

“This narrative is no fiction” : Mapping Cultural Expressions of Post-Traumatic Slave Disorder

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Originally Submitted June 2009

Revised April 2010

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on African American cultural products, such as literary texts, films, and artworks, as artifacts of their condition. They do not merely attest to the historical fact of slavery; they represent forms of response, writing back to white supremacy, working through trauma, and forging grounds for a sense of identity by legitimating personal experience within the context of widespread, systemic violence filtered through the lens of the creative process. The focus of this dissertation is therefore an examination of both historical documents and contemporary creative works to identify the extent to which PTSD can be mapped in African American writing or creative arts. My particular examples will be slave narratives, chiefly that of Harriet Jacobs, but also other forms of contemporary autobiographical writing, and the work of Toni Morrison, although the reach of the project requires that many other texts and textual processes are addressed in terms of a residual trace of the impact of slavery on cultural practices. PTSD is, in essence, a “retronym” in that the issue has always existed despite not being named as such. My assertion is that, by focusing on narrative and artistic expression, the *origins* of this disorder can be assembled within the context of American culture, and some of the modes of transmission from one generation to another can be mapped in substantial detail as a result. What follows from this, I believe, is the recognition that white supremacist ideology, in all of its manifestations, and African American experience and collective identity have been shaped by a mutually contingent relation to one another, and African American history is accordingly the product in part of the moral violations inherent in white supremacist social practice. The history of that collective experience, then, must be moral as well as intellectual, culturally centered as well as factually accurate. A further issue at hand regards not only contextualizing slave narratives, and therefore contemporary African American literature, but in determining the residual effects of a history of bondage and racism in any efforts to teach American history.

Acknowledgements

Much appreciation is extended to the following people for their support and assistance during the writing process of this dissertation:

Jill G. Breitbarth, my partner; my parents, Jim and Andrea Parker; my daughter, Day; Dr. Marissa Gold of The Trauma Center (Brookline, Massachusetts); Dr. Charles Mills of the University of Chicago; Dr. John Ernest of West Virginia University; Dr. Jenny Lawn of Massey University (New Zealand); Dr. Irene Kacandes of Dartmouth College; Dr. Ruth Ann Hendrickson, formerly of The Ohio State University; Suzanne Onufry; Dr. Neta Crawford of Boston University; Dr. Alison Bartlett of The University of Western Australia; Dr. Chris Lee of USQ; and naturally, Dr. Laurence Johnson of USQ, whose fabulous ideas, assistance, editing, and sometimes insistence, has been invaluable.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Slavery and Representation: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as a Retronym

The objective of this study is to establish the presence in African American literature and art of an underlying condition described as Post-Traumatic Slave Disorder (herein referred to as PTSlaveD), a specific manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Beyond this broad objective, however, the present study seeks to show in more specific terms that even as literary and artistic forms provide clear evidence of the residual presence of PTSlaveD, literary and artistic production invariably provides modes of resistance and contestation, introducing frictions or tensions within the cultural condition of slavery and its residual effects. This study will focus for the most part on literary productions, for the sake of clarity, although some consideration will be given to the wider cultural complex, in order to point out that literature is not altogether privileged in its capacity to provide a mode of resistance in this way. In any case, the more specific argument will be made here that literary and artistic forms critically engage the cultural heritage of slavery and the broad objective of establishing the presence of PTSlaveD in African American literature and art is achieved in unison with the more specific project of identifying the ways in which such productions write back to slavery and, in so doing, work through PTSlaveD. The possible existence of this condition is currently the subject of widespread debate within the United States, and it has not yet been recognized by the American Psychiatric Association for inclusion in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM), but there is a growing body of research by psychologists and sociologists to support the belief that, as a group, African

Americans share the cultural legacy of slavery, presenting in the community as a root cause of violent or self-destructive behavior.

Sekou Mims, Larry Higginbottom, and Omar Reid, authors of *Post Traumatic Slavery Disorder: Definition, Diagnosis and Treatment*, argue that PTSD can be diagnosed and treated in the individual as a form of PTSD, and must be recognized as such within professional practice and in the wider community. Their more immediate goal is clear: include the condition in the DSM. The fact that the condition is not formally recognized in this way has already become an issue of legal importance, as Washington County Court Judge Nancy Campbell stated that the absence of the term in the DSM was grounds for disregarding the testimony of Joy DeGruy-Leary in the case of Isaac Cortez Bynum in 2004. DeGruy-Leary, a Portland State University academic had testified that Bynum experienced “post-traumatic slave syndrome” and that this produced violent behavior such as the murder of his son, but Campbell dismissed the testimony. DeGruy-Leary responded to the decision by publicly stating that “post traumatic slave syndrome can be proven scientifically once the politics of race are set aside and the white research establishment takes time to study it” (qtd. Danks).

DeGruy-Leary’s challenge provides a part of the background for this study. There is a need to recognize that slavery and its residual effects are not solely African American phenomena. My assertion is that, by focusing on narrative and artistic expression, the *origins* of this disorder can be assembled within the context of American culture, and some of the modes of transmission from one generation to another can be mapped in substantial detail as a result. As John Hope Franklin explains in *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*, the laws instituted to condone slavery and abuse of blacks directly impacted the outcome of the African American

collective identity. Similarly, John Ernest, Former Professor of African American Studies at the University of New Hampshire, states that we need to “refocus and re-centre the work of understanding what constitutes African American history, for the presentation of African American history is not simply a matter of gathering and recording information to add to the existing historical record” (*Liberation* 15). In his work, Ernest has established the complexly interwoven strands of an identifiable collective historical consciousness that provided the foundations for African American identity and social activism. Increasingly, this work is being continued, at least indirectly, by a number of scholars determined to question our understanding of that which constitutes the frame and field of African American literary and social activism. What follows from this, I believe, is the recognition that white supremacist ideology, in all of its manifestations, and African American experience and collective identity have been shaped by a mutually contingent relation to one another, and African American history is accordingly the product in part of the moral violations inherent in white supremacist social practice. The history of that collective experience, then, must be moral as well as intellectual, culturally centered as well as factually accurate. There can be no “objective” account that does not participate in what Toni Morrison has called the “pathology” (qtd. Ernest, “Underground”) of white Western modernity. Furthermore, Ernest continues, “there can be no assumption that the violations of the past are behind us and that they are not replicated and sustained by an academic practice that rides on the unsteady rails of what we recognize as fact” (Ernest, *Liberation* 15).

Accordingly, we must consider African American cultural products, such as literary texts and artworks, as artifacts of their condition. These items do not merely attest to the historical fact of slavery; they represent forms of response, writing back

to white supremacy, working through trauma, and forging grounds for a sense of identity by legitimating personal experience within the context of widespread, systemic violence filtered through the lens of the creative process. The focus of this study is therefore an examination of both historical documents and contemporary creative works to identify the extent to which PTSlaveD can be mapped in African American writing or creative arts. PTSlaveD is, in essence, a “retronym” in that the issue has always existed despite not being named as such. This study will use the term as a frame of reference through which to focus readings via a range of existing critical methodologies and established reading approaches. The goal is not simply one of recovery or rehabilitating African American literature or art into mainstream canons. As Valerie Smith argues, to focus on the literariness of these texts “is to oversimplify their lineage and to pay homage to the structures of discourse that so often contributed to the writer’s oppression” (6). Identifying a text as an expression of PTSlaveD enables us to consider the way that it works both within and against such a structure of discourse that contributes to the oppression of the writer. In this way, we bear witness to the reality of a condition that is currently being disputed, even as we gain a new and more nuanced understanding of how literary and artistic works function as a response to extreme social conditions.

For the purpose of this study, then, I employ the term PTSlaveD to gather together a variety of autobiographical and creative works commencing with the onset of the slave trade in the United States. The use of this term as a variant form of PTSD draws attention to the respective relationship between a term coined after World War One and traumatic events that occurred decades earlier. The National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a centre for multi-generational legacies of trauma in New York, has done extensive work looking at different groups and how trauma and

slavery has impacted upon them over the years. The present study seeks to intersect with this kind of work but only from the purview of understanding its textual forms. Rather than expanding upon a psychological profile of victimization of African Americans, this project will draw on the tools of both literary studies and cultural studies to investigate the possibility of *reading* PTSD as it presents throughout a number of texts and within changing views of race and identity.

African Americans have long recognized that their experience was variously both ignored in and incorporated into white historical writing of the post-slavery era, and many wrote both to record their experiences and to correct the misinformation that extended from and served the white supremacist assumption of the inferiority of persons of slave origins. For example, by scaffolding my reading of Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* within postcolonial theory, I also engage the parallel theoretical enterprise that goes alongside fiction. Beyond these necessary responses to racist historiography, though, African Americans faced the troubling problem of representing a history that – in its fragmentation and especially in the depth of its moral complexity – resisted representation. How does one discuss issues associated with the practices of naming that occur throughout slave times? In approaching this challenge, Morrison drew from various sources in a search for the relation between naming and slave history in creative tension with one another. I present an overview of the challenge of African American fictional writing embodying both the traits of slave narrative and present-day subjectivity.

In more general terms, though, postcolonial literary theory has changed the way scholars read slave narratives. Charles Mills describes the importance of historical understanding (which is naturally shaped by white supremacist ideology): “These phenomena are in no way *accidental*, but *prescribed* by the terms of the

Racial Contract, which requires a certain schedule of structured blindness and opacities in order to establish and maintain the white polity” (*The Racial Contract* 19). One of the goals of this thesis will be to marry this detailed historical understanding of the complex interrelations between the white polity and slave writing to the knowledge that psychoanalytic criticism provides about the role of trauma in shaping creative cultural processes. The duality of culture as signified by the term “African American” – which Spillers tags as metaphor, loosely based on DuBois’ protocol of “double consciousness” (397) – can be addressed within a psychoanalytic framework focused on the duality of human subjectivity. Yet Kalí Tal notes, citing Lawrence C. Kolb, that Freudian analysis is no longer at the core of contemporary medical studies of trauma, since most already “begin with the observation that trauma places extraordinary stress upon an individual’s ordinary coping mechanisms” (135). For this reason, the more relevant literature for my purposes will not be the history of psychoanalytic literary and cultural criticism; rather, as I will show in the next section, the clinical description of PTSD will suffice in providing the detail from which a new – and I hope more culturally and racially nuanced – reading method emerges. Central to this framework is my attempt to uncover a mode of criticism that not only illuminates the incidence of historical trauma but contextualizes the importance of race and culture while simultaneously fostering consideration of present day haunting as it impacts American collective identity.

There also exists the question of authenticity. The most direct and sustained examples of historical writing which grapple with questionable authenticity are to be found under the banner of autobiography. I examine the slave narrative style of Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. At the time of the initial

appearance of this narrative, Jacobs was not seeking fame for her authorship and it was widely believed that a white abolitionist woman, Lydia Maria Child, had authored the text *a la* Harriet Beecher Stowe to incite sympathy for the oppressed race. I am interested in the ways in which the historical work of texts such as Jacobs's were predetermined by white expectations, whether to serve the needs of the antislavery movement or to provide a fantasized glimpse into African American life. Thus, fundamental to the autobiographical writing we call "slave narratives," was the attempt to shift the terms of historical understanding, to tell one's story in such a way as to open a space – of discourse, of ideology – in which an autobiographical vision could be represented. Central to that vision, as well to the attempt to liberate individual stories from the white historical narrative, was an insistence on the use of refined, scholarly discourse. Jacobs transformed the nineteenth-century female literary instruments in order to revolutionize the tradition, for she initially employed a white writer to scribe her story. This naturally prompted readers of her time to question the reality of her experience but her methodology subverts the white notion of sentimental fiction while simultaneously preserving conventionality and creating a new definition for authentic autobiography which would pave the way for new genres in African American women's writing.

While much has been published regarding authorship, autobiography versus fiction, and authenticity in an emergent discourse, critics have dealt with slave narratives in the context of understanding history and black identity as a separate entity rather than in the greater scheme of a collective *American* identity. A further issue at hand regards not only contextualizing slave narratives, and therefore contemporary African American literature, but in determining the residual effects of a history of bondage and racism in any efforts to teach American history. Indeed,

how do we deal with a history of trauma from a modern perspective? Most seminal critics of African American literature seek to establish a place for the canon as a sub-genre of American works, which gives African American writing a validity it otherwise previously lacked but also parcels it away as separate from the majority of the canon.

A model for reading the effects of PTSD in any text will need to take into account the interplay or even the clash of cultures involved, rather than to inure the text against such liberal or “white” traditions of reading in criticism or historiography. To this extent, the study of PTSD in relation to literature is relevant, although studies of this kind have in the past been predominantly applied to Holocaust or war literature. PTSD theory applicable to African American literature is sparse. In *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, Kalí Tal occasionally makes reference to victims of trauma being definable by race. She purports that testimony in the face of trauma is necessary because if “members of a persecuted group define themselves as a community, bonded by their common misfortune, and see their individual sufferings as part of a common plight, then (and only then) will the urge to bear witness be present” (124). Tal’s work proves particularly effective in rendering the relationships between individual and cultural trauma as well as showing how collective myths are propagated in history and popular culture. In this sense, Tal’s work serves as a model for the reading of PTSD, yet the paucity of literature specifically concerned with post-slavery as post-trauma points to a significant gap in scholarship that the present study seeks to address in part.

This is not to say that scholarship in the area has been blind to the link between traumatic circumstance and racial or cultural identity. Early scholars in African American literature established the viability and authenticity of abolitionist journals

and slave narratives. Race theorists such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Hortense Spillers, and Charles Mills have examined the impact of “whiteness” or “blackness” in determining a person’s identity and place in society or, rather, cultural collective identity. Early slave narratives expose the arbitrary laws regarding race, particularly highlighting the abuse of those considered chattel and the resultant trauma of those victimized by a supremacist system. As Mills states, “the issue of reparations has become sufficiently mainstream... and for ‘white’ universities to debate the matter,” that the “indictment for (relative) historic silence on the question of racial justice can be extended to American social and political theory” (*Racial Exploitation* 1). Due to competing narratives of what has happened in the past, it is crucial to establish a framework by which to apply post-traumatic response theory to materials that existed before the term itself was defined and given credence.

Widely read slave narratives include Frederick Douglass’s account of an incident of witnessing an aunt being beaten nearly to death (a common method of “disciplining” slaves) and Sojourner Truth’s recollection that an anvil was dropped on her head when she was a child, an event which must have occasioned a significant brain injury. There is a direct correlation between witnessing trauma in the past and the present day cultural identity of the witness or sufferer. Early slave narratives, as Valerie Smith states, represent “the earliest genre in which large numbers of Afro-Americans wrote and the common point of origin of much black fictional and non-fictional prose” (1). The testimony of these narratives, and the subsequent literary and cultural forms to which they give rise, provide a body of evidence that issues of race possess a haunting energy confronting all Americans.

Beyond the question of literary techniques or genres, PTSlaveD presents as a powerful rupture in normal language processes. In this vein, I shall discuss the

concept of naming as a tool for the establishment of cultural norms, fixing language and fashioning shared understandings of society and humanity. The naming process is not restricted to people, however, naming of places, emotions, and ideas plays a crucial part in shaping understanding of the workings of particular cultures and groups. I specifically examine characters and places in Toni Morrison's works, for it is in these that the lyricism of language and naming becomes performative rather than utilitarian. Naming was a particular issue for slaves and their ensuing family members throughout the generations. Within the African culture, people would wait a few days to see if a newborn baby would survive; what followed was one of the most important activities for the entire group, marked with a celebration: selecting a name. American slaves probably did not hold the public celebration, but certainly they would follow the tradition of naming children after close relatives, thereby establishing generational connections. Slaves also practiced day naming, such as giving a girl born on a Friday the name Phoebe. Occasionally the slaveholders involved themselves in the naming process, but more frequently it was to silently intervene with their own surnames, which of course reflected ownership, not kinship. After emancipation, however, it was typical for former slaves to change their surname or reveal one they had previously, albeit secretly, adopted. For reasons such as this, the genealogical records of former slaves are virtually impossible to decipher, if they even exist at all. According to Kweisi Mfume in *No Free Ride*, naming is important to determining stature and is juxtaposed with the philosophies of identity, from the personal name, surnames, name-calling, and the names that identify the race. So important and critical an issue is it that the discussion, in some form, has been entertained by almost every author writing about slave culture in either fictional or non-fictional registers.

To expand the frames of reference for this study beyond the literary imagination, I will also briefly discuss work by artists such as Jean-Michel Basquiat, considered in juxtaposition with the imagery of contemporary genre painting. Often highlighting a perverse pleasure in the African American characters depicted, genre painting, like slave culture icons of the smiling “mammy” figure, sold to the public what they wanted to believe: that Africans imbued in, and even released from, slavery would eventually continue to be the smiling, unintelligent “darkies” everyone knew them to be. This translates into the abject racism existing in the modern day but such an iconography also serves as a convenient focus for lobbyists for social justice while not offering an alternative to the white version of the black person. Artist Jacob Lawrence created such an alternative in his images of African American experience, which “conveyed the humor he saw in a burst of anger, the grace he observed in an act of labor” (Leach 37), and the directness of his technique became redolent of the community’s growing awareness of the African American world in all its rich, albeit fragmented, history and despite its figurative and literal poverty.

Yet it may be the case that the opportunities for cultural texts to positively intervene in the long-term effects of PTSD may be only rare artistic benchmarks. Present popular culture venerates what Dr. Martin Kilson calls “the pretense of hip-hop black leadership,” arguing that it is now popular for black actors and entertainers to verbally dishonor African American civil rights pioneers in an almost anti-black agenda by slandering their ancestors. The point on which the study will close is a consideration of the extent to which the construction of contemporary black celebrity culture connects with the concept of racial uplift, suggesting a deeper link to the trauma of slavery. This trauma affects all Americans. The post-trauma manifests itself in an endless number of ways: poverty, lack of education, lack of self-esteem,

drug or alcohol abuse, familial mental illness, repetitive anxiety or violence—these are common symptoms of the classic PTSD in present day communities.

Compounded with racial issues and modern day chaos, it is fair to assert that PTSD likely deserves a more specific representation when applied to the African American community.

Historically, these roots are clearly traced. Runaway free black children led precarious lives: they faced the risk of abduction back into slavery, sexual assault, lack of shelter and comfort; therefore, ironically, many free black parents signed indentures for their children to keep them from slavery. There were very few whites, however, that did *not* exploit this free black labor. In this study, I examine works that I believe challenge our notion of history: the stories we tell, the ways in which we tell them, and the reasons for the telling. But in looking back to this period of history, we rarely consult these books beyond the attempt to identify a person or follow the trail of references that might finally lead us to solid evidence about what happened in the past. By examining – or perhaps re-examining – these crucial narratives and stories, be they autobiographical or fictionalized attempts to relate reality, it is necessary to acknowledge every encounter with history as a shaping of the present. There is no fairy tale, no hedging of trauma and experience as it relates to American culture.

1.2 Question of Method

As John Ernest states, “the academic mode of continuous history thematizes the story of resistance, and when narrated in this form African American history has always served the needs of a white supremacist culture, making of African American

history a bedtime story rather than a call to action” (“Underground”). Indelible marks can equal social reform, redefined latitudes, challenges to traditional belief systems, and defiance of unjust laws or regulations. It should not be surprising that African American people encountered many obstacles when attempting to publish their work, and it is peculiar that there were few supporters. Interestingly, many white abolitionists published material – some pieces thought to be complete propaganda, and thus discounted – in anti-slavery journals.

Naturally writers who found their way into the abolitionist publications added verisimilitude to the “slavery plight.” Writer Frances Ellen Watkins Harper did not necessarily live through slavery, yet William Lloyd Garrison spoke of her in the context of slavery, comparing her with people who suffered the trauma of generational slavery. Core components of PTSD include the fact that the primary function of slavery was to transform the minds and personalities of the entire African race into soulless articles of commerce for the sole purpose of exploitation. Also, notably, Jim Crow laws and the Black Codes did not allow slavery to end, necessarily, because brainwashing and abuse of black humans was widespread. After legal slavery ended, blacks were no longer protected as articles of commerce but were assaulted or lynched (as documented, for example, in James Allen and John Littlefield’s *Without Sanctuary*) as well as being restricted to certain types of employment or designated social and public areas. The mental and emotional perspective developed in individuals experiencing abject racism and acts of violence becomes a strategy of survival. This thesis aims to point out that the essence of terror and fear tactics is to debilitate or immobilize a human spirit so that a person cannot take protective or corrective measures for survival, regardless of actual or inherited experience. Incapacitation by terror and fear occurs in the victims, therefore

PTSlaveD is manifested and maintained. One of the indices of such incapacitation is to be found in the production of texts that, paradoxically, seek to bear witness to trauma in order to work through its effects. This is to say that the texts that seek to work through trauma also provide evidence of its existence, and can therefore be used as artifacts of its reality. As French archaeologist and historian Paul Veyne states, “It is we who fabricate our truths, and it is not ‘reality’ that makes us believe” (qtd. Ernest, “Underground”), therefore it is a plurality of cultures exhibited in texts that provide evidence of trauma as well as historical context. Other renditions of trauma can be diagnosed in victims of military combat, terrorism, and other actual events, but it is the concept of witnessing events – observing abuse, unnatural death, war, body parts, other victims – that fuels a culture’s concept of reality.

Yet my methodology will also require that I do not merely use this as an exercise in ticking off the identifiable indices of PTSD as they manifest themselves in African American literature, art and culture. It will be necessary to use methods capable of identifying the specific forms in which these indices will present themselves, inherent for example in the components of the phrase “African American literature, art, and culture.” These texts take particular forms – literary, artistic, and popular – and they do so within specific cultural and historical contexts with which we associate the shaping of African American identities. Accordingly, I draw on a range of reading practices that offer a capacity to unravel the complex relations between *form* and *context*. Cathy Caruth, who asserts that literature offers a window on traumatic experience, provides an interesting and useful post-trauma reading practice for the historical narratives and modern literature I am examining. Caruth’s reading practice proceeds by juxtaposing analyses of literary texts with insights drawn from psychoanalytic theory in what she calls the “complex relation between

knowing and not knowing” (*Trauma* 3). This is not psychoanalytic criticism in the form that most would identify with the term. Caruth uses Sigmund Freud, Marguerite Duras, and Jacques Lacan together to frame her understanding of the nature of repression: what “returns to haunt the victim ... is not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known” (6). Thus, the texts we read are important for what they do not allow us to know as much as they are for what they explicitly tell us. In the same manner, I shall take as my starting point the clinical descriptions of characteristics of PTSD: dissociation, detachment, fear, helplessness and horror, re-experiencing the trauma, diminished response, guilt, shame, and despair. I shall consider the texts that I read not only in terms of how well they bear witness to the historical fact of slavery or some other phase of what might be historically identified as an “African American experience”; I shall also seek in them the recognizable signs of PTSD, to read them as fully formed expressions of dissociation, detachment, fear and so on.

Caruth’s post-trauma reading practices are useful in this respect as well as strategies derived from Marxist criticism (based on writers such as Mikhail Bakhtin). From the perspective of the present study, Marxist criticism can best be identified as one that refuses to separate literature and language from culture and society, providing an appropriate means of determining the social significance of class and economic status, but also detailing specific techniques for identifying tensions and contradictions within texts. In this case, a Marxist reading involves the comparison of contemporary African American works with their literary precursors *and* statistical and sociological material relating to slavery and race issues. The tools of narrative analysis can also be used to address how identity construction involves the presentation of particular stories about oneself in order to make a certain kind of

impression in the present, but also to shape a particular version of the past. I will use these reading tools to address specific arguments concerning the relationship between African American narratives which undoubtedly lie at the root of memory formations. These arguments will inevitably link back to the psychological material on PTSD, specifically in the description of the role of memory in the etiology and healing of trauma as both an individual and collective process. The work of black feminist critics and theorists such as bell hooks provides a model for conducting such analyses alongside a critique of the marginalization of African American women as a mechanism for enabling white supremacy. It is crucial in this context to examine the state of present day African American creative works, criticism, popular culture, and reviews, and critics like hooks expand the frame of reference from the literary canon to the cultural text written at large. My goal is to engage the important advances of our understanding of African American narrative history, present literature and media portrayals, and collective cultural experience in the present day. This examination will be national in scope but include discussions of race and narrative from other countries where racial issues affect a nation's literature, art, and media.

