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**“AND WHO HAS THE BODY?”
The Historical Significance of African American Funerary Display**

By

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ABSTRACT

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African Americans have consistently asserted their humanity. In so doing, they have both preserved cultural connections to their African pasts and struggled to express their unique ethnic identities within the United States. Consequently, identity formation, a large part of that struggle, represents a constant in African American history. Historians have investigated many cultural manifestations of African American identity formation. However, African American funerary display remains a neglected area of research in African American identity formation. In this study, African American funerary display includes all familial interactions after the death of a community member from removal of the physical remains, arrangements for the display of the corpse, and final interment of the body. This process of death care offers one history of African Americans' identity formation.[∞] The consistency of African American funerary display in U.S. history gives evidence that African Americans chose funerals to symbolically express their ethnic

[∞] This study began as a graduate seminar paper for “The History of Black Professions in the 20th Century” at Michigan State University with the John A. Hannah Professor of History, Darlene Clark Hine in Fall 1998. Dr. Hine had recently published her book, *Speak Truth to Power: Black Professional Class in United States History*. (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc, 1996). The paper grew from an attempt to redress the neglected community roles and service relationships of African American funeral directors with their non-elite clientele, Black families, into a call for historical revision.

identities. Therefore, the researcher contends that African American funerary display is a historical record, a text of self definition.

This study revises African American historiography by claiming the centrality of funerary display in African American identity formation. This study also incorporates original methodology and an innovative conceptual model, *community clients*, to account for how African American funeral directors and their *community clients* have negotiated collaborative representations of Black identity via their funerary displays. Traditional methods for historicizing the U.S. funeral industry and professional death care providers, funeral directors, do not capture familial functions within African American funerary display. In funerary display, Black families and funeral directors could together “speak truth to power.”

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To the memories of Emmett and Mamie Till—
Although their lives cannot be replaced nor our thanks heard,
There are still opportunities to

“...give what you have...”
2 Corinthians 8:12

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INTRODUCTION

Work and Identity: Literature Review of African American History

Neither the first group to be enslaved in the New World nor people who must claim slavery as their initiation to the Western Hemisphere, the trans-Atlantic slave trade, nonetheless, distinguishes the genesis of African American identity.¹ Neophyte histories of the African peoples dispersed throughout the United States unsurprisingly chose the “peculiar institution” as the defining and ubiquitous context of the African Diaspora in the Americas. Provocative as much as problematic, these early studies, for example, presumed naturalness of primary characters such as slaveholders. As a result, presuppositions concerning control over slave labor became the historical axis of the ante-bellum South. These narratives about subjugated Black bodies, exploitations of enslaved workers, in the interests of powerful men marred the early stages of U.S. slavery historiography. Such uncritical interpretations of the antebellum period made involuntary or slave labor synonymous with being an African American person. In these historical records, African Americans’ work conditions came to represent African American people generally. Consequently, classical histories of slavery in the United States created fictive African American identities.²

Historical reconstruction of the agency of African descendants in the United States means correcting this fallacious collapse of work as ethnic identity. My study of death care, for example, shows how enslaved people used funerals to transfigure enslaved individuals into “symbols of freedom.”³ I argue that the history of African American funerary display offers a transcript of self definition, new facts as well as fictions of the American past. The historical record of the African Diaspora within the United States

must be revised using similar information they provided themselves. Funerals reconstruct their own ethnic identities.

To be fair, at least one writer of early U.S. slavery historiography analyzed the agency and humanity of the bonded labor force. The scholarship of W.E.B. DuBois, particularly his 1896 publication about the slave trade in colonial America, certainly argued the genesis and significance of ethnic identities of the African Diaspora in the United States. However, most classical interpretations of U.S. slavery probably still consider the 1918 publication of U.B. Phillips' *American Negro Slavery: Supply, Employment, and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Regime* as the first scholarly account of U.S. slavery. According to Southern historian Eugene Genovese, this premier text has suffered from mistaken neglect because of the undeniably racist assumptions of its author. That is to say, Phillips embraced a fiction concerning White supremacy. Phillips presented the slaveholders' power in the form of a Grand Narrative, a master narrator. Genovese tried to defend the empirical value of Phillips' contribution and reclaim its legitimacy by explaining that Phillip was a social consequence of Jim Crow, Southern roots. Born in 19th century Georgia, Phillip held a romantic view of his region's past glory and therefore, described slavery in the paternalistic rhetoric which plantation owners repeated to themselves. Understandably, of course, the plantation owners' human property escaped Phillip's idyllic reconstructions as the complexity of slave culture eluded him along with their persona. Phillip's history of White ruling classes, wealthy plantation owners with power over Black bodies, eclipsed the agency and humanity of the enslaved individual. This hegemonic story seemed to deny the very existence of African American families as well.⁴

Emerging from the ethnocentrism of Phillip's grand narrative, the master text of White privilege and ruling class interests, that fanciful indulgence of American exceptionalism and her myopic consideration of attendant human atrocities, historians began to completely rewrite the history of U.S. slavery, challenging this obsession with control over Black bodies or labor as the lead story of the ante-bellum past. For example, the centrality of Black identity or consciousness as a dimension of involuntary servitude revised the historiography for this time period. Historicizing African identities as they took shape throughout the Diaspora, scholars reconnected the memories of enslaved people of African descent. Such scholarship also matured the intellectual appreciation of slavery beyond investigations of labor coercion. Historians shifted their "angle of vision" from discussions of African American bondage as a characteristic feature of the slaveholder's world and function of colonial society to the enslaved people who survived those systems.⁵

The post-modern historiography of the African American experience began with the primer of Black history, John Hope Franklin's *From Slavery to Freedom* first published in 1947. Ten years later, Kenneth Stampp also turned different historical lenses or angles of vision onto the period of African American enslavement. While Franklin wrote the history of Black America emphasizing citizenship and contributions, Stampp looked at slavery and plantation production through the lens of slave resistance. Like Franklin, Stampp's 1957 description of Southern slavery, possibly the earliest hint of the shift from a focus on coercion, seemed to confirm a transition into studies of identification among African American people however affected by bondage. In *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*, Stampp exposed Southern

patriarchy as a dramatic façade between slaveholders and the enslaved, the idyllic self-portrayal of plantation owners. In painting a picture of what he called the “American tragedy,” Stamppp suggested that the actual history of U.S. slavery have not ever be fully recaptured.⁶ That is to say, primary sources, i.e., the historical records, contain a fiction of White control as well as the actual continually recreated or negotiated power relationships between them and the enslaved. Stamppp’s presentation of slave resistance vis a’ vis White domination, perhaps an unconscious segue from slavery studies, inaugurated the Black identity dialectic of domination and resistance. Stamppp did so by acknowledging the multiple tasks of the enslaved in dealing with the patriarchy as well as hypocrisy of Southern men in the latter’s roles as father, citizen, and employer. Followed by the 1968 publication of Winthrop Jordan’s *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro*, the intellectual preoccupation with controlling the labor of enslaved, Black men found an academic companion scholars’ focus on the Black man as he had been constructed in the minds of his White, 19th century masculine counterpart.

Historical reclamation of Black bodies, scholarly articulations that critiqued the U.S. master as the definitive character in U.S. slavery historiography, also analyzed the objectivity and applicability of the master narrative as well. That is to say, while Phillip’s 1918 publication did offer a captivating vignette of the American South and its benefactor, DuBois, Franklin, Stamppp, Jordan and other historians countered with a watershed caveat: the “peculiar institution” had a more nuanced ancestry than that of the White ruling class. However, Phillip called this truth in response to White power, i.e., the resistance, insurrections, and conspiracies belonging to the African American communities, slave crimes. Resistance to the dehumanization of slavery, especially the

impetus to maintain or reconstitute the sacredness of familial type bonds, became an important avenue for documenting the human identity of so-called chattel. Speaking “truth to power,” historians uncovered resistance to enslavement as well as racial and cultural hegemonies as a way to articulate and expose how the seemingly powerless gave meaning to their own lives. Imbuing acts of defiance with political meaning, historians reconstructed the dialectical dynamics that had given rise to defiance, putting the memories of the enslaved into a more accurate, historical context of resistance (truth) and power (domination). In the evolution of slavery studies, social and cultural historians experimented with slave resistance as an expression of both identity and politics. Consequently, the historiography shows how scholars “squeezed and teased” primary sources in order to get behind the mask of Black male subservience and the veil of Black female dissemblance.⁷

Just as a focus on African American identity redressed emphases of coercion and control, the topics of slave families and communities also checked the interpretive fallacy of Southern hegemony and White totalitarianism. John Blassingame’s 1972 publication of *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, in 1974, Peter Wood’s *Black Majority: Negroes in colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*, Ira Berlin’s *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* in 1975, in 1977, *Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina During Reconstruction* by Thomas Holt, Daniel Littlefield’s *Rice and Slaves* in 1981, the 1984 appearance of Charles Joyner’s *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*, Barbara Field’s 1985 *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, and Gary Nash’s 1988 publication about the formation of Philadelphia’s free Black community laid

the foundation for a U.S. slavery historiography that went beyond discussions of labor control, accounting for identity formation by using specific regional or case studies as their historical bases.⁸

Most importantly, slavery studies by the late 1970s described families within the quarters of the enslaved, the tenuous positions of free Blacks, and the tensions between slaveholding people of color and those whom they held in bondage. Family as a unit of social analysis for slavery studies, for example, made it possible to see “within the plantation household,” the private spheres of Black and White communities in the slave South, and the “stolen childhood” of slave youth. As a result of the reclamation of family as a unit of analysis applicable even to those in bondage, the historical literature concerning African Americans’ post-emancipation experiences also reflected an increasing complexity. By referencing the efforts of African American churches, historians brought identity and politics from the discourse on U.S. slavery into discussions of the post-emancipation period. These historians referenced the previous, path breaking contributions to U.S. slavery studies, complicating historical concepts such as identity formation and politics. Historians also began to examine the “world,” i.e., the U.S. civic and cultural societies, that enslaved and free Black people had created it.⁹

Theoretical Syncretism:

The Community Client Model for Historical Revision

Historical promulgation of slaveholding hegemony has gone out of vogue. More sophisticated models have replaced totalitarian descriptions of power to control labor. The historical method of the domination and resistance dialectic, for example, has provided glimpses into the inner lives, thoughts, and needs of the enslaved population.

Among other interpretive benefits, this method facilitates a shift in the researcher's "angle of vision" to African American institution building. At least two institutions deserve credit for our understandings of African American identities beyond racial hierarchy and involuntary subjugation. Reclaiming the complexities of enslaved experiences from the hegemony of labor control, tedious research and revision involving the Black church and the African American family emerged. The 1976 release of Herbert Gutman's *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* followed by several of Jacqueline Jones's book length studies about Black women, work, and migration, the confrontation of a U.S. fiction of master classes over subservient people by the revisionists' complex and nuanced glimpses into "ambiguous" Blackness both enslaved and free had come of age. The Black Church of the 18th century garnered a significant number of investigations, especially its northern beginnings among the free people of color in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The historical record of the Black church through the 19th century community provided evidence of self-help strategies on behalf of newly freed Southerners. Historicizing this institution for the 20th century, researchers highlighted how those traditions of autonomy and community agency became an institutional apparatus. The Black church launched the civil service careers of historical figures such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Adam Clayton Powell. Serious attention to the relationships, functions, and demographics of Black churches also helped correct the fallacy that coerced labor and racial domination fully represented the historical memories of African Americans from slavery to freedom.¹⁰

Unlike the documented leadership of the Civil Rights movement, however, the history of African American death care was neither readily apparent nor available. In

reconstructing African American identities using their funerary displays as primary source material, I collapsed several theories of difference to uncover these rich, cultural histories. I devised an original methodology called *theoretical syncretism*. The methodology fulfilled its purpose as it led to the creation of a new historical conceptualization, *community client*. Collapsing theories of difference, my *theoretical syncretism* yielded a new historical conceptualization, the *community client* model, for studies in African American family history.

Theoretical Syncretism represents a revisionist methodology because it challenges traditional paradigms, i.e., conventional analytic methods, in order to fill gaps and voids within existing historical canons and research agendas. As a method of revision, *theoretical syncretism* functions as a method for synthesizing existing analytic theories and historical explanations to create new historical models. The resultants of this method of historical inquiry are innovative conceptualizations that make it possible to refute powerlessness. Therefore, *theoretical syncretism* functions on the basis of a few presuppositions. First, the existing theories selected for the revisionist process must reflect thorough knowledge of published historical scholarship within the area of the desired revision. A thorough understanding of African American history in my own study, for example, grapples with both fact and fiction, isolating the concepts of hegemony and resistance. Secondly, the potential revision should create or contribute to the emergent theories that currently relate to the area of historical inquiry being considered for revision. I designed *theoretical syncretism* by comparing existing historical methods of several revisionist historians. *Theoretical syncretism* as an analytic method for revising historical scholarship in African American studies rests on my

introduction to theory making, *HineSight Methodology*, a creation I named after the revisionist historian whose training and example inspired its creation. *HineSight Methodology* shows what the revisionist historian should grasp before she can create new historical models for historical inquiry by synthesizing research tools. It functions as the way to find the “silences,” or gaps and voids in current historiography while *theoretical syncretism* offers a method for filling them.¹¹ My analytic method, *theoretical syncretism*, is a blend of several other analytic methods, i.e., historical theories. I began with the culture of dissemblance, a theory of Black women’s resistance to rape and sexual exploitation alternative constructions of race, class, and gender to historicize Black experiences.¹² (See Table 1: *HineSight Methodology*).

Understanding existing historical methods in the reconstruction of African American history must precede the creation of alternate historical conceptualizations, theory making and new models. *HineSight Methodology* makes it possible to identify historical differences resulting from social constructions like race, class, and gender. *HineSight Methodology* helped the researcher find the “silences,” gaps, and voids in the published scholarship concerning African Americans in U.S. history. That is to say, the record of African Americans in U.S. history can be reconstructed as more truths are uncovered. Finding more truth about African Americans in U.S., according to *HineSight Methodology*, involves historical mastery, ingenuity, clarity and acuity. Surely, filling the record of African American histories with accurate descriptions about the working Black woman, her political culture, and myriad subtleties of her ancestral past prove the significance of historical revision. In the case of African American history for the

TABLE 1 – Hinesight Methodology

HINESIGHT METHODOLOGY				
LEVEL	RESEARCH APPROACH	RULE	RESULTS	REFERENCE ARTICLE ARCHETYPE*
Exploration	Read widely	Mastery (i)	Acquire intimate knowledge of subject's secondary literature	"Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance"
Interpretation	"squeeze and tease"	Ingenuity (ii)	Ability to see the invisible and hear the silent	"Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1917-1945"
Application	Look for theme (Focus on gender dimension)	Clarity (iii)	Further implications for future research	"'We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible': The Philanthropic Work of Black Women"
Appropriation	Comparative analysis	Acuity (iv)	Broadens interpretation of gender dimensions	"Black Women's History, White Women's History: The Juncture of Race and Class"

Further Elucidation of Rules

- i Also read any related materials (fiction/nonfiction; intersecting historical fields, etc.)
- ii Scour & probe biography & autobiography, manuscript collections, & other primary sources, with an eye for connections
- iii Scrutinize previous findings (ii) for specificity; locate one subject, group, theme, etc. (e.g., Black women professionals, Black nurses, migration, etc.)
- iv Culmination of levels: Should result in perceptual keenness; sharp and sensitive writing; serious analysis; significant conclusions; and shrewd discernment which prompts polished, publishable scholarly writing

* Source: Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History*, (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1994)

post-modern era, however, revisionist historians accidentally accomplished something else besides the discovery of more truth. In reconstructing the experiences of African Americans following World War II, revisionist African American historiography does not adequately contextualize class privilege. Consequently, the reconstruction of post-modern U.S. history (1945 to the present) has focused on the social mobility, leadership, and struggles of the Black middle class vis a vis their social, political, and economic gains from the Civil Rights movement. Black preachers, lawyers, educators and doctors captured the attention of revisionist historians who only knew to look at men in order to gauge strength, survival, and change. As historians took note of the obvious inequity in retelling those stories, Black women nurses, social workers, and teachers appeared at the center of many analyses, an inclusion that corrected the myopic obsession with validating Black masculinity.

Preparing to fill those voids with reconstructions meant looking at the nuanced foci other scholars whose work reflects a revisionist model. For example, Tera Hunter's scholarship on Black washerwomen, Robin D.G. Kelley's analyses of Black working-class consciousness, and Dwight A. McBride's unveiling critique of slave testimony as the tool of the abolitionist movement all represent the inherent principle of *HineSight Methodology*. Like *HineSight Methodology*, my revisionist method can work beyond its current purposes. *Theoretical syncretism* helped identify the gaps in historical literature about African American identity formation. However, *community clients* came out of this revisionist method that can function in much the same way for any historical void. *Theoretical syncretism* makes such reclamations possible by facilitating the breakdown of the Black respectability paradigm, uncovering the agency of non-elite Black families.

Hine's theory of dissemblance, Kelley's "hidden transcript" of Black "infrapolitics," historian Earl Lewis' "overlapping Diasporas," and the community building process of historian Richard Thomas were collapsed using *theoretical syncretism*.¹³

I combined several theories found in African American historical literature as a way to correct the marginalization of non-elite, Black families in post-modern African American historiography (See Table 2). Hine's theory of dissemblance always leads to questions about what happened behind what she called the curtain or veil, i.e., the masks that African American women donned to function within inequitable differences of a social construction based on power, i.e., racism. Kelley's theory of "infrapolitics" helped me see how Black women in urban landscapes found safe places to take off their masks, unveil, and draw back the curtain. And the community building process that historian Richard Thomas uses to describe urban landscapes show how Black people collaborated in their "infrapolitics" across time and place. The very strategic manifestations of Black women, their inner lives behind the veils, prove that they knew when and with whom it was safe to publicly be and to express themselves. The "infrapolitics" in "overlapping Diasporas" or dispersed communities looks at historical subjects accounting for human experiences like death care and funerary display. The investigation of these subjects helps deconstruct power, hegemony, and silences. Table 2 visually represents how the resultant model, the new historical conceptualization of African American families as *community clients* was produced. Reconstruction and revision lead to spaces where self-definitions of African American identities become evident. However, historicizing self-definition neither reconciles nor refutes differences in African American identity formation.

TABLE 2— THEORETICAL SYNCRETISM

Historian	Revision	Theoretical Synthesis	Reference
		<i>Community Clients</i>	
Darlene Clark Hine	The metaphor of Paul Lawrence Dunbar's mask for greater attention to the silence female gendered resistance	Ask questions that peel truth (resistance) from power (silence, domination or hegemony)	"Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance"
Robin D.G. Kelley	The dissonance of class consciousness within African American history that challenges the hegemony of Black bourgeois respectability	Look for spaces where truth (resistance) has subverted silence, domination and/or hegemony; historical subjects are active and not dissembling	<i>Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class</i>
Earl Lewis	African American history as multipositional (opposed to a singular, social reconstruction) influenced by and inclusive of multiple, dispersed communities	Both truth (resistance) and silence (power) must be placed in the context of U.S. ethnic diversity as well as the African Diaspora	"To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas"
Richard Thomas	Self-help and social responsibility of Black communities uninterrupted by distance or time	Differences and dialectics catalyze African America community building	<i>Life for Us is What We Make It: Building Community in Detroit, 1915-1945</i>

The history of the preservation and presentation of the Black corpse simply conceptualizes their dissimilarities. Using *theoretical syncretism* to investigate African American funeral display, my historical conceptualization *community clients* contextualizes at least one method in the history of Black resistance, the politics of respectability. For while funerals do reveal the ethnic identities of the less powerful, they

also reveal intra-racial prejudices and class preferences among African Americans. That is to say, more dissimilarities or differences in U. S. history than the obvious Black to White, free to bondage, and rich to poor become evident when the “angle of vision” shifts from simple resistance to fluid and constant reclamations. My study of funerary display represents such a historical reconstruction.

Historical reconstructions based on new theories of African American identities uncover the dissimilarities in these histories. Perhaps the dissimilarity that a study of African Americans funerals reveals can best be described as the 21st century version of Black folks’ double consciousness. For while DuBois identified the color line as the defining problem of the 20th century in African American consciousness, African American history has been written on the bases of resistance versus reclamations. This double consciousness has emphasized the tension between Blackness or the African legacy and the American dream. My study of funerary display, however, moves the idea of double consciousness into the next millennium. In my *theoretical syncretism* this dual consciousness of African American identity has less to do with tensions based on fixed racial boundaries and more with the reclamation of the past despite the conditions of the present. A 21st century critique of double consciousness in U.S. culture, the indelible indicator of African American identity according to DuBois, shifts the center of this history from race relations and resistance to a constant renegotiation of past with present. My decision to study death care resulted from a change over time in my own double consciousness. Focusing on the tensions of past to present, funerary behavior unveils how Black folk simultaneously felt

about their pasts and their present conditions as they displayed themselves to their communities. Yet, differences occurred even in their negotiated funerary displays, especially after emancipation and migration to larger urban centers. Therefore, dissimilarity versus monolithic characterizations of resistance to race oppression is the consequences of historical reconstructions based on my *theoretical syncretism*.

For example, a study on African American consciousness and racial identity as they are revealed in funerary display deconstruct the hegemonic paradigms like the fictions of White Southern supremacy and the hegemony of slaveholding power. Most importantly, this new area of historical inquiry for African American identity formation also provides a historical conceptualization, *community clients*, to check the hegemony of one model of Black resistance, the so-called politics of respectability. The history of African American funerary display dispels this myth of a cohesive universality in African American resistance and its civic leadership.

The subject of African American funerary display permits historians to construct more accurate descriptions of African American identities. Death care accounts for these Black families' individual choices with respect to their collective pasts. In Black funerals, specifically, Black families (regardless of their socio-economic status or relationship to material resources) have significantly contributed to the creation, support, and expansion of their communities. In their patronage of Black service professions like the family-owned funeral home, poor, African American families can be demythologized by a corrective descriptor, *community clients*. However, this historical analysis of the relationship between Black morticians leaves much of what has been said about the social responsibility, self-help, and institution building of the Black

middle class in tact.[∞] In fact, within their racially segregated communities, both undertakers and insurance agents collected money from working-poor, Southern Black families. However, there is a need for more mining of Black church records, especially their productions of the earliest Black community newspapers, to see how the mutual aid associations eventually grew into industrial insurance ventures that facilitated the rise of Black undertakers as business professionals. Historian Carter G. Woodson (1929) and other early, 20th century scholars noted the success of industrial insurance businesses among African Americans. Black insurance agents solicited rural Blacks and this clientele produced the largest corporations owned and operated by Black people in modern U.S. history.¹⁴ Death care became a skilled occupation through the purchase of burial insurance by Black families. African American people believed in funerals. Their patronage of this service offers self-disclosure of their thoughts about the past, their relationships in the present, and their dreams about the future.

However, when non-elite Black people merited historical attention, prior to the revisions of scholars like Hine, Hunter, Kelley, Thomas and other social and cultural historians, these Black families appeared as victims trapped by urban decline, joblessness, residential segregation, societal isolation, inadequate education, and, most of all, inescapable poverty. In *The Centennial Review: Economic Narratives and Postmodern Culture*, Bill E. Lawson contributed an article, “Conceptual Frameworks,

[∞] The most common title to refer to those persons who are licensed in the funeral industry is funeral director. The term undertaker comes from the antebellum period; embalmer was in use during the post-bellum period; morticians indicate the modern era, and funeral directors had replaced all of the previous designations and gained prominence by in the post-modern, U.S. society. However, historians have used them interchangeably. I make no exception.

The Black Family, and Public Policy,” that echoes the call of Black family scholars to “demythologize” the negative stereotypical views promulgated by the public policies, media, and literature within the majority of society. Lawson laments the presupposition of poverty as a definitive characteristic of most Black families as a resultant of their slave past. He exposes this presupposition as he demonstrates how it has pejoratively shaped U.S. social policies concerning African American families. Harriette Pipes McAdoo, editor of the anthology, *Black Families*, currently in progress for its 4th edition, urges scholars to keep abreast of the dynamic debates generated by challenges such as that mounted by Lawson. McAdoo urges explorations of diverse conceptualizations to combat the tendency of relying on poverty and discrimination to fashion federal policies affecting Black families.¹⁵ In answer to this call for more diverse conceptualization of Black families, I blended several theories to create my historical conceptualization of African American families, *community clients*. Theoretical syncretism yielded the historical conceptualization of *community clients*. Therefore, a study of the historical significance of African American funerary display functions as a revision of post-modern African American historiography. African American death care responded to functional needs of Black families or *community clients*. Sadly, positive functions of non-elite Black families, have not been given enough scholarly in the research of African American social and cultural historians. Rather, public policy makers, sociologists, welfare reformers, and urban/labor historians have grappled with the changes over time in post-modern Black families or the “underclass.”

African American funerary display is historically significant because it discloses the experiences of work, identity, and politics as they were articulated by the masses of

Black bodies. That is to say, the Black body redeemed from the “world that the slaveholders made,” reclaimed from antebellum abolitionists’ appropriations, and revered in the process of African American death care must take center stage in describing change over time in African American identity formation. For example, African American funerary display in the historical literature of the African American experience can extend discourse on Black community building and class formation. Michael Plater, for example, committed an entire chapter to trace the history of the connection between African American ideas of death and three industries: funeral service, insurance, and banking. He showed exactly how death beliefs, “not only nourished a successful profession in the African American community, but are also responsible for the development of the two largest African American industries” of the modern era, banking and insurance.¹⁶ However, as important as decent burials, death benefits, and family cohesion were to Black people from the antebellum South before to the post-modern period, cultural historians have left the slave funerals, mutual aid societies, benevolent associations, and undertaking businesses in the periphery of their discussions about African American families, migration, and community building, and urban decline. Consequently, from the end of the institution of slavery to the last century there remains another “egregious void;” a corruption of African American memories resulting from the historical marginalization of their funerary display.¹⁷ In life, although enslaved, impoverished or otherwise dishonored, in death African Americans, especially poor Black families, have yet to have their say.

Fortunately, researchers and scholar-activists of African American history are just recently attempting to place Black families in proper historical context. However, cultural

and social historians are the trained revisionists who can lift the Black family from the shadows of poverty studies. These historians can offer alternative models for studying Black families. Conceptual models like *community clients* deconstruct hegemonies such as “underclass” and middle-class respectability, i.e., the fictional, normative mainstream of both White and Black cultural politics. In the end, innovative conceptualizations such as *community client* and sophisticated interpretive frameworks like theoretical syncretism will prove to be the best way to include the poor without creating stereotypes and ahistorical memories of them. An emphasis on the relationship between the Black funeral business and its patrons rescues the working poor and lower class members of Black urban communities from the historical shadows of middle-class, Black ministers, nurses, civil rights attorneys, teachers, and social workers. Although these elite race men and race women gave leadership to Black communities, the human experience of death levels the historical plane and mines the somewhat marginalized voices of poorer African Americans. Consequently, the historical conceptualization of poor Black families as *community clients* shows how death in Black urban communities and those who cared for the dead are missing pieces of Black family studies. My reconstruction of the African American identity formation as a history of *community clients* reflects one way to: conceptualize Black family studies without relying on the poverty paradigm; revise African American urban and labor historiographies; challenge the “politics of respectability” as the dominant paradigm of Black resistance; and study a human condition that defies U.S. class, race, and gender constructions, i.e., the decision of what to do with dead bodies.

African American Funerary Display as a Process of Identity Formation

Non-elite, Black families represent an underserved community in the traditional field of African American history. While public policy makers, sociologists, welfare reformers, and urban researchers have highlighted the Black underclass, these scholars are only recently attempting to place these analyses in historical context. However, revisionist historians are the trained academicians who can mine Black family histories from the shadows of poverty studies. Scholarly discussions about Black people in funeral businesses are found in either dated albeit empirical, journal articles or reviews of Blacks in business that have been written by economists or labor/business historians versus social or cultural historians. Recent treatments and commentaries on the topic of Black people and death care have also come from sociologists, literary theorists, novelists, and anthropologists. Karla Holloway deserves praise for her most recent publication about African American funerary rituals. The traumatic loss of her adopted son compels her to reconcile the reality of premature death, violence, and culturally-driven, mortuary practices among African Americans. Although Holloway provides a poignant and personal description revealing how African American racial identity and community structure absorbs the impacts of premature death in U.S. society, this is not a book length description that tells the social history of African American mortuary practice.¹⁸ Although, Holloway did discuss the community roles of Black morticians whose labor of love entailed preservation and presentation of embalmed bodies to their Black families, we are still awaiting empirical studies such as journal articles, monographs, and

anthologies describing the functions and negotiations between Black families and their communities' funeral establishments.

