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From the Plantation Zone: The Poetics of a Black Matrilineal Genealogy for the Americas

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Eileen S. Chanza Torres

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Eileen S. Chanza Torres

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the

Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend

acceptance of this dissertation.

Susan Scheckel – Dissertation Advisor
Associate Professor, English Department

E. Anthony Hurley – Dissertation Advisor
Chair, Africana Studies Department

Helen M. Cooper – Chairperson of Defense
Emerita Professor, English Department

Dawn P. Harris – Outside Reader
Assistant Professor, Africana Studies Department

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Interim Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

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In the Humanities, studies on the legacy of enslaved Black women are often split along ethnic, cultural, linguistic and national lines. My dissertation brings together literatures and visual arts from Puerto Rico, Martinique, Suriname, the Dominican Republic and the U.S. representing a myriad of linguistic and cultural traditions that turn to the legacy of the historical Black female body as their myth of creation. I position these works under the heading of Plantation Zone Literatures and Visual Arts, a term I use to indicate the centrality of Black women's genealogy in 20th-century and 21st-century works from the Black Diaspora. Once a geographic space where Africans and their heirs were forced to labor, the Plantation Zone serves as a metaphorical site where the legacy of the historical Black female body—in multifarious forms of triumph and pain—is celebrated in Black Diasporic literatures.

In this project I argue for a shift in the study of literatures of the Americas from a Eurocentric lineage that supports the European conquest of the New World, to an approach that locates the birth of the Americas in the history of the Plantation Zone. My methodology relies on an interdisciplinary model, with works from historians, ethnographers, sociologists and philosophers grounding my analysis of the epistemological confrontation that occurs when fictionalizing Black women. My intervention in the fields of Africana Studies, Caribbean Studies, Latina/o Studies and Transamerican Studies comes through examining how the friction between the real and the imagined offers new ways of thinking about literatures of the Americas through the matrilineal genealogy of the Black Diaspora.

Pa’ mi mamá, Iris Torres Torres.

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[1] As per my committee's approval, the figures discussed in this project have been omitted due to copyright laws.

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Introduction: A Secret Sharer in the House of English

The fact that I
am writing to you
in English
already falsifies what
I wanted to tell you.
My subject:
how to explain to you that I
don't belong to English
though I belong nowhere else
—Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Bilingual Blues* (1995)

In the Humanities, studies on the legacy of enslaved Black women are often split along ethnic, cultural, linguistic and national lines. My dissertation, "From the Plantation Zone: The Poetics of a Black Matrilineal Genealogy for the Americas," brings together literatures and visual arts from Puerto Rico, Suriname, Martinique, and the U.S. representing a myriad of linguistic and cultural traditions that turn to the legacy of the historical Black female body as their myth of creation. I posit these works under the heading of Plantation Zone Literatures and Visual Arts to study the centrality of Black women's labor in 20th-century works from the Black Diaspora. Once a geographic space where Africans and their heirs were forced to labor, the Plantation Zone serves as a metaphorical site where the legacy of the Black female body—in multifarious forms of triumph and pain—is celebrated through literatures and visual arts. In the Americas, Black women, unable to shake their classification as matriarchal and as such emasculatory, have been deemed dangerous to the heteropatriarchal structure of nation-states and are subjected to coercive measures to dethrone their power. Reading representations of Black women requires attention to how modern states were dependent on their labor, and in the aftermath of the plantation's demise

have attempted to expunge her genealogy from the Americas. This project utilizes an interdisciplinary model to engage with works from historians, ethnographers, sociologist and philosophers in order to study the epistemological confrontation that occurs in the art of fictionalizing Black women and how the friction between the real and the imagined offers new ways of thinking about the Black Diaspora through its matrilineal genealogy.

Before addressing the central role Black women's labor holds in the formation of the Americas, this Introduction provides a critical discussion of the limited presence of the Caribbean in English Studies as well as interdisciplinary studies in the U.S. This is a necessary step that provides a platform for my intervention in English Studies, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Latina/o Studies, Africana Studies and Black Feminist Studies. Beginning with European colonization, the Caribbean has held a key role in the domination of the Americas. Yet, the literary and artistic production of this region has maintained a limited presence in English Studies. I argue that in recognizing the Plantation Zone as the birthplace of English Studies for the Americas, European history will cease to be the marker for literary studies in the U.S. Dislodging this Eurocentric approach to the study of literatures, as housed by English Studies, will produce scholarship that privileges the relationship between the literary history of cultures native to the Americas and the emergence of new cultures that ensued with the Atlantic Slave trade.

Through representation of Black women's labor, the 20th-century works gathered in this dissertation contest the marginalized role of Black women in the history of the Americas. I argue that the productive and reproductive labor forced upon enslaved Black women in the plantation system gave birth to the cultures, arts, politics and history of the Americas. This by no means

suggests that the geographic region known as the Americas did not exist before the arrival of enslaved Africans. Instead, I posit that the creation of the New World, an European invention, and the manipulation of the land that produced European wealth could not have been achieved without the double labor performed by enslaved Black women. As such, the histories of Native Americans are not discussed in detail. While the histories of Blacks and indigenous peoples are indisputably intertwined, a comparative model would require more than the space allotted in this project.

The role Native Americans played in the plantation, both as slaves and owners of slaves, leads to different questions about ethnicity and citizenship in the Americas. For the purpose of this project, I point to two important distinctions: the first, many of the indigenous tribes that survived the European invasion maintained their ancestral languages and cultures; and, the second, indigenous cultures have been appropriated by Euro-Americans in the formation of New World nations. In the U.S., the American Indian has entered into the national consciousness as a romanticized subject, while African Americans maintain their status as interlopers. In *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century American Culture* (1998), Susan Scheckel writes that the "War of 1812 marked a turning point of U.S. attitudes towards American Indians" (4). During the 1820s, U.S. Americans began to construct an identity that, as Scheckel argues, went "beyond the founding act of revolution to offer post-Revolutionary generations a source of national identity and legitimacy" (7). As the founding fathers were dying, Scheckel notes, U.S. Americans needed to develop an identity that did not betray the Revolution and portrayed them as the rightful heirs of the Americas. Scheckel argues that the U.S. had to account for the dispossession of the American Indian while maintaining the claim of the "nation

as stable, consensual union of virtuous citizens" (4). Her study demonstrates that the literatures and monuments created in the first half of the 19th century developed a trope of mourning for the vanishing American Indian. This trope relegated indigenous people to the past, thus alleviating U.S. Americans from their participation in the "genocidal violence" against American Indians (Scheckel 129). As Scheckel notes, the inclusion of American Indians by white authors as the founding myth of American identity maintained the the break with Britain and legitimized the generation after the Revolution as the rightful heirs to the Americas. But the inclusion of Native Americans existed only in the realm of fiction. In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the "Indian Removal Act" forcefully moving Native Americans from the Southern states to the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. The "Indian Problem" was treated by relegating the myth of the American Indian to the past, and actual American Indians to the margins of U.S. national identity. The distinction in how the U.S. treated the "Indian Problem" and the "Negro Problem" lies in how white citizenship utilized the myth of the American Indian to claim ownership of the land and the enslaved African as resources to insure the genealogy of its citizens.

This projects argues that English Studies in the U.S. must be representative of American culture. To do so, English Departments, which by the nature of literary studies are interdisciplinary, must include a significant discussion of literatures of the Plantation Zone through a Black feminist ideology. This approach requires that literary scholarship centers on the confluence of gender, race and class in the Americas. The present Eurocentric approach that dominates English department places literatures representative of the majority of the population of the Americas on the margins. In this work, I'm conscious of the use of the signifiers

"American" and "Black" as pertaining to U.S. citizenship. Within the U.S., American signifies white U.S. citizenship and when hyphenated with minority signifiers—such as Native, African, Mexican—is used to indicate the larger population of citizens who, unable to inhabit a white identity, are denied full U.S. citizenship.[2] South of the U.S., particularly in countries of the Americas where Spanish is spoken, American or *Americano* is not indicative of U.S. identity alone. This term is usually modified to indicate people of a region under multiple nationalities, such as *Norte Americanos* to indicate people of Mexico, U.S. and Canada, and *Centro Americanos* to indicate the people of Central America and *Sur Americanos* to indicate people of South America. In other words, while U.S. citizenship may monopolize the term American as a singular identity, I recognize it as indicative of a larger identity that spans the two continents and its outlying islands. The highly controversial signifier Black is generally recognized within the U.S. as indicative of African American culture. Outside of the U.S., Black is used to recognize African heritage but to varying effects. Caribbean cultures celebrate to varying degrees their indigenous, African and European heritage, although the latter is given prominence, as part of their national identities. U.S. racial codes developed during the frontier period that shape the current understanding of race recognize white identity as dialectically opposed to an African heritage. While in Cuba, for example, the prefix "Afro" or Black may be used to describe a particular musical style or cultural artifact, national identity recognizes the amalgamation of the indigenous, African and European cultures. In other words, in the Caribbean there is not a

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[2] Although by law, ethnic minorities are supposed to be afforded full benefits of U.S. American citizenship, the current political climate suggests otherwise. In Arizona suspicious individuals are harassed to provide proof of citizenship, traffic cops are trained in racial profiling and segregated housing of minorities within public housing projects questions how ethnic minorities inhabit full citizenship.

separate body of citizens that are labeled as Afro-Jamaicans or Afro-Puerto Ricans. This does not suggest that Cuba is free of racism, but that the U.S. "one drop rule" does not control racial identity or citizenship. Instead, the collective identity is recognized as emerging from the history of African slavery. As an cultural signifier, Black, much like the term American, has also been monopolized as belonging to U.S. culture. In this project, Black is used to connote the multiplicity of cultures that emerged from the Plantation Zone.This Introduction will be followed by chapter descriptions.

The Caribbean in English Studies

With few notable exceptions—such as Édouard Glissant's critical work on William Faulkner, the reading of *négritude* poets alongside the Harlem Renaissance, and the attention to Cuban literature from Marxists Studies—the Caribbean basin remains relatively silent in English Studies. The literatures brought together in this project are founding fictions in their nations of origin, but in translation they are not studied as representative of American literature, a term inhabited in the U.S. by literatures written in English. The absence of a multilingual approach to the study of English is in part due to the monolingual myth that limits the study of literature to white U.S. American and white British writers. In the U.S., English Departments are founded on a literary lineage that connects to British literatures and sees its ancestry in Old English and co-opted ancient texts. *The Republic, The Holy Bible, Beowulf*, and *The Canterbury Tales* are read in translation as foundational works for the study of English in the U.S. Because these works are presented in translation, it demonstrates that the English language is not the unifying element in English Studies. Instead, it suggests that the construction of national identity in the U.S. as

represented through the literary canon has yet to embrace its multilingual and multicultural reality.

English Departments have been slow, if not resistant, to adopt the ideological shift in American Studies to the more promising comparative model of literary scholarship in Transamerican Studies. This shift promises to recognize an American identity beyond the Black and white binary and study the multiplicity of cultures that come to define the Americas. These limited changes can be seen in the inclusion of *corridos*, Filipina/o literature and Nuyorican poetry in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature: Contemporary Period (1945 to the Present) 6th Edition* (2009). In literary criticism, this Transamerican approach is predominantly seen in works by scholars of African American literature such as Vera M. Kutzinski's 1987 study, *Against the American Grain: Myth and History in William Carlos Williams, Jay Wright, and Nicolás Guillén.* Kutzinski's multilingual comparative project connects Jay Wright and William Carlos Williams, the latter a canonical U.S. American poet, to Nicolás Guillén, Cuba's national poet, as representative of American literatures. Another example is Michelle M. Wright's *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (2004), which compares the decolonization experiences in Black writers from the U.S., the Francophone Black Diaspora and the Black German population. But comparative projects like Wright's and Kutzinski's are rare.[3] The category of American Studies and Transamerican Studies, as seen in the singular representation of America as opposed to the Americas, privileges U.S. literatures and culture. The study of minority literatures, particularly those of the Black Diaspora, has been relegated to

[3] See also Valèrie Loichot's *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literatures of Faulker, Glissant, Morrison, & Saint John Perse.*

interdisciplinary studies that tend to be overwhelmed with the multicultural and multilingual demands of their respective fields.

Heavily weighted towards India and its relationship to England, Postcolonial Studies emerged as a means to combat the effects of European colonization. There are multiple points of similarity between the history of colonialism in India and the history of colonialism in the Caribbean. As a geographic space, both were occupied by the major colonial powers of modernity—Portugal, Spain, France and Britain—but the presence of U.S. imperial projects and the role assigned to languages in these histories disrupts a smooth comparative model. As Wright argues in *Becoming Black,* postcolonial scholars like Gayatri Spivak and Hommi K. Bhabha "have offered numerous possibilities for a postcolonial subject, their derivations ignore all but those of South Asian descent, often 'reinventing the wheel' by passing those African diasporic works of theoretical significance in favor of dialoging with their colleagues in poststructuralism" (26). For Wright, the relationship forged between postcolonialism and poststructuralism fails to recognize the intellectual traditions of "peoples of African descent in the West" that offer counter discourses to the "oppressive epistemologies of Western European colonialist thought" (26). Wright's critique points to how "unwittingly" postcolonial studies falls prey to its own critique by acting on the "very assumptions it seeks to overturn" (26). It is undeniable that the writing of the Martiniquan Frantz Fanon has shaped the works of the U.S. postcolonial trinity—Gayatri Chakrovarty Spivak, Edward Said, and Homi K. Bhabha—but the field of Postcolonial Studies has not included a comprehensive analysis of Caribbean thought.

The study of postcolonialism in Latin American and Caribbean Studies, albeit the effects of European or U.S. colonization, is predominantly represented by literatures written in Spanish

and Portuguese and works to recover indigenous languages such as Quechua and Guaraní. As in English Studies, the study of the African heritage, particularly in literatures written in Spanish, is relegated to a subdivision and has canonized literatures that are influenced by European aesthetic movements. In English Studies, the study of literatures from Latin America and the Caribbean turns to the Latin American Boom novel—such as the works of Julio Cortázar of Argentina, Gabriel García Márquez of Colombia and Mario Vargas Llosa of Peru—influenced by *vanguardismo* or the vanguard movement in Latin American and European modernism, and its predecessors *novelas de la tierra* or novels of the land—such as the work of Juan Rulfo of Mexico, Horacio Quiroga Forteza of Uruguay, José Eustacio Rivera Salas of Colombia and Jorge Luis Borges of Argentina—that were inspired by indigenous cultures. Although taking the name of the region, Latin American and Caribbean studies privileges continental literatures, leaving literatures written in Spanish from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, as well as literatures from the region written in French, English, Dutch and Creole, underrepresented, if not completely absent, in this field.

Good Neighborhood, Bad Neighbor: Expansion of the U.S. Empire

The silence of the Caribbean in English Studies, and its subdivisions, is perhaps more jolting since the U.S. first flexed its imperial prowess with the Spanish American War in 1898 and its subsequent invasion of Cuba, the Philippines and Puerto Rico. But it was President Theodore Roosevelt's bold response to the demand by European governments for Latin America and the Caribbean to pay their old debts that led the U.S. to establish its rise to world power. In his 1905 Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, Roosevelt called for "some civilized nation" to step in and defend the "impotent" against "chronic wrongdoing" by European powers and named the

U.S. as an “international police power” (ourdocuments.gov). The “cordial good will” policing of the “Corollary” (ourdocuments.gov) was replaced in 1933 by FDR’s “Good Neighbor” no interference policy but this was quickly discarded after 1945 when the U.S. named Communism as its archenemy. U.S. foreign policy in Latin American and the Caribbean during the 20th century “would train and fund a police force and military to maintain order and would sponsor an election intended to put into power a strong leader supportive of American interests[...] such as Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, and Francois Duvalier in Haiti” (Perez 184). By the end of the 20th century the number of military occupations and/or interventions to protect U.S. financial interests had created client states throughout the region allowing private companies to monopolize the economic market in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Controlling the Caribbean was an important step enabling the U.S. to maintain power over the Americas. The U.S. modeled its approach to dominate the Americas to tactics employed by European powers in the colonization of the New World. Since the 16th-century when Spain controlled the area, the Caribbean basin, particularly the 100 mile Florida channel, had long been considered the “cockpit of international rivalry” (Pérez 166). In “Intervention, Hegemony, and Dependency: The United States in the Circum-Caribbean, 1898-1980” Louis A. Pérez, Jr. argues that, for Spain, controlling the Caribbean Sea was of utmost importance because it was in Havana, Cuba, that “the great treasure fleets of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” “that subsidized Spain’s ascendency in Europe” converged (166). The Caribbean basin was the “exposed jugular of the Spanish empire” and the other European empires understood that “to defeat Spain in Europe it was necessary to attack Spain in America” (Pérez 166). Regardless of

the vast and strategic naval presence set to protect the shipping lanes in the Caribbean, Spain could not hold exclusivity over the region and by the end of the 17th century the Eastern Caribbean was under the control of other European powers (167). Pérez argues that the exclusivist model held by Spain for almost 200 years in the Caribbean became "the cornerstone of [U.S.] hemispheric policy" (166). Unlike the European model of colonialism, the U.S. developed a "client state" that allowed it to maintain a hegemonic presence through electoral manipulation and military backed dictatorships in Latin America and the Caribbean (Pérez 167).

The most beneficial strategy for the U.S. in Latin America and the Caribbean was the creation of banana republics. A term used to describe countries whose main exports are tropical fruits, banana republics best exemplify the U.S.'s expansion project that began in Central America. In *The Banana Men: American Mercenaries and Entrepreneurs in Central America 1880-1930*, Lester D. Langley and Thomas Schooner argue that through privately owned companies, or, as they refer to them, agents of imperialism, the U.S. dominated the import and export of goods starting in Central America and the Caribbean. The most infamous U.S. American mercenary/entrepreneur, Minor Cooper Keith, the grandson of a railroad builder and the son of a lumber merchant, built a railroad through the Costa Rican jungle that allowed the transport of goods from San José, the capitol, to Puerto Limón on the Caribbean coast. Keith began this extensive and dangerous project with laborers from Central America. When most of these laborers perished, he imported incarcerated men from a New Orleans jail. When these laborers perished, he then imported recently arrived Italian immigrants to the U.S., most of whom also perished under arduous working conditions. At the cost of hundreds of lives, the railroad was finally built. When Keith, low on capital, merged with his rival, the Boston Fruit

Company, to form the United Fruit Company (UFCO) he was transformed into one of the most powerful men in Central America. Also known as "el pulpo" ("the octopus") because its tentacles reached throughout the Americas, the UFCO in the first half of the 20th century controlled 70 percent of the export of bananas from the Caribbean region (Langley & Schooner 180). According to the United Fruit Historical Society, Keith was the "uncrowed King of Central America" (unitedfruits.org).

In "Black Workers in the Export Years: Latin America, 1880-1930," George Reid Andrews argues that the growth of trans-Atlantic commerce also produced trans-Atlantic migrations of white-European workers (11). From 1880-1930, 28 million Europeans migrated to the U.S. and 10-11 million migrated to Latin America and the Caribbean (Andrews 11). This migration was encouraged in Latin America by the government elite who were looking to "whiten" their population, but the hazardous working conditions of banana plantations repulsed European laborers. While many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean vied for European workers, it was Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Uruguay that had the combination of job opportunities and working conditions to attract white workers (Andrews 14). In Brazil, Argentina and Cuba these European immigrants took prominent roles in mobilizing labor and orchestrating work stoppages, but the bulk of the arduous work was left to West Indian immigrants brought to the area by U.S. owned companies (Andrews 14). While "Latin American elites and government [...] actively discouraged black immigration and in some cases formally banned it", U.S. enterprise in Latin America and the Caribbean would be built upon the labor of Black workers (Andrews 16). U.S. owned companies "imported" West Indian workers in staggering numbers: 200-300,000 were brought to work in the oil industry in Venezuela; 150-200,000 to build the

Panama canal; and 300,000 to work the sugar plantations in Cuba (Andrews 15). Displaced Cuban workers in Oriente protested against the "Africanization" of the Island by U.S. owned sugar plantations that brought workers from Haiti and Jamaica (Andrews 16). Andrews argues that the import of workers from the West Indies was a maneuver by U.S. companies to displace local Black workers who had begun to demand better working conditions. The conflicts that arose from the influx of European and West Indian laborers would prove to be beneficial for the UFCO by pitting workers against each other and further aggravating racial rifts in these regions.

The U.S. was not the only imperial power involved in the production of banana republics or the revival of sugar cane production in Latin America and the Caribbean, but it played a key role in continuing the tradition of imposing a monocultural market for this region. This form of economic exploitation was modeled after European colonialism. In *Voicing Memory: History and Subjectivity in French Caribbean Literature* (2003), Nick Nesbitt writes that colonizing the space, bringing slaves from Africa, committing genocide upon the native populations and creating dependence upon the metropolis is part of the antillean historical experience (7). As Nesbitt argues, the dependency of the colonies on the metropolis was foretold as early as 1727 when France monopolized the economic market by ensuring "that their trade would be throughly and insidiously complementary: no products might be produced in the colonies that would compete with metropolitan production" (7). As Nesbitt writes, "only rarefied, exotic goods impossible to produce in France (sugar, bananas, fur) were cultivated, while the colonies imported all other goods from France" (7). This type of monocultural mode of operation defines the colonies in the Americas where slaves toiled to produce sugar, cotton, coffee and other "exotic goods." The U.S. applied a similar market strategy to control resources in Latin

American and Caribbean countries for the benefit of powerful elite and privately owned U.S. companies.[4]

In the 20th-century, the majority of Black workers laboring in fruit and sugar plantations in the Latin American continent have been labeled as immigrants from Caribbean islands. But the anthropologist Darío A. Euraque, in "The Threat of Blackness to the Mestizo Nation: Race and Ethnicity in Honduran Banana Economy, 1920s and 1930s," challenges the claim that the Black population in Honduras, one of the largest banana republics in Central America, is predominantly made up of West Indian immigrants. As the title of Enraque's text indicates, "Blackness" as expressed by the Honduras elite was constructed as a threat to "Mestizo" identity. The term mestizo is often used to describe the mixture of indigenous and European cultures creating an Indo-Hispanic identity. In this article, Euraque argues that census records have been misread and that the Garifuna population, who have lived along the Caribbean coast of the Latin American continent since the 1790s, have been mistaken for West Indians. Predating the banana enclave, the Garifuna population was formed by escaped enslaved Africans from Latin American and Caribbean islands that merged with the population of indigenes in the area. Euraque posits the turn by government officials in the 1920s to idolize Lempira, an indigenous Chieftain who fought off the Spaniards in the 16th century, as a national figure revived the indigenous culture of

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[4] In 1899, after sugar plantations in Puerto Rico were devastated by two hurricanes, laborers from the Island were sent to work in sugar plantations also owned by the U.S. in Hawaii. This would not be the first time that the U.S. would mobilize cheap labor from Puerto Rico to other areas of the U.S. The large migration of Puerto Ricans between the World Wars displaced African American workers in the U.S. and help maintain power over the Island. Today, Puerto Rico's economy is dependent on U.S. tourism and pharmaceutical drug companies. These U.S. owned companies on the island export "16 of the 20 pharmaceutical drugs sold in the U.S." (*pridco.com*). Yet, Puerto Rico's unemployment levels in March of 2011 was at 16% almost twice that of the U.S.

the region as a means to create a Honduran culture outside of a Black identity. Much as Scheckel argues in her study of the American Indian, the turn towards Honduran indigenous heritage allowed the Creole elite a naturalized claim on the land while omitting its Black population. The Garifunas trace their lineage to escaped African slaves and the Native population from along the coast of the Latin American continent. The turn to indigenous heritage as definitive of its national myth and the manipulation of census records to mark the Garifuna workers as West Indians demonstrates a desire to rid the Honduran identity of a Black population.

While Euraque stops short of suggesting that the turn towards Lempira was in response to the presence of the U.S., for the U.S. maintaining power over Latin America and the Caribbean reached beyond economic and political dominion. Through privately owned companies with the support of the U.S. military power, the U.S. imposed its racial ideology through the Americas altering identity politics in the region. In *Taking Haiti: Military Occupancy and Culture, 1915-1940,* Mary A. Renda argues that the U.S. behaved towards Haiti like a benevolent father taking reign from the child-like Haitians. The U.S. created a new military force, *gendarmerie d'Haïti*, commanded by U.S. American officers, including some who dressed in Haitian military uniforms. These officers brought with them U.S. racial hierarchies and applied the racist assumption they held about African Americans to Haitians. Under the guidance of the U.S. military the *gendarmerie d'Haiti* was responsible for squashing the *cacos* rebellion in 1915 and the growing women's movement in Haiti (Renda 142).

What European colonization was to the New World in the 16th century —devastation of peoples, cultures and land—the U.S., through its private corporations, was to Latin American and the Caribbean in the 20th century. Privately owned U.S. companies mobilized workers from

economically depressed regions in the Americas to U.S. owned companies throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. This importation of laborers displaced poor Black laborers in the region by offering low skill jobs to recent immigrants. This in turn disrupted the decolonization process for Latin America and the Caribbean because those efforts were monitored by U.S. international policy. Numerous interventions and occupations initiated by the U.S. government to protect its financial and military interest in Latin America and the Caribbean spanned the region and the 20th century. By monopolizing the export and import of goods, the U.S. made the region financially dependent on the U.S.

Los de acá y los de allá: Towards the American Dream

In the U.S., Latina/o scholarship is often split by migration patterns. West Coast universities, such as the California state universities, have developed strong Chicana/o scholarship. East Coast universities, such as CUNY Hunter and CUNY The City College of New York, have developed Puerto Rican and Dominican studies in the U.S. Florida, as the original hub of Cuban migration, has developed strong departments of Cuban Studies. While studies of the Spanish speaking Caribbean islands—Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico—are common, maneuvering an interdisciplinary literary project between the Spanish speaking U.S. and Black Studies has proven to be difficult. This is in part due to the limits placed by imaginary color lines that shape how immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean conceive of the American Dream.

The promise in the U.S. Declaration of Independence "that all men are created equal" and can achieve prosperity and success has proven to be a false U.S. motto for immigrants of color searching for the American dream. In 2005, Mexico's then President, Vicente Fox Quesada

criticized the U.S. treatment of Mexican workers by stating, "there's no doubt that Mexican men and women — full of dignity, will power and a capacity for work — are doing the work that not even blacks want to do in the United States" (usatoday.com). Rev. Jesse Jackson criticized the President for being “inciting and divisive” in light of the tension that exists between African Americans and Latinas/os who compete for similar low-wage jobs. Rev. Al Sharpton was quick to point out that Fox, who was educated in the U.S., "is not unaware of the racial sensitivities here" (usatoday.com). Refusing to apologize, Fox defended his comment as “stating a fact” about U.S. attitudes towards Blacks (usatoday.com). Fox has stood by his comment because "the purpose [...] was none other than to show the importance Mexican workers have today in the development and progress of U.S. society" (usatoday.com). Mexican labor, documented and undocumented, is essential to the U.S. economy, but, in attempting to defend Mexican workers, Fox utilizes racist ideology that portrays Black workers as both lazy and only capable of unskilled labor. This statement reinforces the separation of Black and white forms of citizenship that is an ubiquitous component of U.S. national identity. Viewed as separate from white industry, the labor of African Americans is seen as transferrable to immigrants because it is not constitutive of U.S. national identity and will not lead to the American Dream. Furthermore, the suggestion that immigrants perform the work that “not even blacks want to do” implies a hierarchy where the Mexican workers’ “dignity, willpower and capacity” rises above that of Blacks. Instead of challenging how the U.S. government repeatedly violates human rights through poor work conditions and lack of legal representation for its undocumented workers, Fox’s comments obfuscate racist institutional practices that target people of color through divisive imaginary color lines.

The representation of Hispanic writers in literary studies is complicated by a similar approach that ignores or minimizes how the history of African slavery shapes Latina/o cultures in favor of a turn towards their European or indigenous heritage. In "'So Far From God So Close to the United States': The Roots of Hispanic Homogenization," Suzanne Oboler writes:

> [...]unlike all other groups in this country, the very basis of African American historical struggle for human and civil rights is rooted in slavery. Thus, the specificity of their history contrasts markedly with the terms of the historical public debates on inclusion of people of Latin American descent. Regardless of the prejudices and racialized discrimination against the latter, they did not have to contend with the political and socioeconomic consequences of enslavement. Instead, the situation of Latinos entailed the disentangling of the conflation of their race and national origins in their struggle for political and civil rights. (39)

By making the claim that people of Latin American descent can be free from the consequences of enslavement, Obeler relies on concepts of racial purity that denies the existence of plantations in Latin America and the involvement of Latinas/os, especially Chicanas/os, in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. The disentangling of "the conflation of race and national origins" that, according to Oboler, Latinas/os must undertake then suggests that to gain political inclusion in the U.S., Latinas/os must break with the African American political struggle. Oboler's stance demands recognition for Latinas/os political needs outside of African American politics. But, regardless of their Hispanic roots, Latinas/os live in African American areas and, like African Americans, suffer from a disproportionate lack of adequate education, job possibilities and are

targeted by police through racial profiling. Obeler draws on a distinction that is based on class constructions. Class prominence in the Caribbean and Latin America tends to undermine skin color identifications. This does not undo or lessen the effects of racism, but for Latinas/os negotiating their identity outside of African American identity, race through class construction vacillates between a desire for difference and racism.

The racist and historical inaccuracies that underline Fox's and Obeler's desire for difference is not unique to Latinas/os. In a 1996 interview for *Harper's Magazine*, Cornel West defined Latinas/os as follows:

> I think of them as voluntary immigrants who entered America and had to encounter this thoroughly absurd system of classification of positively charged whiteness, negatively charged blackness. And they don't fit either one: They're not white, they're not Black.[...] But they are not treated as whites [...] Even if a Latino brother or sister has supposedly white skin, he or she is still Latino in the eyes of white privilege. (West 506)

West's answer reveals tensions on the politics of race relations between people of color: by imposing the dominant African American construct of Black and white identity upon Latinos West elides the distinctive and complex dynamics of Latina/o racial identity. In naming Latinas/os as "voluntary immigrants," West is not recognizing how the U.S.'s presence in Latin America and the Caribbean displaced workers from this region ensuing an economically forced migration to the U.S. West argues that Latinas/os "don't fit" white nor Black identity, but doesn't offer any other alternative. He goes on to explain that he sees Latinos "primarily as people of color, as brown people who have to deal with their blackness-whiteness" (506). This contrast of Black and

white identities requires or expects Latina/o immigrants to choose a Black identity because in the U.S., regardless of how they are identified back "home," they are barred from inhabiting a white identity. For West, immigrants who visually or culturally fit African American identity are categorized as an African American and are defined by this racial and cultural re-assignment. Latinas/os, like many other immigrants from the Plantation Zone, are left to negotiate their re-configured identities through either racist assumptions that block their access to whiteness or a Black identity that collapses their culture under an afrocentrist African American identity. Shaped by this paradigm—West's "blackness-whiteness"—Latinas/os both shape and are shaped by this collision.

Latinas/os in the U.S. are shaped by the re-articulation of their identity through U.S. Black codes, but they also actively participate in shaping both the signifiers that are imposed upon them and the cultures they come in contact with. Juan Flores, in *From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* (2000), takes the position that the categories of Hispanic and Latinas/os both generate and perpetuate stereotypes. As he argues, these categories are misleading because it assumes that the cultures swept under this category "are all progressing toward acceptance and self-advancement from the same starting line, and at the same pace" (8). In "'Que Assimilated, Brother, Yo Soy Asimilao': The Structuring of Puerto Rican Identity in the U.S.," Flores argues that the migration, social cultural history and racial characteristics of Puerto Ricans allow them to both shape and be shaped by Chicana/o, African American and Black Caribbean cultures. For example, Flores posits that Puerto Rican culture shares a commonality with other groups from Latin America because of their history of Spanish colonialism and Spanish language. The category of Hispanic serves on an international level to make connections

with Spanish American cultures, but these similarities tend to create more difference than unity when collapsed into one category. In the U.S. Puerto Ricans, because of their unique position as "internally colonial" in the U.S. American ethnic landscape, are closer to Mexican Americans, American Indians, and African Americans than to Latinas/os living in Latin America and the Caribbean (*From Bomba* 10). Puerto Ricans then represent an unassimilable diaspora with overlapping dimensions of difference that allow them to shift between an international immigrant experience and internal minorities experience; therefore, Puerto Ricans elude categorization under these kinships but still shape and are shaped by these cultures.

The fluidity of the Puerto Rican experience—between the international immigrant and internal colonial subject—is the foundation of Nuyorican literature. As opposed to literature from Puerto Rico, the authors of the Nuyorican literary movement predominantly choose to write in English or in Spanglish (code switching). In Piri Thomas's fictionalized autobiography, *Down These Means Streets* (1967)*,* Piri is caught between international Hispanic identity as constructed through his Cuban father and Puerto Rican mother that in the U.S. exists only in the space of the home, and the internal colonial experience of Black identity imposed upon him in the streets of Harlem, NY. His search for a definitive racial identity, Hispanic or Black, takes him not to the Caribbean, where his parents were born, but to Texas. Feigning that he does not speak English and with the help of a Mexican American man, Piri enters a brothel that does not serve Blacks. After having sex with a white prostitute, Piri confesses in English "you got fucked by a nigger, by a black man" (189). Piri is allowed entrance into the brothel when he performs, with the help of a Mexican American informant, an international immigrant identity. But once in the brothel, Piri reassumes his internal colonial identity through the U.S. signifier nigger. In doing so, he

discards his parents' attempt to cling to a white Island identity and embraces a Black American identity, which he had assumed was part of his culture all along. But Piri's embrace of a Black identity comes with caveats. His love interest Trina, a light-skinned Puerto Rican, is classified as a "paddy" placing her outside of a Black identity but still racializing her within the non-white Irish identity. Piri explains to the African American character Brew, who is distrustful of Trina, that, unlike in the U.S., light-skinned Puerto Ricans marry dark-skinned Puerto Ricans. Brew responds by asking, "Think, she'd marry a dark cat who wasn't no Porty Rican like me, fo' instance?" (166). Holding out the hope that Trina has not bought into constructions of U.S. white identity and could love him regardless of the Black identity he inhabits in the U.S., Piri responds, "If she loved you" (166). This exchange between Puerto Rican, Mexican American, and African American identities demonstrates a fluidity of the Latina/o experience that can be manipulated through U.S. racial codes but never quite rests within a white or Black U.S. identity.

Connections among Puerto Rican, African American and Mexican American cultures are often threatened by racialized hierarchies developed through colonialism. Marta E. Sánchez's 2005 comparative study, *"Shakin' Up" Race and Gender Intercultural Connections in Puerto Rican, African American, and Chicano Narratives and Culture (1965-1995),* links Chicana/o, Puerto Rican and African American literatures through the Mexican metaphor of La Malinche. Sánchez deploys this metaphor as a means to create an intercultural feminist reading that allows her to "lift a veil" and reveal the "scenes and themes enacted" in her reading of minority literature in the U.S. literary canon (12). For Sánchez, Mexican, and by extension Chicana/o, identity is formulated through the figure of La Malinche. In Mexican culture La Malinche, or Malitzin Tenépal, is seen as betraying the native population through her role as military strategist

and concubine to the Conquistador Hernán Cortés. Her role in the fall of the Aztec empire has transformed her into the "symbolic mother of Mexican *mestizos* and *mestizas*" (original italics 13). For the study of the Mexican mestizo identity Sánchez states that "gender is indispensable" to map an "intercultural literary and cultural studies," but fails to place in conversation the well known black female tropes in both African American and Puerto Rican literary traditions alongside the trope of La Malinche (11). This failure suggests that Puerto Rican and African American cultures do not possess the same historical legacy as Mexican and Chicana/o cultures. In not offering models of comparison with La Malinche she implies an absence of progenitor female metaphors for Puerto Rican and African American cultures. In doing so, Sanchez denies the literary legacy of these cultures. Another point of contention in Sánchez's study is the use of Oscar Lewis's *La Vida; A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York* (1966) and Senator Moynihan's "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action" as sources of information on Puerto Rican and African American cultures, respectively. Both the Moynihan Report and *La Vida* provide racist depictions of both cultures and aggressively attack the misconceived matriarchal family structures of these cultures. Furthermore, Sánchez utilizes Thomas's *Down These Mean Streets* as representative of Puerto Rican literature when it's one of the founding works of Nuyorican literature. This ignores the literary history of the Island and its long standing conflict with the literary tradition of Puerto Ricans, or Nuyoricans, living in the states.

The literary production by Latinos living in the U.S. and Latin Americans and Caribbeaners living in their home of origin has a long tradition of conflict. Lyn Di Iorio notes in *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity* (2003) that islanders,

especially Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, believe that in the Diaspora, Nuyoricans and Dominican Yorks live in a "fragmentary hybridized Spanish" (4). The distinctions that arise between Island writers who stick to the "pure" Spanish language and those in the U.S. who manipulate English through "broken" language or code switching creates a rift in these literary traditions. Di Iorio names this rift as *matando el español* or killing Spanish, a term she borrows from Puerto Ricans living on the Island who consider Nuyoricans's use of code-switching as a threat to Island culture. She argues that Latina/o authors who choose to write in English are still "bound to Spanish, be it broken or pure, and bound to memory or an awareness—sometimes more powerful to a denial—of the lands of origin" (2). Through the works of Latina/o writers of different nationalities, Di Iorio's study demonstrates "an ambivalence about a (a past) Caribbean or Latin American origin as well as (a present) unassimilated U.S. Latino/a identity" (3). She argues that the unassimilated characters are often women who are sacrificed because they are linked to "past origins, an identification which must be give up so that characters can assimilate to the new American reality" (3). Often presented as "dead, mad and Black," these characters haunt the stories crafting the "new American reality" through an allegory that reassembles the unassimilated past as they are "constantly remembered, lived, reinvented" (Di Iorio 12). The killing of Black characters, especially women, comes to represent a rupture that maintains a jagged remnant of its place of origin for Latina/o cultures. This creates new expressions that shape and are shaped by migration and the evolution of the Spanish language in the Americas.

The Caribbean in African American Discourse

Migrating at the end of the nineteenth century, the Puerto Rican Arturo Schomburg (1874-1938) became involved in the Harlem Renaissance and amassed a collection of inter-

national and inter-cultural Black literatures that spans the African Diaspora in the Americas. This collection was later purchased by the 135th Street Branch of the New York Public Library that was renamed in his honor as the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. The goal of the collection, to demonstrate the vibrancy of Black cultures throughout the Americas, is curtailed by placing the collection under a singular Black identity. Writers of the Black Diaspora, because of their shared history of slavery and cultural similarities, have maintained a presence in African American literary discourse. But this union is always under the threat of collapsing Caribbean cultures under the dominant African American culture.

This threat manifests itself through the censuring of any Black expression that is not in keeping with the U.S. one drop rule of racial identity. In *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938)*,* Zora Neale Hurston deploys a searing critique against Jamaican creole identity for its celebration of whiteness and its seeming rejection of Black identity. Hurston argues that the desire by Jamaicans to hold on to any association to whiteness harks back to how recently freed slaves in the U.S. behaved. She writes,

> the situation presents a curious spectacle to the eyes of an American Negro. It is as if one stepped back to the days of slavery or the generation immediately after surrender when negroes had little else to boast of except a left-hand kinship with the master, and the privileges that usually went with it of being house servants instead of field hands. (7)

Hurston critiques Jamaican Creoles as not having devolved from the colonized mindset. She speculates that Jamaican culture functions on an imposed hierarchy whose ideology is based on access to whiteness and claims that “at present, no shame was attached to a child born” out of

wedlock ("'in a carriage with no top'") when this places the child closer to a white identity (7). Hurston imposes upon Jamaican culture an African American concept of racial identity whose goal is to "achieve a position equal to the white population in every way but each race to maintain its separate identity" (8). Hurston's clash with Jamaican culture demonstrates that for African Americans claiming or relying on any claim of an European heritage is a betrayal of the self and an attack on Black identity. She argues that in Jamaica, particularly among the "mixed bloods," "a person may be black by birth but white by proclamation" (8). Hurston surmises that the majority of Jamaica's population is Black, but the "Englishman" allows them to be white on census records because it will make them "better colonials" but in private racial purity still matters (8). Hurston's critique is directed at middle-class Creole elites who in the absence of a greater European presence on the Island are able to proclaim their whiteness.

In light of the contribution of Jamaican writers to Black Diasporic thought, Hurston's critique may seem reactionary and outdated. Yet, her critique in *Tell My Horse* is still pertinent today because of how she characterizes African American culture. In stating that Jamaicans are still holding on to the colonized mentality of recently freed slaves, she is proclaiming African American cultures as being the first group to arrive at a decolonized Black identity. In doing so, she categorizes the signifier Black—the desire for equality but difference from white culture—as emerging primarily, if not exclusively, from African American culture. In "Slippery Language and False Dilemmas: The Passing Novels of Child, Howells, and Harper" (2003), Julie Carie Nerad contends that "the one-drop rule still has a toehold on American racial consciousness" (814). She writes that "racial uplift, with its debt of responsibility, has become a significant part of our racial ideology: if one's family is African American, if one has any 'drop'

of black blood, then one has a responsibility to the race and should proclaim oneself black" (Nerad 814). Nerad argues that African American racial ideology censures those of African heritage who attempt to live outside of a U.S. defined Black identity. This expectation is imposed on all immigrants of African descent and, inadvertently, consumes all Black cultures under one universal African American identity. This conflation threatens to erase the multiplicity of cultures that emerged from the Plantation Zone by collapsing the signifier Black as belonging exclusively to African American culture.

The phenomenon witnessed by Hurston is not unique to Jamaica. As opposed to the U.S. where any amount of African heritage classifies the individual as Black, in the Caribbean being Black has varying meaning that are modified by education and wealth. The sociologist Nancy Foner, *In a New Land: A Comparative View of Immigration* (2005), argues that in the U.S. and Britain, West Indian immigrants are labeled Black as an universal group. Foner writes that in Jamaica, "'blacks' are generally thought of as impoverished individuals with African ancestry, dark skin, and certain facial features and hair types" (111). As opposed to the U.S. and Britain, where regardless of varying skin tones all Caribbeaners are Black, in the Caribbean phenotypes that may be attributed to European, Asian or Middle Eastern produce varying classifications such as '"brown' or 'colored'" (Foner 111). As Foner points out in New York and London "education, income, and culture do not partly 'erase' one's blackness'" (112). After being categorized as Black in the U.S., Caribbeaners are subject to the same prejudices as African Americans. If poor Caribbeaners have to contend with being classified as Black on their Islands of origin, then their experience as immigrants in the U.S. is marked not by being classified Black but by being classified African American and having to contend with how the U.S. deploys Black stereotypes.