Because trauma theory is not a new one, I wish to hone in specifically on literature of and about trauma and violence, identifying the connections (and disconnections) between theory and practice. I will consider trauma in the context of race, class, and occasionally sexuality; the ethics of representing trauma in testimonial literature, autobiography (including the question of false trauma memoirs) and fictional texts; and the capacity of language to articulate the experience of trauma. The overarching collections of trauma include: personal trauma such as rape, incest, relationship violence, and mental illness; as well as historical trauma such as the Holocaust, Native American genocide, and the Vietnam

War, but because I am focusing particularly on racism, trauma theory can be situated at the intersection of poststructuralist, feminist, and psychoanalytic theoretical approaches, as mentioned earlier. The engagement with this body of theoretical work is an essential dimension of this paper.

The most direct and sustained examples of questionable historical writing and autobiography are the subject of chapter 2, “Female Sympathies: Evangelism and Autobiography as Survival in a Raped Culture,” where I initially examine the slave narrative style of Harriet Jacobs with *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Jacobs’s methodology subverts the white notion of sentimental fiction while simultaneously preserving conventionality. Passionate and articulate women, like Jacobs, received much backlash for their “cross-fertilization” of causes (women’s rights, abolitionism, evangelism, and certainly sentimental memoir-type narratives) yet confronting the ills of society in a forceful manner overtly would cause duress. Subtly exposing the horrors of slavery and survival prompted readers to notice that not only did Jacobs cross the color barrier, but she was able to establish a bond with at least a small reading audience who would then attempt to take responsibility. By gently suggesting a call to action, writers like Jacobs employing nonviolent manners created a completely new genre that, while resembling sentimental fiction, still drew readership and sympathy, according to Garfield and Zafar, both very powerful tools. I go on to describe the works of lesser known nineteenth-century women activists such as Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Mrs. AE Johnson, and Frances E.W. Harper, who promoted not only anti-slavery causes, but couched the issues in more acceptable evangelical and societal uplift causes.

In chapter 3, “Contending Forces and Separate Worlds,” I present an overview of the challenge of African American fiction writing embodying both the traits of

slave narrative and present-day subjectivity. African Americans recognized that their experience was variously both ignored in and incorporated into white historical writing of the time, and they wrote both to record their experience and to correct the misinformation that extended from and served the white supremacist assumption of the inferiority of those of slave origins. By examining Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* within a postcolonial theory to scaffold my arguments, I also engage the parallel theoretical enterprise that goes alongside fiction. Beyond these necessary responses to racist historiography, though, African Americans faced the troubling problem of representing a history that, in its fragmentation and especially in the depth of its moral complexity, resisted representation. How does one discuss naming issues that occur throughout slave times? In approaching this challenge, Morrison drew from various sources in a search for the relation between naming and slave history in creative tension with one another. I refer to other works by Morrison, including *Song of Solomon*, as well as issues of naming and identity that have permeated into the latter twentieth century.

Chapter 4, "Afterwords – Slavery's Residue" continues in a more recent vein, addressing music, television, and art, but still noting the former rupture in society that has been the residue of slavery and racism. While it is clear that the effects permeate present day society, the motto during the Obama campaign was "Hope for the Future," and even more humorously playing on the "Got Milk?" advertisements with bumper stickers such as "Got Hope?" A tense but uplifting presidential race certainly had ramifications of previous negativity in American society, but the prevailing President's speeches and policies are reminiscent of the Martin Luther King, Jr. ideals. Perhaps now society is more equipped to move forward.

Chapter Two

Female Sympathies: Evangelism and Autobiography as Survival in a Raped Culture

2.1 Introduction: Grandmothers' Children

There are times when it is difficult to avoid the feeling that American historians have unintentionally obstructed the view of history, particularly as it relates to African American women. Controversy often sets the stage for enquiry and also acts as a powerful stimulus to new interpretations of old material. There also exists the fact that historians are continually discovering new material that impacts upon what we have previously understood as “truth.” There is no better example of this general item than the historiography of the importance of African American women’s literature in the nineteenth-century. During the last two decades there has been a phenomenal outpouring of new material and criticism on the subject. The neglected aspects of American history have opened up new dimensions on the subject of women in slavery, and definitions of racism and sexism. The purpose of this chapter is a modest one. It examines only a few of the early works by black women that help to further mould our perception of history. Though only scratching the surface, I hope to identify crucial issues and basic problems and to attempt to trace the development of early writings by African American women without succumbing to the lure of a larger historical problem: how to correct historical mistakes? And finally, how do we ensure that we are not committing the same sort of oversights in present day chronicling of daily events? By returning to the slave narrative and other forms of contemporary chronicles of slavery (such as in evangelical writing), we seek to bypass the residue of white historiography, and reach out to the past with an eye to how the written word responds in the midst of

slavery to its traumatic impact. The writing of the time should both chronicle the early onset of PTSD within a generation of those most directly affected by this trauma, and it should give us insight into a specific kind of working through in relation to this trauma.

Such a project can hardly be difficult to localize in relation to trauma. Nineteenth-century African American women scream out the torture and the pain they have endured over the centuries. During their lifetimes, their voices were so completely ignored, their development so hindered, that to ignore them would be an unthinkable crime: it is to be complicit in the tyranny of history. Their voices are now merely scraps of cloth perhaps found in a quilt of literature, perhaps found in interviews, correspondence, and journals. Speech, song, storytelling, and writing create indelible histories. Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, Julia Foote, and Harriet Jacobs, were deeply involved in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and were pioneering activist women. They were determined to express themselves somehow, whether or not there was anyone of the 'white community' to acknowledge them. As a writer and preacher who traveled extensively pioneering uncharted territory for African American ministers to follow, Zilpha Elaw stated that everyone needs

to break forth and sing with a melodious and heavenly voice, several verses in a language unknown to mortals. A pure language unalloyed by the fulsome compliment, the hyperbole ... the insinuation, double meaning and vagueness, the weakness and poverty, the impurity, bombast, and other defects, with which all human languages are clogged. (Andrews 74)

Until one can find that purity of discourse, however, there are holes and loose strands with which to grapple. To speak and be acknowledged is everything; pure speech differs from heard speech in that in the latter instance speech is filtered through the mask or outfit every human being is forced to don in order to amalgamate into

society. Often these camouflaging uniforms enable a person to function within the constructs of the surrounding world, yet sometimes the means of amalgamation malfunctions and serves instead as an eraser. The formerly liberating, functional outfit becomes one that is inconspicuous or even invisible. Too often the means by which one expects to achieve a particular end achieves just the opposite or, worse, achieves no goal at all. Blending in with the rest of the world is not necessarily a successful means of self-expression; too often blending becomes a form of self-destruction. African American women of the nineteenth century needed to find the voices and the unique ‘clothing’ by which they could express themselves as individuals, not merely perpetuate their imposed servility. In doing this, however, they also had to influence society so that, in effect, they could, through speaking and writing, reweave their own history within the significant mainstream literature rather than be consumed and made invisible by it: a courageous step to take, certainly.

In general, women of the nineteenth-century took on a variety of societal issues and causes to further their own education, to form their own voices, but also to broaden the scope of the society that not only discriminated against them but from which they so desired acceptance and integration. Weaving themselves in, creating a pastiche of their individuality, women found themselves involved in a variety of social causes. One of the ways women sought to involve themselves was through belief in the power of Christianity and spreading their shared beliefs in the power of the word of God. African American women embraced religion wholeheartedly, often joining their white sisters in building an integrated institution. Religion and education naturally went hand in hand. As Anne Boylan, author of *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution*, states, “despite the efforts of whites to limit their knowledge, slaves occasionally formed Sunday schools for their own

benefit, just as they ... expressed their theological understanding in spirituals, and held clandestine church services” (29). There is, perhaps, a power to be gained in the embracing of religion and learning despite the fact that the controllers of religious and other educational knowledge bases were forbidding entrance into either arena.

Religion often acted as an analgesic. There is perhaps an assuaging power to be gained in the embracing of religion and learning, in attempting to understand the constructs of the surrounding world. Authors Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson examine the nineteenth-century views of outspoken African American women in their treatise *A Shining Thread of Hope: The History of Black Women in America*. According to Hine and Thompson, “seen from the vantage point of today’s political realities, many ... ideas about the need for African Americans to throw off dependence on white society seem remarkably modern and to the point” (106). Many slaves pursued religion as a method of assuaging pain and trauma, as well as preserving their sense of community. Preaching was officially designated to men to appease the white Christians who wielded power over slaves worshipping. Black men also believed their dignity “depended on maintaining traditional gender roles, even if the tradition these roles were derived from was white and European” (Hine and Thompson 40). This was the context in which Jarena Lee, in 1809, and Zilpha Elaw, by 1817, petitioned for the right to preach, not in the manner designated by the white world or the male definition, but according to the manner inspired by a greater power. Lee stated in her journal from 1849, “as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible, with God” (Andrews 28). The widespread belief in the early Methodist tradition was that one should seek sanctification or ‘cleanliness’ (assuming one embraced the metaphoric ‘dirt’ and ‘sin’ society forced people to believe was inherent in the soul).

For blacks, the metaphoric “dirtiness” became a literal indoctrination of actually *being* befouled. Color symbolism reached many aspects of day-to-day life, not the least of which was the juxtaposition of the white master (pure, clean power-holder) to the black slave (tarnished, sinful, submissive animal). Many blacks strove to reach sanctification - thus, purity - yet simultaneously rejected the “white” definitions of both races. In particular, the resistance of enslaved women to their oppressive situation was a very personal and individual act in many cases. When it was collective, it was well-planned and organized.

Ironically, the pursuit of religion by black slaves was a threat to many slave owners. Why? Religion meant that power could quite possibly shift to the perceived weaker species; therefore knowledge of religion, particularly in the perceived ‘wrong’ minds, epitomized the *loss* of power to slaveholders. In his essay, “Christianity and the Meaning of History,” Paul Ricoeur argues that “a culture’s equipment does not lie within the equipment itself; it depends on the fundamental attitudes taken by the men of a given civilization in respect to their own technical possibilities” (87). This concept is something like that conceptualized by John Ernest in a lecture from 1994: the slave makes use of the master’s tools whereby s/he builds a secure structure that *protects* him/her from that same master who actually owns the tools. It is indeed an interesting and ironic twist. A black slave is educated by a white concept of final judgment. Ernest argues that in a variety of ways, white American culture does not value its physical and conceptual tools, as is evidenced by the insistence of either misusing them (for example, its reliance on corrupted American political and religious ideals), or ignoring them completely (for example, the cultural dismissal of the intellectual talents and perspectives of black Americans). Historically, the white slave owner became frightened by his very own ‘creation’: a

slave who could be resourceful, created by tools the slave owner himself was unaware he was providing. This imminent threat caused many white slave owners to feel such tension that they ordered their slaves to discontinue attendance at sermons. Slaves who attended church sermons were being influenced by a force other than their owners, and ultimately were being provided with the tools they would need to overcome their own powerlessness. Furthermore, slaves who prayed perhaps experienced an escape of sorts, a release from their subservient roles and the pain inflicted by various acts of violence and torture on the part of overseers and owners. And, more daringly, particularly with the early Methodists, belief in religion taught the belief in a final Judgment Day, when even “whites would be punished for wrongs committed against slaves” (Lyerly 212).

Religion and attendance at services also promoted gathering. This is mentioned briefly in a fictional context in the next chapter when we witness Toni Morrison’s character Baby Suggs and a gathering of women pose a threat to the white women observing them convene. The sense of community also facilitated the overthrow of existing systems by amassing numbers. As author Cynthia Lynn Lyerly states, the benefits of Methodism far outweighed the threats of persecution:

Despite such persecution, the psychological benefits of Methodism seem to have helped the inner slave woman, for she could, through oral testimony, hymns, shouts, and Holy Spirit possession, demonstrate to others her sense of self-worth, her own concept of gender identity, and her determination to worship God in the way she chose. Methodism also helped strengthen the sisterhood of slave women. (212-213)

A woman who wishes to be a part of a community by joining a religious organization is a threat to the white slaveholder. A woman who wishes to baptize her child, thus instinctively protecting her child from harm and simultaneously “playing by the white rules” of morality is refused this right; and finally, combining these two issues,

the overall concept of slave motherhood, from the white perception, is negated. Rules that the whites dictated made morality virtually impossible for the slave woman.

Since my fundamental contention is that nineteenth-century African American women used available materials – in particular evangelism (religion and education) and writing autobiographically (even if in a disguised manner, such as through seemingly fictionalized events) – to construct their collective identity, it is appropriate to conclude that for black women, the church was the cultural, social, political, and moral centre. I will explore the works of Jarena Lee, Julia Foote, Zilpha Elaw, Harriet Jacobs, Amelia E. Johnson, and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. These works range from autobiographical journals to fictionalized autobiography (for protective purposes, as is the case with Harriet Jacobs, or obsequious mixtures of fictional techniques, as with Amelia Johnson) to poetry which echoes the multi-faceted experiences of the black slave woman. Overall, black women realized that through religion, education, and writing, lives were shaped by stories both told and untold, by stories that simultaneously attracted and repelled, and the slave women had to learn how to narrate what must be told along with what could be hoped.

2.2 Evangelism and Autobiography: Lee, Foote, and Elaw

Just as fictional works reflect cultural dilemmas, so many real-life women were experiencing similar “cultural dilemmas” in dealing with gender issues, racial issues, and questions of morality. Jarena Lee could not imagine life without her spirituality, for she could “hear the howling of the damned ... see the smoke of the bottomless pit, and ... hear the rattling of those chains, which hold the impenitent under darkness” (Andrews 30). If authors of fiction – whether or not they were actually fictional –

could monopolize such emotional themes, their reading audiences would certainly be agitated and perhaps forced to believe in whatever cause was portrayed. Although the struggles are evident, perhaps “black women have a strong claim to being considered the founders of both the African American literary tradition and the American women’s literary tradition” (Foster 8). Here is the previously invisible black woman who cannot simply be added to history or to literary traditions, so she creates her own reality somehow. American women struggled with gender inequality; *black* American women not only suffered gender inequality but racial inequality. William Lloyd Garrison, an activist on the forefront of the abolitionist movement with his newspaper *The Liberator*, stated that the English language was “inadequate to describe the horrors and impieties of slavery, and the transcendent wickedness of those who sustained the bloody system” (Gara 165). In a similar vein, the literary discourse of the time would also have been to a large extent exclusionary of women. Black women should be noted as attempting to bridge the gap not only between races but also between genders.

Women well knew the impediments that came before them as they emerged into the public sphere. Each woman expressed herself in a seemingly overused language but they were at the same time establishing the groundwork for a new interpretation of that language. Lee was committed to her ministry and, through this, she found a voice for herself. Granted, she was still contending with an exclusionary language, but her autobiography, as William L. Andrews states, “offers us the earliest and most detailed firsthand information we have about the traditional roles of women in organized black religious life” (Andrews 30). In her journal, Lee states, “as unseemly as it may appear now-a-days for a woman to preach, it should be remembered that nothing is impossible, with God. And why should it be thought

impossible, heterodox, or improper for a woman to preach, seeing the Savior died for the woman as well as for the man” (30). Quite a daring idea to postulate, indeed. Jarena Lee’s story also elucidates “the ways in which resistance to those roles began to manifest itself” (Introduction, Andrews 2). Lee’s resistance becomes a subtext to history. She was able to resist the established “norms” by wearing a disguise; but privately, she longed for her own pure language that was not borrowed or appropriated from anyone else. This unique voice was certainly within her and she says it was “so loud ... that I awoke from the sound of my own voice” (Andrews 35) but no one was listening to the words as if they were unique to her. She was only acknowledged as a minister of what had already been pontificated but she longed to find her place within the language of moral discourse and of society. “This language is too strong and expressive to be applied to any state of suffering in *time*,” Lee states in her journal, and she continues: “Were it to be thus applied, the reality could nowhere be found in human life; the consequence would be, that this scripture would be found a false testimony. But when made to apply to an endless state of perdition, in eternity, beyond the bounds of human life, then this language is found not to exceed our views of a state of eternal damnation” (38).

Religion certainly acted as a catalyst for African American women to develop their linguistic abilities, but perhaps Lee’s uncle, also a minister, was aware that some of what she had wished to highlight was previously ignored. He said that her preaching “might seem a small thing, yet he believed [she] had the worth of souls at heart” (46). Did he, in fact, recognize her true words and the fact that she was forcing herself into a language, a discourse that did not fit so that she could simply forge her way into the public eye? In her journal, Lee states how frequently she “preached with difficulty to a stiff-necked and rebellious people, who I soon left without any

animosity for their treatment. They might have respected my message, if not the poor weak servant who brought it to them with so much labor” (47). Finally, Lee ends her manuscript by calling this very thought into question:

It is known that the blind have the sense of hearing in a manner much more acute than those who can see: also their sense of feeling is exceedingly fine, and is found to detect any roughness on the smoothest surface, where those who see can find none. (Andrews 48)

Jarena Lee recognized the boundaries of the language she had no choice but to utilise and later modify according to her own needs as well as those of her struggling people. Only the most sensitive listeners might recognize how uncomfortable she truly was. To the less sensitive, everyday ears, nothing would have seemed ill at ease. This is yet another symptom of amalgamated racism.

Jarena Lee and Zilpha Elaw wrote about numerous contradictions between the lives they led and the lives they wished to lead. Many such contradictions also actually existed in the life of Julia Foote, yet another woman involved with the African American Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. She comments on the hardships she was too frequently forced to endure:

Yet, never being entirely defeated, disabled or vanquished, I would gather fresh courage, and renew the fight.... But instead of getting light, my preacher, class-leader, and parents, told me that all Christians had these inward troubles to contend with, and were never free from them until death; that this was my work here, and I must keep fighting. (Andrews 183)

Julia Foote countered her hardships in a more overt manner, however: she remembers an incident when she was falsely accused of stealing some cakes and her owner Mrs. Prime “applies” (whips) and tries to force a confession out of the girl. Rather than give in and confess, Foote says she “carried the rawhide out to the wood pile, took the axe, and cut it up into small pieces, which [she] threw away,

determined not to be whipped with that thing again” (176). Perhaps a daring venture, and Foote reveals that she felt “hardened” afterward. Yet she was not whipped by the Primes again.

The basic middle-class values of thrift, sobriety, and hard work that had been instilled by white society show up in Foote’s commentary quite frequently. She constantly struggles with the morality of being a woman as well as a self-created activist in a changing society. At the beginning of her narrative she comments often on how she did not agree with women in the ministry *for any reason*, yet later in her experience she herself was assisting in various institutions and was involved in community activism, most especially as an evangelist. Most probably, as Lee noticed, Foote struggled with the widespread inconsistencies put forth in the racist language and cultural differences of nineteenth-century society. As author Anne Boylan describes, the conflict Foote noticed was perpetuated because the “acceptance of the evangelical idea of womanhood restricted the autonomy and independence of women teachers and limited their ability to challenge nineteenth-century gender-role prescriptions” (122). They were only able to “exercise power ... over others of their sex” (122) and, perhaps in Foote’s case, to exercise power over others of her own race as well. In this respect, Julia Foote closely resembles Harriet Jacobs’s character Linda Brent in her *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which will be mentioned in more detail in the next section. Foote’s life illustrated “alternative sexual standards for women,” as Jean Fagan Yellin describes in her work, *The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (92). Foote also moved “beyond the limits of nineteenth-century polite discourse and toward modern feminism” (94); she accused society members of conforming and allowing the same old clichés to dictate

how the world was run, for the politics of oppression – as illustrated through religious morality – were still perpetuated.

As mentioned previously, Zilpha Elaw, a visionary revivalist, was also searching for a new language but found herself grounded in a jaded one. To her, Christianity was the only pure and good thing; she was seemingly undaunted by the racism and sexism that so many people used to try to hinder her cause, most likely because she continually saw the potential good in people, despite their being led astray by “evil” (Andrews *passim*). Slavery was certainly the largest evil in her world. Elaw frequently affirmed, “The Lord enabled me to keep my heart with all diligence; and having my own soul right with God, I was enabled to set others right also” (Andrews 114). Elaw antagonized those around her by challenging them to see her in a different light, not as a black or as a woman, but as a black woman who was just another one of God’s creatures. In her *Memoirs*, Elaw states that this challenge “was the manner of my soul’s conversion to God, told in language unvarnished by the graces of uneducated eloquence, nor transcending the capacity of a child to understand” (Andrews 57). Her enthusiasm was contagious and her public speaking engagements seemed to grow in their vehemence just as she challenged the slaveholders she addressed. Her argument was that “God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty” (Yellin 92). The “mighty,” so to speak, took for granted that their language – their entire history – was provided for them, in a way, rarely called into question.

Julia Foote, like Lee and Elaw, recognized the immaturity in this narrow-minded view. Foote asked, “As we look at the professing Christians of to-day, the question arises, Are they not all conformed to the maxims and fashions of this world?” (Foote 230) These three women, Lee, Elaw, and Foote, all identified that the

fashionable language, the literary discourse of the time, was outmoded. The women, in their unconventionality, were perhaps the ones accused of deliberately acting and speaking eccentrically, but they intentionally drew attention to themselves in this manner. As Lyerly comments,

It is not coincidental that white onlookers, especially slave owners, took special offense at slave women's enthusiasm at services.... An analysis of this... reveals how race, gender, white opposition, and Methodist belief intertwined in slave women's religious experience. (210)

The cultural short-sightedness of the white readers or audience, in particular, is a product of the jaded language and sins of oppression that were committed time and time again. Harriet Jacobs, discussed in the next section, was often met with disbelief or excluded entirely. Nevertheless, new voices emerged, sometimes using the same old phrases, but often transmuting words to have a different impact. Slavery had oppressed every black person in America and even after the Civil War and emancipation, slavery's sting was ever-present, especially in the language and in ways in which people communicated. When the resistance to racism, slavery's aftermath, became collective, it was nourished by the deep needs of the individuals.

2.3 Grandmother's Child: Harriet Jacobs

Assumed to be the first interracial women's gathering of any consequence, the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, which took place in 1837, gave women a dual directive – for “hearts to be lifted upward to God's purifying realm, and for jealous care to be directed outward against humankind's corrupting realm” (Ernest, *Liberation* 81). Harriet Jacobs was a woman “exposed and enchained,” because the “nineteenth-century American culture” mandated that she be so (Yellin,

Introduction to *Incidents*, xiii). Hine and Thompson write, “The abolition movement had significance for black women far beyond the elimination of the legal institution of slavery. Culturally, it brought many free black women into the mainstream in a number of different areas, including literature, the arts, and education” (118). The most significant of American slave narratives by women is probably Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself*, published in 1861. The novel was originally thought to be abolitionist propaganda like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s famous - or perhaps infamous, at the time - *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, for it dealt with the abuses, both physical and sexual, experienced by a slave woman, and how she fled her owners and later even rescued her children. It challenged the institution of chattel slavery with its supporting ideology of white racism, as well as traditional patriarchal institutions and ideologies. The autobiographical novel was originally thought to have been written by a white woman, Lydia Maria Child, who had befriended Jacobs and had also edited and helped Jacobs find a publisher for her work. Its title page gave Child much credit, yet omitted the name of the author. At first the book was over-exposed, as a result, but it later suffered the opposite fate of obscurity. As Rafia Zafar, editor of *New Critical Essays* on Jacobs, verifies, “Until well into the twentieth century, the reception of *Incidents* attested to the continuing difficulty of Jacobs’s, or any black woman writer’s, gaining an audience; faced with the ‘double negative’ of black race and female gender, Jacobs ... had to contend with a skeptical readership that said her work could not be ‘genuine’” (Garfield and Zafar 4). In actuality, Jacobs accomplished a great deal: she literally transformed herself into a literary subject through the creation of her narrator, her pseudonym, Linda Brent. Also successful was the manner in which Jacobs went against the conventional nineteenth-century polite discourse.