The historical significance of funerary display connects the relationship between non-elite, Black people and their community institutions from the “peculiar institution” of ante-bellum slavery to the Black church, benevolent societies, modern undertaking business, and the post-modern funeral home. Robert Farris Thompson’s detailed analysis of the grave decorations in slave cemeteries, Newbell Puckett’s studies of Southern superstitions concerning death and Charles Joyner’s work on cultures of the Sea Islands are examples of how work and identity coalesce as cultural politics. Even more recently, Michael A. Gomez plainly concluded that slave funerals, despite the pain of death, became the way that the enslaved came together and moved toward a “corporate identity.” In coming together, Gomez believed, “they made the collective statement that they belonged to and were affirming each other. They were becoming a single community.”¹⁹ Gomez’s definition of identity as a collective or communal action, i.e., the meaning of slave funerals for African American people, coincides with Dwight A. McBride’s *Impossible Witness*, the slave testimony of abolitionist literature. McBride made it clear identity for Black people under slavery, never an individual’s prerogative, was “...not just about being in the body but about the body being in the world.”²⁰ When scholars Barry Schwartz, David Kertzer, Gary Laderman examined the response to the martyred body Abraham Lincoln, the first assassinated president of the United States, using cultural theories they all confirmed that funeral rituals have provided opportunities for articulating (even changing) the meaning of someone’s life or in other words

reconstructing the relationship between lived experiences in the world and what people will remember.²¹

Schwartz, Kertzer, and Laderman conclude that the funerary display of Lincoln's body transformed the collective memory of his life. In other words, Lincoln's funeral elevated him to a sacred national symbol. Both the body and memory of this murdered national leader "became the focus of unprecedented celebration, commemoration, and memorialization [sic]."²² The funeral rites afforded the body of the slain man established Lincoln's civic legacy, solidified the collective memory of his life, and symbolized values such as integrity and freedom that would be associated with him in the writing of U.S. history.²³ The funerary display of Lincoln's body transformed Lincoln, a controversial president, into a sacred national symbol because

Although people disagreed intensely about Lincoln's worth as president, their common participation in his funeral expressed and reinforced their common identification with the nation...It would be more precise to say that controversial objects, like the memory of Lincoln, promote solidarity only on the condition that they represent noncontroversial [sic] realities whose sacredness all recognize, ultimate realities on which fundamental consensus rests.²⁴

Kertzer's analysis of rituals highlighted its political power to build community and collective consciousness. Laderman's explained the process by which this ritual created such cultural or national consensus. "In the weeks after the assassination," Laderman wrote, "Lincoln's corpse became visible and accessible to the nation; from the moment he was shot until the interment in Springfield, Illinois, his body was considered public property, given to the citizens who made up the Union body politic."²⁵ Schwartz surmised that there are three functions of funeral rites in U.S. civil society, by examining the relationship between American history and Lincoln's body. First, funerals can

transform the negative and controversial into figures that actually embody the most commonly shared values. Secondly, funeral rituals can transform and enhance status. Last, an elaborate funeral can reconstruct a life and make a symbol.²⁶ Michael Plater's words best capture the cross-cultural applicability of Schwartz analysis to African American funerary display. "The African American community," explained Plater, "transformed individuals upon death into symbols of freedom and, through the large funeral expenditures, economic prosperity."²⁷

Although the cultural history of American funerals has been the subject of inquiry for at least one historian, Gary Laderman, conceptualizing the history of African American funerary display as a record of ethnic identity formation necessitates the incorporation of difference. For example, Laderman severely limited his treatment of death care in specific ethnic contexts. In fact, Laderman's most recent work gave only three pages to discuss the specifics of death care in African American communities. Furthermore, he based all of his observations about the history of African American funerals on a secondary source, the biography of an African American man who owned a Virginia-based undertaking business written by Michael Plater.²⁸ Thankfully, Plater's conclusions about African American funerary behavior rooted these death rituals against a backdrop of African cosmology. However, Plater relied heavily on the experiences of a solitary figure, a Black man in the undertaking business. Plater's decision to create a biography versus a cultural history did not permit the full disclosure and critique of African Americans' decision-making processes in removing, adorning, arranging, viewing, and interring the bodies of their family and community members. Consequently, neither a scholarly example of cultural studies concerning American

funerals nor a case study of an individual African American funeral director includes all familial interactions after the death of a community member from removal of the physical remains, arrangements for the display of the corpse, and final interment of the body. Plater examined the ritual behavior of death care or African American funeral traditions. He agreed with Lawrence Levine that the dynamic details of African American culture reflect a dialectical process of interactive and fluid adaptations, creative responses “to the realities of a new situation.” Unfortunately, relying on “elite writing and legal documents” lamented Plater, those dynamic details are lost, however. Scholars who rely on conventional historical methods are blindsided by the dissemblance or “hidden transcripts.” Lifting these masks over African American identities requires documenting the death care negotiations in the African American past. Dissemblance, consequently, is one theory of difference which must be an essential function for any study of African American funeral behavior. Dissemblance or masks, myriad manifestations of silences and powers conceal the truth of African American familial resiliency, for example. Plater concluded that only organic research tools such as folk expressions, music, and material culture allow African Americans from the 18th and early 18th century to “become more historically articulate.” For this reason, African American funerary display, the negotiation between undertakers and their clientele, Black families, lifts the veil of dissemblance from the lived experiences of poor Black families. In their historical patronage and attention to their communities’ death care they left their stories and memories.²⁹

My historical reconstruction of African American identity formation highlights emergent class consciousness by chronicling their struggles to give meaning to their

humanity, freedom and citizenship. In chapter one, I discuss how enslaved Africans Americans had to reconcile their inabilities to control when and where they dealt with death. Under the “peculiar institution,” i.e., the personal prerogatives of the slaveholders’ pecuniary power over Black bodies, the “invisible institution,” i.e., slave religion rooted in an African-derived cosmology, maintained a continuity of community even in death. Chapter one also includes some comparative histories that incorporate the funeral rituals and death care practices of New World Africans in both Brazil and the Caribbean Islands. Chapter two speaks to the significance of African American institution building to gain even greater control for honoring and remembering their dead. Black preachers, morticians, business women, community leaders, and secret society members used funerals as social capital and status symbols. Chapter three begins with a discussion of Southern Blacks’ migration to the urban north. With the migration of Southern sharecroppers, city dwellers, and domestic workers, a distinctive funerary behavior came to the urban centers of places like Detroit. Chapter three explores how middle-class African Americans living in northern U.S. cities attempted to use their community roles as entrepreneurs and civic activists to reform the funerary displays of their Southern kinfolk.³⁰ This chapter shows how the study of African American funerary display brings non-elite Black families to the center of historical analysis. Chapter four comes from several interviews with owners of African American funeral homes in Michigan. In chapter four, I provide an example for writing the history of African American professionals within the context of “overlapping,” Diapsoran communities. Chapters three and four combined attest to the historical agency of working-poor Black families via their use of community “intrapolitics.” These chapters with full details document the

historical significance of funerary display conceptualized their power as *community clients*. Chapter five recalls one particular example of African American community collaboration of Black identity via a mother's business negotiations with an African American undertaker. Chapter five revisits the murder of young Emmett Till. More specifically, this chapter deals with his mother's decision to share her pain with the nation through her decision of an open casket funeral. I use my *community client* model to reinterpret the public display of his mutilated corpse in terms of African American identity formation. With my incorporation of identity and politics in the expressive memories of the past, I prove African American funerary display as a viable record of identity formation. A research agenda concludes my study. My concluding chapter also highlights the need to incorporate African American funerary display in the history literature about the meanings of freedom to Black people. For example, Eugene Genovese saw the acquiescence of slaveholders' to enslaved Southerners' cultural demand for burial or funerary rites as a check of supposed hegemonic authority. Slave funerals, in this view, are historical examples of mediated concessions, a negotiation that occurred somewhere between work, identity, and politics.³¹

A study of African American funeral display permits the poor to speak in the historical record. The historical lens of African American death care provides a different angle to their collective pasts other than poverty, domination, and exploitation. Poor Black people in the post-modern historical record deserve reconstructions that actually reflect the ways in which they spoke truth to power. And their identities as represented by the elaborate displays of their dead despite the travesty of slavery and the urban crises of poverty do them justice. The Black body of the

post-modern era is a source of truth. Or, taking words from both Michael A. Gomez and Dwight A. McBride, exchange marked the Black body, whether it was an exchange of one country for another, scarring that confirmed belonging to those which disfigured or transference of rhetorical propaganda for live testimony. For Black families, however, a historical reclamation must return their bodies to themselves, an “authentic, irreducible, material sign [that] cannot but tell the truth.”³²

Chapter 1

FUNERALS AND THE COSMOLOGY OF DEATH CARE IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

In his book about an African American mortician, Michael Plater asserted African American funeral rites should be studied in order to have historical understanding of American-born Africans living in Diaspora. Plater studied the pecuniary success of one man, R.C. Scott, as evidence of how African Americans paid for funerals in order to proclaim their humanity, preserve their traditions, and protect their collective consciousness. In Plater's view,

...funeral rituals had more direct connections to Africa than any other African American tradition. The community searched for ethnic identity in African culture and the African connections they found highlighted a very distinct African American idea of death...the African American idea of death is an African transplant.¹

Like Plater, several cultural anthropologists, historians, and other scholars of the African American past reference the death care practices that would lay the foundation for African American identity formation. Michael Gomez, however, provides the most succinct description of African American funerary display. In this book, *Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, Gomez explained that

when a Black person died, the body was washed and shrouded in white, tasks mainly performed by women and occasionally by an individual or group designated for such a responsibility. The shrouded

body was then usually placed upon a 'cooling board,' a table also covered with a white cloth; sometimes, however, the body was placed directly into a coffin. At this point, the 'settin up' or wake began, which always lasted through the night. The wake was a sacred moment for Black folk, in which elements of grief, despair, recollection, consolation, and consideration of the hereafter were all combined.²

Gomez stressed the cultural significance of African American funerary display in terms of a process, a community ritual. The African Diaspora integrates the people of African descent who were forcibly dispersed from the Continent by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Although surely not the only human story of dispersal or involuntary migration, historical accounts of experiences with enslavement in the New World are now compared in order to argue for this cosmological or cultural connection, i.e., the African Diaspora. The African Diaspora is as much reconstructed memories as it is historical consequence. That is to say, the dispersal of African people as a result of the trans-Atlantic slave trade defines the Diaspora. However, scholarly attempts to describe the changes over time in the life experiences of those people also constitute Diaspora. The African Diaspora, consequently, is both conceptual and consequential. This chapter explains the African Diaspora as belief system using death care to mark change over time the mutual responsibilities and expectations between the living and the dead. The mention of funerals and similar acts of humanity in the work of scholars David Roediger, Albert Raboteau, David Barry Gaspar, Rachel Harding, Hilary Beckles, and David Roediger provide comparative examples of death and display in the African Diaspora.

A Southern historian, David Roediger, in his article, "And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, & Heaven in the Slave Community 1700-1865," Roediger portrayed "the funeral

as an institution deriving its impetus from the strength of the slave community,” despite the criticisms those rituals would later engender.³ According to Roediger, slaveholders supported colonial legislation that regulated slave assemblies on all types, including funerals. “As early as 1680,” Roediger reported, “colonial legislators asserted that ‘the frequent meetings of considerable numbers of Negro slaves under the pretense of...burials is judged dangers’ and moved to institute a strict pass and patrol system.”⁴ By 1687, the Northern Neck region of Virginia had legislated to make public funerals for slaves illegal. Roediger asserted that the both civil authorities and slaveholders continued their “careful scrutiny of slave funerals” on into the national period of U.S. history. Gabriel organized his plot during a child’s funeral. The point here is that some White people perceived the dangers of slave funerals because of its community organizing power. They feared the slave funeral’s potential for overt subversion of White authority. They fought against its proven identification as a source of African pride and affirmation of their humanity.

Slaveholders in the antebellum South also realized that there were distinct differences in meanings or cosmological purposes of slave funerals versus their own. Albert Raboteau in his book on the religion of the enslaved, for example, pointed to Great Awakening, a religious revivalism that spread across the British North American colonies in the 1740s as a possible explanation for the ethnic differences between American slave funerary display and the African-based funerary rituals in other parts of the Americas. As African Americans had participated in conversions to Christianity in increasing numbers after the latter half of the 18th century, their African gods, died.⁵ Although in Haiti, Brazil and Cuba, conversely, religious syncretism allowed African cosmology to blend with

Catholicism to a greater extent, resulting in the Voodun, Candomble, and Santeria. A debatable issue, certain elements in antebellum African American funerary behavior did outlive the African gods who inspired them. In fact, the first chapter in Raboteau's book on the "invisible institution" of the enslaved, he entitled, "The African Diaspora." The most frequent mention in this first chapter concerning the influences of African cosmology on slave funerals dealt with the importance of the ancestors. Although the slaves' superstitions about "improper or incomplete" burial rites did not fully mature to the extent of long-lived "cult of the ancestors" witnessed in Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Caribbean slave communities, death care for Black bodies was important to American slaves because through death, the dispersed generations reconnected to their lost homeland.⁶

Gaspar explained that in Antigua during the 18th century, civic authorities were so intent on a comprehensive subordination of the island's enslaved population that they even regulated slave funerals. Gaspar referenced an Antigua act from 1757, proving that civic authorities had attempted to regulated slave funerals. The act stated that either "through too great Indulgence of Masters, Mistresses, Owners, Renters, and Overseers...or the Ambition of the Slaves themselves," the enslaved frequently had "pompous and expensive" funerary displays supposedly in imitation of the ruling class. As a corrective measure, this regulation authorized the Antigua's citizens to seize enslaved people who buried the dead in any other container than "a plan Deal-board Coffin," those Africans who covered or ornamented the dead, and any bond people who wore "any Scarfs or Favours at any of their Funerals."⁷

Gaspar also cited the following letter dated December 8, 1787. The story from this letter testifies about the importance of funerals in the enslaved community. Gaspar's inclusion of this primary source allows them entry into the historical record. Thirty years after the Antigua act, according to a late 18th century observant on the island:

Negro funerals particularly such are [sic] of old Creole families, or in esteem among their fellows, are numerous attended... The body is mostly inclosed [sic] in a wooden shell or coffin, which during the procession to the grave, is covered with a sheet, by way of pall, and such as have it in their power, bring liquor, fruit, etc, to the house of their deceased uncle or aunt, brother or sister (the common appellations, whether related in consanguinity or not), which are consumed by the company while things are getting into readiness.⁸

Whether enforcement (or punishment) concerning the regulation had lapsed, three generations later, in 1787, saw a sheet draped over a wooden coffin in a slave procession on its way to a familial repast. Gaspar did not neglect to note the subversive quality of the letter's observation. Gaspar concludes "...that slave coffins were covered with sheets, suggests that it may not have been easy to enforce these laws that were meant to maintain a social distinctiveness even in death between whites and blacks."⁹ Precisely, the interpretation of a scholar who has studied slave resistance, Gaspar leaves room for other eyes to find yet another nuance in the letter. The fact that the observer noted that "*during* the procession to the grave, [the coffin] is covered with a sheet" could mean that the sheet was added only when the enslaved had moved beyond the gaze of the masters' civic authority. The enslaved community violated the 1757 act in their funerary display. Although colonial legislation attempted to control Africans' funeral rites, nothing kept the slave community from the practice of celebrating death as a journey; as a return to freedom; as a promotion to power, i.e., an ancestor; and as an occasion to rejoice in the

cycle of life with dancing, singing, and refreshment. The research of Roediger, Raboteau, and Gaspar can confirm the importance of funerals in African American community's identity. Roediger's article brief by definition and Raboteau's book length reconstruction obviously offered greater details such as

‘The living never forget that they are trustees of the dead. The dead are always watching to see that the living preserve what their forefathers established. And since the dead have power to bestow either blessing or adversity...the welfare of the dead is felt to be bound up with the faithful performance of ancient custom.’¹⁰

It may have been that honoring the memory of their deceased demanded greater acquiescence than the island's statue. At any rate, the observer noted their choices for proper funeral rites. And Gaspar made note of how this defiance was one among many ways that the enslaved rebelled against attempts to strip them of their cultural practices and human needs. The funerals on Antiguan slaves reveal this persistent identity. The grave site or burial and the procession to this sacred space may have given way to other forbidden death expressions and funeral practices. Gaspar did say that an 18th century cleric in Nevis, the Reverend William Smith, reportedly witnessed that, “slaves sang at burials, got drunk and...[were], ‘calling out to the Dead Person and asking him, Why he died, when he wanted nothing the World could afford, to support Nature?’ ”¹¹

Given the significance of slave resistance emanating from capture at the West African coast, transport across the Atlantic and seasoning in the Caribbean, Booker T. Washington's statement that Black people, those African descendants in the United States, “have always” valued funerary display might be verified by finding stories about civil disobedience in slave funerals. The investigation of the Rebellion of 1800 led by Gabriel (Prosser) in Richmond, Virginia and the Virginia legislature's response to Nat

Turner's Rebellion both legitimized White paranoia regarding the subversive environment that could be fostered at Black funerals. After the preacher Nat Turner revolted in 1831, both African American preachers and public funerals with an exception of those which occurred under the supervision of a white official were banned.¹²

In addition to the slave funeral as a site of conspired resistance in its function of identity formation, the importance of funerals in African American identity can also be teased from White citizens' complaints about how enslaved people reveled beyond both their status and means in displaying their dead. There are also documented descriptions of collaborative familial or fictive relations in response to a death. And some of these historical reports include stories about mourners who continued to have conversations and maintain connections with their deceased community members. In fact, an article about contemporary African bereavement salutations recognized the continued bond between the deceased and the living has continued as an influence in funerary traditions among the Yoruba of Western Nigeria. "This is very important to the Yorubas who do not let go of their relationship," Kemi Adamokekun elucidated, "with the deceased as they believe in ancestral spirits. These spirits are even consulted from time to time to assist in the decision-making process. There is scientific evidence that people alter and then continue their relationship with the dead person."¹³

Yet, before making strides to discuss African American or Black funerals in the ante-bellum South, more needs to be said about funerary display in the Diaspora.

Although not addressing death and display directly, Rachel Harding's work about Blackness in 19th century Bahia, Brazil provides the proper historical context to support the reconstruction of African American funerary rituals from a Diasporan approach.

Harding quoted Brazilian historians who investigate the African Diaspora as having to contend with the reality that there are “precious few of their own words” (i.e., primary sources from enslaved populations.) However, Harding’s informants offer this recourse, “we do have many accounts of what slaves *did*...[and] if we are perceptive and open enough (and adequately prepared), those actions can suggest their meanings to us.”¹⁴ Harding accomplished this challenge of historicizing “what slaves did” by examining how an indigenous syncretism of faith, the religion of Candomble articulated the aspirations and beliefs of enslaved Afro-Brazilians.

Harding’s work, however, helps other investigators of the African Diaspora as well. For example, an account for “what slaves did” permits the observer’s letter and the Antiguan act regulating slave funerals to be submitted as evidence of identity formation among the island’s enslaved inhabitants. Hilary Beckles retold this account in the conclusion to his 1989 publication, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* which attested “the emotional and spiritual closeness the community of [enslaved] women displayed at the death of a intimate members; in this case it was the funeral of Jenny.”¹⁵ Lifting this story about a Barbadian community’s funerary display of an enslaved woman from an 1809 account, Beckles recounted

The corpse was conveyed in a neat small hearse, drawn by one horse. Six boys, twelve men and forty-eight women walked behind, in pairs as followers...The females were neatly clad, for the occasion, and mostly in white...Instead of weeping and bewailing, the followers jumped and sported, as they passed along, and talked and laughed, with each other, in high festivity...They had full faith in Jenny’s transmission to meet her friends, at her place of nativity; and their persuasion that death was only a removal from their present to their former home—a mere change from a state of slavery to a state of freedom—did not barely alleviate, but wholly prevented the natural grief and affliction arising from the loss of a friend. They confidently expected to hear from poor Jenny, or to know

her influence, in the way they most desired,...¹⁶

Most 21st century scholars of African American history acknowledge the African Diaspora construct.¹⁷ In order to analyze the lived experiences of these descendants from the Continent, they use African Diaspora to account for both diversity and continuity. One way of verifying whether or not African Americans or Black people “have always” valued funerary display, for example, would be to examine whether or not their ancestors had passed on cultural cues concerning death and burial ceremonies. In his article “And Die in Dixie,” David Roediger did just that. Roediger’s essay on the historical significance of African roots in the death care practices of enslaved Southerners pointed to several possibilities. Roediger’s introduced his interpretation, “The Afro-American’s views on death and heaven from deep African roots, gained a paradoxical strength and resilience from the horrors of mid-passage, and flowered in *the slave funeral, ...a value-laden and unifying social event which the slave community in the United States was able to preserve from both physical and ideological onslaughts of the master class.*”¹⁸ (emphasis added)

Roediger claims that the slave funeral was “a value-laden and unifying social event” because he has studied the historical record of “what slaves *did*” in the antebellum South. In this way, Washington’s statement that African Americans “have always” regarded funerary display as “special and peculiarly important” has even more validity. Herein we also see the basis for Harding’s theoretical methods for historicizing enslaved Afro-Brazilians according to their actions in the absence of their written records. In this way it is also apparent that funerals are in fact primary source material for the processes of identity formation among enslaved Africans in the New World.

Africans in Diaspora observed communal responses to death, African-influenced behaviors. Slave mourners in antebellum America, Roediger alleged, for example, often took part in interring the coffin as each slave approached the grave with handfuls of dirt to throw on top of the coffin, a gesture of farewell; each man also took turns with the hoe to make sure that they had contributed to the filling of the grave. In Barbados, the enslaved believed that grave dirt represents the Divine Power of the ancestors' spirits. For example, enslaved people could testify in legal proceedings involving other enslaved people or freed Barbadians, but for the un-baptized enslaved witness, an oath sworn "by grave dirt" signified the civil recognition and cultural power of African death rituals in that society...both master and servant classes; the preference of grave dirt over the Bible as a civic authority with power to extract truth rested on the belief the "Divine Power" of the departed souls of African ancestors; in African cosmology dead people negotiated rewards and punishments for the living. The dirt from their graves symbolized their power.¹⁹ Perhaps this is the reason why the enslaved in Antigua gave more respect to their funeral traditions than to a legislative edict. Everything in the funerary display of the people in Diaspora, surmised Roediger, was a "highly traditional activity" aimed at expressing and preserving "a sense of family ties" despite the oppression of slavery.²⁰

The roles of Black women in funerals made them the social gauge and spiritual conduit of a good funeral. Some slave funeral crowds in antebellum America, Roediger stressed, seemed reminiscent of African women in certain Akan societies, who, Roediger noted, "were particularly given to such displays, often crying, shouting and singing as the preacher spoke." Some women were so intense in their public funerary displays of singing, shouting, and hand-clapping that they actually drowned out the preacher. On

some occasions, women overcome with grief and emotional frenzy had to be physically carried away from the burial. Roediger quoted the African American theologian, Howard Thurman, to give some context to female funerary demonstrations in the slave community. Such an excited state at hearing a good funeral sermon, Thurman is reported to have asserted, showed that the slave's "contact with the dead was immediate, inescapable, dramatic."²¹ Or at least, there is evidence that Black women's funerary behavior reveals that while they may not have led the service, they were neither invisible nor silent in communal activity of funerary display.

Other African funerary customs that remained a part of Black death care, according to Raboteau, included the belief that a person's spirit may wander when they are asleep as well as when they die. The African custom of grave decoration also survived a common feature across the rural South. However, cautioned Raboteau, searching for Africanisms or cultural retentions in Black religious expression in the United States should not degenerate into the Melville Herskovits-E. Franklin Frazier debate about African survivals. Raboteau gave credit to Herskovits, declaring that his "theory of reinterpretation as a factor in cultural contact is an advance over the notion that a people's beliefs, values, and behavioral patterns simply disappeared in the face of systematic oppression." However, Frazier's objection to the exaggerations and excesses in Herskovit's argument made sense to Raboteau as well. "Frazier was also right," Raboteau explained

in posing the question of African survivals in terms of significance or meaning and in keeping sight of the real differences between Afro-American cultures in the United States and elsewhere in the hemisphere. If he tended to undervalue instances of African survivals in the United States, he did maintain that the new situation was important

in influencing slaves to develop a new world view and a new culture. While it is true that Africa influenced [B]lack culture in the United States, including [B]lack religion, it is also true that African theology and African ritual did not endure to the extent that they did in Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil.²²

One helpful methodological tool for asking and answering questions about how the Diaspora has changed and influenced African American culture comes from Afrocentric literature. Afrocentrism as a paradigmatic construct defies oversimplification. For example, for the students of Afrocentrism at Temple University in Philadelphia, the African centered perspective can not be simply categorized as anti-European. Rather, the Afro-centrist scholar considers all human life as equally valuable, i.e., the organic dignity of all of humanity. However, Afrocentricity as a paradigm for studying the African Diaspora carries a political imperative as well. Any investigation that involves African culture or behavior (including their descendants living in Diaspora) “must use African ideals and values as the way of life and expression.”²³ The obligation to adopt a scholar-activist approach to human knowledge reflects an “essential assumption” of any Afrocentric study concerning the experiences of African people. The Afrocentric perspective in relation to Black Americans, for example, acts as a “liberating discipline...[because]

the specific purpose of the knowledge generated is to empower Black people to effect positive social change and to describe Black life experiences as determined by Black people’s understandings, interests and experiences; finally, the researcher (scholar) must always maintain a dialogical relationship with the subjects.²⁴

There is no question about the historical significance African American funerary display and community identity. Given the importance of historicizing “what slaves *did*” at funerals in the Caribbean islands and Brazil. Enslaved African’s funerary display had African cosmological basis. Death was as transfiguration from slavery to freedom and the hope that the deceased, the ancestors, would be a benevolent influence in the community life that they had left behind. Enslaved Americans in the rural U.S. South believed in the importance of good and decent funerals. Historical, anthropological, and ethnographic data all confirm the emphases placed on decent burial as well as funeral ceremony and reunion in the death care practices within the African Diaspora. But while most scholarly investigations of African American funerary rites has focused on the question of African retentions, e.g. the cosmological significance of Southern Black grave decorations and burial ground, Gomez told the primary importance of paying less attention to the Diasporan connections in slave funerals and more to the impact of funerary rites on African American community relations.²⁵

Roediger chose to quote Booker T. Washington as an introduction to his historical overview of the enslaved communities’ funerary behavior. However, Roediger did not repeat Washington’s 1907 commendation of successful African American undertakers. Rather, Roediger chose to repeat Washington’s lamentation about how Black people dealt with death. Roediger, quoting Washington, restated,

‘The trouble with us is that we are always preparing to die. You meet a white man early Monday morning and ask him what he is preparing to do...he is preparing to start a business. You as a colored man...he is preparing to die.’²⁶

Without citing the date on which Washington supposedly made this statement, Roediger left room for historians to question an obvious ambivalence in Washington’s analyses

about African American funerary behavior. According to Roediger, Washington purportedly “lamented” how much time and energy Black men spent talking about and planning for their demise. Roediger explained that, “...the Tuskegee educator thus counseled [B]lack Americans to downplay their traditional Afro-Christian concern for death and afterlife, so that they might more fully share in the Protestant ethic...”²⁷

However, at least in his 1907 publication, Washington had congratulated Black men who worked in death care, recognizing the undertaking profession as a “prosperous business.” The tension between Washington’s lamentation and commendation concerning African American funerary behavior almost certainly makes sense to those who understand the priorities of Booker T. Washington. Washington may have had little value or interest in the cultural significance which motivated such African American funerary displays. Yet, when Black people preferences funerary displays gave birth to a “prosperous business,” undertaking it merited serious attention from Washington. Otherwise, what accounts for the glaring contradiction between Washington’s comment comparing Black men’s aspirations regarding death care and his 1907 commendation of Black undertakers’ commercial success? Washington always favored fiscal strategy over approval (or condolence) a propos Black people’s acceptance of “the Protest ethic.” Although Washington undeniably protested what he thought inappropriate, Black behavior, perhaps Roediger missed the more probable explanation that Washington revered the Protestant *work* ethic; the Tuskegee Machine grieved anyone’s corruption of that principle especially if they were already economically vulnerable.

Some slaveholders did, however, performed some “grand gestures,” as Roediger called them, like attending slave funerals and weeping openly or purchasing stone grave

markers if a one of an elite or special group of slaves passed away. However, the enslaved received more common contributions from their masters like nails to construct a coffin, a covering to decorate the wooden box, and a white cloth to dress the body. Although some slaveholders tolerated or encouraged slave funerals, the paternalism of special allotments of food, rum or whiskey did not represent wide spread affection or romanticized sentiment for their human property.²⁸ To be sure, few slaveholders granted time off from work for attending slave funerals. As a result, more often than not, night burials and Sunday wakes or funeral services occasioned the death of a slave. Night funerals avoided work stoppage. Furthermore, Sunday funeral services and wakes avoided missing work hours. The slaveholders' restrictions regarding the logistics of slave funerals reflected the capitalist interests that the latter had invested in Black bodies—a dead slave was no longer profitable and their living kin and friends although bereaved were still unfree laborers. The African American community, however, used the cover of night to gather in virtual privacy. Beckoning friends and relatives from other plantations, if permission had been granted, slave funerals articulated a particular meaning for end of life. “The cover of darkness,” Plater stated, “allowed slave funerals to be closer to the slaves’ African-based funeral customs.”²⁹ The slave community would then bid farewell to its deceased member with an impressive, solemn and mystical funeral, the darkness of night funerals veiling their “eerie ceremonies.” Labor requirements on the plantations may have controlled the length of time between interring the body and performing the rites, but nothing kept the slave community from observing their communities’ death care practices. Enslaved Southerner revered their elders because respect for older people helped preserve the memory of the dead and the elderly

were chronically closer to the ancestors than they. The transition from elder to ancestor, physical death, in traditional African cosmology, according to Raboteau, called for, “long, complex, and expensive” funerary displays that “it would be a great disgrace for a family not to observe the proper rites, even if they must go in debt to do so.”³⁰

If a slave funeral lasted through the night, the procession to the grave started around midnight. Roediger discussed the funeral procession to the slave graveyard. If allowed to sing, they paced themselves by slowly singing hymn in an effort “to avoid any inauspicious mishaps during the graveyard march.”³¹ Raboteau included this slave testimony about the procession and slave graveyard

‘de slaves had dere own special graveyard an’
us’d make de coffins right on de place dar.
When someone died, he was taken in an ox
cart to de grae, wid all de slaves a-walkin’
‘long behine de car singin spirituals,..’³²

Genovese believed that the processional to the slave graveyard, “...especially the use of those drums which were so reminiscent of Africa,” proves the historical continuity and influence of African cosmology in African Americans’ distinctive funerary display in the ante-bellum South.³³ Gomez provided an even more poignant inscription, using Roediger’s estimates of slave mourners who participated in funeral processions, Gomez commented, “the average funeral procession ranged from three hundred to seven hundred people; obviously all of these people were not related, nor could they have all known one another. But they all came together anyway, and in their coming together they made the collective statement that they belong to and were affirming each other. They were becoming a single community.”³⁴

The slave graveyard, the procession's destination, provided a poetic conclusion for a life lived under racial subjugation, a segregated space where the "dead bodies of slaves never mingled their dust with that of the sovereign race."³⁵ A second hand documenting of mortuary customs and beliefs of South Carolina slaves confirmed the prevalence of night burials and graveyard processions. One late 19th century ethnographer cribbed the following story about slave superstitions regarding death care from an article originally published in the "Atlanta Constitution," a Southern circular:

In former times the burial took place at night, and a long procession of friends and relatives, bearing lighted torches, escorted the corpse to the graveyard. After the interment a funeral feast was held, and every one was expected to bring from the graveyard and lay before the door a clod of earth, as proofs that he had really been to the burial, on pain of being haunted by the 'spirit' of the deceased... the colored people do not exactly fear death; on the contrary, *they invest it* with a kind of solemn religious exultation...³⁶ (emphasis added)

Nevertheless, slave funeral services required White permission, regardless of how much a decent burial and solemn ceremony meant to Black people. Some slaveholders and slave traders purposefully refused to bury the dead bodies of recalcitrant, rebellious, or runaway slaves. Fatality reprimanded. The enslaved understood threat of violence, the severing of communal rites, and possibilities of like condemnations. Several slave narratives as well as interviews collected by the WPA ethnographers, for example, mentioned children deprived of attending the burial of their parents or spouse. Some slaveholder did not allow Black bereavement, so there was no option of stopping work to attend a slave funeral, regardless of relation. In *The Narrative of Henry Watson, A Fugitive Slave*, Watson sketched this form of cruelty using the following description of

the manner in which some slaveholders disposed of deceased slaves. Watson gave confirmed that at the death of a slave he was sent by his master

to the overseer, requesting him to send two boys to the house. On their arrival, he would order them to the hospital, or sick-house, as it is generally called, and they would take the body, fasten it in the blanket on which he had died, put it on the hand-barrow, and carry it to its place of burial. This was generally done very hastily,...without minister or coffin, or permitting husband, or wife, or mother, to see the last disposal of that which had been dear to them on earth.³⁷

Another child's life-long memory of the final moment with his enslaved mother was even worse than denying a final viewing of the body. Shot by their master for lagging behind, she fell in the same place where he had shot her, the slave mother dying right in front of her little boy; her dead body left in the open.³⁸

Roediger's sole purpose in recounting such atrocities entailed a rebuttal. His evidence refuted a claim that slaveholders were responsible for the "vitality" of funerals within slave communities. His investigation of the compromised and mixed "record of the master class" required recollection of both their generosity and barbarity. As far as who was responsible for the "vitality of the institution" of slave funerals Roediger's articles leaves no question that the slave community, enslaved Black families, were the ones responsible for this community function. Therefore, Booker T. Washington was right about the interest in and importance of the corpse for African Americans. And Roediger's article provides evidence not only that enslaved Southerners gave priority to attending their dead, but also the similarities of funerary behavior of African Americans,

Antiguans, and Barbadians. The grave processional, the importance of mass attendance, and culinary fellowship following interment all illustrate continuity in African Diaspora.