According to Foner, in a strange turn, the West-Indian immigrants in London see their racist experience as based on U.S. constructs of Black identity. In other words, while in Britain they feel that they have been misnamed as African Americans and are being treated as such, suggesting that Black identity at an international level is tied to U.S. racial codes.

The treatment of slaves in the Plantation Zone is eerily similar regardless of the European power in control (and after the American Revolution in the U.S.), but after emancipation the Caribbean and the U.S. developed differing ways of policing Black identity. In the U.S., the treatment of people of African descent is marked by the reverberations of slave codes and after emancipation through the 19th century Black Codes and Jim Crow Laws that spanned the second half of the 19th and late into the 20th century. In the Caribbean, the policing of Black culture was not marred by the genocide of African Americans that ensued from Black Codes in the U.S.; nonetheless, these nations developed political and cultural mechanisms that policed Black identities through class consciousness based on sanguinary euphemisms. For example, the Jamaican author Michelle Cliff writes that her family on the Island was labelled as "red" to connote her family's light skin color. This placed her family outside of a pure Black identity and at the same time classified her family as belonging to a higher social class. By having white ancestry Cliff's family removed itself from a pure Black identity but did not completely erase an African slave genealogy. Cliff's family had lived in the U.S. and this also elevated her family's social class. Cliff writes that while Jamaicans' "primary colonial identification is English, American colonialism was a strong force" (16). Like many other inhabitants of the Caribbean and Latin America, Jamaicans were employed by U.S. owned companies and were exposed to U.S. music and movies. In a similar fashion the Puerto Rican author Mayra Santos Febres writes

that growing up middle-class on the island in the 1970s her parents forbade her from listening to the emerging music genre of Salsa because it was an expression of the lower class. As her parents were interested in raising a "negrita fina y acepillá" ("a refined Black girl with straightened hair"[5]) they allowed her to listen only to Disney songs and traditional children's music from Spain (Santos Febres 175). For Santos Febres, as a dark-skinned child growing up in the twice colonized island, being proper was emulating white identity by consuming cultural artifacts from the U.S. and Spain.

Accounts of passing for white or becoming white in the Caribbean may appear similar to stories of passing in the U.S. But passing in the U.S. means extracting oneself from a visually inescapable minority group of African Americans, to hiding within the larger white U.S. American identity.[6] This move requires that the individual live in exile from the Black community. All association with Black culture and darker-skinned family members who would divulge the family's African heritage ceases. In the Caribbean and Latin America passing for white requires moving from the larger population classified as Black, to the minority of whites, but this move does not come with a complete divorcing of Black identity either by choice or circumstance. Living a middle-class life in the Caribbean suggests moving away from Black stereotypes even if this condemns aspects of the national culture through the employment of these stereotypes. Racism in the Caribbean is deployed through class constructions that model

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[5] My translation.

[6] Passing is a theme present in African American literatures from slave narratives such as William and Ellen Craft's *Running a thousand Miles for Freedom, or the Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (1860), in works of fiction such as Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) and in memoirs such as the works of Gregory H. Williams *Life on the Color Line: The True Story of a White Boy Who Discovered He Was Black* (1995).

proper behavior as white behavior. While an individual may be dark-skinned, money and education elevates the individual out of poverty and a Black identity.

Passing for white by Black people in the Americas may differ by region, but it shares a common motivation: economic and psychological exploitation. While the basis of slavery was economic, through sanguinary euphemisms both Cliff and Santos Febres demonstrate how their respective cultures have internalized the debt owed by Black cultures for their freedom. The internalization of this debt has historical roots in the tradition of slaves purchasing their freedom and in the payment Haitians made to France after its Revolution. Haiti's first democratically elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, demanded restitution for the penalty Haiti was forced to pay to France for its successful revolution. The claim was dismissed by France and Aristide's demand for restitution was deemed by France and other *first* world countries as outrageous.[7] This form of repayment for loss of revenue is also seen in the caveats of slave emancipation in the U.S. as well as in the Caribbean where slaves were declared free but had to continue working on the plantation for varying lengths of time to allow the slave owners to adjust to this economic change.

Aside from the monetary debt, slavery is presented as moral debt. The German philosopher H.G.F. Hegel, who never traveled to the African continent, claimed in *The Philosophy of History* (1837) that "the Negro[...] exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state" and to understand him "reverence and morality" must be laid aside (93). Hegel located Africa and Africans outside his vision of normative and universal human history as "the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which

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[7] See Nicolas Rossier's documentary film, *Aristide and the Endless Revolution* (2005).

had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History" (99). To teach the "Negro" the value of freedom, Hegel argued that they must be enslaved. The debt owed by enslaved Africans for their freedom is then seen as a debt that is passed down through generations. In the economic realm, this is presented in the refusal of reparations and in the moral realm in the accusation of the inherit wickedness that is Black identity. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967), Frantz Fanon reflects that the colonized mindset suffers from a "neurotic existence" that carries the "burden of original sin" (194). Fanon names this psychosis as "Negrophobia" which sees Black identity as:

> ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality. In other words, he is Negro who is immoral. If I order my life like that of a moral man, I simply am not a Negro[…]Color is nothing, I do not even notice it, I know only one thing, which is the purity of my conscience and the whiteness of my soul. (192-93)

Fanon sees that the weight of this neurosis forces the Martiniquan who wants "to achieve morality" to vanish from his consciousness all that is Black, dark and Negro; in other words, all that emerged from colonization (194). While Fanon does not name what these Black, dark and negro objects/attitudes are they belong within the psyche of the colonized. Fanon argues that this debt has been internalized by colonized subjects, and, after emancipation, the objects used to maintain the bodies as enslaved, whips and chains, are now internalized. That which is Black is then seen as sinful/immoral. The rejection of Salsa music, a Black cultural production, by Santos Febres's family was a means to cleanse the body of the sin of Blackness. Cliff's family status as "red" is then seen as the body cleansed or in the process of expunging all sins through a light skinned color.

Black identity in the Caribbean may seem like a coy play on race through class because it ultimately privileges an European based identity. This stands in conflict with African American ideology that purports an all Black identity as a means to establish its cultural identity outside of white oppression. The clash between the expression of cultural pride in the Caribbean and the U.S. is difficult to maneuver because after emancipation both regions gravitated towards cultural pride and uplift of the race under vastly different political climates. While the U.S. is marred by Jim Crow, the decolonization process in the Caribbean is marked by capitalist ventures from the U.S. and other European countries. But, regardless of these distinctions, the artistic production of the Caribbean in the 20th and into the 21st century expresses an undeniable desire to capture the historical legacy of the Plantation.

From Within: Pluralizing Black Feminism

The field of Black Feminism has long existed in the margins of Feminist Studies and Black political thought. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (1991), the sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues that Black women hold a subject position as an outsider-within white feminist studies for being Black and outsider-within the tradition of Black male thought for being women (9). Placed in a position "between the dominant group's actions and ideologies," Collins argues that Black women developed an unique perspective on both white feminist and Black social and political thought through a "vital analytical foundation for a distinctive standpoint" that created "a Black woman's intellectual tradition" (Collins 11). As outsider-within Black male thought, Black women who write against Black patriarchy are accused of betraying their race. Collins argues that while Black male writers have enjoyed an "outstanding recognition throughout the history of Black writing," they have

demonstrated hostile attitude towards Black women writers because their work is seen as "'counterproductive' to the historical goal of the Black struggle" (9). The progress of the Black race as presented through the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X, two of the most visible figures of the Civil Rights Movement, utilized religious rhetoric based on the heteronormative family structure.[8] For Collins, the resistance by Black male writers towards Black female writers reflects that the progression of the "race" is to achieve male equality, between white and Black men, and not equality for all Black people.

The tradition of Feminist Studies emerged and has maintained its standpoint from middle-class white women's struggle against their denigrated position as mothers and wives within the patriarchal family structure limiting their involvement as workers and thinkers. Working class white women also find themselves on the margins of this discourse because their struggle for equality is shaped by having to work outside of the home for their family's survival (Collins 27). Collins writes that women, while "united by biological sex, do not form the same type of group as do African-Americans, Jews, Native Americans, Vietnamese, or other groups with distinct histories, geographic origins, cultures, and social institutions" (27). Neither biological determination nor class association has forged a bond strong enough to develop a feminist approach that will include women of color. Collins argues that African American women's experience of impoverishment in U.S. inner cities is a continuation of "earlier forms of Black women's economic exploitation" (4). Black women share some similarities with white middle class, as well as working class, women's struggle, but their shared position as women does not produce the same type of experience that shapes racial and ethnic groups (27).

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[8] Religion speaks the language of patriarchy, a topic I turn to in Chapter 1, where women by religious mandate are subservient to their male counterparts.

In this work, Collins challenges the definition of Black feminism by dismissing the assumptions that all African American women, by being classified as women and Black, are Black feminist. She argues that such a stance conflates gender and race through "questionable biological" categories (22). Instead, Collins posits Black feminism as defined by the shared experience of African American women that denigrates them for being of African descent (34). An afrocentrist female ideology recognizes its plurality to effectively incorporate the manifold African American women's experience across class lines. While Collins does not preclude other women of color—of cultures other than African American—from utilizing a Black feminist approach, she argues that these groups can join in the struggle after producing their own unique standpoint from their lived experiences. For Collins, Black feminist thought cannot be produced without African American women. She writes, "the full actualization of Black feminist thought requires a collaborative enterprise with Black women at the center of a community based on coalitions among autonomous groups" (36). While not arguing against Collins's stance on the necessity of Black women's experience as central to the production of Black feminist thought and activism, in using Black as an exclusive signifier of an African American experience, she's inadvertently upholding U.S. racial categories. Much like West and Hurston, Collins defines Black feminism in terms that collapse the experience of Black women who are not African American but experience oppression for being of African descent into the African American experience.

The oppression felt by African American women for being of African descent is felt across national and cultural identities in the Black Diaspora. In "Something Latino Was Up With Us," Spring Redd writes that as "a product of two ethnic groups and cultures," Puerto Rican and

African American, she suffered from racism and sexism (52). She writes that her grandmother, after fleeing from an abusive husband in Puerto Rico, arrived in the U.S. with her daughters and labored as a domestic worker in the South. As she writes, "Because my relatives were dark-skinned and had practiced the Pentecostal faith in Puerto Rico, they integrated into the Black community in Virginia" (Redd 52). Her grandmother maintained control of the family and kept the family together under one house when they moved to Cambridge, MA. Living in a Black community, where "there weren't many Puerto Ricans," joining a Black Baptist Church and having an African American father, "had in important effect on [her] total assimilation into Black culture" (52). This assimilation into the dominant African American culture she argues was not by chance but shaped by being shamed into adopting an African American culture at the expense of her Puerto Rican culture.

The domestication of Redd's Puerto Rican heritage stands in contrast to what she assigns as her "Black American" heritage. Redd, who describes her grandmother as "the strongest and most for-real feminist I've ever known," was the only one who spoke Spanish in the home (53). While her grandmother fought to speak to her grandchildren in Spanish, Redd's mother forbade her daughters to do so. If Spanish was spoken they "got a slap in the face" (53). This shaming technique could not completely perform a "deculturation" of her family's Puerto Rican past because, as Redd writes, "it was very evident to my friends who would sometimes drop by our house that something Latino was up with us" (54). The remnants of the family's Puertoricaness was obvious in what the author describes as eating "more red rice and beans than the mind can imagine;" and their home also depicted staples of Puerto Rican cultures (if not working class

Caribbean cultures) such as having hand made dolls and red furniture (Redd 53).[9] The double standard of sex roles that she attributes to Puerto Rican culture led Redd to gender her Caribbean heritage through domesticity. Aside from having to keep up the family home, through cleaning and cooking, Redd and her sisters were held to strict moral codes that did not apply to her brothers. As her aunt would argue, "'Boys and men can lay in the gutter and still get up and be men, but if a woman gets drunk or goes out she cannot get up and be the same person'" (53). At the same time that the older women in her family were imposing gender roles that upheld a different set of moral values for each sex, they were the bread winners and decision makers of the family. The men in her family, while their needs were placed before the needs of women, were mere figureheads (53). Redd's experience growing up as a woman of color in the U.S. is marked by the Puerto Rican and African American heritage of her bicultural family. The constant exposure to her parents's instructions "on all of the negative stereotypes about Puerto Ricans" and her friends saying derogatory "things" whenever they would "see one" led her to construct a Black identity that privileged her African American heritage.

Redd's experience as a woman in the U.S. is marked by her African heritage, and while she includes referents that mark her mother's side of the family as emerging from an African based culture in the Americas, she doesn't actively name her Puerto Rican heritage as Black. At the same time, she doesn't actively deny that her Puerto Rican heritage, the dominant culture in the home, is Black. Redd recognizes that both Puerto Ricans and African Americans are exposed to racism in the U.S., but she compartmentalizes her experience of sexism to her Puerto Rican

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[9] Both Junot Díaz in "Fiesta, 1984" and Edwidge Danticat in *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1998) describe the furniture of Caribbean immigrants as having a proclivity towards red furniture and large handmade dolls. Díaz describes this style as Dominicantacky.

heritage and Black pride to her African American heritage; nevertheless, her experience with racism is shaped by both cultures. After leaving home, she investigates her family's cultural make-up by first joining the Young Lords Party (YLP).[10] She abandons the YLP, however, because she feels out of place. She then joins the Black Panthers but left when she realizes that she had to sacrifice her social consciousness shaped by her experience as a woman of African descent for the "'more valuable opinions and status of [her] brothers in the movement'" (Redd 55). By the mid 1970s Reed has joined a women's community, but there she also feels out of place because the group, controlled by white middle-class women, only discusses sexism while ignoring race and class (55). Redd's account of growing up between Puerto Rican and African American cultures exemplifies how the shared experience of racism that Black Diasporic cultures have in common is often obfuscated. Redd's Puerto Rican relatives are able to find a community in African American culture because Puerto Ricans, while having their own distinctive culture, share the lived experiences of people of African descent in the Americas. While Collins writes that women are not aligned based on gender, as cultural or national identities bind other groups, the women of the Plantation Zone are bound by their experience as women of African descent.

Black, Noir, Negro, Prietu: Translation & Migration in Africana Studies

It's difficult to ignore the racial divisions present in the studies of literatures of Black Diasporic writers. The afrocentrist ideology in Africana studies re-articulates the one drop rule of U.S. Black Codes and clashes with cultures from Latin America and the Caribbean that recognize an African heritage but resist a Black categorization. Emerging out of the shift in Black Studies

[10] A Latino based political movement that emerged from Chicago's South Side but is often attributed to Puerto Ricans living in NYC.

from African American culture to the study of cultures of the Black Diaspora, Africana Studies in the U.S. casts a wide afrocentrist multilingual ideological net. But, because of the attention placed on the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and the record number of African nations that gained independence in the 1950s, Africana Studies favors literatures from the Anglophone and Francophone Black Diaspora. For Caribbean islands that have not and may never reach independence gaining a foothold in this discipline is a daunting task.

The shortage of multilingual comparative scholarship is linked to issues of translation, patriarchal approaches to Black thought and divisive interpretations of what constitutes a Black identity. The problem of translation for Caribbean literatures can be divided into two overarching concerns: first, the lack of English translations especially of literatures written in languages native to the Caribbean; and, second, the overwhelming presence of U.S. racial categorization that denies the multiplicity of Black cultures by reducing all to a singular identity. Texts translated into English from the Caribbean are predominantly written in French and Spanish. For example, aside from a special edition in *Callaloo* in 1998 and Olga E. Rojer's and Joseph O. Aimone's 2008 translation of Cola Debrot's *My Black Sister,* Boeli van Leeuwen's *A Stranger on Earth* and their 2011 joint translation of Carel de Haseths's *Slave and Master,* few literary works from the Dutch Caribbean have been translated into English. While the bulk of literature from this area is written in Dutch, poetry also appears in Sranan Tongo, Sarnami and Papiamentu which are native languages to Suriname, Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. But problems of translation reach beyond the absence of trained multilingual scholars.

Literatures of the Caribbean exemplify the exilic migratory condition of Black Diasporic writers. The Haitian poet Léon Laleau (1892-1979) addresses this exilic migratory condition in "Trahison"/"Betrayal" by challenging the cultural imposition of colonialism:

> This haunted heart that doesn't fit
>
> My language or the clothes I wear
>
> Chafes within the grip of
>
> Borrowed feelings, European ways.
>
> Do you feel my pain,
>
> This anguish like none other
>
> From taming with the words of France
>
> This heart that came to me from Senegal?

As reflected by Laleau's poem, the imposition of French culture leaves the subject position of the colonized in a state between two worlds that are in conflict within the speaker. The question mark at the end of the stanza suggests the heart is haunted by a past whose roots have been severed from Senegal by the grip of colonialism. Haunted by its past that cannot speak itself but through the language of a culture intent on its destruction, the heart is unable to return and instead exists in a state of exile that migrates between the unattainable past of Africa and the act of speaking that enacts its colonized condition. Language for the Black Diaspora relives the act of colonization betraying its speaker by reminding it of its ahistorical condition. This is not to suggests that Black Diasporic literatures are trapped in a modernist trope that recognizes the inadequacy of language. Instead, from its first utterance in the New World, the language of colonialism has always been the language of betrayal because it cannot speak of its past but can

only utter itself through European history. This diachronic condition persists into the present condition of Caribbean literatures in English Studies.

Jamaican Patois and Barbadian Bajan, creole languages from the Anglophone region, demonstrate that English itself is in constant negotiation in the Caribbean. While the literatures written in these languages are accessible to the English reader, the past that works to undermine its ahistorical condition is lost in translation. Writers of the Black Diaspora are placed in the impossible position of proving their worthiness to belong alongside white authors. It is not rare to find the works of Anglophone Caribbean poets in English department syllabi hidden in the folds of African American literatures or ethnic minority literatures. But courses that tackle the complexity of the languages that flow from the Caribbean face the incredible hurdle of negotiating through the meaning of Blackness for a region faced with the weight of the European continent. This manifests itself in the signifiers nigger, Black, negro, noir and prietu. Among these, nigger is the only term born out of slavery. While black, *negro*, *moreno, noir* and *prietu*, predate slavery, nigger emerged from the Atlantic slave trade. Robert F. Reid-Pharr writes that

> [Ralph] Ellison comes close in some of his writing to suggesting that the word 'nigger,' because it so marks the person being hailed as of this place and this time, might easily be substituted for the word American. (40)

Indeed, nigger is an unique cultural production of American identity, even more than the questionable use of Native American, American Indian or Amerindian to signify the people, and their descendants, that predate the European invasion. While the languages of the other colonial powers did not develop a direct equivalent to nigger, it is found in the use of these pre-slavery signifiers such as *negro*, *noir* and *prietu*. How to translate these signifiers as nigger or Black

when in the U.S. these terms are firmly rooted in African American culture is problem for translators of Caribbean literature. In the Spanish Caribbean when *negro* is used as a racial epithet or as a positive representation of cultural or national identity through an adjective or noun, it is translated as Black.

In naming the francophone aesthetic movement *négritude,* the initiators, Aimé Césaire from Martinique, Léon Gontran Damas from French Guiana and Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal, had to confront the use of the language of colonialism. At the root of their revolt lay the use of the term *nègre.* Derived from the latin *niger*, *nègre,* translates to black, but when used to describe a person depending on the qualifying adjective and its content, such as *sale* (dirty), it means nigger (Diagne qtd. plato.stanford.edu). The slave trade transformed the use of *nègre* but, like its Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese equivalents, it still maintains a meaning outside of slavery and European oppression. While the negritudists purposely utilized this highly sensitive signifier to arm their revolt, for Césaire the term never lost its roots of colonialism. In a 1987 lecture at the International University of Florida, Césaire confessed that the word, while grounded in the reality of Black people, still evokes a sense of discomfort (Diagne qtd. plato.stanford.edu). The reality draws on the constrictions of language and the struggle present in the Black Diaspora speaking through the language of the colonzier. *Négritude* contains the history of slavery and the rise of the revolution against this history. But, much as in Laleau's poem, the language of the Caribbean is one of borrowed words that have the power to excoriate Black speakers.

The relationship of Caribbean authors and their translators, may they be U.S. American or otherwise, has at its root this abrasive quality. In translating *Poetics of Relation*, Betsy Wing notes that Édouard Glissant's work from the beginning "has been concerned with exploring the

possibilities of a language that would be fully Antillean"(Glissant xi). For Glissant this possibility is not built upon the rejection of French, the language enforced upon Martiniquans, but "by interrogating it" by forcing "the Other to know his difference" (xii). Glissant's "transforming ecology" pushes the limits of French through the creation of new words thereby making possible the "writing the Antilles into history, generating a conception of time, finding a past and founding a future" (xii). Wing's theoretical approach recognizes that the language employed by Glissant is a collision of cultures that is not subject to common linguistic usage (xiiii). To use the traditional theoretical approach of translation that calls into question the inability to create authenticity is not sufficient. Translating the Antilles forces the translator to recognize that the act of enunciation is already an act of betrayal. Wing recognizes that Glissant attempts not to destroy the language of colonialism but transform it through its enunciation. If Caribbean literature sets itself up to change the very nature of the European language, then how to incorporate this disruption within the language of translation. If the work of the translator is to decode a text from a complicated system of signifiers and recode into another complicated system of signifiers, the signifiers Black and nigger require special attention to how these terms are utilized by Caribbean authors.

In *Poetics of Relation* Glissant argues for a broader construction of Caribbean identity with the term *antillanité.* For Glissant hybridity is a unifying element for plantation cultures in the Americas. This further complicate an unifying Black identity because Caribbean identities were formed by indigenous, European and African cultures, and the later arrivals of indentured servants from India and China to the Caribbean. *Antillanité* recognizes the emergence of racial and ethnic identities as unique to the region and accepts that there is no means of return to a pure

identity, be it African, European or Indigenous. In an afrocentrist study, not embracing a Black identity that calls on Africa as its progenitor and instead relegating it to the past indicates a rejection of Black identity. The friction found between U.S. Black identity and Caribbean identities rests on how the experience of belonging to a Black culture is articulated as an universal experience as opposed to the multiplicity that forms the diaspora.

This is a difficult field to traverse; even in studies of the Hispanic Caribbean the effort is complicated by monolingual and national spaces that do not recognize the fluidity created by the constant migration and re-migration of its inhabitants and by inattentiveness to how this has shaped the Black and white binary of American identities. The Caribbean emerged from the history of European colonial expansion to signify a space, and people, ripe for the progress brought about to benefit colonialist enterprises. In our contemporary notion of the Caribbean, gone are the white colonial houses flanked by sugar cane plantations. In their place are factories and vast expanses of luxury hotel chains owned by foreign corporations that beckon pale white bodies to come and enjoy, as many TV and printed ads claim, the Caribbean's five hundred years of history—a history that merges the charm of the Old World with the amenities of the New World. The signifiers Caribbean, *Antilles, Antillas* and West Indian all speak to the impossibility of escaping the language of the colonizers. All artistic expression from this region always returns to the language of the colonizer but it is a return that unsettles the order of language.

The Plantation Zone

Writing the Plantation Zone, in the absence of a literary legacy, demonstrates that its emergence, like no other in the Americas, is the defining product of the New World. As opposed to holding on to the European literary legacy that emerged from colonization, and in the shadows

of the genocides committed against indigene cultures, the Plantation Zone is the foundation of the New World. As I have suggested in the above pages, English Studies in the U.S. functions through a mononational and nation-centric construction that exists in conflict with the reality of the demographics of its population that shapes the hybridity of American cultures throughout the two continents and its neighboring islands. In "A Transnational Poetics," Jahan Ramazani argues that the mononational or nation-centric constructions of English studies exist in conflict with the works that make-up the canon particularly in the early 20th century. According to Ramazani:

> many of the key modernists were expatriates and exiles, transients and émigrés [...]yet, the implications for nation-based literary histories have not been fully absorbed within institutions of literary instruction, dissemination, and criticism, which remain largely nation-centric. (334)

Ramazani argues that the massive migration of Black Americans from the rural south to the north, literary "translations among European and North American cities," "cartography-traversing technologies such as the phone, cinema and radio," the ease of travel and U.S. expansion, challenge mononational narratives because the U.S. came in contact with other cultures that span "continent and even hemispheres" (335). A figure of interest for Ramazani is the Jamaican Claude McKay who has been housed in the Harlem Renaissance but whose work resists simple classification. McKay's first two collection are written in Jamaican Patois, he lived in Europe, the Soviet Union, North Africa and then became a citizen of the U.S., and was, posthumously, claimed by Jamaica as their national poet (338). McKay as a literary figure demonstrates how versatile English Studies could be, but, instead, he has been consumed in

English Studies as representative of African American literature and as such marginalized to a sub-division of English Departments.

A model for an approach centered on the Plantation Zone is exemplified by the 1946 anthology *Mapa de la poesía negra americana (Map of Black American Poetry*). Edited by the Cuban poet Emilio Ballagas, this anthology demonstrates the wide girth of influence Black Diasporic cultures have had in literatures of the Americas. This collection creates an assemblage of poetic works spanning four centuries and multiple linguistic traditions and nationalities. This grouping provides a literary archeological site that includes the Mexican Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the U.S. poets Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Walt Whitman, James Weldon Johnson, the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío, the Cuban José Martí and the Iberian poet Federico García Lorca. Ballagas argues that the poetry collected in his anthology is not for the purpose of presenting "poesía negra en toda su pureza, mitologia y originalidad" ("Black poetry is not treated here in all its purity, mythology or originality") (8). Instead, Ballagas seeks to define *poesía negra* as an expression of "contraste y asimilación de culturas" ("contrast and assimilation of cultures") that could be expressed by the Black or mulatto from his own intuitive lyric expression or by the white man through a phenomenon of mirroring (9). The multiplicity of expression in *poesía negra* places these poets as emanating from the Americas, a specified geographic space. This anthology demonstrates not only the ubiquitous presence of Black peoples and their cultural influence in the Americas from its colonial period into the 20th century, but, with the inclusion of García Lorca, who wrote *Romancero Gitano* (*Gypsy Ballads*) (1928) and *Poeta en Nueva York* (*Poet in New York*) (1940) after a trip to the Americas (which included New York City as well as Cuba) the anthology insists that Black cultures are a defining characteristic of the Americas, if

not the defining American trope. This collection sets out to map through a diversity of temporal, geographical and multi-lingual compilation of languages the inextricable assimilation of African cultures in the development of American identities.

English Studies strives to engrain in their students the literary legacy of the U.S. to produce cultured well rounded citizens. It is difficult to imagine an English Department without a Shakespearean scholar or a college graduate who is not exposed to Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson. This makes more evident the marginalization of U.S. minority literatures within the U.S. academy. The literary works of the Caribbean, as I previously stated, live within this margin. Relegated to subdivisions of the Humanities, Caribbean writers become lost in interdisciplinary programs that are taxed with the immense task of representing more than half of the population of the Americas. I am not interested in arguing for a reconfiguration in the study of English. The present state of English Studies in the U.S. is already going through a transition that demands the field acculturate to broader concepts of interdisciplinarity. Nor am I arguing for a new field of study that would create further divisions in the already bifurcated approach to the study of literature in English Departments. Instead, I argue that as English Departments shift to accommodate the changes in the field from an Euro-American approach to a Trans-American approach that the Plantation Zone become its point of departure.

Chapter Descriptions

In the first chapter, I argue that the exclusionary approach emblematic of U.S. citizenship is at play in how the literatures of the Black Diaspora are read. The scarcity of women-centered research in the history of the Spanish, Dutch and French Caribbean poses a challenge to creating a comparative study as it tends to privilege the history of British and U.S. slavery in the

Americas. Recognizing this challenge, the historical analysis provided here depends predominantly on Black U.S. feminist archives. This is not to suggest that this project privileges one historical account above another, but that historians have yet to catch up with the claims found in the poetry, fiction and visual works of these less historicized regions. As such, representations of Black women are read through U.S. Black stereotypes of Jezebel, Mammy and Sapphire. Although these stereotypes are ubiquitous in the Americas, how they are deployed in the Caribbean can be lost when solely contextualized through U.S. history. This chapter outlines a Black feminist methodology for engaging Plantation Zone Literatures and Visual Arts.

The second chapter performs a reading of Luis Palés Matos's "Majestad negra" "Black Majesty." As the initiator of poesía negra, Palés Matos has entered the pantheon of Caribbean poets as the father of 20th-century Puerto Rican poetry. In this chapter, I break with an almost century long history of literary criticism that insists on portraying Palés Matos as a white poet writing Black themed poetry, and deploying Black female figures as a representation of the poet's unrequited love for a Black woman. Instead, I posit Palés Matos as a poet of and for the Americas; as such, his work cannot be categorized through archaic concepts of Black and white racial identities that belie the passing of history. This chapter aims to bypass the "white" body of the poet created by past critics and propagated by present critics to arrive at a reading of "Majestad negra" "Black Majesty."

The third chapter asks the questions, can Black women love and, if so, what does this love look like? Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, portrays white women as the only ones in the Hegelian nation-state capable of love and reads Mayotte Capécia as an example of how Black women betray the nation-state through their relationships with both Black and white

men. I compare Capécia's power, in *I am a Martinican Woman*, to make men Black with an inkwell to the power Black female characters possess to expel men from the remnants of the Plantation Zones in both Joseph Zobel's *Black Shack Alley* and Boeli van Leeuwen's *A Stranger on Earth*. But, as these novels demonstrate, Black women also have the power to bring Black bodies, be it children or adults, back into the Plantation Zone. I examine this power in Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* These texts demonstrate the complexity of Black female characters and what forms love takes in the remnants of the plantation.

Chapter four delves into the abyss of Kara Walker's re-inscription of the antebellum south through her majestic silhouettes. Through an art form reserved for capturing serene scenes of U.S. American portraits in the 19th century, Walker has offended and thrilled audiences through what has been deemed unspeakable depictions of Black bodies in bondage since her debut in the art scene in 1994. Walker has been accused of being opportunistic and her work has been denounced as irresponsible due to the erotic and violent depictions of her silhouettes and the attention this has garnered from institutions that have historically ignored the works of Black artists. Maintaining this tension between what is speakable and what must be left to conjecture, this chapter is concerned with how Walker signifies the silenced history of Black people through Black women's bodies. The conclusion looks forward to what can be gained through a poetics of matrilineal genealogy for English Studies.

Chapter 1 The Babelic Uterus of the Plantation Zone and the Cult of Black Womanhood

Acaso no me he olvidado ni mi costa perdida, ni mi lengua ancestral.
Me dejaron aquí y aquí he vivido.
Y porque trabajé como una bestia,
aquí volví a nacer.
Nancy Morejón, "Mujer negra" (1979)

Perhaps I haven't forgotten my lost coast, or my ancestral language.
They left me here and here I've lived.
And, because I worked like an animal,
here I was reborn.
Nancy Morejón, "Black Woman" (2004)

There must be a conspiracy
Against the Black Man
Because what's being done
To the Black Woman
Has never been kept a secret!
Nicole Breedlove, "There Must be a Conspiracy" (1994)

I begin with two poetic gestures that illustrate the American condition of Black female subjectivity in literary studies. The first—exiled, bereft of history, forced into the immediacy of a geographic space of the "here"—is exemplified by Nancy Morejón's "Mujer Negra"/"Black Woman" where, through her labor, Black Woman gives birth to herself. This is a regenerative act inscribed within the body politic positing the past, present and future of the Americas on the schema of her flesh. The second—a demonized genealogy, a non-secret told through a fractioned spectacle—is exemplified by Nicole Breedlove's "There must be a Conspiracy" where she challenges the fraternal embrace of white and Black patriarchy intent on pursuing a teleological supremacy that forgets it was Black Woman who brought the Americas into existence. As Breedlove's poem reminds us, there has "never been" and, as Black feminist tradition argues, will never be a conspiracy against the Black Woman because her labor—mined and contained by the plantation—was never a secret. "What's being done" and has been done to "Black Woman"

emerges, even in her historic silence, in the violent colonial encounters captured in ledgers, wills, legal documents, political speeches and public policies that shaped and continues to shape constructions of Black female identities in the Americas.

Black Diaspora writers often turn to the genealogy of the enslaved Black female body to contend with the history of slavery and in its impact in the aftermath of the plantation's demise in the Americas. Édouard Glissant, in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), relies on the imagery of birth to describe the transportation of bodies from the African continent to the Americas. For Glissant, the belly of the slave ship is imagined as a demonic uterus where feces and food commingle in babelic mayhem. In Glissant's re-imagining of this Black metamorphosis, the Atlantic Ocean is littered with the debris of bodies that did not make it to the other side. The ocean is a graveyard that lulled the pregnant belly of the ship until it released new Black cultures on the shores of the New World. Out of this abyss, re-born in the Americas, Black diasporic cultures emerged. With the gaping Atlantic Ocean between the New World and their ancestral home, enslaved Africans, stripped of their languages and histories, inhabited fields decimated of the indigene. Deprived of their multiplicity and inscribed in European history as property, the children of these African immigrants could no longer speak in their ancestral languages of a past before the plantation. What the African continent may have been to the enslaved before their forced migrations—kingdoms, tribes, history, language, difference—became, through the enunciation of the European, an amalgamated space outside of history labeled as Africa.

Another traumatic but poetic representation of this genealogy comes from Frederick Douglass's 19th-century slave narrative, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845). His coming into being, or consciousness, is dependent on his

relationship to his Aunt Hester's body. Hoisted upon a joist, Aunt Hester is exposed to the white overseer, Mr. Plummer, and his whip, and the young Douglass and his memory. Aunt Hester is punished by Mr. Plummer for sneaking away to see Lloyd's Ned, a Black slave in a nearby plantation. Douglass sees himself as a participant in this macabre scene: *her* screams, *his* words, *their* blood. For Douglass, her body, forced open and bleeding, represents the gates into the hell of slavery. Douglass, Mr. Plummer, Aunt Hester and the recipient of the text are all complicit in this spectacle. This passage presents desire in its multiplicity: in Douglass's passive role and desire for manhood; Mr. Plummer's desire which Douglass is unable to utter and leaves to "conjecture;" and, most importantly, in Aunt Hester's desire that leads her, regardless of its outcome, to defy her enslavement. Desire, whether her own, her oppressor's, or the spectator's, is inseparable from the enslaved female body's internal labor and the myth of her indestructibility. Whether she is searching for comfort in the arms of Ned or is raped by Mr. Plummer, these multiple forms of desire will inevitably culminate in the production of yet another slave for the plantation.

Turning to an image of a woman bloody and in pain in search of a genealogy is sadistic. But it is imperative that we do not lose the sadistic tension in her desire and desirability because it confronts myths of Black women's nature. Aunt Hester's body is trapped by laws governing Black women's labor: a productive external labor performed in the fields alongside enslaved Black men and the reproductive labor that sustained the longevity of slavery. Because Aunt Hester's desire is interdicted by the laws that name her a slave, her aberrance represents the many layers of Black women's experience of resistance that speak to both victimhood and triumph in the plantation. In refusing to give in to Mr. Plummer's attention and in her cries of

pain, she demonstrates that Black women's bodies were not, as the laws of the plantation believed them to be, indestructible. But Aunt Hester's body is not all pain. In her act of defiance in seeking out Ned, regardless of how her body would later be punished, she refused a life devoid of pleasure, and, perhaps, love. In choosing to seek out Ned, Aunt Hester defies her role as a slave by claiming, if limited, agency over her body.

For Douglass, writing before the abolition of slavery in the United States, and Glissant, writing at the end of the 20th century, the myth of origin for enslaved Africans in the Americas is imagined through feminine metaphors. But emancipation and decolonization projects envisioned the liberation of the enslaved as Black men moving away from their role as interloper within the nation-state to inhabit the role of proper citizen. If within the fields of the plantation both enslaved men and women performed equal roles, this quickly changed when they attempted to integrate into the dominant white culture. This is not to diminish the struggle Black men faced after the demise of the plantation, but the limited transcendence availed to Black men was more than what was availed to Black women. If Black men had to contend with transforming themselves from slaves into proper citizens, what were Black women to do?

From its earliest appearance, literatures by Black women have challenged the marginalization of Black people in historical archives. In the dedication page of her 1834 collections of poems, Phillis Wheatley, the first Black poetess of the Americas, exposes the hypocritical stance of Christians in their treatment of Blacks by stating, "But know, ye Christians, Negroes black as Cain/May be refined, and join the angelic train" (Wheatley). In 1857 Mary Seacole, in *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands,* rebuffs "the term 'lazy Creole'" and assures her readers that she has never been "indolent" (13). In the first

autobiographical Black novel, *Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* published in 1859, Harriet E. Wilson tells the story of Frado, a free mulatto girl, and the cruelty she endured from her white mistress for being of African descent. In 1861 Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself*, detailed the horrors of slavery through rape and sexual coercion in the plantation. These early works challenge the virtuosity of white citizenship and its duplicitous religious claims about gender constructions of both white female domesticity and Black female animality that are necessary to the intersections of race and gender. These early works set the framework for the intervention of Black Feminist scholarship and activism that would enter the academy in the latter half of the 20th century.

Black women's intellectual tradition in the U.S., forged by figures who have been deemed dangerous, has extended the tradition of early Black women writers. After a tumultuous career at UCLA, where she was fired twice, once for her affiliation with communism and the Black Panthers and again after being falsely accused of accessory to a crime, Angela Y. Davis was placed on the FBI's most wanted list. With the publication of *Black Macho and Myth of the Superwoman,* Michelle Wallace was accused of betraying Black people by attacking Black patriarchy, and what she then perceived as Davis's complacent relationship with the Black Panthers. Bell hooks has been cited for her murderous rage, most notably in her work *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* where she writes, "I am writing this essay sitting besides an anonymous white male that I long to murder" (8). When Elaine Brown took over leadership of the Black Panthers she provided an inclusive model for reproductive rights that went beyond the need for the pill and legal abortions, to women's health care and child welfare. As two of its founding figures, Denise Oliver and Iris Morales centered the Young Lords Party on the needs of women

of color by creating community-run child care in urban ghettos in NYC and Chicago. Audre Lorde complicated and shocked the study of Black feminism by claiming that all "Black women are lesbians [...]We're all dykes, including our mommas" (Hammond 19). While I'm only naming a few intellectuals in the field of Black feminism, their scholarship and activism is the theoretical model necessary to study the matrilineal genealogy of the Plantation Zone produced through Black women's labor because its point of departure is the confluence of race, class and gender.

In the Introduction, I argue for a shift in the study of literatures of the Americas from an Eurocentric lineage that centers on the European conquest of the New World to an approach that places the birth of the Americas in the history of the Plantation Zone. This approach argues that American identity, which is not unique to the U.S., but incorporates the American continents and islands, is dependent on the laws developed through the practice of slavery. Representations of Black female characters, be they visual or written, carry as an inheritance the laws and practices imposed upon Africans and their descendants by planter's economy. The matrilineal genealogy of the Plantation Zone is a threat to nations that allegorize the European conquest of the Americas and work to erase the history of Black women. This chapter investigates the development of the Plantation Zone's matrilineal genealogy and what it means to inherit the Black female body in the Americas. I refer to this body as singular not because Black women are one; instead, the Black female body is a metaphor for the historical legacy that unites Black diasporic cultures. Hidden within the permanence of Black female stereotypes is an anxiety that understands the cult of Black womanhood as the end of nation-states. As such, the matrilineal genealogy of the Americas is marked for destruction. The cult of Black womanhood is not a return to the slave ships or the Africa entombed in the Atlantic Ocean. Instead, it is a turn

towards the complicated meaning of diaspora for Black cultures of the New World. The cult of Black womanhood exists in the interstice created by the friction produced when myths and histories collide. In this chapter, I argue that reading Black female bodies, both fictive and non-fictive representations, is born out of this friction.

Race of White Men

The productive and reproductive capacities of enslaved African women and their daughters proved to be the key that unlocked the promised cornucopia of the New World. Camouflaged under the language of morality and civility, the economic system of the plantation framed the relationship of White/European land holding men as masters to indentured servants, white/European women, indigenes and Africans (Brown 5). From this position of power, the white/European male chose a white/European wife to bear his rightful heirs and the enslaved African woman to bear his property. In the Americas, the structure of the plantation mimicked the traditional European genealogy of white/European women producing a race of white/European men. To economically support the race of white men in the New World, enslaved African women would give birth to a race of Black women. These two genealogies were purposeful and necessary to manufacture the wealth that produced white/European citizenship in the Americas.

The genealogy of white men as rightful citizens of the Americas is an imported European ideology contextualized through *The Holy Bible*. On arrival to the new found land, Spaniards would read out loud the "Requerimiento," a document that named the New World as ordained by God to belong to the Spanish crown. Upon pain of war, slavery or death, the inhabitants of the Americas were forced to accept the words of the Christian God as truth. This ignored the

languages and religious practices of the indigenes through a violent imposition that is endemic to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Patriarchy's narrative calls for the domination of nature and ownership of land. When the "Requerimiento" was read it brought into the New World a narrative of European man's traditional rights to property and women's moral obligation to the cult of motherhood. Hence, when the Spaniards arrived in the New World, it mattered not if the natives understood the declarations in the "Requerimiento," but that the privileging of the European/white male become ubiquitous to the structure of the New World.

Enunciation, within the Judeo-Christian ideology, is a power reserved for God. It was through the sound of his voice, "And God said let there be light," that the Earth came into being (*King James Version,* Genesis 1:3). The laws of man evolving from Judeo-Christian theology are dependent on the enunciation of an omnipotent vengeful God that created man in his image, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (*King James Version,* Genesis 1:27). Because "he him" is named first, he is "in the image of God." "Female," created after "him," arrives already too late into the hierarchy.

