspora descendants depicts the diaspora experience and brings cohesion to a group that has been divided by physical borders and invisible boundaries.

The daughters and sons of Africa began an odyssey, initiated by Europeans, away from Mother Africa's shores in the 1400s that continued until the late 1800s. This journey has been filled with tears, bloodshed, hurt,

pain, sorrow, and has created, what Henry Louis Gates calls, "many rivers to cross." These rivers were real as in slave boats on the Mississippi River in America, the Rio Grande de Añasco in Puerto Rico, and the River Cauto in Cuba, or the imagined longing for the Congo River in Africa. These rivers were the elusive tear-formed rivers filled with the emotions of people whose hope of freedom was too painful to imagine. But these "rivers" both actual or intangible have created bonds deeper than genetic DNA or phenotypical correlations.

This chapter will bring to completion the goals of this study by proving that themes of the African diaspora create commonality and unity in a culture fragmented by the diaspora. Specifically, I will examine the themes of alterity, use of vernacular language, the practice of "passing," and distrust of whites to show that there is unity in a deeply fragmented culture. Moreover, I will show that the selected works of fiction in this study, depicting different time periods, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds, and written by black, Caribbean, and white authors, bear similar themes, experiences, and struggles germane to the African diaspora experience. Thus, as this project comes to a close, I posit that rather than possessing a river of tears, African heritage descendants have been weaving a "basket of unity" which contains stories, lived experiences, written words, and social customs.

African diaspora descendants took on the languages of their European captors and gradually lost their native tongues. This further separated members of the African diaspora community from each other. Though this afforded black people the ability to communicate in their new countries, it created another level of fragmentation. Painter expresses this further:

> Writing in European languages allowed black authors to reach readers who did not know African languages. But the different European languages also segmented the African Diaspora. People whose ancestors might have come from the same region—say Angola—would not be able to speak to each other if they grew up in colonies belonging to different European powers. (Painter 53)

The splintering of language communication among original African diaspora members created fissures in the black community that have lasted generations. In addition to the physical loss of "home" this demographic experienced further acts of violence at the hands of their captors. The chains and shackles of African diaspora members were tangible and invisible. The silencing of their voices through the removal of their native languages was an imperceptible shackle and an added layer of bondage. The African diaspora breached the culture of its members and left many wounds that are also visible and unseen. Despite the disjunction that exists, the African heritage fiction of this study serves to weave a "basket of unity" that encapsulates the

shared black experience. This basket is filled with elements that are common to the conditions of black life outside of Africa.

Alterity

The divisions among African Diaspora descendants are vast, but there are similarities as well. Present in all three categories of African heritage literature (Afro-Caribbean, African-American, and white American) is the theme, both stated and implied, of alterity. The black characters in all of the books in some way represented "other." Cynara in *The Wind Done Gone* and Mati in *Daughters of the Stone* are "othered" in the treatment they receive from their father's respectively. Both women are the mixed-race daughters of the master and a black slave woman, and the residents of the plantation and hacienda know this. However, neither receives better treatment or is allowed a rightful place in the white family of the master. These women lead slave existences while they watch their white siblings receive luxury, education, and wealth. Cynara and Mati are denied these benefits simply because they are the dark ones and are perceived as lesser because of their African lineage.

The white American authors allude to this sense of difference regarding black characters in both straightforward and patronizing ways. Van Vechten's white characters, in *Nigger Heaven,* are enthralled with the thrill of Harlem life. "It's as wild as a jungle in here" one white character states as he observes life in a Harlem cabaret (209). Gareth Johns, a famous

white author, states, "the low life of your people is so exotic" (107). With these interactions, Van Vechten shows the perceptions white people hold towards blacks. Somehow black life and culture is viewed as jungle-like and fascinating in a peculiar way. More telling in the practice of "othering" is the depiction of black life as low or lower than white life, which symbolizes an unstated feeling of white superiority over black life and culture. Heyward takes a similar approach in *Porgy* when he references Porgy's ability to sleep in midafternoon "under the terrific heat, as only a full-blooded negro can" (14). At play here is the belief that Negroes are impervious to the force of the blazing Charleston summer heat. Alterity mitigates the potential that perhaps it is so hot that one cannot help falling asleep, that perhaps sleeping is the only respite from the intense southern heat, or that race is no such indicator of who falls prey to the intensity of the heat. In focusing on the differences of the black characters, all of these texts prove that black life is perceived in a different light than white life. Hence, alterity is the first element in the "basket of unity."