Chapter 2

BENEVOLENCE AND BURIALS

Church and Charity: "Invisible Institution" to Post-Emancipation Communities

Black people who were not enslaved during the 18th century, free people of color in the North and the South, also provided for the funerals in their communities. In 1787, for example, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones organized the free African Society, one of the first mutual-aid or benevolent associations organized by African Americans. The members pledged to provide for each other in sickness and death with special provisions for widows and children of their deceased members. The society's members also purchased some land to use as a burial ground, an act of protestation against the prejudice of burying Black bodies in other cemeteries. Hundreds of like associations followed as Northern Blacks of the ante-bellum period combined their community needs with organizational opportunity. Free Blacks in Northern cities like Philadelphia adopted the practice of pooling their resources to secure and finance decent burials and funerary tributes. Church relief societies became the chief form of African American self-help beginning in 1787, the same year for which Gaspar documented the esteemed and "numerously attended Negro funerals" among enslaved Antiguans.¹

The "elite writing and legal documents" of White people during the American colonial period substantiate Gaspar, Roediger, Raboteau, Plater, and other scholarly discussions about how White people feared the consequences of Black bodies congregating because of a corpse. However, White people interested in freeing those

bodies, ardent abolitionists, sensationalized their polemical appropriations of brutalized Black bodies. For example, Dwight McBride, in his book *Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony*, provided a literary critique of abolitionists' political purposes for Black bodies. According to McBride, abolitionists put Black bodies on the stage so that former slaves could "bear witness to their authentic experiences of slavery." Authentication by a Black body testifying on stage, contended McBride, "was somehow more truthful than the word of white abolitionists, who were mere witnesses one step removed, as they were not themselves slaves."² But, in appropriating the testimony of the Black body, argued McBride, abolitionists denied the individual humanity of the witness. The body became "the referent, the signifier, the site of contestation" because it was used both "in the pro-slavery advocacy and rearticulated in the abolitionist texts." In this sense, the Black body did not belong to a human person, but rather to a complex and conflicted White psyche. The slave witness, explained McBride, represents collective evidence or proof because whether or not other slaves are present on stage with, "the slave who is witnessing in the narrative, they are a part of a collective slave body by condition." In abolition, the cause of freeing Black bodies, exacts the cost individual identity. "This logic goes far toward explaining why white bodies can signify individuality," McBride elucidated, "and why Black bodies—with their limited access to the category of the individual—almost always signify as representative bodies...the collective Black body under slavery."³

For this very reason, African American funerary display must be fully historicized. That is to say, Southern slave funerals reclaim the Black body from an identity that is overpoweringly "context bound," the rhetorical property of the abolitionist

crusaders and the human property of the slaveholder. Gomez also argued that slave funerals are in fact both resistance to the context-binding vis a vis the other, i.e., White authorities,

The passing of a fellow, whether enslaved or freed, was of great significance to Black folk...it was not necessary for the deceased to have been a relative or even a personal acquaintance. What mattered was that someone of like fate had passed on, and it was vitally important that she or he be remembered. It was important that the person be remembered by the community, because 'the world' would not remember. It would not have mattered to most white folks that the deceased had ever lived; her life was of no special significance in the overall scheme of things. So it was crucial that Black folk pay respect to their own. It was essential that as many as possible come out, for in honoring the deceased, they validated their own worth.⁴

Enslaved Southerners primarily neither slaveholders nor free people of color assumed the care and nourishment of the sick that the plantation did not afford them. Enslaved people nursed their community members until they return to health and buried them when they died. The enslaved used their communal bonds to heal each other. There is at least one empirical study that found although prohibited to assemble, forbidden to congregate, restricted in their movements, and largely illiterate and moneyless, enslaved Black people still managed the clandestine organization of society memberships. Poignant and spectacular, enslaved African Americans, according to Harry Joseph Walker's 1937 thesis, *Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans: A Study of Their Structure, Function, and Membership*,

resorted to an ingenious method of carrying on their organizations. A slave, preferably one who could read and write and who was trusted by his master, was selected secretary. He kept all the books, and on specified days, 'the slaves, one by one' would go to his cabin and 'call their number and leave their

payment with the secretary who recorded it in his book that was usually kept covered on the bed.’⁵

The secretary, who enjoyed more freedom of movement because of the favor to the plantation owner, notified the society’s membership when another member died. The society would assemble at the church on the appointed day to hold the funeral, if their masters had given permission for holding and attending the service. In the death of a society member, although the “slave funeral” may have been at the mercy of a master, the assembly of mourners identified the deceased by another record, a name and number which had been prepared for this significance event. Culminating the funeral services of church with procession, the society members, “formed in a column, and singing mournful dirges followed the corpse to the graveyard.”⁶

Important before the Civil War, nearly all African American benevolent societies “stated that their purpose was to furnish sickness and death benefits.”⁷ The South American corollary, the Afro-Brazilian *irmandades*, or sisterhoods or fraternal societies of Salvador, Bahia, performed the same function in the mid 19th century. Rachel Harding found that in the 1850s, every Bahian whether enslaved or free probably belonged to one or more *irmandades*. For the Afro-Bahian, *irmandades* assumed care for sick members, managed resources towards manumission, provided fellowship, conferred status, “and, especially, assured a decent burial.”⁸ Membership in Afro-Bahian *irmandades* was not based on accumulated wealth, however, but rather skin color, social class, racial parentage, and, sometimes, occupation. Therefore, “within any particular Afro-Brazilian lay association,” Harding clarified

a slave could feel himself the equal of a small businessman and both could fulfill the same responsibilities. Also, through the *irmandades*, Afro-Brazilians enjoyed...funeral services

as extravagant as those of elite whites, and display themselves with 'with brilliance and grandeur in [their] religious processions...' ⁹

Historian Carter G. Woodson wrote that within the U.S., especially large cities in the North like Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati, these mutual aid organizations or benevolent fraternities "reached a stage of unusual influence in Black churches and sometimes expanded into secret associations, a thing which could not be done in slave territory." ¹⁰ In the South, the restrictions placed on the enslaved regarding their mobility, assembly, and liberty forced their communities to deal with death via their "invisible institution," slave religion and night funerals. However, free Southern Blacks in large cities like New Orleans, Charleston, and Richmond took advantage of their tenuous freedom by establishing benevolent societies with the same fervor as their counterparts in Northern areas such as Philadelphia. ¹¹ For example, the Brown Fellowship Society, a funeral society started by a group of free Blacks in Charleston, SC in 1790 had, by 1794, bought land that became their society's personal cemetery; and the Humane Brotherhood, another group of free Blacks who bought a lot next to the Brown Fellowship plot "the desire for proper funerals provided the vehicle for these early African American social organizations. Therefore, death customs provided an important foundation for the construction of an autonomous African American community." ¹²

Still, there is also the possibility that Black people responded to the corpse in culturally distinctive ways because they are African Americans, i.e., descendants whose roots belong to the African Diaspora. Gomez attested to the fact that both enslaved and free African Americans as well as country born and Creole shared the same mourning rituals or responses to death in their respective communities. "Both the African- and the

American-born mourned, and that together,” Gomez explained. Going further into his explanation, he added,

They surely reflected not only upon their individual plights but also upon the circumstances visited upon them collectively. The source of lamentation was the suffering and mistreatment of the slave and his freed cousin. But beyond all of this, they mourned the waste and destruction of potential and creativity. The deceased would never know what could have been. This was, and remains, the greatest tragedy of the African American.¹³

The testimony of an itinerant preacher, an enslaved man by the name of John Jasper discloses how antebellum Black communities dealt with the tragedy of destruction and waste. The slave preacher and funeral sermons are an undervalued source of this historical articulation. The presence, prestige, and power of the slave preacher connect White concessions to the cultural demand for decent burials, African-based cosmological ideals concerning death care, and the primary symbol or shared value of slave death, i.e., freedom. Slave funerals are the genesis of the African American preacher. Plater argued,

“Funerals provided a mechanism for constructing social organizations, and established the role and relevance of the African American preacher. While the African American funeral in the antebellum period was a white-sanctioned religious ritual, the funeral as a social event, cultural builder, and pageant may be the more significant aspect of this antebellum American ceremony. The opportunity to come together, conduct a ritual according to their own ideas, and share this experience with an extended group of their peers made this occurrence a unique and significant event for African Americans during slavery. Funerals gave slaves an opportunity to establish a cultural identity. They instilled personal values beyond the reach of slave owners. Within their strictly dominated environment, death customs offered the slaves one realm where they controlled their fate.”¹⁴

John Jasper started preaching in 1839, twenty-five years before his own emancipation. Born on July 4, 1812 in Fluvanna County, Virginia, and the youngest of twenty-four children, Jasper had worked a cart boy, house servant, table waiter, gardener, and hired hand before his conversion in 1839. And for a quarter of a century, Jasper ministered to the enslaved as a community member. He was no stranger to either work or bondage. According to William E. Hatcher, Jasper's biographer responsible for the 2nd edition publication of Jasper's biography in 1908,

There was one thing which the [N]egro greatly insisted upon, and which not even the most hardhearted masters were ever quite willing to deny them. They could never bear that their dead should be put away without a funeral. Not that they expected, at the time of the burial, to have the funeral service. Indeed, they did not desire it, and it was never according to their notions. *A funeral to them was a pageant.* It was a thing to be arranged for a long time ahead. It was to be marked by the gathering of the kindred and friends from far and wide. It was not satisfactory unless there was a vast and excitable crowd.¹⁵

And, Hatcher added, the slaves “demanded” that a Black preacher must “preach the funeral.”¹⁶ Proper African American funerary display required the participation of a preacher. The slave community venerated the funeral preacher, conferring upon him the only true and organic elite status within their community, a status that did not depend on White acknowledgement, dehumanizing servility, or involuntary subjugation.¹⁷

The slave funeral, i.e., the funerary sermon or eulogy delivered by the slave preacher, need not have occurred immediately preceding or following the actual burial or interment. In fact, it was somewhat common for the funeral sermon to be separated from the burial by several days, weeks, and even months. Sometimes several funerals were preached at one time. Plater gave details to support the preacher was the principle or

central character in the “drama” of African American funerary display in antebellum slave communities. In the absence of the dead body, the preacher was the focus slave funerals. The slave preacher had the responsibility of dignifying the loss of the community member, comforting those bereaved of their kin or friend, and rectifying the travesty of stolen humanity, creativity, and potential. No wonder Plater reasoned, “only the best African American orators and preachers received speaking invitations.” He continued,

The presence of a well-known African American preachers showed the status of the deceased and the slave owner. For the slave owners, having renowned African American preachers come to their plantation reflected on the slave owner’s social prestige. African Americans expressed the general conditions of their lives through their death customs. An emotional and spectacular commemoration of death served as a form of communal catharsis in African American culture. During the ceremony, participants ecstatically appealed to spirits of the present and past. It was the preacher’s role to incite the mourners’ emotions and achieve this catharsis. Night funerals with torches, grave site dancing, and fires were vital elements in the drama and pageantry.¹⁸

The “drama and pageantry” that characterized the funerary display of the enslaved, elaborate social functions negotiated with and conceded by those in authority, perhaps redeemed the mourners’ cosmological obligations to the deceased. The lengthier postponements of unsolicited weeks for slave funerals afforded the enslaved more time for planning.¹⁹

The funerary displays of enslaved African Americans reflect their ethnic beliefs concerning community cohesion. In their cosmological views, death itself did not disrupt the roles and responsibilities of community members. Therefore, how less could the temporal prerogatives of controlling slaveholders interrupt their funerary rituals?

Raboteau gave testimonies from both the slave community and outsider opinion to explain how the enslaved dealt with involuntary delays in death care. Citing a White minister who noticed that Sundays were usually the time of the week set aside for slave funerals, Raboteau quoted the cleric as having acknowledged that there was no immediate chronological sequence between a slave's death and the funeral gathering. Recalling a freedmen's comment on the lag between death and the funeral service, Raboteau confirmed that some enslaved people met in church for the funeral sermon maybe half a year after the burial. Whereas, the former bondmen explained, " 'De [W]hite folses had all dier funeral sermons preached at de time of buryin.' ”²⁰

An essential feature of the sorrowful yet exciting event of a slave funeral entailed the participation of what Hatcher called “the officiating brother...one of their own colour [sic], and a man of reputation.” Hatcher explained that the preacher who officiated a slave funeral was responsible to “plough up their emotional depths [because the enslaved] must have freedom to indulge in the extravagancies of their sorrow.”²¹ Raboteau portrayed the slave preacher as a somewhat privileged character in comparison with other bondpeople. The slave preacher was usually male, clever, and eloquent, although often illiterate. He presided over slave baptisms, funerals, and weddings. He was the “leader of the slaves’ religious life and an influential figure in the community.”²² Jasper’s biography classified his oratory speech as “tempestuous, ungrammatical eloquence.”²³

Conceivably, Jasper’s fame as a preeminent funeral orator of the Richmond, Virginia slave community began in this way: he preached a funeral at which women fainted, men shouted, and a thrilling and fiery eulogy all attested that the deceased and

their enslaved family both had been adequately honored. Hatcher's depiction of a slave community attending funeral suggested such a conclusion.

A [N]egro funeral without an uproar, without shouts and groans,...with pictures of triumphant deathbeds and the judgment day, and without the gates of heaven wide open and the subjects of the funeral *dressed in white* and rejoicing around the throne of the Lamb, was no funeral at all.²⁴ (emphasis added)

Unparalleled in importance, there are no questions regarding the ethereal authority of the Black preachers in African American community building. Enslaved Southern Blacks solicited these earliest death care professionals in order to access proper burials. In addition, though impoverished and largely illiterate, also enslaved communities embraced church membership, secret societies, and burial associations in order to negotiate "decent burials" for their deceased loved ones and themselves. By the end of the ante-bellum period, preachers and church sextons or grave diggers had begun to charge individual families for funeral services. In the fall of 1864, a yellow fever epidemic in New Berne, North Carolina, recalled Captain Horace James, Superintendent of Negro Affairs for the North Carolina district, confirmed the community function and indispensable aid of both Black preachers and undertakers. Captain James' annual report showed that although more Black people died of the small pox epidemic later that winter, nearly a fourth of the white population of New Berne had died of yellow fever earlier that fall. Describing the need for death care, the captain reported

The town, deserted, forsaken, shut out from intercourse with the world, unprovided [sic] with things essential to the comfort of the sick or the sustenance of the well, all business suspended, except the undertaker's,..Brig. Gen. Harland...summoned the colored troops to so guard duty in town, and attend the burial of the dead.²⁵

James' Annual Report of 1864 accounted for the lack of sufficient "white people enough in the state of health to inter its own dead with the forms of Christian burial." He went on to say that, "As it was, not a few were left to die alone, and were carried to the grave without a friend to follow the hearse, or listen to the service."²⁶

Laderman stated much more bluntly just how status-free removal of disease stricken corpses could be. He showed that "the only periods that exhibited a degree of egalitarianism in burial practices were those seasons of severe and brutal epidemics." When societies faced "intermittent breakouts of yellow fever and smallpox," Laderman concluded, the color of the dead victim's skin did spare "social chaos, collective misery, and a multitude of corpses." Disposing of the bodies, Black people witnessed the abilities of their White neighbors to respect life regardless of what ancestry influenced hue. And in death at the times of such catastrophic diseases, poverty determined the final destination of fallen victims more so than status or ethnicity.²⁷ Epidemics necessitated expedient and practical forms of physical removal and afforded a somewhat macabre manifestation of equality.

Captain James observation about Black people attending to White bodies stroke this witness because in Laderman's words, Black people at the "margins of society," who would have been denied access to the same burial spaces because of color, status, or condition of servitude had assumed responsibility for disposal. An anonymous, communal graveyard with lime and dirt awaited the remains of anyone who died during an epidemic who did not have a way to secure a more respectable removal. African Americans provided decent burial for people who probably under normal circumstances

would have denied them even the right to have the same. Before concluding his report, however, Captain James made note the stark contrast of the Black community in terms of ministerial intercessors and spiritual guides. He found it necessary to state, “The colored people will raise up and support their own preachers. There is no lack of ministers among them.”²⁸

By September 1865, J. W. Alvord, the General Superintendent of Education of the Freedman’s Bureau Schools, had received his appointment. Originally called the inspector of schools, Alvord’s tasks required him to make reports to Major General O.O. Howard, including the first general report to the Freedmen’s Bureau schools filed January 1866.²⁹ Still on the job four years later, Alvord’s periodic letters to General Howard, especially one dated January 21, 1870, confirm the symbiotic relationship between preachers and death care in the U.S. South after emancipation. The following excerpt comes from Alvord’s letter to his boss written from Atlanta, detailing a subject Alvord listed as “Comparative morality among [W]hites and [B]acks.”

Dear General: I may perhaps write oftener than you wish, but You desired of me short letters rather than one lengthy report at the end of my tour. My impressions *at the moment* are also more distinct and accurate than they would be after delay. I am carefully collecting statistics of industry, mortality, crime, &c., as well as general information. City clerks and chiefs of police do not hesitate to answer all of my queries;...I consult also the colored preachers and sextons, who of course attend all burials.³⁰

Inspector Alvord’s “short letter” affirms the presence, power, and position of the preacher as well as the Black preacher’s civic and spiritual corollary, a death care provider.

S.A. Martha Canfield kept a diary during her three year tenure at the Memphis Colored Orphan Asylum. Col. John Eaton Jr., the General Superintendent of Refugees

and Freedmen, also received a letter from Mrs. Canfield, dated March 1, 1865 from Colored Orphan Asylum in Memphis, Tennessee. Looking at both of these documents, Mrs. Canfield tried to capture the familial atmosphere which the asylum attempted to foster for Black orphans. One particular journal entry deserved particular attention:

“Jan. 30th—Buried Joseph Boone. Uncle Morris officiated, and the services were quite impressive. The remains were carried in a wagon, and most of the children followed in procession to the grave.”³¹

The children of deceased slaves and soldiers had not lost their cultural lessons in Black funerary behavior. Mrs. Canfield had unwittingly documented a generation of anthropological research in her simple entry. “Uncle Morris,” the venerable appellation for elderly Black people especially those who had important community roles like funeral preachers; good attendance at the funeral; and following in procession to the grave were all displayed under slavery. The amazing continuity of death care and funerary display at the orphanage may suggest that despite even the ultimate disruption of the Black family, the death of both parents, there were certain ways of dealing with death that had to be representative regardless.

Interestingly, the surprise of some officials and civil servants working for the Freedmen’s Bureau in response to African Americans’ request for burial assistance disclose their lack of preparedness to deal with the poor, dispossessed freed people within their own cultural context. In a letter written from Vicksburg, Mississippi on January 31, 1865, Colonel J.H. Weber, a Provost Marshal of Freedmen reported that of all the business, transactions, and services which his post provided to Black people, one particular need request was difficult to meet, i.e., assistance for burials in the Black community.

During the winter a great many applications have been made by the poor for coffins, etc., to bury their friends; but as there was no fund which could be used to defray such expenditures, nothing could be given; and the friends or relatives were compelled to make shift for themselves. In many cases people have not been decently interred [sic] and often without coffins; But a contract has been made with a responsible party, a colored man, to inter the poor on orders from this office; his bills being paid out of the fund derived from the tax on permits.³²

Weber's letter told how freed people of Vicksburg, Mississippi asked him to provide coffins for the Black community because not only did these former slaves still believe in funerals, but they also associated charity and benevolence with burial assistance and funeral expenses. In fact, historian August Meier posited that the sheer number and massive impact of mutual benefit or benevolence societies and their activities "reflect the thinking of the inarticulate majority better than any other organizations or the statement of editors and other publicists."³³ Weber, however, resolved to defray the former slaves' funerary costs using the Bureau's purse under the most only under the most extremely desperate circumstances. "Care, of course is taken," he assured Colonel Samuel Thomas, Provost Marshal General, "to give orders for the burial of those only whose friends are unable to pay the expense themselves."³⁴

Weber seemed to have overlooked two very important, cultural assumptions of the former slaves. Largely poor, vulnerable, and illiterate, African American people dealt with the uncertainties of their lives, lacking the security of health care or life insurance, with mutual helpfulness. Woodson commended, nonetheless, the rescue attempts of Freedmen's Bureaus and Freedmen's Aid Societies. Explaining the vulnerability of newly freed people, Woodson highlighted the ubiquitous and culturally-proven belief in

Black self-help to make sense of the Bureau's shortcomings. Referencing the efforts of the Bureau, Woodson opined

these agencies could not reach the whole body of the needy; and, at best, their ministration was temporary. The Negroes in the final analysis had to learn to look out for themselves. The deep-seated idea of solving a social and economic problem through benevolent societies, then, seemed more practical than ever.³⁵

Carter G. Woodson, understanding the connection between death, slavery, and community function, saw the “invisible institution” of the ante-bellum South and historicized “the handmaiden of religion,” the benevolent society. One researcher candidly called benevolent societies, ... “the only means the poor people had of insuring themselves and their families against the great handicaps that result from sickness and death.”³⁶ Historian Jacqueline Jones echoed,

neighborhoods sought to compensate with a tight work of both formal and informal secular and church-related social welfare services. Kin and community could help, ... to fill a gap left by the death or departure of a household wage earner.³⁷

After the Civil War, Southern Black churches institutionalized the “invisible institution” of slave religion. Slave religion in its overt, post-bellum practice, the Black church, was the natural extension of agency and mutual aid; emancipation provided the freedoms to solidify its organizational and institutional infrastructure. “After the emancipation of the whole group,” Historian Carter G. Woodson clarified, “the [Black] church in its new freedom gave ample opportunity for the unlimited development of benevolent societies among Negroes.”³⁸ Still illiterate and propertyless, Black people's interdependence, fostered under slavery and extended by an acceptance of charitable resources from more privileged slaves and also free Blacks, transitioned into the

widespread development of benevolent societies. In the U.S. South, post-emancipation benevolent or burial societies captured a cultural legacy that extended back to U.S. slavery, the belief in reclaiming the Black body as part of the community. Both primary and secondary sources point to the “invisible institution” of slave religion and the slave community’s efforts at mutual aid as the genesis of Southern benevolent societies of the post-emancipation era. In fact, community aid or self-help cooperatives had become a cultural expectation or norm among in Southern cities like Richmond, Atlanta, and New Orleans, especially, according to historian Carter G. Woodson, “wherever Negroes had their own churches.”³⁹ Post-emancipation Black churches in Alabama, according to C.A. Spencer, in Alabama, for example, “naturally assumed leadership in the formation of benevolent societies.” Spencer reasoned, Black churches, “provided religious and moral guidance and much needed sense of belonging—in other words, group affiliation and social acceptance.” With the close supervision and power paranoid of White Christians having been terminated by the post-emancipation of Black congregants’ newly established, racially homogenous places of worship, both free and freed Blacks could more fully embrace the functions of the benevolent society.⁴⁰

Spencer case study of benevolent societies in post-bellum, Mobil, Alabama is a detailed account of African American self-help. Flooded with significant numbers of destitute people, both Black and White, late 19th century Alabama was the perfect place for organizing mutual aid or “cooperative” associations. Spencer’s article presented the organizational history of Black benevolent societies in Alabama as a point of departure for tracing the evolution of Alabama’s first Black insurance company. Spencer believed that these self-help cooperatives did not issue individual policies or certificates to its

members. Therefore, the society's constitutions and by-laws, according to Spencer, served as a contract between the societies and its members. The "contract," i.e., the members' acceptance of the society's functions and rules, specified that certain "benefits" should offset familial insecurities caused by sickness, disability, or death. Spencer argued that the contract between benevolent society and its members foreshadowed the life insurance policies that would be sold to Black families when the financial instability of benevolence society itself became too unbearable.⁴¹

Plater's opinions about the importance of African American funeral directors in their communities confirmed Spencer's review of the destitution and insecurity faced by poor Black families in the post-emancipation period. Plater insisted that important before the Civil War, the significance of sickness and burial societies to freed African Americans drastically increased across the post-bellum South and the ranks of potential membership soared. In Plater's biography of Virginian mortician R.C. Scott's impact on Richland's African American community, Plater argued the importance of Scott's connection to his social organizations. Scott's funeral business was successful because he understood that there were few large-scale, African American businesses with access to cash with the exception of those monies paid to church societies in the forms of membership dues and burial insurance premiums. In fact, as Plater outlined, even the African American church depended on the services and financial support of the funeral industry for their survival.⁴²

"Church relief societies," Plater, Hughes, Butler, Spencer, Walker, and other scholars all have documented,

were the earliest organizations to provide insurance
[stability and security] for African Americans. In their

early form, mutual aid societies also served as centers of worship. The community and economic responsibilities of church relief societies increased as their insurance systems became more sophisticated. African American organizations [church relief and fraternal benefit societies] provided security against the cost of disability and death.⁴³

Ex-slaves in the post-emancipation period believed that freedom had brought no disruption in their value of funerary display or expectation of community support to adhere to it. However, there were some significant changes. The “invisible institution” or slave religion gave way to the freedom of assembly in Southern, Black churches. As a result, the tradition of self-help and mutual aid flourished. Enterprising Black men with the support of Black women combined their membership in Black churches and benevolent societies to capitalize on the Black communities’ belief in funerals. The “society undertaker” became an official occupation, a service sustained under slavery, transformed by freedom into a viable trade for death care and ultimately, industrial insurance. This explains why, in his 1907 publication, *The Negro in Business*, Booker T. Washington connected Black people’s “demand for solemn and decent and often elaborate burial services” to a “prosperous business,” undertaking. In doing so, Washington emphasized that African Americans “*have always*” valued funerary display.⁴⁴ The historical significance of this claim begs an overview that connects death care as a “special and peculiarly important” event for Blacks of the U.S. ante-bellum South to the premier African American community building efforts of the post-emancipation burial and benevolent societies.

The change over time from African American bondage to the abolition of slavery also marks a cultural transformation from a cosmological preoccupation with death, a

feature of African American life which Washington detested. In freedom, death care became a lucrative trade and as such redressed Washington's assaulted Blackness. Thus, by the time of Washington's 1907 publication, the funeral business had become worthy of professional recognition by the quintessential Black businessmen of the 19th century and president of the National Negro Business League, the Tuskegee Wizard, Booker T. Washington. The consistency of Southern Blacks' funerary displays blossomed from support of self-help associations into full of locally-owned funeral homes in their respective communities. Therefore, the patronage of poor, Black families transformed the preservation of Black bodies from a collaborative ritual to that of a service occupation. By the modern-era, one researcher's survey accounted for over one hundred and thirty benevolent societies in New Orleans, Louisiana alone.

New Orleans, Funerals, and Jazz

In 1937, Harry Joseph Walker reported his anthropological findings about New Orleans' Black benevolent organizations to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Walker's examination weaved field research and survey results into a historical narrative that proved the intimate familiarity and traditions of mutual aid, Black identity and death care. With testimonies from old society founders, interviews with 19th century members still alive in 1937, and examinations of societies' and members records, Walker's case study offers a unique peel of truth from power.

Walker's research confirmed the connection between slave religion, the function of mutual aid, and the emergence of benevolent societies. Walker believed New Orleans' societies to be evidence of earlier "mutual helpfulness" that characterized enslaved and

free communities during the antebellum period. He noted that the history of “a great many of these societies developed around the church which was in itself an agency looked to for aid when misfortune overtook a person.” Walker’s study confirms that the African American church was a direct product of the “invisible institution,” the religion of the enslaved that defined burial as a community’s business and obligation.⁴⁵

The membership of many of the societies reflected settlement patterns. For example, specific groups of freedmen and women residing in a particular neighborhood often purchased lots in an existing cemetery or a different site in which they established burial plots for members use only. Walker and other researchers confirmed the exclusivity practiced by society members. Marcus Bruce Christian, for example, a businessman, writer, poet, teacher and an ethnographer of the “Colored Project” of the Louisiana Federal Writers’ Project (FWP) at Dillard University from 1936 to 1943 compiled 19th century newspaper clippings, personal papers, historical and literary writings. Christian collected this story in the November 11, 1873 edition of *The New Orleans Republic* to protect the history and elitism of one society, the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana. Founded near the second half of the 19th century, this social organization celebrated its 25th anniversary with a gala event that merited that a *Republic* journalist covers the occasion. Those who followed New Orleans’ society columns were no doubt impressed with the guest list at this gathering. Most notably, the reporter dropped the names of U.S. Senator Pinckney Benton Stewart (P.B.S.) Pinchback and his mother, calling Senator Pinchback just “one of the honored quests,” but also, “the undoubted idol of the colored people.” Senator Pinchback had also served as lieutenant governor of Louisiana following the mysterious death of Lt. Governor Oscar James Dunn

in 1871. The impeachment of the state's governor, Henry C. Warmouth, in 1872, resulted in Pinchback's six week stint as acting governor of Louisiana. At the same time, U.S. Representative Pinchback had already won a seat in Washington D.C. And by 1873, Pinchback was elected to the U.S. Senate. Not only was the Senator and his mother in attendance, but the name dropping journalist also mentioned the presence of the widowed Lt. Governor [Mrs.] O.J. Dunn and the wife of his successor, Lt. Governor Antoine.⁴⁶

The Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana, however, was as much a charitable society as it was a high profile association that merited the favored presence of such distinguished guests. Incorporated by the state of Louisiana in 1848, the society focused on "benevolence including deeds of kindness toward their fellow beings in sickness and suffering, even unto the grave." This particular group of Black women was prominent enough to "have a very fine vault in Greenwood Cemetery, wherein they bury their dead." This property held communally by the Benevolent Daughters marked their association's status among many such organizations. The vault also provided "a time honored custom" as members made an annual visit as a "pious observance [to] the tombs of their departed friends." After their visit with their deceased members, the Benevolent Daughters hosted a soiree for their society officers, members, and invited guests. In this venue, the journalist from the *Republic* was a participant. The impressions of the reporter provide primary witness of how funerary display was combined with both charitable organizations and societal prestige. That is to say, membership in the Benevolent Daughters certainly had its privileges. Perhaps the most socially significant one was being identified with such esteemed community leaders such as national politicians. However, by far the most culturally resonant advantage was the Greenwood Cemetery

vault that belonged to these society women. Fortunate enough to be buried in this space, no one would doubt the significance of the deceased and at least on the night of the big party someone would get by there to pay homage to their memory. That is to say, the identity of the death would not cease to exist as long as they had people who would remember them. Such a powerful part of identity formation, ownership of burial property, made it possible that the Benevolent Daughters had “flourished through all the changes and vicissitudes of a quarter of a century.” The funerary display practiced by the Black women in this volunteer organization had fomented their communities’ opinions. The general reputation of the society “wherever charity and kindness are appreciated in the city” made it possible for the journalist’s public declaration in this New Orleans’ paper.⁴⁷

The racial separation enforced by White prejudice made way for a competitive, high society complete with namedropping, hobnobbing, and grand standing. For while Black church societies aided the destitute whose freedom from bondage was not accompanied by viable options for subsistence, the status of membership in certain benevolence agencies meet other social needs like parties with high-ranking government officials and secure burial plots at prestigious cemeteries. Before the Black women’s club movement, African American women whose family and financial status permitted coalesced for good works in societies primarily concerned with decent burials and funerary memorials. That is to say, one of the first concerns in Black communities for race women was the significance of adequate death care including funerary displays that affirmed the status of certain community members.

At times, Black preachers, “the natural leader in organizing” benevolent societies even restricted membership in specific benevolent societies to a specific church or group

congregations. Just thirty years after Washington published his commendation of Black undertakers, Black-owned funeral businesses had become so customary across the South that in New Orleans, Louisiana many benevolent societies established contracts with local funeral directors. These business partnerships ensured that the society members' burial benefits and their funeral arrangements would be handled by death care professionals intimately familiar with the traditions of African American funeral display. Whether a "Black" family in New Orleans may have spoken English, French, Cajun French, or other Creole dialect with surnames and complexions similarly distributed, those who joined benevolent associations expected their funeral arrangements to include a mode of transportation, plenty of mourners and band music. In New Orleans, membership in certain societies created not only competition, but also a peculiar New Orleans funerary behavior complete with patronage, and popularity, and pageantry.⁴⁸

The most prevalent expectation of society members regarding the funerary products provided to them by their funeral directors dealt with appearances or what Hatcher referred to as a pageant.⁴⁹ Plater argued that even the Jim Crow railroad companies at the turn of the century "catered to the fraternal societies" because of the impressive parades, displays, and crowds which the benevolent societies generated.

These trains transported whole communities to distant cities on excursions sponsored by different fraternal societies. They might travel from city to city, but usually the trains brought people from the rural sections of the South into large cities. Excursions typically began early in the morning; participants enjoyed the festivities all day, and returned late in the night. In addition, communities judged the status of individuals by the number of fraternal societies represented in their funeral procession, or in other words, how many societies they had joined.⁵⁰

New Orleans, a large Southern city, provides an opportunity to historicize how “the social functions of fraternal societies contributed to their popularity and their spectacular growth.”⁵¹

Curiously, however, even in Southern cities like New Orleans where embalming procedures had been available since the 1850s, neither the dead body nor its container or coffin was the center of African American funerary display during the antebellum and post-emancipation eras.⁵² During the antebellum period, the slave preacher, funeral sermon, and grave yard procession were the center of African American funeral display. In the decades of the post-emancipation period up until the modern era, poor African American families who preserved the bodies of their kin and loved ones long enough for elaborate funeral rites that centered on the physical remains were in the minority. Not until the post-modern era, did embalming become a widespread option or preference of American families, regardless of the family’s region, ethnicity, or social status, in the modern era.⁵³ In fact, American families without regard to social constructions had few reasons to choose this mystic procedure for preserving their dead at the turn of the century.

For African American Southerners, perhaps the slave past played a role in the detachment from the physical bodies of their dead. That is to say, slave communities often funeralized or grieved their dead sometimes a few weeks or months after they had buried the bodies. The church service, eulogy, attendants, procession, and food made a good funeral, not the aesthetic appearance (or availability) of the dead body. After emancipation and secondary migration to Southern towns, Black families, who wanted

their kin embalmed as a part of the funeral arrangements, had to patronize White funeral homes; White embalmers had the chemicals, equipment, and training necessary for embalming dead bodies. Therefore, Southern White undertakers, from the turn of the century until after World War I, serviced Black families' requested embalming services. Some of these establishments gave their Black customers the customer-centered deference expected of any business owner. Others attempted to Jim Crow the dead with dark, back alley entrances, night funerals that were no longer politically correct, odd colorations and inadequate cosmetics for the Black corpse.⁵⁴ Shut out by Jim Crow, most Black families did not even explore the availability of embalming, being cognizant of not only the costs involved for the procedure but the obvious possibility that prejudiced embalmers would not be able to respect the Black body as "sacred remains."

The trauma of Southern lynching although copiously documented by the Progressive-era crusader and "princess of the Black press," journalist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, remains a curious silence in the history of African American undertaking. A city the size and age of New Orleans, for example, could not have been too unlike Philadelphia or Memphis, cities in which mob rule and lynching had been utilized to frighten and coerce freed communities. W.E.B. DuBois reprinted an entire article from an October 1871 issue of a Philadelphian, African American community newspaper, the *Tribune* to document how both Black and White Philadelphians' memorialized the martyred Octavius V. Catto in protest to his brutal slaying. The White civil authorities detested Black political participation and the encroachment of Republicans upon the old network of Democratic authority. Catto, however, refused to be intimidated by the climate of racial hostility. He openly voted, a civil act that spoke volumes about both

Catto's citizenship as well as his Black masculinity. Catto did not renounce his 15th amendment right. A lynch mob shot Catto, a respected community member and schoolteacher, in front of the police station. This is what historian Michael Gomez called "the source lamentation" for African Americans, not natural death, but rather the deliberate destruction of our potential. The travesty of lost potential, the "lamentation" of Ida B. Wells-Barnett concerning the 1892 lynching of Memphis-area grocers, Thomas Moss, Calvin McDowell, and Henry Stewart are also examples of the wicked cruelty exacted upon Black male bodies who refused to compromised the Constitutionality of their ambitions and the dignity of the masculinity.⁵⁵

The author of the *Tribune* article, "an eye-witness, Mr. W. C. Bolivar," publicized Catto's lynching some twenty year prior to Wells' "crusade for justice," or anti-lynching campaign. However, like Well's memoirs, journal articles, anti-lynching pamphlets, addresses, letters, club activities, and international organizing, Catto's murder along with his sacred remains became historical records about the reclamation of post-emancipation, Black body.