Jacobs was a woman “exposed and enchained,” yet even in the face of torture, repeated physical and psychological abuse, and terror at the fearsome prospect that her life would always be prone to such abuses, Jacobs survived and overcame. But she put herself at extreme risk on many occasions. She also created risks for herself and her children. Her contemporary readers had virtually no understanding of the kind of life Jacobs led. She needed to explain her story in a way that would affect the general reader on a level where s/he would understand the hardships a slave endured without sounding as if she were merely donning the nineteenth-century propensity toward sentimental literary form. Certainly Jacobs had to affect the female reader on the level of an oppressed person battling prejudice and being allotted an inferior role in society, but she also needed to come to terms with her own self-hatred, which perpetuated her oppression. In her case, Jacobs was not only haunted by the terrors she endured as a slave, but she was forced to confront a dual prejudice.

Jacobs authored *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* but at the time of its initial appearance, she was not seeking fame for her authorship and it was widely believed that the white abolitionist woman, Child, had authored the text to incite sympathy for the oppressed race as well as to appeal to the sentimental nineteenth-century female reading audience to whom Child was already well known. Jacobs’s narrative is undoubtedly loaded with many allusions to typical themes found in women’s literature of the time, but she constantly questions the standards and expectations of female behavior and whether or not such standards are applicable to her as an escaped slave. Her subjugation obviously moulds her perception of society, and therefore of herself, but Jacobs manipulates this idea. She had no other choice, for her ultimate survival depended upon it. In order to reconstruct an acceptable version of how she viewed herself, Jacobs separated her allotted self from her true one,

allowed her body and mind to be abused, and she even inflicted self-abuse, all in a master plan to invert and *survive* the entire slave system.

As a young slave woman, Jacobs acted as an undercover detective. She learned quickly the behaviors which kept her from being completely annihilated by the slave system: compliance, subservience, and ultimately self-loathing. Through her character, Linda Brent, Jacobs illustrates to her readers just how she was able to manipulate her owner and society in general. When her owner, Dr. Flint, attempts to send her secret messages, she takes very seriously the threat he makes on numerous occasions, that he will kill her if she is not “as silent as the grave” (Jacobs 28). Through her character, Jacobs also takes supposedly acceptable values and inverts them so that she can achieve freedom for Linda [herself] and her children. As the character Linda Brent states, few people seemed “to be aware of the widespread moral ruin occasioned by this wicked system [slavery]” (52), and therefore she needs to expose these incidents in order to incite awareness on the part of the entire American culture that perpetuated such a “wicked system.”

The story is perhaps a typical fugitive slave narrative. Through her narrator and heroine Linda Brent, Jacobs recounts her own history. She owed much of her loyalty and success at survival to her grandmother who hid Harriet from her master for seven years in an attic refuge merely seven square feet in width. Jacobs also had a brother, who escaped and spoke on behalf of abolition, and two children whom she later rescued from slavery and sent north. The narrative recalls the torturous events of her slave life, including the horrors of being made her master’s concubine and the broken promises of Mr. Sands, the future congressman who fathered her children but later refused to set them free. Jacobs also portrays a supportive black community (both slave and free), sympathetic whites who sheltered fugitive slaves, and finally

northern employers and friends who fervently encouraged Jacobs to write her autobiography and the story of her survival.

Through Linda Brent, Jacobs blames the poison of slavery for her own corruption: “The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and foul talk of her master and his sons are her teachers” (51). It is not until she is pregnant with the child of paramour Sands that Flint acknowledges his wish to control, impregnate, and thus become literally a part of Linda. She is very much aware of his power, of course, and had intended to strip him of at least a morsel of it by getting pregnant by another man. Author Blyden Jackson notes that Jacobs’s early life reveals her as “a black woman in bondage” subjected to “the lust of white men legally empowered to use her body as they might choose” (155). In real life, Jacobs had been raped numerous times by her owner, Dr. James Norcom, yet could never speak about it and certainly found herself with few options for recourse. The character Linda’s pregnancy by Sands allows Jacobs to break this silence. Although Linda is compromising herself and her virtue by becoming pregnant by Sands, she feels this is a better choice than submitting to Flint. At least Sands offers her affection and the promise of freedom for herself and her children. It is this compromise, however, that exposes Linda’s more disturbing agenda: she is willing to sacrifice her body and her deepest beliefs, such as her belief in virtue, which contributes not only to society’s definition of worth but also her own. According to Hazel Carby, “Linda Brent’s decision as a slave, to survive through an act that resulted in her loss of virtue, placed her outside the parameters of the conventional heroine” (59), and thus outside the definition of a woman with *self-worth*.

As a child, Jacobs’s Linda had been instructed by her grandmother, her only true role model, that her virtue was her one pride and the one thing she could control.

She certainly controls it by deciding when to expose her loss of it, yet with this decision comes the loss of respect from her grandmother. Ultimately, her self-respect is also damaged. When Linda successfully escapes and continues to elude Flint, his obsession for controlling her worsens so she subjects herself to even harsher abuse – existing in perhaps the poorest living conditions imaginable, creating something of an attic hideaway where she just barely survives for seven years. It is with this horrifying self-sacrifice that the nineteenth-century female writer’s figurative captivity and self-loathing crashes its way through the screen of reality. It is precisely here that Jacobs transforms the nineteenth-century female literary instruments in order to revolutionize the tradition. In employing Child to scribe her story, Jacobs prompted readers of the time to question the reality of her experience but her methodology subverts the white notion of sentimental fiction while simultaneously preserving conventionality and creating a new definition for authentic autobiography, complete with trials and tribulations, horrors and abuses.

It is easy to view Linda Brent’s plight as being unique to a slave woman – and it is – yet its universality is applicable to all those enslaved, nevertheless. The strong woman, be she an actual person or a character in a novel (Jacobs presents both due to the transparency between herself and her character) must have her foibles, but naturally there are obstacles to achieving the final liberty she so desires. Jacobs implores her readers to excuse Linda Brent’s self-inflicted misery; her “crime” of escaping, even though she knowingly abandons her children, must be acquitted. The corrupted (readers) are forced to look at the products they have spawned. That is, Jacobs is molded out of a corrupt society’s racial and patriarchal ideologies united toward the pursuit of profit. Simultaneously, black women performed a reproductive function vital to the economic system of slavery in general, which in turn leads to the

subjugation of women. Such subjugation becomes endemic to the mores of society, and as Gilbert and Gubar, authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic*, observe,

just as blacks did in the master-slave relationships of the American South, women in patriarchy have traditionally cultivated accents of acquiescence in order to gain freedom to live their lives on their own terms, if only in the privacy of their own thoughts. (Gilbert and Gubar 73-74)

It is not surprising that Jacobs's work was initially thought to have been a contrivance; she wrote in a style that was quickly and easily categorized as sentimentalist, much like a Jane Austen imitation perhaps. Her plot seems typical of nineteenth-century women writers with the "dramatizations of imprisonment and escape" which are "all-pervasive" (Gilbert and Gubar 85). Linda chooses to imprison herself in her grandmother's attic so that she may remain close to her children. Simultaneously, she throws her pursuers off her trail quite thoroughly; naturally they assume she has fled north. Despite being imprisoned, as typical nineteenth-century women heroines were, either literally or figuratively, Jacobs departs from the symbolic paraphernalia typical of these narratives, such as locked trunks, costumes and mirrors. Instead, she incorporates *literal* objects and settings. Linda Brent leaves her personal trunk *open* so that someone will look inside and see that her belongings are missing. Linda dons a costume at one point in her escape, yet it is a tool to make her escape more successful, not a hindrance forcing her to mask herself and submit to another's will. Linda *chooses* to cloak herself and *chooses* to imprison herself as a means of achieving freedom. While her slave-owner is looking for her up north, she is merely a mile away. After seven years, she can go north with less of a worry about being pursued. Even though her self-sacrifices add such an element of reality that it seems there is no longer a figurative or metaphoric commonality between Jacobs and other women writers of the nineteenth-century, this in fact blends her in deeper with

typical sentimental novelists. Authors such as Stowe or Elizabeth Gaskell, for example, followed formulaic writing styles which submerged or disguised “private, brooding female resentment” (Gilbert and Gubar 205). Jacobs broke the rules. Her believability was still questioned by her contemporary readers, yet now we can read her narrative with a deeper understanding of what Jacobs was trying to accomplish: revision of the manner in which literature promotes women and politics while the author remains somewhat protected behind, or within, the words.

As I stated earlier, to perform this task, Jacobs had to re-educate her readers, teaching them to see the invisible by voicing the previously unspeakable, forcing white readers beyond their comfort zone and into a realm of uncertainty where nothing can be addressed directly. In the next chapter, I describe a similar trend among writers – either of fiction or non-fiction – and critics, as Toni Morrison does with her “speaking the unspeakable” in her novels. To manipulate common discourse is to become empowered. Slaves and whites alike had been taught in the system of slavery to accept and participate in the moral corruption of society. Jacobs believed that those produced by this system needed to realign their behaviors with the intellectual conception of morality. She could not simply appeal to the true function of Christian principles, for the corruption produced by slavery made such appeals meaningless. Likewise, the many supposedly Christian slaveholders and pro-slavery ministers regularly demonstrated that such appeals could easily be re-routed back at the enslaved. Jacobs was well aware of the nefarious methods by which slavery was capable of subverting those people with sympathetic feelings. Carby argues that the whites “who formed Jacobs’s audience were implicated in the preservation of this [ideological] oppression” (55). Jacobs knew how to use the *tools* of the dominant culture to instruct and create a consciousness *within* the dominant culture. She wrote

for herself, to tell her story in the best way she knew how, but she also wrote her story with the intention of being instructive, if not visionary.

Parallels between Jacobs's work and works of her contemporaries are pervasive. Many women authors created a "mad double" to enact their "own raging desire to escape" (85), and Jacobs created Linda Brent as a stand-in for her own acts of violence – as both inflictor and receiver. There is also in these narratives the subtle binary of "agoraphobia and its complementary opposite, claustrophobia" (86), which can easily be applied to Linda Brent's reluctance to leave her hiding place and escape the South completely, agoraphobia of sorts, and she exhibits claustrophobia with her overwhelming desire to sneak down into the shed to stretch her aching limbs or in the way she bores tiny holes in the wall of her confinement to get some air and to secretly peek at her children. Like her contemporaries, Jacobs expresses her feelings of social confinement and her yearning for physical and spiritual escape [from slavery]. Yet Jacobs can also easily be set apart from her contemporaries by virtue of one major difference: they experienced oppression and confinement within the constructs of a society that at least included them in the sphere of humanity. This is exactly what Jacobs does with her narrative: define herself despite the fact that she was excluded from any conventional realm of existence. Perhaps her lashing out at herself, her self-inflicted abuse and denials, are the only ways in which she can attack the system that oppressed her. She did not like herself the way that the system created her, so Jacobs feels the implicit need to destroy parts of her character – thereby herself – as a method of purging. She needs the contemporary female reading audience to identify with her at least on a superficial level because no one else had the capability; therefore, Jacobs wrote in a style especially familiar to just that audience. But Elizabeth Bennett (Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*) certainly does

not come waltzing off the page, either. It is more likely that Bertha Rochester (Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*) would come running right behind Linda Brent, torch in hand, determined to ignite the Flints of the world. Madwomen in attics had nowhere else to go until the society that forced them there was able to acknowledge their worth and their brilliance. That was not sufficient for Harriet Jacobs. Charlotte Brontë killed her character, in the typically violent demise of nineteenth-century women characters possessing strength and will. But Jacobs's Linda Brent is too strong-willed and too determined not to die. Jacobs (as Brent) would not have given Flint the satisfaction.

2.4 The Plight of Deouble Jeopardy

So how did Jacobs go about recruiting her white female audience and at the same time elicit their understanding? She spoke their language, and she recognized their “distinctively female literary tradition” with the plots fraught with “images of enclosure and escape, . . . metaphors of physical discomfort manifested in frozen landscapes and fiery interiors – such patterns recurred throughout this tradition” (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* xi). Even though this language was not entirely her own, Jacobs adapted it to suit her purpose, and the metaphors were in fact her life. Of those who received her work, all – even the skeptics – lived in the very same society where specific social positions existed for women. These same women had access to similar types of reading material. The sentimental novel spoke of the things all women recognized, so perhaps Jacobs discovered that she could camouflage her true story by writing in this genre, with its disposition to fiction. Like her contemporaries, Jacobs, too, inhabited the “ancestral mansions owned and built by men,” but she was

not as conscious of being “constricted and restricted by white male authors” (xi). She did certainly understand the concept of white male dominance, and as Carby states, “unlike her white female audience or contemporary authors, Jacobs had neither the advantages of formal education nor contemplative leisure” (47-48). Because of her disadvantages, Jacobs had to overcompensate and force herself into writing in a manner that was recognized as fictional just so she could tell her story. Even if her work sounded fictionalized, Jacobs had to trust that the manner in which she chose to write was the closest to telling her story adequately enough that anyone else might comprehend.

Jacobs knew that she was constricted and restricted by the institution of slavery throughout her entire life and therefore she still needed to forcibly separate herself and her story from the typical nineteenth-century female genre even as she simultaneously wrote in such a style. There were two distinct operative forces involved: “the oppression of women who were enslaved and the oppression of women who were free,” but the “white free antislavery feminists obscured the crucial differences between the experience of women who were held as chattel and their own experience” (Yellin 78-79). Literal and metaphoric enslavement has been compared unfairly, and Jacobs’s writing style may even perpetuate this. Her discussion of “the sexual abuse of slave women” (xix) marks a clear delineation between the literal and the figurative even though so many other pervasive women’s themes appear in her work. Utilizing a common “language” does not mean that Jacobs wrote from the same perspective. She was able to write as a prisoner of her “own gender” (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 85) but she also wrote as an enslaved black woman who possessed no other language with which to define herself, thereby constructing a literary mode of presentation by which to transform the white historical narrative.

Many questions arose about the validity of Linda Brent's story, but the words of the narrative "take on new meaning and relevance" (Botkin xiii) as her story unfolds. Perhaps it is Linda Brent's "self-willed self-burial" (Gilbert and Gubar *Madwoman* 87) that disturbed her reading audience the most. This incident bridged the chasm between the imaginary and metaphoric to the real and horrific. Perhaps, too, it was her unique form of self-starvation, not only from food, but from the nourishment of love and affection of her grandmother and her children. The reading audience undoubtedly tried to examine these incidents and may even have denied their reality so as to keep Linda Brent encapsulated, for even after seven years of freedom from her hiding place she still suffered "from the effects of that long imprisonment" (Jacobs 148); her haunting was tangible, whereas the contemporary African American writers reach back through the haze of time and feel the fingers of ghosts. Jacobs's piece channeled every other "uniquely female tradition in this period" (Gilbert and Gubar *Madwoman* 85). But for Linda Brent, whose choice of self-imprisonment was preceded by society's version, the solution was almost worse than the problem.

Linda Brent literally lives the fact that nineteenth-century "sexual etiquette demanded passivity of women" (Yellin 111). She argues that slavery, in the form of her master, Dr. Flint, destroys every moral notion her grandmother had inculcated in her, but when it comes to actually conveying this to her grandmother, the confession is excruciating. Loss of virtue was a forbidden subject, just as writing about it was controversial with her white audience, for as Jacqueline Jones states, it was "enforced through the use of violence and intimidation" and had always "signified the hatred men of one race felt toward members of the other" (149). When Lydia Maria Child wrote *fiction* embodying such themes, her stories were recognized as

dramatizations which repeatedly focused on “a female supplicant, a pleading oppressed dark woman vulnerable to white violation, sexual bondage, and incest” (Yellin 65). When Harriet Jacobs’s version appeared, the discourse was easily recognized as something outside of the accepted realm. Her contemporaries needed the conventional language in order to even mildly understand Jacobs’s intention. Jacobs daringly ventured into this world as the mysterious yet real Linda Brent and she encountered judgment based on the typical writings of the time. At times she requested such judgments (or criticisms, if you will), but this may have been yet another unintentional invitation for abuse. As she had experienced throughout her life, negative attention, even temporarily, was attention nonetheless and often paved the way to affirming Jacobs’s self-worth as she flipped the values. As her editor, Lydia Maria Child was one person who guided Jacobs away from these potentially self-abusing situations, for she understood that Jacobs had experienced enough abuse already. She knew that Jacobs was telling the truth in her narrative, that “women slaves served as breeding stock as well as objects of their masters’ licentiousness” (Mill 262). As Mill suggests, Jacobs calmed her readers yet still persuaded them to be morally outraged. Once again, Jacobs transformed the methodology.

Self-abuse may also be presented in a figurative sense. Linda Brent experiences the literal, the real abuse, yet the self-abuse is highlighted also, often in direct relation to the consequences of the abuses of another: “I was lowered in my own estimation, and had resolved to bear his abuse in silence” (Jacobs 58). Granted, this was a result of the corrupt slave system and Linda acknowledges such; however, the inexorable suggestion is that Linda is commenting on the horrors she endured as “natural” consequences “of her inferior race” (Yellin 87). As many nineteenth-century women, according to Gilbert and Gubar, willingly excused themselves from

the “competition of victimization,” (*No Man’s Land*, vol.2, 78), so did Jacobs. The issue of competition emerged time and again between white and black women. Linda Brent is a “narrator who assumes responsibility for her own actions” (Yellin 87), even those that imply that she is willingly violating herself. Although it is self-inflicted torture in one sense, the point is that Linda Brent’s decision to hide herself away and avoid all but minimal contact with her family is an empowering one for her to make. She manipulates the system and uses its own methods of oppression to break out.

This still brings us to the plight of the nineteenth-century female protagonist and therefore the nineteenth-century woman. The only way Linda Brent can gain power herself is by giving it up completely at first. Dr. Flint abuses and imprisons Linda, then he abuses and imprisons her children. She allows him to get away with this for a while so that she can *refuse* him the power later on. Actions that were successful for him in gaining control in the past no longer work as effectively when his strength and power over Linda are gradually diminished. Previously, as Blyden Jackson states,

her seduction became virtually the one driving obsession of that master’s whole existence, so much so that, in desperation, she gave herself to another white man, . . . in order thus to avoid the even worse degradation of herself she firmly believed submission to her master would have entailed. (155-156)

In the hiding place, Linda is still sacrificing herself in any number of ways, but as she witnesses Flint’s loss of power, her own strength is revitalized, despite her poor condition. A particularly dramatic point is when Dr. Flint plots to actually recapture Linda and she retaliates by cleverly arranging to have letters sent to him from the North. She skews his perception by confirming it. Crouched in her hiding place, Linda overhears Flint reading her letters aloud to her grandmother, but he changes

many of the words and messages to suit his own agenda. The power struggle shifts back and forth on many such occasions, yet in this situation, Linda knows she retains the upper hand. Flint's manipulation of her *words* is symbolic of how he – and all believers in the slave system – have controlled her existence all along. Despite the fact that Linda is cramped and suffering, burdened with the idea that by her own actions her children may not even remember her, there are connections between her physical situation and her ongoing struggle for complete independence. Flint actually believes that Linda has been in the North for many years and he is angered by the fact that he has no jurisdiction over her. In some ways he does, however, for it is not until Linda is absolutely sure of her triumph (when Flint's persistence in finding her abates) that she even dares to think of leaving her hiding place. Perhaps it is no longer even Flint's power over her, but her adaptation to self-inflicted persecution. Later in this dissertation, I look at the manifestation of this same adaptation with Sethe, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, who finally accepts her own actions in the face of horror and her need to preserve her family, practically creating a madness as a soothing and sometimes haunting retreat.

In her hesitance to leave her hiding place, coupled with her fear of being caught, Linda, too, creates a virtual madness for herself. Like other nineteenth-century women characters and writers, Linda Brent's "cave-prison became more constricted, more claustrophobic . . . she planned mad or monstrous escapes, then dizzily withdrew" (Gilbert and Gubar, *Madwoman* 101). It is merely out of accidental circumstance that Linda does leave her hiding place and this literally saves her life. The journey begins, as does Linda's/Harriet's story, and as her definition of herself is just emerging. Now she tells the story through a different set of eyes; her visions for the future take on new meaning and she can reinvent herself through her

own experiences. Because Jacobs probably read various styles of women's writing (bicultural feminism), she possessed a deeper understanding of what the central issues were, yet this also enabled her to keep her "true self" hidden. Although, as Anna Julia Cooper states so matter-of-factly, imitation "is the worst of suicides; it cuts the nerve of originality and condemns to mediocrity," Jacobs wasn't worried about *how* her work was received; she only wanted to tell her story in any way that she could. By encoding her experiences in a conventional writing style, the secrets she still felt she needed to protect remained concealed.

Secrecy permeated almost every aspect of Jacobs's life, so naturally the connection between her enslaved life and her "free" life could not be entirely severed. As a slave, Linda keeps to herself the abuse inflicted by Dr. Flint; she never divulges the identity of Sands; her hiding place is never revealed to employees of her grandmother; and of course her children can never betray their mother's concealment which would threaten her survival. When she succeeds in escaping to the North, Linda Brent must still cloak her whereabouts for a number of years. Jacobs was also sure that her own employer at the time she was writing *Incidents*, Nathaniel Parker Willis, was proslavery and she "did not even want him to know she was writing" (xviii). She must have feared that revealing *all* of her secrets would lead "either to submission or destruction" (Gilbert and Gubar 432), and this only weakened her ability to define herself and achieve autonomy. Despite the fact that she freed herself from her voluntary prison, she was still a captive of the slave system even in the North and she had to remain silent. If she did not, there were risks not only for her own life but for her children's - Ellen, specifically, who was relocated to the North earlier - for as Jones says, "violence against freed people was not only sanctioned, but sometimes initiated by so-called law-enforcement authorities" (72). Linda Brent

still puts herself in precarious situations many times, though: she ventures to see and protect Ellen on various occasions and she also knows her mistress's husband could be a threat to her freedom. The fact that "the viciousness aimed at freedwomen was particularly significant" (72) absolutely plays its way into the perception Linda has of herself. In any case, the *character* of Linda and the actual *person* of Harriet (the dual roles of the same woman) are somehow reconciled and Jacobs is able to come to terms with the complex world in which she finds herself living. Even as she rejects and escapes her enslavement in the South, her power is still limited by a system that grants control to others (whites). Gilbert and Gubar assert that "Power itself does seem to be dangerous, if not fatal, for women" (433), but it was especially threatening for one who was just learning to recognize and use it: Jacobs as a black woman in her doubly jeopardized state of oppression.

Although Jacobs did not buy wholeheartedly into the double-jeopardy idea, it was clearly impossible for her to escape it. Her lack of complete power over her own life once she establishes herself in the North is subverted to a low self-esteem. This frustrates her; like many women of the time, she lived "an ambitious life that she could not write about because it could not be contained within traditional literary genres" (483), and the disparity between the life she found herself living and the one she desired to live is never reconciled. Jacobs is never able to force herself through the barrier of the domestic sphere; she is constantly just on the perimeter, forced there by a society that defines her one way, but then rejects her because of that same definition. Even speaking the language by adapting her story to conventional genres does not change Jacobs's position of being just on the fringe. As Hazel Carby observes, Jacobs was constantly seeking to "establish the sisterhood of white and

black women as allies in the struggle against the oppression of all women” (53), but she found that her “experiences in slavery had filled [her] with distrust” (Jacobs 34).