Vernacular Language

Also present in the works used in this project is the hybridization of culture. The culture of the white colonizers is taken on by black characters who meld their blackness into the white culture which creates a new culture. This is most noticeably seen in the use of language. Adding another layer of cohesion and another element to the "basket of unity" in the literature of

fragmented African Diaspora culture is the use of vernacular language. It must be noted that the Caribbean authors did not use dialect in their works. The use of vernacular speech is present in four of the books used in this study, *Devil in a Blue Dress, The Wind Done Gone, Porgy, and Nigger Heaven*. However, its authenticity is only achieved by the black authors, Mosley and Randall. The white authors were enthusiastic in their attempts to include black speech in their narratives, but their effort comes across overdone, caricatured, unauthentic, and very hard to understand, especially in *Porgy*. Vernacular language removes the invisible shackles placed on African diaspora members and their ancestors by restoring the ability to speak in a manner of their choice. David Cowart says that in the hands of a sufficiently resourceful literary practitioner language can always be made to subvert hegemonic structures (178). The use of vernacular language boldly diminishes the influence of hegemony on African diaspora descendants by creating a form of communication that is close enough to "whiteness" as to be viewed as non-threatening and innocuous, but black enough to be beyond the full comprehension of white people, which allows freedom in black expression.

African heritage literature unifies part of the brokenness in the African Diasporic culture. The languages of Africa were gradually lost as each new generation took on the European languages of slave masters. Glottophagia was a side effect in countries outside of Africa. Africans and African descendants in these places have no knowledge of the languages of

their ancestors; hence, the fading of African speech and expression. This fading of discourse forced Africans and their descendants to become Europeanized in verbalization. Karin Barber indicates that "the model proposed by postcolonial criticism—the model in which colonial Glottophagia silences the native until he or she masters and subverts the colonizer's language—is based on a fundamental misconception, almost a will to ignorance" (Barber 11). Yet, these diaspora victims did not willfully give up their languages, but they relinquished their native tongues at the threat of violence, as the usage of African language was literally beaten out of them. Nell Painter further explains the reaches of Glottophagia and the history behind it indicating that every African transported to the New World had to learn to use a new, colonial language, often more than one (52). She further explains, "In Latin America, people of African descent came to speak Spanish and Portuguese; in the Caribbean, they spoke English, French, and Spanish, (and, to a much lesser degree, Dutch and Danish). In the North American colonies, most black people spoke English, although some, like the New Yorker Sojourner Truth, spoke Dutch as a first language" (52). Glottophagia was a tool used to inflict further violence upon these diaspora victims because it created additional stratification amongst Africans. They were mandated to learn the European languages of their new colonial home lands, and they were, in many cases, forbidden to speak the languages of Africa. This fracturing of spoken language created divisions amongst slaves, and the

learning of Spanish, English, Dutch, French, and Danish splintered the black experience even more. A mother and child taken from, say Nigeria, and sent to America and Cuba, respectively, would have difficulty communicating if ever reunited because of the stripping of their native language. Their newly acquired languages would be completely different with one speaking English and the other Spanish.