On the sixteenth of October the funeral occurred. The body lay in state at the armory of the First Regiment, Broad and Race streets, and was guarded by the military. Not since the funeral cortege of President Lincoln had there been one as large or as imposing in Philadelphia. Sympathetic public gatherings were held in many cities, with the keynote of condemnation as the only true one. Here in Philadelphia a meeting of citizens was held, from which grew the greater, held in National Hall, on Market street, below Thirteenth. The importance of this gathering is shown by a list its promoters..[and]..speeches...all breathed the same spirit, the condemnation of mob law and a demand for equal and exact justice to all. This is but a mere glance backward at the trying days of October, 1871, and is written to refresh the minds of men and women of that day, as well as to chronicle a bit of sad history that this generation may be informed. And so closed the career of a man of splendid equipment, rare force of character, whose life was

so interwoven with all that was good about us, as to make it stand out in bold relief, as a pattern for those who have followed after.⁵⁶

DuBois added his own memorial to Catto, “The outward expression of this was a great mass meeting, attended by some of the best citizens, and a funeral for Catto which was perhaps the most imposing ever given to an American Negro.”⁵⁷

Yet, the primary source documentation from and about New Orleans’ African American funerary culture has not revealed how the horrors of mob rule and lynching impacted their communities’ care of the Black body. One 19th century account ledger of a New Orleans “society undertaker,” the A.P. Boyer firm does prove the historical significance of African American funerary display. The other primary source, Walker’s field study of modern-era New Orleans’ Benevolent Societies also supports the historical continuities in a communal or cooperative approach in African American death care. Neither source mentioned the truth of lynching, but rather focused on their communities’ expectations regarding funerary display. The prerequisites for a final rite that would make a lasting impressible and social statement about the identity of both the deceased and their kin resolved less around the corpse or coffin and more so around the funeral carriage.

The widow, Mrs. Albert (Jane) P. Boyer, undertaker, lived at 520 North Rampart and split the operations of her family’s funeral business between her private residence and the property at 518 North Rampart.⁵⁸ The firm’s ledger for October 1896 to June 1899 lists over thirty benevolent societies with accounts at A.P. Boyer. Many of those societies advertised their organizations in an appended supplement at the back of the 1896 city directory, *Soards’ Official, Society and Church Guide*. (See Table 3.)

Table 3—A.P. Boyer Account Ledger for October 1896–June 1899 (continued on page 76)
(with author's cross-references for benevolent associations also listed in the *New Orleans City Directory* for 1896)

Account Number	Firm/Benevolent Association	Appears on These Dates
81-83	Frantz & Schoen* **	10/96; 10/96; 10/96; 11/96; 12/96; 1/97; 2/97; 3/97; 9/97- 9/98; 1/99; 2/99; 3/99; 4/99; 7/99
91	E. Dufreche* **	10/96; 10/96; 10/96; 10/96; 11/96; 12/96; 1/97; 2/97; 3/97; 4/97
134	Daughters of Zion Business Association*	11/98
163	A.P. Boyer (2 carriages/\$6.00)*	6/99
151	Salvador Business Association*	2/99
205	Laudumiey* **	2/99
221	Orleans Manufacturing Co.	10/96
234/254	Friend of Charity	1/97
237	Ladies Viadalia Business Association	4/98
263	Ladies Olive Branch	2/97; 3/98; 4/98; 7/98; 3/99
278	Ester Chapter #1	3/98
281	Old Folks Home	10/96; 1/97
288	Ladies Corporation Business Association	4/99
294	Young Men Vadalía Business Association*	12/96; 1/97; 4/97; 4/98; 6/98; 8/98; 11/98; 1/99; 3/99; 5/99

* Also listed in the *Soards' 1896 New Orleans City Directory* "Appendix. Official, Society and Church Guide. Vol. XXV. 1898"

** White-owned funeral parlors that rented carriages from A.P. Boyer

Sources: A.P. Boyer, Undertaking (New Orleans, LA), University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections; *Soards' 1896 New Orleans City Directory* "Appendix. Official, Society and Church Guide. Vol. XXV. 1898"

The Boyer ledger also documents the firm's business dealings with several other New Orleans' funeral firms, Frantz & Schoen and Dufreche. These firms belonged to families of European not African ancestries. Frantz & Schoen, for example, German Americans, loaned and borrowed funerary equipment, primarily carriages for the burial procession, to the "Widow P. Boyer."⁵⁹ Cross referencing Boyer and Schoen's account ledgers, the New Orleans' city directories, Walker's 1937 surveys, and the ethnographic data in the Marcus Christian collection, changes over time in the Southern African American funeral, family and their collaborative functions become evident. In fact, a synthesis of this sufficient primary permits a somewhat detailed case study of one funeral home business. In the

years prior to the Boyer account ledger, Mrs. A.P. Boyer had done so much business with the Schoen family, German Americans that the latter kept record of their business dealings with a more meticulous system than a daily log of their transactions with the Boyer undertaking firm. Instead of a daily listing that referenced individual accounts, Schoen listed Boyer in an alphabetical directory preceding his ledger. Placed under the “A-D” tab, the Schoen accounts’ registrar simply updated the account for “Boyer, P. Wid.,” by adding the *page number* in the ledger on which business with the Boyer firm had most recently been transacted. The page numbers under Boyer’s name corresponded with dates when the two firms had rented, borrowed, or exchanged carriages. According to the Schoen record keeper, the “Widow P. Boyer” borrowed their funeral carriages quite frequently to service the African American families and society members who patronized the Boyer undertaking firm.⁶⁰ Schoen’s fastidious bookkeeper made two columns for each family, organization, or funeral firm that had an account with the Schoen business office. In the left column the accountant recorded “Frantz & Schoen from...” and in the right, “To...from Frantz & Schoen.” In addition to the record of lending and borrowing between funeral establishments, the Schoen accountant took note of the when and how much money was applied to the Boyer and other accounts with their firm. All loans and exchanges with the “Widow P. Boyer” were marked “paid” or “settled.” The “Widow P. Boyer” was never referred to by her Christian name, Jane. The “Widow P. Boyer” only borrowed or rented Schoen carriages. However, at least by 1896, Mrs. A.P. Boyer was providing her own documentation that her firm did return Schoen’s professional courtesies (See Table 3).

Table 3—A.P. Boyer Account Ledger for October 1896–June 1899 *(continued from page 74)*
(with author's cross-references for benevolent associations also listed in the New Orleans City Directory for 1896)

Account Number	Firm/Benevolent Association	Appears on These Dates
295	Young Friends of Hope*	10/96; 12/96; 1/97
299	Ladies Equal Justice*	8/98; 12/98; 2/99; 3/99; 4/99; 6/99
304	Daughters of LA*	1/97
306	Young Men's Charity*	4/98
308	Young Vidalia, Jr.*	3/97; 2/99
310	Crescent Lodge #1646*	1/97
317	P. Gallegher (1914 Conti)	10/96
317	Alfred Laboste (Roche & Caroudt)	10/96
322	Coachmen Business Association	2/99
329	Lutheran #1 Business Association	2/99
332	Young Veterans	4/98
335	Beneficial Business Association	8/98
336	Lutheran #2 Business Association	1/97
339	Young Men's Progress Business Association*	12/96; 3/98; 8/98
340	Ladies Providence*	1/97; 2/97; 3/97; 3/98; 7/98; 8/98; 12/98; 2/99; 3/99
341	Mt. Zion Business Association*	3/97; 4/97; 11/98; 3/99
343	Young Veterans St. Louis 1837*	1/97; 4/97
348	Perserverance Business Assoc. Passive member*	4/99
348	Ladies Independent*	4/97; 4/98
349	Le Dames Natives*	7/98
350	Ladies of Hope*	3/99
351	Ladies of Hope*	12/96; 9/98
352	St. Eulalie Business Association*	7/98
357	Les Dames Esperauce Business Association*	8/98
362	Berry	10/96
362	Albert Martin	10/96
363	Mrs. Thompson	10/96

* Also listed in the *Soards' 1896 New Orleans City Directory* "Appendix. Official, Society and Church Guide. Vol. XXV. 1898"

** White-owned funeral parlors that exchanged, rented, or loaned carriages to A.P. Boyer

Sources: A.P. Boyer, Undertaking (New Orleans, LA), University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections; *Soards' 1896 New Orleans City Directory* "Appendix. Official, Society and Church Guide. Vol. XXV. 1898"

According to Boyer's ledger, their carriages carried Schoen's customers beginning October 1896 to July 1899. Boyer assigned the German American-owned firm of Frantz & Schoen account numbers 81, 82, and 83. Every date on which this Schoen accounts numbers appear shows that funeral carriages were being borrowed or rented

(See Table 3). Finally, the Boyer ledger appears to be both an itemized account for the firm's transactions with individual families and clients as well as their contractual relationships with other undertaking and funerary establishments. And the majority of Boyer's monthly charges were either for carriages or the package deal of carriages and coffin or funeral hearse.⁶¹

The almost three dozen benevolent societies which utilized the Boyer undertaking firm followed the same pattern. The majority of Boyer's charges to the benevolent societies' accounts were for either carriages or the combination package, a carriage and coffin, i.e., the funeral hearse as well as carriages to transport the bereaved and the community from the funeral service to the grave site, i.e., the funeral procession. In 1937, Walker conducted a survey of New Orleans' benevolent societies.

While Harry Joseph Walker canvassed the city for histories of these associations, Marcus Bruce Christian continued his ethnographic field research on behalf of the Federal Writers' Project (FWP) of Louisiana at Dillard University. Their findings together with the Boyer account ledger peel the true significance of African American funerary display from a very specific place and time (See Table 4).

The sheer number of the benevolent societies that Walker surveyed in 1937, totaling over 130, does not actually account for all of the mutual aid associations in the city. Walker's list compiles only those associations which he actually surveyed. Historian Jacqueline Jones explained that, "Benevolent and mutual aid societies that were in evidence throughout [Southern] rural areas flourished in urban areas where people had more cash and greater access to central meeting places."⁶² The Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana may serve as the best example of this distinction between the self-help

initiatives of poor, rural African American communities of the post-emancipation South and their urban and more affluent counterparts. The membership, sisterhood and charity of The Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana predate both the Black women's club movement and the Black Greek-lettered organizations of the urban South.⁶³

Table 4—Partial Listing of New Orleans' Benevolent Societies Surveyed in 1937 (author's cross-referenced compilation of extant associations with A.P. Boyer accounts, 1896-1899)

Boyer Account Number	Firm/Benevolent Association	Alternative Spellings used by Walker
134	Daughters of Zion Business Association	N/A
237	Ladies Vidalia Business Association	N/A
263	Ladies Olive Branch	Lady Olive Branch
288	Ladies Corporation Business Association	Lady Cooperators
295	Young Friends of Hope	N/A
304	Daughters of LA	Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana
306	Young Men's Charity	N/A
308	Young Vidalia, Jr.	Vidalia (Jr.)
332	Young Veterans	N/A
340	Ladies Providence	New Ladies of Providence
341	Mt. Zion Business Association	Mr. Zion
348	Ladies Independent	Lady Independent

Sources: A.P. Boyer, *Undertaking* (New Orleans, LA), University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections; Harry Joseph Walker, *Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans: A Study of Their Structure, Function, and Membership*. Nashville, Tennessee: Fisk University, 1937. "Appendix: Partial List of Benevolent Organization in New Orleans"

However, the historical literature on African American fraternal orders, benevolent societies, and mutual aid associations reflects two trends. First, if the discussion centers on labor or other pecuniary relevant topics, researchers have focused on Black men. Secondly, if the discussion centers on community building or other non-topics, researchers have focused on Black male preachers or middle-class African American reformers. When scholars remembered that African American woman were present in the history making the Black church was one of the first places the record was

corrected. In addition to the religious activities of Black church women, several of them were also civic leaders and the work of Black women historians has judiciously documented these contributions. Given the prolific scholarship in African American women's history, the gap in literature reflects a class versus gender bias, however. That is to say, the institution building and community organizing of middle-class Black people (including women) have been the center of much historical discussions. Even with foci on poor families, destitute people or working-poor folks, the interventions of middle-class reformers most often take center stage. Only a few studies maintain the organic organizational and survival strategies of the poor in post-emancipation African American history. The historical significance of funeral display offers a point of reclamation of a specific piece of African American identity formation. It reclaims the community activism of Black women prior to the middle-class reform movements of the modern era. Funerary display also bridges the artificial distance between middle-class reformers and the targets of their improvement campaigns, poor families. Decent burials were mutual concerns and death itself a proper equalizer in African American communities in both the north and south.⁶⁴

For this reason, Walker's research in New Orleans makes an especially beneficial contribution to a study of African American funerary display. Although he did not list all the individual members' names, the fact that the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana made Walker's community inventory testifies to the strength of this community organization which predated African American emancipation by at least 17 years. Marcus Christian, for example, placed the sisterhood in the historical record with his preservation of *The New Orleans Republic* article of November 11, 1873. At the time this article was

written, the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana celebrated their 25th anniversary. The sisterhood must have been founded in 1848, almost two decades prior to the end of the Civil War. This date, the location, and the longevity of the association all confirm that African American urban communities possessed both opportunity and means for more organized and stable self-help initiatives. When Walker took note of their existence in 1937, the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana was almost 100 years old.

In 1873, the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana boasted that their members included state senator's mothers, the wives of successful business men or civil servants, as well as spouses and widows of other elected, governmental officials. And, by 1896, the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana, operating at that time for almost half a century, had an account at the A.P. Boyer Undertaking firm. The Benevolent Daughters were still around when Walker conducted his field research in 1937. The Widow A.P. Boyer was what Walker called a "society undertaker." Plater credited the benevolent society for the unparalleled success of African American funeral directors. Plater believed

The popularity of burial associations produced many benefits for the African American funeral director. Since the associations set the guidelines for their members, [so that] the funeral director could concentrate on the technical aspects of the funeral. In addition, the association relieved the funeral director from making assessments and negotiating payments because each person joined an association that fit his or her financial and social status needs.⁶⁵

While the business of burying the dead in urban African American communities of the post-emancipation South, especially those African American families who requested embalming, went to some White undertaking firms, by the turn of the century, Black undertaking firms like A.P. Boyer had positioned themselves as entrepreneurial

contenders for Black bodies. Marcus Christian posited that the self-help community activism of benevolent societies explains the flourishing of funeral establishments across Louisiana because they “encouraged or promoted the foundation of undertaking parlors throughout the state.”⁶⁶ Walker’s contemporary investigations concur. “It is significant that the undertakers, who had the greatest number of funerals under the direction of benevolent societies were those, without exception, who had membership in large numbers of these associations. A considerable numbers of the [society] undertakers felt that it was necessary to belong to the organizations in order to hold their business.” In fact, Walker is quite thorough in his definition of the “society undertaker,” because

they are under contract with the benevolent associations to provide funerals for deceased members at a fixed rate. It is usual for the benevolent society to elect its undertaker, or undertakers, at the regular annual election. Prior to the election, the candidates for election as ‘society undertaker’ present in writing their ‘bids’ to the association. For an undertaker to contract with a large number of benevolent associations to bury their deceased members, was a reasonable assurance, in the long run at least, of a considerable amount of business.⁶⁷

Thirty years before Walker’s study of New Orleans’ benevolent societies, writing in 1907, Booker T. Washington similarly noted,

A prominent feature of the secret organizations, which have sprung up and become extremely popular in recent years among the colored communities, has been the provision of sick benefits and burial expenses. This demand and these organizations have created a special business opportunity for Negro business *men* of which they have very largely taken advantage.⁶⁸
(emphasis mine)

Washington made a point of gendering the undertaker as male. However, Marcus Christian complimented Mrs. Jennie Daire-Gilbert as “the most successful Negro

mortician of Baton Rouge” at the turn of the century. And Schoen’s ledger reflected a volume of business with the “Widow P Boyer” that was unmatched by any other firm holding one of their accounts.⁶⁹ In fact, it could be that Black women, quite comfortable in their traditional roles of nurturer, comforter, and charitable servant, joined associations like the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana. Veiling themselves with the titles from their husbands and capitalizing on their social connections, these entrepreneurial women built a reputation based on African American funerary display, expanding their family’s undertaking business via the truth that Black people believed in funerals.

To be fair, Washington did not have the benefit of sophisticated theories about the social constructions of sexuality, however, he still mistook the success of turn of the century Black undertakers as the fruits of male agency. A slight “squeeze and tease” of his own evaluation of the undertaking business reveals the fallacy. In chapter ten of his 1907 publication, for example, Washington commends the wife of the undertaker, Rev. Preston Taylor from Shreveport, Louisiana. In the closing sentence of Washington’s chapter, “The Negro Undertaker,” Washington acknowledged, “In all his [Rev. Taylor’s] efforts he has had the aid of his wife, formerly one of the original Fisk Jubilee Singers, and a woman of strong sympathies, and invaluable to her husband.” How could Washington have missed the obvious appeal of having a former Fisk Jubilee Singer, the internationally known performers of slave songs and spirituals, possibly render for status-conscious people of color?⁷⁰ Then again, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were not compensated entertainers, but fundraisers. Therefore this very pragmatic Protestant, the epitome of its work ethic, probably did not consider Mrs. Taylor’s talent as a job.⁷¹ Also, in chapter eleven, “James C. Thomas, Undertaker and Business Man,” Washington dedicates his

closing statements to the wife of the former. “In 1884, Mr. Thomas was married to Miss Ella Rollins, of Richmond, Virginia, and she has been of great assistance to him in his business, having entire charge of the work in his absence. They have seven children, all of whom are being educated, in addition to their school training, in their father’s business.” Now, if Mr. Thomas trusted Mrs. Thomas to take care of the family business while he was out of town, who would have been had charge of their children, but the same woman who was running the office?⁷²

Washington’s faulty representations of Black women contradict the reality of females in undertaking businesses prior to the modern era. The changes over time that may account for the claim that Black funeral directors became “kings of their communities” include the decline of benevolent associations and the emergence of Black industrial insurance firms. That is to say, the instability of the benevolent societies made it possible for Black men with cash and connections to establish insurance businesses. The rise of the Black insurance industry hailed the end of the benevolent societies, those familiar spaces of female activism protected by the conventional acceptance of charity work as a woman’s role. Although the majority of Black preachers and ministers were men, the leadership of the post-emancipation Black churches, the “handmaiden of religion,” was a woman and member of a benevolent society. The industrial insurance companies which replaced her were built by traveling salesmen who sold insurance policies. The mobility and danger involved in this work, gendered male, displaced Black women as primary negotiators of African American funeral display. For example, Walker clarified,

Negro undertakers of New Orleans also commonly enter into similar contracts with insurance companies [as those

with the society] which offer policies with provisions for medical care and burial. These companies appear to be rapidly displacing the benevolent institutions as a form of health and life insurance.⁷³

In a chapter of Roberta Hughes Wright's *Lay Down Body*, one she entitled, "Burial Societies and Lodges," the connection between death, post-emancipation benevolent associations, and industrial insurance of the modern era are made quite clear. Burial societies and lodges served as the precursors to modern-day insurance companies for America's [B]lack communities, filling the important gaps in security and peace of mind created by racial discrimination. Although many benevolent societies also supported schools for Black children as well as the social and religious center of the community via its connection to the church the most important among all the activities, "they contracted to guarantee a proper funeral and burial for their dues-paying members. 'Without a doubt their major concern was the death benefit; making sure their members received not only a decent but a special burial.' "⁷⁴

There is little debate that the Black church was the center and scene of post-emancipation Black life, including social activities. African American funerary display, however, within those organic institutions needs to be historicized in terms of their socializing functions. John Jasper, for example, the itinerant preacher with eschatological genius, "was best at funerals," captured William H. Pipes in the book, *Say Amen, Brother! Old-Time Negro Preaching: A Study in Negro Frustration*, where, Pipes continued, Jasper's "vivid and spectacular eloquence resulted in an uproar of groans, shouts, fainting women, and people who were swept to the ground to lie in a trance-like state sometimes for hours." Now, this funeral display occurred most of the time *without*

the physical presence of the Black body, as most slave funerals did not coincide with the burial of the body because of work stoppages and slaveholders' prerogatives.⁷⁵

The appearance of the dead body at post-emancipation funeral services, rarely embalmed, but definitely available, escalated the opportunities for dramatic display. The availability of Black "sacred remains" for both display and transport accounts for the "pageantry" and spectacle of post-emancipation funerary display. Woodson, Walker, Marcus, and other scholars supported Hatcher's historical description of African Americans funerary behavior as public display of their communal values. *A funeral to them was a pageant.*⁷⁶ It was a social event that had to be arranged for ahead of time. An African American was meant to be occasioned by the gathering of kindred and friends from far and wide. In fact, a funeral regardless of the status of the deceased was not satisfactory unless there was a vast and excitable crowd. Walker, quoting Carter G. Woodson's assessment, repeated

The idea of the parade appealed especially to the freedmen. They liked beautiful regalia, and as most of these uniforms [those of the benevolent societies] were oriental like the Negroes themselves, the color of the freemen harmonized With that of the festive attire. Thousands of freedmen who otherwise would not have joined these societies came into them *for mere display.*⁷⁷

The Widow A.P. Boyer needed to contract carriages from the German American owned firm because her *community clients*, African American families, believed in funerals to much that the procession from the church, the place of male leadership and female emotional, to the grave was the opportunity to extend their funerary display. Walker concluded his 1937 study of New Orleans' benevolent societies noting the negative consequences when benevolent societies lessened, changed or terminated their

endorsement or benefits for these elaborate social displays. They declined in importance.⁷⁸

One final feature of African American funerary pageantry, however, exhibited across the rural and urban South also bears mention. The funerary music whose syncopated pulse paced the procession was New Orleans' or Dixieland jazz. Popularized in Harlem night spots, clubs whose patrons were White and workers Black, jazz bands originated around New Orleans and played parades and funerals—both social functions of the benevolent societies. Much mysticism and superstition surrounded the march to the grave. Both Roediger and Raboteau blamed African cosmological beliefs about the spirit of the deceased being malevolent to mourners who failed to adhere to the proper funerary behavior. Whatever the genesis, the funerary music of New Orleans was obeyed and copied. Pipes cited one author who compared the power of Black preachers to that of the jazz musician in terms of their affect on the emotions. “What is true of the Negro preacher and his swaying congregation, of the jazz-band leader and his cavorting man... What they do... is seldom not alive and active.”⁷⁹

The pageantry, activity, and liveliness of funerary music, New Orleans' jazz, would have been reason enough to “pay up” society dues, ensuring that an association member was in good standing. In “Where Jazz Was Born: The Funeral,” jazz music was the reason why everybody looked forward to their own funeral.

When jazz was very young in New Orleans, ‘round the turn of the century, everybody who was nobody looked forward to his own funeral. This odd outlook was due in part to the fact that a funeral was treated as a major celebration. As sort of the honored guest at his own ceremonial departure,.. the deceased was the cause of attention in death as he never had been in life. He went “in style,” with plenty of mourners attending. For once, everyone knew HE was passing by. His funeral would be the

biggest event in his life. It was something to live for!⁸⁰

The paying of dues to benevolent societies permitted the hiring of bands to play at society members' funerals. Benevolent societies also collected dues to pay for fancy burial clothes or "robes," as they were itemized in the Boyer account ledger, and refreshments. The more money the deceased had paid into the benevolent society or saved on their own, the more elaborate the funeral; the greater the number of on-looking mourners; the better the dramatics of fainting women; and the bigger and noisier the graveyard procession.⁸¹

One ethnographer, a researcher from The University of Michigan at Flint, in the early 1990s published an article in a Parisian journal about New Orleans' funerary music. Stressing the Africanisms of New Orleans Jazz funerals, It was from the African tradition of African-American benevolent societies and clubs that the funeral procession and its use of band music began in the New Orleans African-American community."⁸² The African roots of the funeral procession to the gravesite from slavery to the post-emancipation period included the "zig-zag" or non-direct route, ritual dressings, celebratory parading, burial rites, bearing of items for grave decorations, ceremonial dances, and, of course, singing and dancing—to band music. Whereas the enslaved may have accompanied the singers and dancers with banjos, pipes, fifes, or violins. The jazz bands played brass, reeds, and drums.⁸³

New Orleans jazz funerals typify the historical significance of African American funeral display. However, the attempts to appropriate certain Southern features of funerary behavior like, for example, huge funeral processions, band music, and uncontrolled emotional outbursts met with some resistance after the mass migration of Southern Blacks to the urban North in the modern era. Stein, however, believed funerary

behavior to be proof of the African Diaspora in the United States, a distinctly African American, not only Southern, celebration. “The ritual celebration of the jazz funeral,” he concluded, “is perhaps unique to New Orleans and can be traced to its African and West Indian roots. If it managed to integrate elements of European Christianity, it is still informed with African beliefs and practices, with African performing styles—with a spirit of resistance to...domination.”⁸⁴

Chapter 3

MODERNITY AND MASCULINITY

Migration and Identity

Resistance hallmarked African American experiences prior to the modern era. By the middle of the second decade of the 20th century, the modern era, the formerly enslaved had not only survived human bondage, but inadequate federal interventions, lynching atrocities and mainstream ostracism as well. Resistance undeniably characterized African American ethnic identity because of these events that occurred during the time period that historian Rayford Logan has called the nadir. Resistance to White domination and Jim Crow oppressions had armed Southern freed people with a contradistinctive superiority, i.e., a belief in the power of their own moral goodness.

To document African American ethnic identity formation, a study of funerary display confirms characteristic features such as resistance. Despite their migrations to bigger and busier urban centers, the technological developments in mortuary science, and the consequent creation of the funeral industry, Southern Blacks resisted drastic changes to some death care traditions. For example, Black Southerners continued their adherence to African-influenced beliefs such as proper burials and decent funerals as familial debts. African American communities resiliently continued to prize their methods of insuring this important societal obligation. Southern Blacks also persisted in their belief that funerals must be well attended and that neither distance nor financial difficulties should be given as excuses for neglecting the customarily large gatherings and reunions occasioned by the death of kin or friends. Finally, Southern Blacks did not readily

succumb to the bourgeois expectations of their northern counterparts. Middle-class mores fueled well intended African American reformers in northern cities like Detroit. But, an alternate and historically charged Southern identity answered them. Surprisingly, Southern stubbornness turned out to be more than the passive resistance of economically destitute, illiterate, and unsophisticated newcomers. Centuries of domination had made survival less a matter of color confrontation and more a distinguishing ethnic characteristic. Consequently, some migrants ignored bourgeois interventions in their Southern death care traditions. Black Southerners' funerary displays derived from an African-based cosmology concerning funerals as homage to influential ancestors. By the modern era, Southern Blacks had transformed their funerals from ancestral tributes to distinctive representations of their own culturally driven identities. In the Southern Diaspora created by the migration of freed people and their descendants out of their former land of bondage, expectations of public familial grief, preferences for jazz band funerary music, and acceptance of ecstatic female mourning indelibly documented that resistance had migrated to northern cities.

By 1915, hundreds of thousands of Black Americans (numbering almost 1.5 million by 1925) had left the South. This human tide continued throughout the first World War and beyond the depression years finally receding around 1940. Interestingly, the tide turned in succeeding decades. Blacks traveled back across the Mason-Dixon line via return migration to the South. Suffice it to say, as historian Darlene Clark Hine explains, "The significance of temporal and spatial movement to a people, defined by and oppressed because of the color of their skin, among other things, defies exaggeration."¹ In fact, the change over time from emancipation to the Civil Rights Era is characterized by

freedom movements, both political and physical. As a result, migration becomes a very significant subject in American history because it moves the narrative of Black history forward.² Migration also serves as a major informant of Black urban history. The massive relocation of people partially explains the growth of northern metropolises. Yet, the topic of migration concerns more than a few major industrial centers. Migration studies contribute not only to a broader understanding of industrial change and development but also to subsequent changes in social and political practices.

Moving from Southern rural areas and some changing their minds about Southern cities too, most of these migrants needed connections to both material and social resources once they reached their destinations. Therefore, the community agency and mutual aid associated with the historical journey from slavery to freedom certainly had some Northern counterparts, primarily the Black church. In chapter four *The Negro Church in America*, “Negro Religion in the City,” E. Franklin Frazier described the influx of largely poor, industrially unskilled, illiterate, agrarian mass as a “crises.”³ Frazier’s characterization only echoed what DuBois and his staff of researchers had already described in their 1899 case study, *The Philadelphia Negro*.¹ The thesis of this book reflected the purpose of DuBois’ research. Commissioned by the sociology department of the University of Pennsylvania, this work sought to answer the mounting concerns of race relations at that time. Therefore, DuBois framed his study around a series of questions regarding the conditions of Black migrants. He wanted to analyze the influence of the urban experience upon the migrants as well as any relevant preparation they received before their arrival. The most significant contribution of this work (in terms of the actual migration process) pointed to the primary migratory patterns or precise geographical

origins and destinations of early migrants. A metaphor for the subtext, however, could certainly have been “crises.”⁴

Awkward as it may be to talk about people as “crises,” the reality of the migrants’ economic desperation and attendant vulnerability propelled many urban Blacks into action. The social responsibility of stabilizing the residentially segregated neighborhood in which they all were forced to live, prompted the more affluent and bourgeois members of Black communities into action. In addition to the logical self-interests involved, many middle-class Blacks were also held over, Progressive-era reformers. For example, the Black women’s club movement, firmly established over twenty years prior to the Great Migration, had already made good on their motto, “Lifting as We Climb.” Modernity and migration then did find receiving Black communities unprepared for the challenges of mutual aid. Teasing out why DuBois and Franklin characterized the needs and demands of their Southern-born community members provides the historical context how Black African American funerary display created not only another dispersed community, the Southern Diaspora.

Bourgeois Respectability

The patronage and popularity of post-emancipation benevolent societies attested the importance of African American funeral display, but it was funeral pageantry that became the enduring feature which survived the relocation of one and a half million migrants. Before World War I, benevolent societies had allowed individual community members to preplan funerals to ensure burial preferences according their member dues payment. From the post-emancipation era into the modernity of U.S. society following

the Great War, the African American insurance industry replaced sickness and burial societies. Some benevolent societies continued to function within African American communities. In New Orleans, for example, even modernization in mortuary science and the emergence of Black insurance companies failed to replace those annual social activities afforded by associations such as the “pleasant party” of those “hospitable ladies” in the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana.⁵

The transition from community self-help via the “handmaiden” of the benevolent society, the advent of the modern era practice of embalming also removed funerary display from the hands of Black women. Herein lays the gendered dynamic of the change over time in African American funeral display. In the post-emancipation South where benevolent societies provided communal security and stability to support the historical belief in funerals, African American women held prominent and visible roles. Death care, gendered female was cooperative, nurturing, and affirming of the Black families’ need. With the onset of modernity, the funeral home as business became a male domain. Modernity brought an attendant assertion of African American masculinity to the traditions of African American funerary display. Modern Black families without the benefit of the former benevolence functions of the societies began to surrender their decision making power to professional funeral directors. In fact, Plater concluded that Black families became increasingly dependent on their communities’ morticians as he gradually took control over all death care details. According to Plater, the Black funeral director by the modern era had become the “a prime cultural leader and purveyor of the African American community identity.”⁶

Reflecting their modern times, African American funeral directors gradually abandoned the designation of community “undertaker” to mark their transition from an essential trade in removal and burial to a profession called mortuary science. Secondly, the requisite training to become a licensed mortician became quite popular in urban areas both in the North and South during the modern era in affluent communities, Black and otherwise.⁷ However, in northern cities like Detroit, professional morticians still served Southern expatriates. These transplanted communities practiced their traditional funerary displays despite their physical relocation to northern cities. And while northern Black churches extended supports and protections those migrants readily identified and accepted as customary community aid, the reform minded interventions of northern Blacks also contained some bourgeois intolerance for Southern-based funerary displays.

African American pastors, for example, like the Reverend Dr. R.L. Bradby of Detroit set up committees to meet trains at Michigan Central. He wanted Second Baptist, the oldest Black church in the state, to be proactive in its ministry of housing and employment assistance to the newly arrived migrants.⁸ Although, Pastor Rev. Dr. Bradby went as far as to hire an assistant pastor to give leadership to Second Baptist’s benevolence on behalf of Southern migrants, no group had more influence, according to cultural historian Victoria W. Wolcott, than Black church women, especially those of the middle-class.⁹

However, criticized Wolcott, the majority of scholars who have studied Detroit has been labor historians and social scientists. The community building model of historian Richard W. Thomas an exception, most researchers overlooked the Black female leadership of America’s city, the center of the Rust Belt, and ring seat for the

heroic struggles between capital ownership and industrial labor. With this lack of attention on the culture of Detroit, the gendered biases of what is considered work and thereby noticeable and important left Black Church women and their expressions of resistance or truth behind veils and curtains of silence. It may be that the “crises” which Frazier and DuBois saw coincided with the chance that Black women had to polish and professionalize what both their gender and racial stereotypes had given them permission to do—cleaning up for other people. Interestingly, the chance to help poor migrants, especially other women, brought African American women who were already the “bone and sinew” of their race further to the center of the civic responsibilities assumed by their local congregations.¹⁰

The respect afforded Black Christian-activists ironically account for two simultaneous developments. First, the race work of Black church women, whose class status afforded them the social mobility to do make reform a personal priority, created an alternative transcript via their activism so that cultural and social historians would be able to unveil the “hidden complexity” of industrial Detroit, the site of “crises” for some and the chanced of others. However, these middle and professional class women who belonged to Black churches, clubs, and associations that promoted reform of poor people’s culture as legitimate race work failed to appreciate the difference between *mutual* aid and bourgeois behavior. In doing so, these women set the standards for *respectability* and Black femininity, taking their gender approved chance of leadership to create yet hegemony. These attempted to redefine the funerary behavior of Southern migrants.¹¹

For example, in a letter written to Reverend Dr. R.L. Bradby dated November 7, 1925, Black clubwoman and Christian-activist Nannie Helen Burroughs congratulated the former on his 15th anniversary in pastoral ministry at the historic, Second Baptist Church in Detroit, Michigan that was published in a souvenir booklet dedicated to this occasion. As a leader and spokesperson of the National Baptist Convention's Women's Auxiliary, it was an appropriate gesture for such a letter to be both requested and published.¹² Interestingly, Burroughs took this opportunity to reveal her "detest" of obituaries. The traditional of eulogizing among African Americans as a celebration of life was apparently irritating to Virginia born, Washington, D.C. resident, Burroughs. This sentiment may have stemmed for Burroughs' own outspoken, uncompromising attention to gender equity and social responsibility. Capturing the center stage of the Black Christian world at only twenty-one years of age, Burroughs had delivered her famous address, "How the Sisters Are Hindered from Helping" at the annual conference of the National Baptist Convention. The founder and longtime president of Washington, D.C.'s National Training School for Women and Girls, Burroughs is also credited for with the motto, "We specialize in the wholly impossible." An elite grouping of Progressive era, African American female reformers, Burroughs was affiliated with the National Association of Colored Women, an affiliation of local and state organizations included such race women as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Margaret Murray Washington of Tuskegee, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Mary Church Terrell.¹³

Burroughs had a fellow clubwoman who shared her critique of African American funerary behavior, Cora Reid MacKerrow of Boston, Massachusetts. Having served as Called held civic and community roles such as president of the Harriet Tubman House

and vice president of the Women's Service Club, MacKerrow's interviewer identified the MacKerrow, as a "dignified gentlewoman," for the readers of the Boston Globe.