Two opposing viewpoints do not coexist peacefully and this damages Jacobs’s view of herself immensely. She values the opinions of other women – which has its roots most in her early relationship with her grandmother – yet the Northern women she relies upon “were not immune to the effects of the slave system” (Carby 55), either. Her propensity for desiring and establishing sisterhood is extensive; however, the moments of rejection or lack of support weigh heavily on Jacobs’s view of herself. Again, as Gilbert and Gubar say is typical of nineteenth-century women, Jacobs had to face

equally degrading options when she had to define her public presence in the world. If she did not suppress her work entirely or publish it pseudonymously or anonymously, she could modestly confess her female “limitations” . . . [or] she could rebel, accepting the ostracism. . . . [Jacobs was] confronted with such anxiety-inducing choices [therefore she] has been strongly marked not only by an obsessive interest in these limited options but also by obsessive imagery of confinement that reveals the ways in which female artists feel trapped and sickened both by suffocating alternatives and by the culture that created them. (*Madwoman* 64)

With Dr. Flint and other domineering men in her life, such as Nathaniel Parker Willis, Jacobs takes “conventional feminine qualities of submission and passivity” and allows them to eventually be “replaced by an active resistance” (Carby 56); yet with the threat of strong-willed *women* opposing her, her “strength and resourcefulness” seem transmuted into a childish need for approval and affection. It is Linda’s grandmother who reproaches her for her “want of affection” (Jacobs 91) toward her children and Mrs. Flint about whom Jacobs states: “Nothing could please her better than to see me humbled and trampled upon. I was just where she would have me – in the power of a hard, unprincipled master” (92). Indeed it seems that the

potentially passive qualities in women hold the most power. Did Jacobs rebel against other women's passivity because she so strongly resented it in herself? Or perhaps she chastised herself and forced herself to be passive before anyone else could exert that uniquely feminine power over her. Indeed, it is passivity that seems to inspire strength. As Mills states, because of Linda Brent's past hardships, her grandmother's lessons "must stand as the primary exemplar of and mediator for redemptive feminine virtue" (259).

Linda Brent feels passive and powerless when she is repeatedly raped (both figuratively and literally, emotionally and physically) by her master; the same when her children are imprisoned and she can do nothing to comfort them. She also feels powerless and violated when she witnesses her daughter Ellen being treated harshly by her mistress and later harassed sexually by Mr. Thorne. Where does Harriet Jacobs reconcile the events of her life with the ones she portrays in Linda Brent's? Perhaps the duality, the use of two persons to recreate her story, was the only reconciliation and resolution Jacobs could find. She uses Linda Brent as a stand-in for herself in her mode of self-preservation, and ultimately this duplicity "becomes a strategy for survival in a hostile, male-dominated" (Gilbert and Gubar 473), prevalently *white* world. Jacobs's writing is positioned therefore on the edge of the typical nineteenth-century realm of discourse. Although women were excluded from the patro-centric writer's club, Jacobs was virtually excluded from all realms because of her color. However, readers *needed* the conventional female discourse in order to understand Jacobs and other black women writers of the time. Because Jacobs ventured into this world, she was judged by its categories (which at times she requested, certainly), but she also transforms the style of women's writing so that she herself can gain a deeper understanding of what the central issues are. She literally

writes herself into being. Although the use of duplicity and masking was yet another common nineteenth-century female literary instrument, Jacobs revolutionizes the tradition; her method is, as Carby says, “unique in its subversion of a major narrative code of sentimental fiction” (59). She is able to figuratively rape the standard, accepted culture and force upon it a new knowledge that it had not necessarily desired, much in the manner that she transcends her own loss of innocence and turns a tragedy into the means for success. Jacobs uses her “impure state” and her “illicit liaison as an attempt to secure a future for herself and her children” (59). By telling of her experiences, Jacobs also gains the power she needs to confront the impure world and the corrupt slave system that constructed her initially. She literally reconfigures the images.

It is also through her grandmother character that Jacobs preserves some conventionality, thus making her work more acceptable to the reading audience. Mills explains this by saying that it is “the grandmother who constantly asserts the importance of Brent’s duty as a mother and thus champions the maternal power which gives Brent the strength to endure” (259). She needed to shed the old definitions, often through allowing herself to be temporarily subjugated, and although she did not break through some of the barriers she wished to, Jacobs was eventually able to forge passages so that she alone held the pen that told her story of how she survived the slave system. Yet she could not have survived without her grandmother who provides “a protective womb for Linda’s birth to freedom” (Mills 259). After her freedom, Brent goes on to create herself closer to the way she and her grandmother envisioned her to be. Per Lydia Maria Child’s suggestion, Jacobs brings her story full circle, ending with memories of her grandmother. It is the character of the grandmother (as well as the real person) who acts as the “moral center, the person

most important to Linda Brent's rearing and protection" (Mills 258); however, it is Jacobs's unique learning experiences and personal endurance that allow her to mold herself – based on her grandmother's model – into an independent, free woman:

I remembered how my good old grandmother had laid up her earnings to purchase me in later years, and how often her plans had been frustrated. How that faithful, loving old heart would leap for joy, she could look on me and my children now that we were free! . . . My story ends in freedom . . . We are as free from the power of slaveholders as are the white people of the north; and though that, according to my ideas, is not saying a great deal, it is a vast improvement in *my* condition. (Jacobs 200-201)

2.5 Facing the Dilemmas and Furthering the Struggle: Amelia E. Johnson and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper

As previously discussed, many African American women writers struggled to define their position outside of – or in spite of – the dominant culture. On the other side, however, was Amelia E. Johnson, who melded herself right into the literary tradition, as is evidenced by such novels as *The Hazeley Family* and *Clarence and Corinne (or, God's Way)*. Her plots utilize trendy, white middle class values by completely nullifying the importance of race or religion. [As Charles Mills states, there is a “feminist concept of patriarchy and the Marxist concept of class society” therefore women have been “able to intervene in mainstream discussions of justice [because] they have also contested the factual picture that has framed this discussions” (*Racial Exploitation*). By appropriating other causes such as women's suffrage, temperance, and evangelism, African American women subtly challenged white privilege. Johnson, though, embraced a different tack with her ability to, like Jacobs, appeal to the senses of social system of the fashionable nineteenth-century reading audience.

The danger in this methodology, however, is in their being appropriated by the larger scheme of society. Why do the few illustrations (albeit vaguely) show white-looking people? Most depict a common looking, nondescript family, or the main character, Flora, in despair and needing consolation, usually by a man. As Barbara Christian explains in her introduction to the novel, Johnson wrote her works in the latter part of the century, more than fifty years *after* many African Americans were integrally involved in social reforms. Christian states that “Mrs. Johnson has neutralized her tale so as to demonstrate that black women could write a sentimental romance in nonracial terms much the same way that white women did” (xxvii). It seems, too, that Johnson may have had a different agenda; her own subtle camouflage acted as a metaphor for society’s color-blindness. In part, the fact that many readers may have misconstrued Johnson’s characters – or even Johnson herself – may have worked in her favor, enabling a readership that might otherwise have discounted her abilities (as was the case with Harriet Jacobs) right from the start. By leaving the racial makeup of her characters in obscurity, Johnson effectively slides them right into the white perception by maintaining black invisibility. Christian further points out that “family unity is not easily maintained and must be carefully nurtured.... Society does not provide any institutions to aid in the solution of some of these problems” (Introduction, xxxii-xxxiii). Therefore the main character, Flora Hazeley, is educated not only to be a homemaker, but a social housekeeper, a role of increasing importance for all women in the late nineteenth-century. Again, Johnson’s issues at hand deal more overtly with hardships and education. As early as 1834, Samuel Cornish was adamantly arguing for the education of black women; Johnson curiously binds the issues of racism and education. Shirley J. Yee, author of *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism 1828-1860*, quotes Cornish as saying that

educating blacks “constituted a form of overt resistance to racist practices, for... it was still illegal to teach slaves to read and write” (49). It seems too often that many African American women and their ideas and writing were, in fact, simply absorbed into the everyday literary genre, if they were not outright excluded.

Yet we look at Amelia Johnson’s work now with different eyes, I suspect, and it is difficult to ascertain whether or not she herself, as author, was purposely attempting to blend her work into common literary traditions, or if her work suffered racist society’s appropriation. Most likely Johnson knew her readers would assume her characters to be white if she did not clarify their race, but if one examines the text closely, Johnson occasionally uses very typical “racist” signifiers – such as “our nig” or “the mistress” – when referring to her characters, yet she also underscores the lack of security and freedom felt by her female characters who fear for their own well-being. As Barbara Christian states in her introduction to *The Hazeley Family*, “Afro-American writers used various tactics to overcome racial stereotypes like the smiling plantation darky that white publishers of the era demanded of ‘colored’ writers” (xxvii). What Johnson tried to do was not only break the stereotype but in effect compare the typical family lifestyles of both white and black Americans. Despite the exclusion of racial identity, she underlines the theme of (black) protagonist Flora’s education by including within it the story of another (white) young woman’s growth. In a subplot, Johnson demonstrates how young (black) men are threatened by social vices such as drinking, gambling, and petty crimes, when they leave home to work in other towns. The issue at hand in the novel is thus not the race of the characters, but the differentiation between gender roles. Flora Hazeley is a typical sixteen year old daughter of a small town railroad worker whose aunt attempts to raise her according to “her own idea of what constituted education of a girl” (Johnson *The Hazeley*

Family, 39). The moral development of the girl is the impetus behind the novel's structure—what does it matter that the heroines are black? Barbara Christian states that, regardless of race, “the naturalness of family and home and woman's place in it” (Introduction to Johnson *The Hazeley Family*, xxxvi) are the most important messages and to make these messages more palatable, Johnson related them in an apparently race-free novel.

As is highlighted in *The Hazeley Family*, education for girls constituted additional preparation in domestic skills whereas boys received training for specific trades. Johnson also embodies this theme in *Clarence and Corinne*. After their father kills their mother and abandons the children, Corinne is immediately assigned to Miss Rachel, who, although professing to be a Christian woman, virtually abuses Corinne both verbally and physically. Clarence, on the other hand, the non-Christian who later becomes “converted” is immediately apprenticed to a doctor. Johnson added some twists to this seemingly sexist and typical scenario, though. Corinne's love of the Bible and endurance of her hard-knock life cause her to eventually end up in a happy, stable environment. Clarence's luck continually dwindles throughout the plot until he also finds religion and works toward becoming a learned Christian. Johnson needed to portray Corinne in this way so that the female character would be believable; her original obedience becomes a catalyst for her independence. This independence and nonconformity was also portrayed in Johnson's characters of Helen, the schoolteacher, and her invalid sister, Mary. Similar gender roles and learning outcomes – belief in Christianity pays, non-belief results in one's downfall – are exemplified in Johnson's *The Hazeley Family* as well.

Just as authors created characters like this, women themselves devised “social foils, such as being called by God to do these extraordinary things, so that they still

be [are] accepted as women” (Yee 170), despite color differences. Johnson presents exemplary characters that offer readers moral guidance and subliminally affect them by raising up the African American race through literary discourse because the readers are tricked into making their own assumptions. Again, this is the methodology of utilizing the master’s tools to tear down the master’s house. Because most readers would probably assume Johnson’s characters – and Johnson herself – to be white, the joke is on the reader for not allowing him/herself to be culturally color-blind. This issue is not only central to women’s literature of the time, of course. Andrea Newlyn refers to issues of “racial crossing” as resulting in a lack of privilege, as in Sinclair Lewis’s 1947 novel *Kingsblood Royal*, where a seemingly white man, Neil Kingsblood, attempts to pass as black. If one were color-blind when reading these novels, there would be no assumption about race; the reader would be entirely open-minded about the possibilities. Richard Dyer states, “There is a specificity of whiteness, even when the text itself is not trying to show it to you, doesn’t even know that it is there to be shown” (*White* 14). Johnson must have intrinsically understood this. By manipulating the language, she was blending her needs with what the society around her expected, and this was, in effect, a form of education for Johnson herself and for others. But as I mentioned earlier, it is difficult to clearly ascertain what Johnson was up to; she can be measured in relation to other African American women writers of her time, or she can be a parenthetical writer who does not quite fit anywhere. Regardless, Johnson was obviously well-educated and she sought to further the cause of educating blacks and dispelling the cultural assumptions made by whites.

As Harriet Jacobs did, many writers argue that they write for themselves, yet at the same time there is so much validity awarded to the work when someone else

reads what has been written, by establishing a specific audience. However, when attempting to overtly convince a primarily white audience of the injustices maintained by slavery and racism, writers such as Jacobs and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper might also have felt greatly discouraged. Frances Smith Foster, University of California professor and editor of works by Harper, claims that “Not only did African American women appropriate the English language to record their truths, but assuming prerogatives to its literary traditions, they consciously revised that tradition to more accurately conform to their truths and their visions” (Foster, *Written By Herself* 2). Indeed, Harper was using the language of the dominant culture because that was all that was available to her. Despite accurately conveying “their truths and their visions,” using this jaded language would greatly distort the meaning of what is written because of who is reading the words – namely, a white audience – because the person attempting to utilize the language (the black woman) was purposefully excluded from its realm. Naturally trying to employ such an “exclusive” language is not comfortable, for it was – and is constantly – undergoing the wear and tear of everyday existence, not to mention the fact that it is designed for another person (or persons) entirely. Jarena Lee, an activist mentioned earlier, described finding her voice as similar to donning a garment “which entirely enveloped my whole person, even to my fingers ends” (Andrews, 29). If language only acknowledges the existence of white society, then, there is no possible way that language is not up for revision. Harper enjoyed a hard-won reputation as a poet, orator, and activist, and wished to challenge the deep-rooted influences of some of the most strategically racist literature the nation of white Americans had produced; she wished to refute myths and stereotypes perpetuated by writers such as Thomas Nelson Page and Helen Hunt Jackson but also to expand upon the ideologies already put forth by

earlier and contemporary black women writers. Harper knew that if she failed, as Foster states, she would be cited as one possessing the “artistic inferiority of Afro-Americans in general” (Foster, *A Brighter Coming Day* xxxiv). Foster has noted the similarity between Harper and some of her fictionalized characters responding in part to a white presence. The black community, as Harper was aware, was inevitably shaped by the cultural politics of the time. Her character of Annette in *Trial and Triumph*, for example, has been taught to “believe that not only is her own honor at stake as a student, but that as a representative of her branch of the human race, she is on the eve of winning, or losing, not only for herself, but for others” (Harper, *Trial and Triumph* 227).

From the efforts at self-construction, Harper gleans the knowledge and courage necessary to recreate a vision of history. Harper’s subject and characters enable the African American woman to speak, for she is now placed, as Carby adds, “outside the images of the conventional heroine” (59). These images of the conventional heroine did not possess the adequate means to portray the complexity of culture. By maintaining a clear strategy of constructing selfhood, Harper melds the voices of all the women before her, she follows their instructions and patterns for weaving themselves into the culture and into the history that was previously ill-equipped to acknowledge them. These women have all “elevated the tone of society” (Harper, *Sowing and Reaping* 175) and as Harper combines the voices of her nineteenth-century African American sisters, she states in the end of *Trial and Triumph*: “permit me to say under the guise of fiction, I have essayed to weave a story which I hope will subserve a deeper purpose than the mere amusement of the hour, that it will quicken and invigorate human hearts and not fail to impart a lesson of usefulness and value” (285). Simultaneously, Harper faced taboos in cultural and literary politics.

Her novel *Iola Leroy* has been seen as an idealization of the nineteenth-century opinions of womanhood and therefore Harper's work was seen as acquiescence to the standards of identity established by the dominant culture.

While Harper's writing might be valued by some as historical document, it is often indistinguishable from typical nineteenth-century novels. This is broadened by Foster's edition of *Three Rediscovered Novels*, which Harper had published serially in the *Christian Recorder*. As John Ernest stated in a 1994 lecture, the novels are Harper's emphatic warnings about "the dangers of intemperance, greed and disunion within the African-American community." Foster argues in her introduction to the works that they are "clearly not protest stories or guided tours of black folk culture designed primarily to convert and convict readers outside of the African American culture. These books speak about and to African Americans themselves" (xxvii). Harper's speeches, prose, poetry, and novels evoke the daily struggles and triumphs of black women in the public world. Whether they be purely autobiographical or not, certainly it is obvious that Harper was equating literacy with freedom. She understood that her rhetorical skills would be used as a measure of her race's inherent ability but in addition, her work would also serve as a reminder that history is a dynamic and diverse process. Readers and writers possess variably conditioned minds and we are all historical agents. We all possess the power to re-envision the world around and that within.

2.6 CONCLUSION: A New Mirror

As has been suggested, the first black novels were written for a white – or certainly "white sympathetic" – audience. Because of the alienation of the African

American race, not to mention the denial of their social worth, black women authors specifically needed to camouflage their true motive, which was to educate and affect the literary audience by raising awareness and cultural consciousness. This similar methodology can be seen in the use of pseudonyms that many white women have taken on over the years, such as the Brontë sisters or George Eliot, in order to be even remotely considered by male editors and by society at large. This is a type of camouflage or costume required because society was so conditioned to take seriously only work produced by (white) men. The same appears to be true in many cases of African American literature: society is conditioned to consider seriously only works by white (male, in many cases) authors. Racism, like sexism, is endemic to the history of human societies.

The characters presented by African American female authors, widely known or those becoming newly discovered, are more overtly symbolic rather than representative of true life experience. I refer once again to Flora Hazeley, who, according to Barbara Christian, “affects both the young and her elders. Her example encourages her mother to change her ways while the sixteen-year-old passes on her values of godliness, caring, and homemaking to young girls” (Introduction to Johnson *The Hazeley Family*, xxx-xxx). Flora is a good model for *all* women. In her *Black Feminist Criticism*, Christian states that a woman, “because she bears and raises children, has, for better or worse, embodied those intangibles of a culture deemed worthy to be passed on more than any code of law or written philosophy” (4). It is irrelevant that Flora Hazeley is a black character, for she is a prototype for any nineteenth-century woman, and if a white audience is subliminally influenced by what they are privy to as readers, then Johnson has accomplished what she set out to do. The authors and activists mentioned in this essay intended to offer an ideal and

have it work in the real world eventually. Foster said that black women “knew it took more than words to change society and they knew that their words would be subjected to interpretations engendered by non-literary expectations and assumptions” (18).

Rather than simply speak or write, black women took on community activism as a form of protest, but it also provided spiritual sustenance. Women were, as Yellin explains, “transforming themselves from the objects of the discourse of others into the subjects of their own discourse” (79). To do this, changes had to occur at the most innate, soul-level. Because literature is so often the correspondent to cultural issues, authors found themselves both consciously and unconsciously writing about subjects that were already part of the accepted belief systems. African American writers had to explore therefore the established authoritative texts. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was not an accurate portrayal of slave life. No longer was the dominant belief in servitude – “our nig,” the “darkies” and “mammies” – acceptable. In fact, such terms are verbally abusive and emotionally traumatizing a culture’s fault lines are built in, yet sometimes they are so well hidden, so mainstreamed, that they are no longer perceived as faults. Racism and sexism are two prime examples of this; recognition of the fault lines, the potential weak points, has to occur before reconstruction can even begin. Jarena Lee, Julia Foote, and Zilpha Elaw each placed herself in the position of martyr, denying “conventional feminine qualities of submission and passivity,” as Hazel Carby states, and allowing themselves to take on a role of “active resistance” (Carby 56). Their choices smoothed out some of the problematic areas of the conventional language and attitudes toward African American women. Amelia Johnson and Harriet Jacobs struggled to construct a new prototype, but because they were still using the same

jaded language, the task fell short. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, aware of the politics of discourse, built upon the trials and triumphs of her predecessors and contemporaries to completely rework the identity of the black female.

African American writing has indeed been confronted with a series of trials, yet the triumphs are finally beginning to emerge as well. Without the building process, the development and combining efforts – sometimes seeming to be coming from vastly different angles – we would not be hearing these voices today. To some, the issues are loud and clear, to others there is merely a whisper. Through their efforts of social reform, writing autobiographically, even when masked through supposedly fictionalized events, and arriving at their own self-actualization, these women have marked a difference in the perception of African American women and their place in literary discourse. The task for us all is to make sure the voices are never silenced, never ignored, never swallowed up in other areas, and certainly never disparaged. Most of all, the language that we as humans utilize – in our religions, our educational systems, and our written documents, be they historically or fictionally intended – must remain under constant supervision by every one of us, regardless of race or gender, or place in history. Otherwise, the effects of PTSlaveD will continually haunt our perceptions of black women and their actuality and participation in American history and culture.

Chapter Three: Contending Forces and Separate Worlds

If you surrender to the wind you can ride it.

- Toni Morrison

3.1 Introduction: The Post-Traumatic, Beloved Past

Often historical studies present us with paradoxical and even contradictory ideas. While categorized oppression exists in every culture, ultimately history is a fictive premise. As slavery became an economic necessity, one filled with negotiations both morally and monetarily, the implicit cultural training that was enforced upon Americans of all backgrounds was one of mutual dependence, however obscured by cultural differences. The biases inherent in history become transmuted into a subjective past; that is, there are intimate questions posed by writing and identity through story and the building of narrative through emerging voices. As Toni Morrison elucidates in many of her novels, the roots of slavery are present – both subtly and overtly – in American culture. Through the amalgamation of names, the blending of music and art, and the acknowledgement of many African cultures having been virtually annihilated, Morrison's characters, like non-fiction narrative writers, try to make sense of the world in which they find themselves surviving, often with tendrils of confusion and certainly haunted by ghosts of their pasts.

We have seen in the previous chapter that the same autobiographical, evangelical, and other forms of writing that bear witness to the trauma of slavery also provide ways of working through the trauma. The writing carries within it the hallmarks of a traumatic experience, but demonstrate that by working through this experience, they come in some sense after the fact: they are a post-trauma. As such,

the writing bears the hallmarks of classic PTSD: dissociation, detachment, fear, helplessness and horror, re-experiencing the trauma, diminished response, guilt, shame, and despair. What renders this writing an expression of *PTSlaveD*, more specifically, is not simply the content of the traumatic experiences (as the experience of slavery, that is). Rather, it is a specific cultural expression that writes back to slavery but also embeds the residual impact of slavery within the cultural fabric of America. The form of dissociation or detachment that takes place in the literature of slavery, for example, is not simply a withdrawal from society writ large: it is a form of withdrawal into the slave narrative, in the case of Harriet Jacobs, or into evangelical doctrine, in the case of others. This is to say that the writing that survives slavery captures for the immediate reading public and for subsequent generations of readers the expression of this withdrawal from slavery and the society built upon its brutal foundations.

In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which a much later generation of writing is in some sense still bound up in the post-trauma established in these earliest narratives, yet continues to find new ways to seek to work through the trauma in a manner that has much in common with – and therefore may well be a clear index of – PTSD, where the traumatic event is the whole history of slavery. Through the writings of Toni Morrison, I contend that we witness renewals of the hallmarks of PTSD: dissociation in the form of a refusal to simply absorb the slave past; detachment from the cultural present that remains haunted by its slave origins; fear, helplessness and horror expressed in the idea that mere remembrance is unacceptable, since the memory is already filtered through white history on the one hand or an already post-traumatic literature on the other; a re-experiencing of the trauma through an engagement with its literary heritage, but at the same time a form

of diminished response (as discussed already in relation to Jacobs) by virtue of the fact verisimilitude is risked in the fictionalizing treatment of singular though representative events; guilt and shame, encountered in the suspicion that anger or silence, being only directed toward the slave past, may take part in a form of complicity in the post-slavery present; and, finally, despair in the realization that naming and identity are so deeply enmeshed in the historical slave experience that there may be no other present or future than one characterized to the core by a post-slavery culture.

Further in this dissertation, I will delve into issues raised more in a fictional or creative venue, as tracing the history of the race problem in sociology is tantamount, certainly. But tracing reality is the central problem of the discipline of trauma study/trauma theory itself. Namely, these texts exist as a form of evidence or testimony. When fiction writers and artists collude (unintentionally or intentionally) to raise the consciousness of these theoretical footholds to a social reality that has existed over the past few hundred years, the craft becomes influential in shaping human beings. These next few sections will ostensibly transform the previous “view from nowhere” that modern readers of history have not been able to successfully translate into a vernacular language for a democratic, global society.