These European languages stripped African descendants of a cultural awareness rooted in language that connects individuals to their homelands. The African diaspora left its descendants divorced from Africa. However, the use of vernacular language creates a new hybridization, and identity, if you will, that connects this new African diasporic culture. Vernacular language gives black people the ability to speak to each other in a way that is not controlled or even understood by white people, which is referenced in *Nigger Heaven.*[1] It is a break from European hegemony in language. When Ezekiel "Easy" Rawlins and Raymond "Mouse" Alexander, in Walter Mosley's *Devil in a Blue Dress,* speak to each other they are not worried about white linguistic rules. They are speaking their own language in a natural way. Mouse says, "You gotta man comin' here wanna kill you, Easy. Yo' eye look like hambuger. Man, I could see why you called me, you could use some help" (199). Easy responds, "No, Raymond, I did call ya, but that was when I was low. I mean I'm glad you saved me, man, but your kinda help ain't nuthin' I could use"

[1] Carl Van Vechten includes a glossary of "unique Negro terms" at the back of *Nigger Heaven* in an attempt to inform his white readers of the speech patterns related to black people.

(199). Mosley's use of dialect is not overdone or unrealistic. It captures everyday talk and speech patterns of some African-American men. Similarly, Alice Randall captures the essence of black language and speech in *The Wind Done Gone*. Jeems, a black chauffer, visits Cynara in her home. "This here's yo' front do', ain't it? This ain't Cap'n B's house, is it" (81). These dialogues are not overdone. They clearly represent a part of black communication, but they do not represent all black dialogues because black people are not monoliths. The black characters are very comfortable and at ease in these dialogues. They are not worried about speaking properly to satisfy the mainstream. Their concern is to communicate with each other in a way that is natural and that expresses their meanings, thoughts, and feelings adequately.

As realistic and straightforward as black authors' use of dialect, the black dialect created by white authors is akin to a foreign language. Carl Van Vechten's version of black dialect is an acknowledgment of black vernacular. However, it is a style of English that seems unauthentic, forced, and contrived, particularly to the ear of an African-American. In a dialogue between Ed and Creeper, two black men in Harlem, the conversation is rife with a dialect that appears more "dumbed down" than vernacularized. Ed says, "Hello, "Toly!" and Creeper replies, "Hello, Ed. How *you* been?" From this point forward the conversation becomes one of derision by the author, as

Van Vechten, perhaps unintentionally, portrays a highly-caricatured imitation of a black dialogue. The conversation, in its entirety, follows:

> No Complaints. Nummer come out. Drew sixty-seven bucks.
>
> Holy Kerist!
>
> Yeh. Anatole displayed his teeth.
>
> What Nummer?
>
> Seven—Nine—Eight.
>
> Whah you found et?
>
> Off'n a gal's fron' do'.
>
> Comin' out?
>
> Goin' in. Ah went. Out duh back winder. Her daddy done come home widout writin'.
>
> Hush mah mouf!
>
> Ah doan mean mebbe. (Van Vechten 4)

This dialogic exchange further perpetuated the Stepin Fetchit[2] image of black males. It reinforced the belief that black people were uneducated simpletons incapable of speaking properly or acting respectably. Heyward creates a version of black dialect that is similar to Van Vechten's except Heyward's is even more heavily pronounced and caricatured. Serena Robbins, a resident of

[2] Stepin Fetchit was a character created and played by Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry (May 30, 1902 – November 19, 1985) during the 1930's. Perry portrayed a lazy simpleton who avoided work at all costs. He was a trickster who represented the laziness attributed to black workers. Perry, though typecast and pigeonholed into stereotypical roles, was the first black person to earn an on screen credit, and he was the first black actor to become a millionaire.

Catfish Row, talks with Porgy, the protagonist of *Porgy*. Serena says, "How come yuh ain't ax me fu pray ober um?" she enquired in a slightly offended voice. "Mus' be yuh is done fergit how Gawd done answer we las' prayeh, and sen' dat goat tuh sabe yu' life, when starbation done stan' dey an' look yuh in de eye (99)." Her speech is heavily satired in a derisive sense and further serves to present a cartoonish image of black women. She continues in this pasquinade exclaiming, "…Oh, Jedus, who done trouble de wateh in de sea ob Gallerie" … "An' likewise who done cas' de Debbil out ob de afflicted, time an' time agin—… "An' sen' de Debbil out ob she, down er steep place intuh de sea, laky uh use' tuh do, time an' time agin." (Heyward 99)

The use of black vernacular language by white and black authors acknowledges the verbal heritage of this demographic. It weaves another layer into the basket of unity as it shows the formation of a unique language that was created specifically for black communication. Haj Yazdiha indicates that "language has long been bound in definitions as a symbol of nation and a mode of exclusion. As a means to connect with other social beings, communicating with language is a meaningful performance in that speaking requires two parties, one to perform language and an audience to absorb language" (33).