MacKerrow was a licensed mortician who had owned and operated the Modern Funeral Home since 1926. The first African American to "ride up front in a hearse, and...direct a funeral" in the Boston-area, MacKerrow told her interviewer that she frowned on flamboyant funerals. She thought that bands, blaring music, and dancing in the streets were all "atrocious and a desecration to the dead." She said plainly, "I wouldn't allow them."¹⁴ Obviously, like Burroughs this successful entrepreneur and Black women's club leader also detested some expressions of African American funerary display. The fact that she recalled specific manifestations of it after almost fifty years in the funeral business serving African American families proves both continuity and power of *community clients*. In the end, the more refined and bourgeois members of Black communities resigned themselves to the fact that Southern-born African Americans, poor Black families, believed in funerals.

The *community clients*, poor Southern migrants, who had transformed a service rendered to them via a segregated market into a viable business and structured profession had also transplanted that patronage and power. In doing so, poor Black families proved across both time and place that they believed in funerals. Indeed, Black families alone have kept their funeral traditions alive, simultaneously facilitating the community leadership, socio-political mobility, and wealth building of African American morticians. These entrepreneurial, small business owners were the "kings of the Black community," from the late 1920s through the post-modern era. Plater accredited the source of their authority in the African American community to

was their unique ability among the African American merchants to demand and receive cash instead of credit. The inability of African American small business owners to grant credit drove many out of business. A shortage of money forced patrons to bypass African-American owned stores and shop where there was sufficient credit available. Funeral directors not only had most of their bills paid in cash or goods up-front, but received compensation for high ticketed items and service. Among merchants and professionals, including doctors and lawyers, the funeral director was the rare merchant whose stature and type of service made up-front payment an unquestioned canon of the community.¹⁵

As a result of their financial advantage, Black undertakers sometimes buried community members at no charge to the family. They often loaned money to Black families in other, non-funeral related times of financial distress as well. In places like Chicago, Black morticians sponsored radio stations, variety shows, and community newspapers. Urban undertakers even opened bars, speakeasies, and other clandestine establishments for extralegal activities such as gambling and number running.¹⁶ In both Detroit and Chicago, making money from both dead and living Black community members meant exploring all avenues of capitalist venture. Especially popular were the entertainment and recreation affordable to the numerous working-poor, Black migrants, an indulgence which of course drew the criticism and correction of the more bourgeois and conservative, middle class. In fact, only a decade after World War II, the belief in Black funerals had enabled death care providers of Black communities to use their status and connections to enter local, state, and national politics. For example, a name to drop in late the 1940s to 1950s if in Detroit would have been Charles Diggs, in Phoenix Lincoln Ragsdale, and if in Memphis, Eugene Ford.¹⁷ All of these men were both civil servants in representative government and funeral directors. Other Black men from central cities like

New Orleans, Washington, D.C., Charlotte, Charleston, Dallas, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Boston, and Chicago also earned recognition and notoriety from their successful mortuary practices.¹⁸

Southern Funerals as a Northern Industry

The practice of embalming Black bodies by Black men and the attendant under representation (or exclusion) of Black women from formal training and professional certification apparatuses available in mortuary schools gave Black men opportunities to emerge as “kings of their communities.” True, the practice of mortuary science had gained some polite respectability since its inaugural public service during the U.S. Civil War. However, most families still used some combination of cooling techniques to preserve dead bodies, especially families living in rural districts.¹⁹

Black morticians, inheriting a more professional designation than undertaker because of their formal training and certification in embalming and mortuary science, saw an increase in community patronage and a burgeoning professional respectability during the modern era as Southern-born, Black families continued to alter the urban landscape of American Diaspora. That is to say, the Southern Diaspora converged with the presence of Old and New European Immigrant in the northeast and mid-west. No longer terrorized by the racial hostility and rural isolation of their Southern backgrounds, poor Black families did alter their death care habits. For example, German families in Milwaukee abandoned several of the culturally distinctive, funerary behavior. Kuhm lamented the loss of his childhood experiences with death that were both German-focused

and clan specific. Death in the family, according to Kuhm was “as natural and intimate” as home birthing in his Milwaukee childhood. He concludes,

With time the seemingly perdurable tribal customs that orchestrated the protocol of the clan funeral in my childhood gradually fell by the way. Their loss tolled the death knell of the clan. As morticians became more concerned with the business of death, intimate family involvement inversely diminished. Although benefits were gained, the comforting aspect of clan cohesion was lost.²⁰

Although, African American *community clients*, the migrant Black families, stubbornly held on to their belief in Southern funerals. However, middle-class, urban Blacks did try to eliminate the embarrassing emotions and demonstrative bereavement of Black Southerners exhibited at their funerals. Therefore, the class tensions between newly arrived, Southern migrants and the existing Black communities of the North also disclose the distinctive, funerary behavior of African American families. Regardless of the class tensions, however, most African American funeral directors still “performed elaborate funerals whenever possible because their personal reputations and business viability depended on lavish display” which produced “competition for the initial possession” of Black bodies.²¹

African American funeral directors, or male undertakers of the modern era, succeeded in competing for Black bodies because they had become professional promoters of African American ethnicity. They had emphasized their willingness and ability to provide the “lavish display” culturally demanded by the historical significance of African American funeral display. Their emphasis on the unique and distinctive ways that African Americans preferred to display their grief “created a barrier that African American families were not willing to cross.”²² In other words, African American men

had transformed their communities' traditional funerary rituals into an exclusive entrepreneurial enterprise, safeguarding their market niche with a legacy: a cultural standard of service excellence that most non-community morticians were incapable of providing. As a result of this orchestrated understanding of differences between African American and non-community death care services, African American men in the funeral business separated themselves from everyone else in the funeral industry and thereby guaranteed their prestige, power, and cash payments.²³

In the modern era, as insurance agencies attracted and employed the formally educated, African American men of Black communities, licensed and board certified African American funeral directors joined them in a co-opting death related services. As "kings of their communities," Black morticians provide almost every social need to their communities. The Black man at the funeral home could read mail for the illiterate, intercede in schools on behalf of their patron's children, and endorse candidates running for public office, signaling which way the community should vote.²⁴ There are also testimonials of Black funeral directors who fed Black families at Thanksgiving with free turkeys and can goods.²⁵ As charismatic as a classy, Black preacher, as trusted as the Black doctor or dentist, as visible as the Black school teacher, as reliable as the community barber, and as savvy as the Black lawyer, funeral directors were indeed, "kings of their communities."²⁶ To be sure, these service professionals and poor families represent a ubiquitous and quintessential survival story in African American family history, or the significance of African Americans' belief in funerals. Death care translated into mobility and status for several African American men. The historical significance of African American funeral display proves *community clients* as an accurate and

responsible conceptualization for Black families; and the funerary traditions of those poor families secured a provider role with major decision making power for Black men at a time when Jim Crow systematically confined them to what U.S. society considered inferior residential and occupational spaces.

By 1924, under the leadership of R.R. Reed African American men in the funeral business were able to organize their own professional organization, the Independent National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA). At one point, Black funeral directors had been meeting with Booker T. Washington's National Negro Business League. However, between the 1907 publication of Washington's *The Negro In Business* and the 1924 breakup, "funeral directors were not able to develop their full potential in the Business League because it was made up of general business groups." In 1926, NFDA members changed the name of the organization to the Progressive National Funeral Directors Association.²⁷

R.R. Reed, the founder of the NFDA, operated out of Chicago. From this Northern city to which Southern migrants were drawn, Reed sponsored several periodicals dedicated to propagated the burgeoning respectability of the Black death care business and promoting the "full potential" of its professional practitioners. Shedding the more provincial title of "undertaker," a job that was as humble as a sexton or church yard grave digger and as lucrative as a Washingtonian business, modernity encouraged men whose livelihoods depended on the traditions of African American funerary display to turn the trade that became a business into a full fledged profession. One of the magazines dedicated to this end, *The Colored Embalmer* (1927-1932), contained both news of NFDA members' mortuary work across the country, articles that

would be of interest to those in death care, and achievements of its members who received local, state or national recognition. After the demise of *The Colored Embalmer*, *The Progressive Negro Funeral Director* (1939-?) and *The Acomisinc Bulletin* 1942-?) became official organs of the Black funeral profession, both published by the Atlanta College of Embalming and Mortuary Science. However, librarians and archivists from the National Funeral Directors Association in Brookfield, Wisconsin to the National Funeral Directors & Morticians in Atlanta explain that there are no manuscript collections or depositories of records for African American funeral history. Most of the leadership at the national and state levels either neglected or removed their documents as they changed office. Over the 20th century, there has been no effort to glean what is available, no attempt to search the attics, basements, Bibles, etc. those places where social and cultural history seem to retreat. Yet, the inability to fully document, cross-reference, and corroborate evidence about Black morticians' organizational activities does not preclude historicizing the significance of African American funerary display. The very possibility that this occupation service, the removal of human remains, evolved from a trade to a business and then a profession despite the poverty and presumed powerlessness of those people whose bodies were at one time valued, i.e., because of the uncompensated work extracted from them, and then violated by Jim Crowism, is proof enough.²⁸

The only other source of information about the history of African American funeral directing, other than individual case studies or biographies of specific funeral directors, are the assessments of the profession by business professors, labor historians, and economists. For example, Juliet E.K. Walker in *The History of Black Business in*

America: Capitalism, Race, and Entrepreneurship gave some history as to how several 18th century trades such as carpentry, cabinetry, and upholstery coalesced as coffin makers. Walker moved forward in time by connecting their 19th century counterparts' occupational mobility like livery stable owners who removed dead bodies and catered in the families' funerary meal.²⁹ John Sibley Butler's third chapter, " 'To Seek for Ourselves': Benevolent, Insurance, and Banking Institutions," focused on the benevolent societies founded by free people of color in Northern communities like Philadelphia before drawing his conclusions about the beginnings of Black insurance and banking enterprises. Walker skips right over the mutual aid initiatives of the freed people of the post-emancipation South and does not even mention the service artery which flowed between the benevolent societies and the emergence of Black insurance agents and industry, African American funeral practices.³⁰ Plater, for example, proved that insurance businesses evolved from mutual aid societies, the community effort to help Black families adhere to the historical belief in funerary display. The benevolent societies were pragmatic strategies to pay the undertaker. But the modernization of the undertaking business facilitated the abandonment of the communal practices of the benevolent society and the embrace of the insurance industry. In so doing, Black men who sold insurance policies locked down on the prosperity of Black communities by supporting the funeral industry.³¹ The coalition of Black men in funeral service and the insurance industry made them "kings of the community," but it rested on the historical significance of African American funerary display.

Perhaps Butler drew his historical understanding about the activities and importance of benevolent societies from reading E. Franklin Frazier. Frazier, a modern

example of those Black urbanites who saw the need to reform the cultural mores of migrants, had this to say about the organizations and self-help initiatives of recently freed, poor, and transient Black people:

These associations for mutual aid which were generally known as beneficial societies.. These 'sickness and burial' societies should distinguished from the fraternal organizations which played an *important* role in early economic cooperation among Negroes.³² (emphasis mine)

To be sure, Frazier did root the existence of the less “important” mutual aid societies to the Black Church, the premier racial cooperative to ameliorate the living conditions of the freed people. However, Frazier may have slighted the agency not just of the poor, but of the funeral profession. That is to say, the “kings of the community,” survived as an economic occupation because of their cooperation with the less “important” benevolent associations. The modernization of mortuary science and the power of its male practitioners seemed to have silenced the truth. The legacy of their modern funeral business was in Southern cities like New Orleans where the post-emancipation and turn of the century “society undertaker” did not snub her noise at the business they received benevolent societies. Bourgeois respectability, modernity and masculinity became a hegemony that challenged the traditions of the Southern Diaspora, the historical significance of African American funerary display. However, the Cole family of Detroit, Michigan, the oldest funeral business of the Motor City, however, did not share in this conceit. And when James H. Cole died the wealthiest, Black Detroiter in 1907, his will left monies and properties to his sons, James and Charles, the latter which founded the

Cole Home for Funerals with a clientele of Southern migrants and an acceptance of the ways that they expressed their belief in funerary display.

Chapter 4

CASE STUDY OF MICHIGAN AFRICAN AMERICAN FUNERALS BUSINESSES

While the Dr. Rev. Robert Lewis Bradby of Second Baptist Church enjoyed the public maneuverings of masculinity like rescuing poor women from prostitution or arranging jobs and homes for migrant men and their families, the credit for this Black preacher's status and prominence belong to James H. Cole. The 15th anniversary booklet of Detroit's Second Baptist confirmed that it was, "...reasonable to assume that it was partly through the good offices of the Cole family that Rev. Robert Lewis Bradby was offered the position of Pastor of SBC [South Baptist Church]."¹ Dying prior to his son's establishment of Detroit's oldest African American family-owned funeral business, Cole's business acumen, community status, and social connections transferred to his progeny. A review of Cole's personal history may help explain how his own avoidance of bourgeois elitism could be the reason why his son James was able to embrace the funerary behavior of the poor masses, including those from the Southern Diaspora.

James H. Cole, according to their family genealogist, the late Leontine Cole Smith, born in 1838 on a plantation in Yazoo County, Mississippi, received his freedom from his White father after James had demonstrated an ability to provide for himself. In preparation of his emancipation, James trained and handled horses from his early youth. Eventually quitting his father's place, a man who reportedly owned thousands of acres as well as approximately 150 enslaved workers, when at age 15, his father "considered him mature enough to make his own way" and manumitted him.²

The Yazoo county of Cole's birth, situated near the Mississippi River, borders the states of Tennessee and Kentucky. In 1853, Cole followed the river north, traveling on foot, sometimes hitching a ride along the way, stopping to work in exchange for funds or food. Arriving in Detroit around 1856, the young James had already lived in several states, held several jobs, one of which was in Salem, Kentucky where, said his great-great granddaughter, Leontine Cole Smith,

he met a beautiful young girl, Mary Belle Thompson. He fell deeply in love, but felt he could not declare his affection because of his financial plight and her tender years. When he was ready to depart the Thompson[s], he vowed when Mary Belle was grown and he could financially care for a wife, he would return to Kentucky and claim her as his very own.³

With a personal goal in mind and a transferable skill, Cole settled in Michigan, a free state since 1837, without too much concern of being absconded as a supposed fugitive and with the geographic advantage of Canada's safety and freedom. Shortly after his arrival in 1856, Cole joined the Second Baptist Church, a place where both free Blacks and fugitives, those who chose not to continue on the Underground Railroad via the SBC station, received assistance with transitioning from the rural South to the urban North. A delightful depiction, Cole's great-great granddaughter believed that, "the ladies of the church took special interest in him. They showered him with motherly aid and comfort in adapting to his new life in this strange new city."⁴ Black church women helped Southern migrants prior to emancipation, before the Great Migration, and preceding the modern male infrastructures and bourgeois women's clubs attempted to reform them.

When the Civil War began in 1861, James tried to enlist in the Union Army. He

was initially refused because “colored” troops were not accepted. Rejected by the Union Army, James noted the bitter hostility aimed at Black Detroiters, blamed for the Civil War by area Whites. Committing to another kind of protection, i.e., Washington’s work ethic for financial security, James took care of horses, a trade he had learned while enslaved, a skill which he had used for survival during his previous stages of migration. James would build two barns and also negotiate a contract with the U.S. government to stable the horse of the First Cavalry and Artillery quartered in mid-Michigan. James found a way to make his contribution to African American freedom. And on September 23, 1863, this determined Black man who seemed to consistently accomplish whatever he had a mind to do, “married his adored Mary Belle.”⁵ The rest of Cole’s extraordinary history deserves retelling here

[his] efforts during the war were the beginning of the Cole fortune. His credo was ‘Just work and lay by’--- a rule he always followed. Thus by continued hard work and thrift, judiciously investing in property...he was able to accumulate public halls, stores and dwellings. He later added a moving business in which his sons were employed.⁶

Booker T. Washington would have approved.

After Cole’s death in 1907, the Widow Mary Cole became the executrix of the Cole estate. James and Charles Cole decided to use his inheritance, training in transportation, and social connections to the historical Second Baptist Church to segue into the funeral business. The brothers’ undertaking firm started in 1917 split up because of a differential preference in base clientele. Charles “Charlie” became the favorite of the Detroit’s affluent bourgeoisie, progress minded African Americans. James took on the needs of the poor.

James H. Cole, Sr., the son of a former slave, opened his funeral business in 1919 on the lower east side of Detroit, a community of less “respectable” working class urbanites and newly arrived migrants, known as the Black Bottom. The earliest documentation available from his grand daughter, Karla Green Cole, the current owner and operator of Coles Home for Funerals in Detroit, include an itemized bill of funeral costs, receipt of payment installments, and a personal letter from James H. Cole, Sr. asking his client to make good on the balance.⁷ Certainly, the tone of this letter reveals the humility and genuineness of a business man more concerned with serving people than trying to reform their habits (See Appendix: Cole Funeral Home Correspondence, 1929).

By 1944, men like James Cole, Sr., the son of an enslaved migrant who had worked his way North to Detroit, had obtained professional status through licensure and certification at mortuary schools across the country. Chicago had the most prestigious mortuary school in the modern minds of aspiring African American morticians. The Windy City, for example, home to R.R. Reed as well as Robert A. Cole, began the birthplace of the first fraternity solely dedicated to training the death care professional, the Epsilon Nu Delta Mortuary Fraternity. Epsilon Nu started as a study group at Chicago’s school of mortuary science. After World War II, Epsilon Nu renamed its student affiliates “Horus clubs,” expanding and restricting its membership to only licensed embalmers and morticians. Therefore, from the modern era in which Black male masculinity had subverted the female gendered traditions of mutual aid in dealing with the dead, the change over time in the organizational structure of their own professional fraternity proves that the post-modern consolidation of their power of African American funerary display was even greater exclusivity.⁸

While Cole (and later, his son James, Jr. and grand daughter Karla) earned the most funerary patronage, doing the largest volume in death care of any African American funeral home at that time or since, the approachable and recognized personage of Charles Diggs, the only child and inheritor of the family funeral business, The House of Diggs, the congressman whose tenure as a U.S. Representative from the State of Michigan began in 1955 and ended in 1971, provides an historical example of how African American funeral display, modern masculinity, community service, and respectability could be reconciled.

Charles Coles Diggs, Sr., another transplanted Mississippian farm boy, founded the family business, the House of Diggs Funeral Home in 1921, two years after the establishment of the James H. Cole Home for Funerals. By 1938, the House of Diggs had relocated several times in Detroit's Black communities, finally settling at 689 Rowena Street (later renamed Mack Avenue). The House of Diggs on Mack Avenue was the site where this modern mortician's family business flourished for one reason: the funeral home was directly across the street from the Brewster Housing Project.⁹ This location put the House of Diggs conveniently at the doorsteps of poor African American families; people who believed in funerary display and had come to rely on Black men to fill their funerary needs. DuBose collected two testimonies that confirm the interdependence of the Diggs' family-owned funeral home and the Brewster community: the Cadillac fleet with which the Diggs' announced its ability to provide the historically significant funerary display of poverty dissemblance and the fact that "people in need could count on 'Mr. Diggs' for financial assistance. He was a practical man in such matters. Helping others was a trait he passed on to his son."¹⁰ The cultural and financial advantages of

servicing funerary displays and status needs of poor African American families were not the only legacies that Diggs, Sr. left to his son.

At its peak, the House of Diggs employed five hundred people. In addition to the funeral home, there was a florist that was called The House of Diggs Flowers. There was also a burial insurance company called the Metropolitan Funeral System, the only burial insurance company in Michigan. Its name was later changed to Detroit Metropolitan Insurance Company, due to a newly created state law.¹¹

Diggs, Sr. began selling Metropolitan Funeral System policies door-to-door in 1942. He acted, presumably, DuBose, wrote, “after discovering that people were so poor they could not pay for their funerals.”¹²

However, despite the fact that the Michigan Compiled Laws of 1948 disrupted the methods that modern Black men, Digg’s and Cole’s father, had used to turn the historical significance of African American display into lucratively legacies, The “Road That Led to Congress” was paved by the patronage of a Southern Diaspora of poor families who believed in funerals. Representative Clarence F. Graebner, an insurance agent, sponsored the bill that became this public act to prohibit the Black communities’ access to burial insurance via the hands of their modern morticians. This bill eventually became *The Insurance Code of 1956*, solidifying the illegality of simultaneously holding interests and ownership of funeral businesses and life insurance companies. Obviously, the representative legislature of Michigan saw some conflicts in selling life insurance and burial services. DuBose saved some rich commentary from Diggs regarding the matter.

In later years, Diggs contended that the new law had been racially motivated. As he put it, ‘The Republican majority legislature, in Lansing, feared the growth of the burial insurance firm would threaten the viability aspects of the mortuary market.’¹³

Apparently, poor Black families and modern men who strategically had positioned themselves to take care of their communities' gendered needs from jobs to housing to displaying their dead.¹⁴ Yet, DuBose does not neglect a little anecdote from a former Diggs' insurance salesman.

Even after [Diggs] changed the name from Burial Society, to one that met insurance laws of the state,...when I would go their homes, the old folks would come to the door and ask, 'You the Diggs burial insurance man?' ..[they] still referred to it as Diggs burial insurance.¹⁵

Neither Northern migration, masculine modernity, bourgeois respectability nor the Michigan legislature could change the fact that poor, Black families believed in preparing for their burial and funeral displays. And the Diggs' family advantageously responded to the "infrapolitics" at work in Detroit's Black communities.

In his biography, Carolyn P. DuBose credited the Diggs family for many changes in Detroit. For example, Diggs, Sr. opened the Detroit Memorial Park Cemetery for Black people.

People were impressed by the Diggs family as a whole. They were pioneers in business and community activists. The essence of their efforts was to improve people's lives. Their success as morticians was the result of hard work and commitment to the community.¹⁶

DuBose repeated one informant's opinion that, "Whatever they did in Detroit, it was news—even in the white community. They were leading citizens. The Diggs family belonged to the crème of the crop."¹⁷

DuBose, press secretary of U.S. Representative Diggs during his last year in office, declared "Diggs is a very famous name in Detroit."¹⁸ As proof, DuBose

chronicled the political career and entrepreneurial activities of Diggs' father, Charles Coles Diggs, Sr. The senior Diggs served as the first Black Democratic senator in the Michigan legislature, the only Black state senator at the time. Diggs took his seat in 1937. In his first year as a Michigan state legislator, Senator Diggs sponsored a bill called "Diggs Law," enforcing anti-discrimination in Michigan's public places.¹⁹ According to DuBose, Diggs, Sr. "was an articulate man [who] helped people understand how their votes could change things. More practically, people trusted his judgment. Many of them had grown up in the South where trying to vote could cost them their lives." The fact that Diggs, Sr., was a licensed embalmer with a successful, modern mortuary practice in a bustling city with a sizable Southern-born population all account for the generational fortune of the Diggs' family in both business and politics. The Diggs' family prominence cannot be accredited to the conventional "first Black" diatribe, however. The Reverend Jesse Jackson spoke the truth about how African American leaders such as the Diggs' men achieved community power. Jackson confessed, "Most Black people [who] had a job at all, worked for White people. But, the one guy in the community who...was vocal, oftentimes educated, articulate, *paid by Black people*... for a long time, the preacher and the funeral director were the two freed voices in the Black community."²⁰

No wonder urban historian and native Detroiters Richard R. Thomas called the elder Diggs, a "symbol of an age." As a "symbol," for example, only Diggs could be convicted of graft in 1944, receive a three to five year sentence, and serve prison time from 1948 to 1950 only for Detroiters to re-elect him in November 1950 for another seat in the state senate. Although the Michigan Senate, folding from pressures exerted by a majority its Republican members, refused to seat Diggs by a 22 to 6 vote in January

1951, Charles Coles Diggs, Jr. won elections to the seat that had been refused to his father, in April 1951. The Diggs saga does seem to volumes about the power of Black community, the “intrapolitics” of its poorer members, and the ways dissemblance in Black culture does not preclude symbol making.

The “intrapolitics” of Charles Coles Diggs community retained his leadership despite the fact that he was neither a model nor perfect citizen. Electing an ex-con to public office, Black Detroit created this “symbol of a age.” The patronage and votes of poor Black families facilitated the fiscal and political successes of the Diggs’ family. Regardless of his criminal record, Black voters as *community clients* endorsed both the Diggs’ business and their political careers. The Diggs’ men could not be displaced even by the strong arm of the law. The “intrapolitics” protected them from such civil deflowering. If the truth were told, outsiders’ attempts to discredit such Black male leadership tended to backfire. The “intrapolitics” of disfranchised Black people often caused them to rally to protect one of their own men. Detroit’s “intrapolitics” seemed especially hard at work in this case. The Diggs’ family was one of the precious few whose wealth, learning, and connections had not converted them into typical reform-minded bourgeoisie. The *community clients* served by House of Diggs and the constituency represented by these politicians did not get messages that their lifestyles were inappropriate, manners too crude, or behavior unsuitable.

Charles Coles Diggs was a Southern migrant, modern mortician, turned politician intimately familiar with the source of his power, but openly accepting their status needs to have him be the “crème of the crop.” That is to say, the “symbol of a age,” Diggs was the dissemblance or mask of his vulnerable and poor *community clients*. A community

that couldn't protect itself from forced relocation, Detroit's redevelopment and their neighborhood removal, could protect its symbol, the source of community pride and trust which had been invested in the Diggs' family name.²¹

By 1990, in fact, the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Census of Population and Housing indicated that Black funeral directors represented about 9% of the total funeral directors in Michigan. According to this EEO census data, one hundred and thirty-four Black funeral directors survived (at some point) Michigan's rigorous training standards for licensed, funeral directors. Considering that Black people represented about 14% of Michigan's population in 1990, Black funeral home directors commanded a proportionate presence within their profession.²² However, many people appear to be quite unconcerned about death until it impacts their lives in some way. Therefore, the "very existence" of the funeral director's occupation serves as a constant reminder of the universal, everyday reality of death.²³ My research establishes the historical connections between Black funeral directors the consequences of an unavoidable market, i.e. the death experience, and Black, urban communities in mid-Michigan. In this discussion, I use sparse second literature on the U.S. funeral industry in order to contrast a traditional critique of capital/consumer tensions versus the communities of Black-owned funeral homes and other Black institutions, indirectly, e.g. Black families and churches. With primary data such as personal interviews with contemporary, state-licensed morticians and state licensing personnel as well as U.S. Department of Commerce economic and population statistics. I argue that an urban, community-based construction of Black, professional class includes these formally trained and state licensed service providers.

The seminal work on the U.S. funeral industry, Jessica Mitford's 1963 *The*

American Way of Death, begins with a definition of the occupation's work ethic. In the forward to her third edition, Mitford establishes that an ethical funeral home director "adheres to a prevailing code of morality, in this case one devised over the years by the undertakers themselves for their own purposes the code of their calling."²⁴ Similarly, Vanderlyn R. Pine also recognizes the heavy handed emphasis on sensitive service within the funeral director's occupational code. In a sociological study on the subject of death, Pine explains that funeral directors operate within a regulated code of ethics in order to protect the community. The formal authority of the code entails the acceptance of a professional oath. For example, funeral directors swear adherence to their occupation when admitted into the profession. In short, a professional code of ethics reflects an organizational attempt to monitor the behaviors within the profession.²⁵ Therefore, certain practices contradict the image of Pine's dedicated, service professional, the ever ready, service professional. In fact, I propose that the contradistinctions of Pine's professional behavior and Mitford's ethical conduct are probably the two sides of the same coin. Mitford lists particular acts which surely would qualify as unprofessional comportment. For example, a few of those practices include: unscrupulous contracts with coroner's office to obtain business, bribery of hospital personnel to influence recently bereaved families, illegal reuse of coffins, and fraudulent "double charges" for welfare cases (when an account is paid by both the government as well as an individual family.)²⁶ However, Mitford's leftist sentiments in the post-McCarthy U.S. (she was more than a Communist sympathizer—she went on to join the party, but recanted before her death) informs her solutions to these ethical dilemmas. Mitford advocated low cost, funeral providers to redress the abuses with the funeral industry. However, over thirty years later,

the realization of Mitford's ideal reform, i.e. low cost providers, has had some disturbing affects on Black institutions including the Black church and Black-owned, funeral establishments.

The thesis from Pine's monograph involves two paradigms which he uses to further distinguish between funeral home directors. The personal service model dominates funeral directing. In this framework, funeral practitioners respond to the "social relationship" which exists between their job performance and the communities they serve. Within a specific "institutional complex," i.e. the funeral home, customers receive specialized, individual service. In the personal service model, customers receive direct and personal communication from the funeral home director, although, according to Pine, there is no other connection.²⁷ In contrast to this concept, the bureaucratic model carries a negative connotation. People expect a host of inefficient, unnecessary, complicated, frustrating, and practically unavoidable issues. In this model, an extensive division of labor organized around an hierarchy of offices governs the ways in which families are treated. In the bureaucratic approach to funerary needs, the undertaker makes a clear distinction between personal and business matters.²⁸

In addition to the emphasis on the two models, Pine plainly presents a working definition of professionalism which highlights the connection between funeral home directors and their communities. Pine explains that the very nature or meaning of professionalism concerns the technical complexities which structure modern societies. Caught up in the need to catalog, count, and characterize, modernity commonly causes people to divide occupations into groups. Consequently, sociologists and other scholars consider specific attributes as markers of the professions. Briefly stated, most professions

posses: an underlying systemic body of knowledge and theory which is acquired through long training in professional school; a high degree of authority and judgment with which they tell people what is "good or bad;" a sense of honor, respectability, and prestige; an architectural history that pre-dates the client's appointment (for example, a new doctor's office is not created each time someone gets sick and funeral homes exist before people die); a level of expertise as well as success (for example, the difference between a *professional* and amateur golfer); and a type of job in contrast to other kinds of occupations (for example, the "white collar workers" such as bankers and insurance sales associates, "blue collar workers" such as plumbers and mechanics, and *professional* careers such as law and dentistry). Furthermore, a profession contains a "special culture"; particular values and norms with accompanying signs and symbols that announce the occupation's professional activities.²⁹ Most importantly, professions carry the "sanction of community." This means that the community approves of and gives power to professionals through agencies such as licensing boards. In addition, confidentiality also represents a form of community sanction.. Clients or customers often disclose sensitive issues to people protected by laws regulating professional immunity.³⁰

As a result, claims of professionalism constitute what I call a transferable resource. Allowing for regional prejudices such as skin color, accent, and gender preferences, professionals find demands for their talents across the country. Funeral directing provides no exception. I cite Pine's work to show that people seek to improve or enhance the public conception of their occupation by claiming the mantle of professionalism. For example, according to Pine, funeral directors hope to overcome their societal stigma as "caretakers of the dead" by promoting their professionalism.³¹

By the twentieth century, federal and state governments regardless of whether or not they were welcomed or invited began to “help” this occupational transformation by enforcing certain regulations. The significance of this change over time conveys the message that this particular occupation was important enough to receive standardized evaluations. In addition, the regulation of the funeral industry caused the birth of licensing boards and the retention of appropriate staff to manage them. All of this means that the funeral industry made enough money to merit spending public dollars to insure it contributed safely and legally to both the society and the economy.