3.2 Fiction as Historiography: Recognizing the Branches and Digging Up the Roots of Trauma in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*

Definitions of freedom vary. To some, true freedom means facing problems head on, no distractions, no deceptions; freedom is not simply location, although in slave times, reaching the North via the Underground Railroad was vital. To others, freedom is a symbol: a flag of one’s country or the government one supports. Toni

Morrison explores the idea of freedom - from the ghosts of slavery, freedom to live one's life without persecution, and to heal the personal psyche - in her novel *Beloved*, a haunting, historically accurate fictional piece. With one reading of the novel, one might focus on Sethe and Denver's escape, in which they gain freedom from Beloved. Another reading might interpret the story as Sethe's journey toward freedom. But it is Denver's story which provides the most compelling struggle for freedom. Denver is "the daughter of history" (Rushdy 571) and Morrison's novel is about achieving freedom by accepting one's past as it impacts the present. *Beloved* is, on one level, Denver's quest for freedom and her journey toward enlightenment. It is Denver's message to future generations and although it may not be a story "to pass on," it is one to be experienced. Although Denver did not live through slavery, the impact of her journey through slavery's haunting is unmistakable.

Denver as a character, as an archetype, has inherited the memory and experience of slavery. As Morrison says in *Playing in the Dark*, "the subject of the dream is the dreamer" (17); the character of Denver - representative of many slave survivors - is forced to confront the memories of slavery just as the American culture must do so. Denver is faced with the same dilemma as any culture with 'ghosts,' for as Miriam Horn says in an interview with Toni Morrison: "You can't absorb it; it's too terrible. So you just try your best to put it behind you. It's a perfect dilemma. Forgetting is unacceptable. Remembering is unacceptable" (75). It is *slavery itself* that impacts American society, for slavery, "Beloved is saying ...is the thing to blame" (Rushdy 581), and Morrison is asking us all to read our history by confronting the haunting memories - just as Denver learns to do - with that in mind; to recognize ourselves as the subjects of history and not simply as the observers of some distant past.

Sethe's history and Sethe's story are those of a woman trying to cope. Denver's story is a journey of discovery. Each of the characters is, in a sense, writing her own history, but certainly not from scratch. Histories can only be written from the artifacts and pieces we dig up and to which we give voice. Both Sethe and Denver are on journeys, as Marilyn Sanders Mobley has said, "not to the self but to the community of others" (132); however, Denver cannot reach the community of others until she completes her personal journey, until she knows her true identity, including the past horrors she has tried so hard to ignore. The murder of her sister, whom I shall call Beloved for identification purposes, as her "naming" is another issue I wish to examine later in this chapter, also killed a part of Denver. Denver was nursed on Beloved's blood, therefore Beloved is, in essence, a part of Denver. Beloved also represents the trauma of slavery and that, too, is a part of Denver. This novel is an awakening of Beloved *within* Denver and Denver's acceptance of her there.

When the ghost of Beloved first arrives, it is a baby and with its "venom," it drives out the members of the household with whom it does not seek reconciliation or even, perhaps, retribution. The baby ghost represents the part of Denver that she has yet to acknowledge within herself; Denver is the angry survivor of a traumatic situation. As Ashraf Rushdy states, "Beloved is more than just a character in the novel.... She is the embodiment of the past that must be remembered in order to be forgotten; she symbolizes what must be reincarnated in order to be buried, properly" (571). This aspect of Denver's personality is the *opposite* of the usual ideal associated with feminine selflessness. Deep within herself, Denver knows that her mother committed a crime so heinous as to cause herself and her family to be ostracized from the community. But there is also a part of Denver that recognizes (but does not openly admit) that her mother committed this act completely out of

“the extreme measures a person would take to escape the ‘seething hell’ of slavery” (573-74). Denver needs to be selfish, or more appropriately, self-contained, in order to make peace with herself and with her past. Ostracized as Denver is, she learns to cope with life in her own manner, perhaps by creating her own world since nobody offers to help her. If anything, the community of others that Denver strives to reach is comprised of the same “others” that shun and push her and her family away. The community’s rejection can only last so long, for no one is unscathed when it comes to history or to sins resulting from historical trauma. Eventually the community realizes its own responsibility in coping, just as Denver needs to realize exactly what these horrors are before she can begin to fully understand her role or anyone else’s role.

In order to understand Denver, one must first examine the character of her mother, Sethe. Sethe escapes from slavery in Kentucky and journeys to freedom in Ohio. As I have stated earlier, freedom is not necessarily one’s physical liberty, but one’s mindset. Sethe is free for only twenty eight days, the time of an average female menstrual cycle. Interestingly, she gives birth to Denver at the beginning of this “freedom” cycle and murders the baby Beloved at the end; symbolically and literally a bloodshed. Morrison uses birth and nursing allusions throughout the novel, which is another reason why I purport that Beloved and Denver eventually become one and the same person, or image, in Sethe’s mind and perhaps even in Denver’s. The mothering issue is crucial, for Morrison is trying to forcefully dispel the notion that had long been purported in relation to motherhood under slavery: she says that “slave women are not mothers; they are ‘natally dead,’ with no obligations to their offspring or their own parents” (*PD* 21). While pregnant with Denver, Sethe was still nursing Beloved. She says to Paul D, “nobody had her milk but me” (*Beloved*, 16), and

because she had sent the children ahead of her in escaping, Sethe prides herself in the fact that the baby girl “wouldn’t have forgot” her because of the milk. It is therefore particularly invasive to Sethe when the boys at Sweet Home take her milk from her. It is also after that incident when Sethe receives the lashes which form the tree-like scar on her back; she is mentally and physically scarred as one symbol of life is taken from her (foreshadowing the death of the baby girl) and another is imposed upon her.

Just as Sethe is forced to shed blood trying to protect her babies’ nourishment, the older baby (Beloved) is forced to shed blood that ends up becoming Denver’s nourishment. After Schoolteacher and the other men trying to capture her find Sethe in the woodshed, “Sethe reached up for the baby without letting the dead one go” and “Denver took her mother’s milk right along with the blood of her sister” (Morrison *Beloved* 152). Despite the horrifying image, Sethe is in control of what is happening to herself and to her children. Sethe ends up taking the infant Denver to prison with her, as if the child is branded, that is, carries equal guilt, with the crime of the mother. Denver has even ingested the symbolic blood of her mother’s crime, therefore both daughters have inherited slavery. Obsessions are delusions that ultimately impact a person’s reality, and Sethe intensifies her will as a magnifying glass intensifies sunlight. She accidentally discovers that by jettisoning her diverse abilities she forgets about being a complete person. She throws her whole being into a single obsession, by which she achieves narrow excellence; that obsession becomes Beloved. Sethe wishes to possess her returned daughter completely, so as not to allow her to ever “escape” again. Obviously this kind of behavior is bound to affect her other daughter, Denver, as well. Ownership of Beloved is a central struggle between Sethe and Denver. Although it begins as an unconscious impulse, Denver is at first possessive of her mother when Paul D arrives at 124 Bluestone; she “flat-out

asked Paul D how long he was going to hang around” (43). Interestingly, Paul D knows Sethe from their “past life” at Sweet Home, so it is perhaps appropriate at this point in her development for Denver to reject Paul D based on that symbolic notion. Paul D and Sethe’s collective memories threaten Denver, and justly so. After fearing the impending loss of her mother, Denver turns her attention readily and easily to the ghost who is embodied as Beloved. For the women in *Beloved*, then, unconditional love means risking excessively and therefore leads to the desire to possess.

Sethe “wears on her body the signs of her greatest ordeal at the Sweet Home plantation ... scars on her back” (Gates 347). But Denver bears scars of slavery as well. She also becomes the object of scorn due to the crime her mother committed. Sethe and Denver are continually subjected to the community’s ostracism. Denver comprehends her own loneliness, the destiny that began with her literal and figurative imprisonment when she was an infant. Denver’s moment of realization—that she is also the object of scorn—occurs at school with Lady Jones. Nelson Lord “asked her the question about her mother” (102) that forces Denver to confront the reality. Denver willfully isolates herself and purposely avoids confrontation about her situation after she realizes she is the living symbol of her mother’s crime. While Sethe committed a legal crime, Sethe and Denver both wear the badge of their history, their black skin. Concerning Beloved, however, Sethe “both seeks forgiveness and ‘luxuriates’ in it.... Sethe seems more and more compelled to earn [Beloved’s] forgiveness, perhaps realizing that reconciliation with Beloved is finally a way to forgive herself even while she rejects judgment” (Otten 91). Sethe is a marked woman, ostracized by the community because of her excessive behavior. The novel “inscribes the story of a mother-daughter reunion, of female bonding into a community of women, and of the connection between this world and the next”

(Mobley 175).

In addition to the judgments passed, the community plays a crucial role in the plot dynamics in *Beloved*. The townspeople embark on a peculiar attempt to conduct a witch-trial against Sethe and her family, resulting in a virtual public tattooing of them. But this method of marking deserves public shame of its own. Sethe must be accepted back into the community, so must Denver. They both “could move from discipline and punishment to disciplining and punishing; from social ostracism to social rank” (Morrison, *Playing*, 35). It is difficult to determine the real causes surrounding the ostracism of Sethe’s family, but it is particularly the women who appeared to take peculiar interest in whatever punishment might ensue. Women are involved in Baby Suggs’ festival initially, and women possess the voices that break over Sethe at the end of the novel, reclaiming her. When celebrating their escape from slavery (short-lived as the “freedom” is), it is the excessiveness of the celebration as it appears to the townspeople. Perhaps celebration was not in order so extravagantly *because* of the underlying knowledge that no one could ever completely escape slavery? The community members witnessed Sethe’s earlier violence toward her children, thus the taint of slavery has touched the entire town. Baby Suggs understands the feeling of disappointment in the air, but the full impact is not clear to her. She’s still not able to create what is satisfactory to the community. The culture is still very much enslaved: “She told them that the only grace they could have was the grace they could imagine. That if they could not see it, they could not have it” (Morrison *Beloved*, 88). There seem to be claims and counterclaims to bipolar positions, but the overwhelming impetus is *don’t do it to excess*. Of course, no one has the guts to come right out and state that in as many words; everyone remains silent, waiting. The only grace the community has is the lack of vocalization.

Their silence is perfect; it is graceful.

Just as silence is promoted within the family and the community, Morrison forces attention to what is *not* said in other situations. In the scene when Ella rescues Sethe, Ella “listened for the holes—the things the fugitives did not say; the questions they did not ask” (92). Silence is the response of the townspeople who do not warn Baby Suggs and Sethe that Schoolteacher is coming after Sethe and her children. The loss of words is more cataclysmic than any warning could have been. This silence is perpetuated over the years, too.

The townspeople may not be as vehemently ostracizing Sethe and Denver, but they are not exactly welcoming them either. Conversely, Denver loves to hear—over and over—the story of her birth because the journey her mother made to freedom also represents Denver’s journey into the world. Denver doesn’t ask anything about *why* her mother was running; she doesn’t ask what she already knows. As if her presence isn’t enough, she demands and controls information from her mother. Sethe abides by this unsaid agreement with Denver as well, and as Mobley says (quoting Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), “The stories we tell ourselves and our children function to order our world, serving to create both a foundation upon which each of us constructs our sense of reality and a filter through which we process each event that confronts us every day” (93). Like Ella, Denver doesn’t like “past errors taking over the present” (256), because for Denver, the present is all-important and all-encompassing. Yet the present also encompasses slavery, which, as this story reveals, is not an issue of the past in any respect, much as the characters might wish it to be. The inexpressibility of the subject, to Denver, reasserts the “depth of their suffering” (Gates 354). Denver’s resentment toward her mother and her mother’s crime is translated into outright hostility; the resentment is actually against slavery, and Sethe

is a representative of that past that Denver doesn't wish — or perhaps is not prepared just yet — to face.

The hostility Denver feels is subtle, though, and Morrison expresses it as a form of sibling rivalry between Denver and Beloved, or perhaps representative of Denver's two conflicting identities, her present self as she wishes to define it, and her past--which impacts her present self--that she suppresses. Denver "hated the stories her mother told that did not concern herself, which is why Amy was all she ever asked about. The rest was a gleaming, powerful world made more so by Denver's absence from it. Not being in it, she hated it and wanted Beloved to hate it too, although there was no chance of that at all" (*Beloved*, 62). What Denver has yet to realize is that she is, in fact, in that story, but she "finds it impossible to ask about the moment Sethe might have expressed her love murderously" (Rushdy 580) because that would mean facing things she isn't willing to face. When Denver finally assumes responsibility for the resentment she has harbored against her mother, she also reaches out to the community. The circle is then completed, for what was left unsaid (by the community) in the beginning is still being left unsaid by those who know what is missing. It is ironic, according to Rushdy, because "although Denver thinks that the present alone is what interests her, she luxuriates in the past, in dwelling on a shadowy history which she is unwilling to confront or confirm" (580). When Denver notices "the convergence of her mother and sister, as though their identities begin to merge" (Otten 92), it then becomes possible for Denver to protect her mother from the wrath of her dead sister. Symbolically, the memory of Beloved possesses Sethe and is well into the process of destroying her. Only Denver, who recognizes the potential for destruction, can save Sethe.

As Morrison subtly intimates, patterns of abuse repeat themselves throughout

generations. Morrison's fictitious characters grapple with this knowledge, whether faced forthright or not. It calls to mind the *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, renowned anti-slavery advocate and women's rights orator, who seems a classic case of emotional and physical abuse. In her case, the violence was often perpetrated by her mother, who, most probably repeated what she herself "inherited" from her own history – from owners, parents, and society in general. In her time, as in too many more contemporary situations, society dictated that abusive treatment was not only acceptable, but expected. Traumatic events have shaped, and continue to shape, Western history and current society. This is what it means to be haunted by a collective memory: painful events are perpetrated, but often at the hands and minds of few, if any, living members that may have directly suffered. The issue of PTSD within American culture is certainly intergenerational, but it is far too easy to memorialize past injustices rather than take or assign responsibility. By writing in both narrative and fictional forms, acknowledging PTSD shows that some members of the American culture refuse to condone collective amnesia; living readers whose post-traumatic responsibilities are urged to recognize that these issues are both retrospective and prospective. Trauma never happens only once.

3.3 Anger and Silence = Complicity?

Marianne Hirsch argues that "anger may have to remain unspeakable" and that "the mother-daughter conversations that do occur ... are conversations from beyond the grave; if Sethe is to explain her incomprehensible act, she has to do so to a ghost" (428). I find this explanation incomplete. Although Sethe may have a loose grip on reality during these conversations, for she is pestered with delusions, she is very

much aware of Denver as an audience; she has always been aware of Denver since Denver is an extension of and substitute for Beloved as well as an extension of herself. Sethe doesn't speak of it, but she knows that Denver is just as much a child of slavery as she is herself. As Otten states, "Once Denver begins to comprehend the enormity of Sethe's love and experience 'shame' for her mother's suffering, she herself becomes morally alive" (92). Supporting Hirsch's theory, it is through *not* directly speaking to Denver that Sethe makes the clearest communication and "although Sethe thinks she is attempting to convince only one daughter of her love, in reality she is convincing the other daughter, too" (Rushdy 583). Sethe knows intuitively that speaking indirectly provides the only communication condition under which Denver will listen. It is also the only way Sethe can begin to speak of slavery and to confront it, although it is through the guise of her dead daughter.

Silences and speaking indirectly seem to be perpetuated by the female characters, and as Morrison states in *Playing in the Dark*, "in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourse" (9). The residents of 124 Bluestone are all female (once Howard and Buglar run away); even Beloved enters in silence: she "came through the door and they ought to have heard her tread, but they didn't" (Morrison 100). The men—specifically Paul D and Stamp Paid—consistently break the silences and speak almost *too* directly; that is, until Denver reclaims herself and her identity at the end of the novel. Paul D forces Sethe to discuss Sweet Home and all the unresolved issues she has hidden within herself (or been unconsciously forced, by her own fear and by Denver's existence, to keep hidden) about Halle and her life there. Typical of the slave narrative tradition, the social context in which Sethe and her family have been living shapes how she interprets her own story. If we see Sethe as a type of author, the community and her own guilt prevent her "from

dwelling too long or too carefully on the more sordid details of [her] experience” (Morrison “The Site of Memory,” 109). Paul D’s version of the narrative so differs from Sethe’s that it frightens her; it makes her question her own edition of her story. Mobley states in her essay “A Different Remembering: Memory, History and Meaning in *Beloved*” that what also comes back through the stories Paul D shares are fragments of history for which Sethe is unprepared, such as the fact that years ago her husband had witnessed the white boys forcibly take milk from her breasts, but had been powerless to come to her rescue or stop them. Furthermore, his personal stories of enduring a “‘bit’ in his mouth--the barbaric symbol of silence and oppression that Morrison says created a perfect ‘labor force’--along with numerous other atrocities ... introduce elements of the classic slave narrative into the text” (Gates 362). Because this narrative forces Sethe to encounter her past more openly, it is to Paul D that she gains the courage to disclose some of her own secrets.

Secrets are difficult to uncover when they are hidden so well. Stamp Paid is the one who finally discloses what is really inside Sethe: the story of the murder and the reasons behind it. The novel consists of a series of blockages followed by interventions in a complex choreography of emotions. Both Stamp Paid and Paul D “share in a humanizing guilt” (Otten 90) because they have both been victims of slavery, and because they feel powerless to understand what Sethe has had to endure. As Stamp Paid says to Paul D, “She ain’t crazy. She love those children. She was trying to out hurt the hurter” (234). Just as it affects Denver, the topic of what slavery has done to them comes crashing down upon Paul D when he hears of this terrible incident. Paul D’s self-preservation is termed as the “tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be” (72-73). Paul D carries within himself his own history of enslavement, whipping, and being on the chain gang. Freedom was the “ideal”

because he didn't think it could get any worse. But the concept of a mother's love is alien to Paul D; he cannot understand the bond between Sethe and her daughters. Paul D represents a Dimmesdale type character, shrinking from society in a twisted form of self-recrimination. Paul D withdraws in order to free his mind enough to accept what happened to Sethe and her children. In his eyes, slavery has a different form and a different name as it applies to Sethe, for she physically escaped Sweet Home as far as he can tell.

Because experience varies according to each person, so does one's image of self. The process of naming is another crucial issue in the plot and development of characters and their acceptance of the past and of themselves. The naming process calls into question opposing forces: the affirmation of self versus the affirmation of the community. Russell states that it is "naming, as well as 'rememory,' that threads its way through this novel. These characters are not 'slaves,' but people who give themselves back to themselves by the process of naming. Baby Suggs, known to her master as Jenny, and called so, is never asked if that is her name" (110). Stamp Paid goes through a similar experience. He says to Paul D, "Let me tell you how I got my name.... They called me Joshua ... I renamed myself ... and I'm going to tell you why I did it" (232). Rather than snap his wife's neck because she has been forced to sleep with the white master on many occasions, Stamp Paid tells Paul D he decided to change his name—as a form of self-protection—and leave. The severity of slavery and all of its associated baggage takes its toll on everyone, yet the key here is self-identity and the power of choosing for oneself.

The naming of children not only substantiates their personal existence but immortalizes their ancestry as well. The ownership connotation is intentional: by "possessing" one's children, one can fabricate ownership of self. Sethe names

Denver after the white girl who helps her deliver the child. But Amy Denver is there “to remind us that nineteenth-century child labor and its attendant abuses caused poor whites to suffer as well as blacks” (Russell 108). Morrison promotes an interesting hierarchy in the particular story of Amy Denver and the birth of the baby. Amy seems to immediately take on the role of superior as soon as she meets Sethe. Whether or not Amy is even capable of helping Sethe is irrelevant to her, despite the fact that they are equally oppressed people. In Amy’s case, though, this comparison is not within her capability, for, as Morrison states in *Playing in the Dark*, the “act of enforcing racelessness ... is itself a racial act” (46). Amy does seem to subtly ‘pull rank’ on Sethe, constantly referring to velvet and going to the city; she makes herself important by silently asserting that Sethe must certainly have no acquaintance with such luxuries. Amy is symbolic of those lacking confidence tending to overstate their importance. I believe Amy unconsciously reacts to many similarities between her own and Sethe’s situations, but even as a lower class white woman, Amy’s social standing is higher than a slave’s. Amy knows the power of racism, thus her being white becomes endemic to her treatment of Sethe. This is similar to the relationship between Huckleberry Finn and Jim in that the level on which both characters exist, intellectually and sociologically, is practically the same. Morrison points out two things in Twain’s novel that are also true in her own: “the apparently limitless store of love and compassion the black [man] has for his white friend and white masters; and his assumption that the whites are indeed what they say they are, superior and adult.” Just as Jim does, Sethe concedes her inferior status to Amy “(not as slave, but as black) and despises it” (*PD* 56-57). Amy Denver humiliates Sethe to a degree, but Sethe still admires her and subsequently names her daughter after the white girl.

Just as Morrison’s tool of self-renaming acts as *validation*, lack of naming

operates in a similar manner. Beloved is never given a true name that we know of. Before the escape from Sweet Home and the birth of Denver, Sethe only refers to her as the baby girl. Once she is reunited with her children and Baby Suggs, she is so amazed that her daughter has grown so much in such a short time that she only refers to the child as the “crawling already? baby” (99). All references are made to Beloved as the “crawling already? baby,” during the twenty-eight day period before the murder and in all the “rememory.” That is the only name given to the murdered child. Although it could be interpreted that the *lack* of naming this child is symptomatic of the slave mother’s “natally dead” syndrome mentioned earlier, I would argue that Morrison is again using a silence — something purposely not said — to draw more attention to the second, post-murder naming process of the child. In slavery, Mobley says, “names not only form a historical and cultural index to the past but also empower the community and the individual to shape and affirm their own experiences” (Mobley 103). Sethe’s original naming of her daughter is superseded by the naming process of her daughter for the gravestone. Sethe sells a part of herself for the memory of her daughter, literally and emotionally:

Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten could she have got “Dearly” too? She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been possible--that for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral.... But what she got, settled for, was the one word that mattered. (Morrison, *Beloved* 5)

Beloved’s new name reflects the struggle and pain her mother went through: names belong to those who do the naming, not to those named.

In many ways Beloved cannot be named because she represents the unforgiving perspective, the “incarnated memory of Sethe’s guilt” (Rushdy 578), and the need Sethe has to forget. The presence of the ghost creates a duality between

Sethe's two daughters. Denver represents the loving view, Sethe's need to remember, and the potential for forgiveness on all levels, personal and public. Sethe faces a dilemma when the baby ghost materializes: rather than a memory, the daughter is a physical reminder of the crime Sethe committed. Baby Suggs has died, her sons have abandoned her, she cannot stand the ghost *or* the community's rejection of her, so Sethe and Denver summon the ghost, hoping that by calling it forth they could end the persecution with "a conversation ...an exchange of views or something" (Moble 174). The process of trying to summon the (nameless) ghost not only forces Sethe into the unwanted memory of having to trade sex for letters on her dead baby's gravestone but it also recalls the act of killing the child in order to save her. The naming custom takes on a completely different mechanism given this preface. The baby child was given a new name and therefore a new identity through death. She is beloved in memory, she is beloved to the healing process, and she is Beloved because that is all Sethe was able to sell of herself to pay for the seven letters on the gravestone. Beloved's name is taken from the words spoken at her funeral; thus her identity is forged in death. The death itself, however, becomes newly conceptualized; it represents slavery and the wish to exterminate the atrocity both physically as well as in memory, impossible as that is. Beloved's naming elucidates the slavery issue as it permeates every aspect of Sethe's life, even after she has escaped physically. As Ronald Takaki states, there is a "relationship between racial and sexual domination" (*Iron Cages*, 137) and the two merge when examined within the institution of slavery.