Black vernacular dialogue creates a spoken form of language and it forces audience interaction. Though white usage of the form fell flat, it succeeded in bringing to light that there exists a special form of

communication and language in black culture. Unfortunately, Heyward and Van Vechten chose to characterize this communication as comedy rather than as an authentic form of communication which harmed African diaspora descendents by promoting a stereotypical image of uneducated black speech.

Passing

Racial mixing frames a considerable space in the story of African Diaspora descendants. White slavers often took captured slave women as "bed warmers" on their voyage from Africa to the Americas. These encounters were not usually consensual, and they spawned the creation of biracial beings. As a result, black people outside of Africa realized that their race consisted of a kaleidoscope of browns, reds, yellows, whites, and combinations unable to affix with a color distinction. In *Creating Black Americans,* Painter further expounds upon this understanding and references this practice:

> African Americans realized early on that their group included people who were as much European as African. They seldom made an issue of racial purity, quite to the contrary. The African-American class structure reflected close relations between people whom others classified as belonging to different "races," just as some white fathers sought to protect their

> offspring from the poverty and humiliation associated with "Negro" identity. (Painter 58)

Racial mixing is directly mentioned in *The Wind Done Gone, Daughters of the Stone, The Agüero Sisters, and Devil in a Blue Dress.* It is alluded to in *Boundaries* and *Nigger Heaven.* The chart that I have created gives greater detail. One can surmise that this is included in the fiction because it represents the undeniable truth regarding the history of African diaspora descendants and the slave experience.

Text	Character/Historical	Reference
The Wind Done Gone	Cynara "Cinnamon"	daughter of slave master (Planter) and Mammy (black slave)
Daughters of the Stone	Mati	daughter of slave master and Fela (African slave)
The Agüero Sisters	Reina	Mulatto father and white mother
Devil in a Blue Dress	Daphne Monet "Ruby Hanks"	Creole mother and white father
Boundaries	Historical account	…they have the same skin color, that tells the tale of the islands history…Arawaks, Carib Indians, Spanish conquistadors, Africans in chains (Nunez 19)
Nigger Heaven	Dick Sill	Very light skinned black man who lives as white— unstated reference to racial mixing in his genealogy

Figure 4: Racial Mixing References

Passing is the byproduct of racial mixing, and it is the term used to define the process of assuming a white identity. Assuming another identity is nothing new in black life and culture as life was often easier without the

distinction of being black. Self-protective coloration was one form of identity change while code switching was another form. But "*passing*" is the ultimate form of identity swapping as it pertains to black people. It was the taking on of a white identity by a black person whose skin-color, features, and hair textures were light enough, straight enough, and fine enough to blend into a white mainstream culture. While some individuals *passed* out of a hatred and rejection of their African heritage, most engaged in this practice as a means of survival rather than a rejection of culture.