However, individual states control the strict laws governing the licensing of funeral directors. A comparison of the U.S. Department of Labor research and a recent telephone interview with the State of Michigan Mortuary Licensing Board Administrator offers an interesting look at change over time in this process. In 1939, all states in the Union required that embalmers possess a license or certificate as proof of their eligibility to practice mortuary science. Potential funeral practitioners secured this approval by completing an accredited course at a mortuary school, prescribed apprenticeship at a funeral establishment, and an official examination. During the 1930s, admittance to most mortuary schools necessitated a high school degree and a minimum age of 18 years old. The curriculum demanded that students commit anywhere from 3 weeks to nine months in subjects such as anatomy, chemistry, funeral directing, pathology, histology, physiology, and restorative art.³² Besides these qualifications, certain moral qualities defined embalmers and undertakers of the 1930s. "Called upon to talk with families of deceased persons," the Department of Labor reported, "they should be tactful and sympathetic, and able to inspire confidence in their patrons."³³ Conducting themselves

with thoroughness and industry, the embalmer and undertaker impressed their families with business minded, yet personal attention.³⁴

Today, for example, a successful applicant to Wayne State University's School of Mortuary Science, the only accredited, university-based mortuary school in Michigan, needs to have completed at least sixty hours of liberal arts curriculum. While often the sixty college hour requirement comprises the completion of a B.A. or B.Sc. degree, all successful applicants to mortuary school possess the minimum instructional hours if not a degree.³⁵ While the option of attending a proprietary mortuary school remains, Wayne State University (WSU) offers Michigan's future funeral directors a diploma in mortuary science upon completion of its one year program. A Bachelor of Arts Degree in Mortuary Science belongs to only those students who complete the traditional, four year tenure at WSU.³⁶

Upon graduating from an accredited mortuary school, two additional years of preparation await the potential, Michigan funeral director.³⁷ He or she also completes a one year residency at an accredited funeral home under the sponsorship of a licensed, funeral director.³⁸ This full year of mortuary training simulates the experiences of the occupation. The funeral director trainee performs specific tasks or skill sets during this time.³⁹ The time invested in education and preparation for a career in mortuary science totals four years.

However, three other barriers stand between the trainee and official certification. If the trainee passes both state and national examinations, he or she enters the last phase of becoming a licensed, funeral director in the State of Michigan.⁴⁰ The final obligation mirror the personality evaluation of funeral directors from the 1930s. The State of Board

of Mortuary Science insures the congeniality of Michigan's funeral directors by licensing only those of the "good moral character."⁴¹

Interestingly, the four interviews I conducted in urban cities across mid-Michigan all address some aspect of this curious brand of professional respectability, available to funeral home directors. Taken over the course of three months, these information sessions gave me an inside look into the professional lives of licensed funeral directors.

As calm, serious people worked cooperatively and intensively throughout the multiple story building at 2624 West Grand Boulevard, I waited for an audience with Mrs. Karla Cole on September 23, 1998.⁴² Peeking her head into the comfortable director's office overlooking the main street, Karla affirmed her presence and my importance. Initially, Karla's attention to practically every detail of postmortem arrangements seemed counterproductive for a person in her position. During the next ninety minutes, however, this business minded and energetic woman clearly explained her methods of operation through the history, philosophy, and longevity of the Cole Funeral Home. Started by her grandfather during 1919 in Detroit's "Black Bottom," Cole Funeral Home grew from a small establishment in a segregated community into two locations serving the Detroit metropolitan area. As the owner and operator of a family owned, Black business, Karla's inheritance also includes work related demands or sacrifices.

Karla's legacy includes the philosophy espoused by her father. Before his death in 1991, Karla's father told her that when the time came, she should "push his body over in the corner and get to it later." He stressed to his daughter the immense importance of what he called "my families." Constantly interrupted once we were able to begin the

interview, Karla's commitment to this principle clarified her omniscient managerial style. As the tape recorder snapped finished the first, forty-five minutes, I turned the tape over. Karla spent the rest of the time patiently elaborating on one of the first lessons of her work and the funeral industry as a whole.

The primacy of Cole's bereaved families dictated Mr. Cole's life. His wife and two daughters understood his priorities. They also knew the unpredictable nature of death. Death indiscriminately interrupted family dinners, much needed rest, and scheduled activities. Mr. Cole's "families" required his immediate attention. Karla accepted leadership of the family business with her eyes open. The interesting differences between Mr. Cole and Karla's administration allows for a gendered comparison of their occupational roles.

Mr. Cole's periodic absence from the nuclear family freed him to attend the losses of other families. In so doing, he acted as the household provider and friend of other Black families.⁴³ Her father's periodic absence from their nuclear family freed him to attend the losses of other families. In so doing, he acted as the household provider. Mrs. Cole remained in the home. Karla also described the tensions between the death care industry, the family business, and her own household.⁴⁴

As a wife and mother, Karla retained the family name for the sake of professional consistency. Well aware of the demands in her chosen profession, present domestic strains mirror some of the pressures Karla witnessed in childhood. However, when Karla stays late at the office, wakes up to help out in a crisis, or misses a family meal, the traditional figure of comfort and stability in *Black* families also steps away from home. In addition, the stereotype of women who neglect their husbands and children through

worldly preoccupation or "busy work" also taunts professional women in traditional settings. Adhering to the philosophy of the Cole Funeral Home while actively taking care of her current household constantly challenges the equanimity of this career woman and professional service provider.⁴⁵ At this same time, however, such unquestionable loyalty to Black families also insures the financial security of her immediate family. Equally important, Karla's priorities also earn the confidence and continued patronage of Detroit's Black families.⁴⁶ As generations after generation receive the Cole's dedicated, fairly priced, and professional service, the family maintains their relationship with Black families and underwrites the economic health of Cole Funeral Homes.

Karla also takes on other community roles. Once she hosted a group of medical students from Wayne State University. After the livery attendants (the ambulance service from the funeral home) transports the body from the morgue, the family's next institutional interaction occurs in the office of the funeral director. Karla gave them a tour of the Cole facilities. She shared with these burgeoning medical professionals the other side of human health, that is the death experience.

She explained that many doctors and head nurses face families with the news that a loved one has died without concrete ideas about what will happen next. Releasing the body to the hospital morgue breaks the connection between the family, the medical staff, and the hospital.

The visit to Cole Funeral Home brought clarity to the other scenario of patient care, the question of what happens without recovery. Karla addressed a family's final decisions concerning deceased patients. In this educational role, Karla simultaneously achieved two ends. She furnished future Cole's families with more informed and

sensitive health care providers. Second, this volunteer service also facilitated a much needed and neglected dialogue between two related, yet hitherto estranged, professional service institutions.

Yet, prior to completing the live interviews on November 13, 1998 with James R. Riley, Jr., the owner and director of Riley Funeral Home in Lansing, I still needed to succinctly describe and empirically explain what I believed to be a familial approach in this community-based, Black business in order to achieve a more inclusive definition of urban, professional class. For while the personal interviews supplied the histories of a few, mid-Michigan funeral establishments, only some sort of marketing research would ensure an adequate measure of Black funeral directors socio-economic and cultural standing in Black communities.

Teasing out the contours of Black community, a cross section, community survey proposed a possible method of analysis. This approach allowed me to see that particular connections between funeral home establishments, funeral directors, and Black families. Marketing analysis, as an assessment tool, indicates *how* funeral directors constitute a professional class as well as extended members of the Black family.⁴⁷ Beyond race, class, and gender considerations this research permits an interdisciplinary study of the mid-Michigan funeral industry.

I chose Lansing as the site for this marketing analysis for a specific reason. Riley Funeral Home at 426 West St. Joseph remains the only family owned, Black funeral home in Lansing. Since April 1957, pastors, factory workers, wives, and local celebrities made their last public appearance with the assistance of Riley Funeral Home. Because Riley continues as the only choice of Black customers with a cultural or community

preference, an objective appraisal seemed to be in order. Responding to a community survey, profiles of customers and potential customers in the Lansing area suggest reasons for the duration of Black funeral homes. (See Appendix G.)

James Riley. Jr. operates the establishment at 426 West St. Joseph in Lansing, Michigan. This address marks Riley Funeral Home since construction of Interstate 496 required its relocation in the early 1960s. Founded by Riley's father in 1957, Riley Funeral Home remains as Lansing's only family owned, Black funeral home. Riley Funeral Home enjoys a competitive edge with racialized spending power. Black people in the Lansing area who consciously patronize businesses according to phenotypic and cultural association chose Riley Funeral Home for their mortuary needs. However, James Riley, Jr. pointed out other results of this "small town" conditions.

That is to say, in Riley's view, his business both benefits and depends on the community's preferences. He works hard to attend not only to the immediate needs of Riley families, but also the perceptions of community leaders such as pastors, teachers, and other small business owners. Riley went to public school with several of the school board members. He sends his son to community charter school that emphasizes academic and cultural preparedness for children of color. He encounters Riley families in the grocery store, the barber shop, and diverse places. That is to say, when Lansing sees James Riley, Jr. they see Riley Funeral Home.

However, according to Betts, Moon's multi-million dollar expansion of the establishment currently prohibits such benevolent actions. In fact, some families complain of the resultant price changes since the capital improvements. Betts tries to reassure his clientele that the comfortable and tranquil enhancements comprise the cost

adjustments. In addition to this tension, increased competition from what Betts identifies as "acquisition groups" also fuels customer criticism. Most notably, the British Columbia-based conglomerate, Loewen Group, Inc. (NYSE: LWN), initiated a local pilot program targeting Black church members in May 1997. Through a local sales representatives or "funeral counselor" Black churches in Detroit offered "pre-need" funerary services to their members. This means that members of Detroit's Black churches could purchase graves, vaults, tombstones, and mausoleum crypts without patronizing traditional funeral homes such as Cole, Brown, and Browne.⁴⁸

Offering what one Canadian magazine coined as "bargain priced burials," corporations like Loewen Group, Inc. launched aggressive acquisition campaigns which simultaneously gave consumers more options and absorbed community-based funeral establishments. According to Betts, corporate competition in what another Canadian periodical called the "death-care business," created more informed, yet somewhat unrealistic customers. Armed with prepaid burial plots and mass marketed caskets, some Black customers come to Betts with the tail end of their mortuary needs—embalming and displaying of the body. Betts tells these consumers that their itemized demands corrupt the professionalism of his craft. Although he understands the advantages of bargaining, Betts also sees the cheapening of funeral services through such corporate practices. Most importantly, Black funeral homes lose revenue as a result of direct competition with international organizations.⁴⁹

For a more in depth look at this development and specific responses see: Ian Portsmouth, "The Trial of Ray Loewen: Funeral-home mogul Ray Loewen built an industry giant by expanding almost effortlessly into the U.S. Then he was blindsided by a

legal and cultural gap he never knew existed," *Profit: The Magazine for Canadian Entrepreneurs*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (February/March 1996): 24-32; Ross Laver, "Bargain priced burials," *Maclean's (Toronto Edition)*, vol. 110, no. 28, (July 14, 1997): 38; author not cited, "Takeover fight livens up death-care business," *Financial Post*, vol. 90, no. 38, (September 21/23, 1996): 78; Jennifer Hunter, "Taking on the giants: a consumer revolution is shaking things up in the funeral business," *Maclean's (Toronto Edition)*, vol. 110, no. 40, (October 6, 1997): 62. The Loewen Group, Inc. listed their company on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in October 1996 under the symbol LWN. As of Friday, May 14, 1999, their earning per share reflected -8.50 loss. Since its initial public offering some ten years ago, according to The Loewen Group web site, the company grew ... "from owning 47 funeral homes and one cemetery to its position today of owning and operating over 1,100 funeral homes, 500 cemeteries, and 50 crematoria." In addition, The Loewen Group, Inc. home page claims that the company "...is the world's second largest publicly held funeral service and cemetery corporation in terms of revenues and assets. The Company employs some 16,000 people and owns and operates...funeral homes...[and] cemeteries in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom." In addition to falling stock prices, Loewen faces a particular stumbling block in the state of Michigan. To counter monopolies in the funeral industry, Michigan enacted an anti-combination law which prohibits one company from holding both cemeteries and funeral homes.

In short, my research of mid-Michigan Black funeral homes establishes the historical connection between funeral directors and Black, urban families. Furthermore, I argue that an urban, community-based construction of Black, professional class includes

these formally trained and state licensed service providers. Simply, Black funeral directors attend, patronize and socialize with Black churches, local barber shops, and certain prominent community leaders. Therefore, within these behaviors, we can pull out the basis of the relationship between the Black funeral home director and their communities. My historical conceptualization, *community clients*, exists between the Black funeral director and their communities or customers versus a linear, clear cut and unquestioned business relationship. However, the loyalty and patronage of the Black community underwrite the very existence of the Black-owned funeral home. The bottom-line business mentality/orientation or what Pine sees as the "bureaucratic model" of the occupation, would bankrupt a traditionally run, Black-owned funeral home. The linear, closed-end business idea, Pine's "bureaucratic model," structures the organization and operation of the funeral establishment based on the function and the customer's ability to pay for services. This strict allocation of time and effort contradicts the focus of a symbiotic dependency. A symbiotic relationship occurs when different organisms live together in close association, particularly for mutual benefit. This symbiotic function of the *community client* model maintains that relationships between funeral directors and Black families continue even beyond a specified business transaction.

The *community client* relationship demands a consistent level of professionalism or personal service to all customers, regardless of their income level. This factor dictates how funeral home directors deliver their services. The existence of Black funeral homes rests on an understanding of their community. These businesses function in relation to the Black community. For example, Karla Cole's business sense recognizes the power of the Riley's "small town" or the symbiotic dependency factor of the *community client*

relationship. She admits the real necessity of constantly delivering indiscriminate, quality service to each and every family within the Black community regardless of any previous, current, or anticipated additional pecuniary power.

I conceptualized the symbiotic relationships within the Black community to describe what Mr. Riley's called the "small town" thesis. My historical conceptualization of Black families as *community clients* is obvious in and confirmed by the lack of aggressive marketing strategies for most African American owned funeral establishments. The live interviews with four, Black funeral directors reveal very minimal advertising budgets. In short, a logical question uncovers the inapplicable piece of Pine's proposition. If the advertising budgets of personal service model, funeral home directors remain nonexistent, how are they communicating with their customers?

The answer lies in the funeral director's word-of-mouth marketing strategies. This time-tested and trusted advertising approach also repudiates a part of Pine's report. The connection between the Black funeral directors and their customers extends beyond the business transition. As additional proof, the traditional promotional items employed by funeral home directors also reinforce their communal or collective identity within the Black community.

For example, along with the greeting cards and other seasonal correspondence sent by relatives and friends, Riley's annual "holiday calendar" finds its way into Lansing homes as well. The "holiday calendar" reminds the household of the year, days, and months. The "holiday calendar" also reminds them of a physically absent, but readily accessible "family" member. The warmth, tenderness, and comfort of the Riley family come with the colorful monthly planner just as surely as with any well wishes from a

neighbor in a "small town." The Black community interacts with the funeral director as a professional person. They also interact with this service professional outside of their mortuary needs. They attend some of the same churches, frequent similar stores, and share aspects of their private sphere with the funeral home through promotional, household items. In fact, the funeral director's accessibility and communal identity causes the community to respond with loyal patronage. Generations of Black folks continue to patronize Riley and other Black-owned funeral homes not because of some catchy, sophisticated consumer marketing campaign, a constant memoir of the *community client* relationship. My conceptual model *community clients* accurately capture the historical significance of Black families' funerary display, their traditional dependence on African American funeral directors as service-oriented leaders, and the political as well as cultural consequences of this consistent, ethnicity driven patronage. This ethnic belief in the funeral as an indicator of familial, communal, and individual identity has been traced from enslaved preachers of the ante-bellum period through the post-emancipation burial societies and the modern affiliations with Black funeral homes.

One final critique of the *community client* model necessitates a final application of this historical conceptualization. Ethnographer Hylan Lewis supplied the context for this last case study when he recorded the questions that *community clients* typically asked the family of the deceased. The two questions Lewis recorded suggest the centrality of African American funeral display in contextualizing the loss of community members. "To which church did the deceased belong?" and "Whom do you want to preach the funeral."⁵⁰ However, the quintessential question was, as Karla F.C. Holloway, later explained, "And Who Has the Body?"⁵¹

Chapter 5

“AND WHO HAS THE BODY?” THE CHILD MURDER OF MAMIE’S BABY

Historically, almost all political, cultural, anthropological and ethnographic research about Emmett Till’s murder overlooked the question, “who has the body?” as a salient illustration of African American identity formation.¹ The emphasis on Mamie Till Bradley’s response to the child murder of her son has never been placed on the role of the funeral home she selected. In this chapter, the concept of *community client* emphasizes the customary negotiations between Black families and their funeral directors to reconstruct the infamous events that ended the life of Emmett Till. In addition, this historical revision also includes an analysis of Mrs. Bradley’s anticipation of collective or communal sympathy. Together, these neglected foci in the history of the Emmet Till murder document the functions of funerary display within African American ethnic identity formation.

Historical understanding of how African American communities across the United States responded to the murder of Emmett Till must account for his mother’s decision to publicly display his mutilated body. Mrs. Bradley insisted that the owner of A.A. Rayner & Sons arrange an open casket funeral. However, Mr. Rayner’s acquiescence regarding the display of Emmett Till’s body dishonored a specific stipulation for having the body shipped from Mississippi.² Therefore, in deferring to the mother’s preference, the funeral director negotiated reclamation of her control over a child who had been stolen by an unwarranted sentence of death. Specifically, Rayner’s focus on the mother’s familial power concerning what to do with Emmett’s body

documents a particular historical function of African American funerary display. The mother's insistence on publicly displaying her child's corpse for, "all to see what they did to my boy," became Rayner's most important professional duty. This often repeated quotation explains why Rayner reneged on his prior consent to the Mississippian mortician's specification.³

Mamie Bradley Till would later confess that she had not really wanted her son to vacation in Mississippi. Yet, after repeated lessons about the racially charged fragilities which characterized the lives of Southern Black folk and doubtless minutes in prayer, Mamie consented.⁴ On August 20, 1955, Mrs. Bradley took her baby to the 63rd Street train station. She booked him a southbound passage for his visit to the rural homestead of her uncle, Moses Wright, in Money, Mississippi. Emmett had only been visiting their relatives down South for a week prior to his murder.

Trial record, newspaper features, magazine articles, and personal interviews provide the details of Emmett's murder. Although some versions diverge, the facts situate Mamie's son in a small store tended by the young wife of a local, White grocer named Roy Bryant. Bryant's wife, Carolyn, tended the family's store alone whenever her husband went out of town. On such occasions, Mrs. Bryant's sister-in-law, Juanita Milam, would often come and sit in the back of the store.⁵ In the company of these unattended Southern White women were the Bryant and Milam children. Supervised by their Aunt Juanita and protected by a .38 Colt gun under the seat of Milam's car, the 21 yr. old mother was able to concentrate on her duties as a shopkeeper's wife without neglecting her job as a mother.⁶ The afternoon of August 24, 1955, Carolyn Bryant's children were safe with their babysitter when Mamie's baby entered their family's store.

Emmett was not alone that day. Six other teenaged boys and one local girl accompanied him. He and this group of Black youngsters had borrowed 1946 Ford and driven into town together. He had only been visiting a few days. But, Emmett's vacation in the Southern hamlet of Money, Mississippi had brought more intrigue than his male peers could handle and his personal safety could control. Emmett had a wallet with the picture of a young White female who he claimed was one of his Chicago conquests. His brag about a romantic relationship with a White girl led to the dare which ultimately cost Till his life.

One of the boys edged him to show off his charm to the "pretty little white woman" behind the store counter. Whether Emmett propositioned Mrs. Bryant, tried to fondle her, spoke suggestively or simply whistled are all speculative points of contention.⁷ His mother said Emmett may have whistled, but the sound he made would not have been that notorious "wolf whistle." She claimed that Emmett had a slight speech impediment for which she had taught him the finesse of whistling his way through any difficult communication he encountered. Whatever transpired, Emmett's behavior traversed the social etiquette expected of Black men in relation to White women in the South. Carolyn Bryant took offense, ran to the back of the store, alerted her nanny of a problem, and went to retrieve Milam's gun. By the time Carolyn Bryant had reappeared with that gun, the Chicago visitor was gone.⁸

"Bo," the familial appellation by which Emmett was also called, probably let this encounter drift into the background of his out of town adventures. For example, the very night Mrs. Bryant's husband and his half-brother, J.W. Milam, confronted Till about his inappropriate advances to Bryant's wife, Emmett had just returned from an earlier outing,

passing the evening with some of the same entourage of teenagers who had also joined him in the previous excursion. So, when Bryant and Milam came looking for Emmett the morning of August 28, 1955, the adults in the Wright household were already aware of the store incident. While Emmett's Uncle Moses thought it better that Emmett should return to Chicago or at least leave town, his wife, Aunt Elizabeth, believed Emmett's childish prank would not engender serious consequence. That is to say, Mrs. Wright did not anticipate anything more than the uncomfortable paranoia that Southern Black life had continually been for those folk who had chosen to stay there.⁹ Emmett surely was reprimanded. Whatever his aunt may have said to him, however, could not have arrested the egotistical folly manifested in the Bryant's grocery store days earlier. Bo's family knew the risks and provocations of hosting a vacationing, fourteen year old boy. His mother had tried to indoctrinate the societal taboos under which her Southern kinfolk lived their lives. But, away from his only real authority figure, his Mama, Emmett had no real prohibition from indulging his pubescent male ego.¹⁰ Emmett either forgot his mother's instructions or had no inclinations to obey. However, by the time his aunt had asked him what had happened in the store; Emmett had already begun acting out his own version of young Black masculinity. Emmett's identity, however, was devoid of the dissemblance and subservience that had come to characterize the survival of non-migrant, African Americans in the South. The story that Milam and Bryant sold for \$4,000 to journalist William Bradford Huie supports my analysis that Emmett Till was murdered because of what he believed about himself. Till's kidnappers told Huie that they had gone to look for "the nigger who did the talking."¹¹

Five months after Milam killed Emmett, in the January 24, 1956 issue of *Look*,

the brothers disclosed to a public readership that they had kidnapped Mamie's child. However, a boy "who did the talking," stood almost 5 feet 5 inches tall, and weighed 160 pounds was hardly a child in their opinion.¹² The most outspoken and least intimidated of the two men, Milam, admitted his utter astonishment at failing to terrorize Till into the customary cower expected of Black people when confronted by angry or accusatory Southern Whites. In fact, not once did Bo attempt to escape his captors, although there were several opportunities to slip away from them.¹³ In the end, Milam shot Mamie's baby because Bo defined himself from a place of self-exclamation that saw neither sacredness in White skin color nor supremacy in their brutality. That is to say, Bo was not murdered for being fresh to Milam's sister-in-law, Mrs. Carolyn Bryant. Her husband and his half-brother kidnapped Emmett and beat him as a punishment for that transgression. No, Emmett died because of his unflinching assertion of his African American identity.

In the paid confession for *Look* readers, Milam chronicled in gory detail his thought processes that prompted him to kill Emmett Till. Just before shooting Emmett in the head with his Army .45, Milam asked Bo two questions: "You still as good as I am?" "You've still 'had' white women?" Even in the face of certain destruction, Mamie's baby would not acknowledge himself as less than a White man or unworthy of human interactions such as romantic attractions, flirtations, and friends, regardless of color. And neither kidnapping, pistol whipping, stripping the child butt naked, nor pointing a gun to his head resulted in the posture which Milam expected. But, Milam had convinced himself that uppity Negroes from the north like this young boy should be broken down. However, the defiant calm and unaffected stoicism of the Black youth's demeanor

infuriated Milam to the point that he would end Till's life. Therefore, when Bo answered yes to both of Milam's questions, Milam shot Bo in the head near his right eye as his reply. He tied a cotton gin fan around Bo's neck and threw his body in the Tallahatchie River to punctuate that response. Milam's admission of this truth has been neither theorized nor deduced here. It was divulged, a tragedy that eventually became international news.¹⁴

Uncle Moses identified Bo's body after it had been recovered from the Tallahatchie River on August 31, 1955. Mamie Bradley had her son returned to Chicago. By the time she claimed his body at the Chicago rail station, she was already drawing on both spiritual and community powers to deal with her loss. The picture taken that day at the Chicago terminal of Till's nailed down casket is flanked by his mother, Bishop Louis T. Ford, the pastor of St. Paul Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.) and Bishop Isiak Roberts, pastor of Roberts Temple C.O.G.I.C. In fact, in almost every photograph of his mother thereafter she is near or with at least one or more Black men. One poignant snapshot that speaks to the importance of the community's empathy is one in which Mrs. Bradley is walking into Roberts Temple C.O.G.I.C. for her son's September 3, 1955 funeral. Neither her own mother nor any other relative is at her side. Mr. Rayner, the funeral director, escorted her to her seat.¹⁵

Many of the images from the Till "child murder lynching" as the Black press called the homicide were those of his mother's devastation and the Black communities' ancillary anger and sympathy while supporting her. Possibly the most far reaching coverage was that of the multimedia Johnson Publishing Company. The September 15, 1955 issue of *Jet* magazine made this mother's pain into a spectacle for all those inclined

to witness what had happened to this woman's baby. The most hauntingly graphic photos were those of Emmett's Till's corpse, so badly disfigured (almost beyond recognition) and too grotesque for some of *Jet*'s readership to ever forget.

Sports celebrities, entertainers, scholars, activists, children, and working people contributed their memoirs of the Emmett Till murder. For example, Carolyn C. Dillon of Pittsburg, Norma Johnson of Fishers, Indiana and Carl Grimes of Washington, D.C. all recalled their first impressions of the murder. Dillon remembered, "the lines—the long long, LONG lines outside the funeral home, the pictures of Emmett's bruised, beaten, battered body. All the grown ups were very happy that Emmett's mother let the world see what White America did to Black people when she let the Rayners show Emmett's body." Johnson's and Grimes' families had weekly subscriptions to *Jet* magazine. Remembering "the center or near centerfold of the small magazine...picture of the young Emmett Till lying in the casket" fueled their later political activism. Darlene C. Hill was eight years old and a Chicago elementary school student. Mamie Till Bradley was her third grade teacher. When Hill saw the article in *Jet* magazine, she "brought it to show the other children and was fussed at by the other children. They were afraid it would hurt our teacher's feelings."¹⁶

Many of the memoirs submitted on-line to the PBS American Experience website for the Till documentary were written by people who were school age children in 1955. However, the September 24, 1955 issue of the *Chicago Defender* publicized contemporary reactions of city youth. The article, "Teenagers Give Meaning to Money: It's the Worst," clarified:

There's a great deal of correspondence being written
from Mississippi these days relative to the lynch-murder

of Emmett Till, the trial there and the way natives feel about the incident which disgraced a nation. Normally, when racially explosive events take place, the school children and teen-agers take only cursory notice. During their young lives, they have acquired a sort of cynical immunity to these things... Not so with the Till case. Chicago's youngsters show deep concern about this case...*the killing of a child* with whom they can identify more closely seems to heighten the starkness of the drama in their youthful minds (emphasis mine).¹⁷

Along with the children's voices, celebrities and community leaders also added their memoirs of Till.¹⁸ While James Forman and Mrs. Medgar Evers included the influence of the Till killing in autobiographical formats, Muhammad Ali and Anne Moody shared their memories of Emmett's murder on-line and in their autobiographies. Muhammad Ali remarked: "His mother had done a bold thing. She refused to let him be buried until hundred of thousands marched past his open casket in Chicago and looked down at his mutilated body." Historian James Horton confessed, "The need to understand encouraged my graduate study of Southern history." Attorney Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr., said that the Till murder made him, "want to do everything I could to make sure this event would not happen ever again."¹⁹

Just as there was disagreement regarding what had actually transpired between Bo and Mrs. Bryant, reporters could not agree on how many mourners viewed Till's body. The *Chicago Defender* claimed 250,000 people witnessed the "saddest funeral in history."²⁰ The most conservative estimate came from the *Washington-Afro-American* at 10,000 mourners. The *New Amsterdam News* reported 50,000 and the *Pittsburg Courier* doubled that figure in its headline claiming "100,000 View Battered Body of Lynch Victim."²¹ However, when the kidnapping and murder trial of J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant opened in Sumner, Mississippi two weeks after the open casket funeral, African

Americans were not able to visit the courtroom in any such numbers. African American communities around the country relied on television coverage, newspaper articles and radio talk shows for information. Once the not guilty verdict had been rendered, Black people stepped up their protest of “approved killing in Mississippi.”²²

Going beyond arming themselves with information, for example, the N.A.A.C.P. mounted a letter writing campaign as well as launched a membership drive fueled by Till’s “lynching.” At the same time, Emmett’s mother hit the lecture circuit determined to do more than just grieve.²³ Thousands of dollars and significant numbers of recruits were the response to the partnership between Mrs. Bradley and civil rights leaders. U.S. Representative and Detroit funeral director Charles Diggs, Jr., with all the conviction and courage of a 20th century Ida B. Wells-Barnett, had even flown to Mamie Bradley’s side as affirmation of this woman’s right to seek justice over the “lynch” murder of her baby boy.

The use of the word “lynching” in reference to the murder of Mamie’s child, unleashed however, a great hue and cry just as the denial that he was, in fact, actually a child. Whatever the height and weight of Mamie’s boy, Emmett was her only child, her only son. African American mothers have used the endearment of “baby” in reference to their children regardless of numbers or birth order. That is to say, the “baby” of a family can mean the last child born, the only girl or boy, and even the most favored or indulged regardless of age.

Letters which made their way to the desks of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, Attorney General Herbert G. Brownwell, his assistant, Warren Olney, III and even President Dwight Eisenhower (often reprinted or mentioned in media like the *Chicago*

Defender) reflected knowledge of the confession, the trial and the verdict. These letters demonstrate an outrage of U.S. communities regardless of race.²⁴ White citizens as well African Americans were seeking some official denouncement of the wrong that had been done in Mississippi. Sadly, the Justice Department failed to assuage these citizens' despair.²⁵ Investigations of possible civil rights violation yielded no grounds on which to file a federal case against the child murderers. Regardless of the writer, origin, or addressee of the correspondence, all governmental respondents answered the same: there was no legal basis on which to pursue a civil rights violation. To add insult to injury, Black communities were confused even more when on November 9, 1955, a LeFlore County grand jury in Greenwood, Mississippi refused to indict Milam and Bryant on kidnapping charges, a crime to which they had previously confessed.

No politician's office or particular civil servant who wrote back believed Mrs. Bradley's story of tragic loss justifiable, necessarily. Rather, binding themselves to the letter of the law alone, politicians also tied their hands to comfort not only Mamie Till, but all those communities within U.S. society who sympathized with her.²⁶

Although Till's mother had already been informed of everything that had transpired up to the kidnapping of her son, she would not know of the final moments of her child's life until the account had been made public knowledge by *Look* magazine.²⁷ Historian Robin D. G. Kelley gave an interview for the PBS American Experience documentary confirming the reputed bravery of Till's mother. An echo of the memoir contributed by Ali, Kelly's comment, labeled "Open Casket," opined: "Mamie Till Bradley's decision to have an open-casket funeral was incredibly courageous and, in fact, it was the thing that was—even more than his murder—an emotional catalyst for

many people who were drawn to this incident, largely because she made the decision to allow the world to see what these white supremacists did to her son, and it became an international event, and that image of his face was marked on just about every single Black person, of that generation, let alone people in Europe and Africa and Asia who saw the same images.” (emphasis mine)²⁸

Much like her son’s uncompromisingly clear sense of self in the face of death, Mrs. Bradley’s refusal to quietly suffer loss as a Black mother also epitomizes the historical significance of funeral display as a function of African American identity formation. In fact, this mother’s decision to show the world what had happened to her child is exactly “the source lamentation” for African Americans, not natural death, but rather the deliberate destruction of our potential. The travesty of lost potential was the “lamentation” of late 19th century anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells-Barnett and, unfortunately, the same dirge of succeeding generations. Emmett Till’s murder was in fact a lynching. Therefore, he became a martyr, another Black male body that refused to compromise the self-determined dignity of his masculinity.²⁹

African Americans, especially Southern born Black folks, understood lynching as an extralegal appropriation of violent force against their people. Lynching meant mob rule, brutality, and death. Lynching was a public act of hatred by private individuals against the Black race. Lynching a mother’s child, however, was the last sacred sacrifice Black communities were willing to make. Poet James A. Emanuel memorialized the slain young man. Emanuel entitled his soulful sonnet, “Emmett Till.”

I hear a whistling
Through the water.
Little Emmett
Won’t be still.

He keeps floating
Road the darkness,
Edging through
The silent chill.

Tell me, please,
That bedtime story
Of the fairy
River Boy
Who swims forever,
Deep in treasures,
Necklace in
A coral toy.³⁰

Conclusion

African American Death Care the Meaning of Freedom

In the antebellum era, enslaved African Americans used funerals to reconnect their cosmological beliefs regarding the intercessory power of the deceased. Some scholars argue that the transformation in the observance of ancestral rites represents a form of African retention in the Diaspora. To be sure, the process of African American ethnic identity formation in the United States does reach back to the period of our enslavement. However, the real root is in Africa. Our expressive death care ceremonies and taboos prove that even bondage had not broken Africa's influence. In fact, funerals became a fugitive cosmology. And in their death care, African Americans transfigured chattel people from slavery into symbols of freedom. African American funerary display translated dead slaves from this world in order to retain their traditional practice of the veneration of the dead.. In so doing, the enslaved gave themselves an unfettered definition of freedom, an ancestor with power that even slavery could not chain.

Of all the things I have learned about change over time in African Americans' funerary display, I cherish our refusal to skimp on funerals. The truth is that people of African descent invest in the continuity between death and life by taking care of ancestors. While on the continent of Africa ancestors received tangible tributes such as shrines, libations, and progeny naming ceremonies, living within the African Diaspora of the United States, however, we have adapted our cosmological investment in ancestors by pouring our hearts and pooling our resources into their funerals.