Sethe's complete 'motherlove' also combines both of these types of oppression: sexual and racial. As Rushdy states when describing the story of Margaret Garner (on whose story Morrison based her novel), she "chose death for

both herself and her most beloved rather than accept being forced to return to slavery and have her children suffer an institutionalized dehumanization” (569). Although Sethe does not kill herself, she may have intended to complete the carnage and remove her entire family—and herself—from schoolteacher, her former owner. A part of her certainly does die, though, spiritually, and she attempts to at least protect her dead child’s memory by purchasing and inscribing a headstone for her, even if it means allowing herself to be dehumanized. This is also Morrison’s way of balking against society’s expectations. Naturally, the community surrounding 124 Bluestone is not one to commemorate the murder of a child, but Sethe won’t let them forget. If they forget the child, they will forget the reason the child was murdered. Sethe does not expect acceptance of what she did, but she demands acknowledgement for the reasons behind it. She wants to remind society that they, too, are to blame for the child’s death. Sethe may physically cover her own whip scars but the pain of them will always be in her memory. Until Beloved’s return, there are only two forms of expression that Sethe knows: silence and apology. Once she is able to accept Beloved, her process of healing occurs. She “acknowledges her act and accepts her responsibility for it while also recognizing the reason for her act within a framework larger than that of individual resolve” (Rushdy 577).

On many occasions throughout the novel, Denver states that she suspects Beloved of being something more than just her dead sister’s spirit. Perhaps this is her recognition not only of her own ancestry, but of all of the other concerns emanating from her sister’s murder and her mother’s violence. Beloved possesses astonishing power and represents “the historical reality of slavery and its consequences ... the issue of mothering ... and the importance of ancestors” (Moblely 170). Rushdy maintains a similar view when he says the novel “both remembers the victimization

of the ex-slaves who are its protagonists and asserts the healing and wholeness that those protagonists carry with them in their communal lives” (575). Both Denver and Beloved - as separate persons and as one spiritual symbol of recognition and forgiveness - help Sethe to come to grips with her own history. Not only do the daughters represent forgiveness, but also they represent society itself critiquing history. Beloved stands for the presence of the past *in the present*. As she becomes the centre of attention, so must slavery become the centre of attention before it can be relegated to the past, that is, forgotten (as Sethe says, “disremembered”) or, more appropriately, left behind. Denver’s story is not over because the issue of slavery and racism are not over. Morrison implies that this unfinished story is everyone’s because of the necessary assimilation of past into present.

All of these issues come into play best in the latter part of the novel when Morrison illustrates the varying, yet strikingly similar, viewpoints of the women in the sections from pages 200-217. This threnody, or lament for the dead, not only fuses the three women, Sethe, Denver and Beloved, but unites past and present. These passages also act as a foreshadowing device for the voices that wash over Sethe: the women of the community coming to reclaim her. Morrison acknowledges just what Denver discovered she could not ignore: that ancestry is an integral part of every individual. On page 216 of *Beloved*, the voices of past and present merge through the blending, a threnody (lament for the dead) of Sethe’s, Denver’s, and Beloved’s:

Beloved
You are my sister
You are my daughter
You are my face; you are me
I have found you again; you have come back to me
You are my Beloved
You are mine

You are mine
You are mine

Whereas Sandi Russell claims that for these characters “Life is only made possible by shutting off some part of themselves” (112-113), I would argue that their process of survival may have been incumbent upon ignoring the past momentarily, but Morrison’s point is that people must accept rather than “shut off” the part of themselves that is slavery. Everyone in this novel somehow “opens that tobacco tin,” and is touched “on the inside part” (Morrison, *Beloved* 117). Denver is the one, at the beginning of the novel, who most wants to live in the present, yet she integrates her family’s history with her own concept of self as her mother’s growth in acceptance of their past and forgiveness of herself. Denver has no choice; if she did not face her own history, her family and indeed her sense of self would disintegrate. Denver realizes that not everyone is as far along as she is in this journey through the past to the present; too many still ignore their history. It is Denver’s voice that speaks at the novel’s conclusion: “Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don’t know her name? Although she has claim, she is not claimed” (275).

Voices not only represent what is being said but what is being heard. Stamp Paid comments that there “used to be voices all round that place. Quiet now ... I can’t hear a thing” (264). The *sound* of voices is what is important here; there is a fundamental, communal understanding taking place with the convergence of voices. For Morrison, the voices and personalities of the past are all embodied in the character of Beloved, who is not gone and still keeps coming back to haunt future generations until she is taken in and acknowledged—with all of her love, and with all

of her venom. The multitude of people in Morrison's novel build "voice upon voice until they found it, and when they did it was a wave of sound wide enough to sound deep water and knock the pods off chestnut trees" (261). The community journeys toward Denver since she finally reached out to them. Denver's journey is a claiming of her dead sister and of slavery as part of her own history. Morrison ends with a moral assumption, but also with a question: will humankind accept this assertion and learn from it? She is asking us to transform our voices, our language and its undertones and not bypass history. Denver learned to pay attention and unless we—as readers, listeners, speakers, and as society writ large—want to be consumed by history, so must we all. We *are* the subjects of this dream; history belongs to us but it also owns us.

3.4 Naming, Shaming, and Identity: First Corinthians and Stamp Paid

The concept of naming is one that most people would trace back to biblical times with the stories of Adam and Eve and ensuing generations of the human race. Or perhaps one might trace history back much further, to prehistoric times and cave drawings. Regardless, naming is a way in which we as humans make sense of the world around us and by which we learn about one another. One of the first phrases learned in a foreign language is, "My name is . . ." and indeed the first question (after "Is it a boy or a girl?") asked to new parents is "What is her name?" Often we are asked what our names mean or if there is any familial, historical, or symbolic significance to them. Names are a very powerful tool of identity, but also of our language, culture, and understanding of society. Imagine what our lives would be like *without* names. It would be a very confusing place indeed. Poet Audre Lorde

describes the concept of “biomythology”: a “deliberate amalgamation of autobiographical fact and mythically resonant fiction that locates her racial identity and self-identity in the battle against racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia in America” (Henke 103). Similarly, many African American writers of fiction and narrative use writing as a vehicle of integration, incorporating characters – real or fictional, biographical or not – as heroes or anti-heroes, proving a way to work through isolation, shame, and early experiences of trauma. As Suzette Henke states, “The trauma victim cannot ... establish a position of safety in the interest of self-recuperation. Instead, she must continue writing as a way of fighting for her life, binding up wounds to body and spirit even as they invade the territory of consciousness and threaten to consume her sense of self” (117).

Toni Morrison incorporates a variety of symbolic and rite-of-passage issues in her work and development of characters. In her novel *Song of Solomon*, Morrison prefaces part one with a pertinent quote after the cover page: “The fathers may soar/And the children may know their names”. The novel is full of references to the naming process, such as the black community’s insistence on calling a particular street ‘Doctor Street’ rather than its legal name assigned by town officials. When the doctor that warranted the name is dead and gone, the community resorts to calling the street ‘Not Doctor Street.’ The character of Macon Dead is illiterate, yet the influence of the Bible allows him to choose—and therefore spell correctly—names for his children:

he had copied the group of letters out on a piece of brown paper; copied, as illiterate people do, every curlicue, arch, and bend in the letters, and presented it to the midwife.

“That’s the baby’s name.”

“You want this for the baby’s name?”

“I want that for the baby’s name. Say it.”

“You can’t name the baby this.”

“Say it.”
“It’s a man’s name.”
“Say it.”
“Pilate.”
“What?”
“Pilate. You wrote down Pilate.”
“Like a riverboat pilot?”
“No. Not like a riverboat pilot. Like a Christ-killing Pilate. You can’t get much worse than that for a name. And a baby girl at that.”
“That’s where my finger went down at.” (18-19)

Interestingly enough, Macon “Milkman” Dead also has daughters named First Corinthians and Magdalene. While naming to the father character is elemental to his family’s heritage, which the process also carries with it, the story highlights how a member of the black community carries inherited familial and racial shame. Class privilege, African American heritage, and identity searching all contribute to tensions that are addressed, mostly, to middle-class African American males who seem to have what J. Brooks Bouson deems a “kind of amnesia about their cultural history – about the shame and trauma of family histories rooted in slavery – and who, in donning the mask of bourgeois (white-identified) ‘pride,’ come to see poor blacks as stigmatized objects of contempt” (75-76). The persistence of shame as it texturizes American culture deals with issues that, for blacks, are fraught with racial prejudice and class conflicts. Morrison’s narrative uses folkloric, biblical, and mythic sources to characterize shame as an inheritance, but also to counteract what bell hooks calls “the color-caste hierarchy” (*Outlaw Culture* 174).

The lyricism of the names and the naming process are typical of Morrison’s style, as well. In *Beloved*, of course, Denver is named after the ‘whitegirl’ Amy Denver, who helped Sethe give birth. It is the lack of a name that names the baby ghost. If Sethe had possessed (or, earned?) enough money to engrave the headstone with the entire thought, “Dearly Beloved,” what would the baby ghost – later the

corporeal Beloved – be called? By choosing to inscribe the tombstone with the one simple term, Sethe is utilizing performative language. Her dead daughter literally becomes what she has called her. Sethe is taught that the origin of her own name is significant. Baby Suggs tells her, “She threw them all away but you... You she gave the name of the black man” (62). The *others* to whom Baby Suggs refers, of course, are white men who most probably raped Sethe’s mother, thus the deleterious effects are haunting. In all of her novels, as Barbara Hill Rigney explains, Morrison “implies the primacy of the maternal and the semiotic in the economy of language in order to achieve *signification*” (emphasis mine, 12). Calling on mythic and inherited rites, Morrison highlights how naming was a particular issue for slaves and their ensuing family members right throughout the generations.

Within the African culture, people would wait a few days to see if the newborn baby would survive, then one of the most important activities was the selection of a name, which was also marked with a celebration. American slaves probably did not hold the celebration, but certainly they would follow the tradition of naming children after close relatives, thereby establishing generational connections (Ernest, “Underground”). Slaves also practiced the use of day names, such as naming a girl born on a Friday “Phoebe.” Sometimes the naming would be in reference to a significant event, such as a recent holiday, that the family experienced, or a place or person that had an impact on the family somehow. Boys and girls born in Africa were traditionally given names that reflect the circumstances surrounding their birth, names that describe the state of their home or their parents’ relationship at the time of birth, or names that indicate what the parents hope the child will become.

The slaves brought to the U.S. from Africa had to endure a number of brutal crimes against them, not the least of which was being stripped of the names they

were given in their native countries. These names held great importance, as they were often bestowed during special ceremonies held to celebrate the giving of a new name. This forced abandonment of something so precious destroyed a vital link to their countries of origin and took away a heritage that dated back much further than that of their enslavers. Rather than being called by the traditional and often very beautiful names that were so much a part of the culture they left behind, African slaves were given new names. Sometimes these new titles were given on the boats that brought them to America, and sometimes they were given by their owners when they arrived. Slave owners thought nothing of replacing what they considered to be strange-sounding, exotic names with ones they could more easily pronounce. These new slave names were often based on the popular names of the time, but they were usually given in their pet or shortened forms. If there was more than one slave with the same name in any given group, they were assigned various identifiers such as “little” or “big” so each would know who was being called for when a master beckoned. Typical names from this period included: Biblical names like Adam and Eve (the names often given to the first man and woman brought aboard each slave ship); short, simple, percussive names like Tom, Jack, or Bill; classical names such as Cato, Nero, Caesar, Pompey, Phoebe, and Venus, which came from such literary sources as the plays of Shakespeare and popular novels of the time; and nicknames like Curly, Tomboy, Prince, and Duke. Also, in the years just prior to the Civil War, it also became fashionable among slave families, as it was among their owners, to use the surnames of American leaders as first names. Washington was the name most often used; Madison and Jefferson also were popular.

Occasionally the slaveholders involved themselves in the naming process, but more frequently it was to silently intervene with their own surnames, which of course

reflected ownership, not kinship. This is true of Paul D, Paul F, and Paul A Garner, the Sweet Home men in *Beloved*, for example. In some cases, there existed humiliating names, as a result of the humor of some owners who named their slaves after unflattering substances or gave them all the same unoriginal name. After emancipation, however, it was typical for former slaves to change their surname or reveal one they'd previously, albeit secretly, adopted, such as the passage where Stamp Paid states, "Let me tell you how I got my name.... They called me Joshua," he said. 'I renamed myself'" (232). Thus, for reasons such as this, the genealogical records of former slaves are virtually impossible to accurately decipher, if they even exist in any legible form.

Because names are such a significant aspect of communication, it is also worth noting the process by which *non-proper* names are given. In *Beloved*, there are various references to *others* by quite obvious signifiers, yet the non-proper names also indicate what is true and exact. For example, terms used to describe white people are run together: *whitegirl*, *whitepeople*. This terminology might also be a reaction to the demeaning terms such as *slavegirl*, *nigger-boy*, *nigger-girl*, *nigger-baby*; one cannot be just a girl, there must be an offensive determinate attached to it. Similarly, white people are not just people, they are whitepeople. Another truism, as far as I can tell, is the reference to the "men without skin." This indirectly refers to William Lloyd Garrison's many anti-slavery comments in an 1838 edition of *The Liberator*, promoting that all people were created equal except those whose skin was dark. Certainly the paradigm is switched here, for if skin is dark then non-dark skin does not exist, a nice twist, indeed; this refers to the white slaveholders who previously oppressed all the slaves at Sweet Home. Naming is referred to again when *Beloved* says repeatedly in her fear of losing Sethe "again", that there is "no one to

want me – to say me my name” (*Beloved* 211). Another name (or lack of one) was the reference to ‘schoolteacher,’ the former slave owner. Initially he is referred to by this name with a small ‘s’, yet later on in the novel, the ‘s’ is capitalized. This change perhaps signifies Sethe’s acceptance of him as a major player in the tragic outcome of her escape, but it could also signify her own process of naming. The change occurs during the threnody between Sethe, Denver, and Beloved as a subconscious narrative, the process of reclaiming of one another and themselves.

This is also the occasion where Sethe recalls her former owner Mrs. Garner calling her by the name “Jenny,” a further reclamation of her selfhood and assimilation of her past and her present. Really, that is what naming is all about, is it not? We can be named something that we become, or we can become that after which we are named. Or maybe it is always ever a little bit of both, and this is the point that Morrison is making with the presentation of naming and names in her novels. Interesting, also, is Morrison’s use of the Garner surname as the proprietors of Sweet Home. The entire novel is based on the true story of Margaret Garner, who committed infanticide rather than have her child(ren) sold back into slavery, as mentioned previously in this dissertation. Through telling this story, as Cynthia Wolff explains, Morrison is exposing “the shameful treatment of African-American slave mothers who, according to the racist constructions of nineteenth-century apologists for slavery, were ‘more primitive’ than white women, and were ‘not civilized’ – not really ‘attached’ to their children” (107). We could take this another step further to say that by retelling the Margaret Garner story, Morrison is reinvestigating “the shame-pride issues surrounding the Garner case” (Bouson 134). Yet even further than this, I purport that by utilizing the Garner name as that of a family of slave-owners, Morrison intentionally wanted to remind readers – subtly or

not – how slaves would typically have received their names: as pieces of property given a surname based on their status as chattel.

According to former Congressman and leader of the NAACP, Kweisi Mfume, in his autobiography *No Free Ride*, naming is important to determining stature and the process is juxtaposed with the philosophies of identity – from the personal name, surnames, name-calling, and the names that identify the race. So important and critical an issue is it that the discussion, in some form, has been entertained by almost every author I have encountered in researching this dissertation. Numerous questions abound in relation to the issue: What does my name mean to me? What does it say about me? What does my race have to do with how I am identified? Where will my name take me? What are we as a people? What pride is there in my people's name? And, ultimately, who am I? The answers to these questions lie dormant in our readings. Mfume addresses these with clear understanding of the important relationship between name and identity, writing:

My change in attitude brought a decision to change my name. More than ever, I needed a way to reconnect with my cultural ancestry, and Kweisi Mfume became it. I viewed my name change as one of necessity and survival. Frizzell Gray had lived and died. From his spirit was born a new person. I would often think back to my days in Tumers Station and how Mr. Smitty would pull me aside on the baseball field to tell a story and teach a lesson. "A change of name," he once said, "is nothing new or unusual. Forty generations before Christ, Abraham and Sarah's names were changed when God decided to make them father and mother of great nations. Jacob's name was changed from Jacob to Israel, when it became his mission to carry on the traditions of his forefathers. Saul of Tarsus, who was the persecutor of the early Christians, became Paul, an apostle of Christ." Although many years had passed, Mr. Smitty's story made sense now. A true elder in my family, my great aunt had brought back, at my request, an indigenous name from the coast of West Africa. She would later explain that it was the only name she felt appropriate and the only one I would ever need. "It doesn't say what you were child, it says what you will be. Kweisi, that means conquering," she said. "Mfume . . . son of kings. The vibrations in the name will help you to be what you must be. Always be true to yourself and your name will carry you," she uttered. "But if you bring dishonor to your new name it will forsake you. You are Kweisi now . . . Kweisi Mfume. (187)

For Mfume to fully realize and achieve his potential, he needed to change his name. This new name asserted his identity, and helped him place importance in himself. It gave him the foundation to distinguish who he was, to experience a spiritual rebirth while still appreciating his tough street life upbringing in West Baltimore, and finally by honoring his mother's wisdom and strength. It also allowed him the freedoms to unveil a man with the highest of virtues.

A similar philosophy also held true after emancipation. In *Up From Slavery*, Booker T. Washington mentions that after freedom was granted, slaves did two things: they left the plantation for a few weeks to ensure they were free; and they changed their names. This establishment of a new identity was important to one's self-confidence, life and identity. Another important issue is the relationship of race and nationality to identity. There is no clearer idea about this than in W.E.B. DuBois's book, *The Souls of Black Folk*. DuBois takes much effort showing how a lack of identity in oneself, in relation to people around you, has a tremendous impact on how one views oneself. DuBois explains the "Negro Problem":

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, this longing to attain self-conscious manhood to merge his double self into a better and truer self. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows without having the doors of opportunity slammed in his face. From the double life that every American Negro must live, as a Negro and as an American, as swept on by the current of the nineteenth while yet struggling in the eddies of the fifteenth century, from this must arrive a painful self consciousness, an almost morbid sense of personality and a moral hesitancy which is fatal to self confidence. The worlds within and without the Veil of Color are changing, and changing rapidly, but not at the same rate, not in the same way; and this must produce a peculiar wrenching of the soul, a peculiar sense of doubt and bewilderment. Such a double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes, must give rise to double words and double ideals, and tempt the mind to pretense or to revolt, to hypocrisy or radicalism. (127)

DuBois makes several compelling points but most importantly, from the perspective of the present discussion, he identifies a path from a double consciousness to a dubious self-consciousness which evokes a moral hesitancy that is fatal to self-confidence, and that is critical when assigning value to one's identity. This downward spiral, most certainly the result of the paradigm of superiority and inferiority, of domination and subordination, must be broken; else, how can the individual develop the self-worth that would allow her to recognize her own potential and make steps toward self-advancement? And if the double identity persists, it is certainly understandable how someone could rationalize extremes, to live within two borders without balance or to seek irrational goals. As Charles Mills mentions, "Marx had to provide an analysis of class society not merely in terms of rich and poor but, more rigorously, in terms of ownership of the means of production. So both are being employed as terms of art" (*The Racial Contract* 121). Similarly, this is a form of mental homicide, or suicide, as a means of survival in a society that negates identity and history.

3.5 Naming as Reclamation

Racial exploitation has invariably affected many different groups of people throughout history, wherein the group's identity, material reality, and inclusion in social and cultural processes or norms is determined in the first instance by the use of their race as a marker of capacity. Given that racial exploitation seems almost a ubiquitous fact of human history in broad terms, we may wonder to what extent the forms of exploitation evident in the United States could be described as differing from the norm. Indeed, are we to suspect that the indices of PTSD as we are considering them here are in fact no more than a regional slant on a universal

phenomenon. If this is the case, we cease to be describing a “disorder,” do we not? Yet we must always consider any form of racialism to be aberrant – even abhorrent – on the basis of its impact on those groups of people to whom negative connotations become naturalized. The link to slavery in the case of racial grouping in the United States is clear and can perhaps best be summarized by observing that the term “white supremacy” has not only been regularly used, but has been embraced historically as a creed by different sectors of American society. Mills considers the issue of how one can isolate such a term in relation to its specific causes and effects: “Black activists have always recognized white domination, white power... as a political system of exclusion and differential privilege, problematically conceptualized by the categories of either white liberalism or white Marxism” (*The Racial Contract* 131). He goes on to state that, more importantly, the term carries with it the connotation of systematicity. Unlike the current more fashionable and politically correct “white privilege,” *white supremacy* implies the existence of a system which not just privileges whites but which is also run by whites, for white benefit.

Understanding this analysis, it is obvious that the idea that one’s value and cognizance of self-worth has the greatest impact on achievement. Specifically, a positive attitude seems crucial to self-confidence and potential. This is expressed in common readings for introductory secondary and college curricula: the idea that hate has significant influence in how one views oneself. Mae Bertha Carter’s daughter Ruth, in the book *Silver Rights*, said, “Mama was right about hate. Because you don’t feel good about yourself if you hate someone else” (67). In *This Little Light of Mine* Fannie Lou Hamer’s mother tells her daughter, “I feel sorry for anybody that could let hate wrap them up. Ain’t no such thing as I can hate somebody and hope to see

God's face." Walter White, in *A Man Called White*, upon being threatened with a lynching, realized the importance a positive attitude has to identity:

Yet as a boy there in the darkness amid the tightening fright, I knew the inexplicable thing--that my skin was as white as those who were coming at me. The mob moved toward the lawn. I tried to aim my gun wondering what it would be like to kill a man. Suddenly there was a volley of shots. The mob hesitated, stopped. Some friends of my fathers had barricaded themselves in a two story brick building just below our house. It was they who had fired. . . . The mob broke up and retreated up Houston Street. . . . In the quiet that followed I put my gun aside and tried to relax. But a tension different from anything I had ever known possessed me. I was gripped by the knowledge of my identity, and in the depth of my soul I was vaguely aware that I was glad of it. I was sick with loathing for the hatred which had flared before me that night and come so close to making me a killer; but I was glad I was not one of those who hated; I was glad I was not one of those made sick and murderous by pride. I was glad my mind and spirit was part of the races that had not fully awakened, and who therefore had still before them the opportunity to write a record of virtue as a memorandum of Armageddon. (12)

Through understanding the effect that race and nationality have on identity, it becomes evident how important pride and not prejudice dictates the value placed in the identity of a race and its people. Also important to identity is how one identifies oneself and her peers, in terms of the name of one's race or collective identity. Dr. T. J. Jemison, former President of the National Baptist Convention, said during an interview, "I am comfortable with the term 'Black.' I've gone through changes in the Deep South over the word Negro. I fought with the press here in Baton Rouge, LA, to write the word 'Negro' with a capital N. Then we got them to go Black. I'm perfectly at ease and accept the term 'Black.' I don't see any need to identify us as African Americans." In *Crusade for Justice*, Ida B. Wells expresses support for the use of the term "Afro-American." Perhaps her terminology is outdated, but her argument is valid: "Negro leaves out the element of nationalities, and we are all Americans, nor has the republic more faithful and loyal citizens than those of our

race. Some of the colored people are not distinguishable from whites, so far has their Negro blood been diluted, but they are all Afro-Americans--that is Americans of African descent” (qtd. Reed, *All the World is Here* 37).

Here, critic Henry Louis Gates provides some interesting insights, this time on the subject of racial identity, and how significant a race name can be. He reveals in his 1995 memoir *Colored People*, that he used this line as the opening of his personal statement in his application to Yale.:

I knew that there was power in our name, enough power that the prospect frightened my maternal uncles. To open the “Personal Statement” for my Yale admission application in 1968, I had settled upon the following: “My grandfather was colored, my father is Negro, and I am black.” (If that doesn’t grab them I thought, then nothing will.) I wonder if my daughters, nine years hence, will adapt the line, identifying themselves as “I am an African-American.” Perhaps they will be Africans by then, or even feisty rapper-dappers. Perhaps, by that time, the most radical act of naming will be a return to “colored.” (201)

Gates has provided a timeline of the progress in establishing a fitting identity.