Lilith and Eve, the first two women in the Judeo-Christian myth of creation, prove to be treacherous companions for Adam. Borrowed from Mesopotamian and Syrian myths of origin, Lilith arises from *The Old Testament* as the failed first wife of Adam. After refuting a passive posture to Adam, Lilith is condemned to produce and consume a hundred children/demons a day. Lilith is expunged from the records as a woman and turned into a beast. In Isaiah 34:14 she is a screeching owl and any turns towards her history are condemned as an gnostic perversion of Genesis. As the second woman and wife, Eve is made by God from a rib in Adam's body. Eve lives in harmony with Adam in the Garden of Eden until she finds her voice. Able to convince

Adam to follow in her defiance of God, Eve flexes her power through enunciation. God's wrath first turns to Eve, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (*King James Version,* Genesis 3:16). Eve's punishment is shame perpetuated through the function of her gender. In the Garden of Eden, Eve's nature was separated from Adam though the experience of pain. In heightening her pain, God marks her role in child birth as punishment for her nature. After punishing Eve, God turns to Adam, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (*King James Version* Genesis 3:17). Prevented from consuming what is his right as the son of God, Adam is forced to work the land. Because Adam listened to the voice of Eve and gave in to her desire in opposition to God's command, the land is a shameful reminder of Adam's weakness over Eve's unmediated nature. To ensure that Eve does not rise again, Adam takes possession of Eve's desire. Expelled from the Garden of Eden, Adam works the land while Eve, her desire no longer her own, loses her power with each child. Eve's desire, dispensed through her voice, is taken from her and given to Adam in the form of man's genealogy. Women in the *Old Testament* prove to foil God's plan for Adam and as such man is left to control their dangerous nature.

From the *New Testament* arise two powerful female figures: Mary the Mother of Christ, chosen to produce the Son of God through a virgin birth; and Mary Magdalene is the first to witness the Resurrection. Because women carry the burden of shame, their roles in Christianity are tempered by their gendered bodies. In the Catholic tradition, Mary the Mother of Christ is trapped in a virginal body. To give birth to Jesus, she knows not God nor any other man. She is a

vessel whose genealogy is erased so that God can reproduce his image once again in Jesus. Unlike Mary the Mother of Christ, Mary Magdalene's powerful role in the rise of Christianity is based on being the first to witness the Resurrection. She utters Christianity's most powerful cry, "He has risen" (*King James Version* Luke 24:10). The power afforded to Mary Magdalene through her proclamation is taken from her by Pope Gregory the Great. In the year 591, during a mass on Luke's Gospel, the Pope accused Mary Magdalene of being a sinner by announcing that the seven demons Christ liberated her from were the seven deadly sins (americancatholic.org). Mary Magdalene's power was demoted by a sinful past and she was relegated to a perpetual state of penance.[11]

Within the Judeo-Christian tradition, language and maternity benefits God the Father and his rightful heir who has been made in his image as man. In *Sexes and Genealogy* (1993), the French philosopher Luce Irigaray writes, "Man is able to exist because God helps him to define his gender (*genre*), helps him orient his finiteness by reference to infinity" (original italics 61). Man's orientation to God propels him towards a horizon that is manifested through the will. Irigaray posits that the ability to will is tantamount to the condition of becoming, but one cannot will without a gender (*Sexes and Genealogies* 61). The act of becoming or will moves towards a

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[11]Theology scholars have rebutted the depiction of Mary Magdalene's as a sinner, but in art she is still depicted as a beautiful woman in penance. Although Mary Magdalene is often associated with Catholicism, she is the figure of female penance in all sects of Christianity. For example, from the 18th to the 20th century, church-run laundromats, from different Christian denominations, named after Mary Magdalene were found through-out Europe, Australia and the U.S. Known as Magdalene Laundries or Magdalene Asylums, they housed fallen women who had children out of wedlock, were sexually abused or were simply too pretty. The women were referred to as penitents or Magdalenes and their punishment was to work in laundries without pay. The last laundromat closed in 1996 in Ireland. See: http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/25/world/europe/25iht-abuse25.html, Lu Ann de Cunzo's *Reform, Respite, Ritual: An Archaeology of Institutions, the Magdalen Society of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (1994); Steve Humphries' documentary *Sex in a Cold Climate* (1998).

specific ideal that is modeled by infinity or God. To avoid the limits of the finite, Irigaray argues, man creates God in his image. As I mentioned earlier, the act of engendering as a linguistic act is reserved for a male God who brought all into creation through the sound of his voice. Eve's power to enunciate was an attempt to model herself after God. Because God gave Eve's desire to Adam, she is left without will. Women's lack of transcendence is, as Irigaray argues, reinforced by, "[m]en's appropriation of the linguistic code [that] attempts to do at least three things[...]prove they are fathers; prove they are more powerful than mother-woman; prove they are capable of engendering the cultural domain as they have been engendered in the natural domain of the ovum, the womb, the body of a woman" (*Je* 69). Irigaray posits that men override women's nature as assigned by God and its possible meaning in the cultural domain. By the power invested through the Judeo-Christian myth of creation, men will their power inside women's bodies. Because language is gendered, the nature of women voiced through a linguistic code does not allow for transcendence. Irigaray argues that man made God in his image and women are left with no deity to model themselves after. While man's power is infinite through his access to God, women are defined by the finite. She *is* animal like Lilith; she *is* mother like Eve; she *is* the perpetual virgin like Mary the Mother of Christ; she *is* penitent like Mary Magdalene; but, she *is not* man. The myth of man contains no transcendence for woman.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition man creates God in the image of man and woman was designed to support the purpose of man (*Genealogies* 6). This patriarchal structure does not distinguish the female gender from its function of bearing children, such that women are prepared to serve as wives-mothers or sisters (*Speculum* 63). As wife-mother, woman is entrusted with the labor of maternity but the relationship developed between mother and child is policed

by enforcing the role of the father. Irigaray posits that "man takes his orientation from his relation to his father insofar as his name and property are concerned" (*Genealogies* 3). Because the genealogy of the wife-mother is collapsed into that of the husband-father, Irigaray argues that "gender is always subservient to kinship" (*Genealogies* 4). The relationship between mother and child is manipulated to enforce the fidelity of the wife-mother to patriarchy. For Irigaray, the "cult of the son's mother" is tied to the "mother-son incest issue" that overshadows the genealogy of the wife-mother (*Genealogies* 3). As such, the son models himself after his father not only for his access to a socio-economic position but through his desire for his mother. Through his father, the son learns to desire a woman who will be committed to his genealogy. The daughter does not model herself after her mother. Instead, the relationship between mother and daughter is severed for the daughter to leave her mother and dedicate herself to the "cult of the children of her legal husband and to the husband himself as a male child" (*Genealogies* 2). This family model allows men to exist through what Irigaray refers to as the logic of sameness. That is, the state is made of multiple units where man is the head of the household. Irigaray's analysis of society, as the cultural domain of man, centers on the family as an economic unit through the division of labor. The legacy of white male power is dependent on the Judeo-Christian tradition that produced the heterosexual couple as the family model for the state.

Before England established its colonies in the New World, religion and the law carried the burden of explaining the differences between men and women (Brown 21). At the same time that Virginia was being settled by Englishmen and women, England was affirming the characteristics of Englishness through the patriarchal household model dependent on female domesticity (Brown 14). The reign of Queen Elizabeth I had revived discussions of women's

nature towards good and evil because "like nature herself" women "elude precise definition" and, as such, are dangerous (Brown 14). In *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (1996), the historian Kathleen M. Brown writes, "England was not alone in the coincidence of rising imperial enthusiasms and conflict over the true nature of women [...] Spain, the Netherlands, France, Portugal, and the Italian principalities" were also discussing "questions of nature, power, and national identity" (14). Queen Elizabeth I maintained her power within this patriarchal structure by manipulating the definitions of gender roles assigned through Christianity. Refusing to marry, Queen Elizabeth I proclaimed, "I have long since made choice of a husband, the kingdom of England...charge me not with the want of children, forasmuch as everyone of you, and every Englishman besides, are my children" (qtd. in Brown 21). Brown argues that Queen Elizabeth I maintained authority by "reversing monarchical gender imagery [and becoming] mother to all English subjects" (21). Proclaiming herself to be the Virgin Queen, Queen Elizabeth I defined her reign by calling on the image of the Virgin Mary. This allowed her to unequivocally align her reign to the Christian God's will, and, as such, she reaffirmed the Christian myth of creation for the English monarchy. Englishmen, as her children through a metaphorical virgin birth like Jesus of Nazareth, were also reaffirmed as made in the image of God. Then, Queen Elizabeth I was not an unmarried woman running one of the most powerful monarchies in European history, but, instead, she was a manifestation of God's will. By relating to God as wife, Queen Elizabeth I successfully manipulated the language of patriarchy and proclaimed herself the mother to all English*men* severing her relationship with her potential daughters. Although the reign of Queen Elizabeth I disrupted the patriarchal structure of the English monarchy, it did not upend the traditional roles assigned to common women. The

threat to patriarchy would come from across the Atlantic ocean in the Virginia colony where the demand for tobacco exposed the unstable cultural origins of political authority through the changing role of women's labor (Brown 12).

As head of households, Englishmen were connected, as Brown writes, by "concentric political circles that extended from the humble cottage to the king's palace" (15). As within the household, the division of agricultural labor defined men and women's roles within the social structure of England. In the English colonies the social unit of the home with its exact labor divisions was disrupted by tobacco demands and the disproportionate gender ratio that forced free and indentured English people into the fields to perform the same work regardless of gender (Brown 25). Whence traditionally women's agricultural labor had been defined by the use of the hoe, for Englishmen the "plow signified status, mastery, and political identity" (Brown 25). In England, women's agricultural labor was often seen as temporary work, but the cultivation of tobacco required both male and female English servants to perform the same labor using the hoe in tobacco fields (Brown 25). The shortage of female labor ultimately threatened the structure of the home because it forced male servants to perform domestic tasks (Brown 84). Citing the suicide of 14-year-old John Verone, who performed domestic duties for six adult men, Brown demonstrates that there was a resistance by Englishmen to take on domestic labor. Verone's suicide could be attributed to the solitary confinement of domestic chores or a sexual component to this arrangement, but, nonetheless, his suicide represents domestic labor as incompatible with masculine identity. Men were meant to be heads of households, but, due to the shortage of women and the break down of labor divisions, they were prevented from occupying their gendered identity endangering the patriarchal structure of the colonies and by extension England.

To encourage the migration of Englishwomen to the colony, Brown argues, colonial promoters constructed the image of the "hard working good wife" because Englishwomen "who aspired to housewifery in their own households would find such descriptions appealing" (86). The good wife symbolized "yeoman security and prosperity" and while they were afforded a degree of power and status in the colony, they also reflected "a social order that hinged on virtuous and obedient women" (Brown 86). While most settlers lived plainly with few material objects, such as limited cooking utensils and straw mats, pamphleteers attempted to exalt the virtuous nature of Englishwomen as "'dressing victuals, righting up the house, milking imployed about dayries, washing, sowing'" but the lack of supplies in the colony made this a reality for very few privileged women (qtd. Brown 85). In England poor women held domestic positions as well as hocked their wares in markets. The lack of basic supplies to produce soap, cheese and cloth, combined with demand for tobacco forced Englishwomen in the colonies to labor in the fields alongside men (Brown 85). As opposed to good wives, whose labor benefitted traditional homes, nasty wenches refused to marry and had children outside of wedlock. Nasty wenches were considered a threat to the Crown because their labor benefitted homes that did not fit the family unit of as dictated by patriarchy. Furthermore, because they were forced to labor in the tobacco field like men, nasty wenches upended beliefs of women's naturally weaker bodies (102). While nasty wenches were liable to receive court mandated corporeal punishment, it was the power wielded by the good wives that had greater influence (102). Although good wives did not write laws that punished women who behaved immorally, mistresses held power over their servants by policing their morality (102). Through court documents, Brown demonstrates that good wives disrupted the legal system of the colony by using "slanderous remarks" to attack

other women and men of power "through their central role in local gossip networks" (Brown 100). The distinctions that emerged between nasty wenches and good wives "reflected the importance of women's construction of power in relation to other women" (Brown 104). But, since women held no legal representation in the court, men of means held ultimate power over the Virginia settlers. To buttress the power Englishwomen may gain by laboring in the tobacco fields, the Crown required that unmarried female servants be taxed at a different rate than wives and daughters performing similar labor (Brown 121). This class division, Brown notes, was supported by Englishwomen who held the status of good wives and wielded their limited power over women who refused to behave according to English moral codes. These practices privileged the role of men as head of households and created different classes of white/European women.

The English family unit constructed on divinely sanctioned gender labor differences proved adaptable to planter's economy (Brown 2). Englishwomen were coerced by laws created by Englishmen and moral codes enforced by good wives. The threat to patriarchy emerged not only in the shifting labor roles inhabited by indentured and poor Englishwomen, but by free and enslaved African women who labored alongside them. In 1643 Virginia lawmakers divided laborers into two categories: dependent laborers were "English women, servant and free, children, and old men deemed too weak to produce as much as prime male hands;" and productive laborers were "Englishmen, African men, and African women" deemed capable of making a living on the tobacco they cultivated (Brown 119). In classifying African women within the same category as African and English men, the laws of tithable were the first of many laws that began to transform ethnic differences based on geography into differences based on racial identity (Brown 119). The 1643 laws of tithable were followed by the law of 1662 were

children inherited the status of their mothers; and the 1691 law prohibiting interracial marriages (Brown 119). Englishwomen who married enslaved African men were classified as slaves for the longevity of their husband's lives and the children born from these unions, because their mothers were slaves at the time, would also be slaves. While white married women were not taxed, Black women were taxed regardless of their marital status.

Brown argues that the taxation of Black women's labor in the Virginia colony made free Black women undesirable as wives. Brown demonstrates that out of the ten households held by free Black men in the Northhampton county of the Virginia colony, half appeared to be married to white women (Brown 127). Brown writes, "For free Black women, the tithe's potential to impede marriage only compounded the moral stigma of racial slavery and field labor" (Brown 127). Taxes on Black women's labor remained in place until 1705 when some counties remitted the taxes on free Black women upsetting planters. Brown argues that is not known if the upset was over the loss of revenue or that this upset the developing racial categories. In 1723 the tax statute returned to taxing Black female labor and the labor of all women married to Black men regardless of their race (Brown 127). As Brown argues, the changes in the tax laws and the definition of Black women's labor through tithability benefitted land owning whites. These laws mark the historical shift that, as Brown writes, "transform ethnic distinctions, based on place of birth, into racial ones" by applying the "legal criteria and financial burden of tithes to the Virginia-born daughters of African women" (127). When once nasty wenches were Englishwomen who had challenged their gender roles as defined by religion and law, Brown demonstrates that this term was transferred to free and enslaved African women regardless of the labor they performed or their marital status.

Women, as mothers and laborers, carry the stigma of the Judeo-Christian myth of origin. Before the invention of the New World, the genealogy of European women was collapsed into the husband's genealogy through the birth of children.[12] Brown's study on the Virginia colony demonstrates the adaptability of English gender structures to meet the demands of colonialism. White/European women were taxed with the labor of maintaining the civility of European masculinity through racial purity, and African women, because they were classified outside of European womanhood, were taxed with the production of American wealth. As Brown argues, when the law openly codified African women as different from European women, gender became the portal of race.

Race of Black Women

In opposition to the patriarchal genealogy of the Americas formed by Judeo-Christian ideology and dependent on female domesticity, the Black matrilineal genealogy of the Plantation Zone emerged from European colonialism and its dependence on myths of Black women's indestructibility. The introduction of enslaved Africans to the New World may not have begun with the purpose of creating a race of slaves; nonetheless, the labor demands of a planter's economy on enslaved African women's bodies created a race of workers to produce American wealth through a matrilineal genealogy. In *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (2004), Jennifer L. Morgan argues that the gendered and racialized ideology of 16th and 17th century travel narratives through sub-Saharan Africa provided European settlers with the language that robbed enslaved Africans of their humanity and allowed for the

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[12] The genealogy of man is an oft repeated discussion in Irigaray's oeuvre: see, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1985), *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985), *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993), and *je, tu, nous: Towards a Culture of Difference* (1993).

commodification of their bodies through the obscene logic of racial slavery. Morgan's study demonstrates early settlers understood "race and sex were fully intertwined" in the relationship between slavery and plantation management (Morgan 144). While the crops produced by enslaved African women in the early English Atlantic world differed by region, their reproductive labor produced the necessary generation of creoles to fulfill the labor demands of the New World (Morgan 144). During their lifetime, planters benefitted from enslaved African women's arduous labor, but their potential "increase" was indispensable to the planter's economic future (Morgan 144). As such, Morgan argues slaveowners's imaginary futures were dependent on the exploitation of enslaved African women's productive and reproductive labor.

For Europeans, the civility of African cultures was judged through Judeo-Christian gender norms.[13] The fantastical depictions of African cultures in European narratives offered slaveowners the ability to reason away the humanity of the enslaved. These texts vacillate between the depiction of African women's bodies as beautiful, such as Richard Ligon's account upon first seen an African woman in Cape Verde, off the West Coast of Africa, in *A True and Exact History of Barbados* (1647), and African women's bodies as monstrous, such as Pieter Marees, in "A description and historicall account of the golden Kingedome of Guinea" (1602) who described African women as filthy and lecherous (qtd. Morgan 13). Describing the people of Sierra Leone, Marees writes,

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[13] Kathleen M. Brown offers a brief discussion of Britain's colonial encounters with Ireland in *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (1996). She argues that the colonization of Ireland by the British served as a prelude to Africa where the civility of the culture was judged by Irish women's failure to adhere to Judeo-Christian moral values.

> very greedie eaters, and no lesse drinkers, and very lecherous, and theevish, and much addicted to uncleanenesse' one man hath as many wives as hee is able to keepe and maintaine. The women also are much addicted to leacherie, specially, with strange Countrey people...[and] are also great Lyers, and not to be credited. (qtd. Morgan 30)

Reduced to the lechery associated with greed, lust and sloth, three of the seven deadly sins in Christian ethics, Marees's depiction of African savagery would find an eager audience in England. European travel narratives evoked desire while presenting African women as "simultaneously unwomanly and marked by a reproductive value that was both dependent on their sex and evidence of their lack of femininity" (Morgan 14). Marees was one of many travelers that would utilize the trope of the over-the-shoulder breast feeding African woman, which became a popular image, in both print and visual depiction (Morgan 14). When Ligon arrived in Barbados, he wrote that the scantly clad enslaved African women appeared, when bent over in the fields, to have six legs. In the imagination of European writers, enslaved African women's bodies were transformed by their forced labor in the fields of the New World into animals. Morgan argues the myth of African women's monstrous breasts was perhaps one of the most damaging myths developed of African women's bodies. The Black breast was often placed in opposition to depictions of small young white women's breast with the latter always representing beauty and the civility of European culture.

Morgan posits the emergence of the monstrous deformed African body as unfolding from a medieval myth of the wild woman (16). Disguised as young and beautiful, the wild woman's elongated breasts dragged on the ground as she prowled for men to satiate her carnal desires

(Morgan 16). The fear of African women's bodies found resonance in the myth of the wild woman and, in extension, the Judeo-Christian myth of Lilith who is portrayed as a sexually aggressive unclean animal. Morgan writes, "Monstrous bodies became enmeshed with savage behavior as the icon of women's breasts became evidence of tangible barbarism" (49). While most travel narratives located evidence of African savagery on the female body, Morgan writes, "in an unique twist on the consequences of the curse of Ham, [Richard Jobson's *The Golden Trade* (1622)] maintained that African men carried the mark of the curse in the size of their sexual organs" (29). Morgan argues that Jobson's interpretation of the penis as pendulous and distended echoed the interpretation of African women's breasts (29). Ultimately, European travel narratives reflected the fear of women's potential power if left unmediated by man.

European travelers interpreted the integral labor African women performed in the fields as both proof that African men were lazy and that African women's natural state was to perform arduous work (Morgan 14). These assumptions about working the land carry the stigma derived from Adam's punishment after his fall from grace. But, African women's labor was not equated to Eve's punishment. As opposed to European women who required a rest period after giving birth, European travel narratives claimed that African women did not suffer in child-birth (Morgan 14). As Morgan writes, "Women enslaved in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries did not give birth to many children, but descriptions of African women in the Americas almost always highlighted their fecundity along with their capacity for manual labor" (36). In the New World, the working conditions of enslaved African women led to depressed fertility rates, and, when compared to Europeans, the separation of enslaved African women from their infants along with malnutrition led to a high mortality rate amongst the slave population (97; 111).

The animalistic endurance assigned to enslaved African women's bodies allowed for European women to leave the fields and return to domestic employment. Indentured European servants were strongly discouraged from having children because this would disrupt their assigned labor, but, unlike African women, when they became pregnant they did not produce indentured children (Morgan 92). Enslaved African women, who were used as sexual outlets for both Black and white men, were "encouraged" to have more sex partners to increase their chances of fertility (Morgan 100; 156). European men who impregnated enslaved African women faced no legal repercussions and enslaved Black men held no reproductive responsibility towards their children. In removing paternal responsibility for enslaved children, the genealogy of man—regardless of his status as free, enslaved, Black and/or European—was collapsed into the genealogy of the enslaved African mother. Morgan points out that while the high infant mortality rate meant that many children will not survive childhood, slaveowners counted on the future production of their female slaves (98). Children "became part of the slaveowner's economy, and as such they also became part of the future of the slaveowner's family" (Morgan 98). Morgan argues that the obscene logic of slavery defined enslaved Black women's reproductive capacities as a profitable labor (145). Her analysis of enslaved African women's childbearing and motherhood is based on 17th and 18th century British, Caribbean and South Carolinian archival records. Morgan works to connect how the private life of slaves supported the public life of those who owned them and how the children of the enslaved reinforced this economy (103). As her study shows, the progeny of enslaved African women became "unencumbered capitol" for which the planters "sacrificed the relationship between mother and child to the economics of legacies" (96). In this system, Black women's childbirth was both

relied on and devalued (Morgan 167). As Morgan points out, Thomas Jefferson "consider[ed] a woman who brings a child every two years as more profitable than the best man of the farm, what she produces is an addition to the capital, while his labors disappear in mere consumption" (Morgan 92). Slaveowners appropriated enslaved African women's reproductive capacities as a means to sustain their genealogy of white supremacy.

Planter's economy came to disrupt the relationship between birth and humanity for enslaved Africans and, as such, children came to represent enslaved women's vulnerability (Morgan 116). By bequeathing unborn children, the slaveowner gained an omnipotent power over enslaved Black women's bodies from beyond the grave (Morgan 116). But, Morgan argues, childbearing was also an act of resistance: African women who did not bear children mourned the loss of motherhood but they also celebrated the economic loss this meant for their masters; and, African women who did become mothers enriched their masters but at the same time they "created communities fostering complicated oppositions to and compliance with American racial domination" (166). As Morgan argues, Black women's reproductive lives refuse easy categories of compliance or resistance because, "language of resistance and accommodation is already insufficient" (166). Morgan recognizes that these polar opposites are created to "capture the wide range of responses to repression," but she argues that relying on these binaries "presumes too much" because it suggests there is a consensus about the meaning of behaviors under an oppressive regime (166). As Morgan argues, to imagine enslaved African women never resisted their enslavement is to agree with the obscene logic of racial slavery that normalized the mechanized slave labor of the plantation as natural to enslaved Africans (Morgan 167). But, she also warns, to suggests that enslaved African women were in a constant state of resistance is in

accordance with travel narratives that claimed their bodies never felt pain (167). In the Epilogue, Morgan writes, "on the most reductive level, this study has illustrated simply that African women were there" (197).[14] Their being there, if only partially captured through bill of sales, wills and captain ledgers, is sufficient to argue that enslaved African women's lives were not marginal to the history of the Americas but that they were central to the production of American wealth and American identity.

As previously stated, in planter's economy, Black women's double labor came to represent the unencumbered capital that allowed the genealogy of white/European man to flourish in the New World. In slave holding states, after the U.S. American Revolution, Black women served as the hinge by which U.S. American identity evolved. The myth of the southern gentleman as a man of good breeding, good social standing and wealth was dependent on the laws created in the Virginia colony that defined women by race. It is through the collapsing of white women's genealogy into that of her husband's that southern gentlemen attain their social standing. Through the study of diaries kept by white mistresses in plantations, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, in *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (1988), demonstrates that racial slavery allotted land-holding white men power in all aspects of southern plantation life. Masters dictated when and who was allowed to worship, who was allowed to marry, when slaves were sold and the relationship between white mistresses and Black female house slaves. Fox-Genovese argues white women held a tenuous position of power in the domestic sphere. Regardless, when compared to yeoman or poor white women, slavery offered

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[14] In *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (1989), Marietta Morrissey, due to the silenced voices of enslaved Black women, cannot prove beyond doubt the extent of their oppression and is left, like both Brown and Morgan, to flesh out the economic data available.

white mistresses a leisure life. Fox-Genovese argues that white mistresses treated enslaved Black women with a cruelty that equaled and at times superseded white masters. Culling from a variety of diaries, Fox-Genovese argues the antagonistic relationship between enslaved African women and their mistresses demonstrates the control exerted by a patriarchal structure that feared any commonality between Black and white women. Fox-Genovese turns to the journal of Miss Sally who was forced by her husband, Jordan, to slap a Black slave for spilling coffee. When her first slap was not administered with sufficient force he ordered her to "hit de black bitch like she 'zerve to be hit" (qtd. Fox-Genovese 313). Miss Sally later sought-out the slave, not for forgiveness, but for refuge from her husband's cruelty. As Fox-Genovese demonstrates, power was granted to white mistresses only in accordance with the master's desire.

In Harriet Wilson's autobiographical novel, *Our Nig: Sketches From the Life of a Free Black* (1859), the mistress of the house, Mrs. Belmont, shows no compassion for the narrator, Frado, a free Black girl entrusted to her care. Set in the North, *Our Nig* contests the idealized woman, as expressed in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). When Frado demonstrates desire to attend church, she is beaten severely by Mary, the young mistress of the house. Mrs. Belmont approaches her husband about preventing Frado from attending church and school, and pleads her case through the economic drain this presents to the home. Frado, who is young and frail, is profitable for the household and performs the work of two girls but, although a free Black, receives no payment. When Mr. Belmont challenges his wife's hypocrisy as a Christian, Mrs. Belmont responds,

> Yes, but who ever thought of having a nigger go, except to drive others there? Why, according to you and James, we should very soon have her in the parlor, as

> smart as our own girls. It's of no use talking to you or James. If you should go on as you would like, it would not be six months before she would be leaving me; and that won't do. Just think how much profit she was to us last summer. We had no work hired out; she did the work of two girls. (90)

Her response demonstrates both the fear of having her and her daughter's social positioning equated with that of Black women. Frado's labor within the home supports the leisure life of Mrs. Belmont's social class. As such, the only reason a "nigger" should attend church is to serve as driver for whites. To spare Frado or to provide her with the privilege of attending church or school is seen by Mrs. Belmont as taking profit from her role as a woman, and she guffaws at the idea of allowing Frado to sit in the parlor, the premier space for the Cult of True Womanhood. Mrs. Belmont reasons that the distinction between white and Black women lies in Black women's ability to survive their imposed labor. As she argues, "you know these niggers are just like black snakes; you *can't* kill them. If she wasn't tough she would have been killed long ago. There was never one of my girls could do half the work" (original italics 89). Mr. Belmont by asking, "Did they ever try?" challenges his wife's assertion that it is in Frado's nature to work in manner not fit for white women (89). Mrs. Belmont's response, "What a man!" demonstrates that gender definitions, including her husband's, are dependent on Black women's labor (89). Although the cruelty of Mrs. Belmont and her daughters demonstrate that she lacks two of the four tenets of the Cult of True Womanhood, piety and submissiveness, she does hold on to purity, through racial difference, and domesticity by upholding her role in the domain of the home through Frado's labor. Frado defines Mrs. Belmont's role as wife/mother as well as Mr. Belmont's role as father/head of household. As Mrs. Belmont argues, if Frado's role as a Black

woman is not enforced, then the space of the home unravels. As previously mentioned, white women's labor moved from the field back to the domestic space through the labor of the enslaved Black woman. For white women to maintain their limited power in the home, white women enforced as inherently normative the myth of the indestructibility of Black women's bodies.

Although Wilson's novel is set outside of the literal plantation in the second half of the 19th century in the U.S., the preoccupation with gender and social strata permeated the Plantation Zone from its inception. Fertility and mortality rates amongst enslaved populations were among the widely discussed distinctions between Caribbean and U.S. slavery, but, as Barbara Bush writes, in *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838* (1990), "the common image of the woman slave, culled from planter and abolitionist sources alike, is a compound of the scarlet woman, the domineering matriarch and the passive workhorse" (5). Similar to the development of Black women's stereotypes that emerged in the U.S. such as the promiscuous and sexually insatiable jezebel, the asexual and complacent mammy, and the emasculating sapphire, enslaved and free Black women throughout the Plantation Zone had to contend with how their labor defined their gender identity outside of white female identity.[15]

In reconstructing the economic foundation of the Americas, the historians Brown, Morgan and Fox-Genovese as well as the novelist Wilson posit Black women at the center of creating and sustaining the Americas. As I have argued, the economic legacy of the Plantation Zone formulated during the frontier period of the Americas produced two genealogies, a race of

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[15] Bernard Moitt, in *Women and Slavery in the French Antilles 1635-1848* (2001) argues that like in the British colonies, enslaved Black women in the Francophone Caribbean were assigned the heaviest field work. While enslaved Black men, were seen as specialist and were employed in skilled labor.

white men and a race of Black women that while separated by legal definitions were interconnected to support the making of the Americas. In the following section I explore how the U.S., no longer in need of her reproductive labor, marks Black women's body for destruction in the 20th century. I begin with an analysis of how the New Deal and the Great Society changed the meaning of Black citizenship in the Americas to then study how Black women disappear from the nation-state.

From the New Deal to the Great Society Black Identity and Citizenship

On January 11, 1944, in his State of the Union message to Congress, President Franklin D. Roosevelt stated, "we have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence" (*presidency.ucsb.edu*). In his address, FDR enumerates the rights that as a nation the U.S. accepted as the second Bill of Rights. These include "the right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;" "the right of every family to a decent home;" "the right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy health;" "the right to a good education;" and "the right to every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living" (***www.presidency.ucsb.edu***). To achieve these noble goals, FDR had initiated an aggressive set of domestic programs known as the New Deal aimed at eradicating poverty.[16] It was during FDR's presidency the domestic budget first toppled the $100 billion mark (Gordon 39). In "The New Deal Was a Good Idea, We Should Try it this Time" (2009), the historian Linda Gordon argues that FDR's New Deal projects "did more than rescue people temporarily from

[16] Historians often locate the New Deal between two time periods: the first, between 1932-1934 and second, between 1934-1940. Most of the programs that I refer to in this section were put in place during the second New Deal but were formulated within the first period.

destitution and insecurity," but also "transform[ed] the nature of U.S. citizenship" (32). The New Deal was responsible for creating temporary manual labor jobs that built roads, schools and airports through the 1933 Civil Works Administration (CWA); promoted labor unions through the 1935 National Labor Relations Act; established minimum wage, guaranteed overtime for certain jobs and prohibited child labor through the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act; and employed millions, fed, clothed and housed the poor through the 1939 Work Projects Administration (WPA) (Gordon 32). But FDR's vision of inclusion was hindered by the gravity of the project in light of the Great Depression, limited funds and racist and sexist discriminatory practices by the issuing state agencies (Gordon 32).

The New Deal created an estimated 3.5 million jobs, but there were 11-12 million U.S. Americans reported unemployed (Gordon 32). In light of this incredible need, the discriminatory practices employed by government agencies in charge of distributing both monetary relief and jobs privileged white men over white women and people of color. Women who applied for jobs through the CWA and the WPA were required to pass a morality test and those who were employed had their checks mailed to the male head of their households (Gordon 33). In studying 1934 employment statistics, Gordon demonstrates that out of the 1.6 million jobs provided through the CWA, 11 percent were held by women (33). While she doesn't specify if these statistics take into account women of color, Gordon asserts that these dismal numbers corroborate that women's labor—echoing similar strategies employed during the frontier period of the Americas—was seen as "exceptional and not fundamental to the family's economy" because it assumed that female employees belonged to their father's or husbands's household (33). When employed, people of color "were often segregated into stereotyped, low-wage,

tedious jobs" (Gordon 33). In distributing aid to the poor, Gordon writes, local relief administrators in San Antonio argued that "whites needed $35 a month" but "to Mexicans $12-$15 represented a fortune because, it was alleged, all they liked to eat anyway was beans, grease, and cornmeal" (33). Gordon's study demonstrates the rhetoric of FDR's New Deal aimed at eradicating poverty for all, but there wasn't a plan in place to counteract the structure of white male privilege ubiquitous to the nation. Gordon argues that exclusionary practices by the state officials deepened the chasm between those citizens who could move from below the poverty line into upper-working-class and middle-class status and this "helped create the growing inequality on which today's economic crisis rests" (32). FDR's rhetoric imagined a nation united to fulfill the American Dream for all citizens, and while it failed to counteract the patriarchal structure that privileged white men, Gordon asserts that "the New Deal delivered a powerful message of inclusion in the polity" (32).

Despite Jim Crow, Black Codes and the growing lynchings of African Americans, FDR did not pre-figure a problem in the implementation of the New Deal programs. FDR was slow to react to the mounting attacks by white mobs against African Americans in the U.S. It was under increased international attention on racially instigated crimes against African Americans and pressure from A. Phillip Randolph's March on Washington that promised to bring thousands of African Americans to the White House lawn that FDR issued Executive Order 8802 in July of 1941. This resulted in the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee that banned discriminatory hiring practices in federal government jobs and private corporations receiving federal funds (Gordon 33). During his presidency, FDR promised to desegregate the armed forces, but it would be President Harry S. Truman, after Congress terminated FEPC, who issued

Executive Order 9981 in 1948 desegregating the armed forces. To categorize Truman's concerns over the attacks against African Americans as trivial would be inaccurate, but, it must be noted, Executive Order 9981 was issued two years after the 1946 Georgia lynching of two African American veterans and their wives sparked national attention. This forced President Truman to instruct the Justice Department to investigate this and other Civil Rights violations (Anderson 61). In *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights 1944-1955* (2003), Carol Anderson writes that "Truman, who was also a veteran, was distressed that men who served their country were clearly being targeted for elimination" and "expressed his horror at the crimes" (61). But Truman's concerns, as honest as they may have been, were mitigated by his need to attain the support of Southern States where the majority of lynchings and other crimes against African Americans took place. As Anderson argues, the African American struggle for equality was caught between Southern Democrats who controlled the Senate and the U.S. grab for power in the formation of the U.N. Southern Democrats were vigilant for any changes in the Constitution that might offer African Americans legal reason to break with Jim Crow (Anderson 44). Under the power of Southern Democrats, Anderson writes, "America's human rights policy would barely evolve beyond the Mason-Dixon line" (Anderson 44). Race relations in the U.S. were marked by vicious attacks on African Americans and a judicial system that refused to protect its Black citizens.

While FDR's New Deal programs embodied the struggle for social and economic rights, such as education, housing and employment, when African Americans demanded access to the same rights, these demands were classified as communist, and, as such, aligned the African American struggle for equality with the Soviet Union. In the struggle for equality, Black leaders,

such as NAACP board member Early B. Dickerson, were critical of the Communist Party because they failed to understand the issues that affected racial minorities in the U.S. (75). For African Americans the most pressing issue was the end of Jim Crow and achieving racial equality, but the Communist Party expected Black leaders to, as Anderson writes, "turn the other cheek" because there were more pressing matters to deal with (75). Anderson argues that because human rights were aligned with the Communist Party, Black leaders were forced to down play such concerns to maintain a presence in the anticommunist leadership of President Truman (Anderson 75).

As Anderson points out, the victors of WWII formed the U.N. to achieve international peace and security, but they did not give up their imperialist ventures. In the post-war period, the selling of American democracy was a necessary tactic for the U.S. to maintain a leadership role in human rights discussions within the U.N. (Anderson 72). But, in light of the horrors of Nazi Germany, the lynching of African Americans garnering international attention portrayed the U.S. not as a seat of democracy, but as colonial power exterminating minorities. Truman, like FDR, could not ignore the growing attention from the international media that, as Anderson argues, threatened to expose the "sheer 'lipocrisy" of the U.S. "flexing its moral muscle at Nuremberg while claiming impotence in Monroe, Georgia" (Anderson 63).[17] Anderson argues the State Department and the Department of Justice had to change their tactics in dealing with the "Negro problem" because it "made the job of selling America to the rest of the world just a little more

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[17] Although the murder of George W. Dorsey, his wife Mae Murray and Roger Malcolm and his wife Dorothy Malcolm, known as the 1946 Georgia Lynching, was investigated by the F.B.I. and a Grand Jury was convened, no charges were brought against the mob of 15-20 people responsible for the murders. The Grand Jury referring to the murders as an "occurrence" would not find reasons to indict. See Laura Wexler's *Fire in a Canebrake: The Last Mass Lynching in America* (2003).

difficult" (72). The ritualized murder of African Americans at the hands of white mobs, such as the lynching in Moore's Ford, garnered international attention from Mexico and the Soviet Union. As Anderson writes the U.S. embassy "complained that the murders were given 'prominence...out of proportion to [their] importance'" and "other articles on lynching or Jim Crow were also summarily dismissed as 'Soviet propaganda' or, worse yet, 'pro-Negro,' as if that automatically meant anti-American" (Anderson 72). Anderson's study argues that African American organizations, such as, the NAACP, the Civil Rights Congress and the National Congress of Negro Women, intercepted U.S. international relations and played a critical role in the U.N.'s protection of international human rights.

Black leaders, such as Walter White, Roy Wilkins and W.E.B. Du Bois, understood that civil rights laws were not enough to repair the damage done by slavery and that human rights needed to be the standard for legal equality (Anderson 74). For the 1945 U.N. meeting held in San Francisco the then State Secretary, Edward Stettinus Jr., was looking to represent a "broad base of support for the forthcoming U.N. treaty" and invited forty-two national organizations, including the NAACP, as consultants to the U.S. delegation (Anderson 41). Du Bois and White attended the U.N. meeting as representatives of the NAACP to argue for an end to the attacks of African Americans in the U.S. and push for an "end to racial discrimination and the abolition of colonialism" (Anderson 41). Regardless of Stettinus's invitation, Anderson argues, Du Bois and White would come to realize that they were there as "window dressing" and the State Department viewed their presence as "cheerleaders" and not as consultants (40). Du Bois and White caught Stettinius off guard by positing that if so many lives had been lost to fight for human rights during the World Wars, they could not support any initiative that did not take into

account how colonialism and racism was still at work in the U.S. (Anderson 43). The NAACP refused to support the State Department and were not appeased by Stettinius's "promise to submit proposals on these two issues" (43). Anderson contends that because of "Jim Crow, interment of Japanese, genocide of the Native Americans, debt slavery, and racist immigration laws," the U.S. faced the possibility of human rights violations (45). To avert international attention from these violations, the State Department formed the "Subcommission on the Protection of Minorities, but then filleted the definition of 'minority'" by resorting to "semantic legerdemain" (Anderson 75). The State Department argued African Americans did not possess a language or culture of their own, and were not asking to secede from the U.S., but, instead, they wanted to become a more integral part of the nation and, as such, did not fit the definition of national minorities (Anderson 75). The Department went on to apply the same reasoning to Mexican Americans, Native Americans and Asian Americans and concluded there were no national minorities in the U.S. (Anderson 75). Because only true national minorities were a concern for international conflict, African Americans, along with all the other minorities in the U.S., had no valid argument to present to the U.N. (Anderson 75).

Similar to Anderson's *Eyes off the Prize,* Mary L. Dudziak's *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (2000) focuses on the Civil Rights Movement in the context of the Cold War to address how the decolonization progress in Africa and Asia, in the latter half of the 20th century, affected U.S. international policies. During Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency American racism, under the watchful gaze of the Soviet Union, continued to attract international attention transforming racial discrimination in the U.S. into an issue of national security. During Eisenhower's presidency the Civil Rights movement made

advances through *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) making segregation of schools unconstitutional and the 1957 Civil Rights Act, the first substantial civil rights legislation since Reconstruction, protecting voting rights. Eisenhower's presidency is also marked by the kidnapping and brutal murder of Emmett Till in Mississippi in 1955 and Governor Orval Faubus's mobilization of the Arkansas National Guard to prevent nine Black students from entering Central High School at Little Rock in 1957. In openly defying the government, Dudziak, argues the State Department viewed Gov. Faubus as playing into the communist propaganda. Dudziak argues that while initially refusing to directly interfere, Eisenhower's decision to finally act in Little Rock was not based on support for desegregation because he was not a supporter of the *Brown vs Board of Education* decision (130). Chief Justice Earl Warren, as the cases were pending, writes that Eisenhower pulled him aside and said, "These are not bad people. All they are concerned about is to see their sweet little girls are not required to sit alongside some big overgrown Negroes'" (qtd. Dudziak 130). Dudziak notes that the international coverage of the stand-off in Little Rock "was so noteworthy to U.S. newswriters that there was widespread coverage in U.S. papers of the coverage abroad" (119). It was then, under increased international attention, that Eisenhower took action against Gov. Faubus. When he addressed the nation in a televised speech Eisenhower said, "Our personal opinions about the decision have no bearing on the matter of enforcement," and argued that the desegregation of schools "demonstrated to the world that we are a nation in which laws, not men, are supreme" (qtd. Dudziak 132). The President urged Americans to follow the law not because segregation and the mistreatment of African Americans was morally reprehensible, but because the Communist were watching. Dudziak notes that Eisenhower ends his speech "with the exact

language of the last words of the pledge of Allegiance" and in doing so he "appealed to patriotism. Little Rock was not simply an internal dispute: the nation, the national image, and the national security were at stake. Patriotism required that the needs of the nation be placed ahead of sectional loyalties" (134). Eisenhower's speech attempted to recast the image of Little Rock not as a racist and openly defiant of U.S. laws, but as a place that represented the democratic strength of America. The people of Little Rock, in allowing Black students to attend school with their white children, were portrayed as champions of democracy.

American racism did not only jeopardize the U.S. standing in U.N. Since the 1940s, State Department officials were concerned the ideology of white supremacy would jeopardize developing relationships with the newly formed countries in Africa and Asia. In 1960, the year Kennedy was elected president, "seventeen African nations achieved independence" and "a total of twenty five former colonies on the continent had now been liberated" (Dudziak 152). Known internationally as the "Year of Africa," in the U.S., 1960 was known for "the Greensboro, North Carolina, lunch counter sit-ins" (Dudziak 153). As Dudziak argues, the State Department was concerned that visiting representatives from these newly formed African and Asian nations could not be exposed to the "Whites Only" rhetoric of American culture. The decolonization progress in Africa compared to the U.S.'s inability to progress beyond emancipation and into full citizenship for African Americans underscored the U.S.'s colonialist ideology instead of an image of democracy.