In addition to the adaptation of traditional veneration of African ancestors, the leadership of the "invisible institution" of the antebellum South, slave religion, also

appropriated funeral display in the formation of their identities. Specifically, Black preachers like John Jasper, although an illiterate and enslaved man, established himself as a funeral orator. His reputation as a speaker and consequent preferential status among the enslaved as well as White population rested on his ability to preach a good funeral sermon. Within this role, the identity of John Jasper was not confined to his condition of servitude. In fact, his identity as a consummate eulogist had freed him from that stigma.

When emancipation came to John Jasper and the other four million Southerners who had been held in bondage, the status of Black preachers and their churches also changed. One very significant change over time was the abundance of associations established to meet the death care needs of Black communities, especially those who were poor and lived in Southern cities. Unlike the invisible institution of slave religion and the need of secret societies of mutual benevolence during the antebellum period, these post-emancipation associations tended to be both open and numerous. Most notably, the female composition and leadership of such associations welded them into the fabric of Black community life. Membership in local churches, for example, coincided with membership in certain associations. Particularly, African American female identity in the post-emancipation urban South reflected the influences of charity as an indicator of both social status and service. Whether recently free or having never been enslaved, the organizational activities of associations concerned with funerary display such as the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana attest to the collapse of status, service, and African American femininity. Finally, whether they verbalized it or not, an Africanism, a cosmological carry over, compelled emancipated African Americans to join the mutual aid associations and benevolent societies that predate the burial policies provided by

Black industrial insurance businesses.

The move to the urban north and the transition from the post-emancipation period into the modern era brought other significant changes to in African American funeral display. Modern funerals meant the presence of a new masculinity, the emergence of the educated African American mortician. Shedding his earlier trade designation, the undertakers, these Black men exercised freedoms that had been quite rare in Black communities of earlier times. Most remarkably, they had cash money. Black families regardless of their own poverty held burial policies. They paid their insurance premiums in cash just as they had paid their previous membership dues into church societies. As a result, Black morticians joined the rank of the preacher as African American families across the United States signed over their policies to men in the south like R.C. Scott of Richmond, Virginia as well as men in the north like Robert A. Cole of Chicago's Metropolitan Funeral System Association to pay for their funerals. Black families regardless of their status in the community paid for funerals in cash, the most precious commodity in negotiating new freedoms in the modern area. Their investments in African American funerary display simultaneously built the Black insurance industry, financed the modernization of the communities' death care services, and facilitated the rise of one of the most influential forces in the formation of African American identity—the Black mortician. Modern Black men like Scott and Cole built their small fortunes and fame on the foundation of African American funerary display.

In the post-modern era, the years following the second world war, African Americans witnessed the most dastardly attack on their collective identities and the confirmation of a civil rights attorney's prophesy, the purposeful targeting of their

children. Attorney Charles Hamilton Houston had prophesied that the battle against Jim Crow could be won if it was fought for our children. Hamilton died before the Supreme Court ruled on the landmark 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* case.¹ But, he had been right. Black people who had dealt with slavery, rape, theft of their lands, labors, and families, disfranchisement, Jim Crow, poverty, job discrimination, housing crises, inequities in public accommodations, and even the loss of their own ancestral gods did not tolerate the destruction of their children, in school or on summer vacation. In the December 17, 1955 edition of the *Chicago Defender*, Fred Poindexter, sent a letter to the paper's, "What people say," column to enlighten those who doubted how they should respond to the situation. Poindexter wrote, "Dear Editor: here is some advice I would appreciate your printing. Negro mothers and fathers must stop sending their kids down South on vacation...(down South) by not saying 'Yes, Sir,' and 'No, Sir,' is [considered] sufficient reason for the uncivilized white man to lynch our kids."

Whether the murder of Emmett Till should be remembered as *the* catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement or not, the funerary display of Till's open casket funeral horrified Black and White communities across the United States. However, for this singular reason, some cite the tragedy of the Till family as the catalyst of the Civil Rights movement. Yet, a theoretical analysis of the child murder of Emmett Till that synthesizes the responses of Black communities does prove at least one point in the historical significance of his funerary display. As an undeniable historical moment in African American ethnic identity formation, the Civil Rights agenda was irrevocably influenced by a mother's choice to publicly display the body of her martyred child.

African American Family Studies in the 21st Century

Elected officials, civic leaders, and social agencies have sought prescriptions to the needs of poor, Black families from the late nineteenth century through the penultimate decade of the last century and the present day. Only since the late 1980s, however, has the work of historians been seriously discussed vis a' vis the options of poor, Black families in urban centers. Yet, the enduring dependence between social engineers and social scientists confirms their mutual interest in social reform.

Unfortunately, social policies are often devoid of accurate, historical conceptualizations of Black families. Thus, problematic conceptualizations such as “underclass,” “welfare queens,” and “baby daddy,” had already taken root by the time historians took their rightful place at the conference table concerning race and poverty. Only in the last two decades have labor and urban historians began to reclaim their academic voice to correctly describe the interactions of poverty and familial functions.²

Therefore, positive functions of non-elite, post-modern Black families, must be given much more scholarly attention in the research of African American social and cultural historians. That is to say, cultural and social historians are the trained revisionists who can lift the Black family from the shadows of poverty studies. These historians can offer alternative models for studying Black families. New conceptualizations such as *community client* will prove to be the best way to include the poor without creating stereotypes and ahistorical prescriptions for them. This possibility is the reason why scholars and researchers of African American families must provide historical conceptualizations that complement social prescriptions. *Community clients*, for example, refute myths and misconceptions about the functions of African American families in U.S. society.³

An emphasis on the historical significance of African American funerary display is just one way to correct societal misunderstanding about Black families. The history of our funerary display helps contemporaries recognize the extraordinary value that we place on community cohesion, mutual accountability, and status making. In writing the history of African American funerary display I have also tried to argue for some methodological shifts and historiographical revisions by placing the funeral industry in the context of family and community. In the evolution of African American death care from a community service—the undertaker to a licensed professional—the funeral director, there was one constant: poor, Black families’ patronage. Whether the death care providers were women or men, “society undertakers,” urban embalmers, modern morticians, or post-modern funeral directors, their *community clients* continually patronized funeral businesses. By placing more focus on the people for whom they worked, poor Black families, as opposed to the work that they did, i.e., the professionalization process, African American biography, family case studies, and post-modern social prescriptions avoid the fallacy of trying to talk about poor Black people without their historical context.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹ Europeans in the New World enslaved Native Americans initially, i.e., Africans first worked in the New World as sailors, soldiers, etc. not slaves.

² For an introduction of so-called slave psychology in order to historicize the fiction of Southern slaveholding, please see: Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "The mask of obedience : male slave psychology in the Old South," in Society and Culture in the Slave South. J. William Harris, ed. New York: Routledge, 1992. For book length discussion of the female stereotypes applied to enslaved African Americans during the antebellum see: Deborah Gray White, Ar'n't I A Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South. New York: Norton, 1999. To appreciate the change over time in the literature on slave personalities or "psychology" beyond the fiction of totalitarian control via labor exploitation compare the above treatments of the topic with the pioneering research of Stanley M. Elkins, Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life. Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1959, first edition.

³ Michael A. Plater. African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The story of R.C. Scott. New York: Garland, 1996), 87.

⁴ Ulrich Bonnell Phillips. American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor As Determined by the Plantation Regime. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1918); W.E.B. DuBois. The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States, 1638-1870. (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1896).

⁵ The phrase "angle of vision" is a metaphor for historical revision, especially the reconstruction of the U.S. past. It comes from Darlene Clark Hine. "An Angle of Vision:

Black Women and the Constitution, 1787-1987,” Speak Truth to Power: Black Professional Class in United States. (New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1996), 129.

⁶ When Stanley Engerman and Robert Fogel released their 1974 attempt to “understand what really happened,” during American slavery, Time On The Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery (Boston: Little Brown, 1974), Kenneth Stampp responded with his own monograph to correct their revision of the U.S. ante-bellum period which they had based on mathematical methodology or cliometrics. Stampp’s book length critique, Slavery and the Numbers Game: A Critique of Time On the Cross (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1975) as a good example of how the scholar’s angle of vision reveals issues of truth and power.

⁷ Darlene Clark Hine, “Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance,” in HineSight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History (New York: Carlson Publishing, Co., 1994); Bertram Wyatt-Brown. “The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South” in Society and Culture in the Slave South. J. William Harris, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1992) , 128-161. The Black “mask,” i.e., the metaphor taken from Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s poem, “We Wear the Mask” that represents the double consciousness of oppressed people of color living in the United States. I think Hine may have used veil for its feminine connotation or at least mask had been so appropriated by male gendered theories of differences that veil or curtain, two metaphors which Hine used to get at silences in the historical records about African Americans in the U.S. are more inclusive of women. The “squeeze and tease” method of historical data collection is Hine’s advice for reconstructing histories from thin documentary sources. For an example of this see: Darlene Clark Hine, “Lifting the Veil, Shattering the Silence: Black Women’s History in Slavery and Freedom,” in The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future, Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986).

⁸ John W. Blassingame. The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Peter H. Wood’s Black Majority: Negroes

in colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion (New York: Knopf, 1974); Ira Berlin Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South (New York: Pantheon, 1975); Thomas Holt. Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina During Reconstruction (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1977); Daniel C. Littlefield. Rice and Slaves Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Charles Joyner. Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Barbara J. Field. Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985);, and Gary D. Nash Forging freedom : the formation of Philadelphia's Black community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁹ Willard B. Gatewood. Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990); James Horton. In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Wilma King, Stolen Childhood: Slave Youth in 19th Century America (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997). For more historical works in the literature about African American families, see also: Andrew Billingsley. Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African-American Families (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); W.E.B. DuBois. The Negro American Family (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969); and the books by Jacqueline Jones: The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present. (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); and A Social History of the Laboring Classes: From Colonial Times to the Present. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

¹⁰ Anthony B. Pinn. The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era (New York: Orbis Books, 2002); Rupe Simms. The Politics of Accommodation and Resistance in the Black Church: A Gramscian Analysis (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen, Press, 2000); Janet Duitsman

Cornelius. Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); Samuel G. Freedman. Upon This Rock: The Miracles of a Black Church (New York: Harper Collins, 1993); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); C. Eric Lincoln. The Black Church in the African-American Experience (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990); James H. Cone. For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984); James H. Cone. The Black Church and Marxism: What Do they Have to Say to Each Other (New York: The Institute for Democratic Socialism, 1980); E. Franklin Frazier. The Negro Church in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1974); William Jacob Walls. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Reality of the Black Church (Charlotte, NC: A.M.E. Zion Publishing House, 1974); William L. Banks. The Black Church in the U.S.: Its Origin, Growth, Contributions, and Outlook. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972); Albert B. Cleage. Black Christian Nationalism: New Directions for the Black Church (New York: Morrow, 1972); Hart M. Nelson. The Black Church in America (New York: Basic Books, 1971).

¹¹ The author developed HineSight Methodology by examining a theory of difference called the "culture of dissemblance." Darlene Clark Hine theorized dissemblance as one way of explaining why Black women behave in different ways. Nineteenth century Black women used dissemblance as a strategy for preserving their sanity and sanctity in the face of sexual exploitation and vulnerability. Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham refers to Hine's theory, the culture of dissemblance as "politics of respectability." The culture of dissemblance refers to "... the behavior and attitudes of Black women that created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from their oppressors." This response to assaults upon Black womanhood promoted a coping mechanism that allowed Black women to function and survive. Hine also draws connections between dissemblance, migration, organizational protest, and institutional protection. The need for safety prompted hundreds of thousands of Black women to leave the South between 1915 and 1945. The same need motivated the formation of thousands of women's clubs. The dangers faced by newly arrived Black,

female migrants were checked by working-girls associations and community households such as the Phyllis Wheatley Association. And because the primary employment of migrant women continued to be domestic service (with attendant economic and sexual vulnerability), Black women utilized their “culture of dissemblance” in the North as well. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, “African American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” in “We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible”: A Reader in Black Women’s History, Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, eds. (Brooklyn, New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1995). For Hine, dissemblance examined the feminized version of the African American “mask,” i.e., the metaphor taken from Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s poem that represents the double consciousness of oppressed people of color living in the United States. The author created HineSight Methodology as an adaptable tool for finding other historical differences, especially topics that should gender the processes of Black urban and labor histories. The culture of dissemblance is one avenue towards re-constructing American history, particularly urban and labor histories via Black women’s experiences. However, the question of the method or process for this historical reclamation still remains. The author constructed this conceptual framework using the theory of dissemblance and the historiography of Black women’s history. Hinesight Methodology recognizes the life work of Black women’s historian, Darlene Clark Hine. The theoretical strength of my conceptualization rests on its relevance to the reclamation of Black women’s history. It honors the work undertaken by Black women historians in the 1970s, 1980s, and the present. Hinesight Methodology is a process for Black women’s historical reclamation. It is constant interplay on four levels of intellectual inquiry—exploration, interpretation, application, and appropriation. Consequently, Hinesight Methodology is both a thought process and a research tool. The culmination of the process is scholarly re-constructions of American history. It is possible to diagram Hine’s methodological approach for re-constructing American history with respect to Black women. This chart is a structural conceptualization of Hine’s fourteen essays found in the volume for which the methodology is named. (See Chart One: HineSight Methodology) For additional theory and difference: Elsa Barkley Brown, “‘What Has Happened Here’: The Politics of Difference in Women’s History and Feminist Politics,” in “We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible”: A Reader in Black

Women's History. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, eds. New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995.

¹² Darlene Clark Hine. "Culture, Community, and Consciousness"; a paper delivered to a group of historians that opened my eyes to the need to identify institutions and practices that symbolically represented all three of Hine's proposed, alternative constructs, i.e., death care as a collaborative reconstruction of Black identity via the negotiations between Black families and funeral directors is quintessential African American Culture, Community, and Consciousness. Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women: Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in HineSight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History (New York: Carlson Publishing, Co., 1994). For other works that use the concept of community consciousness or slave culture to historicize African American experiences, see: Lawrence Levine. Black Culture, Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Sidney W. Mintz. The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976); and Sterling Stuckey. Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and The Foundation of Black America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹³ Hine, "Rape," 37-48; Robin D.G. Kelley. Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class. (New York: Free Press, 1994); Richard Thomas. Life For Us is What We Make It: Building Community in Detroit, 1915-1945 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992); Earl Lewis, "To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas," in Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora. Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, eds. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999).

¹⁴ Andrew F. Brimmer. "The Negro in the National Economy," In The American Negro Reference Book (Yonkers, NY: Educational Heritage, Inc., 1966); Michael A. Plater. "African American Insurance Enterprises" ch. 5 in Plater's African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The Story of R.C. Scott (New York: Garland

Publishing, Inc., 1996); Juliet E. K. Walker. The History of Black Business In America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998); John Sibley Butler, 'To Seek for Ourselves': Benevolent, Insurance, and Banking Institutions," chapter 3 in Butler's Entrepreneurship and Self-Help Among Black Americans: A Reconsideration of Race and Economics. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Bill E. Lawson, "Conceptual Frameworks, The Black Family, and Public Policy," in The Centennial Review: Economic Narratives and Postmodern Culture, Harriette Pipes McAdoo, Black Families, 3rd Edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1997).

¹⁶ Plater, African American, 89.

¹⁷ The terminology "egregious void" is used by Darlene Clark Hine to lament the ongoing need to reconstruct or revise U.S. history vis a vis the experiences of African American women. See: Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in The Great Migration in Historical Perspective, Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 127-145.

¹⁸ Karla F.C. Holloway. Passed On: African American mourning stories: A memorial. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Michael A. Gomez. Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 277-78. Robert Farris Thompson. Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy (New York: Random House, 1983); Newbell Puckett Niles. Popular Beliefs and Superstitions: A Compendium of American Folklore (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981); Charles W. Joyner. Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984). See also Joyner's: Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); and also, Margaret Washington Creel. A Peculiar People: Slave Religion

and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs (New York: New York University Press, 1988); and Guy Carawan. Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life?: The People of Johns Island, South Carolina—Their Faces, Their Words, and Their Songs (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1989).

²⁰ Dwight A. McBride. Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony. (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 12. For an introduction to a body of historical literature about identity formation, power, resistance, the “other,” i.e., discursive subjectivity and contextuality in multiple discourses see: bell hooks. Black Looks: Race and Representation (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992) bell hooks. Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993); Lawrence W. Levine. Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977: Paul Gilroy. The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Timothy Mitchell. Colonising Egypt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Sharon Patricia Holland. Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Janet L. Abu-Lughod. Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Edward W. Said. Orientalism (Penguin, 1995 reprint); Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak. Selected Subaltern Studies (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Benedict Anderson. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1991); James C. Scott. Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Eric J. Hobsbawm. Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th centuries (Manchester, England: University Press, 1959).

²¹ Barry Schwartz. “Mourning and the Making of a Sacred Symbol: Durkheim and the Lincoln Assassination,” in *Social Forces* 70(2), 343-364; David Kertzer. Ritual, Politics and Power. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988; Gary Laderman. Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883. New Haven, CT: Yale

University Press, 1996; Michael A. Plater. African American entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The story of R.C. Scott. New York: Garland, 1996).

²² Laderman, "Lincoln's Hallowed, Hollowed Body," in Sacred Remains, 158; Plater, African American, 86.

²³ Kertzer. Ritual; Plater, African American, 86.

²⁴ Schwartz. "Mourning," 360-61.

²⁵ Laderman, "Lincoln's Hallowed, Hollowed Body," in Sacred Remains, 158. None of those scholars questioned what Lincoln's life and body may have meant to the "nation within a nation." That is to say, U.S. history contains a constant silence regarding the truth of Black people as *Americans*. Any historical explanation of how "AMERICANS" think, feel, respond, etc. is virtually incomplete without accounting for or incorporating the myriad communities which comprise the country. For example, in their theoretical treatments of how rituals either transform societies or how societies use rituals as tools of conformity, no where in those discussions about the political power of public rituals do they consider what Lincoln's assassination meant to the freed people. I would argue that the man who entered Richmond, Virginia in the eyes of those African American who witnessed Lincoln's triumphant moment as the leader of the conquering nation, the Union, may testify of him as a hero or symbol of their freedom. Contrary to the conclusions reached by the other scholars, Lincoln's death, at least for African Americans who associated Lincoln with their personal liberty, elevated him from symbol to saint.

²⁶ Schwartz. "Mourning," 360-61; Plater, African American, 86-87.

²⁷ Plater, African American, 87.

²⁸ Gary Laderman. Rest In Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 161-163.

²⁹ Lawrence W. Levine. Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; Michael A. Plater. African American entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The story of R.C. Scott. New York: Garland, 1996).

³⁰ The author criticizes the activist-scholarship of social and cultural historians from the Black Studies movement as more of a race-conscious evolution of educated African American people who capitalized on their the post-modern Black middle class and their generation's demand for more inclusive and diverse representations on college and university campus as well as knowledge about and deconstructions of traditional hegemonies that skewed the historical roles of people of color in U.S. history. However, this generation of social and cultural historians were so preoccupied with reclamation of their African pasts and infusing a neo-Afrocentism into their own contemporary cultures that it failed to continue the previous generation's real "race work," the stimulation of traditions of self-help and agency that connected leadership to the most vulnerable of oppressed people in the U.S., the urban poor Black families and their children. She finds that of the notable exceptions to this trend among social and cultural historians, Jacqueline Jones most consistently acknowledged the non-elite of the African American past up to the post-modern era, providing historical conceptualizations of the Black poor to compete with the theories of Black families' presupposed pathologies and give context to urban and labor historians' Black family poverty studies. See Jacqueline Jones: The Dispossessed: America's Underclasses from the Civil War to the Present. (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998); and A Social History of the Laboring Classes: From Colonial Times to the Present. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999).

³¹ Eugene Genovese. Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976 ed.), 194-202.

³² McBride. Impossible Witness, 8.

CHAPTER ONE

¹ Michael A. Plater. African American entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The story of R.C. Scott. New York: Garland, 1996).

87.

² Michael A. Gomez. Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 275-76 passim; Newbell Puckett Niles. Popular Beliefs and Superstitions: A Compendium of American Folklore (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), 82; David R. Roediger. "And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, & Heaven in the Slave Community, 1700-1865" in *The Massachusetts Review* v22n1 (1981), 168-70; Catherine I. Godboldte. Ancient African Traditional Funeral Ceremonies and the Funeral Ceremonies of the Historic African American Church. (Temple University, 1995), 131.

³ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 163.

⁴ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 164.

⁵ Raboteau, Slave Religion, 86.

⁶ Albert J. Raboteau, Slave Religion: The "Invisible Religion" in the Antebellum South (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), ,13, 30-31, 44-45, 83.

⁷ David Barry Gaspar. Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 145.

⁸ Gaspar, Bondmen 144-45, n.38 on p. 298.

⁹ Gaspar, Bondmen, 145.

¹⁰ Raboteau, Slave Religion, 230; Also see: John W. Blassingame. The Slave Community: Plantation Life in The Ante-bellum South. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 13, 45.

¹¹ Gaspar, Bondmen, 145.

¹² Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 164; Eugene Genovese. Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976 ed.), 194; Michael A. Plater. African American entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The story of R.C. Scott. New York: Garland, 1996), 108.

¹³ Kemi Adamolekun, "Bereavement Salutations Among the Yorubas of Western Nigeria," in *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying*. V39n4(1999), 277-285.

¹⁴ Rachel Harding. A Refuge in Thunder: Candomble' and Alternative Spaces of Blackness. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), 21.

¹⁵ Hilary McD. Beckles, Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 176.

¹⁶ Beckles, Natural Rebels, 176, 182.

¹⁷ Frazier, E. Franklin. The Negro Family in the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); E. Franklin Frazier. The Negro in the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1949); E. Franklin Frazier. Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class in the United States. (New York: Free Press, 1957); M.J. Herskovits. The Myth of the Negro Past (New York: Harper & Row, 1941).

¹⁸ The suicide of captive Africans aboard Atlantic slave ships has been inconclusively linked to a spiritual belief that death would return them back to Africa. However, DuBois laid to rest any hope of making decisive deductions in this area of slavery studies because of the paucity of documentation regarding the attitudes of early 18th century, enslaved Africans. As a result, "...the impact of longing for Africa on slave attitudes toward death cannot be conclusively determined. Quoted from: David R. Roediger. "And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, & Heaven in the Slave Community, 1700-1865" in *The Massachusetts Review* v22n1 (1981), 163, 177.

¹⁹ Plater, African American, 108; Handler and Lange, 207-208.

²⁰ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 172.

²¹ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 169, 172-73.

²² Raboteau, Slave Religion, 86.

²³ One of Asante's graduate students presented this working definition of Afrocentrism in the methodology section of her doctoral dissertation which was directed by him at Temple University. See: Catherine I. Godboldte. *Ancient African Traditional Funeral Ceremonies and the Funeral Ceremonies of the Historic African American Church*. (Temple University, 1995). p.19. For an introduction to the motivations and interests of these intellectuals examine the works of the following authors: Cheik Anta Diop, John Henrik Clarke, Maulana Karenga, Naim Akbar, Josef Ben-Jachanon, Francis Cress Welsing, Raymond Winbush, and Tony Martin.

²⁴ Godboldte, Ancient African, 28-29.

²⁵ Gomez, Exchanging, 274-78.

²⁶ David R. Roediger. "And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, & Heaven in the Slave Community, 1700-1865" in *The Massachusetts Review* v22n1 (1981), 163. Also quoted by Roberta Hughes Writing in her "Introduction" to Lay Down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1996), xxv.

²⁷ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 163.

²⁸ Guion Griffis Johnson reported a story of a slave funeral in 1850 Salisbury, North Carolina. The master actually sent out notices advertising the funeral of his favored bondwoman. The masters and mistresses of the invited mourners loaned their horses and vehicles to provide transportation to the funeral of such a special slave. It was estimated that hundreds of people attended the funeral. In fact, "It was not unusual for domestic servants to 'consider themselves as forming part' of the master's family," especially if genuine affection and mutual respect were combined with the cash income of a faithful and skilled slave whose per annum as a shoemaker, tanner, cooper, confectioner, distiller, seamstress, etc. contributed to the "family." C. W. Harper, "Black Aristocrats: Domestic Servants on the Antebellum Plantation," in *Phylon* v46n2 (2nd Qtr. 1985), 123-135.

²⁹ If permission could not be obtained, Raboteau stated, distant community members "might steal away to pay last respects." Plater, African American, 107-08; Raboteau, Slave Religion, 230.

³⁰ Raboteau, Slave Religion, 13.

³¹ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 170. For a thorough ethnographic discussion of the history in African American graveyards, see: Roberta Hughes Wright. Lay Down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries. (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1996); and Robert Farris Thompson. Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy. (New York: Random House, 1983).

³² Raboteau, Slave Religion, 230.

³³ Genovese, 1976 ed., 194-202.

³⁴ Gomez, Exchanging, 277-78; Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 169-170.

³⁵ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 170.

³⁶ Mary A. Waring, "Mortuary Customs Among South Carolina Negroes." *Journal of American Folklore*. v7 (1894), 318.

³⁷ Henry Watson. Narrative of Henry Watson, A Fugitive Slave in From Slavery to Freedom: The African-American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909
<http://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/queryD?rbaapc:12:./temp/~ammem IvIV::>

³⁸ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 168.

CHAPTER TWO

¹ David Barry Gaspar. Bondmen and Rebels: A Study of Master-Slave Relations in Antigua. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985), 144-45, n.38 on p. 298; Plater, African American, 130.

² Dwight A. McBride. Impossible Witness: Truth, Abolitionism, and Slave Testimony. (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 4-5.

³ McBride. Impossible Witness, 10-11; 61-62. Nell Irvin Painter also critiqued polemical appropriate of the Black body in her theoretical analysis of White feminism and the abolitionist leader, Sojourner Truth. See: Nell Irvin Painter. Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol (New York: Norton, 1997); But, symbol making or collective appropriations of Black bodies has also been historically depicted as racial stereotypes. For an example of

racial stereotyping and slave women, see: Deborah Gray White. Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York: Norton, 1985); and for an example of racial stereotypes being transformed into consumer products or material culture symbols, see: Kenneth W. Goings. Mammy and Uncle Moses: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994).

⁴ Michael A. Gomez. Exchanging our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 276; McBride. Impossible Witness, 12.

⁵ Harry Joseph Walker. Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans: A Study of Their Structure, Function, and Membership. (Nashville, Tennessee: Fisk University, 1937), 35.

⁶ Walker, Negro Benevolent, 35.

⁷ Michael A. Plater. African American entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The story of R.C. Scott. New York: Garland, 1996), 119.

⁸ Harding, A Refuge, 122. In Brazilian Portuguese, the English word sister, is “irma” and brother is “irmao.” But the term *irmadades* can be translated as brotherhood, sisterhood or fraternal society.

⁹ Harding, A Refuge, 122-23.

¹⁰ C.G. Woodson. “Insurance Business Among Negroes” in *Journal of Negro History* v14n2 (April 1929), 202. For an in-depth study of Philadelphia’s Black community and its organizational activities see: Gary G. Nash. Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Julie Winch. Philadelphia’s Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

¹¹ Leslie J. Pollard. "Black Beneficial Societies and the Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons: A Research Note," in *Phylon* v41n3 (3rd Qtr. 1980), 230-234; Harry Joseph Walker. Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans: A Study of Their Structure, Function, and Membership. (Nashville, Tennessee: Fisk University, 1937), 30-33. C.G. Woodson. "Insurance Business Among Negroes" in *Journal of Negro History* v14n2 (April 1929), 202. For an in-depth study of Philadelphia's Black community and its organizational activities see: Gary G. Nash. Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Julie Winch. Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988). As early as the 1790s, free Blacks in the South just as their Northern counterparts in cities like Philadelphia began to organize mutual aid societies to fulfill their obligations to the their communities and their dead.

¹² The first sickness and burial organization was the "free African society" started in Philadelphia in 1778 by Richard Allen who founded the AME and Absalom Jones. Plater African American, 109, 119; W.E.B. DuBois. The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1899), 222; Roberta Hughes Wright. Lay Down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries. (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1996), 267-290.

¹³ Gomez, Exchanging, 277.

¹⁴ Plater, African American, 109.

¹⁵ William E. Hatcher. John Jasper: The Unmatched Negro Philosopher and Preacher (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908). 36-37. For a biographical encyclopedia of other self-educated race leaders, a little used reference is: *The College Life or Practical Self-Educator, A Manual of Self-Improvement for the Colored Race: Forming an Educational Emancipator and Guide to Success, Giving Examples and Achievements*

of Successful Men and Woman of the Race as an Incentive and Inspiration to the Rising Generation..Embracing Business, Social, Domestic, Historical and Religious Education. Originally published in 1895 by Chicago Publication and Lithography Co.) Reprinted, Miami: Mnemosyne Publishing Inc., 1969.)

¹⁶ Hatcher, Jasper, 37-38.

¹⁷ Plater, African American, 109.

¹⁸ Plater, African American, 109-10 passim.

¹⁹ “It is difficult to say,” confessed Raboteau, “whether this practice reflected an African system of multiple funerals or was simply a necessity dictated by the uncertainty of permission and the lack of time available to the slaves to attend such [funeral] service.” Raboteau, Slave Religion, 230.

²⁰ Raboteau, Slave Religion, 230-31.

²¹ Hatcher, Jasper, 37-38.

²² Raboteau, Slave Religion, 231-32.

²³ Hatcher, Jasper, 38.

²⁴ Hatcher, Jasper, 37-38.

²⁵ Horace James. Report of the Superintendent of Negro Affairs in North Carolina, 1864 in *From Slavery to Freedom: The African-American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909* <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/queryD?rbaapc:12:./temp/~ammem IvIV::>, pp.10-11.

²⁶ James, Report of the Superintendent, 47.

²⁷ Gary Laderman. Rest In Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 40-41 passim.

²⁸ James, Report of the Superintendent, 47.

²⁹ James Anderson's volume confirms the instrumental role of the Black church in Black literacy. Copious and meticulous documentation like Alvord's annual reports are just one set of data. For example, from Alvord's filed reports and field notes, Anderson reconstructs the essential contributions of "native schools," self-taught teachers and tutors among the freed people, Sabbath schools, [B]lack church operated schools, all "...such local activities by ex-slaves that spurred the establishment of widespread elementary and literary education and provided the grassroots foundation for the educational activities of northern missionary societies and the Freedmen's Bureau. James D. Anderson. The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 6, 13, 15.

³⁰ J. W. Alvord, January 21, 1870 to Major General O.O. Howard in *From Slavery to Freedom: The African-American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909*
<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/queryD?rbaapc:12::/temp/~ammem IvIV::>

³¹ S.A. Martha Canfield. Colored Orphan Asylum and Extracts from Mrs. Canfield's Diary. in *From Slavery to Freedom: The African-American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909* <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/queryD?rbaapc:12::/temp/~ammem IvIV::>, pp. 11, 15, 20

³² J.H. Weber. Pass System at Vicksburg. January 31, 1865 letter to Colonel Samuel Thomas, Provost Marshal General in *From Slavery to Freedom: The African-American Pamphlet Collection, 1824-1909*
<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/queryD?rbaapc:12::/temp/~ammem IvIV::>, 24, 27.

³³ August Meier, Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1963), 130.

³⁴ Weber, Pass System, 27.

³⁵ C.G. Woodson. "Insurance Business Among Negroes" in *Journal of Negro History* v14n2 (April 1929)," 203.

³⁶ Harry Joseph Walker. Harry Joseph Walker. Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans: A Study of Their Structure, Function, and Membership. (Nashville, Tennessee: Fisk University, 1937), 306. C.G. Woodson. "Insurance Business Among Negroes" in *Journal of Negro History* v14n2 (April 1929), 202.

³⁷ Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 127.

³⁸ C.G. Woodson. "Insurance Business Among Negroes" in *Journal of Negro History* v14n2 (April 1929), 203. For a comparative analysis of church-based social services in the 18th century, African Diaspora See: George Liele, Stephen Cooke, et.al., "Letters Showing the Rise and Progress of the Early Negro Churches of Georgia and the West Indies," in *Journal of Negro History*, v1n1 (Jan. 1916), 69-92.

³⁹ Woodson. "Insurance Business," 202. For an in-depth study of Philadelphia's Black community and its organizational activities see: Gary G. Nash. Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Julie Winch. Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848 (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

⁴⁰ C.A. Spencer. "Black Benevolent Societies and the Development of Black Insurance Companies in Nineteenth Century Alabama," in *Phylon* v46n3 (3rd Qtr., 1985), 256.

⁴¹ Spencer. "Black Benevolent," 251-261.

⁴² Plater, African American, 119. Although focusing on the undertaking enterprise of Richmond, Virginia's R.C. Scott from the turn of the century to 1940, Plater's conclusions about the impact of Black families' patronage of funeral establishments is applicable across both time and place.

⁴³ Direct quote comes from Plater, African American, 128-130 passim.

⁴⁴ Booker T. Washington The Negro in Business. (New York: AMS Press, 1907, 1971 ed.), 94.

⁴⁵ Harry Joseph Walker. Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans: A Study of Their Structure, Function, and Membership. (Nashville, Tennessee: Fisk University, 1937), 28. There seems to be only two copies of this invaluable ethnographic study and field survey, the only organic and primary examination of the post-emancipation benevolent societies. One copy is at Fisk University and the other is held by the New Orleans Public Library. The researcher kindly thanks Greg Osborne, the specialist in the African American collections at the New Orleans Public Library for access to Walker's study. None of the historical investigations or references to benevolent societies published by scholars to date have made use of this material.