Perhaps this progress has helped answer another of the questions to which I referred previously, and which seems to be a fundamental current in all of the readings I have done on this subject. This is the question: “Who am I?” This is no simple question to answer, but it has been the consistent, repeated pride in oneself – and, indeed, the acknowledgement that one has a *self*— that has allowed the authors we have been considering to achieve what they have achieved. Fannie Lou Hamer once asked her mother why they weren’t white, to which she received the response, “I don’t ever want to hear you say that again, honey. Don’t say that because you’re Black. You respect yourself as a child, a little Black child. And as you grow older respect yourself as a black woman. Then one day, other people will respect you” (qtd. Lee 13).

Walter White speaks how important knowing one's identity is to self-respect:

I am a Negro. My skin is white, my eyes are blue, my hair is blond. . . . The traits of my race are nowhere visible upon me. I am not white. There is nothing within my mind and heart which tempts me to think I am. Yet I realize acutely that the only characteristic which matters to either the white or the colored race--the appearance of whiteness--is mine. There is magic in a white skin; there is a tragedy, loneliness, exile, in a black skin. Why then do I insist that I am a Negro, when nothing compels me to do so then myself? There is no mistake. I am a Negro. There can be no doubt. I know the night when, in terror and bitterness of soul, I discovered that I was set apart by the pigmentation and the color of my skin (invisible though it was in my case) and the moment at which I decided that I would infinitely rather be what I was than, through taking advantage of the way of escape that was open to me, be one of the race which had forced the decision upon me. (*A Man Called White* 3)

Clearly, the issue of name and identity is important to the individual, not just in how he views himself, but how he sees himself among his peers and what worldly importance he places upon himself. Without establishing one's identity, vital components to one's self worth are missing. It is this that damages the mind and traps the soul, not keeping a person from realizing their potential, but keeping them from attaining it. In this way the link between racial typologies, naming, identity, and the residual impact of PTSD can be established, at least in a speculative manner. A name is necessary to self-worth and self-worth so necessary to a name, that the worth of an individual or race is based upon the value placed in their identity. Perhaps Kweisi Mfume is most correct in recalling an African Proverb: "It's not what you call me, it's what I answer to." And if that is so, the rose "would still smell as sweet" no matter what you called it.

While political figures and textbooks can sometimes marginalize such issues of identity, Toni Morrison takes name issues and converts them to "shame" issues directly in her writings. Like issues of trauma, shame has largely been neglected or discounted, because, until recently, it "has had a 'stigma' attached to it" (Bouson 9).

Until the Civil Rights movements and the black revolution of the 1960s, “to be called ‘black’ in America meant to live in a state of shame,” states theorist Donald Nathanson (qtd. Bouson 9), therefore racial prejudice and the trauma of labels – naming one’s color, literally -- continued to have a major impact on African American identity. Just as Morrison challenges language signifiers and dominant cultural views in her work, she also “subverts traditional Western notions of identity and wholeness” (Rigney 36). Rigney also goes on to explain, via Henry Louis Gates, Jr., that there is an “irony of African American writers attempting ‘to posit a ‘black self’ in the very Western languages in which blackness itself is a figure of absence, a negation” (Gates, qtd. Rigney 38). As mentioned previously in this chapter, the character Sethe is physically marked by the whipping scars she carries on her back, residual of her time as a slave at Sweet Home. Naming and language signifiers are essentially the verbal equivalent of such marks. Young children taunt one another by calling each other names, arguably as hurtful and damaging as physical blows simply because they invoke shame.

Yet naming – in positive or negative means – does not always delineate an *individual’s* identity; often naming and recognizing language signifiers (particular of place locations, like “124 Bluestone Road” in *Beloved* or “Not Doctor Street” in *Song of Solomon*) imparts an identity larger than self, a sense – or absence – of community. People of African descent were not only psychologically scarred by having to take on a name invented by white owners, but how is one to connect with any ancestry if unable to trace a family name, or a tribal connection? As previously mentioned, owner Mrs. Garner referred to Baby Suggs as “Jenny,” but it is when she is given her freedom that she struggles; she has no connection to her heritage. Baby Suggs “did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if

alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never the map to discover what she was like” (*Beloved* 140). In Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Macon Dead has a similar dilemma when he “considers that he might have a better sense of identity ... if he could locate his ancestral context” (Rigney 41). The Dead family members were given their name three generations earlier by a drunk white bureaucrat. Macon Dead is known to repeat, “You can’t kill me. I’m already Dead” Or “Ain’t but three Deads alive” (*Song of Solomon*, 38). Prophetic indeed, as throughout the story the character futilely strives to find some connection to his past.

Like mirrors for present day societal issues, Morrison’s narratives illustrate the authority of language, how authority dominates, as well as how naming represents how power is distributed. Imagistically and philosophically, Morrison confronts the ideas of self in fragmented form as well as the concept of self becoming whole. Again, naming is a utilitarian device by which power is denoted, but metaphorically and symbolically in society, the uses of names for identification can simultaneously be tools for shame and degradation. As I have mentioned previously in this dissertation, authors and artists are by cultural definition forms of personal documentary that become testimonials to history. American culture is defined by language signifiers whether individual terms have a cohesive effect (the Black race, African-Americans, and other significant race identifiers) or a rupturing of a system of power herein been claimed by a nation of prejudice. Language and naming also constitute methods of identity formation, whether for an individual, a sub-culture, or a generation.

In his 1993 book, *The Rage of a Privileged Class*, Ellis Cose interviews a number of professional black people who claim that their race, and therefore the haunting and trauma of slavery, have caused issues anywhere from madness to the

inability to fit in, and from low self-expectations to fully blown identity troubles. San Francisco's famous minister, the Reverend Cecil Williams of the Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, has few illusions about race having much to do with identity. He states in his 1992 book, *No Hiding Place*, that "rejection by whites quite literally drove him mad" (Introduction 15). At the age of ten, growing up in San Angelo, Texas, Williams had been involved in many community activities (such as singing in a choir before the all-white Kiwanis Club) but realized that he was repeatedly reminded that he was inferior. After the crippling loss of his grandfather, Williams suffered a breakdown. He remembers hearing voices in his head proclaiming his doomed father and to "accept the life of a nigger in the South" (Cose 53-54). Like African American poet Phyllis Wheatley, Williams claimed that, once recovering from the breakdown, he had drawn a certain strength from such haunting. As in many documents regarding plantations, many slaves would attempt to demonstrate that they were not inferior by working so hard they nearly killed themselves. Contrarily, today some African Americans avoid or reject employment (according to Mims, et al) due to the PTSD syndrome which Cose identifies as low self-expectations. This is in keeping with the associated features and disorders including hopelessness and self-destructive behavior identified in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

Identity is directly related to one's name, as we have seen, and understanding of one's own immediate and ancient background. My daughter is a fan of the *American Girl* series of books. Her favorite, the collection having to do with a nine year old slave girl named Addy, makes mention of how Addy was named: after Addy's father and brother are sold away to another slave owner, the character and her mother escape from North Carolina to Philadelphia, despite the fact that they

have to leave Addy's baby sister behind; on the journey, Addy's mother gives Addy a cowry shell on a leather shoestring for a necklace and tells Addy that her grandmother, sold into slavery and bringing the shell from Africa, was named "Aduke" which means "much loved," and that she saved the name for Addy. While adopted and African American, my daughter has always known that her name, loosely, in a combination of English and Maori, means "sacred day." While my own daughter is only nine, like her favorite character, fiction is a form of historiography and greatly represents how we come to view ourselves, whether positively or negatively.

In her poem "Our Grandmothers," Maya Angelou repeats the lines, "I shall not be moved," from a well-known gospel song, as she narrates, from a slave woman's point of view, the treatment of those considered chattel. Stanza 11 of the poem states the case explicitly:

She hear the names,
swirling, ribbons in the wind of history:
nigger, nigger, bitch, heifer,
mammy, property, creature, ape, baboon,
whore, hot tail, thing, it.
She said, But my description cannot
fit your tongue, for
I have a way of being in this world,
And I shall not, I shall not be moved.

Further in the poem, utilizing naming as an attempt at reversal of traumatization, Angelou refers to well-known African American women of strength such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Here naming and narrative operate as reclamation of identity, even one so painful and difficult to understand as post traumatic slave disorder. As Irene Kacandes notes, "the victim produces a narrative of the traumatic events. The production of this potentially

healing narrative is hauntingly difficult, however, because the event that needs to be narrated may not have been experienced by the victim fully consciously in time” (91).

By referring to relatives who survived slavery, to notable historic figures, or to fictional or narrative features, narrative discourse often mimics second or ensuing generational trauma. Subjects of this collective trauma need to translate the untold story of slavery into language; sometimes narrative voices – or characters, if you will – are arrested in the traumatic time through a sort of body consciousness or disjunctive moments of memory. As mentioned in previous chapters, the various forms of torture applied continuously inflicted the notion on slaves that they were just bodies, reinforcing powerlessness and reducing them to non-people. No matter what histories are written, naming and narrative offer a textual way of examining what Robert Berkhofer calls “the factuality of a partial past” (47). As Hayden White clarifies, “This permits us to speculate that the growth and development of historical consciousness” has everything to do with remembering (14).

3.6 Conclusion

As in early slave narratives, Morrison’s novels, Kweisi Mfume’s autobiographical narratives, and miscellaneous poetry and even children’s books, all of which take on a narrative and historical voice, the issues of identity are tantamount. As Dominick Lacapra asserts, writing is a “process-oriented notion of identity formation [which] does not exclude the importance of difference and differentiation with respect to experience, the experience of both self and other, or of analyst (historian, critic, theorist) and object of study” (38). He goes on to question whether or not commodified experiences count as truly authentic experience.

Certainly Maya Angelou never met the historic women she refers to in her poem. The author of the *American Girl* novel offers a version of relative historical accuracy in describing a family's escape from slavery and the struggle to regain employment and status in a non-slave state. These are examples of collective memory in a narrative or fictionalized form, but does it mean that the stories are any less accurate?

As Charles Mills explains in *Contract of Breach*, "The renewed life in the reparations movement in the black American community, and the grudging acknowledgment it has begun to receive in at least some sections of the white community, can be attributed both to the efforts of local activists and the increased global sensitivity in recent years to issues of atonement and apology for governmental wrongdoing" (1). This sentiment echoes past written work from the time of slavery, such as Lydia Maria Child's *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans.*, published in 1833. The author was known to have written popular books on child care, household management, and cooking, but she was able to use her elite position in Boston literary circles to further the abolitionist movement through her own appeal, or, I would venture to say, apology. Mills goes on to discuss a "recent anthology, for example, *When Sorry Isn't Enough*, [that] suggests that we are now living in an 'age of apology,' and has a planetary sweep, including sections on successful as well as so far unsuccessful demands for reparations to Jewish and Romanian victims of Nazi atrocities during World War II, Korean 'comfort women' kidnapped and subjected to gang rape by the Japanese military, Japanese Americans interned by the American government, expropriated Native Americans, black Americans suffering the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, and South African victims of apartheid," (1) and so on. While a tiny handful of black philosophers, such as Bernard Boxill and Howard McGary, have played a pioneering

role for thirty years in trying to get the issue of reparations for racial injustice taken seriously by the profession, mainstream philosophical discussions of social justice have for the most part ignored it.

Both Mills and Lacapra explain the concept of “postmemory,” which is “the acquired memory of those not directly experiencing an event such as the Holocaust or slavery, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma or of post-traumatic symptoms as haunting reverberates” (108). While Lacapra acknowledges that many historians’ responses discount public memory and testimony as unreliable sources, it is my assertion that examining narrative forms is simply another valid way of explaining events of the past to a variety of audiences. As Mills makes “reference to the non-traditional (and hardly ever discussed) subject matter of *racial* economic inequalities, which obviously also have a very great and pervasive effect on people’s life-prospects,” (5) so do I believe that the literal transference of trauma among generations not directly experiencing events results in a variety of unavoidable consequences. Many of these ideas lead back to PTSD as an identifiable feature of the residual impact of slavery on cultural and social processes and norms for ensuing generations of Americans. Memory is operative in how we make sense of ourselves; collective memory enables us to make sense of ourselves. When that collective memory is haunted by the rupture of slavery, it creates a negative cultural identity.

Chapter Four: Afterwords –Slavery’s Residue

4.1 Conclusions: Trauma and Poverty

Racial subjugation and the trauma of slavery affect all Americans. The post trauma then manifests itself in an endless number of ways. Poverty, lack of education, lack of self-esteem, drug or alcohol abuse, familial mental illness, repetitive anxiety or violence; these are common symptoms of the classic PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) in present day communities. Compounded with racial issues and modern day chaos, it is fair to assert that PTSD likely deserves a more specific representation when applied to the African American community, thereby establishing what I assert to be the concept of post traumatic *slave* disorder, a complex and compelling issue. Why is it that the plight of the African American, in particular, seems grossly disproportionate to that of any other oppressed people in the United States? According to the CARE Organization (www.care.org), statistics suggest that the percentage of abused, poverty-stricken African American women outstrips those of Latinos by more than 2:1. A former image of strength and in many cases the primary household organizer, why is the black woman suffering so horribly in a modern society? We discount that slavery is residual, yet the present day African American is enslaved by a history so deplorable that no one can escape it. Further adding gender and stereotyping to that equation results in more deplorable conditions. The language of poverty, I assert, is naturally compounded by region, lack of educational opportunities, all resultant of the deep-rooted and deeply poisonous tendrils of slavery.

According to the 2003 United States Census Bureau, education in primarily black areas of the country is at best minimally sufficient to meet state and national standards, but naturally because we average results together, this can quite efficiently

be camouflaged (<http://www.census.gov>). Social services are more inclined to snatch children from their homes under the guise of neglect than to take pro-active measures to rehabilitate the family structures in a healthy way. Among African-American women, 36 percent worked in technical, sales and administrative support jobs and about 27 percent each in managerial and professional specialty jobs and in service occupations. Still, the residual sting of slavery holds sway: modern stereotypes of the robust Aunt Jemima are drastically damaging the women of today, for how can one simultaneously dispel and live up to false connotations of their personhood? Where is the nurturing, physically agile image we all have from slave days? One cannot forge an identity, much less lead a contented, successful life when one's heritage is based solely on corruption, evil, and outright genocide through enslavement.

The median income of African-American households in the United States in 2003 was \$29,689. The percentage of African-American children under the age of 18 in 2003 who lived in poverty was 33.1% and the percentage of African-American children under the age of 18 in 2003 who lived in households that received public assistance was 10.6%. As recently as 2004, according to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, cases of racial, ethnic, and economic segregation remain widespread throughout the United States, and the stories – apocryphal or otherwise – of delayed emergency responses to black ghettos in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, for example, do nothing to suggest the picture has changed any in the few short years of the interim. In 1996, the Connecticut Supreme Court said that children's constitutional rights – African American and Latino, in particular – were being violated. Lead plaintiff Elizabeth Horton Sheff, whose son was ten years old when the case was first filed in 1989, stated, "Every citizen in Connecticut should be outraged at the State's blatant disregard of our Constitution. Whose rights will be sacrificed next?"

(www.naacpldf.org). Sheff's son, Milo, was a fourth grade student at Annie Fisher Elementary School in Hartford, Connecticut, when she joined with others and began a long and arduous journey to redress the inequity between the level of education provided to students in Hartford public schools and that available to children in surrounding suburban districts. Clearly the premise of racial segregation is alive and well into the Twenty-First Century, a disturbing trend for State departments of education to ignore. Indeed, if there is any down side to the arrival of the first black President of the United States, it may well be a concern that some will find it even easier to maintain or cultivate their ignorance, on the premise that now it must hold true that any father's son could aspire to the Presidency.

As John Hope Franklin explores in *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation*, the laws instituted to condone slavery and abuse of blacks directly impacted the outcome of the African American collective identity. Today in the United States there exists a misconception that the way one speaks indicates a person's inferiority or superiority. I am a little hesitant to accept the statement that to "talk black" indicates a person's inferiority (it sounds less educated, less refined, conjuring up images of the superstitious Jim in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; slang and atrocious grammar infect modern communication). I agree that this is fundamentally true, but I think the point can be established more vividly. Consider this scenario: a young man in very baggy pants appropriately paired with the requisite shirt/sweatshirt/hooded jacket, baseball cap/do-rag/head wrap, a giant attitude, and language that is considered "black" *a la* rap/hip-hop walks into the corner store for a soda. If the kid is black does he get a different reaction from the clerk than a white kid wearing the exact same outfit and talking the exact same rap-influenced language that would make NWA and P-Diddy proud? I believe so, and it

is not only because of how he talks. It is because *he is black* and he talks that way, in the eyes of our white-dominated culture. The black kid is inferior; the white kid is a suburbanite on a lark who can stop talking that way any time he wants (grow out of it). I wonder what it would mean if the black kid were the true suburban poser and the white kid from some alley in Brooklyn?

In tracing the history of languages as the African slaves attempted to preserve the little they had from their former, memory-clouded homelands, one cannot help but notice the same inflections in present day areas resultant of the involuntary African diaspora. Like adjusting to any dialect, the African inflection is noticeable to those not initially exposed to it, thus listening and speaking are crucial to developing a clear ability to communicate. Similarly, all Americans regardless of race need to listen attentively to the stories not often told, in the language they are meant to be recited. We can no longer pretend that our history books from 1975 are an accurate representation of times past, nor can we assume that our prescription for today is going to be relevant thirty years from now. This process of recognition and revision is crucial. May we label all blacks as survivors of slavery? Not at all. But all blacks are survivors of the issues compounded by slavery; the effects of racism on our entire society are deep rooted and the poison has now amalgamated itself into even the youngest of generations. Truly, this is haunting.

In his work, Franklin examines the profile of a typical slave existence: “Death came early to slaves, and those who reached their twenty-first birthday could expect to live about 16 or 17 additional years. In some sections, yellow fever, dysentery, pneumonia, and cholera carried off many slaves still in their teens and twenties” (197). With disease and death everywhere, the compulsion to escape affected young males in particular. Later, laws were worded referring to these young blacks as

“uncontrollable,” “ungovernable,” and “unmanageable,” (205) almost exactly the wording used to describe incorrigible children today, particularly in poverty stricken, gang-populated areas of black youth. The tensions, conflicts, and violence surrounding runaways complete the picture of racial subjugation. As Wilma King asserts in *Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in Nineteenth-Century America*, “Slavery caused enough trauma to affect slaves of all ages” (91) due to the excess of corporal punishment, sexual abuse, and familial separations, all of which were common. Slaves were combatants who were “bound but refused to surrender. In such a society slaveholders, overseers, drivers and patrollers dispensed punishment freely to maintain [the institution of] slavery” (91). Furthermore, not even children were spared its bitter horrors. In his work *Psychological Trauma*, Dr. Bessel Van der Kolk states that the “emotional development of children is intimately connected with the safety and nurturance provided by their environment” (14). When an environment consisting of abuse, no perceivable outlet of safety, and outright danger results in trauma, black children carry the likelihood of repetitive haunting, thus promoting violence far into the future.

The haunting of collective memory, according to Professor Jenny Lawn of Massey University, means “painful events that few, if any, living members of the culture may have directly perpetrated or suffered from their own persons” (lecture, April 1999) yet the traumatic events of slavery and the antebellum period have shaped and continue to shape Western culture. The desire to voice individuality spurns victims and survivors to wish to be separated from the collective memory, but I have stated earlier, it is far too easy to memorialize past injustices or make apology rather than take responsibility. Do we in the present day condone collective amnesia? How can we possibly allow the cycle of poverty and inadequate education to exist in

our society, thus our contemporary white patriarchal existence? At risk here is the overuse of the word “trauma” itself. There are diverse accounts of broken boundaries, from both a literary and a visual representation of the black race. Atrocities are still occurring. Our culture’s post-traumatic responsibility is both retrospective and prospective. Poverty is a cycle that must not be allowed to continue, yet the primary reason for its survival is the present day white genesis of just that: poverty is allowed to exist because it means that one culture or another believes that it is inevitably superior to its counterparts. This is case and point that trauma never happens only once, as asserted by Cathy Caruth: “the narrative of belated experience,” poverty, is indeed the aftermath of slavery.

In the mass media alone, African Americans are met with little change in representation. As bell hooks claims, “opening a magazine or book, turning on the television set, watching a film, or looking at photographs in public spaces, we are most likely to see images of black people that reinforce and re-inscribe white supremacy” (*Outlaw*, 28). As a result of slavery and racism, hooks continues

Theorizing black experience in the United States is a difficult task. Socialized within white supremacist educational systems and by a racist mass media, many black people are convinced that our lives are not complex, and are therefore unworthy of sophisticated critical analysis and reflection. Even those of us righteously committed to black liberation struggle, who feel we have decolonized our minds, often find it hard to “speak” our experience. (29)

Perhaps it is for this reason, as described by James Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time* -- referred to as his “eloquent manifesto” when it first appeared in *The New Yorker* magazine -- “there has been almost no language” to describe or survive the “horrors” of black life. Without a language in which to name pain, the inadvertent result is allowing the perpetuation of poverty, whether through cognizant awareness or not.

For example, in her study *African American Children: Socialization and Development in Children*, Shirley Hill notes that the “growing socioeconomic diversity of African Americans makes the inordinate research emphasis on poor and low-income populations even more problematic, as the results generated by such studies fail to capture the life experiences of most blacks by presenting them as a monolithic group” (x). She continues to assert that the current socio-political discourse on black families actually downplays the realities of racism and economic inequality, thus this naturally reinforces the notion of poverty as a means to an end. Due to the phenomenon of delayed response, a trauma often unfolds inter-generationally, thus the *real* is that which cannot fail to elude us. Poverty will remain, therefore, as a national problem and it directly impacts black communities.

Authenticity plays an integral role in the viewing and acceptance or denial of black culture. The trauma of slavery affects all Americans. As Ron Eyerman notes in *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, “slavery produced hidden social networks which permitted blacks not only to survive, but also to maintain their dignity and traditions” (24). Despite attempting to turn tragedy into triumph, though, as Eyerman continues, blacks proved their “worthiness, only to be rejected by a white society busy painting pictures of its own” (24). With the threat of marginalization, the post-trauma then manifests itself in a potentially endless number of ways, masked also as a generic problem inherent in any process of marginalization. As noticed already, poverty, lack of education, lack of self-esteem, drug or alcohol abuse, familial mental illness, repetitive anxiety or violence are common symptoms of the classic PTSD in present day communities. Yet we must not lose sight of the specific racialized form that these symptoms present in America, in the experience of both black and white communities. Historically, these roots are

clearly traced. Runaway free black children led precarious lives: they faced the risk of abduction back into slavery, sexual assault, lack of shelter and comfort; therefore, ironically, many free black parents signed indentures for their children to keep them from slavery. There were very few whites, however, that did *not* exploit this free black labor. Eyerman asserts that it “was in this context of failed reconstruction and rejection that what had previously been a social condition, slavery, became fully transposed into a symbolic one, race, as perceived difference. Slavery after all does not need race.... This of course was double-edged, as race and indeed, slavery, were also negative ascriptions, although Anglo-Saxons had been using the term in a positive way when referring to themselves” (36).

The abolitionist movement degraded whites based on the anti-Christian, evil system of slavery, yet when race is placed in a present day context, cultural expression is virtually frowned upon. Take the brilliant artist Jean-Michel Basquiat, for example, who had garnered attention initially through his violent yet compelling works of graffiti (under the tag name “Samo”). Despite his ambition and notorious associations with Andy Warhol, Basquiat’s acceleration in the art world in the 1980s was met with revulsion, racist slurs (he was once asked about being the “pickaninny” artist representing the black community), and almost a grotesque hype for his seemingly indiscreet behavior. This negative reaction represents something of an ironic disparity from critical approaches to earlier resurgences of creativity. Harlem Renaissance figures such as Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes were, according to Eyerman, “a part of a new generation of American blacks for whom the past was re-conceptualized as cultural heritage, useful for understanding as well as orienting the present and future behavior” (90). Where did that leave Basquiat when,

only sixty years later, the ugly features of racism were used as the basis for completely discounting his ability solely based on his heritage?