To combat this image of American racism abroad, JFK created a set of domestic programs known as the New Frontier to address the continuously growing civil unrest. But it would be after Kennedy's assassination that President Lyndon B. Johnson, and his domestic

program, the Great Society, that the U.S. began to aggressively address Black inequality. Shortly after Kennedy's assassination, Johnson pushed for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawing job discrimination and segregation in public spaces. He followed this with the Voting Rights Act of 1965 assuring minority registration and voting, and outlawing states from imposing literacy test on voters. On his February 15, 1967 message to Congress, Johnson said "I am proposing fair housing legislation again this year because it is decent and right. Injustice must be opposed, however difficult or unpopular the issue" (Godzwig 31). Johnson received advice from civil rights leaders like A. Philip Randolph who argued that "Housing is central to the whole field of civil rights and no amount of success in any single phase of the civil rights movement can be sustained as long as racial discrimination in housing persists" (qtd. Godzwig 28). This led to the Civil Rights Act of 1968 banning housing discrimination and extending constitutional protection to Native Americans on reservations. Johnson's attack on racism targeted not only the Southern way of life but the divisions clearly created from colonialism through-out the U.S. Spaces previously marked as white were now opened to people of color. Johnson's commitment to ending poverty and racism is undeniable, but the Vietnam War and the continued growing civil unrest will explode in response to the changes brought about by Civl Rights Acts. When Johnson left office "he left a nation divided on issues of race and a Democratic party in disarray" (Dollinger 438).

Black leaders, such as Malcolm X, viewed the 1964 Civil Rights Act as a smoke screen to prevent further international embarrassment and to convince new African nations that the U.S. had changed its racists ways. In 1964, months before he was assassinated, Malcolm X delivered one of his most poignant speeches, "Ballot or the Bullet." This speech challenged White House's

tactics to grant minorities their civil rights, because, echoing the struggle during FDR's presidency, the heart of the problem lay in the denial of human rights. For Malcolm X, arguing for civil rights placed Black people "under Uncle Sam's jurisdiction" (*edchange.org*). Malcolm X understood that the fight for human rights could not be argued in U.S. courts because, as he stated, "You don't take your case to the criminal; you take your criminal to court" (*edchange.org*). For Malcolm X, arguing for civil rights held no positive outcome because he recognized that the U.S. judicial system was created on the premise of white supremacy. Dudziak argues that Malcolm X refused "to contain his critique of American racism within the boundaries of Cold War liberal discourse" and, in his travels through Africa in 1964, Malcolm X petitioned burgeoning African countries to refuse economic help from the U.S. (223). Malcolm X warned African nations to not be fooled by civil rights legislation passed because it was based on "deceit and trickery to keep African nations from condemning [the U.S.'s] racist practices before the United Nations" (qtd. Dudziak 222). Regardless of Malcolm X's passionate and aggressive appeals, "African leaders approved a resolution commending the United States for passing the Civil Rights Act" (Dudziak 222).

Malcolm X was not alone in taking the fight for human rights to the international stage. A decade earlier Josephine Baker, during a Latin America tour in 1952, criticized the U.S. on race discrimination. Unlike other Black activists, Baker was able to travel without restriction because she had renounced U.S. citizenship and had become a French citizen. Although her remarks about the U.S. were not as radical as other Black figures of the Civil Rights movement, the attention she received from the Peronistas in Argentina and other countries alarmed the State Department (Dudziak 72). They kept track of her activities in Latin America, and, as Dudziak

argues, Baker believed that they forbade newspapers from printing stories about her speeches and forced Chile to deny her a visiting visa (74). In 1954, on route from Paris to Mexico, Baker was held and questioned for four hours in New York by the INS (Dudziak 74). The growing FBI file on Baker demonstrated the Cold War tactics monitored Black Civil Rights figures for derogatory language against the U.S. (Dudziak 74). The U.S.'s constant watch on its Black citizens, and, as with Baker, its ex-citizens, demonstrated a fear that its second class citizens would place at risk its status as an imperial nation. As both Anderson and Dudziak argue, the anticommunist hysteria from FDR to Johnson's presidencies forced Black leaders to discard the language of human rights and to adopt the language of civil rights. African Americans were defined outside of an internationally recognized minority and the demand for human rights was aligned with communism. This left African Americans, as well as other ethnic minorities, maintained their marginalized status in domestic and international politics. The actions taken by the State Department demonstrate that the marker that differentiates the U.S. and the Americas from Europe is its African history. In the formation of the U.N., the U.S. worked to disproved their racist, or, as Truman had referred to, the U.S. brand of Naziism, but, in doing so, emphasized that Black citizens were at the center of U.S. American identity.

"Men Beget Men" as Black Women Disappear

The deaths of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King jr. would signal a change in tactics by Black leaders in their struggle for equality. In his eulogy for Malcolm X, Ossie Davis argued,

> Malcolm was our manhood, our living, black manhood! This was his meaning to his people. Consigning these mortal remains to earth, the common mother of all, secure in the knowledge that what we place in the ground is no more now a man

> but a seed which, after the winter of our discontent, will come forth again to meet us. And we will know him then for what he was and is. A prince. Our own black shining prince who didn't hesitate to die because he loved us so.(*malcolm-x.org*)

Although Malcolm X was a converted Muslim, Davis conjures images of a Black Christ who as the son of a King/God was sacrificed for the greater good of his people. The meaning Davis assigns to Malcolm X, as the living manhood of his people, references the effects defining enslaved African men as outside of the patriarchal structure of the family has had on African American culture. In referring to the Earth in the feminine tense, the metaphorical interment of Malcolm X's remains within a feminine body alludes to the role assigned to women within Judeo-Christian theology whose sole purpose is to serve man. In other words, Earth "the common mother of all," singular in her purpose, will produce not a daughter, but a son who will be a reincarnation of Malcolm X. In his eulogy, Davis mimics the language of Christianity through the Holy Trinity where the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit avail power only to male entities. Like Jesus of Nazareth, Malcolm X was sacrificed as an act of love for his people. Davis mythologizes Malcolm X as the son God and, as such, the rightful citizen of the Americas. If each unit of the modern state is defined by the husband as head of household who, as Irigaray argues, made God in his image, then Malcolm X represents the shift of Black men from interloper to citizen within the nation state by re-creating God in the image of Malcolm X. His legacy, then, is a return of Black men's manhood that was robbed by New World slavery. In morphing Malcolm X into a Jesus Christ figure, African American men enter into a patriarchal genealogy that has at its premise a return to a Garden of Eden. Black progress narrative imagines

a linear trajectory that marches towards a return to Africa before the emergence of New World slavery dependent on Black women's genealogy.

The emergence of Black patriarchy cannot be placed on the shoulders of Malcolm X alone. Freedom for Black men in the New World has only been imagined as inclusion in the modern state. In his *Narrative,* Douglass transforms from slave to man when he fights the white slave owner Edward Covey, attains his freedom, demonstrates self-reliance by finding employment and marrying Anna, a free slave. In doing so, Douglass's freedom is modeled after the construction of man within the same structure that named him a slave. Frantz Fanon, whose writing fanned the flames of revolution throughout the Black Diaspora, imagined Black subjectivity, like Douglas, only through an European model of the modern state. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Fanon, writing from the position of a Martiniquan expatriate entrenched in the Algerian War (1954-1962), demands that the native rise from his knees and "set himself up in the settler's place to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible" (39). If white masculinity was derived from a labor system that privileged white men through New World slavery, then Black men reiterated the same dangerous structure only this time they take on the role of citizen. The struggle for Black men in the Americas was visualized as transcending from their role as interloper to white male citizenship. This form of transcendence does not advance the role of Black or white women towards securing equality to white men within the nation state.

In *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the Black Diaspora* (2004), Michelle M. Wright takes to task how the first generation of Black male thinkers in the 20th-century—W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Cesairé, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Frantz Fanon —whose works challenge the

"Western nationalist metaphor that posits the Western patria as the white female who must be protected against the Black male Other by the white male citizen" (21). Wright argues that, faced with their role as interlopers within the structure of the nation, these writers created counterdiscourses utilizing the "same logical processes of the original discourses: the dialectic" (10). In doing so, Wright argues, they reaffirm an inherently patriarchal structure allowing "only men to claim a positive agency, white women remain passive, and Black women do not exist" (21).

In *Becoming Black,* Wright provides a cognitive map of Western ideological principles in the formation of the modern state. Although, as she argues, the Enlightenment "was composed of diverse spirits, from the royalist, anti-Semitic humanism of Voltaire to Jean-Jacques Rousseau's anticolonialist, antimonarchical humanism [...] it produced discourses that became dominant in European and American theses on progress and civilization" (Wright 29). These early discourses, "through aggressive and xenophobic biases," placed Europe at its center and European man as its highest achievement (Wright 29). The similarities between the invention of the modern state and the Judeo-Christian myth of creation are starkly similar: an omnipotent God created in the image of man and progress is created in the image of Europe. In this construct all cultures that do not adhere to European definitions of achievement are considered savage and placed outside of analytical history. Judeo-Christian gender relations are also easily transferable to the modern state. White men reserves the right to enunciate the laws that white women must adhere to under the auspice of protection. Within the modern state, white women serve as agents of white supremacy and are allowed, through their limited agency, the power to reject Black men (Wright 11). White men, as the proper citizen of the modern state, are granted power over women's

desire. In this structure Black man is presented as the antithesis to the white subject/citizen. It is against the construction of the Black/Negro Other as the antithesis to the white subject that Wright argues Black male writers in the Americas and, with the inclusion of Senghor, Senegal struggle to gain Black *male* subject position through a dialectic idiom (11).

As Wright posits, European and American thinkers produced the modern white subject some two hundred years ago at the same time it produced "the Black Other on which he relies" (28). Wright dates the emergence of the Black Other from late 18th and 19th-century Western philosophy and points to the discourses created by the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel, the 19th-century French writer and diplomat, Count Arthur de Gobineau and, the principal author of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson as having the most influence on both the modern concept of identity as "inextricably intertwined with the concept of nation" and, as such, African diasporic counterdiscourses (28-9). As she points out, at the beginning of the 20th-century, when these African diasporic thinkers were writing, "Blacks in the West were fighting for the full rights of citizenship and/or sovereignty from their colonizers" and it was necessary to demonstrate that Blacks could becomes subjects within the nation (10). As such, the counterdiscourses produced by Black thinkers in the early 20th-century were writing through Hegel's dialectic that posits the Negro, "outside of analytical history, bereft of culture, progress and civilization;" Jefferson's assertion that the negro is "a malevolent force […] within the nation […] not unlike a nasty virus on the national body whose sole aim, as dictated by nature, is to weaken and ultimately destroy that nation;" and Gobineau's use of race as a metaphor to argue his aristocratic belief that "man is great, noble, virtuous not by his actions but by his blood" (8; 40). Against these figures of European Enlightenment Du Bois, Césaire, Fanon, and Senghor set

out to prove—utilizing the same structure that originally marked them as the Black Other—that Blacks can become subjects within Western civilization "or more specifically ([...] with the exception of Senghor), the nation"(10).

Du Bois, Césaire and Fanon all utilize the modern state as the only structure by which subjectivity is gained creating a nation of male subjects. The heteropatriarchal assumptions that Wright ascribes to Black male thought fails to recognize the matrilineal structure of the Plantation Zone. In the struggle for Black male subjectivity, the laws of New World slavery that defined enslaved Black women, through the laws of tithability, within the same category as white man and Black man are forgotten. This historical amnesia decries the role of enslaved Black women in the plantation and in the histories of the Americas to produce a new history where Black men and white men square off for control of a genealogy that only produces male citizens. As such, Wright contends, "men beget men" (101).

"**Mama Sign Here, No More Babies:" Eugenics and the Black Body**

While freedom from racial oppression is imagined by Black male writers as becoming equal to white male citizens, freedom from oppression for Black women is dependent on no longer devaluing their labor, both as mothers and productive members of society. This can only be attained by Black women gaining control over their reproductive rights. In her study, Wright turns to mother daughter dyad as the foundation for a dialogic structure of subjectivity. But to establish the centrality of reproductive freedom as a key tenet to attaining freedom from racial and gender oppression, I turn to the struggle for reproductive freedom for women of color in the U.S. and the devastating effect the invention of the welfare queen has had on women of color. As previously mentioned, Morgan, in *Laboring Women,* argues that children born into slavery in the

New World represented a slave owner's projected fortune. The enslaved women responsible for producing white wealth in the Americas were at once valued for the reproductive capacities, yet treated with contempt. For the enslaved, children were tangible links to an African past (Morgan 108). This is seen in the survival of folktales handed down through generations as oral history, the production of new languages, such as *kreyòl* and *papiamentu*, and African religious practices that amalgamated with Christianity, such as *espiritismo*, *santeria* and *vodu*, that call on an African past as the foundation of New World Black cultures. If the reproductive value of enslaved Black women was indispensable to the plantation system, in the aftermath of its demise, Black women, whose reproductive capacities no longer produced wealth, were marked for destruction.

Women in the Americas became targets of U.S. eugenics projects that aimed at increasing the white population and protecting it from miscegenation. While the U.S. began this project by sterilizing incarcerated men against their will, women were an easier target who could be manipulated while in hospitals when giving birth or when requesting government assistance for their children. Implemented in the first decades of the 20th-century to prevent race degeneration, U.S. eugenics projects sterilized white women who were found to be mentally disabled and/or physically feeble. White women, whose children could have the potential to weaken the strength of white/European stock, were sterilized on individual cases. But, African American, Native American, Mexican American and Puerto Rican women, regardless of their mental and/or health status, were targeted by the state for sterilization as a group based on race. In *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty* (1998), Dorothy Roberts demonstrates that in the U.S., after emancipation, the state continued to demonize Black women's reproductive

practices and formed policies that extended its control over African American bodies only this time the aim was to eradicate Black women's reproductive capacities. Although Roberts focuses on how public policies devalued the reproductive rights of African American women during the 20th-century, compulsory sterilization, coercing women into taking dangerous birth control drugs and welfare program policies that systematically shamed its recipients were felt by all women of color with any link to an African heritage. Under the aegis of public health, the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 called for two racial categorizations, white and colored. This marked any non-white person under the same category as African Americans and, as such, candidates for compulsory sterilization. This turn by the state, to demonize anyone outside of a white identity by marking them as colored, a term predominantly used to signify people of African descent, expounded the undesirability of a Black identity.[18] The Racial Integrity Act of 1924 reaffirmed the one-drop rule of racial identity in the U.S. and revived by expanding the miscegenation laws, created during the frontier period, by bringing up to date the criminalization of inter-racial marriages.

Although laws against inter-racial marriage in the U.S. greatly contributed to the systematic alienation of its Black citizens, it was the forced sterilization that had the most insidious effect on women of color in the 20th-century. In *Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* (2003), Jennifer Nelson demonstrates that women of color were targeted for compulsory sterilization at hospitals when giving birth. Spanish speaking women of color were tricked and coerced into signing consent forms for sterilization. Latinas who did not speak

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[18] The physician and public health advocate, Walter Ashby Plecker, author of *Eugenics and Racial Integrity in Relation to the New Family* (1924), argued that Native Americans were for the most part mixed with African Americans and therefor classified them as colored. See Paul A. Lombardo's *A Century of Eugenics in America: From the Indiana Experiment to the Human Genome Era* (2011).

English and women of color who could not read were at most risk since these forms were written in English, and their contents were not translated into Spanish or had the procedure explained to them by doctors or nurses. Women of color, according to Nelson, were victims not only of overzealous eugenics practitioners in hospitals, but, until the mid-20th century, their voices went largely unheard by white feminist organizations fighting for reproductive rights. As Nelson argues, Black feminists, such as Angela Davis, criticized second wave feminist for failing to make forced or coerced population control central to their reproductive rights platform (73). Davis argued that the birth control movement was advantageous to all women but the ideology of its leaders was bias towards middle-class white women's needs and failed to encompass the needs of women across race and class (Nelson 73-4). The reproductive rights platform of second wave feminism argued for the right to contraceptives and legal and safe abortions, but, according to Davis, it did not include the needs of women of color who were fighting against compulsory sterilization and working class women who had no means to raise their children out of poverty.

If within reproductive rights movement, led by second wave feminist groups, the needs of women of color went largely ignored, in Black Nationalist rhetoric Black women were relegated to producing soldiers for a patriarchal, albeit Black, cause. Reproductive rights for women of color became ensnared in the struggle for power between the heteropatriarchal structures of Black nationalist movements and the state. Black nationalist groups, such as the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam, viewed contraceptives and abortions as instruments of genocide. Nelson argues that Black women activists, such as Angela Davis, Assata Shakur, Kathleen Cleaver and Elaine Brown, criticized the Black nationalists for conflating compulsory sterilization with women's reproductive rights. Nelson argues that leaders of the Black Panther and the Nation of

Islam were weary of government sponsored family planning programs because the U.S. had a history of using the Black population for human experiments, such as the Tuskegee syphilis experiment conducted on Black men from 1932-1972.[19] Kathleen Cleaver argued that due to the shrinking Black population, the suspicion that the government purposely distributed heroin in Black neighborhoods and the FBI's investigation on civil rights leaders led the Black Panther Party to grow even more suspicious of all government sponsored reproductive rights programs (Nelson 87). Black Nationalist position on health care and family planning differed drastically between the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party. Nelson argues that the Nation of Islam "articulated a relatively weak plan for total health care [and] their warnings of a genocidal conspiracy, published in their paper *Muhammad Speaks,* often sounded more like science fiction than rational political editorializing" (88). Nelson notes that the Black Panther Party offered advice for total health care and opened community controlled clinics in poor Black neighborhoods (88). Although the Black Panthers advocated for community health programs, it came with a political agenda that believed government funded family planning was a ploy by the U.S. to eliminate the Black population. Nelson argues that the fears expressed by Black Nationalists were not completely unfounded. The National Medical Association of Black physicians also voiced suspicions against federally funded family planning programs in Black communities (88).

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[19] In the 20th-century the U.S. utilized ethnic minorities as subjects for human experiments without their consent. For example, in Guatemala between 1946-48 the U.S. infected poor men and women with syphilis. The president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party alleged that he and other incarcerated men of color in Atlanta were used in human radiation experiments. Under orders by President Bill Clinton, the U.S. Department of Energy disclosed that from the 1950s to the 1970s radiation experiments were conducted on incarcerated men without their consent. See Victor Villanueva's "Colonial Memory and the Crime of Rhetoric: Pedro Albizu Campos" *http://www.buffalostate.edu/orientation/documents/CE0716Colonial.pdf*

Criticizing the role assigned to women in the movement against Black oppression to child bearing, Black women, at first, chose not to split from the Black nationalist movement and instead worked within it to change women's political participation (Nelson 60). In 1973, after being accused of murder, Huey P. Newton, the leader of the Black Panther Party, self-exiled to Cuba making Elaine Brown the leader of the party. Under her leadership the Black Panther Party "began to develop in a less violent direction, focusing on community-controlled institutions to build local black political power" (Nelson 103). By placing women in key positions in the organization and raising funds to expand on Newton's survival programs, Brown channelled the party's effort towards building community controlled social programs, such as funding elementary schools in Black neighborhoods. Brown also became involved in electoral politics serving as delegate for Jerry Brown's presidential campaign in 1976 (Nelson 104). The changes brought about by Brown's leadership upset Black men in the party who did not want a woman leading them (104). When Newton returned to the U.S., Brown went into hiding in fear of retribution from some of the party members. Nelson argues that "Newton felt pressured from the 'brothers' in the organization to reassert masculine leadership by physically 'disciplining' women who ran the social programs. This ugly display of masculine aggression drove important female members of the party to cut all ties with the Panthers" (104). Nonetheless, Brown's tenure as leader of the Black Panthers changed the rhetoric towards family planning. In her autobiography, Brown states that "I would support every assertion of human rights by women—from the right to abortion to the right of equality with men as laborers and leaders" (qtd. Nelson 108).

Adopting the Black Power principles of Black Nationalism, the Young Lords Party (YLP) emerged as a gang from Chicago's South Side. But, unlike the Black Panthers and the Nation of

Islam, the YLP adopted a radical feminist platform that recognize freedom from racial oppression was dependent on reproductive freedom for women of color. Nelson attributes this radical feminist platform to the leadership within the YLP of Denise Oliver and Iris Morales and their involvement with women's liberation movement. Similar to Brown's leadership of the Black Panthers, Oliver and Morales advocated for community run programs such as after school programs and community health care. These leaders spoke up against machismo in the Latina/o community and demanded, much like Black feminist within the Black Panther Party, a recognition of women's reproductive rights that extended beyond abortions and contraceptive to the right to decide when and how many children they wish to have and the right to raise them out of poverty.

Although compulsory sterilization of women of color continued late into the 1970s, women of color changed both the discourse of Black Nationalism and the reproductive rights movement. Together, Black feminist and Latinas worked to change not only the attitudes towards women's reproductive rights within their community and cultures, but also change the reproductive right's agenda to an inclusive platform that recognized the distinctive needs of women across class and race. Unable to kill-off the Black female body, the U.S. government changed its tactics and maintained an attack on Black women's reproductive behavior with the help of the media.

Dangerous Black Mothers

Perhaps no better actor could have entered the stage of U.S. domestic social policy in the latter half of the 20th century than President Ronald Reagan. Born in 1911, he lived through the Depression Era, New Deal, Great Society, McCarthyism and the Civil Rights movement. At the

age of seventy, Reagan came to set straight a century that had run off the rails by "the big taxers and big spenders in the Congress [that] had started a binge [and] threatened the character of our people" (qtd. Hayward 220). President Reagan was the perfect father figure to assuage the anxiety that had been building since the New Deal programs began to mobilize the working class through a set of aggressive domestic programs that helped the poor and politicized unions. Reagan turned the War on Poverty begun by FDR's New Deal and continued through to Johnson's Great Society, into the War on the Poor. Reagan was able to win over the conservative Republican party by maintaining Communism as the international enemy and naming the welfare queen as the domestic enemy.

During his 1976 failed bid for the Republican presidential nomination, Reagan introduced the nation to the fictional welfare queen from Chicago's South Side who "has eighty names, thirty addresses, twelve Social Security cards, and is collecting veteran's benefits on four deceased husbands...She's collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash alone is over $150,000" (qtd. Douglas and Michaels 185). In locating the welfare queen in an area historically populated by African Americans and Hispanics, and using verbs such as "collecting" and "getting" alongside "tax-free," Reagan tapped into the anxiety experienced by social conservatives who felt U.S. American values were under attack from the the laws brought into effect by the demands of the Civil Rights Movement and second wave feminism.

The emergence and longevity of the welfare queen cannot be credited to Ronald Reagan's racist rhetoric alone. In "The End of Liberalism: Narrating Welfare's Decline, from the *Moynihan Report* (1965) to the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act" (1996),

William Graebner argues that "social scientists played central roles in shaping perceptions of welfare, most significantly by examining the impact of welfare on the work ethic, on family structure, on gender relations, on poverty, and on inner-city black communities" (170). Graebner argues that Daniel P. Moynihan's *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965) was an anxiety laden response to the demands of the Civil Rights Movement and the transition into the Black Power movement. He writes that "Moynihan feared a revolution based on rising expectations, as blacks turned from the quest for legal equality and equal opportunity to another quest, more threatening to the society: this one for equality of results as a group" (171). The Black Power movement was asking for inclusion in the polity as a group that was seen as foreign from the general U.S. American population. Reading the *Report's* "indictment of the 'crumbling,' disorganized, dysfunctional, and pathological Negro family," Graebner argues, "reshape[d] and reconceptualize[d] ongoing debates on welfare, the welfare state, civil rights, the inner cities, and the place of blacks in American life" (172). The *Moynihan Report* found the failure of African Americans to effectively rise out of poverty on the matriarchal structure of Black families. Graebner argues that Moynihan portrayed the damage done to Black families over three centuries as dire, but the *Report*, as the title suggests, does not provide a "solution." Instead, it provides an overt concern for patriarchy over that of race (Graebner 177). Portraying Black life as a "tangle of pathology" that traced the history of damage the Black male psyche had endured from slavery to the then present had "produced and obedient black male with a low need for achievement" (Graebner 172). For Moynihan, the history of slavery, segregation, Jim Crow and high unemployment resulted in "Negro men never learned to be men" (Graebner 173). The damage to Black men and their subsequent undermining of the "'position of father' and

contributing to the community's harmful 'matriarchal structure'" (173). In other words, Black women by having an inordinate amount of children out of wedlock led to the poor work ethic of Black men.

Similar to the *Report*, Oscar Lewis, in *La Vida; A Puerto Rican Family in the Culture of Poverty—San Juan and New York* (1966), conducted a study of Puerto Rican families living in poverty on the Island as well as in New York. Lewis, a white U.S. anthropologist, did not offer solutions to Puerto Rican poverty, but, like the *Report,* found that the failure of these families to overcome their economic condition rested on the a matriarchal family structure. Lewis's study depicts Puerto Rican women as foul-mouth, dirty, lascivious and with more children than they could support. Lewis penned the term culture of poverty to explain how poverty was handed down as a cultural legacy. Because the crux of Puerto Rican poverty emerged from the failure of a patriarchal family structure, women were responsible for handing down this inheritance through generations. Moreover, the women of *La Vida,* when they were not working as prostitutes, received government benefits. Almost identical to the Moynihan's *Report*, Lewis's study claimed that without a home to rule over, Puerto Rican men were emasculated by aggressive Puerto Rican women and, as such, they developed a poor work ethic. Unlike the *Report,* Lewis's *La Vida,* does not address how race produced or affected poverty on the Island or in the U.S. Race is present in the narrative Lewis produced but it becomes lost in a rhetoric of filth.

Welfare reforms advocate assume welfare recipients live a life of privilege payed by tax paying U.S. citizens. Published almost two decades ago, "Dethroning the Welfare Queen: The Rhetoric of Reform" (1994) from *The Harvard Law Review* provides insight into the continuing

debate on welfare reforms. The failure of poor people to abstain from having children until they are married, not purchasing a home and living a God fearing life, demonstrates that poor people do not possess the social values necessary to be part of the nation because they are unwilling to work at achieving the American Dream (*Harvard Review* 2015). The authors of "Dethroning the Welfare Queen: The Rhetoric of Reform" argued the solution to poverty was envisioned as forcing poor people to stop being lazy by denying them the benefits that began with the New Deal and continued as government assistance through out the 20th century because this will lead them to conform to the U.S. American work ethic.

The welfare debate is structured as a clash of moral values between the white middle-class who worked, are married and own their homes and Blacks who refuse to work, are not married and profit from public assistance in government sponsored housing. Although statistics demonstrate that Black and white women receiving public assistance were on par, welfare recipients are portrayed as Black women. For example, "in 1991 black families accounted for less than thirty-nine percent of the welfare population; white families accounted for a little over thirty-eight percent; Hispanics made up over seventeen percent; and Asian Americans and Native Americans constituted the remainder" (*Harvard Review* 2020). Furthermore, as the authors argue, studies demonstrates that a large percentage of women on welfare worked prior to receiving benefits and also worked while receiving benefits, the average size of families receiving welfare benefits were "approximately the same size as" families who did not receive welfare benefits, and that no correlation between receiving welfare benefits and family size existed (*Harvard Review* 2016). These statistics often go ignored by politicians and media outlets because the myth of the welfare queen, Black, lascivious, crafty and immoral, serves as sound

bites to deter the public from more pressing matters affecting the nation. Instead of worrying about the devastating financial effects reaganomics had on the American family during the 1980s and into our present time, politicians and journalists turn their attention on the welfare queens because it provides an easy believable scapegoat that defers attention from more pressing national concerns. As such, welfare mothers or queens represented an attack on the the founding moral codes of the U.S.: hard work and family values.

Reagan's infamous speech, which he reiterated often throughout his career as a politician, tapped into the long standing stereotypes of Black people's laziness and rampant fertility. In *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How it has Undermined Women*, *Media & Public Policy* (2005), Susan Douglas and Meredith Michaels argue that the immediacy of the welfare queen stereotype is available to our imagination because for the greater part of the second half of the 20th-century it was sensationalized by the media. Journalists scoured inner city ghettos hot on the trail of Black welfare queens intent on destroying U.S. economy with their fertile wombs. Douglas and Michael open their chapter on the welfare queen with a reading of the 1975 *New Yorker* article titled "A Welfare Mother." The article spotlights Carmen Santana, the fictitious name of the welfare mother, whose large corpulent body, foul mouth and abusive behavior towards her out of control children was offered as proof of the existence of the welfare queen stereotype. Carmen migrated to the U.S. from Puerto Rico and, after being unable to hold down a job and unable to master birth control, had six children with different men and depended on welfare. Her apartment, whose walls were covered in graffiti, were a representation of her womb, dirty and dangerous. Carmen's lack of feminine attributes and house keeping skills are

paired with her foreign-ness highlighting the ease by which Black women take advantage of the system.

In the 1980s and 1990s, portraits of the welfare queen abounded in media outlets that revived the language of the *Moynihan Report*. For example, in Bill Moyer's 1986 documentary *The Vanishing Family: Crisis in Black America*, Douglas and Michaels argue, characterized "the black family as a disaster, with the all dominating black matriarch who had 'too many children too early' and emasculated the men in her life, as the cause for this 'tangle of pathology'" (193). The sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues that the Moyer documentary portrayed the values expressed by Black families as "strikingly different from those held by middle-class whites, for in this 'inside-out world' men refuse to support their children, women feel they can get along without husbands, and the husband-wife family unit no longer is desired" (878). As Hill Collins argues, Moyer utilized the "fundamental assumption of self-perpetuating African American cultural deficiency" (878). Moyer depicts Black women as creating a matriarchal counter-culture financed by hard working tax-payers that devalues the founding Christian values which the U.S. was founded upon. Moyer was not alone in his attack on Black matriarchs. In 1994 Charles Murray, in a segment for NBC, speaking on "'the special problem posed by blacks in our country'" argued that Black women "[...]posed the threat of contamination: their behavior was going to infect us" and warned the U.S. public that "we will have white urban neighborhoods that look and feel pretty much like the black urban neighborhoods do now. And that is a disaster for everyone" (Douglas & Michael 194). Mimicking the language of Thomas Jefferson who saw slaves as virus that will destroy the nation, Murray found that Black women had the potential to infect white women and this ultimately threatened the role of white men in the nation. More than

three hundred years after their initial publication, the language of European travel narratives once again portrayed Black women as dirty, lascivious and lacking morality, but instead of the Africa that only exists in savage myths, they lived in the myth of the U.S. and threatened to infect the white nation with their Blackness.

As Douglas and Michaels argue, Moyer's documentary marked a turning point in the war on the welfare queen by turning the attention towards poor pregnant Black teenagers. Similarly to how children born to Black women during slavery inherited the condition of the mother, welfare queens handed down their condition to their teenage daughters. Similar to Lewis's culture of poverty that explained the inability of poor people to rise out of poverty because they embrace weak work ethics, the welfare queen hands down to their daughters a sense of entitlement that allows them to depend on government hand-outs. During the 1990s, journalist and politicians alike portrayed the nation as held hostage by the rampant sexuality of Black teenage girls. To prevent the daughters of the welfare queen from taking over the nation, in 1996 the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act relegated individual states to control the dispersal of benefits. By law, states were required to move 25 percent of welfare recipients "to jobs or work programs within one year, and half into jobs by 2002" (Douglas and Michaels 199). States were allowed to deny benefits to women, including teenage mothers, who, while on welfare, had more children and benefits were capped off at five years (Douglas and Michaels 200). States demanded that poor women dependent on welfare work 30-40 hours but did not subsidize child care (Douglas and Michaels 200). As Douglas and Michaels argue, poor women were forced to leave children unattended, send them to school when they were sick and went to bed hungry (Douglas and Michaels 200). Because most of the women on welfare were

placed into low income jobs that did not have much flexibility to meet the demands of single mothers, most women, not able to find adequate child care, were fired. One of the most devastating effects of welfare reforms was the increase of homeless population. In 2000, New York City reported its highest homeless rate, most of which were women and children (Douglas and Michaels 200). The socio-economic conditions that blocked Black women and men from attaining adequate jobs and moving out of poverty failed to enter into the welfare debates. Instead, journalist and politicians joined forces to publicly shame Black cultures by characterizing the relationship between Black mothers and their daughters as evil.

Douglas and Michaels point out that although the media attention on the welfare debate predominantly rested on Black women, in 1995 CBS, in a *48 Hours* episode, "The Rage Over Welfare," interviewed two white women on public assistance while living in trailers, the poor white equivalent to Black projects. Although it also portrayed them as taking advantage of the welfare system, their behavior was not a representation nor an indictment against all white women or their white daughters. For the nation, the welfare problem is caused by the matriarchal structure of Black families. Douglas and Michaels argue that the preoccupation with the dangerous Black mother was placed in comparison with the good white mother. Douglas and Michaels define the mommy myth as state sponsored feared tactics aimed at controlling white women in the workforce. Guilt and shame is a prevailing theme in this text where mothers who work outside of the home are controlled by the fear great harm will fall upon their children because they are at work and not mothering their children around the clock. Douglas and Michaels write,

> [...]the stereotype of the lazy, irresponsible, neglectful, and promiscuous welfare mother became so important in the 1980s and beyond because however insecure we felt in our identities as "mothers," we suddenly (if briefly) felt very confident and virtuous when juxtaposed to this other "bad" mom. Our exclusion of her from the "perfect mom" club ensured our own membership, even though we knew we weren't perfect. Compared to the scowling, dark-skinned mother of five who made her kids sleep in their own feces while she got high on crack, we were transformed, purified, the Madonna herself. (199)

Black women appear in *The Mommy Myth* as examples of worst case scenario for raising children. Consumed by drug abuse and failure to bring children into a two parent home, Black mothers, Douglas and Michaels argue, are portrayed in the media and political discourse of social reforms as bad mothers. Similar to the frontier period of the Americas when white women were defined in contrast to the labor of enslaved Black women, at the end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, white women defined their identity as not Black women.

The Babelic Uterus of the New World and the Cult of Black womanhood

In the 20th-century and into the 21st-century, women of African descent in the U.S. had to contend with government policies that attempted to erase their genealogy through sterilization, and, when that failed, portrayed them and their daughters as bent on destroying the nation. At the same time, they also had to contend with how Black diasporic male thinkers fail, implicitly and explicitly, to include Black women within the decolonization process. Caught between a heteropatriarchal state that needs to forget how the creation of American wealth was dependent on their double labor, and a gendered secession by Black male thinkers that envision citizenship

through a masculinist rhetoric that leaves them behind, Black women in the aftermath of the plantation's demise are pressed to disappear.

Finding no space for Black women's subjectivity in the works of the most prominent Black male diasporic voices of the early 20th-century, Michelle M. Wright turns to the trope of the Black mother in the works of two Black female poets, Carolyn Rodgers and Audre Lorde. While the trope of the Black mother is a common theme in Black letters, for Rodgers and Lorde, as Wright argues, the mother daughter dyad provides a framework that moves from the dialectic idiom—utilized by Du Bois, Césaire, Senghor and Fanon that spilled over into the second half of the 20th-century into Black Nationalist discourses—to a dialogic structures of intersubjectivity (21). In the dialectic idiom, Wright argues, "recognition can only be enabled and thus ultimately defined by the master, leaving the slave with a secondary subject status on achieving consciousness" (142). Wright rejects the dialectic idiom for the dialogic model, based on Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's heterogenous model for Black female subjectivity, where "recognition becomes the means by which an unity based on diversity can be achieved [...] wherein difference becomes the means by which one can speak with, recognize, and thus be recognized by a variety of subjects" (142).[20] In other words, Wright argues that Henderson's model provides a framework "for a *diasporic* subject, one who deploys dialogue instead of logos" (142). As Wright argues, in moving from a logos-based subject, through which white men are made divine and infinite, to dialogic of intersubjectivity, where all who speak can attain subjectivity, "also means a moves from the binary of the nation, in which the line between subject and others is

[20] Wright develops her argument for a dialogic structure of subjectivity through Mae Gwendolyn Henderson's heterogenous model for Black female subject in "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition" (1989).

quite clear" (142). In the works of Roders and Lorde, Wright sees an alternative to the heteropatriarchal structure of the modern state.

Wright argues that Rodgers and Lorde, anticipating Henderson's model of Black female subjectivity, challenged Black nationalists by rejecting dialectic constructions of the subject for the more inclusive model of a dialogic structure. Wright views Rodgers and Lorde's trope of the Black mother as problematizing "Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical critique of the dialectic" on which Black Nationalist ideology rests upon (12). As Wright argues, Bakhtin's "'simplest time chronotope'" allows protagonists to control order and time (Wright 12). Rodgers and Lorde, as Wright argues, "counter the chronotopes inherently masculinist view" because, as in other nationalist narratives, it constructs a linear progression that allows men to posses the power to give birth to other men (12). As she writes, in Rodgers and Lorde the trope of the Black mother shows,

> three things: that the Black male subject cannot be the sole possessors of agency because he alone cannot create other subjects; that all subjectivities are therefore 'intersubjective' in that they come into being through other subjects, not apart from them; that because all subjects are intersubjective, subjectivity cannot be produced dialectically, as thetical and antithetical relations do not exists. (22)

The argument set forth by the trope of the mother is dangerous in its simplicity: No human being can be produced without a woman. The presence of an omnipotent male whose genealogy can be produced without a woman is then discarded for a turn towards the mother daughter dyad that breaks with the linear trajectory of the chronotope. This also breaks with the divine sanctions gained by man through the Judeo-Christian myth of creation. In Christianity, the legacy of Jesus

Christ, as both an embodiment of God and logos, supports the heteropatriarchal structure of Western nations. The turn towards the trope of the Black mother, or the cult of Black womanhood, is not a rejection of Black or white men and women, but instead it is a turn towards the endemic lack of Black women's voice in history. In Rodgers and Lorde the deployment of the Black mother turns lack into loss as a circular process of retrieval (176). In other words, if the oppression of man, as Marxist ideology states, began with the oppression of woman, in the cult of Black womanhood the oppression of man in Western discourse with the invention of the New World is recognized as beginning with the oppression of Black women through her double labor.

Although historically the trope of the Black mother has been deployed in negative terms, both Rodgers and Lorde enable Black female subjectivity through a transferable relationship between mother and daughter (Wright 145). Wright argues that Rodgers explores Black women's consciousness in her work by positing the "mother and daughter in a dialogic rather than oppositional relation to create an intersubjectivity that reclaims and recuperates the history and contributions of Black women past and present" (145). In the relationship between mother and daughter Rodgers creates two voices who battle through ideological claims but neither one has the last word creating a circular chronotope (Wright 153).

As Wright argues, Rodgers' work is semi-autobiographical and in her representation of the relationship between mother and daughter, although not always harmonious, depicts "an always loving and supportive mother casts an idealistic light on an alliance that relies on the Western discourse that deliberately conflates biological imperative with the socially constructed imperative that mothers must be guided by deep and abiding love for their natural offsprings" (172). In doing so, Rodgers, as Wright argues, "does not question the heterosexists

assumptions of nationalist discourse" (22). Although Rodgers deployment of the Black mother trope allows for Black female subjectivity, because it heterosexualizes intersubjectivity, it precludes queer Black subjects (Wright 172). As opposed to Rodgers, Wright argues, Lorde explores the trope of the Black mother not as biological difference but as experiential difference (Wright 164). Because Lorde creates "her Black mother outside a heterosexist framework through queer mothers, adoptive mothers, and symbolic mothers, Lorde effectively negates Rodgers' equation between the production of the subject and heterosexual sex" (23). Black motherhood in Lorde's work is not always a happy experience but is also tied to violence. Children could be born out of rape and be rejected by their mothers. In opening up the experience of Black motherhood outside of the idealistic and not falling prey to Black stereotypes, Lorde's work speaks to a wide array of women across the diaspora (Wright 161). Aside from these important distinctions, Wright notes, neither poet positions the Black mother as an absolute origin, "rather she is the point of orientation for all Black subjects, the medium through which, willingly or not, they negotiate their intersubjectivity" (178).

In her work, Wright argues that Black female subjectivity cannot be attained within a structure that denies the presence of Black women. As Wright argues, "Renewal, loss, and regeneration become the mantra for the Black female subject and the strongest riposte to Black nationalist theories of the Black subject: the past is always with us, negotiating with the present and future" (176). The absence of Black women within discourses of the nation demonstrate the danger they represent to the formation of the modern state because it challenges the assumption that women are by nature weaker than man and as such in need protection. But her exclusion is not only based on the resistance. The exclusion of Black women results in how their histories in

the New World, as both fighters against and victims of colonization and white supremacy, do not allow for the continuation of the modern state that empowers men through the oppression of women. To include Black women is to undo the modern state.

The babelic uterus envisioned by both Glissant and Douglass is a recognition of how enslaved Africans exiled in the New World were brought into the matrix of analytical history to support white supremacy. By being born after the creation of the New World, Americans are born into an Afrocentric position. Identity is negotiated by its proximity to Black culture. The paths that have been set before all women and men are defined by how one moves away or embraces the historical Black female body. The state shapes, forcefully, the relationship the history of Black women's labor by demonizing its history and holding aloft the promise of white privilege. Patriarchy is able to maintain its power in the nation state through labor practices that privilege man's access to employment and this guarantees his position as the head of the family. The babelic uterus of the New World refers to how American identities hinge upon the double labor of the historical Black female body. Identity in the Americas always returns the subject to the two genealogies that defined the New World: a white genealogy that produced a race of white men dependent on the genealogy of Black women that produced the wealth of the Americas. The babelic uterus of the New World speaks to the historic silence endemic to Black women's history with the onset of Atlantic slave trade. But, at once, it also speaks to the bone crushing history enslaved Black women were forced to enact with the children they ushered into New World slavery. This history is embedded in the matrix of modernity.

The scope of this chapter is ambitious and admittedly flawed. The role Black women play in the Americas is approached through a historical U.S. archive that privileges an anglophone

construction of Black women's role in the Americas. Although the role historically played by Black women through out the Americas differs by nation, the laws of Plantation Zone all adhere to the double labor enforced upon enslaved Black women. Black female subjectivity gained through an intersubjective dialogic structure is an end to the heteronormative patriarchal structure of the dialectic idiom. A turn towards the cult of Black womanhood is the end of nation states because enunciation is no longer an act reserved for God and his sons.