According to E. Franklin Frazier, "the social mobility of black people was increased based upon skin color. Because of the anonymity of city life, they have been able to "pass" for white or for Southern European or South Americans" (689). He describes the reasons behind this more thoroughly:

> It is well known that many Negroes 'pass' for white in order to secure employment in occupations which are closed to negroes. Some Negroes experience considerable inner conflict in "passing" for white, while others feel completely at home in the white world. Those who feel an inner conflict despite their physical and cultural identification with whites remain as unassimilated as the dark Negroes. On the other hand, there are mixed-bloods who have identified themselves inwardly with whites and have become assimilated in the white race. The children of such

> people have no history or memories to connect them with Negroes. (Frazier 690)

Adding to our "basket of unity" is the common theme of passing present in several of the pieces of literature in this study. The characters in these stories, like Frazier indicates, are *passing* in order to better their lives. They chose to pass for the sake of better employment and decent treatment. No one expresses a hatred or dislike of the black race but rather displeasure with the treatment doled out by the white race. In *Nigger Heaven,* Richard "Dick" Sill is a light-skinned black man with the physical characteristics of a white man. He indicates that he will "go white" someday, stating, "Well, I've thought it all out and I'm going to pass. …Sooner or later I'm going to pass, go over the line, and marry a white woman" (Van Vechten 48). Later in the story, after *passing,* he meets Byron Kasson, a black friend and he explains his reason for choosing this drastic measure.

> … It just happened accidentally. You know I recently lost my job. Well, I was searching another. Want-ad-page in hand, I hustled from office to office. Always turned down when I told them I was a Negro. Finally, I went into an office where they were very pleasant to me and the job looked fine. After the man asked me several questions, he engaged me. Then he inquired, "You're quite dark. Are you Spanish?

> "My mother was Spanish," I replied. "Do you blame me." (Van Vechten 185)

In *Devil in a Blue Dress,* Daphne Monet lives her life as an enchantingly beautiful white woman. When it is revealed that she is black, her world crumbles and she loses everything that mattered to her, specifically her lover, Mayoral Candidate Todd Carter. Daphne explains her double consciousness as a member of two societies. "I'm not Daphne. My given name is Ruby Hanks and I was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana. I'm different than you because I'm two people. I'm her *and* I'm me" (Mosley 251). Mouse further breaks down Daphne's rationale for *passing*.

> "She wanna' be white. All them years people be tellin' her how she light-skinned and beautiful but all the time she knows that she can't have what white people have. So she pretend and then she lose it all. She can love a white man but all he can love is the white girl he think she is." (Mosley 253)

I have created a chart (see figure 4, pg. 119) that shows how Daphne and Dick, as well as other characters, were in search of basic human dignity and civil rights which were not afforded to black people. They *passed* simply to improve their circumstances. This practice of crossing of the color line by fair-skinned Negroes—started in the colonial period and was institutionalized during the ante bellum period (Bennett 266). The literature humanizes a practice that forced individuals into a false sense of

reality. It also clarifies the reasons why many African Diaspora descendants chose this route.

Book	***Character***	***Situation***
Devil in a Blue Dress	Daphne Monet (white identity) Ruby Hanks (black identity)	Dates a rich white man Deserted when white lover discovers her black ancestry
Nigger Heaven	Richard "Dick" Sill (black man living white)	Obtains a job as a private secretary. Will sail to Europe with his boss. Tells the boss that his mother was Spanish when asked about his dark appearance
Nigger Heaven	Buda Green (black woman living white)	Dating a white man who she later marries, but winks acknowledgment upon encountering her black friend
The Wind Done Gone	Cynara "Cinnamon" (black and Irish)	Lover wants her to live "white"

Figure 5: Character Passing Chart

Distrust of Whites

As the literature strives to weave a basket of unity, the theme of white distrust must not be overlooked or glossed over. The characters in every book—Afro-Caribbean, African-American, or white authored American—portray the theme of distrust of whites. I posit that in African heritage literature whites are "othered." They are seen as the ones to avoid because they present danger and are not to be trusted. When Autherine Lucy attempted to integrate the University of Alabama in 1956, her parents stated, "We raised ten head of children, nine of them still living, and everyone

of them was taught to stay their distance from white folks, but to give them all their respect" (Frazier 690). In this real lived experience, these black parents impressed upon their offspring the importance of avoiding white people as they posed a clear and ever present danger to the safety and well-being of black lives. The fiction of this study supports the lived experiences of Autherine Lucy and countless other African diaspora descendants.