In *Outlaw Culture*, bell hooks explores this issue in her essay “Altars of Sacrifice: Re-membering Basquiat.” As an artistic icon who grew up in extreme poverty, Basquiat was grappling with both the pull of genealogy that is fundamentally “black” (rooted in African diasporic “primitive” and “high art” traditions) as well as a fascination with white Western traditions. hooks asserts that “to bear witness in his work, Basquiat struggled to utter the unspeakable. Prophetically called, he engaged in an extended artistic elaboration of a politics of dehumanization” (27). The artist faced dual critiques: Western imperialism and the way it is produced in culture and in art. Upon earning enough money to waltz into a New York deli and request a \$2,000 tin of caviar, Basquiat was met with disdain and outright hostility; surely a black man could never be able to afford such luxury! Again, Basquiat’s work embodies this inherent and hostile racism; he unmasks the ugliness of those traditions, acknowledging the brutal realities of poverty, assumption, and overt white supremacy. His paintings delineate the violent erasure of a people, their culture, and traditions, leaving nothing left but the shells of poverty and the ghetto in which black complicity has been housed.

There was “abject and degrading misery present everywhere in the form of slavery and black labor” (Hartman 169). Slavery rooted blacks in hunger, suffering and wretched conditions but the “obscurity of blackness had everything to do with the seeming absence of poverty on the American scene” according to Hannah Arendt, who separated the idea of private personhood with the social, political sphere of society. Privilege has most often been awarded on the basis of race. Historically, opacity “necessitated both the state’s management of life and ostensible withdrawal“

(Hartman 169). Returning to Basquiat, his perceived agenda of racial issues are indeed precursor to belief that racial issues are first and foremost in the minds of all aesthetes. By forcing the public eye to examine the telltale history of slavery through his graffiti, Basquiat commanded a presence. Art critics assumed -- often incorrectly -- that the artist was forcing a view of subordination, when in fact the very treatment of his work proved such a point true. The imposition of slavery on the art world was met with hostility; Basquiat was the catalyst by which previously private assumptions became public debate. While Basquiat's work may have illustrated the impoverished, he himself was forced to live it through history's imposition upon him. Thus it is that the "unabashed denial of slavery as a public institution fabricated the nation's innocence by masking the public dimensions of slavery as an institution and focusing on the relations between individuals" (Hartman 174). Basquiat had to nullify his public identity. As bell hooks noted, he insisted that "it was the privacy of black experience that 'needed to be recognized in language'" and his work "gives that private anguish artistic expression" (*Outlaw* 29).

Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish economist, was one of the first scholars to use the term "underclass," referring to economic marginalization and the structural and labor market processes which are unaffected by business cycles and other fluctuations in national economy. In 1981, Douglas Glasgow formalized the concept of a *black* underclass; that is, placing emphasis on persons disadvantaged by structural transformations. A year later, Kenneth Auletta applied yet a different meaning to this "below formal class structure." His belief is that the concept of underclass, popularized in media and adopted by social scientists, is actually affected by the impact of "societal institutions on people to the maladaptive attitudes, values, and behavior of individuals" (Hill 61). It is therefore the undeserving poor -- welfare

recipients, school dropouts, teenage mothers, delinquents and criminals -- who are redefined as people who participate in behavior that violates societal norms. These class abstractions are concepts minimized by contemporary racism. In fact, I would argue that dividing classes into stratifications such as upper, middle, and lower, is a hierarchy based on a fallacy, an arbitrary abstraction of reality which varies according to the objectives of the analysts and a particular concession to an existing view of a social "order". In 1932 there were Marx and Engels, Lloyd and Lunt in 1942, Myrdal in 1944, and finally Wilson in 1987 whose analysis of the truly disadvantaged provides several instances of reification. In particular, to model the African American experience on one of these pictures of a social hierarchy would be to misjudge the degree to which the historical fact of slavery renders this experience as radically other than the norm of a hierarchical social order: the ghetto neighborhoods are frequently made up of people who are both "working class" and culturally "other" and thus living in extreme isolation, literally on the margins of such an order. As bell hooks discusses in *Black Looks*, this cultural Other is an "accumulation of lack and loss.... A social order that knows no outside (and which must contrive its own transgressions to redefine its limits)," therefore "difference is often fabricated in the interests of social control as well as of commodity innovation" (25). She continues to say that, concurrently, the marginalized groups who have been ignored or rendered invisible "can be seduced by the emphasis of Otherness... because it offers the promise of recognition and reconciliation" (26).

Charles Murray's essay "Losing Ground" explores how the black family dynamic typically operates in such a marginalized space: they are headed by a female, lacking a strong work ethic, possess negative self-concept, are often on welfare for long periods of time, and are chronically poor. Murray is well known for

his argument that social programs worsen the plight of the disadvantaged.

Furthermore, a survey was conducted in 1988 by Louis Harris and Associates on behalf of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, as noted above. In addition to data like those cited above, the findings of the survey indicate widespread racism is intricately linked to poverty when the family is headed by an unemployed or underemployed adult male who is likely a high school dropout, the household has a member that receives AFDC, or a single mother is the head of the household. What is perpetuated is the widespread “stereotype that persistently poor have given up all hope of self-sufficiency and thus have abandoned all responsibility for their own lives” (Murray 66). The shifting or different criteria for “membership in class strata” implies current joblessness, poverty, and welfare dependency, all of which fail to disaggregate the long-term from the short-term. Cross-sectional data can often be misconstrued, however, resulting in assumptions of downward mobility. The maladaptive characteristics of black youth are then considered relatively permanent and not responsive to changes in opportunity structure and the vicious cycle continues.

Emphasis needs to be made here that there can effectively exist a molding of a reasonable and moral subject. There have been lingering suspicions about “black worthiness” and a stigma of inferiority based on race since Abraham Lincoln’s declaration of emancipation. The former systems of sympathy and obligation were, once again, according to Saidiyah Hartman, “instrumental ends of rational and moral cultivation: the production of servile and dutiful laborers and the regulation of a potentially threatening population within the body politic” (161). The presiding nineteenth-century belief was that “only the work of the self-cultivation would enable the freed to properly exercise and enjoy the privileges of which they were yet unworthy” (161). Yet not much has changed from the time of the Civil Rights Act of

1866 and 1875, for even today there is “repugnance of the physical.” Liberty is constricted even today, as a direct though diffused result of the traumatic events of slavery in the United States. For African Americans, inferiority is resonant and slavery’s residue needs to be acknowledged, transformed into a public memory inherited by all Americans or we may as well catapult ourselves back two hundred years in time.

4.2 Blood on the Canvas: The Haunting of African American Artists and Contemporary Popular Culture

Art as a representational language that plays to the visual appetites of consumers must never be divested of its contextual background. The symbolism of American genre painting from the pre-Civil War era is a prime example of what constituted the visual iconography of the citizenry of the United States; yet images of American eagles and multi-aged white men reading from newspapers, for example, take on a more ominous air when juxtaposed with the absence of any social differentiation. Unlike Elizabeth Johns’ assertion that this type of painting exhibited character of the citizenry, contrived portrait images such as these were actually a sinister democratic experiment. Often highlighting a perverse pleasure in the African American characters depicted, genre painting sold to the public what they wanted to believe: that Africans imbued in – and even released from slavery, eventually – would continue to be the smiling, unintelligent darkies everyone knew them to be. This then translates into abject racism existing in the modern day as well as gestating the concept of racial contractarianism in this “age of apology“ (Mills, *Contract of Breach* 1).

Physical and psychological abuse comprise a major component of racism and trauma. Sojourner Truth, for example was not only abused by her master, but her own mother forced her to endure shocking abuses and beatings, and later she was further mistreated by a white servant employed by her owner. Truth, in the form of her narrative self, Isabella, was essentially brainwashed and “firmly believed that slavery was right and honorable” (33), just as she accepted that a woman’s place was inferior to any man’s control. Coupling one’s color with sexism and gender stereotyping is nothing short of disturbing. As Valerie Smith states in the preface to her book, *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender*, “black feminist thinking has always assumed that race and gender are mutually dependent, interlocking cultural constructions and projections” (xii). In shifting the paradigm in Twenty-First Century USA, however, we must expect – nay, demand – the need for historical specificity. The past image of the smiling, robust Aunt Jemima is imbued in American popular culture from pancake syrup labels to advertisements for laundry detergent; it is these insidious subliminal hints that grossly undermine the struggle and resistance to exploitation that is the African American woman’s reality. The myriad cases documenting racism and sexual exploitation – from slave times to the present – contribute to my assertion that traumatic experience is residual and haunting among present day blacks and therefore rife in the history of the United States. What S. Craig Watkins describes as the “ghettocentric imagination” points to poverty, familial disorganization, and a fairly bleak social landscape.

Valerie Smith refers to turn-of-the-century journalist and political activist Ida B. Wells, who argues that various acts of violence (such as lynching and rape) really were “an excuse to get rid of Negroes who were acquiring wealth and property and thus [to] ‘keep the nigger down’” (64). But it is not particularly antiquated that

popular culture celebrates denigration of African Americans. James Allen's *Without Sanctuary* Musarium project is a startling example of how, even in the twentieth century, blacks have been made into images of public humiliation -- even amusement -- in their mistreatment, through ritual racial killings and other acts of "mad citizenry." The visual legacy project is a horrific collection of souvenir post cards and paraphernalia of lynchings throughout America. "In America, everything is for sale, even a national shame," Allen states, and the "photographic art played as significant a role in the ritual as torture or souvenir grabbing - a sort of two-dimensional biblical swine, a receptacle for a collective sinful self. Lust propelled their commercial reproduction and distribution, facilitating the endless replay of anguish. Even dead, the victims were without sanctuary." People being tortured, dragged, riddled with bullets, even dismembered become images of popular, racist, haunted culture. Is it any wonder, then, that lyrics depicting violence and beatings that appear in rap music, often referred to as violent, misogynistic "gangsta" rap, are sometimes so graphic?

Basquiat's commonly used motifs of violence, debris, and verbal graffiti caught the art world's attention not because he was necessarily representing a haunted past in his work, but because, as Basquiat himself stated, he slashed his work since he could not reuse the canvases, because "ghosts" of the "previous pictures were showing through" (Hoban 132). Additionally, his "innumerable masklike heads exhaustively anthropologize a tribal civilization that never was" (Schjeldahl, *The New Yorker*: April 4, 2005). The primitive modes stirring in Basquiat's work were likely camouflaged in his own sophomoric attitudes, drug abuse, and spontaneity, but ultimately there is a trickle-down effect residual of the horrors of slavery. The visual effects of his words and gestural marks illustrate a painful artistic crisis exacerbated

by a society not yet ready to face its own past which clearly fostered contemporary rancor, brutality, and inhumanity toward African Americans.

Basquiat is a pivotal figure whose early death of a drug overdose in 1988 marks his existential alienation and his struggle to portray his experience as a black man in a white-dominated society within the context of discomfort and ambiguity. Although his artwork imagined alternatives to the racist ideations Basquiat encountered – despite his rise to fame and wealth – it simultaneously represents his desire to reclaim, if not expose, a deplorable past inherited by virtue of his being black. Racism structured Basquiat’s world, right down to the interview in which, as we have seen, he was nicknamed the “Pickaninny of the Art World.” Thus, his identity caused him to relinquish all the privileges that came along with becoming famous in a racially white-dominated culture. Basquiat’s often disembodied, disturbing works may be seen as a subversive method of resisting white domination while simultaneously embracing his own black heritage and its brutal, even discontinuous history.

Immediately following the popularity of Basquiat (and Andy Warhol’s allegedly catapulting him into fame) and pop art, however, a different sort of black youth response to trauma and haunting has been born. Unemployment, high incarceration rates, and a seeming lack of political awareness and activism seem to characterize the first generation of African Americans to “come of age in post-segregation America” (Kitwana xxii). As youth in general turn more and more toward rap and hip-hop music, music videos, and designer clothing to express “identity,” high visibility has increased for black youth. In particular, the mainstreaming of rap music, which, according to cultural critic Cornel West, has also resulted in white youth “emulating black males styles of walking, talking, dressing

and gesticulating in relations to others” (*Race Matters*). Like the 1970s sitcoms and movies, music videos are entertainment, but they are also symbols of a struggle to define what is and what should be. According to Daniel Leab, this constant “repetition that emphasizes certain stereotypes – as is the black presence on the screen – is overpowering. And this reinforcement has residual effects even when the stereotypes have begun to change” (263). John Singleton, director of the 1991 film “*Boyz in the Hood*” said that the media, “don’t want to deal with the fact that the high crime and murder rates are directly related to the illiteracy problem, the homeless problem, problems in the American educational system.” It is, in fact, the media that shapes cultural response to societal issues. The representation of violence in mainstream society provides contextual implications as to what impacts the youth of today. S Craig Watkins claims that segregation exists in the world of popular culture and quotes Lawrence Grossberg in that the popular culture sphere “is always more than ideological; it provides sites of relaxation, privacy, pleasure, enjoyment,” (47) and so on. Watkins goes on to explore the fact that musical genres such as country represent “urban escapism and white flight” and the “voice of white suburban baby boomers,” while “rap music has become the voice of young black urban America” (48).

Watkins observes that the “label *black filmmakers* is a widely accepted feature of our popular culture vocabulary,” suggesting that “a specific body of films points to a specific group of filmmakers and formation of discourse. The label, in addition, differentiates black cinema from other popular films and sources of entertainment” (226). The first all black cast of a film was “*The Green Pastures*” in 1936, followed by “*Cabin in the Sky*,” directed by Vincent Minelli, in 1943. What is typical of these films is that they rely on characterizations reminiscent of Vaudeville’s so-called

“coon” actors. Critic Nasser Metcalf states that while “the imagery may be somewhat disturbing at times, one still comes away from this film with the feeling that black people enjoy a divine spiritual connection that transcends our earthly struggles” (www.blackfilm.com). Films “Bright Road” (1953) and “Sounder” (1972) bring in natural elements and further the biblical, mythic qualities possessed in the predecessors of predominantly African American cast films. “Bright Road” is based on the story “See How They Run” written by Mary Elizabeth Vroman, a fourth-generation school teacher from the British West Indies, that ran in the June, 1951 issue of *The Ladies’ Home Journal* and subsequently won that year’s Christopher Award. The film is about Jane Richards (Dorothy Dandridge), a young fourth-grade teacher in the South who has a problem in her classroom with 11-year-old C.T. Young (Philip Herburn), a backward boy whose pride has made him a stubborn rebel and an exalted liar. Jane believes in him, discovers that he has an interest in nature when he spends his time watching a caterpillar in a tree trunk as it develops into a cocoon. C. T. is devoted to his family and also to little Tanya (Barbara Ann Sanders, real-life daughter of actress Lillian Randolph), who adores him. When Tanya, despite every effort on the part of Dr. Mitchell (Robert Horton) to save her, dies of viral pneumonia, the embittered C.T. stays away from school. When he returns and chooses to fight a classmate, he is punished. But when a swarm of bees invades the classroom and panics the students, C.T. takes charge and, capturing the queen bee, leads the swarm outside and earns the praise of the school principal (Harry Belafonte). But C.T. has urgent business at hand; the cocoon is splitting and ready to emerge. He has been saving it for Tanya, but now presents it to Jane, who calls the other children to watch the unfolding miracle of nature.

Similar themes emerge with the 1972 film “Sounder” which takes place during the American Depression; the plot centers on a group of black sharecroppers in Louisiana who work diligently to get their children a decent education. With an impressive cast including Cicely Tyson and Taj Mahal, the themes of diligence, crime and punishment, and education for a young black boy echo of mythic odysseys and heroism. Interestingly, however, “between 1969 and 1974, the popular film industry produced over sixty or so action-oriented films that featured African Americans. Commonly referred to as the ‘blaxploitation’ era, this particular period... was largely controlled by white film executives and directors” (Watkins 93). Like the sweeter films mentioned earlier, these nicknamed films also focused thematically on a black hero/heroine who, as David E. James explains, these protagonists created an image that was “compromised and almost entirely countered by the displacement of attention away from the properly political analyses of the situation of Black people and from the possibilities of ameliorating it by systemic social change” (James 134).

By the middle to late 1970s, though, according to Watkins, the production of black themed films declined. Simultaneously, I would argue, television programs portraying African Americans were on the rise. “The Jeffersons” aired on CBS from 1975-1985 and was a spin-off of the earlier comedy “All in the Family.” The notorious Archie Bunker was a loud-mouthed bigot who had no qualms about insulting his black neighbor, George Jefferson. When the Jefferson family moves to Manhattan’s posh East Side, the family is “movin’ on up,” as the television show’s theme intoned. The program was conceived by independent producers, Norman Lear and Bud Yorkin, who had also created highly successful and often controversial sitcoms during the 1970s and early 1980s, and helped to change television history. Other African American centered programs such as “Sanford and Son” and “Good

Times” enjoyed frequent rankings amongst the top-ten most watched programs. One of the “main tenets of the civil rights movement emphasized education as a way to improve the social and economic plight of African Americans” and “consequently, black enrollment in colleges and universities began to increase dramatically” (Watkins 96). I would have to agree with director Spike Lee when he acknowledged that “the weapons from now on will be the newspapers, magazines, TV shows, radio and FILM.... It’s war in the battleground of culture” (qtd. in Watkins 165). Watkins says that the renewal of black filmmaking “was made possible by the innovations and growing popularity of the hip hop movement. Hip hop redefined the presence and vitality of black youth culture in the popular culture landscape” (165).

Hip hop music can claim to be associated with a certain kind of achievement. It is, according to Dr. Martin Kilson, a genre that “has fashioned an entrepreneurial and commercial accumulation breakthrough among African-Americans in the Black/White pop entertainment relationship” (*The Black Commentator* Issue 50). Opposing views, though, include the belief that the hip hop generation, far more than any other, was the one synonymous with drug use and the increase of crime, citing not only issues of police brutality but the explosion of gangs and an abyss between the older civil rights generation and the younger hip-hoppers. Author Bakari Kitwana argues that racial animosity is directly related to the resurgence of black “genetic inferiority” that occurred in the 1990s. He says that the “long-term effects of high unemployment problems on this generation, alongside being saddled with a great deal of negative baggage about our self-worth, have yet to be seen” (Kitwana 45). Furthermore, the hip hop generation seems to be split politically. There is a faction of activists but also those with a different agenda. Since the mid-1990s, rap music magazine *The Source* (known as “the bible of hip-hop culture and politics” and

providing live streaming informational videos) has reported on social and political issues of interest to youth. bell hooks says that, in its earliest stages, “rap was ‘a male thing’ and as a result, the “public story of black male lives narrated by rap music speaks directly to and against white racist domination, but only indirectly hints at the enormity of black male pain” (*Black* 35). Furthering issues of PTSD, hooks continues to reiterate that such intense music, embracing death and violence and the fear of being exterminated echoes Foucault’s ideas of the inability to feel pleasure, experiencing, inasmuch as one can coin the term, cultural numbness. On the positive side, however, is the reactionary idea that many whites and blacks desire to transgress boundaries. My two black daughters adore the remake of the musical “Hairspray,” which takes place during the 1960s. In its plot, the enlightened white people associate with blacks, crossing racial boundaries and almost expecting cultural appropriation.

Yet one of the biggest obstacles of mass culture is challenging racism. Many magazines and music/performance personalities (such as Lauryn Hill, formerly of The Fugees, and Queen Latifah) have stepped up to address voter apathy and made it their mission “to help politicize this generation through their lyrics and public appearances” (Kitwana 176). Political personalities such as Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and of course Barack Obama weigh in greatly on what affects the hip-hop generation. Obama was quoted as saying “I’m here because somebody marched. I’m here because you all sacrificed for me. I stand on the shoulders of giants” (2007 Selma Voting Rights Commemoration). Bronx high school teacher Jackson Shafer has posted a video on YouTube that illustrates how some students went from not even being able to name the Vice President to taking up a political challenge regarding racial issues. Shafer says his students started coming to school early - and

even suggested an extra homework assignment inspired by Barack Obama's "Yes We Can" speech after the New Hampshire -- my former home state -- primary. On the same day Shafer's film was made, Obama was delivering his speech about racial reconciliation in Philadelphia. The Bronx students took up the challenge to talk about race and how their generation is already breaking down old barriers. He states that the predominantly African American student population faces many challenges, from economic instability, unhealthy home environs, emotional issues, and educational interruptions. Through his engagement of race discussions, admitting that he challenged a group of students who thought a particularly articulate classmate was "talking white," Shafer calls his classroom a "small microcosm of racial harmony" ("Bronx"). Students filmed for the video clip discuss Obama's "A More Perfect Union" speech and acknowledge that the media is responsible for drawing attention to race and gender, but the then Senator sees only Americans in a more perfect union.

Reflecting back a few years, Kitwana points out that it is not always the case that political organizations are in such perfect synchronization with the hip-hop generation. He says, "Even though NAACP head Kweisi Mfume has represented African Americans well as head of the Congressional Black Caucus, under his watch the NAACP has missed the mark with the issues that matter most to Black youth" (Kitwana 185). Education debates in the nineteenth-century seem to be echoing, still. Watkins points out, for example, the March 17, 1997 issue of *Newsweek* magazine which contained an article that emphasized the extremes of the hip-hop culture: one to be derided and lacking continuity or hope, versus one that is respectful and ambitious. Eleven years later it is obvious that "black youth have been remarkably resilient and equally brilliant in the face of serious societal change and conflict ... black youth have been caught in the middle of unprecedented economic,

demographic, spatial, and political transformation” (Watkins 242). History has not been generous, but the African American cultural terrain is complex and representational of slavery, justice, and overcoming trauma and shame.

4.3 The “Sorry” Business

Saying sorry is so easy and a good way to clear the air. This is echoed in an article that appeared in *The New Zealand Herald* in May of 1998, written by foreign editor David Hastings. He discusses that when people admit fault, they know from that moment that they are in the moral power of the people to whom they are apologizing. He states that “every nation and every state has something to apologize for” and “the United Nations could issue them all with an equal number of indemnities.” As Lewis Carroll once said, “It is a poor sort of memory that only works backward.” In this age of racial uplift, not apology, is it not surprising that the United States has finally elected an African American president? When Booker T. Washington originally coined the phrase and defined “racial uplift”, there were initially thoughts of social segregation and black acquiescence while simultaneously engaging ideas of black progress in education, economics, and, his passion, agriculture. As mentioned earlier, it was DuBois who advocated for Civil Rights and equality. He viewed racism as barbaric. We do not need a memory crisis. In present times, “racial uplift” is perhaps an outdated term; however, while Barack Obama has been compared to such Civil Rights heroes as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Medgar Evers, he admits his own struggles for notice, for equality, and for justice.

As Charles Mills states, “whites have an illicit advantage that comes about through the inherited legacy of past discriminatory practices sanctioned by law

and/or custom,” but Obama has risen above the “contract” of race to promote cultural authority that lacks the former supposed moral superiority. As Martin Luther King, Jr. stated, “I have decided to love,” and that is a powerful choice many political leaders have chosen (or should choose, I argue). Life has too often argued for ambiguity, yet it is a creative process, and there is certainly a point at which a person’s past – as well as that of societies – emerges. So too do the stories we tell emerge. While some argue that conventions are being manipulated, these notions and expectations are merely an interplay of past and present realities. PTSlaveD has its residue in American history, but modern resistance and friction is creating a new American identity. Like King, Obama has the courage to speak about hope and transformation, in cultural mores rather than a sentimentalist voice. Too often, as bell hooks notes, people are “too trapped by paralyzing despair to be able to engage effectively in any movement for social change” (*Outlaw*, 247), yet Obama is effectively addressing these issues – and society’s needs – and intentionally tackling PTSlaveD and its various manifestations. The moment the United States elected Barack Obama, society at large embraced a move toward cultural freedom and democracy rather than one of prejudice or subjugation. We can never erase our ever unfinished past, but we can always strive to utilize the past in new, positive ways.

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