Chapter 2 The Poet Talks Black: Luis Palés Matos and the Problem of Whiteness in Transamerican Studies

Ñam-ñam. África mastica
en el silencio—ñam-ñam.
su cena de exploradores
y misioneros—ñam-ñam.
Quien penetró en Tangañica
por vez primera—ñam-ñam;
quien llegó hasta Tembandumba
la gran matriarca—ñam-ñam.
Luis Palés Matos, "Ñam-Ñam" (1931)

Ñam-ñam. Africa chews
in silence—ñam-ñam.
a meal of explorers
and missionaries—ñam-ñam.
Who for the first time
forced through Tanganyika—ñam-ñam;
who reached Tembandumba
the great matriarch—ñam-ñam.
Luis Palés Matos, "Ñam-Ñam" (1931)[21]

Tembandumba of the Quimbamba, a mythopoetic creation emerging from the Black Diaspora and catapulted into Puerto Rican letters through Luis Palés Matos's poem "Majestad Negra" ["Black Majesty"] (1934), has proven to be an elusive symbol not only for Puerto Rican literary studies but also in translation for American and Black Diasporic Studies. Palés Matos visualized Tembandumba on an Antillean street as a symbol of resistance and hope that ultimately speaks to the resilience of cultures emerging from the Plantation Zone. This notorious and often misunderstood figure of the *mulata* queen holds in her hips the breadth of cane fields, sugar mills, African sensuality and revolutions that have come to encompass the vilified history of Black people in the New World. Palés Matos has for the better part of the 20th-century and

[21] Unless otherwise indicated, these are my translations.

into the 21st-century confused critics, poets, visual artists and novelists who, fascinated by the sensuality and musicality in "Majestad Negra" have read and continue to read the image of Tembandumba as an erotic fascination of a light-skinned poet for a lascivious Black woman.

As one of the most celebrated and anthologized Puerto Rican poets and widely regarded as the initiator of *poesía negra,* Palés Matos holds an important and yet dangerous position in 20th-century Puerto Rican letters. While his literary forefathers, notably the poet Luis Lloréns Torres (1876-1944), exalted the image of the noble, pious and, most significantly, white *jíbaro* as the Island's national image, Palés Matos's poetry discards an European based identity and roams the Plantation Zone in search of Puerto Rico's Black matrilineal genealogy. Preceding Édouard Glissant's *antillanité*, Palés Matos refuted a white, Black or mulatto identity and instead embraced a complex Caribbean subjectivity which he explored in his poetry through Black feminine metaphors. This turn disconcerted the political temperament expressed by the small group of land owning creole elite who followed the tradition of the previous generations to exclude from Puerto Rican identity its African heritage and cultivated an Island identity based on European colonization.

Palés Matos's poetry has haunted the margins of US American letters since the publication of Tomás Blanco's essay "A Porto Rican Poet: Luis Palés Matos" in the *American Mercury* in 1930 and William Carlos Williams's translation of "Preludio en Boricua" ["Prelude in Boricua"] in 1940. Regarding him as white, critics often privilege Palés Matos's skin color above a textual analysis of his poetry. Therefore, Palés Matos is often read, as Aníbal González Pérez argues, "as another white poet who went 'slumming' in the guise of writing 'black'" (285). Most criticism of Palés Matos's work begins with a reading of his white skin that allows critics

to make claims about the lack of authenticity in his poetry, such interpretations disregard the political implications of a poet insisting on embracing his African heritage in light of the Island's relationship to the U.S. (and its Black codes) in the first half of the 20th-century. Reading Palés Matos's poetry is a challenge in Spanish as well as in English because he has been classified as a white poet writing Black poems. As I argued in the Introduction, racial identity on the Island does not follow in accordance to the one-drop-rule of U.S. American identity. Instead, Caribbean racial identity is a complex system where belonging to a high social class tends to whiten, but never erase the Black heritage, of the individual.

Although my aim is to produce a reading of Palés Matos's work that demonstrates the diversity of his Antillean aesthetics, I begin with the problem, as the title of this chapter indicates, with whiteness that has pursued the reading of this eminent Caribbean poet in both Puerto Rican studies and, in translation, in Black Diaspora Studies. To this end, I begin with a summary of criticism on Palés Matos's work, to then arrive at a reading of "Majestad Negra." The bulk of criticism on Palés Matos's work is dedicated to what the Puerto Rican literary canon has label his *poesía negra,* which appear in his 1937 collection, *Tuntún de pasa y griferia*. Often translated as *Tom Tom of Naps and Kinkiness* or *Tom Tom of Mulato and Black Things*, the play on the word pasa, from the verb pasar to pass, and the noun pasa as raisin, both hold racial connotations. The verb pasar references passing for white, and pasa as a referent to African hair texture, which is often described as raisins in the Caribbean, mark the speakers as of African descent. Because critics first read Palés Matos's motives through his supposed white skin, they accuse him of adopting a white man's gaze that demeans Black culture. Not authentic enough for Black Studies and not white enough for American studies, Palés Matos is not included alongside

eminent poets of the Black decolonization process and is absent in the traditional U.S. American canon. This chapter aims to reintroduce Palés Matos into Transamerican studies not as a poet obsessed with hypersexualized Black women, but as poet-heir to the Plantation Zone's matrilineal genealogy.

Early Critical Reception

Born in 1898 to a family of poets, Palés Matos achieved critical acclaim at an early age.[22] Palés Matos published his first poem, "Para papa" ["For Father"] in 1913 after his father's death and his first collection of poetry, *Azaleas,* in 1915. A year after his first wife's death in 1919, Palés Matos moved from his rural hometown of Guayama to Old San Juan, the capital, where he quickly became a fixture in *tertulias* (salons) that included well known Puerto Rican literary as well as political figures, such as Luis Lloréns Torres, Tomás Blanco, Bolívar Pagán, Luis Muñoz Marín (who in 1949 became Puerto Rico's first democratically elected governor) and José I. de Diego Padró. Palés Matos partnered with Diego Padró, to create the short lived avant-garde literary movement they named *diepalismo*, a combination of the two poet's paternal names. This experiment echoed the *isms* that emerged from European aesthetics. Diego Padró defined *diepálismo* as an aesthetic experiment that separated the "words" from their inherent meaning. Palés Matos and Diego Padró produced two co-written poems, "Orquestración diepálica" ["Diepálica Orchestra"] and "Intraobjetivismo de intención precubista" ["Intraobjectivism of Pre-Cubist Intentions"] published in *El Imparcial* in 1921. Shortly after the publication of these poems Palés Matos abandoned the project creating a rift in his friendship with Diego Padró who, later that same year, went on to publish "Fugas

[22] His father Vicente Palés Anés, his mother Consuelo Matos Vicil and his two brothers Vicente and Gustavo Palés Matos were also poets.

diepálicas" ["Diepálicas Fugues"] in *El Imparical*.

Although *diepálismo* had received attention in the small literary circles on the Island, this experimental movement was quickly overshadowed by the publication of Palés Matos's prose poem "Pueblo de negros" ["Town of Blacks"] in 1917 He revised this poem multiple times under different titles: "Esta noche he pasado" ["This night I have passed"] in 1918; and then "Pueblo negro" ["Black Town"] written in 1920 and published in 1925. The first line of all three versions traces the movement of the speaker through a town of Black people:

Esta noche paso por un pueblo de negros (1917)

Tonight I pass through a Black town (1917)

Esta noche he pasado por un pueblo de negros (1918)

Tonight I have passed through a Black town (1918)

Esta noche me obsede la remota

visión de un pueblo negro (1920/25)

Tonight I am obsessed by the remote

vision of a Black town (1920/25)

The 1917 and 1918 versions utilize the verb *pasar* a double entendre that plays on the similar English verb "to pass," both to indicate movement, and also to pass racially for either white or Black. He discards this verb in 1925. Instead, the speaker introduces us to a new obsession, a remote vision of a Black town.

This obsessive vision may be what lead José Robles Pazos in 1927, a visiting scholar from Spain at the Universidad de Puerto Rico, to publish an article titled "Un Poeta Borinqueño" ["A Borinquen Poet"] in Madrid's *La gaceta literaria* after which the 29-year-old

Palés Matos was hailed as the first authentic poetic voice of Puerto Rico.[23] In his 1930 essay "A Porto Rican Poet: Luis Palés Matos in the *American Mercury,"* the Puerto Rican critic Tomás Blanco writes that Palés Matos's "Negroid" poems were described as perfect (Marzán 29). More accolades followed from noted early 20th century critics Federico de Onís and Angel Valbuena Prat. But not all Islanders welcomed Palés Matos's new vision or *poesía negra.* Julio Marzán writes, in *The Numinous Site: The Poetry of Luis Palés Matos*, that "such weighty recognition from *la Madre Patria,* a major accomplishment for an island poet, prompted a generation of Hispanophilic Puerto Rican critics to respond, apparently now forced to verbalize their [...] silent resentment of these *poemas negros*" (Marzán 29). Two of his severest Island critics, Luis Antonio Miranda in his essay, "El llamado arte negro no tiene vinculación en Puerto Rico"/"No Basis for the So-Called Black Art in Puerto Rico", and Graciany Miranda Archilla in "La broma de una poesía prieta en Puerto Rico"/"The Joke of a Darkie Poetry in Puerto Rico," condemned Palés Matos for portraying Puerto Rican identity with a strong African influence (Marzán, 78).[24] Archilla who was a poet, held a rancorous relationship with Palés Matos and went as far as accusing him of stealing from the U.S. American poet Vachel Lindsay his Black verses. Margot Arce Vazquez, a prolific Puerto Rican literary critics of this time, also downplayed Palés Matos's representation of Puerto Rico's African heritage by claiming his interest in Africa as a desire to inject exoticism.

Often accused of developing *poesía negra* to pander to the European and U.S. consumption of Black culture in the early 20th century, Palés Matos's work led to multiple studies that attempt to undermine the politics present in this aesthetic movement. In *Luis Palés*

[23] Borinquen is the Island's indigenous name.

[24] Title translations are by Julio Marzán.

Matos y su transmundo poético/Luis Palés Matos and his Transworld Poetics (1973), his friend and collaborator, Diego Padró writes:

> Pero me afirmo en la creencia de que Luis Palés comunicó vida a las critaturas de sus peomas negros con evidente espíritu de hombre blanco, supersaturado de occidentalismo.
>
> But I reiterate my belief that Luis Palés gave life to the creatures of his Black poems with the obvious spirit of a white man, saturated in orientalism. (60)

For Diego Padró, Palés Matos's turn towards Black images or "creatures" did not emerge from Puerto Rican culture. Instead, Palés Matos fell upon these images by accident: "Su predilección por lo negroide fue accidental" ["His predilection for the negroid was accidental"] (Diego Padró 60). As Diego Padró argues, Palés Matos's obsessive search for "las formas estéticas verdaderas y generales, Palés perdió el pie y cayó improvisadamente en el abismo" ["true and general aesthetic forms, Palés lost his footing and fell unexpectedly into the abyss"]. In this abyss, Diego Padró argues, Palés Matos was able to connect with his "primigenia, rudimentaria, selvática" ["primitive, rudimentary and savage"] imagination and produce Black themed poetry. Not only was his turn towards Black themes accidental, according to Diego Padró, it also allowed Palés Matos to exist outside of his monotonous every day experience (60).

In this study, Diego Padró's argued that *poesía negra,* and Black themed literature in general, will turn out to be a temporary fashionable interest that would soon fade away. Instead, the most influential Puerto Rican literary figures that followed *la generación del treinta* [the 1930s generation] all turn to Puerto Rico's African heritage.[25] Although both poets represented

[25] Such as Rosario Ferré, Luis Rafael Sánchez, José Luis González and Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá.

the bohemian lifestyle of creoles on the Island, Diego Padró's description of Palés Matos is of a country bumpkin who at dinner confused a stick of butter for cheese. On another occassion, they were both arrested for drunken and disorderly behavior and while Diego Padró laughs off their arrest, Palés Matos cries and is concerned with how his wife will respond. In between the jabs at Palés Matos's masculinity and unsophisticated country, in his study Diego Padró demonstrates a genuine affection for his friend along with a deep seated rivalry. Similar to other Puerto Rican authors of this era, Diego Padró's work has not received much critical attention.[26]

While Puerto Rican critics rejected the authenticity of Palés Matos's claim of an African identity for the Island and the Spaniards enjoyed the onomatopoeic elements of his work, the politics of this aesthetic movement that addressed how the Island's African heritage shaped Puerto Rican culture have gone largely ignored. In 1932 responding to the angst his poetry inspired in Puerto Rican poets and critics alike, Luis Palés Matos writes,

> [...]yo no he hablado de una poesía negra ni blanca ni mulata; yo sólo he hablado de una poesía antillana que exprese nuestra realidad de pueblo en le sentido cultural de este hablado. Sostengo que en las Antillas—Cuba, Santo Domingo y Puerto Rico—han desarollado un tipo homogéneo y están, por lo tanto

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[26] Although a prolific writer of novels, poetry and newspaper articles, it is Palés Matos that is held to be Puerto Rico's national poet. Diego Padró's work appears in most anthologies of Puerto Rican literature, such as Gilberto Mendonça Teles and Klaus Müller-Bergh's *Vanguardia latinoamericana Historia, politica, cultura. Tomo II: Caribe, Antillas Mayores y Menores* (2002), Mercedes Lopez Baralt's *Literatura Puertorriqueña del Siglo XX: Antologia* (2004) and Roberto Marquez's *Puerto Rican Poetry: An Anthology from Aboriginal to Contemporary Times* (2007), he is often mentioned in relationship to Palés Matos, such as Mamdou Badiane *The Changing Face of Afro-Caribbean Cultural: Negrismo y Négritude* (2010), Catherine E. Wall's *The Poetics of Word and Image in the Hispanic Avant-Garde* (2010) and Julio Marzán's *The Numinous Site: The Poetry of Luis Palés Matos* (1995). There is one recent critical text dedicated to Diego Padró's work, Pedro Juan Soto's *En busca de J.I. de Diego Padro* (1990).

> psicológicamente afinadas en una misma dirección. Y sostengo, además, que esta homegeneidad de tipo espiritual está perfectamente diferenciada a la masa común de los pueblos hispanicos y que en ella el factor negroide entreverado en psiquis antillana ha hecho las veces aislador, o, en terminos químicos de agente preipitante. Físicamente, las Antillas constituyen tambien una unidad: paisaje, clima y productos son los mismos; fauna y flora idénticas; núcleos de población semejantes. Económicamente, girando como giran en la órbita del industrialimso americano, corren iguales contingencias. (237-8)
>
> I have not spoken of black, white or mulatto poetry. I've only spoken of an Antillean poetry that expresses our reality as a people and the cultural implications of this type of talk. I maintain that in the Antilles—Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico—have developed in a homogenous type and as such are psychologically attuned in the same direction. And I also maintain that this spiritual homogeny is perfectly differentiated from the rest of the Hispanic peoples and that the negroid factor mixed in our Antillean psyche has been at times the insulating or in chemical terms the precipitating agent. Physically, the Antilles also share an unity of landscape, climate and similar products such as identical fauna and flora, similar population nucleus. Economically, turning as they turn in the American industrialization orbit, they un similar contingencies.

Palés Matos argued that his work should not be labeled as *poesía negra* because his poetry could not be accessed through the dominant colonial discourse that enforces white, black and mulatto

social structures. Instead, he insisted that Antillean identity, and in particular Puerto Rican identity, had morphed beyond a Black and white dichotomy and the hierarchies found in varying skin-color degrees of mulatto identity. Palés Matos insisted on calling the poems collected in *Tuntún* as *poesía afroantillana.* In turning to the term Antilles, Palés Matos draws on the history that marked this geographic location as an invention for European consumption. The poetic response Palés Matos levels against the historicity of the Antillean condition challenges both European constructs of supremacy and the internalized colonized condition, which Frantz Fanon will refer to as negrophobia, of Antilleans by claiming a genealogy and kinship to Africa through the image of Tembandumba. In other words, *poesía afroantillana* was a turn towards the past as a means to establish Antillean identity that was threatened by the rising U.S. empire.

The Pastoral Comes Undone: The *jíbaro* Under US Imperialism

Puerto Ricans have long been engaged in the ritual of self-definition as a means to fight their status as a Black colony. Before the U.S. invasion, the generation fighting for independence from Spain had been lead by two poets, Luis Lloréns Torres and Luis Muñoz Rivera, and an attorney, Rosendo Matienzo Cintrón, who in 1897 successfully petitioned for a more autonomous relationship for the Island with Spain. This was later revoked when Spain entered into war with the US in 1898. Nineteenth century Puerto Rican poetry was not devoid of Black images, but these images represented marginalized figures working in the *cañaveral* (cane fields). To understand the impact that Palés Matos's *poesía afroantillana* or, as the critics argue, *poesía negra* had on Puerto Rican literature, I turn briefly to the mythopoetic figure of the *jíbaro,* the symbol of Puerto Rican identity in the nineteenth century. In the struggle to claim rightful ownership of the Island and demand sovereignty from Spain, the *jíbaro* became the symbol of

Puerto Rican identity. It allowed the creoles to claim ownership of the land but still maintain an European/white identity. As Enrique A. Laguerre and Esther M. Melón write in *El jíbaro de Puerto Rico: símbolo y figura* [*The jíbaro of Puerto Rico: Symbol and Figure*], the term *jíbaro,* sometimes spelled *gíbaro,* is not exclusive to the island. In the Andes *jíbaro* is a derogatory term meaning savage Indian and in Cuba it refers to a savage dog (Laguerre, Melon ix). It is unknown if these definitions originally described the Puerto Rican *campesino,* the country folk; however, in the 19th century the *jíbaro* inspired poets, novelists, and visual artists who exalted the *jíbaro's* noble pious nature, his love for Puerto Rico, and his white skin in their work. The term first appeared in a newspaper in 1814, while Manuel Alonso's novel *El Gibaro* (1849) introduced the term into literary studies.

Luis Lloréns Torres (1876-1944) and Virgilio Dávila (1869-1943), two widely read twentieth century Puerto Rican poets in Spanish, maintained the tradition of configuring Puerto Rican identity through the image of the *jíbaro.* While Dávila, in his poem "El jíbaro," creates a image of a humble *campesino* [country folk] symbiotically connected to the Island who lives "En la montaña, junto al río/y bajo del techo de un bohío ["In the mountain, next to a river/under the roof of a hut], Lloréns Torres follows the tradition of equating land as woman in "Rapsodia criolla" ["Creole Rhapsody"] "Tú eres la patria: novia, hermana, amiga, esposa, madre,/ tierra…" ["You are the mother country: bride, sister, friend, wife, mother,/earth…"]. Lloréns Torres positions Puerto Rico as the mother country, but utilizing imagery similar to European traditions. As in the metaphor of the nation-state, the land is always feminine and is there to be possessed by its rightful citizens. Although the *jíbaro* has set roots in Puerto Rico, Dávila references the indigenous heritage, "y con orgullo de cacique poso mi planta en el batey"["and

with cacique pride I plant the canefields"]. But this cacique, a Taíno word for chief, *jíbaro,* Dávila assures us, is familiar with the works of Miguel de Cervantes, and, like Don Quixote, "poner en duda no es posible que de españoles vengo yo" [it is not possible to doubt that from Spaniards I come"]. Lloréns Torres's poem, dedicated to Puerto Rico, ends with a proclamation of the speaker's undying love "Mas nadie, nadie, patria mia,/nadie en el mundo te ha querido ni te ha cantado como yo" ["No one else, no one, my mother country/no one in this world has loved you or sung you as I have"]. The *jíbaro,* for Puerto Ricans, by the end of the nineteenth century, served as the foundational myth upon which the Creole elite staked their claim as the rightful citizens of the Island. For this to work, the *jíbaro* must stay either in the realm of the past as a mythopoetic figure or expose Puerto Ricans as not of pure European race. In other words, as Black.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Puerto Rican creole elite attempted to write their way off U.S. American Black codes. The outcome of the Spanish American War (April 25-August 12 1898) finalized the slow but steady descent of Spain as a colonial power and marked the rise of the U.S. as a global military power. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898, Puerto Rico, Guam, Cuba and the Philippines became territories, or, neo-colonies, of the U.S.[27] The poets and politicians—and at this time politicians were poets and poets were politicians—who had spent the latter part of the nineteenth century fighting for freedom from Spain, found themselves faced with a new threat emanating from the U.S. and its Black codes. Shortly after the American invasion of Puerto Rico, the *bohíos* (huts) and *jíbaros*, symbols allegorized by

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[27] While the Philippines, in 1946, and Cuba, in 1959, fought and gained their independence, through their respective revolutions, Puerto Rico and Guam are still territories of the United States.

Puerto Ricans seeking sovereignty, were re-signified by the U.S. American imperialist project that deployed anthropologists and other social scientists to study Puerto Ricans and found them to be mostly poor, destitute and in need of US American help (Duany 54).

Jorge Duany, in *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States* (2002), explains that when U.S. American anthropologists searching for Caribs and Arawaks failed to find the indigenous populations, they invented the image of docile, dark-skinned people, "redeemable through hard work, public health, and education" (120). The photograph, "Human poverty amidst nature's wealth – a beggar in Adjuntas" (Fig. 1) taken in the early 1900s by the Underwood & Underwood firm, distorts, at least in comparison to depictions by poets and artists, the image of the *jíbaro.* In the photograph an older man stands by the road wearing the typical *campesino* hat, barefoot with his eyes closed and his hand stretched out towards the camera. A small child, also barefoot, stands behind the older man carrying a sack, which appears full, on his head. Both bodies look malnourished and dirty. This image, juxtaposed with the 1905 painting by the Puerto Rican artist Ramón Frade (1875-1954) titled *El pan nuestro* [*Our Bread*] (Fig. 2) demonstrates that on the Island, at least among the upper class, the image of the *jíbaro,* although poor, is self-sufficient. Frade depicts the *jíbaro* also on the side of a road wearing the typical straw hat but instead of begging his hands hold a branch of plantains, which is being referred to as bread. Duany writes that the photographs taken in the beginning of the 20th-century by American anthropologists, "depict Puerto Ricans primarily as blacks and mulattoes, thus placing them at the lower rungs of human evolution in the dominant thinking of their time" (103). The majority of these photographs which depict poor dark-skinned Puerto Ricans usually alongside their huts against a lush tropical landscape, systematically

undermined the small upper class by "virtually ignoring the existence of a Creole male elite" and constructing the colonized population "as degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (Duany 71). The American photographs re-introduce the *jíbaro* not as some mythical humble figure of the past but as a real person, poor, dark-skinned and in need of assistance. In doing so, the image of the *jíbaro* cultivated for over a century is re-signified to demonstrate Puerto Rico's third world status and the benefits of American conquest.

From the beginning of the U.S. American occupation, the Creole elite protested the American invasion, but it was not until 1929 when the editors of the journal *Índice* posed the question "¿qué somos y cómo somos?" [What are we and what are we like?] that the first generation of Puerto Ricans under American imperialism defined their cultural and national identity. Similar to Césaire's 1939, *qui et quels sommes-nous*, this question addressed Puerto Rico's move towards decolonization. This required a shift in the discourse that, as a colony of Spain, had at first demonstrated a cultural affinity for Spanish culture, and, after 30 years as a neo-colony of the U.S., needed to defend a Spanish heritage as a means to fight off U.S. racial codes. Antonio S. Pedreira's response, *Insularismo: Ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueña* [*Insularisms: Essays of Puerto Rican Interpretation*] (1934) depicted an Island suffering from the traumatic events of 1898, when Puerto Rico became a colony of the US. According to Juan Flores most, if not all, prominent Puerto Rican critics recognize Pedreira as the "father of modern Puerto Rican letters" (Flores 16) *Insularismo* placed Puerto Rico on the intellectual map by creating a collective Puerto Rican claim to nationhood (Flores 20; Duany 71). For Pedreira, Puerto Ricans could only recover from the devastating events of 1898 by turning towards Spain

to rejuvenate the Island's cultural identity. Pedreira's response recognizes, as Flores argues, the "determining power of race," and, as Duany argues, the "territorial isolation, hence the title emphasizing insularity," marginalized the island from history (33; 21). For Pedreira the mixture or "fusion" of the races, particularly the European with the African, is the source of the problems that plague Puerto Ricans. He falls into a dichotomy which pits the European, specifically the Spaniard, against the African. According to Pedreira the superior race, the Spaniards, supplied the intelligence, and the inferior race, the African slave, provided the brawn; he dismissed the *indios* influence as fleeting and unimportant. Pedreira argued that between the two races a gulf exists separating the free man from the slave, the civilized from the barbarian, the European from the African. He believed that Island's status as a neo-colony of the U.S. was due deep seated doubts in the Puerto Rican consciousness emerging from their African heritage.

The "watering down" of Spanish blood through miscegenation had created a Puerto Rican man who was unsure of himself and therefore could not fight off the U.S. For Pedreira, Puerto Rico's dependence on more powerful nations, Spain and then the U.S., and its passive nature are also due to the Island's geographic situation:

> La posición geográfica de Puerto Rico determinó el rumbo de nuestras historia y de nuestro carácter[…]Para colmo de la desesperación nos cupo la desgracia de caer aislados del mundo y ser entre las Grandes, la menor de las Antillas. (61)
>
> Puerto Rico's geographic position determined the path of our history and our personality...To top off our desperation, it befell upon us to be isolated from the world and amongst the Greater Antilles, to be the smallest of the Antilles.

Pedreira perceived that Puerto Ricans suffered from an inferiority complex that forced them to

rely on powerful countries, Spain and the United States (Duany 21). Pedreira names the Antillean's inferiority complex as *platanamiento,*a manipulation of the noun plantain, a staple of Puerto Rican food. Similar to what Fanon will refer to, thirty years later, as negrophobia, *platanamiento* settled into the Puerto Rican man's consciousness leaving him in a weakened state. To regain their virility, Puerto Ricans need to emphasize an European, Spanish-based culture free of African and indigenous traces to fight off U.S. imperialism.[28] But, regardless of Pedreira's racist, elitist, masculinist construct of Island culture, *Insularismo* underlines two important aspects of Puerto Rican identity that previous to U.S. invasion was not present in Puerto Rican letters. First, all Puerto Ricans, even the whitened Creole elite, share a common African heritage. Second, he concedes that the enslavement of Africans created a resentment that permeates Puerto Rican identity and sustains the island's colonized status. In other words, Pedreira still recognizes the centrality of African heritage for Puerto Rican culture.

The massive migration of working class Puerto Ricans to New York and other urban centers, in the first half of the 20th-century, brought urgency to Pedreira's fear that the US would destroy the last vestige of the Island's European culture. The US had already seized the Island's natural wealth (the land and its plantations) and split it amongst US American companies, but the number of Puerto Ricans living in the US threatened to erase the remains of the Spanish heritage. As opposed to the Island, where the U.S. attempted but failed to change the official language in the school system, Puerto Ricans living in the states were forced to learn English. Furthermore, the Racial Integrity Act of 1924 mandated that all U.S. citizens be categorized either as white or

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[28] One of the key strategies employed by Pedreira was the rejection of English as the Island's official language. The U.S. has attempted multiple times to implement an English only education system, but this has failed.

colored. This did not allow for Puerto Rico's creole elite to claim a white identity.

Denying Puerto Rico's Black identity proved to be impossible for the majority of the Island population, and for creoles who, when they traveled to the U.S., realized that their white identity only had currency on the Island.[29] In *El Prejucio Racial en Puerto Rico* [*Racial Prejudice in Puerto Rico*] (1938), Tomás Blanco dismissed the notion that racism existed on the Island by comparing "benign acts of segregation or ñoñerías," such as denying a dark-skinned Puerto Rican access to a restaurant or hotel, to the Jim Crow laws (and lynching) of the United States.[30] Similar to Pedreira, Blanco recognizes the African influence on Puerto Rican culture, but he argues that most Islanders are white. For Blanco, skin pigmentation did not define race in Puerto Rico, but rather class and money made race. He argued that there is a group of *desheredados* (the 'disinherited' ones), poor, dark-skinned people unable to make it into the higher ranks in Puerto Rican society that may feel the burden of *ñoñerías*. To ensure that his audience understands that the *desheredados* are not oppressed due to their skin color but their social class, he includes the testimony of a successful lawyer, Pedro C. Timothée. Blanco introduces Timothée as a 'colored' Puerto Rican, but then dismisses that by saying he is just the color of honey and not really black. Timothée argues:

> Blancos españoles y puertorriqueños se casan con mulatas y cuarteronas, arrojando por la ventana el prejuicio racial y atendiendo sólo a la ley del amor y

[29] This is a common theme present in the works of Zora Neale Hurston, Jean Rhys, Aime Césaire, Frantz Fanon.

[30] Although the Merriam Webster Dictionary translates the word ñoño as dull, in Spanish (according to the Real Academia Española it is defined as, "Dicho de una persona: Sumamente apocada y de corto ingenio." This definition implies that a *ñoñeria* is an act by person of low intelligence.

en la creencia de que han descubierto una compañera amorosa y leal y una buena madre para los futuros hijos.

En Puerto Rico blancos y negros viven en perfecta armonía, se hallan juntos en las escuelas públicas de todas las categorías, en la Universidad, y en todas las oficinas y profesiones.

Si algún malestar existe en las relaciones entre ambas razas no lo produce el blanco que admite su superioridad como cosa indiscutible, no lo produce el negro que ve al blanco como su amigo o como hermano mayor por haber nacido algunos siglos antes a la vida de la civilización. El malestar lo producen los cuarterones y zambos que creen que la única característica de la raza es el color de la piel y olvidando el color perfectamente negro de sus abuelos o bisabuelos, saltan la palizada de la antropología y el registro civil y caen dentro de la finca del blanco, entrando en palacio de éste por la cocina (Blanco 127).

White Spaniards and white Puerto Rican men marry female mulattos and quadroons tossing out the window any racial prejudice and only following the law of love and the belief that they have found a loving and loyal mate that will be a good mother to their children.

In Puerto Rico whites and blacks live in perfect harmony, they are found together in the different categories of public schools, in the University, and in every office and profession.

If there exist any disharmony in the relationships between the races it is not produced by the white who does not admit to his superiority as indisputable,

> nor is it found in the black who considers the white as his friend or older brother because he was born centuries before into the civilized world. This disharmony is produced by the quadroons and half-indian and half-negro who believe that the only characteristic of the race is the color of the skin and forgetting the color of their grandfather or great-grandfather that is perfectly black, they ignore the trashing under both anthropology and the civil registry that forces them into the white man's farm, entering through the kitchen door.

By employing Timothée's statement, Blanco attempts to demonstrate that racism is nonexistent on the island. Timothée's story in effect demonstrated that "white" Puerto Ricans could speak proudly of darker-skinned Puerto Ricans *only* if they are successful, professional, and can forget their African heritage. But, Timothée's testimony confirms the existence of the *desheredados,* or *cuarterones* and *zambos,* who are not accepted in the Puerto Rican white world. Furthermore, Timothée speaks of the children of white men, thus suggesting that a child from a *negro* and a white Puerto Rican (or Spaniard) woman would not be accepted, while the offspring from a white Puerto Rican (or Spanish) man regardless of the women's skin color would. The trashing Timothée alludes to refers to the registry of slaves. Children born to a slave woman, as in all of the Plantation Zone, followed the condition of their mothers. If born from slave, the child would enter through the "kitchen door" of Puerto Rican culture as a slave. An assumption can then be made that the *desheredados* are children of black fathers; the children of white fathers are the only ones who could aspire to whiteness. Blanco's largely idealized world is not clearly divided between black and white because Timothée, who is described as dark-skinned, was admitted into the Puerto Rican white world as a successful lawyer. In Blanco's world all except for the

deshеredados — who are not referred to as Puerto Ricans — are defined as white, or mostly white, regardless of their skin color.

The existence of the *deshеredados* contradicts Blanco's claim that in Puerto Rico racism does not exist. His portrayal of racism in Puerto Rico as *ñoñerías* works only when compared to the US. While there are distinctions and levels of pain and misery, racial oppression is still devastating. Because Blanco does not include testimony from the *deshеredados,* he attempts to speak for poor Puerto Rican *negros* from a position of privilege. Ultimately, Blanco's argument reflects a fear of losing the freedom afforded to creoles on the Island. If all Puerto Ricans, as Duany argues, are categorized through U.S. imperialism as poor, destitute, dark-skinned and in need of help, then the creoles, then the racial and class classifications, muddled in Blanco's work, are discarded. All Puerto Ricans are *deshеredados* for not being born as white U.S. Americans and are entering into U.S. empire through the kitchen.

Poor Puerto Ricans who migrated to the states looking for work were confronted by the one-drop-rule of U.S. racial categories. In *The Puerto Rican Migrant (*1934), Lawrence Chenault argues that similar to Italian and Irish immigrants, Puerto Ricans had to contend with the language barrier, but unlike European immigrants their African features placed them at a greater disadvantage. Thus, employers considered Puerto Ricans as less skilled than the "American Negro." Chenault does not interrogate what the label 'Negro' meant to Puerto Ricans, how they were labeled before, nor if they challenged being considered uniformly of African descent. But, Chenault study does demonstrate the Racial Integrity Act in action; Puerto Ricans were not white, and those who attempted to argue against classification as 'Negro' or colored usually failed. For example, Puerto Ricans serving in WWI argued vehemently against being placed in

the "segregated Negro units [so] to solve this problem the United States Army created the classification 'Puerto Rican white.'" (Kinsbruner 10). In giving in and creating a "Puerto Rican white" classification, the U.S. created a subdivision, not within the white identity, but within the hierarchies found in the "Colored" identities. In the U.S., Puerto Ricans could not utilize the euphemisms of the Spanish speaking Caribbean for dark-skinned Islanders, such as *trigueño.* Deriving from the term wheat, *trigueño,* when used to reference the plant, is the color between dark and blonde. When it is referring to a person, it is someone of dark-skin complexion. On the Island *trigueño* is a sign that a person is dark-skinned but is not classified as Black. For Puerto Ricans accustomed to living in racially charged, but, yet, still malleable racial categories, struggled with the one-drop-rule of U.S. racial identity.

While the history of Puerto Rico as a colony of the United States is long and complicated, amongst the cacophony of voices clamoring to identify a Puerto Rican identity in the first half of the 20th-century, Palés Matos's poetry recognized the centrality of the Island's African heritage. Although Palés Matos rejected the classification of *Tuntún* as *poesía negra,* he began an aesthetic movement that shifted Puerto Rican literature towards an exploration of the Island's African heritage. In the 1930s and 1940s Evaristo Ribera Chevremont, Julia de Burgos and Fortunato Vizcarrondo published *poesía negra*. However, Palés Matos work stands out because of the importance he places on the genealogy of the historical Black female body as the source of Antillean identity.

Within the Margins of English Studies

In the U.S. American academy, when Palés Matos's work is read, it is often in comparison to the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. Under the weight of Guillén's *mulatez,* Palés

Matos's whiteness renders his poetry as inauthentic. The Cuban Revolution of 1959—one of the only two successful revolutions of the Caribbean—has greatly influenced how U.S. American scholars read Guillén. After the revolution, Fidel Castro invested an impressive amount of attention on Guillén's work, and hailed him as Cuba's national poet and in doing so affirmed Cuba's African heritage. This is not to suggest that racism does not exist in Cuba, but that the reception of Guillén's work was predicated and accepted on the basis of his darker skin. As such, when discussing Caribbean Black Diasporic literatures, Guillén's work is privileged above Palés Matos's work because, as a dark-skinned Caribbean, his work is assumed to express an authentic Black man's experience. This argues that racial oppression occurs as a reaction only to skin color as opposed to culturally constructed stereotypes that control specific populations regardless of skin color gradations.

In a 1987 special issue of *Callaloo* dedicated to the work of Guillén, Aníbal González Pérez, in "Ballad of the two Poets: Nicolás Guillén and Luis Palés Matos," argues that the comparisons between Guillén and Palés Matos often privilege a "naively leftist elevation of Guillén as a 'people's poet'" while Palés Matos is often condemned as an opportunist white poet dabbling in Black themes (285). González Pérez argues that Guillén and Palés Matos, as staples in anthologies of Latin American and Caribbean poetry, are studied in "piecemeal fashion" and only through their individual contribution to the *negrista* movement. Instead, he proposes to read these two poets as part of a larger collective of writing by Latin American and Caribbean writers —such as, "the Mexican José Vasconcelos's *La raza cósmica* (1925), the Cuban Jorge Mañach's *Indagación del choteo* (1928), the Argentinian Ezequiel Martínez Estrada's *Radiografía de la pampa* (1933) and the Puerto Rican Antonio S. Pedreira's *Insularismo* (1934)"— who are

"attempting to solve the question of the Caribbean's multiplicity" (287). González Pérez sees this approach as a challenge to a region "where profound racial and social differences tend to tear apart the sociopolitical and cultural fabric" (287). As the U.S. American anthropologist Sidney Mintz, argues, "whether one examines the [Caribbean] region from a racial, a demographic, or a sociocultural perspective, it is as differentiated as it is complex. Any attempt to evaluate the Afro-Caribbean peoples must lead the generalizer to despair" (qtd. González Pérez 286). To avoid despair, González Pérez reads Guillén and Palés Matos through the *negrista* movement, which he defines as "no mere imitation of the 'Africanist' vogue in Europe during the twenties and thirties or of the Harlem Renaissance, but part of a broad search for the roots of national identity which took place at the same time throughout Latin America" (286). In other words, González Pérez argues that to understand the complexity of these two poets' contribution to American letters their work must be severed from the Black Diaspora understood through *negrista* aesthetic movement that was sweeping through the Caribbean and Latin American continent. Furthermore, González Pérez aims to break with the antagonistic relationship, created by critics, that exists between Guillén and Palés Matos in order to study how their works contribute to the larger Hispanic-Caribbean framework. Unfortunately, González Pérez fails to achieve this because he still sees Palés Matos as free from racial oppression. This ignores Puerto Rico's neo-colonial status that, as previously mentioned, categorized all Puerto Ricans as "colored."

González Pérez argues that to fully appreciate Guillén's "'materialistic' or 'realistic' approach to *negrismo*" is to consider both his experience as a dark-skinned Cuban along with his experience as a journalist (293). In other words, Guillén, who belonged to the same social class

as Palés Matos, is able to represent the experience of racial oppression through both a lived experience and his work as a journalist. González Pérez sees Guillén's poetry as achieving "social justice and racial harmony through a patient, day-by-day participation in a process of change," and maintains that "Guillén has always tried to go beyond being a mere recorder or commentator of his moment in order to make his poetry fulfill an active role in Cuba's contemporary historical process" (295). While Guillén is seen as reaching out through empirical knowledge, "without forsaking imagination altogether," Palés Matos is seen as reaching out through "vision and imagination" that according to González Pérez was heavily influence by European philosophers especially Oswald Spengler (295). He goes on to suggest that Palés Matos's "Plena del menealo," ["Shake it Plena"] (1952) which González Pérez considers to be the poet's most political poem, "resonate[s] with the work of Guillén because it is stylized after the Puerto Rican musical style of *plena*" (298).[31] This musical form, *plena,* which became popular in the early 20th century, evolved from *bomba,* a musical tradition that emerged from slave culture. Although González Pérez recognizes the influence of *plena*, he questions if these are "echoes of Guillén? Could this be Palés's sole poetic nod at the colleague from the opposite side of the Antilles with whom he was insistently compared?" (298). González Pérez, whose focus is to laud these two poets, falls into traditional racist rhetoric. In arguing that the authenticity and political gravitas of Guillén's work is tied to his experience as a Black man and his work as a journalist inadvertently ties the Cuban poet to the body (the immediate experience). In arguing that Palés Matos's work is inspired by European philosophers and his imagination, the

[31] "Plena del menealo" was added to the 1959 *Tuntún* version, which Palés Matos approved shortly before his death.

Puerto Rican poet is freed from the confines of his body and allowed the privileged position of the mind. This type of dichotomy does neither poet justice.

González Pérez's article acknowledges that Palés Matos's work helps to "unmask the class and race prejudices which supported the Hispanophilic view and led many Puerto Rican intellectuals to reflect on the problematic relationship between politics and cultures," and recognizes the suppression of Palés Matos's "idea of culture [...] by an official Puerto Rican cultural apparatus which stressed social harmony and fomented the view that there was no racial prejudice in the island" (298). González Pérez considers Palés Matos's work not politically and socially conscious enough to compare to Fanon's work. Regardless of his reading of Palés Matos's contribution to Latin American literature, González Pérez still reduces the project to a relationship of dialectical synthesis where the end product is a mulatto culture. By doing so, he ignores the claims made by the poet, that in the New World, one can no longer speak of a Black, white or mulatto identity. These Black and white structures belong to the past and the present cultures in the Caribbean have as their unifying starting point the history of slavery from which they have evolved into new cultures. These cultures have as their initiating moment the arrival of African slaves but it's impossible to assume that these cultures, indigenous, European or African, would have survived with any sense of purity.

González Pérez through the term *negrista* adds yet another category to Palés Matos *poesía afro-antillana* as a means to understand the root of the poet's inspiration. Although Palés Matos began to publish *poemas negros* before Guillén, González Perez finds that "there is no detectable 'influence' of Palés on Guillén's Afro-Cuban poems.[32] According to González Perez,

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[32] Guillén's "Kid Chocolate" was published in the *Havana Press* in 1929, four years after Palés Matos's "Pueblo de negros."

Guillén arrived at "Afro-Cubanism independently of 'foreign' influences like Palés's and the Cuban precursors of *negrismo*. Therefore, criticism that attempts to encompass the work of these two highly individualistic poets is thus likely to become a study in contrasts" (295).[33] As I mentioned earlier, questioning the origins of Palés Matos's poetry for Puerto Rican critics intent on maintaining an European identity was, in part, a fear of the U.S. racist propaganda, and internalized racism by Puerto Rican critics. But, in the later part of the 20th-century, this took on a different purpose.

In 1932, Pedreira became the Director of what is now known as the Department of Puerto Rican Literature at the Universidad de Puerto Rico and created the classic Puerto Rican literary canon. Juan G. Gelpí notes in *Literatura y paternalismo en Puerto Rico* [*Literature and Paternalism in Puerto Rico*] (1993), that Pedreira used the works of the 19th-century novelist Manuel Zeno Gandia as a model. Zeno Gandia's work portrays Puerto Ricans as suffering through an immense political and cultural trauma as an effect of colonialism. The works Pedreira chose reflect his belief that Puerto Rico is suffering from an illness that can only be cured by rejecting American standards and protecting the Spanish heritage, particularly through language. Regardless of his racist beliefs Pedreira recognized the value of Palés Matos's work, but included his poetry as exemplary of *poesía negra,* a distinctly different title than Puerto Rican poetry. Pedreira thus creates a divide that speaks to a distinction between black and white Puerto Rican writers that still haunts the works of Palés Matos.

It was not until the publication of Julio Marzán's 1995 *The Numinous Site: The Poetry of Luis Palés Matos* that this Puerto Rican poet formally enters into the English reading U.S.

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[33] Such as Emilio Ballagas, Alejo Carpentier and José Tallet.