In this position of "other," whites occupy a space of inherent threat to black lives. Randall references white violence against black people in *The Wind Done Gone*. "Strange fruit grow in the Southern night. It's the boil on the body of Reconstruction, whites killing blacks. They didn't kill us as often, leastways not directly, when they owned us" (Randall 83). Mosley subtly indicates the unstated violence against black people by whites in *Devil in a Blue Dress* as the black protagonist drives through Los Angeles alone at night with a white woman. "We hadn't even seen a police car on the ride and that was fine with me, because the police have white slavery on the brain when it comes to colored men and white women" (Mosley 137). In another instance the violence is not subtle in an encounter with a white police officer. "You've got a right to fall down and break your face, nigger. You got a right to die" (Mosley 114).

White presence, in this literature, is synonymous to the sounding of a fire alarm. Encounters with whites could produce a byproduct of suffering for people of African heritage. In Heyward's *Porgy,* Peter is taken to jail simply

for telling the truth about the murder of Robbins, a resident of Catfish Row killed in a game of craps. The fear of white authority is palpably displayed as Heyward writes:

> Porgy stopped suddenly, and motioned with his head toward someone who had just entered the court. The new arrival was a white man of stock build, wearing a wide-brimmed hat, and a goatee. … He drew back his coat, exhibiting a police badge, and a heavy revolver in a breast holster. (34)

The white man continued to terrorize Peter, "You killed Robbins," he shot out suddenly at Peter. "And I'm going to hang you for it. Come along now!" and he reached out and laid a firm hand upon the old man's shoulders" (Heyward 34). Peter tells the officer everything that he saw, and then he is taken to jail as a material witness. As a result of his stay in jail, his buggy is repossessed along with the furnishings in his home. When he is finally released from custody, he has to pay twice as much to regain his apartment, furniture, and buggy. The inherent lesson expressed from this fictitious encounter is for black people to avoid run-ins and contact with the law under all circumstances.

White subversivness towards black people is not just limited to physical acts of violence. Nunez shows intellectual impacts of white judgments on black literati.

> No one has questioned the intellectual capabilities of white people, no one has stereotyped them over four hundred years as intellectually inferior. One reads a strictly commercial novel by a white writer and one does not say, or secretly think: *This is to be expected. This is the best these people can do; they are incapable of doing any better. This is who these people are; pimps, hustlers, thieves, gold-diggers, abusive fathers, neglectful mothers, and oversexed lovers.* (Nunez 49)

Conclusion

After more than four hundred years of residency outside of Africa, black people are often seen and treated as foreigners and are victims of xenophobia. Native-born African-Diaspora descendants are "othered," exoticized, marginalized, and terrorized. Yet, through all of these changes, they have remained resilient and their story has been told. The story has been preserved through music, songs, art, sculpture, dance, and through the fiction. This study has endeavored to weave a basket of unity that coheres a demographic fractured by the ugliness of human greed and European dominance. Though African Diaspora descendants around the world live as native immigrants in some places, they can be proud of the legacy of unity created by the stories of Africa's children.

African Diaspora members and their descendants have lived dispersed from Africa since the 1400s, and they have overcome many obstacles

presented by the rupturing of African culture. The resiliency and strength of this group is evident. Carl Van Vechten expresses it best when Mary, the protagonist, pontificates about her culture.

> What a people we are! She meditated, cast into alien lands all over the earth, conforming, whether we like it or not, to the customs and manners and laws of folk who despise us, and yet everywhere, in spite of all obstacles, we manage to keep something of our own, even to make something of it. (Van Vechten 60)

There is an African American spiritual that says "I'm building me a home… And the soul's gotta have, oh Lord, somewhere to stay." The physical home referenced in the song, the *patrie*, has not yet been found by African diaspora descendants, but commonality has been woven in the basket of unity through the selected fiction of this study. These stories represent the struggle and the strength of a people while using the art of storytelling to share common themes that are present in the African diaspora experience regardless of geographic location.

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