American Academy. In 1995 Marzán published an excerpt of *The Numinous Site* in the spring edition of *Callaloo,* and in 2000 published a bilingual edition of Palés Matos's work titled *Selected Poetry/Poesía selecta.* In 2009, Víctor Figueroa published *Not at Home in One's Home: Caribbean Self-Fashioning in the Poetry of Luis Palés Matos, Aimé Césaire and Derek Walcott,* the first time Palés Matos was included alongside critical analysis of Césaire and Walcott.

On the back cover of *Selected Poetry/Poesía selecta,* Palés Matos's work is compared to that of Walt Whitman (1819-1892), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), and Vachel Lindsay (1879-1931). The Walt Whitman comparison is easy to recognize. No other U.S. American writer has been as influential as Walt Whitman. Latin American and Caribbean poets, philosophers and writers were influenced by Whitman's call for liberty and revolution. Marzán argues that Palés Matos named his first son, who dies at 22, Edgardo after Poe. Marzán suggests some similarities between the death of Poe's young wife and the death of Palés Matos's first wife, but the Puerto Rican poet married a woman his age who was not his relative. Although early in his career Palés Matos translated Poe's work into Spanish, very few similarities exist between the two poets' individual aesthetics. While some of Palés Matos's earlier work, particularly in his first collection titled *Azalea,* makes reference to dream states, it's difficult to imagine the macabre figures of Poe's work in direct connection with the life affirming figures in Palés Matos's poetry.

Although it was Archilla who in 1929 first suggested the connection between Palés Matos and Lindsay's work, this comparison is often repeated by critics. Diego Padró argues that Luis Muñoz Marín, a fixture in the Old San Juan *tertulias,* introduced them to Lindsay's "The Congo" (1914). Critics like Diego Padró and Marzán credit Lindsay as inspiring Palés Matos's

use of onomatopoeic style and percussive element in his *poesía afroantillana*. Lindsay's "The Congo" is riddled with racist signifiers that replicate the language of colonialism. For example, under the section "Their Basic Savagery," "tattooed cannibals dance in files" while "a thigh-bone beating on a tin-pan song"; under the section titled "Their Irrepressible High Spirits," "Wild crap-shooters with a whoop and a call/Dance a juba in their gambling hall"; under "The Hope of Their Religion," "Redeemed were the forest, the beast and the men." Lindsay's deployment of racist signifiers conjure the savages of Hegel's Africa. In other words, "The Congo" represents the traditional colonialist attitude towards the ethnic other.

At stake in the comparison between Lindsay and Palés Matos is the place of Puerto Rican literature in English Studies. González Pérez argued that as part of the *negrista* movement, Palés Matos belongs to a Hispanic tradition of writers who are coming to terms with the multiplicity of the region's identity. But, Marzán's project is to introduce Palés Matos as a white poet into English Studies and as an European (Spanish) poet into Spanish studies. Marzán argues that Palés Matos's "chronic punning and language tricks" reflect the "enduring influence of the colonial baroque period on the Caribbean" (15). Marzán sees Palés Matos's work as an extension of *conceptismo* a literary movement in the Baroque period in Spanish literature which began in the late 16th-century and lasted through the 17th-century. Marzán describes Palés Matos as a "Latin American original: a white man who, in the 1920's, dared to reflect publicly on his culture's African roots" (15). Aside from this "radical vision" Marzán sees that "[…]Palés contributed to Latin American poetry a stylistic *mulatez* that, consistent with his Afro-Antillean theme, combined 'white' poetic structures with 'black' unconventional humor, social satire, drumbeat rhythms, and most important, an unprestigious, African-derived vocabulary" (15-6).

Marzán locates Palés Matos's work in three disparate literary period, alongside Francisco de Quevedo during the Golden Age of Spanish poetry, alongside Poe during the American Romantic period, alongside Walt Whitman in the interim period between Transcendentalism and Realism, and in the 20th-century alongside Vachel Lindsay, the Prairie Troubadour. But, Marzán does not acknowledge that Palés Matos had contemporaries in the Caribbean, such as Aimé Césaire, and in the U.S., such as Langston Hughes. In *The Numinous Site,* Marzán recognizes that scholarship on Palés Matos suffers from a "pattern of critical writings on Palés[Matos that lie] much either [in] subjective praise or chastisement supported by little substantive textual analysis" (Marzán 36). And while the bulk of *The Numinous Site* is analyzing poetry, Marzán maintains that Palés Matos was a white poet. As such, Marzán continues into the 21st-century, with the publication of Palés Matos's translated work in 2000, the tradition of marginalizing this poet in English Studies.

In *Not at Home in One's Home: Caribbean Self-Fashioning in the Poetry of Luis Palés Matos, Aimé Césaire, and Derek Walcott*, Víctor Figueroa asks, "How to read then, a poet who expresses quite openly, albeit often ironically, his anticolonial stand, who shows awareness of the significance of the Haitian Revolution in the context of a Caribbean resistance to imperialism, yet who voices his criticism, however justified at some levels, from such a blatantly Eurocentric perspective?"(64-65). Figueroa appears to depart from the vast majority of criticism on Palés Matos. He argues that there are two readings of Palés Matos: "as Caribbean critic of colonialism vs. Palés the Eurocentric racist" (65). Figueroa is not looking to rectify these two readings; instead he chooses to work within this tension because "it encapsulates Palés position as a Caribbean intellectual" (65). Although Palés Matos's work has never been out of print, Figueroa, much like Marzán, delves into the poet's oeuvre with a desire to rescue him from the margins of

English Studies. But, Figueroa, like Marzán and all the other critics who came before him, maintains that Palés Matos is a white poet. The almost century long criticism of Palés Matos willfully ignores that this racial classification was created by predominantly Puerto Rican critics and not the poet. This indicates a desire to maintain a tension that allows Puerto Rico's most important poet to remain a political and literary figure of whiteness.

Figueroa finds that Palés Matos's position is one that "remains constant in his commitment, but at the same time retains a distance that never quite gets to talk to power *from* an Afro-Caribbean perspective, but rather *about* it. When it is a matter of facing 'Uncle Sam,' the poet does not hesitate to invoke that Africa; when it is matter of the claims that Africa makes on him, the poet hesitates, and takes a step back" (66). Figueroa recognizes the political criticism leveled against the U.S. in Palés Matos's poetry, but claims that the poet "takes a step back" when Africa makes claims on him. I assume that by Africa, Figueroa means the Africa of the New World. If so, then Palés Matos's response is his poetry. In an earlier essay "Between Africa and Puerto Rico: Haiti and Lyric Self-Fashioning in the Poetry of Luis Palés Matos," Figueroa attempts to move from this strict classification of Palés Matos as a white poet writing on black themes, or a lovelorn white man deploying his sexual frustration with black women on the page. Figueroa introduces early on in his essay the question of Palés Matos's political involvement. He compares him to Pedreria and other contemporary artists who took, according to Figueroa, their political beliefs to the political stage. The questioning of Palés Matos's political activism or commitment, which ultimately Figueroa places in doubt, suggests that a poet must stop being a poet to be political. To suggest that the writing of the poem is a passive act denies both the history of poetry from antiquity to today, and also ignores the political temperament on the

Island. During the 1930s the U.S. empire was on its way to conquer the Caribbean and Latin America. To speak against the U.S. empire while living on a small island that did not possess its own army or police force while cane workers were on strike cannot be considered as taking a step back.

Without Further Ado: Tembandumba of the Quimbamba

The critics that I have brought together in this chapter all recognize the importance of Palés Matos's work, but because they emphasize a reading of his racial identity, which only works in the Caribbean, his work goes largely ignored. In the next pages, I turn to Marzán's translation of "Majestad Negra" to further illustrate the limits imposed by critics who choose to privilege Palés Matos's skin color above his work. The first stanza reads as follows:

> Por la encendida calle Antillana
> va Tembandumba de la Quimbamba
> —rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula—
> entre dos filas de negras caras.
> Ante ella un congo—gongo y maraca—
> ritma una conga bomba que bamba. (ll. 1-6)

> Down the dance-hot Caribbean street,
> shakes Tembandumba of the Quimbamba
> *—rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula—*
> between two rows of black faces.
> leading her, a band —*gongos* and maracas—

pounds a catchy, ass-bouncing *conga*. (ll. 1-6)

In the Spanish version the first three words "Por la encendida" creates an image of a street engulfed in flames. Marzán translates these words into "Down the dance-hot" creating an image of a dance crazed Caribbean street. In the second line, Tembandumba in Spanish, through the use of the verb *ir,* which means go, moves in a penetrating motion through the flames, while in English she "shakes" in place. The Spanish version of the first two lines of this poem calls to mind the streets of the Haitian Revolution where the streets are depicted as set on fire by African slaves. In the English version, we see a carnival, a vacation location. Marzán leaves the third line in its original Spanish as indicated by the italics. The first two words of the fifth line in Spanish state that the band is playing before her, as if Tembandumba, as a queen should, is holding court. In English we see the band "leading her" as if she were under the spell of the musicians. The last line of this stanza *ritma* should be translated into rhythmic. Conga has entered into the English dictionary as a dance specific to Latin America and the Caribbean. While *bomba* is the name of a traditional Puerto Rican music that is dependent on a call and response pattern, and *bamba* is the dance that accompanies *bomba*. In Spanish there is no mention of "ass" as in Marzán's translation. While there is no mention of the Queen's skin color, except for the title, the music and dance referred to is founded upon African culture.

In the second stanza the Queen advances:

Culipandeando la reina avanza
y de su inmensa grupa resbalan
meneos cachondos que el gongo cuaja
en ríos de azúcar y de melaza.

Prieto trapiche de sensual zafra,

el caderamen, masa con masa,

exprime ritmos, suda que sangra

y la moliendo culmina en danza. (ll. 7-14)

Marzán's translation:

Curvaceous behind, the Queen advances

and from her huge rump slide

sexual jiggles that drums distill;

streaming as cane juice and molasses.

Black sugar mill for a sensual harvest,

her great thighs, mass against mass,

extract rhythms, sweating, bleeding,

so the grinding culminates in dance. (ll. 7-14)

While *culipandeando,* which Marzán translates to "curvaceous behind," does not appear in the Spanish dictionary, *pandeando* is a gerund of the verb *pandear* which is to bend a beam, either made of wood or metal. The prefix *culi* could be translated into the English coolie, but I do believe that Palés Matos is playing with the Spanish word for ass *culo*. In the first line the Queen ceases to be made of flesh but of metal with "sugar and molasses" streaming down her thighs. When we reach the fifth line of the second stanza we realize that she has transformed into a sugar mill.

I oppose Marzán's translation, which comes from the first and only collection of his translated works as of today, and offer my own of the first two stanzas of "Majestad negra/Black Majesty":

Through the burning Antillean street

goes Tembandumba of the Quimbamba

—rumba, macumba, candombe, bámbula—

between two rows of black faces.

before her a Congo[34] — gongo and maraca —

beats the dancing conga[35] drum.

With hips reeling the queen advances

and from her immense flanks slide

agitated sexual desires clotted by cymbals

in rivers of sugar and molasses.

Black sugar mill of sensual harvest,

---

[34] Congo is defined, by the *Diccionario de la lengua espanola*, in lower case, as opposed to Congo which is the official name of a region on the African continent, as "Said of a person who is used by others to perform the work that no one else wants to do; e.g. They have taken you as conga; You are congo of that group. Of a person congaleño." The last definition a congaleño is similar to the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of Congo as "The name of a country on the west coast of Africa, south of the Equator, whence many Black slaves were carried to America. Hence, the name has been given in N. America to black people from Congo, and to things belonging to or used by them; also (apparently), to various animals of black colour: cf *Negro.*" The Congo dance "a kind of African dance practiced by Blacks."

[35] I believe Palés Matos was making a distinction between congo and conga to indicate in the line above Black slaves from the Congo and the dance form that emerged from the culture that developed in the Caribbean and Latin America.

her great thighs, mass against mass

extracts rhythms, sweating that bleeds,

and the grinding culminates in dance.

In Marzán's translation the Queen stays in place shaking her voluptuous behind repressing the power found in this Black female body in the original poem. Here I translate culipandeando to reeling because there is no direct translation into English for this word. In Spanish it is an adjective to describe the loss of balance, while usually associated with the effects of intoxication, but could be also said of someone who is reeling from a physical attack. This word describes the unsteadiness of the feet causing the hips to become unbalanced and make wide sweeping movements. Marzán's translation interprets this movement as a physical characteristic, she has a "curvaceous behind." In doing so he reduces the body of Tembandumba to the stereotypical hyper-sexualized black body.

The poem, erotic and violent, speaks to the role of black bodies in the Caribbean. These black bodies ceased being human when they left Africa, turned into human machinery in the sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean, and, by the time they arrived in Europe, had become "sugar and molasses." Tembandumba signifies not only the oppressive historical past that reduced all blacks to slavery, but she also suggests something about the future. "Majestad Negra" creates a foundational myth based on the history of slavery alongside the joyous triumph of the burning streets of Haiti. Palés Matos's *poesía afro-antillana* has disconcerted critics for almost a century because it renders Puerto Rico as a culture emerging not from Spain but from Africa.

Conclusion

Tembandumba of the Quimbamba, under the weight of tragically enduring Black stereotypes, has not found its place in Transamerican or Black Diaspora Studies. To introduce Palés Matos's *poesía afro-antillana* to these disciplines requires that he ceases to be described as a white poet. During his life, Palés Matos never claimed a white, Black or mulatto identity. As Marzán argues, Palés Matos was "a helpless, Caribbean punster" (15). In "Preludio en Boricua" ["Prelude in Boricua"] it is not the "Caribbean punster" who greets the reader in the *Tuntún* collection instead it is the poet addressing his critics:

Tuntún de pasa y grifería,
este libro que va a tus manos
con ingredientes antillanos
compuse un día...
...y en resumen, tiempo perdido
que me acaba en aburrimeinto.
Algo entrevisto o presentido,
poco realmented vivido
y much embuste y de cuento. (ll. 46-54)

Tom tom of passing and Blackness,
this book that goes to your hands
with Antillean ingredients
I compose one day...
...and in summary, lost time,
that I finish in boredom,

something in conjecture (conjunction) or intuitive

little really lived

and a lot of lies and myth.

"Preludio en Boricua" was one of the last poems written for *Tuntún.* In this poem, Palés Matos is his most candid. Suggesting that he wrote these poems out of boredom and lies and in experiences "little really lived" addresses the criticism that governed his work with the publication of the first *poema negro.* In doing so he left an enduring legacy that is warped by critics who are unable to embrace the at times ambivalent and ambiguous Antillean identity found in his work.

Chapter 3

What We Talk About When We Talk About Black Love: Toni Morrison, Frantz Fanon, Boeli van Leeuwen, Joseph Zobel and Junot Díaz

Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all.

Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)

And Thou Shall Inherit the Black Female Body

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Sethe, who barely survives her freedom flight from Sweet Home, the plantation she escaped from in Kentucky, lives an idyllic 28 days in 124 Bluestone Road. Free from the confines of the plantation, Sethe loves her children with an abandonment not known to enslaved Black women. But, this love is tested when the Schoolteacher, along with his nephew, a slave catcher and the sheriff, arrive at 124 intent on returning Sethe and her children to the plantation. When Sethe sees the Schoolteacher approaching she gathers everything she loves and runs into the shed, and there she puts her "babies where they'd be safe" (Morrison 190). To prevent her children from knowing the horrors of slavery, Sethe decides that only in death will they be free; in this act of murder she is allowed to be a mother. When the Schoolteacher reaches the shed and sees her covered in blood, he decides that Sethe has gone wild and leaves her at 124. While her two sons and youngest daughter survive her murderous attempt to protect them, her oldest daughter, Crawling Already, dies. Her death allowed for Sethe's and her surviving children's freedom from bondage. But, freedom comes at a high price. 124 is inhabited by a spirit that refuses to allow Sethe and her

children to forget the price paid for their freedom. Buglar and Howard, the two sons, unable to live with this history, run away leaving Denver locked up in 124 with the spiteful spirit.

Eighteen years after the event, Paul D, a slave who had lived in Sweet Home with Sethe and is now her lover, confronts her about her murderous rampage:

> "What you did was wrong, Sethe."
>
> "I should have gone on back there? Taken my babies back there?"
>
> "There could have been a way. Some other way."
>
> "What way?"
>
> "You got two feet, Sethe, not four," he said, and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet. (192)

Paul D expected Sethe to have found a human solution to the inhuman condition of slavery. The trackless and quiet forest that springs between them is marked by their gendered experiences as slaves within the plantation and as free Blacks carrying the history of their enslavement while living in the margins of post-plantation U.S. society. Paul D, whose masculinity was scarred and shaped by the whip of the School Teacher and his debasement in a chain-gang, is unable to understand Sethe's murderous actions and accuses her of behaving like an animal. Sethe, whose body is also marked by the whip of the School Teacher and whose womanhood was shaped by planter's economy as profitable labor, fought against the brutality of slavery and won her and her surviving children's freedom. Unlike Paul D, whose constant traveling is a failed attempt to escape the limits placed by his historical condition, Sethe, unrepentant, lives at 124 with the inescapable history of Black women's experience of enslavement.

Shortly after Paul D's arrival, a young woman named Beloved appears leaning against a tree stump. Sethe and Denver suspect all along that Beloved is the spirit of 124 made flesh. Beloved's body, unmarked but for a scar on her throat, arrives to take possession of Sethe. At having her murdered daughter returned to her, Sethe once again abandons herself to love; she bestows upon her daughters sweets and colorful ribbons along with the impossible desire to erase the world outside of 124. But, for Beloved, these acts of contrition are not enough. Denver, always afraid that "the thing that was in her [mother] was out, and she would kill again," keeps a close eye on the games that her mother and Beloved play. But, it is Beloved who is a threat to Sethe. Through violent tantrums that consume all of Sethe's time and energy, Beloved demands her mother's love. Bound in Beloved's death grip, Sethe struggls with the past. Sethe attempts to tell Beloved her story, but her words can not undo the past: "Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it" (289). Sethe's attempt to explain her actions is incomprehensible to Beloved, but Sethe forges on. If Beloved wants her history then she will explain the horror of her experience along with the act of love that was Crawling Already's murder.

Sethe is unrepentant of her past actions and determined to make Beloved understand her reasons for Crawling Already's death. But, she fears that Beloved will,

> Leave before Sethe could make her realize that worse than that—far worse—was what Baby Suggs died of, what Ella knew, what Stamp Paid saw and what made Paul D tremble. That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were

> and couldn't think it up. And though she and other lived through and got over it, she could never let it happen to her own. The best thing she was, was her children. Whites might dirty *her* all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing—the part of her that was clean. No undreamable dreams about whether the headless, feetless torso hanging in the tree with a sign on it was her husband or Paul A; whether her bubbling-hot girls in the colored-school fire set by patriots included her daughter; whether a gang of whites invaded her daughter's private parts, soiled her daughter's thighs and threw her daughter out of the wagon. *She* might have to work the slaughter house yard, but not her daughter.
>
> And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper. No. Oh no. Maybe Baby Suggs could worry about it, live with the likelihood of it; Sethe had refused—still.

For Sethe, taking the handsaw across Crawling Already's neck, was her most courageous act of love. Sethe had accepted that her fate was to be *dirtied* by actions of whites. All of the characters who had been born in slavery were dirtied by the same history. Stamp Paid was dirtied by a white master who had demanded his wife for his own sexual pleasure. Ella was dirtied when she was locked up for a year and raped repeatedly by her master and his son. And, Paul D was dirtied by the actions of whites who had been made to believe that his life was worth less than an animal's. But, the cycle that had begun with the exploitation of African women bound for slavery in the Americas will end with Sethe. Crawling Already, her only daughter born at Sweet Home, was sacrificed so that Sethe could protect her other children from internalizing the physical abuse of the enslaved. When Sethe first arrived at 124 she finally possessed the freedom to love her

children, but she could not free her children from the internalized legacy of slavery. Sethe's love was marked by her enslavement. So much so, that she knew her children, "her best thing," were threatened by her condition as runaway slave and, even after emancipation, by a history that had claimed her. Her children, as a piece of her, were marked by Sethe's experience as an enslaved Black woman and both her love and her struggle to find the freedom to love them carried this legacy.

Sethe, perhaps due to pride or anger, had locked up this legacy in 124 and it was killing her. It was up to Denver, the only child she had given birth to outside of the plantation, to save her from Beloved's deathly grip. Afraid of the world outside of 124, Denver reached out to the Black women in town. These are the same women who, eighteen years before, had not warned Baby Suggs or Sethe of the arrival of the Schoolteacher. But when they heard of the return of Crawling Already they reached out to Denver. After years of holding against Sethe "the personal pride, the arrogant claim staked out at 124 seemed to them to have run its course" they came to help her carry the burden of history (287). Ella who did not condone Crawling Already's death, but understood Sethe's actions, organized the exorcism of 124. When the group of thirty women arrived at 124 they knelt before the house and began to pray. When Sethe and Beloved heard the singing they stepped outside of the house holding hands. At the same time, Mr. Bodwin, who had come to fetch Denver for her new job in his home, appeared on the horizon. To Sethe he was the Schoolteacher coming to take her children once again. She broke away from Beloved, ice pick in hand, to attack him but the women who had found their rhythm through a sound "that broke the back of words," fell upon her and baptized her in a sea of Black women. This baptism broke the

spell of the spiteful spirit by bringing Sethe, Crawling Already and Denver into the fold of Black women's experience. The Black female body is a communal legacy not to be borne alone.

Creating Tracks

The trackless forest that exists between Black men and women in the aftermath of the plantation's demise represents the struggle faced by Black cultures coming to terms with the violence of racialized slavery in the Americas. In describing the forest as trackless, Morrison references the silenced history of Black people. This silenced history is crowded with the things that can no longer be said because no language can bear the weight of this experience. Attempting to enunciate the things that ought *not* be said can crush the speaker under the weight of the historical pain, anger and incredible love that forms the diaspora. In Chapter 1, I argue that the planter's economy created two genealogies in the Americas: a race of white men who established a system of privilege through a race of Black women who produced the wealth of the New World. Through the obscene logic of the planter's economy, enslaved Black women were indispensable to the construction and economic support of white male privilege endemic to the Americas, but their bodies and labor were devalued based on the myth of their indestructibility. If within the plantation system Black women were, as Frederick Douglass argued, the portal into the hell of slavery, in post-plantation societies Black women now hold the threat of delivering Black bodies into the margins of society. To create tracks in the forest that exists between Black men and women requires a recognition of the enduring legacy of the historical Black female body not only as a site of pain and violence, but also as a site of strength and love. In this chapter, I explore the meaning of Black love through four Black Diasporic authors, Frantz Fanon, Boeli van Leeuwen, Joseph Zobel and Junot Díaz. These texts demonstrate the

inescapable history of Black women's experience in the Americas and how this shapes structures of belonging and love in the Black Diaspora. The complexities of the plot and character development that drive these texts are not fully explored. Instead, I use excerpts in order to create a discussion on love to pose the following questions: are Black women capable of love? And, if so, what does Black love look like?

Love in the Time of Frantz Fanon

What I thought was love
in me, I find a thousand instances
as fear.
Amiri Baraka, "The Liar" (1966)

The attraction to Frantz Fanon is simple enough. The beauty found amidst the violence, pain and redemption of his prose is seductive to those struggling to reconcile an African heritage in opposition to the hierarchy of white supremacy. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon addresses not white perpetrators out to destroy Black cultures, but Black people who support their own extinction through what Junot Díaz refers to as the economy of attraction of white supremacy. In the Introduction, Fanon writes,

> Don't expect to see any explosion today. It's too early....or too late.
> I'm not the bearer of absolute truths.
> No fundamental inspiration has flashed across my mind.
> I honestly think, however, it's time some things were said.
> Things I'm going to say, not shout. I've long given up shouting.

A long time ago...

Why am I writing this book? Nobody asked me to.

Especially not those for whom it was intended.

So? So in all serenity my answer is that there are too many idiots on this earth. And now I've said it, I have to prove it.

Striving for a New Humanism.

Understanding Mankind.

Our Black Brothers.

I believe in you, man.

Racial prejudice.

Understanding and Loving. (xi)

On the page, reading more like verse than prose, Fanon sets out to start a revolution amongst Black men. But who these Black men are, or, better yet, when these Black men existed or will exist is caught in a temporal uncertainty. The explosion that will not happen today—and, as he indicates, may be "too early...or, too late"—and may never happen, leads Fanon to calmly speak into the vortex of silence engulfing Antillean men. Against a language structured to support racism, Fanon sets out to articulate forcefully a demand for equality that cannot be gained until Black men rid themselves of the inferiority complex instilled in their psyche through the history of racialized slavery in the New World. But, for Fanon, whose focus in *Black Skin, White Mask,* is to create a brotherhood between Black and white men freed from the confines of New World slavery, the Black mother, that tangible link that reminds the Antillean man of his inescapable history as a colonized enslaved subject, must disappear.

Black men hold a tenuous position in Fanon's world. In calling for a revolution, Fanon addresses how Black masculinity is dependent on the manipulation of time by the chronology of European letters. Through a trajectory that begins in a savage Africa that created a racialized slavery in the New World and continued with the granting of emancipation by European doctrine, the Antillean man is cheated out of his masculinity through the absence of revolution where the colonized man is returned or "re-membered" by ousting the colonizer through physical action. Because colonized Black men—and this is with the exception of the Haitian Revolution —were not allowed a revolution, their masculinity is granted by the same structure that enslaved them. Fanon writes that, "the black man lives an ambiguity that is extraordinarily neurotic" (169). This neurotic existence is evidenced by the Black man who believes, as Fanon writes,

> that the Antillean man knows he is Black, but because of an ethical shift, he realizes (the collective unconsciousness) that one is black as a result of being wicked, spineless, evil, and instinctual. Everything that is the opposite of this black behavior is white. This must be seen as the origin of the Antillean's negrophobia. In the collective unconsciousness black = ugliness, sin, darkness, and immorality. In other words, he who is immoral is black. If I behave like a man with morals, I am not black. Hence the saying in Martinique that a wicked white man has the soul of a nigger. Color is nothing; I don't even see it. The only thing I know is the purity of my conscience and the whiteness of my soul. (169)

The Antillean man has internalized the debt of slavery. Blackness then comes to represent that which must be expelled from the collective consciousness of the Antillean man to become whole.

But, what prevents Antillean man from moving beyond this neurotic existence is his biological ties to the Black woman. In ridding himself of the source of his Blackness that which was by law marked him as inferior, the Antillean man can instead become an universal man no longer tied to the schema of his flesh.

A joke found in "The Woman of Color and the White Man," speaks to Fanon's relationship to the female body:

> One day St. Peter sees three men arrive at the gate of paradise: a white man, a mulatto, and a black man.
>
> "What do you want the most in this world?" he asked the white man.
>
> "Money."
>
> "And you?" he asked the mulatto.
>
> "Glory."
>
> As he turns toward the black man, the latter declares with a wide grin: "I'm just carrying these gentlemen's bags." (32)

Fanon's joke is predictable within his polemic. The white man, afraid of being subjugated by financial constrictions, demonstrates his desire for wealth as a means to maintain power; the mulatto, no longer Black, yet not quite white, desires recognition as a means to access power; and the Black man, enacting his role as a happy servant, demonstrates his marginalized status and absence of agency. The only striking, or, perhaps, not so striking, element in this joke is the absence of women. The reader is led to compare these three male stereotypes found in the neo-colonial imagination, but these tropes cannot be impose on Black women. Doing so would lead to an inaccurate reading of the female subjectivity in the Hegelian formation of the state.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, in the nation-state women serve as mothers and sisters. Their purpose is to serve the purpose of man. In New World slavery, enslaved African women's purpose was separated from white women through the laws of tithe. Enslaved Black women, like Black men, worked the fields, but they were also forced to produce more slaves for the plantation. Unlike white women, Black women were not forced to produce citizens for the nation. Instead, Black women have historically produced interlopers who exist in the margins of the nation state. Because white women are assigned the role of producing the proper citizen for nation-states, this is viewed as an act of love. Fanon writes, "Today we believe in the possibility of love; that is why we are endeavoring to trace its imperfections" (24). Although Fanon states that he believes "in the possibility of love," he does not believe that women of color are capable of love. At first, it seems that what prevents Black women from having the capacity for love is their inability to look beyond the value of whiteness. When Fanon turns to Mayotte Capécia's autobiographical novel, *I am a Martinican Woman* (1948/1997), he criticizes, "The enthusiastic reception that greeted this book in certain circles" because it "is cut-rate merchandise, a sermon in praise of corruption" (Fanon 42). [36] The corruption he finds in Capécia's text is the longing for whiteness in Black women. The main character in Capécia's novel falls in love with a white man, but this love is superficial: "All I know is that he had blue eyes, blond hair, a pale complexion and I loved him" (qtd. Fanon 25). For Fanon, Capécia's unconditional love advocates unhealthy behavior because she asks for nothing in return (25). Capécia's unhealthy obsession with Didier, "the boulevard of Martinican dreams," is where she intends to find salvation. But, Capécia is an

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[36] Beatrice Stith Clark, who translated into English Capécia's two published works, *Je suis Martiniquaise* and *La négresse blanche*, believes that Fanon knew that Mayotte Capécia was a pseudonym for Lucette Ceranus. Clark also believes that Fanon and Ceranus most likely knew each other when they both lived in Paris.

outsider in the social circles of Didier because she is a woman of color. Instead of rejecting the dichotomy of the Black/white world, she embraces it and through this "facticity" is the starting point of her resentment (27). This unhealthy living where, against a hierarchy of whiteness, Blackness will always appear as less than human, less than whole, is how Capécia is a representation of love's imperfections.

For Fanon there are two types of women of color in Martinique: first, the negress who is frantically concerned with becoming white; and second, the mulatta also in a frantic search for whiteness but also concerned with maintaining the little whiteness she already achieved. This "frantic search" for whiteness leads women of color to reject Black men as lovers and/or husbands. As Fanon writes, women of color are concerned with how to "whiten the race, save the race, but not along the lines you might think; do not safeguard 'the originality of that part of the world in which they grew up,' but ensure its whiteness" (30). For Fanon the logic of whitening the race, of ensuring the legacy of whiteness, is an attack on Black masculinity. The Black women from Martinique that he meets in France argue that they will never marry a Black man: "Choose to go back there once you've escaped? no, thank you" (30). In returning to the St. Peter's joke stated earlier, women of color buy into the hierarchy of the white, mulatto and Black male tropes. In other words, they want to marry the man who dreams of money, not the man who is content with carrying other men's bags.

But Capécia represents a strange perversion of love for Fanon. Capécia, according to Fanon, believes that she can internalize "the once forbidden values" of whiteness through her rejection of Black men (41). Fanon traces this desire to a moment in the life of the fictionalized young Capécia. In the novel, as a child, she had a run-in with a white boy who offended her by

calling her a "nigger." According to Fanon, Capécia attempted to "blacken or negrify" the young boy for this offence. Fanon, extracts one sentence from this exchange in Capécia's novel: "I took out my inkwell and threw it, showering his head" (qtd. Fanon 28). But, a closer look at the full paragraph a more complex reading of Capécia's actions:

> Of course, at times there were incidents between the white and black children, but it wasn't like in the United States. I, a colored girl, didn't mind at all when I provoked them. In any case when a classmate failed to respect me – treating me like a little 'nigger,' for instance – I took out my inkwell and threw it, showering his head. This was my way of changing whites into blacks. The ink ran down his shirt and that caused a ruckus which at the end of school, degenerated into a fight between my followers and those of the ink-spattered one, sniveling in the corner and thinking about the spanking he was yet to get at home. (Capécia 30)

Fanon reads "This was my way of changing whites into blacks" as surrendering to negrophobia, as conceding to an inferiority complex. But, Capécia's inkwell is her reaction against the signifier "nigger." If by nigger the white boy meant to offend her because of her skin color, she changes his; if by nigger the white boy meant that she was weaker than him, then she strikes a harder blow. Her strength, and the fear expressed by the white child doused in ink, work to empty the signification of the term nigger. But, this is not the only appearance of the inkwell. Later in the novel when Capécia, still a child, receives a wooden bracelet from her childhood boyfriend, instead of a gold bracelet as she had requested, she responds, "You want me to douse you with ink?', I said indignantly. Cautiously, he took a few steps backwards" (Capécia 36). The black ink, a metaphor for her writing, is where her strength lies.

For Fanon, whose intent is to create a brotherhood of men without racial categories, Capécia serves as an example of how Black women have the power to negrify both Black and white men through their act of enunciation. The fear of Black women, represented as disdain in *Black Skin, White Masks,* draws on the historical legacy of Black women. Similar to Morrison's Sethe, Capécia holds in her the threat of destroying Black people. Not through murder, as in the case of Sethe, but in her interactions with Martinican society. Capécia knows that Andre will not marry her, but she still engages in a sexual relationship with him and bears him children. The whiteness that she is creating through her "mulatto" children exists outside of the accepted family unit of the Hegelian nation state. She is not participating in the subservient position of woman who, as Fanon writes, "will support me energetically in assuming my virility whereas the need to earn the admiration of love of other will weave a valorizing web over my vision of the world" (24). Capécia is intent on destroying Fanon's "vision of the world" by not participating in the traditional family structure. As a high paying laundress who has children with her white lover, Capécia demonstrates no need for the Black man, and, as such, no need for Fanon or his virility. Furthermore, when Capécia finds out that her maternal grandmother was white, she finds her mother "prettier than ever, and cleverer, and more refined" (Fanon 47). The turn towards a a white grandmother expands the genealogy of Black women, as mentioned in Chapter 1, to include white women, in turn creating a sisterhood that does not depend on men. As a work of fiction, *I am a Martinican Woman* demonstrates development of the consciousness of the black female body in its historical and social moment. Fanon's reading of Capécia's autobiographical novel is a denial of her place in history.

In “The Man of Color and the White Woman,” Fanon performs a psychoanalytic study Jean Veneause, a black man who is loved by a white woman. But, Veneuse is not just any Black man. While some white men concede that Veneuse has overcome his skin color, for they no longer consider him to be a Negro, he is an anxious man who is unable to escape his body. Veneuse is a shy man that loves his solitude and spends his time amongst European languages. He exists in language as an intellectual who is a colonized subject singing Spanish songs and translating works into English. “But,” Fanon reminds us, “there remains the fact that Veneuse is black” (Fanon 64). He is loved by a white woman, the daughter of a white poet, but unlike Capécia, Veneuse has self control and refuses to give in to this love. Fanon does not scold Veneuse for entering into a relationship with a white woman; he scolds him for feeling inferior. Fanon offers Veneuse as an example of a Black man who has, through his intelligence, entered into white society, not as a Negro, but as a man; but it is his inferiority complex that keeps him out. There is no mention of what the children of this union would produce, but instead Fanon assigns value to this white woman because her father is a poet. Fanon does not reprimand Veneuse because in attaining the love of this white woman, he attains the respect of a white man. The union is not between a black man and a white woman, it is between Black men and white men.

Fanon addresses the incestuous tendencies present in his work by discussing the white man’s reaction to the use of the daughter: “‘What, they say, ‘if you had a daughter, do you mean to say that you would marry her to a negro?’” (Fanon, 164). According to Fanon, the “uneasy” and “incestuous” feelings that this provokes in white men forces him to react with racism as a means to reflect these unwanted feelings. The turn from the incestuous to the homophilic

underscores the sexual rivalry that is a running theme throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon recognizes white woman as a field where the war between the white/black, colonizer/ colonized, master/slave is fought. In this dichotomy white women are suspended, and Fanon does not turn to psychoanalysis to study the subject position of women. Instead, white women are caught in the homophilic gaze of black and white men. Their ability to accept a Black man as a husband, for Fanon, is a sign of love. White women are the only women capable of love in *Black Skin, White Masks* because they allow the Black man to leave his place as interloper in the nation state and take his place alongside white men as citizens. Fanon's views on achieving Black equality will drastically change when he becomes involved in the Algerian War. In *The Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon discards the notion of a brotherhood for a revolution that will oust the colonizer from African lands, but Black women never achieve equality in his work. In "Algeria Unveiled," Fanon encourages Algerian men to allow their women to take off their veil only as a tool for the revolution. But, in unveiling the Algerian female condition, he never addresses their needs or their struggle for equality outside of the colonized man's challenged masculinity. In *Black Skin, White Masks,* Fanon cannot find a place for Black women in his New Humanism and in *The Wretched of the Earth* he only sees them as helpers and not revolutionaries seeking equality.

In light of the treatment of Black female subjectivity in his works, engaging with Fanon through a Black feminist approach is a difficult field to cross. In "Feminism as a persistent critique of history: What's love got to do with it?" (1996), bell hooks argues that seduction by Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* allowed her to imagine herself as a "thinker/writer/ interrogator" by projecting herself "into the phallic imaginary; into the body of the father" (80).

As one of the leading figures in Black feminist thought in 20th- and 21st-century American letters, hooks dove into Fanon's text abandoning herself and forgetting her body and giving into, as she writes:

> a yearning for freedom that was so intense and a quality of emotional hunger that was so fierce that it was overwhelming. Dying into the text, I abandoned and forgot myself. The lust for freedom in those pages awakened and resurrected me. In that moment of recognition, gender had no meaning. (80)

Hooks traces her critical development, before she became engaged with feminist theory, through an intellectual genealogy that includes the works of Fanon, Albert Memmi, Amílcar Cabral, Paulo Freire and Malcolm X (81). Hooks sees these authors as her intellectual parents that allowed her to enter into spaces previously not inhabited by Black women. But, as she recognizes, not only did this intellectual upbringing require her to forget her body to inhabit spaces prohibited to her as a Black woman through a "phallic imaginary," it also led her to forget the body of the mother. It was the feminist movement that reminded her that these authors created a conversation between men. As she writes, "I heard the sound of the father speaking and I recognized for the first time Fanon's insight that the body of the father was a body in pain, a body awaiting loss, a body longing to be re-membered" (82). To be "re-membered" suggests that Fanon, like the ancient Egyptian god Osiris's dismembered body, needs to be put together once again. Like Hooks and other, and *Othered,* women seduced by Fanon's writing, I, too, was swept away by the verse/prose of his revolutionary call for action not yet aware that his intent was to address the role of *men* in the aftermath of the plantation's demise. Caught in the rhythm of Fanon's time, it did not dawn on me that as a woman of color, a light-skinned *mulata,* or *jaba*, I

had no place in Fanon's "New Humanism."[37] Buried under the dialectic idiom, love in Fanon's work creates a path of imperfections that he assigns to Capécia and other Antillean women that ultimately leads to the silenced legacy of the historical Black female body. To search for love in Fanon is to *remember* the relationship between Black women and men in the fields and the spaces they filled with the sound of New World Black cultures.

The Silenced Gestures of Love: Black Women Boeli van Leeuwen's *A Stranger on Earth*

This is my birthright
says the fat black woman
giving a fat black chuckle
showing her fat black toes
Grace Nichols, "Assertion" (1984)

Originally published in Dutch in 1962 and in translation in 2007, Boeli van Leeuwen's *A Stranger on Earth* is the story of the Medema family from the colonial period and into the mid-20th-century. Set in Curaçao, this novella traces the history, or genealogy, of creole identity that privileges an European father but cannot escape the silenced voice of the Black mother. Born in Suriname, van Leeuwen's formation of a creole identity in *A Stranger on Earth* develops from a silenced Black women's genealogy collapsed into that of Dutch culture with the arrival of Janchi Medema. Although the central character, Kai,who lives in the 20th-century, is considered

[37] From the adjective jabada/o use to indicate a light-skinned person with African phenotypes. It is different from mulata/o in that it often a light-skinned person with hair texture and/or a nose shape associated with African heritage.

to be a white man in Curaçao this is an identity that he can only inhabit on the Island. When he is sent abroad to study in Holland his "sensual, vaguely negroid curve of his lip" marked him as a man of color (67). With his racial identity constantly under scrutiny and unable to fit into a white racial identity, Kai challenges his professors by claiming his Black and indigene heritage. In this section, I explore the role Black women play in the formation of the Caribbean Medema family.

The relationship that the men in Kai's family develop with Black women is traced to the first Frisian farmer that arrived in Curaçao. "After invoking God's blessing" Janchi's father sends him to Curaçao because there was no room for him in his farm in Holland (56). Living in the Fortress Amsterdam as a common soldier, Janchi cannot afford to bring a wife from Holland and because of his low status he is unable to marry into the white class of Curaçao. Unable to afford a wife and blocked from marrying one of the limited number of white women on the Island, Janchi turns his attention to Black women: "He would often stare with heated longing at the women who cleaned the barracks and in the afternoons carried on their heads kerosene cans of feces to empty into the sea" (55). When he became a sergeant, these women would wait their turn outside his door once a week to receive their pay with "hips cocked provocatively forward" (55). It was the bold caress of Felicia, who would "touch his hand when accepting the small pay pouch," that gave him the courage to approach her in broken Papiamentu which she responded with "a shrill laughter" (55). One day, "she swayed by him, a kerosene can on her straight neck" and he followed her (56). It was there by the Caribbean Sea, where she disposed of the colonists's excrements, that he lay with her and the Caribbean Medema branch was founded. Felicia, "was always desirable and always pregnant, and soon you would see the sergeant surrounded by rope-haired children, whose light eyes shone catlike in brown

faces" (56). Although Janchi's relationship with Felicia was discussed in their small community, it was tolerated by his superiors. He writes to his father in Holland and informs him of his grandchildren. His father curses him, not because Felicia is Black but because she is a Catholic and they live in sin. Janchi betrays his father and knows that he will never return to Holland. His union with Felicia seals the fate of the future legitimate and illegitimate children as their return to Holland will raise the suspicion of their Black heritage.

After Janchi retires from military service he opens a store and openly lives with Felicia and their children. It's not until Janchi is dying of cancer that he marries Felicia because he's afraid of God's wrath. On his death bed Janchi finds comfort in Felicia's body, "like a child he sought the dark arm of Felicia and hid his face in her armpit, as if the scent of her body were his only link to life" (van Leeuwen 56). After Janchi's death, Felicia and her children continue to run the family store. The children of Janchi and Felicia rise in the social-class ladder. They are described as "intelligent and ambitious" the girls as "exceptionally beautiful and devilishly desirable" and the sons as "hard workers with business sense" (van Leeuwen 57). These children belonged to the Jacomeinchis [low ranked white protestants] but it was when Janchi's grandson who boldly proposed and married a girl belonging to the upper class with no visible Black heritage that the Janchi Medema's family line was classified as "white Protestant Curaçaoan" (57). But the "substantial quantity of black blood in" the Medema family tree would pursue Janchi's and Felicia's heirs making it impossible for the Medema Caribbean family branch to return to Europe as whites.

Kai's father, Jan Frederik, marries Maria-Teresa who is of his social class and maintains the Medema "white Protestant status," but, as his father did before him, Jan, too, holds a

relationship outside of Church order with Black women. He solicits "Black women with the power of ten thousand lionesses in their hips, who robbed him of his sperm and then burst into a shrill and triumphant laughter" (54). Jan keeps *his* Black woman in a "small tin house" where "there he would converse in a soft, relaxed voice while she sat swaying in the rocking chair, legs wide apart, listening to him with a half an ear" (60). He has children with this unnamed Black woman. The men of the Medema family turn to Black women for sexual pleasure and produce illegitimate children. Kai as a legitimate whitened child of the Medema family is raised by his "*jaja,* his black mammy" "who would hold him in her arms [...] and calm him [...] with the bitter, reassuring scent of her body" (65). Kai's relationship with Black women's bodies develops from finding comfort in his *jaja's* motherly embrace to copulation with the house maid:

> […]during the day shuffled slowly on her calloused feet over the wooden floors of the large house. In the dim light of the lantern her face was mysterious, like an idol. And her body brought calm, for she tapped his semen with complete indifference and kept it as one would a fruit in a basket. He did not know that his father had slept with her the previous night, for her impenetrable face betrayed nothing of the triumph of the woman who as a housemaid during the day obeyed her mistress unwillingly but at night gathered the loneliness of father and son in her lap. (73)

Felicia, the founding woman in the Medema Caribbean family, and the housemaid, who is not named, are the most developed Black female characters in the novella. They represent patience and tenacity in their limited role within the family where Kai sees them as the carrier of the "white" men's secret and their strength is derived when in an act of "indifference" they tap out

their semen and cradle it in their lap. Outside of the home structure the role Black women play can lead down a path of misery for creoles in Curaçao, or serve as a platform that assuages any racial conflict. Kai believes that "whoever carries a secret is strong; whoever carries two secrets is twice as strong. And this is why a racial war can never arise on the island: the white man has buried his loneliness in the benevolent black mother, and between the white man and the black man she stands, the kind black mother of both" (73). Black women, who as mammy figures are not allowed a subjectivity in the home, and, who on the streets are denied their subjectivity because of their imposed sexual voracity as jezzebels and sapphires, represent a threat to creole masculinity.

Upon returning to Curaçao from studying in Europe. Kai has not learned much about women or life for that matter. His father reflects on the fact that his brown illegitimate children never benefitted as much as Kai who enjoyed the privilege of having his bank account filled each month without asking or wondering where that money has come from. When he turns his gaze to the Island, Kai sees the same images. Joans, the only Black male character explored in the novella, is still the pacifist who possesses primal intelligence. And the black women are still always available for his sexual needs:

> Out of the little servants' house, the maid appears, slowly swaying, and sits down on a pillar. She swings about with her right leg and holds her head back. He can just see the contours of her body. Then, gently but provocatively, she takes her right breast in her hand and caresses it, as if testing a fruit of ripeness. A flame shoots up in his flanks, and he feels the blood rushing to his genitals. But in the same instant he is shot through

> with a fierce sorrow. He gets out of the car and walks past her with a curt *bon nochi* [Papiamentu: *good evening*]. She laughs at him, shrilly and mockingly, and he enters the house with a bowed head" (154).

Black woman exist only through stereotypes. They are vacillate between the image of jezebels, the insatiable black woman always seeking sex, to sapphires, the black woman who emasculates men. In this novella, Black women are always silent, with the exception of "shrill laughter," and sexually available. Although Kai recognizes that he has substantial "black blood," and he criticizes Island culture for rejecting Black culture, Black women behave in ways that support Fanon's view of women of color. Their sexuality is dangerous because they are only interested in gaining access to whiteness through white male characters.

In *A Stranger on Earth* Black love is a fraternity between creole and Black men. Through his relationship with Joans, the only Black male character mentioned in the novella, and whom he treats as the stereotype of the "magic negro," Kai arrives at an epiphany about his place in the world in relation to Christian doctrine. Kai believes that men are put in this world to love mankind, but, because his love for man is greater than his love for God, man is doomed. Similar to Fanon, Kai believes that love will lead to a brotherhood between Black and creole men bounded by love. Unlike Fanon, Kai does believe Black women are capable of love. They have a place in the brotherhood but unfortunately it is as a hypersexualized body that provides relief for both Black and white men.

Crossing the Bridge: Love and Death in M'man Tine's Hands

> My mother, religious-negro, proud of having waded through a storm, is very obviously,

a sturdy Black bridge that I

crossed over, on.

Carolyn Rodgers, "It Is Deep (don't forget the bridge that you crossed over on)" (1969)

In Joseph Zobel's *Black Shack Alley* (1950/1997) after a day working the cane fields without "incident or misfortune," M'man Tine cries out, "My God, thank you; I've made it back!" (5). M'man Tine's world of the Petit-Morne in Martinique has unrelenting order. In the light of day she works with her back bent over and hoe in hand alongside the other inhabitants of Petit-Morne working the cane fields. In the darkness of night she returns to the "ramshackle wooden huts" on the side of the hills that frame the cane fields and, after a brief reprieve while she smokes her pipe, she enters her home and cooks a meager meal for her and her grand-son José (5). The presence of the Judeo-Christian God in both *A Stranger on Earth* and *Black Shack Alley* make different claims on the role of Christianity and subjectivity for men and women in the aftermath of plantation's demise. In this novel, M'man Tine's labor in the cane fields represents the struggle for post-emancipation cultures in the Caribbean. Although the novel is set in the first half of the 20th-century, the inhabitants of Black Shack Alley are still bound to the unrelenting rhythm of the cane fields. They work from sun-up to sun-down, their children are also destined to work in the cane fields and their meager pay is spent buying their sustenance at the béké's store. Similar to Sethe, M'man Tine struggles to break the cycle of the plantation. First, through her daughter Délia and then through her grandson José. Love in Zobel's novel is bound to the physical labor Black women perform both within and outside of the cane fields.

M'man Tine's labor in the field is grueling, but she has performed this work from when she was a child after her mother died. In one of the many one sided conversations she has at night after returning from the fields, she unfurls the history that she wants to break with:

> When my mother died nobody wanted me, except Uncle Gilbert. Well, what did Uncle Gilbert do with me? He enlisted me in the *petites bandes*, to uproot weeds from the young canes so I could bring him a few cents on Saturday nights. During this time the plots of land my mother had received from the old béké who was my grandfather were tended by him and he planted whatever he wanted, harvested it, rented a plot here, a half-plot there. From morning to night I remained bent over in the furrow, my head lower than my behind, until the commander, Mr. Valbrum, seeing how I was built, held, rolled me over on the ground and drove a child into my belly. Well, I didn't want to have your mother join the *petites bandes.* I couldn't send her to school because there weren't any schools in the village as yet, but I looked after her till she was twelve, as if I'd been a rich woman. Then I put her *au pair* with Mme Léonce in the village. She didn't turn out bad; she learned to wash, iron and cook. (24)

M'man Tine is taken advantage of by her uncle who steals her lands and forces her to work with the *petites bandes.* Bent over in the furrows, M'man Tine's body is not only ravished by the grueling work of the cane fields, but also raped by the commander. Her experience in the post-emancipation Martinique resembles the experience of enslaved women. M'man Tine is not allowed a childhood and she is forced to work like an animal. Her history in the plantation, like her mother and her grandmother before her, is a cycle of unrelenting labor. The plot of land

M'man Tine's uncle steals from her,was given to her mother from the "old béké" who was her grandfather. Her grandmother's relationship with the "old béké" resembled the coerced sexual relationships enslaved Black women had with their masters. But, M'man Tine refuses to hand down this experience to her daughter. Instead, she breaks with the cycle of enlisting children to work in the *petites bandes* and keeps her at home until she can send her to work outside of the fields. M'man Tine succeeds and sends Délia to live and work in a béké's home. All the hopes M'man Tine had for her daughter are dashed when Délia becomes pregnant by the Administrator's coachman, Eugène. Délia is left to deal with her pregnancy alone when Eugène disappears (he either dies in the war or abandons her). She returns to Shack Alley and three months later gives birth to José. She leaves José with M'man Tine who begins the ardous process of ejecting from the cane fields yet another child.

For José education is the key to break with the cycle of labor inhererent in Black women's experience. His education begins in Shack Alley when he listens to both M'man Tine and Mr. Médouze's recollections. Although M'man Tine introduces José to France, the land where they receive their flour and other necessary supplies and the place where "people had white skin and spoke something called 'French.'" Médouze evokes Guinea as their place of origin (32). Médouze, as José describes him, "was the oldest, most wretched and most abandoned on the entire plantation. And I preferred being with him to running, frolicking, amusing myself or pinching sugar" (29). Médouze balances M'man Tine's world of Petit-Morne that is always tied to the present. For Médouze Guinea is the place where, "people were like him and me; but they did not die of tiredness nor of hunger. There was no misery as there was here" (32). Médouze, although old and ailing, refused to return to the *petites bandes* because his

community would lose respect for him. Médouze ignited José's imagination through a game of riddles:

> The main attraction of these riddle sessions was to discover how a world of inanimate objects managed to resemble and be identified with a world of people and animals. How an earthenware water-bottle held by the neck became a servant who only served water to his master when the latter choked him. How the manager's parasol looked like a shack with only one post.
>
> Thus at the mere intervention of Mr. Médouze, the world expanded, increased, teemed in a swirl around me. (30)

Although he does not dwell on M'man Tine's story of rape, José delves into the "cric crac" world created by Médouze. M'man Tine and Médouze serve as bookends to José's early education. M'man's Tine's stories are concerned with escaping the misery of the present and Médouze's stories are concerned with a turn towards the past for hope that in death they will be free from the béké's. Although still trapped by the confines of the sugar cane plantation, José is being groomed by his grandmother to leave the plantation. Because she allows him the innocence of childhood, he is especially apt in recording both M'man Tine's and Médouze's histories. José is seven when Médouze dies in the fields. Médouze's body is recovered and brought back by the men of Shack Alley. His funeral is a celebration of Médouze's life and the inhabitants of Shack Alley, knowing that this, too, is their fate, they turn to story telling.

José's innocence is threatened when one day he, along with the other children of Shack Alley, set fire to Mr. Saint-Louis's garden. Upon finding a hen's nest, the children of Shack Alley tricked the 'house,' where their parents purchased their everyday necessities, to sell them on

credit matches and rum. High on freedom and under the influence of alcohol and the false sense that they controlled their own domain, the children of Shack Alley ran rampant frolicking through the grounds and tearing off the rags that barely covered their bodies. In their frenzy they set fire to the wooden gates of Mr. Saint-Louis's garden as if intent on finding a lost Eden. As the fire rose to the sky the children, including José, unable to comprehend their actions—"overcome with real madness"—danced and shouted around the fire (41). When the adults arrived, and after being severely beaten by their parents, the children were all forced by the békés to join the *petites bandes*. The limited fun and freedom afforded to the children of Shack Alley came to an abrupt end.

For José, the fall-out of after the fire, did not mean that he would join the *petites bandes*. M'man Tine knows that the béké's are taking advantage of the fire set by the children to force the parents to enlist their young children into the *petites bandes.* M'man Tine is disgusted and she "pour[s] scorn on the parents of my friends who had sent their children into the *petites bandes,* calling them shameless niggers who did not know how to do anything properly" (45). Instead, M'man Tine takes José with her to the fields, but she sets him up under a canopy made of leaves so that he is not exposed to the unrelenting Caribbean sun. José notes,

> She would never seek any shelter for herself and worked all the more quickly as a result. When night had fallen, her old straw hat looked like a cap made of manure, the ragged material cover it was soaked and stuck to her skull. And with her feet all muddy and swollen like a stale bread in water, her veins oxidized, M'man Tine, the best and most beautiful of the grandmothers, suddenly became a

> frightful sight, who did not in any way resemble a mamma, and old woman, a black woman, nor even a human being. (51)

In the cover of darkness when José can no longer fully see M'man Tine's body, she is transformed into a beast/monster. Although M'man Tine had been laboring in the cane fields since she was a child, José comes to understand the gravity of her labor in a roundabout way. It is when José connects Médouze's death to the work in the cane fields that he understands the possibility of M'man Tine's death. It is through Médouze's death that he connects the labor M'man Tine performs and the injustice of their lives. Although José does not mention slavery, the condition of the residents of Shack Alley are caught in the old rhythms of the plantation system. M'man Tine's labor in the cane field purchased Délia's freedom and will purchase José's freedom. But, he's unable to buy her her freedom. She, like Médouze and the other laborers of cane fields, will die in the fields never knowing freedom.

The realization that the cane fields are slowly killing the inhabitants of Shack Alley leads José to develop a different understanding of labor. One day finding his friend Jojo crying because his stepmother had been cruel towards him, together they begin to imagine what their future holds for them. Jojo envisions himself as a foreman at the factory like his father, but, unlike his father, he will not marry "a wicked woman" like his stepmother, M'man Yaya. José's future varies drastically from Jojo. He imagins owning a property,

> as big as the whole countryside around us. I wouldn't plant any sugar cane, except a few stalks for my dessert. But I'd have many people cultivating vegetables and fruits along with me, rearing hens, rabbits, but even to go to work, they'd put on trousers and shirts that were not torn, they'd wear fine suits on Sundays, and their

children would all go to school. M'man Tine would not be dead; she'd take care of the hens, gather the eggs. M'man Délia would look after the housework.

I was really dreaming when Jojo, bringing me back to everyday reality, said to me, without any malice:

"But you couldn't have all that—you're not white, your not a béké."

"Makes no difference."

"But your workers, then, they'll be be almost as well fed and lodged as the *békés!* Then, there'll be no more niggers; and what are the *békés* without going to do!"

I remained confused, ashamed, somewhat sad. (101)

José imagines a world where M'man Tine and M'man Délia are not bound by the rigid structure of the plantation. He wants to liberate the field laborers from their history of oppression. But, as Jojo points out, a world without "niggers" is a world without békés and this is a world that is unimaginable to Jojo. The shame José feels is left unexamined in the novel, but it demonstrates the difference in how these two boys inherit the legacy of the Black female body. Jojo who appears to have "good" hair and is light-skinned rejects the history of Black women's labor in the plantation. José knows that his education could not be possible without M'man Tine's strength to break with the cycle of oppression that begins with the *petites bandes.* He honors her work by wanting to erase the institution of the plantation. Later in his studies, we see José attempting to write the history of Shack Alley in school, but his teacher does not believe that he possess the insight found in this history.

As José progresses through school, M'man Tine grows weaker. When he is finally sent to to the city to complete his studies, he leaves the world of Petit-Morne behind. Shortly after his arrival at the Lycee, M'man Tine falls ill and dies. Distraught, José attempts to visualize her face, but he is only able to picture her hands:

> Her black hands, swollen, hardened, cracked at every joint, and every crack incrusted with a sort of indelible mud. Cramped fingers, bent in all directions, their ends all worn and re-enforced with nails thicker, harder and more shapeless than the hooves of God knows what animal that had galloped on rocks, in scrap iron, in a dung heap, in mud.
>
> ...Those hands which M'man Tine used to wash carefully every night, more meticulously so on Sunday mornings, but which seemed rather to have gone through fire, beaten with a hammer on a stone, buried then uprooted with all the earth clinging to them; then soaked in dirty water, dried out in the sun over long hours and finally thrown there, with sacrilegious carelessness, on the whiteness of that sheet in the depths of that obscure shack.
>
> ...Those hands as familiar as the voice of M'man Tine, had fed me my dishfuls of crushed roots, had washed me clean with a tenderness that did not even lessen the roughness, had dressed me, had scrubbed my clothes on the stones of the river.
>
> One of those hands had clutched my little hand one day to take me to school—I could still feel it.

> They had never been pretty, obviously; they had seen so many blemishes, drawn and raised so many loads. And every day squeezed, scratched and clinging to the handle of the hoe, an easy prey to the fierce cuts inflicted by the cane leaves to create Route Didier.

This scene unfurls the history of Black exploitation through a reading of M'man Tine's hands. The first paragraph addresses how the animalistic labor of the cane fields that deformed her hands into "God knows what animal." The following paragraph demonstrates how helpless M'man Tine was to stop her enforced labor and that she can never wash off "the earth clinging to them." But, regardless of how her hands were shaped, in the next two paragraphs we see the triumph over her oppression as she takes care of her grandson with a "tenderness" that belies the roughness of her existence. In this act of tenderness we see that she was able to maintain the strength to love José. The "hands that had clutched" José's hands and brought him out of cane fields is the binding legacy of M'man Tine's strength. For M'man Tine leaving the plantation was not an option, but she fought to buy the freedom of both her daughter and her grandson. In Zobel's novel, love is possible through M'man Tine's hands because they possessed the strength to break with the tradition of life and death in the cane fields.

A Love Story for Postmodern Plátanos: Junot Díaz's Apocalyptic Proclamations

> "I'm telling you guys, we're never going to fucking get anywhere—if you want to hear my apocalyptic proclamation which I would never repeat, but which I know you motherfuckers are going to tweet about—we are never going to get anywhere as long as our economies of attraction continue to resemble, more or less, the economy of attraction of white supremacy."
>
> Junot Díaz, Keynote Address, "Facing Race," November 16, 2012

In Junot Díaz's first novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) the creation of the Antilles is imagined through the arrival of enslaved Africans to the New World,

> They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles (Díaz 1).

For Díaz, the demon is the mayhem of colonization that has cursed the Antilles. The cultures that emerged through this creation myth are tied to a history carried through the formation of New World languages that were first uttered as a death cry for the newly formed Black Diaspora. As Díaz argues, language is maternal but so is their curse, or the fukú, of the colonialism. The Dominican Republic, as the "ground zero of the New World," becomes the fukú's place of origin. Oscar, the protagonist who was born in New York, inherits the fukú through his mother Hypatía Belicia Cabral, or Beli. The Cabral family is struck by the fukú when the father, Abelard, attempts to shield his daughters from Trujillo, the island's dictator, and fails. While he's able to save his three eldest daughters from Trujillo's grasp, they all die with the exception of Beli. Born shortly before her mother hurls herself into traffic, Beli carries the fukú with her and it is triggered through her sexuality. Similar to Zobel's *Black Shack Alley*, the inhabitants of Díaz's novel are tied to the sugar cane plantation. But, as opposed to José whose lived experience allows him to record his family's struggle out of the plantation, Oscar's history is hidden from him. When he travels to the Dominican Republic his search for his family's history is tied to his search for love and both lead him to his death. Love and history in Díaz's novel are dangerous.

Beli, the only surviving member of the Cabral family, is thought to have died but is found by La Inca, her father's cousin, locked in a chicken coup severely beaten and burned. Similar to Morrison's Sethe, Beli has a scar that covers her back as a token of the labor she performed as an indentured servant for multiple "foster families." La Inca brings Beli home and enrolls her in private school. But her dark skin marks her for ridicule amongst the elite students, especially Jack Pujols, a light-skinned boy she falls in love with. During the summer of her sophomore year, Beli goes through a physical change that "transformed [her] almost overnight into an underage stunner, and if Trujillo had not been on his last erections he probably would have gunned for her like he'd been rumored to have gunned for her poor dead sister" (91). At school, Beli flaunts her new curves and finally ensnares Jack Pujols's attention. Similar to Capecia in Fanon's text, Beli falls in love with Pujols because he appears to be white. Too young and inexperienced to understand that Pujols is taking advantage of her, Beli gives herself to him body and soul. After they are caught in the closet having sex, Beli is suspended from school. After being betrayed by Pujols, who does not come to her rescue, Beli decides to not return to any school and begins to work at a restaurant. Shortly after, she meets Dionisio, known as the Gangster, and they have an affair that ends with her pregnancy. But the *fukú* that had marked her family for destruction has not forgotten about Beli. When she informs the gangster that she is pregnant, Beli learns that he is married to Trujillo's sister. Known as "La fea," Dionisio's wife approached Beli as she walked through the park in a "restless fog" (140). La fea has planned an abortion for Beli but, with the help of her employers, two *chinos,* she breaks free. But, as the narrator remind us, the fukú is powerful:

> she should have scammed, I tell you, but she needed to see her Gangster, needed him to explain what was happening. Despite everything that had just transpired she still held out the hope that he would make everything better, that his gruff voice would soothe her heart and stop the animal fear gnawing her guts. Poor Beli. She believed in the Gangster. Was loyal to the end. (143).

Beli's loyalty, her desire to believe in love and in the Gangster leads her to be recaptured by the officers who take her to the cane fields. There they savagely beat her, but, while the narrator explains that she cried out each time they hit her, "she did not cry, *entiendes*? Her fierceness astounds me" (146). Fierce until the end, Beli is left for dead in the cane fields. But, after she was kidnapped, La Inca had begun to work on an anti-spell, a zafa.

Beli barely survives the cane fields. As the narrator comments, "How she survived I'll never know. They beat her like she was a slave. Like she was a dog" (147). Unable to describe the brutal beating, the narrator chooses to instead provides a report of damage inflicted:

> her clavicle, chicken-boned; her right humerus, a triple fracture (she would never again have much strength in that arm); five ribs, broken; left kidney, bruised; liver, bruised; right lung, collapsed; front teeth, blown out. About 167 points of damage in total and it was only sheer accident that these motherfuckers didn't eggshell her cranium, though her head did swell to elephant-man proportions. Was there time for a rape or two: I suspect there was, but we shall never know because it's not something she talked about. All that can be said is that it was the end of language, the end of hope. It was the sort of beating that breaks people, breaks them utterly. (147)

Through Pujols, her first love, and the Gangster, Beli searched for someone to find reason to love her. She had been discarded by fate into indentured servitude in the hands of cruel foster parents who had, because of her dark skin, treated her like a slave. When she used her beauty to attract the attention of men, she only received unimaginable pain. Her body, dark and beautiful, was not marked for love. Guided by a magical beast, a mongoose, Beli makes her way out of the cane fields. With a broken body, she walks out into a future that will bring forth two children: a son and a daughter. Although La Inca is able to save her through a zafa, Beli carries with her the fúku to the U.S.

Beli never acknowledges the love that La Inca bestows upon her, and she is hardened by her experience with love or the lack of love. As the mongoose had predicted, Beli has a son and a daughter that live with her in Washington Heights, NYC. Of her children, Lola inherits her great beauty but not her large breast that had won Beli so much attention in Baní. Never quite meeting her mother's expectation of beauty and womanhood, Lola rebels against all that her mother stands for. Although the novel details Lola's struggle to find love, it is Oscar who inherits with flourish the fukú. If Lola can never be beautiful or womanly enough in her mother's eyes, Oscar is not able to meet the expectations of Dominican masculinity. As a child, Oscar is described as a young casanova who "was always trying to kiss the girls, always coming up behind them during a merengue and giving them the pelvic pump, the first nigger to learn the perrito and the one who danced it any chance he got" (11). But his "nascent pimp-liness" came to a halting crash when, at the age of seven he was forced to choose between his two girlfriends, Maritza Chacón and Olga Polanco. He, of course, chose Maritza because she was pretty and Olga smelled "on some days of ass, which is why the kids took to calling her Mrs. Peabody" (13). The day after he made his

decision, Maritza left him for another boy and he would not have a girlfriend again until he meets Ybón.

Oscar, the doomed hero of the novel, is unable to live up to the sexual prowess of Dominican men and remains a virgin late into adulthood. When he travels to the Dominican Republic he falls in love with Ybón, a prostitute. Yunior, one of the narrators, describe her as "one of those golden mulatas that French-speaking Caribbeans call chabines, that my boys call chicas de oro; she had snarled, apocalyptic hair, copper eyes, and was one whiteskinned relative away from jaba" (279). But Ybón, who lives next to La Inca's house, is involved with a gangster of her own known as el Capitán:

> A skinny forty-something jabao standing near his spotless red Jeep, dressed nice, in slacks and a crisply pressed white button-down, his shoes bright as scarabs. One of those tall, arrogant, acerbically handsome niggers that most of the planet feels inferior to. Also one of those very bad men that not even postmodernism can explain away. He'd been young during the Trujillato, so he never got the chance to run with some real power, wasn't until the North American Invasion that he earned his stripes. (294)

The Capitán, a police officer, stands in complete opposition to Oscar. Where the out of shape Oscar lives in the world of sci-fi literature and comic books, el Capitán lives in a world of real violence and no super heroes. When the Capitán catches up with Oscar, he punches him around and Oscar attempts to defend himself by calling on his U.S. citizenship. Unfortunately for Oscar, his citizenship status holds no weight in the Dominican Republic. After roughing him up, the Capitán leaves Oscar to two other officers for a thorough beating. And, "Where did they take

him? Where else. The canefields" (296). When he was brought into the cane fields, Oscar had a foreboding déjà vu. Oscar's attack was reminiscent of his mother's vicious beating decades earlier. Left for dead, it was because "Clives the evangelical taxista" had found the "guts, the smarts, and yes, the goodness, to follow the cops on the sly" that he survived (300). La Inca and Beli, who had sworn never to return to the Island, but was brought back twice, first to collect Lola and now to save Oscar from his obsession with Ybón, prayed over Oscar's broken body. Neither one recognized the similarities between, "Past and Present" (301). Even after his beating, Oscar, much like his mother, believed in the power of love and attempted to find Ybón. When she finally visits him, Ybón rejects him and demands that he leave the Island. She, too, had been beaten by el Capitán. To Oscar she wore the bruises like an angel, "all he saw was only his love for her" (305).

Oscar is convinced by his family to return to Washington Heights but all he thinks about is returning to Ybón. He tricks Yunior, his best friend and sister's boyfriend, to lend him money for a down payment for an apartment. He takes the money and returns to the Dominican Republic convinced that this time love will triumph. During his first stay at La Inca's he had tried to gather the family's history with the fúku. On his last trip to the Island, he spends twenty-seven days researching the fúku and wooing Ybón. The two are irreparably intertwined. The fúku and the hunt for love are one and the same. When he is captured by her lover's goons for the second, and final, time he is returned to the cane fields.

Under the light of the moon and surrounded by the whispering of krïyold, the language born in the cane fields, fluttering through the the clacking of the cane stalks, Oscar attempts to reason with his abductors:

> The words coming out like they belonged to someone else, his Spanish good for once. He told them what they were doing was wrong, that they were going to take a great love out of the world. Love was a rare thing, easily confused with a million other things, and if anybody knew this to be true it was him. He told them about Ybón and the way he loved her and how much they had risked and that they'd started to dream the same dreams and say the same words. He told them that it was only because of her love that he'd been able to do the thing that he had done, the thing they could no longer stop[...]. (321)

The love that Oscar was able to achieve was rare indeed. The proclamation of love that Oscar makes for Ybón at first seems like a tired cliche that has been played mercilessly in popular culture and literary history. But, Oscar, who had not been allowed to love or be loved, finds that he can accept the aging prostitute without prejudice. Oscar believes that although he cannot meet the expectations of Dominican masculinity, Ybón, the aging hooker, will never be accepted in society; he believes that they both deserve to love and be loved. While in the midst of the cane field, Oscar attempts to reason with his captors to understand and accept the idea of loving a woman who painfully embodies the lascivious and sexually perverse stereotypes of Black women. But language, as it did for Beli when she was taken to the cane fields, fails him. His captors waited patiently for him to finish his apocalyptic proclamations of love—for it must be the end of the world when Oscar, the son of a discarded Black child, and Ybón, an aging Black prostitute, can find love—and then they promised to release him if he could tell them what *fuego* means in English. Tricked into calling for his own death, Oscar eagerly responds, "Fire" (322).

After Oscar's death a letter arrives for Yunior in the U.S. The letter contains perhaps the only moments of joy experienced by Oscar. In his first trip to the Dominican Republic, Oscar shares only one kiss with Ybón, on his second trip he is able to run away with her and spend a blissful week of lovemaking. The letter contains both Ybón's story, one of sexual slavery at the hand of vicious pimps, and their final week together. Oscar had also mailed his manuscript on the history of the Cabral family's fúku but it never arrives. The death of Oscar marks the disappearance of history, but it also marks the beginning of a zafa strong enough to finally vanish the fúku once and for all. Yunior at the end of the novel remarks that he awaits for Oscar's niece, Isis, to be the "one powerful person who can put an end to the curse" (331). Yunior keeps Oscar's remaining journals in a room readied for the arrival of Isis. Strengthened by the Black matrilineal genealogy of the Americas, Yunior believes that Isis will create a language strong enough to withstand the pain, violence, beauty and love that is the history of the Caribbean. Love in Díaz's novel is the ability to bear the weight of Black Diasporic histories.

Into the Forest

I began this chapter with two difficult questions: can Black women love and, if so, what does this love look like? These are hard questions that place an unfair burden on Black women in the Americas. But, as the texts collected in this chapter demonstrate, Black love takes on different forms across linguistic, cultural and national lines that are bound in the Diaspora by the legacy of the historical Black female body. If, as Morrison argues in *Beloved,* a trackless forest exists between the gendered experiences of Black people in the post-emancipation period of the Americas, how then to answer these questions? The texts analyzed in this chapter offer different answers. For Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks,* Black women's love can never release the

recipient from the history of slavery that threatens Black masculinity. In van Leeuwen's *A Stranger on Earth,* Black women are trapped in hypersexualized bodies and serve as the space where Black and creole men work out their frustrations in sexual acts that lead to a brotherhood. In Zobel's *Black Shack Alley,* M'man Tine finds the strength in the love she has for her children to push her body to break the cycle of oppression in the plantation. Oscar, in Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* dies attempting to find a language to express love for a Black woman against the curse that engulfs the Caribbean. Black women's capacity to love is rendered through the histories that marked them as slaves in the plantation and shaped belonging through their freedom to love and be loved. But, as Díaz argues, "we are never going to get anywhere as long as our economies of attraction continue to resemble, more or less, the economy of attraction of white supremacy." These texts demonstrate the struggle to break with the value system that always finds Black women lacking—in intelligence, beauty, soul, identity. And they work to create a new language that can carry the weight of Black oppression without destroying the speaker. To speak of love in the Plantation Zone is to accept and value the legacy of the historical Black female body as the founding myth of the Americas.

Chapter 4 Into the American Abyss: Mad Black Girls in Kara Walker's Tableaux

Should I never be heard from again, follow the Route of my forebears
and quietly, GO, or shall I seek to kill you, burning the last of
the fuel you gave me and expected of me?

Kara Walker, *Letter from a Black Girl* 1998 Excerpt from text on wall

And so ends a fictional letter published on a wall in 1998 by a fictional Black Girl who lived over a century and a half ago as a slave in a not so fictional past. Black Girl, after thanking her owner for "fucking [her] brains out when [her] brains needed fucking," finds that she has a choice: to either "quietly GO" forced as her forbearers into the margins of Western history, or to launch forward "burning the last of the fuel" creating history through murder. Black Girl's interlocutor, Kara Walker, chooses the latter. The silhouette, Walker's preferred medium, is an art form reserved for capturing 19th century domestic scenes and portraits. Instead of Victorian images of propriety, the scatological and bestial imagery of Walker's silhouettes draws the spectator into a world where everything and everyone is tainted by the brutal practices of New World slavery. Often described as portraying unspeakable acts, Walker's sexually explicit scenes are dependent on the narratives already present within a collective national memory inherited by the spectator. Free of frames and imposed directly upon bare walls, Walker's silhouettes lure the spectator into a Dionysian abyss where American identity is caught in the throes of an erotic violence. Here, blood, urine, ejaculation, breast milk, tears, feces, saliva and vaginal secretions all interweave to portray not a re-write, but a fictional fleshing out of the events recorded as Black history in the Americas.

In the previous chapters, I have applied the term Plantation Zone to the literatures that emerged from the Black Diaspora in the Americas. As in Chapter 1, where my intent is to delve into the intellectual connections that bind together Black Diasporic cultures, in this chapter I am interested in the possibilities offered through Walker's visual representation of the metaphorical Black female body. Never straying from images culled from canonical works of art ranging from antiquity to contemporary culture, Walker's silhouettes call on readily recognizable images of 19th century plantation life. Walker's work goes beyond the well versed U.S. American take on slavery by reaching into the catastrophic history that holds together the Black Diaspora in the Americas. I am not suggesting that as an U.S. artist Walker's work imposes a reading of the Caribbean, but rather, her work demonstrates that the Caribbean is present in the production of U.S. history.[38] Often the weight of New World African slavery is placed on African American culture, but the greater population of people of African descent is found beyond these margins in the outskirts of the U.S empire. As I have argued in the previous chapters, the laws and practices of New World slavery permeated the Plantation Zone regardless of national and colonial borders. While Walker's images are specifically calling on U.S. letters, the themes that she draws on—miscegenation, desire, primitivism—are ubiquitous through the production and constant migration of the Black diaspora throughout the Americas.

As exemplified through travel narratives of the 16th and 17th century, enslaved African women carried the weight of European men's wildest erotic imaginations about women's bodies. As discussed in Chapter 1, these fictionalized and bestial descriptions of women's bodies encouraged and justified the perverse economic and carnal desires inflicted upon enslaved

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[38] In the Introduction I discuss how the Caribbean is historically important to the rise of the U.S. empire.

African women and their daughters. Walker's silhouettes offer a fictionalized interpretation of Black women's history that serves as a counter discourse to European travel narratives that marked Black women's sexuality as animalistic. The focus of this chapter is on Walker's silhouettes and the portrayal of Black women's bodies through highly sensitive racist signifiers.[39] I argue that Walker's silhouettes embraces the bone crushing history of the Plantation Zone and offers new ways of interacting with Black women's histories.

In the Shadows of the Museum

Walker has thrilled and offended audiences since her debut in the art scene in 1994. Expressing disdain and disappointment at Walker's representation of New World slavery, African American artists, Betye Saar and Howardena Pindell have condemned her work as irresponsible and playing up to the bestial desires of white supremacy. In light of the attention she has received from museums and galleries that have historically ignored the works of Black artists, I recognize the validity of the criticism directed at institutions that have enthusiastically praised Walker's work but have historically demonstrated a limited interest in Black artists. One such institution, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Met), offered an open invitation to Walker that culminated in her 2006 exhibit "After the Deluge." Given carte blanche, Walker placed her own drawings, paintings and silhouettes alongside works from the Met's holdings such as Auguste Edouart's silhouettes, classical American paintings, from Winslow Homer and John Singleton Copley, as well as the 19th century sculpture, *Male Power Figure (Nkisi)*, from the Democratic Republic of Congo or Angola. Of this exhibit, Roberta Smith, writing for the *New York Times*, noted that Walker's work "tilts the great weight of the museum's holdings in a new direction that

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[39] Walker has incorporated mixed media into her work, video images, shadow puppets and "magic lanterns" projections, but this chapter concentrates on her black paper silhouettes.

makes the Met feel like a different place" (*nytimes.com*). While not as enthusiastic as Smith, I argue that Walker's presence at the Met offers an opportunity to question the efficacy of an institution that purports to "collectively represent the broadest spectrum of human achievement," but, when it comes to arts of the Americas, it represents the grandeur of European conquest, while failing to capture the survival of the colonized as an overt "human achievement" (*metmuseum.org*).

At the Met, the wood sculptures and masks of its African collection stand in austere rooms carefully labeled with genealogical information: date, geography, culture, medium, dimensions, classification, accession number and credit line. The last is of interest because it explains how the work made its way into the Met's collection. Usually a gift or a purchase made through a grant, the placement of a work's cultural origin and its ownership history are given equal prominence. From the moment a work of art is acquired, the provenance is forever linked with the artifact. But this is true of all works of art. Each piece contained by the Met, as well as all museums, has a record of ownership. After WWII museums, galleries, art dealers and private collectors were shamed into (as well as made legally responsible for) returning ill-begotten works of art from Nazi looting of Jewish Holocaust victims. Works with unclear ownership status were flagged and many were returned to their rightful owners or their heirs. But only works tied to the horrors of the Jewish holocaust receive this attention. The Met has an extensive collection of gold from Central and South America, labeled as Precolumbian art, housed in the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas. The provenance of these works is tied to colonialism and the genocide of indigenes by Europeans in the Americas. Artifacts attained through colonialism are housed in the nine galleries dedicated to New World colonization, but, yet, no

effort has been made to return them. The Met is not the only museum that houses ill-begotten artifacts obtained through colonialism, but it is one of the preeminent museums of the Americas and, as such, should set the standard to return these objects to their proper owners. Through the Provenance Research Project, the Met is committed to scour their collections for stolen artifacts from Nazi looting and return them, while defiantly keeping works whose provenance attained European and European American looting.

Museums are institutions of education that contain historical narratives necessary for the foundation of nations. Located on the museum mile, a section on Fifth Avenue in NYC where the Met starts, are also the Museum of African Art and El Museo del Barrio, which is dedicated to Latina/o art, but it is the Met that has had the capital to amass the impressive collection of arts from cultures disrupted or destroyed through colonialism.[40] The distinction I wish to make is that the histories of works from the Americas, Africa and the Pacific Islands contained in museums like the Met, under the guise of preservation, are shaped by the archives that house them. Provenance racializes the works of arts by disrupting their genealogy through a colonialist narrative that takes possession of these cultures through its artifacts. From this point of contention, Walker's intervention erupts through the fissures found in historical narratives to re-insert the imagined slave experience and to say "what they could not" (DuBois 52). As DuBois Shaw argues, Walker's silhouettes work against the "sanctioned histories" that cleanse the horrors experienced by slaves (DuBois 52).

Walker's silhouettes work to disown the provenance assigned by wealthy donors and diligent art historians to artifacts, albeit African statues or Victorian era silhouettes, of American

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[40] The Museum of African Art is scheduled to open at their new location on the "museum mile" in the Fall of 2012.

history. In *Letter from a Black Girl*, Black Girl challenges the privileges history grants the colonizer/master:

> NOW that youve forgotten how you like your coffee and why you raised your pious fist to the sky, and the reason for your stunning African Art collection, and the war we fought together, and the promises you made me and the laws we rewrote, I am left here alone to recreate My WHOLE HISTORY without benefit of you, my compliment, my enemy, my oppressor, my Love. (Walker Fig. 3)

The letter is addressed to the "hypocritical fucking Twerp" who, after the "war [they] fought together" and "the laws [they] rewrote," piously went on to write a history without Black Girl. At the heart of Black Girls torrid retelling of the history of the Americas lies the intimacy that ties Black Girl to her "complement," her "enemy," her "oppressor," and, perhaps, more strikingly, her "Love." This violent dependent relationship defines Black Girl as much as it defines the "fucking Twerp." But, it is through Black Girl knowledge of "how [he] likes his coffee" that Black Girl lays claim to the Americas and unlocks the Dionysian abyss that lies just below the facade of museums. In Black Girl's provenance, the walls of the museum, meant to hold and protect the historicized artifacts of European progress, now expose the "nasty thoughts" contained in the histories neatly archived by western civilization. Freed from the impunity of European provenance, the "stunning African Art collection" is returned to the history of the Black Diaspora reminding the "fucking Twerp" of his past misdeeds and that his history does not exist without her.

Cutting in the Black

In the U.S., the silhouette reached its pinnacle of popularity with the arrival of the French artist Auguste Edouart (1789-1861), who transformed the silhouette from a craft into a highly sought after art form. In *A Group Silhouette Portrait* (1836) (fig. 3), Edouart captures the domestic vision of the Victorian drawing room and its corresponding reification of gendered roles of the 19th-century upper class. In this portrait, the men stand at the left side of the frame immersed in conversation, while the women and children take up the rest of the scene. As is the tradition of the home, the four adult women dominate the space of the drawing room: one looks out the window, representing the role of the older woman; one reaches towards a young girl, tending to motherly duties; and the two remaining figures greet each other, performing their limited social duties. The children in the silhouette also inhabit their gendered social roles: the girls stand by the women, while the boys, toys in hand, stand in conversation mimicking the adult men.

With the exception of a few pieces, Edouart's long career as a silhouette maker is marked by an abundance of serene images of domestic life. As opposed to the confined space of the Victorian drawing room, Edouart's *South Sea Islanders* (1826-1861) (Fig. 4) portrays indigenous men amongst a lush landscape of mountains interrupted by a body of water. At the center of the silhouette are two men: one has fallen to the ground while the other is about to club him. To the left of the fighting men, at a distance, a man plays a wind instrument while two men dance before him. The rest of the silhouette is populated by native men. Some wear feathers on their heads and all, with the exception of the musician, carry spears or clubs. Although this silhouette was created in the mid-19th century, Edouart produces well-known images of natives imposed through colonial contact literature: the land is presented as ripe for European conquest and

indigenes as disorganized and primitive. By placing the fighting men at the center of the silhouette and assigning them rudimentary tools, *South Sea Islanders* taps into the savagery assigned to indigenous people through European colonialism. Of interest is the absence of native women in *South Sea Islanders.* While the native female dress would have been too shocking for the cultured walls of the drawing room, it also suggests the danger for patriarchal rule by the role native women inhabited in cultures that did not collaborate with the strict 19th century moral codes. Compared to the Victorian drawing room, from window treatments, to gender specific portrayal of the European society, *South Sea Islanders* represents the chaotic world of savage people. With this portrait, Edouart demonstrates a deviation from his successful career as a silhouette artist. Perhaps because Edouart worked on commission, the well-heeled space of Victorian society depicted in the majority of his silhouettes is free of the presence of both natives and slaves that populated the world outside of the drawing rooms that displayed them.

The clothing and artifacts of the Victorian era captured in Edouart's silhouettes allow for a historical reading of his work. In the same fashion, Walker's silhouettes depend on the spectator to recognize gendered and racialized artifacts gathered from the 19th century to the present. Unlike the typical silhouette which runs from the size of a cameo, worn as jewelry, to the size of a small painting, Walker's silhouettes are room size tableaux whose sheer size aggressively draws the spectator into Black Girl's world. Walker's choice to produce silhouettes at such a large scale speaks to the immensity of the history which, through the fictional Black Girl, or her other aliases, Negress and Nigger Wench, she looks to disrupt. Upon first seeing Walker's silhouettes, the art historian Gwendolyn Dubois Shaw writes, "Were these elegant black silhouettes actually doing the horrible and ghastly things that I imagined, or was I projecting my

own nasty thoughts onto them?" (4). Indeed, the ghastly images that confront the spectator have the power to shame but also have the power to disarm, if momentarily, white cultural hegemony. The racialized sexual depravity found in Walker's silhouettes, from a Black woman performing fellatio on President George Washington, to Black children being sodomized, forces the spectator, as Dubois Shaw argues, into seeing the unspeakable.

The silhouette has a devious history in racial anthropology. In *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (2005), Dubois Shaw searches for the racialized precedents to Walker's silhouettes and turns to the 18th-century theory of physiognomy expounded by the Swiss German scientist Johann Casper Lavater. Tracing the cast shadow of subjects' heads, Lavater produced silhouettes that he referred to as shades. Unlike an artist's rendition of a portrait, Lavater believed that a shade held "the key to a subject's character, one that might be gleaned more accurately from its essential reportorial form than from the potentially obfuscating objectivity of a painting" (Dubois Shaw 20-1). Lavater studied the contours created by the edges of the shade because from these he could glean, "'the moral code inscribed in the human form'" that "reveal a person's natural and 'national' character" (qtd. Dubois Shaw 20). Dubois Shaw argues that Lavater's pseudo-science discarded the subject's interiority to study the unmediated access to the negative space created by the drawn edges. This afforded him the freedom to "confound and conflate complex racial and narrative representation" (Dubois Shaw 21). In Lavater's work, which was an early form of phrenology, Dubois Shaw registers the process of racial profiling where the "spectator/reader" fills the blank space created by the shade with "whatever ideological baggage" they brought to the experience (22). In Lavater, Dubois Shaw

sees how the negative space created by silhouettes is filled with the gender, racial and national expectations of the spectator.

The shades created by Lavater were strongly dependent on the narrative imposed after its creation, but the silhouette also yields to the manipulation of the artist. To study the role of the artist, Dubois Shaw turns to the self-portrait of the early 19th century mixed-race artists Moses Williams who used the Physiognotrace device to capture his portrait. This machine, created by his former owner and then employer, the painter Charles Willson Peale, allowed Williams to emboss silhouettes on paper. Williams ignored the trace lines produced by the machine and with scissors altered the imprinted length of his hair, changing its texture. Dubois Shaw argues that while "Williams's African blood remain to dominate his facial features," it is his European heritage that he highlights by the anglicized hair that "connotes stereotypical tropes of whiteness rather than blackness" (Dubois Shaw 25). Dubois Shaw argues that by altering the appearance of his hair, Williams's portrait speaks to the anxiety and confusion of recently freed Black men in the dominant white culture of the 19th century (25). Much like in the act of writing, in the act of manipulating the embossed image, Dubois Shaw sees Williams alteration as a triumph over the racist culture that control his image (25). Williams does not rid his portrait of his history as a slave, but, by overriding the traced image recorded by the machine, Williams gained agency over "his representation in the public sphere" (25). It is through this visual representation that Williams takes an active role in defining his historical place in U.S. history.

Into the Abyss: The Unauthorized Story of the Americas

Dictating the collective national memory is one of the many privileges granted to the oppressor, but Black Girl is intent on telling the American story from a different perspective. In

World's Exposition (1997) (fig. 6) a confounding series of images begins to unravel a historical reference to the Atlantic slave trade. In the far left, a white man howls in pain while holding up one leg. Above him a Black woman hangs from a tree limb by her tail. With the exception of two bangles on one arm and a beaded bracelet around her ankle, she is nude. In her hands she holds paint brushes and is defecating on the scene below her. At a distance, below the defecating Black woman, a white man stands before a large pile of excrements. The white man looks over his shoulder at the figure of a Black woman dancing. She is bare breasted and wearing a skirt made of bananas, an image reminiscent of Josephine Baker. The dancer holds in one hand a fan and on the other a mask. In the foreground of the image, directly below the raining feces, a white man holds a naked Black boy by the neck. The positioning of the child, whose penis is visible, gives the impression that he is both being choked and sodomized. The boy's mouth is open with his tongue sticking out about to catch the feces that rains upon him. Behind them, a fully dressed Black woman, whose posture suggests the movement of a lithe dancer, holds a pick used to stab the white man on the neck. Blood spurts from his wound, while the hammer she used to burry the pick in his neck has broken and its head falls behind her. An arm, belonging to the white man stabbed in the neck, holds a quill pen and floats above the hammer. Both objects are set to fall upon a white child suckling on the pendulous breasts of the Black woman who holds him/her. Unconcerned with the floating arm and hammer head and wearing only a frayed skirt that ends above her thick calves, the breast feeding Black woman walks towards the lithe dancer. On the far left, hanging upside down from a tree branch by her knees, is a white woman. Her skirt hangs over her head exposing her body to the small Black child poking at her genitals with a stick. Her long hair is loose and in her left hand she holds a ream of bananas, while from her right hand a

peeled banana falls. Below her, on one knee, is a Black man offering a token to the white woman.

The figures that populate the world exposition—bestial representation of the Black woman hanging from a tree by her tail, the lecherous white man molesting and choking a Black child, the murderous slave, the mammy, the white woman exposing her genitalia to a Black child and the Black man seeking her approval—all collide in a perverse exposition. In the 19th century, and well in the mid-20th century, world fairs displayed both human zoos and technological advances from participating nations. Human zoos displayed natives from Africa, Oceania and the Americas in replicas of their natural habitat. Used to demonstrate, through cultural differences, the superiority of European culture, human zoos were popular in France, England, Spain, Portugal and the U.S., countries whose modernity ensued through, and in the case of the U.S., were created by, the Atlantic slave trade. The 19th-century tradition of human zoos is tied to the popularity of "Negro Art" in the 20th-century by referencing one of the most infamous displayed "natives," Saarjite Baartman through the presence of Josephine Baker. Better known as Hottentot Venus, Baartman toured England and France for five years until her death. Her legacy is marked by her dismembered genitalia which was set in wax and used to display the inherent primitive nature of African women's sexuality. Baker, an American expatriate living in France, is known for taking the stage at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris wearing a skirt made of plastic bananas strung together and not much else. She performed the banana dance on a stage decorated to represent a jungle with bare-chested young black men wearing shorts lounging around as a white man, fully dressed in safari gear, watched her dance. It is not my intent to suggests that Baker and Baartman are compatible historical figures. After all Baartman did not

choose to go on stage, and Baker was not a slave. Baker as the first Black woman to star in a major motion picture broke through race barriers, but the roles she inhabited on both film and stage tied her to the spectacle of the hypersexualized Black body of human zoos.

World fairs were also a platform to increase trade between imperial nations. Held in England, the Great Exhibition of Works of Industries of all Nations of 1851 was wildly successful, but, along with high ticket sales, it also brought criticism to England for its dependency on raw materials from other nations (Purbrick 154). While cotton was one of India's largest exports, England's textile industry was also dependent on the cotton produced in the U.S. through slave labor (Purbrick 154). Cotton was not the only export from the Americas, but sugar, coffee and exotic fruits were also important commodities produced through slave labor in the Caribbean. In *World Exposition,* Black Girl historicizes world fairs by donning the primitive garb, celebrated through human zoos, and painting the violence inherent in European and European American technological advances. The defecating figure and the pile of excrement, a repeating motif in Walker's silhouettes, addresses the vulgarity and savagery rationalized as progress narratives by the nations that participated in world fairs. The violent dependency between Black and white figures is foregrounded by the position of the subjects that frame the silhouette: on the left a Black woman hangs above a white man, and on the right a white woman hangs above a Black man on the right. In Black Girl's retelling of world fairs, she curates a new exposition that places white and Black people in the natural habitat of colonialism. Walker's *World Exposition* is a human zoo that challenges the "exhibition" of colonized peoples by exposing the barbarity of Western culture that is tied to structures of nation-states.

Black Girl is not content with only disavowing progress narratives derived through colonialism. In *Gone: An Historical Romance of Civil War as it Occurred Between the Dusky Thighs of a Negress and Her Heart* (1994) (Fig.7), she tackles the subject of many U.S. American novels representing the idyllic myth of Black slaves content with living on the plantation. Set under a romantic moon and framed by trees heavy with moss, Negress looks on in despair as her white lover romances a white woman. At the far left of the silhouette stands the perfect image of romance: a white woman in 19th-century dress leaning in for a kiss from a dapper white man dressed in military regalia equipped with a sword. The white woman receives support from the extra pair of legs that peek out from underneath her dress. The sword worn by the white man points directly at the buttocks of a naked child who offers a dead swan to the Negress. Using her elongated legs as a boat, Negress lays stagnant in a body of water, gesturing with one hand towards the couple, while the other rests on her hip. Next to the floating Negress, is an islet on top of which stand two children: a white boy whose pants are pulled down and a young Black girl performing fellatio on him. The white boy gestures with both hands towards a Black boy, with an engorged monstrous size penis, floating above them. Below the floating Black boy, a young Black girl raises one leg as two babies fall out from under her skirt. At the far right of the silhouette is a Black woman, broom in hand, with exaggerated lips sitting on the shoulders of a well-dressed man whose head is not visible.

Gone references the edenic plantation life that is the stage for Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel, *Gone with the Wind*. As the title of Walker's silhouette indicates, instead of the U.S. Civil War, the war that takes place in *Gone* occurs between Negress's thighs. In place of the complacent and faithful Mammy of the Pulitzer Prize winning novel, Negress, through the

position of her hands, gestures to two possible readings of the star-crossed lovers. The first is a failed sexual relationship between her and the Southern gentleman. In the novel, Mammy is an asexual character whose relationships with white men are metered through Scarlett O'Hara's sexual liaisons. Scarlett is married three times, the last to Rhett Butler, the dashing Yankee, whose character is transformed from an outsider to a nostalgic symbol of southern gentry. At the beginning of the novel, Rhett is interested in profiting from the war, but by the end, Rhett is jailed for killing a Black man because, "He was uppity to a lady, and what else could a Southern gentleman do?" (Mitchell 623). Indeed, in Southern society gentlemen were required to be cavalier to ladies, but not to Black women. While the novel does not suggest a sexual relationship between Mammy and Rhett, or any of the other white male characters, the frequency with which Black women were raped in the plantation suggests otherwise.

The second reading of the star-crossed lovers emerges as a failed relationship between white and Black women. While Negress with one hand gestures with yearning towards the white man, the hand she places on her hip indicates exasperation at Scarlett's betrayal. Mitchell, an Atlanta native, spent years researching and fact checking the history that she draws on for *Gone With the Wind*. But, as in the tradition of early feminist writing, she fails to register the needs or desires of Black women. In the novel, Mammy is the perfect house slave. She places the needs of the white children she cares for above her own and, even after the war ended, she chose not to leave the plantation. In Mitchell's novel the freed house slaves are ready and willing to support Scarlett's life without thought about their own future. At the end of the novel, after multiple failed romantic relationships with white men, Scarlett closes the door to her plantation home with the confidence that she possesses the strength to move forward. Scarlett fails to recognize

that her ascent to independence and her future is dependent on the loyalty of Mammy and the other house slaves that stayed after emancipation.

While *Gone* directly references Mitchell's novel, the rejection of Black women by white lovers and the tension between Black and white women are themes found throughout the literary production from the Plantation Zone. In the 1948 Martinican novel, *I am a Martinican Woman,* by Mayotte Capécia, the protagonist falls in love with a white man who refuses to marry her, leaving her to fend for herself and their children at the outskirts of society. In the 1996 Puerto Rican novel, *The House on the Lagoon*, by Rosario Ferré, the male protagonist has multiple relationships with Black women including the Black maid who lives in the basement of his home. Much like those in Capécia's novel, the children produced from his multiple liaisons with Black women are left in the margins of white society. A repeating theme in Ferré's oeuvre is the relationship between white and Black women on the island. In her popularly anthologized short story, "When Women Love Men," a white woman of high society is bested by her husband's concubine who is a Black prostitute. Upon his death he splits his fortune between these two women and the white wife goes mad. In Cirilio Villaverde's 1882 Cuban novel, *Cecilia Valdés*, the protagonist, Cecilia, a light-skinned *mulata*, is the bastard child of a rich plantation owner. She grows up not knowing her father and falls in love with her half-brother. Much like Negress, her white lover abandons her, and, like Black Girl, she enacts a murderous revenge. The contentious relationship between white and Black women, and the murderous desire of scorned lovers found in *Gone* also populates the literary histories of Plantation Zone societies.

In both *World's Exposition* and *Gone,* Black Girl unravels narratives of conquest that celebrate white supremacy as progress. Entrenched in the explicit violence contained in Walker's

silhouettes, it is difficult to find a redeeming image that provides hope for the future. In a series of text on paper, Walker writes, “If this is what’s in me, then no one is safe.” Indeed, Black Girl does not only take her oppressor down, she crumbles with him as a reminder that the abyss leaves no one unmarred. While there are no characters in these silhouettes to save us from Black Girl’s wrath, I want to turn to two oft repeated motifs in Walker’s work. First, through lactating Black breasts Walker offers a vision of Black female identity that challenges Black stereotypes emerging from European travel narratives. Second, through the swan Walker addresses the absence of innocence allotted to children of the enslaved in the Americas.

Feeding From the Charitable Black Breast

Walker posits a double meaning to lactating Black women in her silhouettes. In *Camptown Ladies* (1998) (detail fig.8) and *Slavery, Slavery!* (1997) (detail fig. 9) Walker addresses the inexhaustible bounty mined from enslaved Black female bodies. In these silhouettes, fertility signifies, as discussed in Chapter 1, the double labor assigned to enslaved Black women: their productive labor as field workers alongside men, and their reproductive labor that produced slaves for the plantation. In *Camptown Ladies,* a Black woman, naked, but for a bustle and shackles that bind her arms together, holds up a newborn child who urinates down into the open mouth of young white woman kneeling before her. Standing with her legs close together, the Black woman emerges from the ground as if she were a tree. From her breasts, milk spurts out like water from a fountain. Behind her, a young girl, wearing a bra made of metal cups, grows from the ground offering a carrot. By portraying Black female bodies as crops, Walker addresses the mythologized strength of Black women imposed through Atlantic slave

economies.[41] In a similar fashion, in *Slavery, Slavery!*, a Black woman's body serves as a fountain. Standing on a section of grass held up by a monkey who sits on top of a skull on the base of a fountain, liquid jets out from her mouth, vagina and breasts. The fountain harmonizes multiple elements of European colonialism: the skull alludes to the cultural death of Africa for the enslaved that crossed the Atlantic in slave ships; the monkey represents the historical path assigned by European philosophy to Africans as unevolved savages; and, the Black woman grows from the Earth as the utmost symbol of white wealth that could have only been attained through planter's economy.

In Walker's work, lactating breasts also express Black women's resistance to the appropriation of their reproductive capacities. To discuss breasts as a site of resistance, I first turn to the ancient Roman tale of "Cimon and Pero." Originally recorded by Pliny the Elder in *Natural History* (57 AD) a woman visits her mother who has been sentenced to death by starvation:

> Of filial affection there have, it is true, been unlimited instances all over the world, but one at Rome with which the whole of the rest could not compare. A plebeian woman of low position who had just given birth to a child, had permission to visit her mother who had been shut up in prison as a punishment, and was always searched in advance by the doorkeeper to prevent her carrying in any food. She was detected giving her mother sustenance from her own breasts. In consequence of this marvel the daughter's pious affection was rewarded by the other's release and both were awarded maintenance for life and the place where it

[41]In Chapter 1 I discuss in detail the economic foundation of the U.S. through the matrilineal genealogy of the enslaved Black female body.

> occurred was consecrated to the Goddess concerned, a temple dedicated to Filial Affection. (qtd. Yalom 25)

In *A History of the Breast*, the literary critic, Marilyn Yalom notes that at the time the story of "Cimon and Pero" was recorded, breast feeding was at a decline in affluent Roman households (25). Pliny, and others, counseled Roman women, particularly mothers of future high officials, that breast feeding was their civic duty (Yalom 25). Pero's selfless act of saving her mother did not assign women power, but, instead, filial piety affirmed women's bodies were for the benefit of the state. Centuries later, the story of Pero's selfless act will be adopted to expound Christian virtue of charity (Yalom 25). In the Christian version, a popular theme in Renaissance paintings, Cimon undergoes a sex change, and Pero, to great danger to herself, now feeds her father from her breasts (Yalom 25). In Antwerp artists Petrus Paulus Rubens's painting, *Cimon and Pero* (1630) (Fig. 10), Pero, fully dressed, with the exception of her exposed breast, leans into her father's body. Wearing only a long cloth draped over his hips covering his genitals, Cimon's hands are chained behind his back as he feeds from her breast. Pero, whose body is positioned slightly higher than her father's, looks over her shoulder, to both avert her gaze from her father suckling at her breast and looking out for guards. To the right of the image we can see two guards looking through the barred windows. The subjects's positions in Rubens's painting is a repeated pattern, as seen in the works of the Dutch painter Dirck van Baburen's *Cimon and Pero* (1618-1620) (fig. 11) and the French painter Jean-Baptiste Greuze's *Roman Charity* (1767) (fig. 12). In van Baburen's painting, Cimon lies naked with his hands chained behind his back, as Pero offers him her breast averting her gaze from her father's body. In Greuze's *Roman Charity* the father's hands are not tied but instead lay palms side up on his lap. The position of Cimon's

hands in these three paintings are important because, although old and malnourished, he still present a sexual threat to his daughter. As I argue in Chapter 1, patriarchal states have no use for the bond between mother and daughter. The French philosopher Luce Irigaray argues, "under the rule of patriarchy the girl is separated from her mother" and is "transplanted into the genealogy of her husband" (*Sexes and Genealogy* 2). Women, as Irigaray argues, in patriarchal states, occupy the role of sister and wives. The bond between mothers and daughters must be broken for daughters to love their husbands and provide their husbands with heirs and the state with citizens.[42] In changing the sex of Cimon, the mother no longer holds value to Christianity because, as an old woman, she can no longer produce children.

Co opted, although metered through incest, the myth of Cimon and Pero allows for a bond to exist between father and daughter to demonstrate that in Christianity the female body is for the consumption of men. In Rubens, van Baburen and Greuze's paintings the breast is allotted a momentary deviation from women's normative role, but, because Pero is fully clothed, and her body is just out of reach from Cimon's hands, this transgressive act is sanctioned by the state as it represents the highest form of child devotion. I propose a different reading from both the Roman and Christian purpose of Pero's breasts. If unmetered by Romans or Christians, the power of Pero's selfless act apportions the female body a role outside of patriarchy that is internalized within the breast. This internal power rejects gender construction of women's bodies, to support patriarchy, that normalizes the function of breasts. In opposition to the limited role the state assigns to women, breasts open a space that deviates from the structure that marks women as vessels for a patriarchal genealogy. In other words, when women refuse the role

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[42] In *Speculum of the Other* (1974), Irigaray challenges the phallocentrism of Freud's assertion that call for a break in the bond between mother and daughter.

assigned to their breasts outside of their culturally constructed function, Black women, through their breasts, stop serving patriarchy because they no longer, if only momentarily, conforms to gendered norms of motherhood. As such, breasts resist the biological language that dictates their normal function within culturally constructed gender identities.

In *Camptown Ladies* and *Slavery, Slavery!*, breasts as fountains represents the normative role assigned to Black women's reproductive capacity. But, in *An Abbreviated Emancipation* (Fig. 13) and *The End of Uncle Tom* (Fig. 14), Walker deviates from this representation of Black breasts. Similar to the incestuous tension found in "Cimon and Pero," under the shroud of the hypersexualized Black body, the subversive act of lactating breasts is obfuscated by sexual tension. As opposed to *Camptown Ladies* and *Slavery, Slavery!* where milk flows freely from Black women's breasts, in *An Abbreviated Emancipation* and *The End of Uncle Tom* there is no visual evidence of the milk. If present, the milk flows from nipple to mouth unmetered by the labor demands of planter's economy. Also similar to the pictorial depiction of Cimon, in the aforementioned Renaissance paintings, is the position of the Black women's hands. In *The End of Uncle Tom*, the woman at the apex of the triangle gestures with one hand, palm side up, to the woman to her left who, in turn, holds a basket away from her body facilitating the third woman's access to her breasts. Their unbound hands offer their breasts in nurturing gestures that elevates the sexual tension found in adult lactation to filial affection. Their act of rebellion, using their bodies for their own benefit as opposed to their masters, occurs openly as they go about their daily routines. In these silhouettes, the internalized power opened by the breast as a site of contestation, rejects the gender and racial constructions of slave economy that labeled their reproductive means as property of their masters.

The Swan: Wicked Girls at War

As property, enslaved Black women were at the disposal of their masters. In *Letter from a Black Girl*, Black girl regards the sexual relationship she held with her oppressor as a "peculiar institution [...] because there was no other foreseeable alternative" (Fig. 3). Sex between Black Girl and her oppressor is caught in a double-bind that appears as both forced, "what you proceeded to do to me" and coerced, "what I proceeded to do to you" (Fig. 3). As a tool of oppression, rape was understood to be part of enslaved Black women's lives in the plantation. While the invention of the Black man as rapist will not enter into the American consciousness until after emancipation, the invention of Black women's insatiable animalistic sexual appetite predates to European travel narratives of the 16th century and became an important myth in the institution of slavery.[43] The sexual union between enslaved Black men and women was also dictated by slave economies, and parenthood succumbed to inheritance laws that marked their children as part of the master's property.[44] Laws were created early on in the 17th century to discourage sexual relationships between enslaved Black men and white women. If a white woman chose to marry a Black man, she was mandated into slavery for the length of her husband's life. White men who engaged in sexual relationships with their Black female slaves were not penalized and the children born from these unions were, for the most part, absorbed into the matrix of the plantation.

In Walker's silhouettes miscegenation through rape/coercion is found in the appearance of the swan. Referencing the ancient Greek myth of "Leda and the Swan," where Zeus, intent on

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[43] See Angela Y. Davis's *Women, Race and Class* (1981).

[44]See Jennifer L. Morgan's *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (2004).

having Leda, takes the form of a swan and either rapes or seduces her (whether Leda consented or was raped, does not matter within the structure of this myth). From this union, Helen was born. Half-mortal and half-god, Helen from childhood was marked by her parent's bestial union. Her future, as Helen of Troy, incited men, eager to possess the beauty of someone born from an illicit union, to engage in war. Throughout Walker's oeuvre, swans appear in throes of bestial couplings with Black women. Like Leda, the role Black women play in this animalistic intercourse, could be rape and/or seduction through coercion. Most of the women engaged in sexual contact with the swans signal characteristics found in Black female stereotypes of Jezebel, Mammy and Sapphire. In *An Abbreviated Emancipation (from The Emancipation Approximation)* (2002) (detail Fig. 15) a naked Black woman, whose small firm breasts, thin body and loose hair suggest the stereotype of Jezebel, the pretty light-skinned seductress, is penetrated by a swan while wearing a shackle on one leg. Below her, a swan penetrates the mouth of Black woman, whose corpulent body and clothing suggests the image of the mammy. In another section of this silhouette a Black woman is taken in mid air by a swan (detail) (fig. 16). The Black woman's legs are thrown up in the air while she pulls into her crotch the swan's head with her hands. On the ground, a white man looks up at her holding a dead swan. The position of the swan's neck gives the impression that he is holding his flaccid penis in his hands. In this last image, the willingness demonstrated by the Black woman and the flaccid penis/dead swan alludes to the image of the emasculating Sapphire. Dispelling the myths of the asexual mammy, Walker chooses to utilize all the racialized stereotypes enslaved Black women to demonstrate that they were in constant danger of being coerced/seduced by swans/white men.

Much like Zeus, the swans that populate Walker's silhouettes maintain the sexual debauchery of the Greek god. In these illicit sexual acts with swans, Black women maintain their human form, but, with the exception of the man holding the dead swan, the oppressor is portrayed as animal. This forces the spectator to confront the inherent ideology found in Black bodies and shifts the assumption of Black women's hypersexualized nature onto her oppressor. This transfer of power is limited, Black woman are still engaged in a forced or coerced sexual union, but it places the uncontrollable animal urges on the choices made by the oppressor. They are found raping and/or seducing Black women and producing children who are half-human/half-swan. In *The Emancipation Approximation* (scene 25) (1999-2000) (Fig. 17), a swan lays down while a Black woman performs fellatio. In *No mere words can Adequately reflect the Remorse this Negress feels at having been Cast into such a lowly state by her former Masters and so its with a Humble heart that she brings about their physical Ruin and earthly Demise* (1999) (Fig. 18) a Black woman, in mid-air, is tangled with a swan and she appears to bite down on the swans' head as they both fall fast to the ground. Below them are swans with heads of Black children who are the results of these animalized couplings.

Walker does not spare her spectator from the sexual violence imposed on enslaved Black children. In signing her letter as Black Girl, instead of Negress or Nigger Wench, the treatment of children, a subject included in most of Walker's silhouettes, is foregrounded. From the 17th century until emancipation, Black women's appearance in wills demonstrated that their projected children were included as part of their master's wealth.[45] Enslaved Black women's "increase"

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[45] See Kathleen M. Brown's *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (1996) and Jennifer L. Morgan's *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (2004).

factored into their value and ordained their owners with the omnipotent power to control their bodies from beyond the grave.[46] In her letter, Black Girl reveals that her oppressor assigned her the role of "savior" and his ejaculate, which she refers to as poison, but he "call[s] Life that stringy, sour, white strand [he] called Sacred" (Fig. 3). Black Girl as "savior" is not a redeemer of sin but a vessel in which the omnipotent god of the plantation deposits his "Sacred" sperm. Black Girl's womb is left to carry the poison produced by the master-as-god. From ancient myths to the current debates on creationism, women's bodies are necessary for myths of theodicy as both a vessel for creation and, without proper policing, its demise.

To explore how Black Girl's body functions as the conduit of demise, I turn to the Dominican artist Jorge Pineda. In a 2007 exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum, titled "Infinite Islands: Contemporary Caribbean Art," Pineda included a series of drawings and sculptures of children that "addressed the violence and fear inflicted on innocent citizens of the world[...]by those greedy for wealth and power" (Mosaka 190). *Mambrú* (2006) (Fig. 19), a title that comes from a French children's song about the 18th-century Battle of Malplaquet, consists of nine sculptures of pre-pubescent boys, between the ages of 6-11, dressed in long sleeve shirts and short pants holding machine guns above their shoulders (Mosaka 190). These sculptures, made of wood and covered in metal, are wearing Mexican wrestler's masks made from colorful cloth. Tumelo Mosaka, the exhibit's curator and editor of the accompanying book by the same title, sees the wrestler's masks as sinister and suggestive of both the playfulness found in children and the violence they are forced into when recruited for guerrilla fighting (160). As emphasized by the machine guns, Mosaka suggests that before they reach manhood society equips boys with the

[46] See Morgan

power to protect themselves from external sources of violence. According to Pineda, the children in *Mambrú,* "have been taken away and used as instruments of destruction" (Pineda). The masks, according to Pineda, shields the child soldiers from "the feelings reflected by society" (Pineda).

Alongside *Mambrú* Pineda exhibited a serious of drawings entitled *Niñas locas* (*Mad Little Girls*) (2005-6), (*Sara*, Fig. 20; *Mónica,* Fig. 21; *Isabel II*, Fig. 22; *Claudia*, Fig. 23; *Quisqueya,* Fig. 24; *Belkis,* Fig. 25). As opposed to the sculpture of the young boys—who are fully dressed but whose short pants signify their youth and innocence—the bodies of the pre-pubescent girls in this collection of drawings wear black and white Mexican wrestler's masks, white panties and white Mary Jane shoes. While the boy soldiers stand in attention with their machine guns slung over their shoulders, the mad little girls of Pineda's drawings interact with the dark orbs. Mosaka writes that Pineda,

> juxtaposes the innocence of the young girl's body with a threatening black form that suggests *her* dark side. The mask she wears may be the one we learn to wear as we grow older but may also suggest, as in *Mambrú*, that children, still not fully socialized, can be hardened and cruel when war, poverty, and injustice takes a toll on their lives. (emphasis added) (190)

In his reading of the child soldiers, Mosaka attributes an external source to the violence that threatens their bodies, but, in reading the exposed prepubescent bodies of *Niñas locas*, he assigns the threat as emerging from within her body, "*her* dark side" (emphasis added). The masks worn by the mad little girls also signify a difference. As previously stated, in *Mambrú,* the masks protect the child soldiers from society, but in *Niñas locas* the masks suggest a lack of childhood innocence. While boy soldiers are given the power to hide from and destroy that which they fear,

the mad little girls have only the masks to confront the orbs and they give in to their *dark side*: we see *Mónica* (Fig. 21) enters while *Claudia* (Fig. 23) exits their orb; *Quisqueya* (Fig. 24) exercises power over the orb through a remote control; and *Belkis* (Fig. 25) sucks from her orb. The orbs then are not external to the mad little girls's bodies. Instead, the threat is contained in how the girls's bodies interact with the orbs. This suggests that the masks worn by *Niñas locas* do not function to protect them but to exert control over the dangerous power that is inherent in women's bodies.

Much like Pineda's dark orbs, which reflect women's dark side, the negative space created by the edges of Walker's silhouettes are filled by the spectator with the ideological racial and gender roles inherent in images of Black women's bodies. One of the most haunting figures in Walker's silhouettes is that of a crawling Black child in *Untitled (Milk and Bread)* (1998) (detail Fig. 26). Wearing only a diaper, the girl child, shown in profile, leaks milk from her distended breast. This image is difficult to confront because the pendulous breast signifies the co-optation of Black women's bodies that precedes their birth. The mad Black Girls in Walker's silhouettes are at war with their "dark side" assigned to them by history.

The Stain of History

Reading Walker's work requires that traditional history with its causal tendency take a backseat to the myth building that takes place in her silhouettes. Freed from the trenches of history that confines knowledge to a sequence of events professing moral progress, the spectator is exposed to the tragedy of New World slavery as a concern for the present and not the past. But the spectator can be fickle. In "On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life" (1874), Nietzsche questions how the late 19th-century obsession with history benefited life.

Disillusioned with the historical traditions exemplified by H.G.F. Hegel, Nietzsche labelled history as an illness that paralyzed man. Nietzsche refers to this condition as an inwardness because "where there once had been life now there is only thought" (Pappas 18). In *The Nietzsche Disappointment: Reckoning With Nietzsche's Unkept Promises on Origins and Outcomes* (2005), the American philosopher Nickolas Pappas argues that modern observers see themselves as "more decent human types" because in looking back on "American slavery [...] they are struck by past people's blindness to their own cruelty [...] they give themselves credit for higher moral standards in the act of identifying the slave-owners unreflectiveness" (17). I want to push Pappas's application of Nietzsche's concept of inwardness, produced by a historical trajectory that calls for thought but no action, to our modern construct of U.S. history. Today, the modern observer *rests* on a misconstrued sense of inwardness that breaks with the actions of those ancestors who participated in and benefitted from New World slavery, but, yet, still celebrates the very actions that allowed for nations to be built through the enslavement of Africans.

According to Nietzsche, to cure the illness or inwardness of modern nations, a balance needs to be struck between what historical data ought to be remembered and what ought to be forgotten. In the Americas, the history of slavery is necessary for progress narratives. To forget the history of colonialism is to discard the racist myth about non-European Americans that has driven U.S. politics since the invention of manifest destiny. If the colonization of the Americas and the importation of African slaves were not mandated by a Christian God, then the claims made by the U.S. empire would be seen, at the very least, as a form of terrorism. Instead, what the U.S. has chosen to forget are the consequences to the destruction that ensued from

colonialism. In 2009, Rep. Steve Cohen (D. TN), in a step towards healing the nation of its racist tendencies, drafted the resolution to apologize for the historical treatment of Black Americans by the U.S. government. He referred to slavery and Jim Crow as "stains upon what is the greatest nation on the face of the Earth and the greatest government ever conceived by man" (*npr.org*). Attached to this mea culpa is a reparations disclaimer that warrants this apology to be free of financial responsibility. The recognition of "stains" on "the greatest government" happened six months after the U.S. elected its first Black president, Barack Obama.[47] Stain is a peculiar term for the institution of slavery and Jim Crow. A stain befalls something that already exists, but New World slavery predates the U.S. nation. For this historical amnesia to work, the stain, the history of the Black Diaspora, has to be cleaned off.

Walker's silhouettes offer an alternative to the impossible desire of washing off the stains of our ancestors. In "Kara Walker: Memory and Meaning," Alan Pocaro notes that outside of the privileged class that participates in museum culture and academia, "the average denizen of 21st century America" will not be exposed to Walker's work (*aeqai.com*). Pocaro argues that Walker in attacking old stereotypes is "beating a dead horse" and is "distracting us from the inhumane treatment of the living one" (*aeqai.com*). The inhumane treatment of the past horse or the inhumane condition of the present horse cannot be solved by Walker or any one artist. Instead, even if it is in the limited space of the museum, art gallery or college classroom, Black Girl's letter offers a new way of imagining the history of the Black Diaspora, not as a stain, but as an integral part of the cloth that binds the Americas.

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[47] A couple of months later, the U.S. senate asked President Obama to issue an official apology to Native Americans.

Conclusion: From the Plantation Zone, With Love

She tries to ignore their rude stares, the feeling that to them she represents the charm of the tropics: a colorful dressed woman walking along a sunlit road, her shadow stretching behind her as if she were dragging her history.

Esmeralda Santiago, *America's Dream* (1997)

I come from a place where breath, eyes, memory are one, a place from which you carry your past like the hair on your head.

Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994)

New Century Old Stereotypes

Generated by the Family Leader, an Iowa based group, and signed by Rick Santorum and Michelle Bachmann during their failed bids for the 2012 GOP presidential nomination, "The Marriage Vow: A Declaration of *Dependence* Upon MARRIAGE and FAMILY" is an example of how the U.S. actively works to erase the history of crimes committed against enslaved Africans and their children. This document called for a commitment from the GOP presidential contenders to recognize that "the Institution of Marriage in America is in great crisis" and that they are committing to protect the Judeo-Christian construct of family "upon which [their] concepts of Creator-endowed human rights, racial justice and gender equality all depend"(*thinkprogress.org*). Defining marriage as "between one man and one woman," and with the goal of protecting "innocent children, vulnerable women, the rights of fathers, the stability of families, and the liberties of all American citizens under our republican form of government," this document demonstrates the anxiety of conservative U.S. Americans felt after three years under the presidency of the first African American president, Barack Obama, and the social changes sweeping the nation as individual states begin to recognize same sex marriages (*thinkprogress.org*).

While this document represents a myriad of problematic statement that attempts to strip U.S. citizens of their human and civil rights, I'm interested in how it allows for a re-imagining of the Black family structure. Citing a 2005 article published on an online journal for a private non-profit socially conservative organization, *Institute for American Values,* the first bullet point of "The Marriage Vow" reads as follows:

> Slavery had a disastrous impact on African-American families, yet sadly a child born into slavery in 1860 was more likely to be raised by his mother and father in a two-parent household than was an African American baby born after the election of the USA's first African-American President. (*thinkprogress.org*)

The historical inaccuracies in this document rehash post-Civil War stories of the nation. The abolition of slavery led to the wide belief that Black families were better off under the auspices of slavery. Without slavery or the control of an institution like marriage, African Americans—similar to the Africans that populate Hegel's imagination in the *Philosophy of World History*—do not understand the value of freedom and behave in ways that are damaging to the moral and financial structure of the U.S. Because African Americans do not adhere to the traditional Hegelian concept of the family, the government is burden with their lascivious and immoral behavior.

It is of no surprise that this document denies the institutionalized treatment of enslaved Black women and men. In not recognizing that the "two-parent household" was a privilege limited to the free and not the enslaved, denies the laws and social practices that made slavery in the Americas so distinct. The double labor enforced upon enslaved Black women was necessary for the production of American wealth, but to recognize the obscene logic of the planter's

economy that at once devalued Black women and depended on them would require social conservatives to recognize that that the founding morals of the U.S. are in contradiction to Judeo-Christian doctrine. *The Holy Bible* sets specific parameters for the engagement of marriage and children. According to the gospel of Peter, in marriage,

> Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (*King James Version*, Peter 3:7)

Husbands are meant to give "honour unto the wife" who is considered "the weaker vessel." But, as records of slave labor demonstrate, the institution of slavery denied enslaved Black men the duty to give honor to enslaved Black women and enslaved Black women were not afforded the role of the weaker vessel. Furthermore, slaveowners who entered into the sanctity of Judeo-Christian marriages engaged in the systematic rape or sexual coercion of enslaved Black women. The denial of this history refurbishes Black stereotypes that emerged from New World slavery into the 21st century. As I argue in Chapter 1, myths about African women's indestructibility emerging from travel narratives have withstood the test of times and are still in effect. In the 20th-century the welfare queen emerged from a combination of jezebel, sapphire and mammy stereotypes and this in turn has given to its most recent manifestation the baby-mama. In this new stereotype, Black women are lascivious, always pregnant and dependent on government hand-outs.

"The Marriage Vow" argues for "social protection" from lascivious behavior that has "'debased the currency' of marriage." The last bullet point states:

> Social protections, especially for women and children, have been evaporating as we have collectively "debased the currency" of marriage. This debasement continues as a function of adultery; "quickie divorce;" physical and verbal spousal abuse; non-committal co-habitation; exemplary infidelity and "unwed cheating" among celebrities, sports figures and politicians; anti-scientific bias which holds, in complete absence of empirical proof, that non-heterosexual inclinations are genetically determined, irresistible and akin to innate traits like race, gender and eye color; as well as anti-scientific bias which holds, against all empirical evidence, that homosexual behavior in particular, and sexual promiscuity in general, optimizes individual or public health. (*thinkprogress.org*)

Under the guise of protection, the authors of this document are concerned with the well being of women and children, the weakest vessels in our society. Marriage is offered as the solution to poverty and its opposite "sexual promiscuity," "adultery," "quickie divorce," "spousal abuse" and homosexuality are presented as an attack on the moral fiber of this duplicitous nation. Gender and race are defined as "genetically determined" as opposed to culturally and socially constructed and homosexuality and "promiscuity" exist in a bias "anti-scientific" realm. This document is a response to the disruption to patriarchy. Race, class, gender and sexual orientation meet in an archaic abuse of scientific principle and Judeo-Christian doctrine. But, this is the history of the New World. As I argue in Chapter 1, for the heteropatriarchal structure of nation states to maintain its integrity, the hierarchy of white supremacy must be protected.

At its core, "The Marriage Vow" is a direct attack on President Obama. It points to the instability of Black families and, as such, the instability or unpreparedness of a Black president

to assume one of the most powerful position in the U.S. As a son of a white U.S. American woman and a Kenyan father, Obama should be free from the matrilineal genealogy of Black diasporic cultures of the Americas. But, as I argue in the Introduction, being categorized as Black in the U.S. automatically carries the inheritance of the metaphorical Black female body. The authors of this piece cite the *Moynihan Report* to support their claims that the problems endemic to Black people stems from the failure of Black women to adhere to the Judeo-Christian model of the family. The denial of Black women's history in the Americas is necessary because the U.S. cannot at once cite the founding fathers as the moral compass of the nation and recognize that they forced the enslaved to behave in manners that contradict gender roles developed from Judeo-Christian holy scriptures. If, since the inception of New World slavery, the historical Black female body has been demonized in the Americas, what has been done to break this continuous unrelenting cycle?

Daughter of the Welfare Queen

As a teenager, I was in constant fear of turning into another statistic: a pregnant Puerto Rican high school drop-out on welfare. While proper motherhood is highly valued in Puerto Rican culture, my sexuality was policed by family, by teachers, by the church, by the media and —most importantly—by myself. My mother, who first became a mother at 16, held herself as an example of the dangers of teenage motherhood. Her life was dictated by the demands of single parenthood and the poverty she endured as a colonized subject in Ponce, Puerto Rico, and later, as part of the herd of Puerto Rican immigrants living alongside other demonized ethnic groups in the ghettos of the Bronx, NY. In these neighborhoods, when inevitably a teenage girl became pregnant, my mother took the opportunity to lecture her daughters on the perils of women's

sexuality. Her lectures contained our family history: a cycle of poverty that began with a lack of basic health care and education, child labor and single parenthood. My mother, like her mother and her grandmother, had been trapped in perpetual poverty. For my generation, breaking-out of this cycle was dependent on not producing yet another child into the welfare system.

To avoid becoming the sensational welfare queen of the Reagan Revolution, the young women in my family were to abstain from sex. Not because God would punish us, as we were taught at church, but because our reproductive powers threatened to trap us and our children in a concrete world of poverty, drugs and violence. Growing up as children of welfare queens, we had to contend with how our bodies were formed by statistics of gang violence, drug use, criminal behavior and irresponsible sexuality. While the young men in our community had to contend with racialized limits imposed by the state bent on incarcerating them, the duty of children fell upon women and, in my family, women bared the brunt alone. We were to be pious, even if this piety spoke of a Christian faith warped through the demands of the state. We were to behave contrary to the stereotype of the welfare queen created by racially charged statistics that worked to ignore the lack of educational programs and the possibility of progress for poor people of color living in the U.S. and its territories. To behave otherwise would bring shame not only to our family but also to Puerto Rico. My childhood is not unique to working class Puerto Ricans or other working class people of color in the U.S. By 1982, when my family migrated to the U.S., the war waged by the Reagan Revolution and the media against poor Black and Hispanic women was in full swing. Conservative politicians and sensationalist news media coverage depicted poor women of color dependent on welfare as intent on destroying the U.S. economy and the moral integrity of the nation through their promiscuity and laziness. The widely held belief that welfare

provides a better life than working for money ignored the stark reality of many U.S. Americans whose quality of life is improved by welfare but the economic security afforded through a middle-class status stays out of reach.

Women of color who are able to attain the security of wealth and power are still burdened with having to disprove Black female stereotypes. The French philosopher Luce Irigaray argues that to combat the effects of phallogocentrism ubiquitous to nation states, women must develop a language that allows them subjectivity through their gendered experiences. Irigaray also argues that to debunk the power of patriarchy gained through religious doctrine, images of mother and daughter should be placed in all public spaces and homes to enforce a new way of viewing the role women play in society. While she argues for the mother/daughter dyad, I argue for enforcing an image that embraces Black womanhood outside of stereotypes. Both Michelle Obama, as the first African American First Lady of the United States, and Sonia Sotomayor, as the first Puerto Rican Justice of the Supreme Court, can serve as figures to construct positive images of women of color. Unfortunately, in the news media, the reactions spurred by and through Black stereotypes render readings of their physical bodies that belie their achievements. The amount of time spent describing Michelle Obama's body, from her muscular arms to her "large" hips, and the amount of time spent discussing Sotomayor's tendency to lose her patience, all speak to the matriarchal fear assigned to women of the Black Diaspora. Ultimately, for women of color to finally break from the stereotypes, the legacy of the historical Black female body needs to be honored not only by Black cultures but by American cultures at large. By turning to the literary and artistic production of the Plantation Zone, Americans can begin to re-imagine the history of the Americas through what is perhaps the first authentic expression of American identity.

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