⁴⁶ *The New Orleans Republic*, November 11, 1873, Page 3, Column 2 Marcus Christian Collection, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections. Lt. Governor Dunn died on November 22, 1871, exactly two year prior to "pleasant party" which made news in the Republican. Dunn's death brought scandal and gossip on top of the competition inherent in civil service. It was rumored that he had been murdered. Speculations abounded about his supposed murder by poisoning. Just two year earlier, the undertaker, G. Cassanave, threatened to have the body of Lt. Governor, Oscar

James Dunn, the fugitive slave who “lifted himself” from slave society to state politics, exhumed for a post-mortem examination. Cassanave, who had charge of the funeral, interred the lieutenant governor’s body in his private vault, “where it was deposited according to the Masonic ritual.” Ironically, the “pleasant party” in 1873 concluded their evening at the home of one of Dunn’s successor, Lt. Governor Antoine. Mrs. Oscar James Dunn must not minded neither going to the incumbent officials home nor socializing with Senator Pinchback, a man whose “habits, temperament, and character” publicly conflicted with those of her late husband. Unlike her husband, Pinchback was neither a fugitive nor freed. He was a mulatto, born in Macon, Georgia to a former slave who had been freed by his father, a wealthy white planter. His other See: A.E. Perkins, “James Henri Burch and Oscar James Dunn in Louisiana,” in *Journal of Negro History* v22n3 (July 1937), 321-334; A.E. Perkins, “Oscar James Dunn,” in *Phylon* v4n2 (2nd Quarter 1943), 102-121.

Here is a verbatim transcription of the 1873 *Republic* article about the Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana:

Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana

We had the pleasure yesterday of participating in the closing exercises of the above named most worthy association, on the occasion of one of their anniversary celebrations. The society is organized for works of charity and benevolence including deeds of kindness toward their fellow beings in sickness and suffering, even unto the grave.

They have a very fine vault in Greenwood Cemetery, wherein they bury their dead, and it is a time honored custom with them to visit the tombs of their departed friends the second Monday in November, being the day designated for this pious observance. At the close of the day it is the pleasant custom for the officers and members of the society to meet together in social intercourse with each other and invited friends, and partake of a collation provided for the occasion. It was in the

latter that we were so fortunate as to be a participant.

Down in the fourth ward, at Turner Hall, we found a fine spread of eatables, with something to wash them down, and hospitable ladies to welcome their guests. After cordial greetings, due attention to the wants of the inner man and a complimentary toast in honor of the society, Senator Pinchback, who was one of the honored guests, returned thanks in a very well timed, practical speech, which was well received by the hospitable hostesses.

The Benevolent Daughters of Louisiana Society was duly incorporated under the laws of this State about twenty-five years ago, and has lived and increased and flourished through all the changes and vicissitudes of a quarter of a century. This name and good deeds are familiar wherever charity and kindness are appreciated in the city, and they bid fair to go on in their works of usefulness in the long years to come....

Among those present yesterday, including members and guests, we noticed Senator P.B.S. Pinchback, who is the undoubted idol of the colored people;...And the ladies: Mr[s]. O.J. Dunn, Mrs. Lieutenant Governor Antoine, Mrs. Pinchback, the mother of the Senator...The pleasant party adjourned at an early hour to pay a surprise call at the house of Lieutenant Governor Antoine. But an inexorable duty called our reporter away, he could only follow them in spirit to where he hopes they passed the rest of the evening in the enjoyment of the new occasion.

⁴⁷ *The New Orleans Republic*, November 11, 1873, Page 3, Column 2 Marcus Christian Collection, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections.

⁴⁸ Spencer, "Black Benevolent," ; Walker, Negro Benevolent, 29. Woodson, "Insurance," 202-03.

⁴⁹ Hatcher, John Jasper, 36-37.

⁵⁰ Plater, African American, 134.

⁵¹ Plater, African American, 134.

⁵² Wood coffins, was the original container used for dead bodies in American society. The container more commonly used today, the casket, is much more durable and expensive.

⁵³ Matthew JeckerByrne. Dealing With Death: Problems and Responses in American Funeral Practice. (New York: City University of New York, 2000); Karen Lee Krepps. Black Mortuary Practices in Southeast Michigan. (Detroit: Wayne State University. 1990); Eliza Ames Littlefield. Occupational Stress Among Funeral Directors: An Exploratory Study. (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. 1987); H. Joan Michaelson. The Funeral Director: A Qualitative Study of Family-Operated Funeral Homes. (University of South Dakota. 1995); Nancy L. Watterson. In the mix: Emergent Identities of an African American Business Woman: A Dissertation in Folklore and Folklife. (University of Pennsylvania. 1995); Regina Graham. I Have A Testimony: A Perspective on Death, Grief and Widowhood in African American Culture. The (Greensboro, NC: University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2002).

⁵⁴ Karla F.C. Holloway. Passed On: African American mourning stories: A memorial. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

⁵⁵ DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro, 40-42 passim; Gomez, Exchanging, 277; Miriam deCosta-Willis, ed., The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 2.

⁵⁶ DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro, 40-42 passim.

⁵⁷ DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro, 40.

⁵⁸ The New Orleans' directory for 1896 and 1897 had both residential and business listing for the Boyer's family. See: Soards' 1896 Directory, "TYP-UPH, 1018"; Soards' 1897 Directory, "BOW-BOY, 141" The city's directories are available on microfilm. U.S. City Directory for New Orleans, Louisiana, 917.631, N528, Reel 8. The Boyer account ledger has been preserved in the manuscript collection at University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections

⁵⁹ The University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections also owns the account ledger for of the Schoen undertaking firm. The Schoen ledger covers June 1, 1888 to May 31, 1897. Initially, the author wished to cross reference Schoen's account ledger with the Boyer account ledger for the time period which their coverage coincided, i.e., October 1896 to May 1897. But, the last entry in the Schoen ledger donated to the Earl K. Long archives was in 1895. The additional two years of Schoen's coverage may have been in a second book which is not a part of the manuscript collection. The 1896 city business directory gave several addresses for Frantz & Schoen: 3013 and 3014 N. Peters and 527 Elysian Fields Ave. Very likely, the family's residence was separate from the funeral parlor whereas the majority of African Americans in the funeral business from the turn of the century to the post-modern era either lived above or next door to their funeral establishment if not actually in the "funeral home" proper. Part III gives a more detailed, historical account of this distinction.

⁶⁰ The page numbers, i.e., all corresponding to dates from 1889 through 1895, on which the Widow Boyer borrow, rented, or exchanged carriages with the Schoen family firm: pages 15, 40-41, 80-82, 128-129, 146-149. There was a note written next to the last page number under Boyer's name: "New Ledger 8".

⁶¹ Livery stables were among the related business activities of entrepreneurial undertakers. The keeping of horses and carriages was a sensible investment given the need to transport bodies, coffins, families, and catered foods. Consequently, the funeral hearse was often the property of a livery stable owner.

⁶² Jones, Labor or Love, 126.

⁶³ The National Federation of Afro-American Women and the National Colored Woman's League merged in 1896 to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Undergraduate women at Howard University in Washington, D.C. established the first African American Greek letter organizations, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, twelve years later in 1908, and Delta Sigma Theta in 1913. Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold, The African-American Odyssey, Combined Volume. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003, 2nd edition), 374, 378.

⁶⁴ See, for example, the chapter on fraternal orders in: Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Coal, Class, and Color: Blacks In Southern West Virginia, 1915-1932*. (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1990). Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.. See: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). See for example: Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Deborah Gray White, *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves, 1894-1994*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); Wanda A. Hendricks, *Gender, Race, and Politics in the Midwest: Black Club Women in Illinois*.

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Rosalyn Terbor-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Adrienne Lash Jones, *Jane Edna Hunter: A Case Study of Black Leadership, 1910-1950*. (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990); and Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black women, Work, and the Family From Slavery to the Present*. (New York: Basic Books, 1985) and Tera Hunter. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁶⁵ Plater, African American, 121.

⁶⁶ Marcus Christian, "Business and Professions, 1900-1930" Marcus Christian Collection, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections. Manuscript Collection #11, Chapter 40, p. 12.

⁶⁷ Walker, Negro Benevolent, 299-304 passim.

⁶⁸ Washington, The Negro in Business, 94.

⁶⁹ Marcus Christian, "Business and Professions, 1900-1930" p. 12. Also, see author's Tables 3 and 4. The advent of the modern era for Black undertaking firms facilitated the rise of Black men as "kings of their communities," i.e., Black morticians. Morticians versus "undertaker" became the preferred professional label as the requisite training in mortuary science became quite popular in urban areas both in the North and South. The practice of embalming Black bodies by Black men and the attendant under representation (or exclusion) of Black women from formal training and professional certification apparatuses available in mortuary schools gave Black men opportunities to emerge as "kings of their communities."

⁷⁰ Washington, The Negro in Business, 103. Hine, African American Odyssey, 356.

⁷¹ Then again, this is the same man who married several women whose fundraising activities on behalf of his Tuskegee machine took such a toll that the two of the three actually died without seeing the maturity of neither their own children nor the institution itself. See: Booker T. Washington, Up From Slavery. (New York: Signet, 2000 ed.), 102, 139.

⁷² Washington, The Negro in Business, 109.

⁷³ Woodson. "Insurance Business," 202; Walker, Negro Benevolent, 304. "Conclusions," 316-326. Brimmer, "The Negro in the National Economy" J.H. Harmon, Jr. "The Negro as a Local Business Man," in *Journal of Negro History*, v14n2 (April 1929), 116-155; August Meier, "Negro Class Structure and Ideology in the Age of Booker T. Washington," in *Phylon* v23n3 (3rd Qtr., 1962), 258-266.

⁷⁴ Roberta Hughes Wright. Lay Down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries. (Detroit: Visible Ink, 1996), 267-68 passim.

⁷⁵ William H. Pipes. Say Amen, Brother! Old-Time Negro Preaching: A Study in American Frustration. (New Yor: The William-Frederick Press, 1951), 65.

⁷⁶ William E. Hatcher. John Jasper: The Unmatched Negro Philosopher and Preacher (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1908). 36-37.

⁷⁷ Woodson quoted in Walker, Negro Benevolent, 29; Simon Ottenberg analyzing the functions of faith and socialization in a coastal Georgia town of the 1950s, argued in his anthropological that, "almost all adults belong to at least one society, and many belong to two or more." Ottenberg's article historicized the male leadership of Black churches and Black men's roles in founding benevolent societies as examples of non-kin socialization. He did not attempt to do a gendered analysis in order to accurately contextualize Black masculinity as well as the ways in which female leadership in Black churches and

benevolent societies were conventionally constructed. See: Simon Ottenberg, "Leadership and Change in a Coastal Georgia Negro Community," in *The Phylon Quarterly*. V20n1 (1st Qtr., 1959), 13.

⁷⁸ Walker, Benevolent Societies, 315, 324.

⁷⁹ Roediger, "And Die in Dixie,"; Raboteau, Slave Religion; Hine, African American Odyssey, 357; Pipes, Say Amen, 196 n11.

⁸⁰ n.a. "Where Jazz Was Born: The Funeral" article taken from the vertical files of the Wayne State School of Mortuary Science.

⁸¹ "Where Jazz Was Born,"; Leo Touchet. Rejoice When You Die: The New Orleans Jazz Funerals. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Sybil Kein. "The Celebration of Life in New Orleans Jazz Funerals," in *Revue franocaise d'aetudes amaericaines*. n51 (February 1992), 19-26. Also see Walker's section on "Delinquency in Dues," in Negro Benevolent, 68-69.

⁸² Kein, "The Celebration," 21.

⁸³ Where Jazz Was Born,"; Touchet. Rejoice When You Die; Kein. "The Celebration," 24-26 passim; Hine, African American Odyssey, 357. If allowed to sing, they paced themselves by slowly singing hymn in an effort "to avoid any inauspicious mishaps during the graveyard march." Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 170.

⁸⁴ Where Jazz Was Born,"; Touchet. Rejoice When You Die; Kein. "The Celebration," 24-26 passim; Hine, African American Odyssey, 357. Whereas the enslaved may have accompanied the singers and dancers with banjos, pipes, fifes, or violins. The jazz bands played brass, reeds, and drums.

CHAPTER THREE

¹ Darlene Clark Hine, "Black Migration to the Urban Midwest: The Gender Dimension, 1915-1945," in The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class, and Gender, Joe William Trotter, ed. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1991), 127.

² This historical pattern of freedom seeking or migration also characterizes much of the African Diaspora. To the extent that a noted political theorist, Cornel West remarked, "The fundamental theme of New World African modernity is neither integration nor separation but rather migration and emigration." Quoted in Farah Jasmine Griffin, "Who Set You Flowin'?": The African American Migration Narrative. (New York: Oxford, 1995), frontispiece.

³ E. Franklin Frazier. The Negro Church in America. (New York: Schocken, 1963, 47-67.

⁴ The official organ of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), edited by DuBois, was given the title, *The Crisis*.

⁵ Harry Joseph Walker. Negro Benevolent Societies in New Orleans: A Study of Their Structure, Function, and Membership. (Nashville, Tennessee: Fisk University, 1937), 324; *New Orleans Republic*, November 11, 1873, Page 3, Column 2 Marcus Christian Collection, University of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library, Louisiana and Special Collections.

⁶ Michael A. Plater. African American entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The story of R.C. Scott. New York: Garland, 1996), 122-23 passim.

⁷ Catherine I. Godboldte. *Ancient African Traditional Funeral Ceremonies and the Funeral Ceremonies of the Historic African-American Church*. (Temple University, 1995); Matthew JeckerByrne. *Dealing With Death: Problems and Responses in American Funeral Practice*. (City University of New York, 2000); Karen Lee Krepps. *Black*

Mortuary Practices in Southeast Michigan. (Wayne State University, 1990); Eliza Ames Littlefield. *Occupational Stress Among Funeral Directors: An Exploratory Study.* (Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1987); H. Joan Michaelson. *The Funeral Director: A Qualitative Study of Family-Operated Funeral Homes.* (University of South Dakota, 1995); Nancy L. Watterson. *In the mix: Emergent Identities of an African American Business Woman: A Dissertation in Folklore and Folklife.* (University of Pennsylvania, 1995); Matthew Corey Whitaker. *Western Resistance: Lincoln and Eleanor Ragsdale and the transformation of the black freedom struggle in the American West.* (Michigan State University, 2001).

⁸ Victoria W. Wolcott. Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 65. Meeting trains at the city's station was an intervention strategy also used to protect young, female migrants from being entrapped into prostitution. Jane Edna Hunter, the founder of Cleveland's Phyllis Wheatley Home, received at least one migrant woman, Charlotte, who was directed to the door of the Home by a Black minister. See: Jane Edna Hunter. Jane Edna Hunter, A Nickel and A Prayer (Cleveland: Elli Kani Publishing Co., 1940).

⁹ This is the way Wolcott contextualizes the impact of the Detroit Housewives' League, for example. See: Wolcott, Remaking Respectability; For more historical descriptions about the group, also see: Darlene Clark Hine, "The Housewives' League of Detroit: Black Women and Economic Nationalism," in HineSight: Black Women and the Re-Construction of American History (New York: Carlson Publishing, Co., 1994), 109-128.

¹⁰ Several African American women historians have written books that provide gender, class, and race analyses of acceptable work as well as labor activism in situations of Black female resistance to neo-slavery and because of their traditional dependence upon domestic work. For how color and class shaped the aspirations and consciousness of educated, Black women in the modern or Jim Crow era, see: Stephanie Shaw. What a Women Ought to Be and To do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era. (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1996). For an understanding of how

labor organization became the choice of some post-emancipation, Southern domestic service workers, see: Tera Hunter. To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives After the Civil War.(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); The expression "bone and sinew" is an historical metaphor for the indispensable contribution of working-class, Black women to the existence and survival of their families and communities. Carole C. Marks, "The Bone and Sinew of the Race: Black Women, Domestic Service, and Labor Migration," in Families on the Move: Migration, Immigration, Emigration, and Mobility, Barbara H. Settles, Daniel E. Hanks III, and Marvin B. Sussman, eds. (New York; The Haworth Press, 1993), 156-159. Carole Marks, Farwell, We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration (Bloomington: Indiana University, Press, 1989.

¹¹ Wolcott, Remaking, 1,4; John B. Reid, "A Career to Build, a People to Serve, a Purpose to Accomplish: Race, Class, Gender and Detroit's First Black Women School Teachers," in "We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible": A Reader in Black Women's History. Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, and Linda Reed, eds. (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1995), 303-320.

¹² The author uncovered this document in a copy of the Second Baptist 15th anniversary souvenir booklet that had been preserved by the Fred Hart Williams Genealogical Society and archived as the Leontine Cole Craig Smith at the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library. For a complete historical description of the connection between the Black Baptist church and the activism and reform of its female leadership, see: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); For an appreciation of Burroughs' personal sacrifice, organizational dynamism, and spiritual pragmatism, see: Sharon Harley, "Nannie Helen Burroughs: 'The Black Goddess of Liberty,'" in *"Journal of Negro History. v81n1/4, Vindicating the Race: Contributions to African-American Intellectual History"* (Winter-Autumn, 1996), 62-71.

¹³ Dorothy Salem. "National Association of Colored Women," in Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia, Darlene Clark Hine, ed. (New York: Carlson,

1993), 842-851; Stephanie J. Shaw. "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women," in Hine, King, et.al. "We Specialize..", 449-486.

¹⁴ Sarah Mary King, "Cora MacKerrow ties easy chair: After 80, its good to relax," in *Boston Sunday Globe*, February 7, 1971, 2(A).

¹⁵ Plater, African American, 122.

¹⁶ Robert A. Weems, Jr. "Robert A. Cole and the Metropolitan Funeral System Association: A Profile of a Civic-minded African-American Business Man," *Journal of Negro History*, 78(1), 1993, 1-15; Robert A. Weems, Jr.. Black Business in the Black Metropolis : the Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company, 1925-1985. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996); Wolcott, Remaking.

¹⁷ Richard Thomas. Life For Us is What We Make It: Building Community in Detroit, 1915-1945 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992);, 265-69; Carolyn P. DuBose. The Untold Story of Charles Diggs: The Public Figure, The Private Man. (Arlington, VA: Barton Publishing House, Inc., 1998); Whitaker. Western Resistance, 2001.

¹⁸ Graham, I Have a Testimony, 2002; Darlene Clark Hine. Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas. (Millwood, N.Y. : KTO Press, 1979); Michael A. Plater. African American Entrepreneurship in Richmond, 1890-1940: The story of R.C. Scott. (New York: Garland, 1996).

¹⁹ Gary Laderman. Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.

²⁰ Herbert W. Kuhm. "When Black Crepe Hung on Milwaukee Doors," Milwaukee History 3(4), 1980, 112-116. Chinese American Studies are show how to take death care and funerary culture as subjects of identity formation, ethnicity, nationalism, and class,

see, for example: Juwen Zhang. Falling Seeds Take Root: Ritualizing Chinese American Identity Through Funerals. (University of Pennsylvania, 2001.)

²¹ Plater, African American, 126.

²² Plater, African American, 126.

²³ Plater, African American, 126.

²⁴ Graham. I Have a Testimony, 2002; Plater, African American, 128.

²⁵ Wavelet S. Johnson, "Proposal for a Mortuary School at Grand Valley State University," unpublished survey, 1997.

²⁶ This is a contemporary, self-description of the Michigan Select Funeral Directors Association, the state organization of the National Funeral Directors Association.

²⁷ Staff writer. "A History of the Independent Funeral Directors Association," in *National Funeral Director and Embalmer*, reprinted from the *Washington Afro-American*, August 8, 1961. This brief history is also available on the NFDMA website. See: "National Funeral Directors & Morticians Association, Inc." < <http://www.nfdma.com/history.html> > March 27, 2003.

²⁸ "National Funeral Directors & Morticians," There are only two sources for extant copies of *The Colored Embalmer*, 1927-1939, Fisk University in Nashville and Howard University in Washington, D.C. Howard only has one issue. Fisk has several. The author found references to the periodicals for the Black undertaking professional by conversing with librarians and archivists at several locations including the Archives of Labor/Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University, the NFDA, NFDMA, and James P. Danky at the Wisconsin Historical Society. The only sourcebook that proved helpful was. James P. Danky. African-American Newspapers and Periodicals: National

Bibliography. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998. Danky's compilation excites historical research with its exhaustive listing, but when the author called and contacted several of the depositories, majority of which are Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), few libraries had digitized their 19th century sources. According to the Harvard Guide to African American History, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Leon F. Litwack, and Darlene Clark Hine, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University, Press, 2001), one large, mainstream institution, Emory University has archival records of an African American funeral firm founded in the early 1920s, the Hanley Undertakers Company. Unfortunately, the research librarian responded to my request for access with a process date of late December 2004 or possibly the following year. The Harvard Guide also listed another Southern source of primary source material, the Lucy Crump Jefferson papers supposedly located at the Jefferson Funeral Home in Vicksburg, Mississippi. I spoke to her grandson, James Jefferson, several times on the telephone. He was not able to recall any historical records relevant to documenting his family's business in terms of a scholarly endeavor. As a result of paucity in primary source material, the only other source of information about the history of African American funeral directing, other than individual case studies or biographies of specific funeral directors, are the assessments of the profession by business professors, labor historians, and economists. Finally, the obituaries, eulogies, and newspapers kept by individual Black churches may hold the greatest possibilities for seeing into the world of the Black poor from their emancipation through the Jim Crow era across the country and not just those migrants who were the object of bourgeois reform in Northern cities is available but not immediately accessible.

²⁹ Juliet E.K. Walker. "Undertaking and Cemetery Enterprises," in Walker's The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, and Entrepreneurship. (New York: MacMillan Library Reference USA, 1998), 114-115. There are several studies of the history of U.S. death care, but none which place the historical significance of African American funerary display at its center, i.e., not a case study or biography of a specific funeral director. For a good introduction to the newest cultural studies of U.S. death care, see: Virginia Russell Remsberg. From Coffin-Making to Undertaking: The Rise of the

Funeral Directing Industry in the 1880s. Master's Thesis submitted to the University of Delaware, 1992; Karen Pomeroy Flood. Contemplating Corpses: The Dead Body in American Culture, 1870-1920. Doctoral dissertation submitted to Harvard University, 2001.

³⁰ John Sibley Butler, 'To Seek for Ourselves': Benevolent, Insurance, and Banking Institutions," chapter 3 in Butler's Entrepreneurship and Self-Help Among Black Americans: A Reconsideration of Race and Economics. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 79-142.

³¹ Plater, African American, 127.

³² Frazier, The Negro Church, 36.

CHAPTER FOUR

¹ Second Baptist 15th anniversary souvenir booklet that had been preserved by the Fred Hart Williams Genealogical Society and archived as the Leontine Cole Craig Smith at the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

² Leontine Cole Smith, "James H. Cole," 1-11. Cole family history. Leontine Cole Craig Smith, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

³ Smith, "James H. Cole," 4.

⁴ Smith, "James H. Cole," 5.

⁵ Smith, "James H. Cole," 5-7; The Union Army later needed Black troops. And although James was drafted for military service, the quota had been filled before he was called into active duty.

⁶ Smith, "James H. Cole," 7. Karla Green Cole still takes on other multiple community roles. For, example, she hosted a group of medical students from Wayne State University. These prospective doctors needed to see what happened to Black bodies that did not recover. After the livery attendants, the ambulatory service from the funeral home that transported the bodies from the hospital morgue, people whose lives had not been saved by their healing hands, the deceased family's next institutional interaction would occur in the office of the funeral director. Therefore, Karla gave these medical students a tour of the Cole facilities. She shared with these burgeoning medical professionals the other side of human health, that is the death experience. She explained that many doctors and head nurses face families with the news that a loved one has died without concrete ideas about what will happen next. Releasing the body to the hospital morgue breaks the connection between the family, the medical staff, and the hospital. The visit to Cole Funeral Home brought clarity to the other scenario of patient care, the question of what happens without recovery. Karla addressed a family's final decisions concerning deceased patients. In this educational role, Karla simultaneously achieved two ends. She furnished future Cole's families with more informed and sensitive health care providers. Second, this volunteer service also facilitated a much needed and neglected dialogue between two related, yet hitherto estranged, professional service institutions. Now, Karla questions with the intrusion of internationally-owned funerary establishments and cemeteries, who will provide these kind of community functions to Black families, community clients who historically have negotiated literally life and death with their undertakers, morticians, funeral directors.

⁷ The Cole family owned funeral business is the focus of chapter eight. Chapter eight focuses on mid-Michigan, primarily the relationships between Black funeral directors and working-class and poor, African American communities in Detroit, Grand Rapids, Lansing, and Saginaw. The majority of my conclusions about the continuity in death care and poor Black communities are drawn from the Cole Home for Funerals at the center. It is the oldest and largest (in volume) family-owned funeral establishment in

Michigan. All of the mid-Michigan funeral directors interviewed for this study interned at Cole.

⁸ The student groups of Epsilon Nu, “Horus clubs” were probably named in recognition of the Egyptian god, Horus. One of the major Egyptian divinities, Horus was the son of Osiris, the god of the underworld, and Isis, the goddess of nature; Horus was then a natural name for a group of aspiring morticians. Phone and personal interview with the several, current members of Epsilon Nu Delta Mortuary Fraternity gave the research access to this fragmentary history. There is no through examination of the systemic professionalization of Black men in the funeral business. Although the African American funeral industry has not been completely ignored. See, for example: Juliet E. K. Walker. *Encyclopedia of African Business History*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

⁹ Carolyn P. DuBose. The Untold Story of Charles Diggs: The Public Figure, The Private Man. (Arlington, VA: Barton Publishing House, Inc., 1998,) 8. The construction of a U.S. highway cut through the Brewster community, the humble beginnings and homes to many Motown entertainers, including Diana Ross. According to urban research conducted by June Manning Thomas, the Brewster Homes were the results of both local and national housing initiatives. In 1933, Detroit established the city’s housing commission. Four years later, the Housing Act of 1937 gave U.S. cities the authority to purchase land, build low cost housing units, and maintain through the city’s housing commissions. After the U.S. governmental agency that oversaw public housing construction, the Public Works Administration, approved Detroit’s desire site in 1937, the Brewster Homes were built. Thomas’s study of “redevelopment” provides insight into how this neighborhood of some 701 “fortunate Black families” who had moved into the units in 1938. Detroit’s plan of “improvement,” however, eventually gave the City of Detroit the property on which the House of Diggs had prospered. At that point the House of Diggs left the community and expanded to four different locations. City planners serendipitously dislocated the House of Diggs, but permanently dislodged hundreds of Black families in the process. For a detailed social analysis of the power and pawning of Detroit city planners see the work of June Thomas. Redevelopment and Race: Planning A

Finer City in Postwar Detroit. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

For a complete, historical context of African American community building in Detroit, see: Thomas, Richard Thomas. Life for us is what we make it: Building Community in Detroit, 1915-1945 (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ DuBose, The Untold Story, 5, 8-9, passim.

¹¹ DuBose. The Untold Story, 8. The Michigan Compiled Laws of 1948 interrupted the modern methods by which Black men affirmed their control over Black families' mortuary needs.

¹² DuBose. The Untold Story, 8.

¹³ DuBose. The Untold Story, 8.

¹⁴ *The Michigan Compiled Laws*. 1956, Act 218, Eff. Jan. 1, 1957. For an entire history of how life insurance and funeral services were combined and bourgeois politics defied, see: Robert A. Weems,, Jr.. Black business in the Black metropolis : the Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company, 1925-1985. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996).

¹⁵ DuBose. The Untold Story, 8.

¹⁶ DuBose, The Untold Story, 9.

¹⁷ DuBose, The Untold Story, 9.

¹⁸ DuBose. The Untold Story, 8. The Michigan Compiled Laws of 1948 interrupted the modern methods by which Black men affirmed their control over Black families' mortuary needs.

¹⁹ DuBose. The Untold Story, 3- 4 passim.

²⁰ Jesse Jackson. Interviewed in Part 2 of “Too Close to Heaven: The History of Gospel Music.” Princeton, NJ: .” Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1997.

²¹ Richard Thomas, “Charles C. Diggs: Symbol of an Age,” in Thomas, Life For Us, 265-269.

²² *Statistical information taken from one agency, but prepared by another*. Initial publication credit goes to the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) File, 1990 Census of Population and Housing. Actual printout of information was provided by the Applications Programming Office, (East Lansing, MI:, Michigan State University, December 1998).

²³ Vanderlyn R. Pine, *Caretaker of the Dead: The American Funeral Director* (New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc.), 28.

²⁴ Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death Revisited* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), xi.

²⁵ In other words,

the orientation, education, and training of funeral directors are based on the philosophy of professionals [and] the occupational ethos of funeral service is that the funeral director's most important job is that of providing professional services at the time of death.

Pine, *Caretaker*, 25, 27, 28.

²⁶ Mitford, *The American Way*, xi.

²⁷ Pine, *Caretaker*, 29, 30.

²⁸ Pine, *Caretaker*, 31-33, 157-61.

²⁹ Pine, *Caretaker*, 26, 27, 30.

³⁰ Pine, *Caretaker*, 27.

³¹ Pine states this quite plainly

The American funeral director is a death *professional* partly because he hopes to improve the public's conception of his occupation and partly because he is one of the few people in our society who actually knows what can, should, and must be done following death.

Pine, *Caretaker*, 28 (emphasis mine).

³² Department of Labor, 159.

³³ Department of Labor, 160.

³⁴ Department of Labor, 160.

³⁵ The Michigan Occupational Code, Public Act 299 of 1980 as amended (Article 18), Board of Examiners in Mortuary Science dictates the preparation and training of funeral home directors.

339.1806 Practice of mortuary science; license; requirements; inspection; revocation or cancellation

Sec. 1806. (1) The department [State of Michigan, Department of Consumer & Industry Services] shall issue a license to engage in the practice of mortuary science to an individual who has served as a resident

trainee for 1 year under the personal supervision and instruction of the holder of a license for the practice of mortuary science, has graduated from a 3-year course in mortuary science in an accredited school, college, or university, has satisfactorily passed the examination approved by the department and the board [of examiners in mortuary science, created in 1980], and is of good moral character. The applicant may take the examination in 2 parts, 1 part after the completion of the prescribed education and 1 part after the completion of the prescribed education and the service of resident training.

State of Michigan, Department of Consumer & Industry Services, Office of Commercial Services. *Excerpts from the Michigan Occupational Code, Public Act 299 of 1980 as amended (Article 18), Board of Examiners in Mortuary Science*. (Lansing, Michigan: State of Michigan, 1995), 2.

³⁶ Suzanne Jolicoeur, Department of Consumer and Industry Service, Office of Commercial Services, Board of Mortuary Science Administrator, Telephone Interview (Lansing, MI: December 15, 1998). The Board of Mortuary Science, a public agency, interprets and enforces the laws of the Michigan legislature regulating the behavior of funeral directors. They also clarify and update specific rules concerning the licensing of funeral directors. For example, Ms. Jolicoeur told me that mortuary the board determined that school candidates need the following semester hour credits in certain disciplines: 3 hrs/computer science; 6 hrs/composition or business writing, 3 hrs/ public speaking or communication; 8 hrs/chemistry lab and lecture; 6 hrs/accounting, and 6 hrs/psychology, death and dying, or gerontology. The total number of credit hours expected of these hopefuls equaled a two year liberal arts degree or sixty hours. WSU also takes the possession of the B.A. as fulfillment of their educational requirement for admission to mortuary school.

³⁷ After 1949, Michigan mortuary statutes combined the positions of funeral director and embalmer or mortician. From this point on, the designation "funeral director" primarily

serves as a description for both occupations. Also, several authors use the term "undertaker" or "practitioner" as synonyms for this funeral director.

³⁸ Some funeral establishments sidestep the appropriate order of operation regarding apprenticeship, e.g., hiring recent high school graduates interested in their business.

³⁹ The set of assignments include, but are not limited to: twenty-five reports as evidence of the trainee's assistance with or primary responsibility for embalming; accurate recording, filing, and submission of appropriate death certificates; various practical applications such as cosmetics ("restorative art"), helping families make funeral arrangements, removing and transporting the deceased.

⁴⁰ As a public agency, the Michigan Mortuary Board operates independently of private organizations such as the National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA). Yet, the NFDA collects information regarding state licensing procedures. For example, the NFDA keeps track of those states with continuing education policies. That is to say, some states (unlike Michigan) require that licensed, funeral directors to complete fifteen hours of related study every two years in order to maintain their certification. In the State of Michigan, the awarding of the license marks completion of certification prerequisites.

⁴¹ A criminal record check suffices the Board of Mortuary Science in their personal background check. However, more than one section of the Michigan Occupational Code from the Board of Examiners in Mortuary Science addresses the funeral director's department. See below and also note 10.

393.1808 Resident trainee; license; qualifications, service; notice; reports; statement; supervision.

Sec.1808. (1) The department [of Consumer & Industry Services] shall issue a license as a resident trainee to an individual *who is of good moral character* and possesses a high school diploma or its equivalent.

State of Michigan, *Excerpts from the Michigan Occupational Code*, 3-4, emphasis mine.

⁴² Cole Funeral Home employs more than half a dozen people. A secretary handles the clerical duties of the front office, several receptionists interact with visitors to the establishment, and drivers transport the deceased and their families from homes, hospitals, churches, etc. Licensed funeral director or morticians perform embalming and cosmetic services.

⁴³ African American or Black families comprised the majority of the Cole clientele. At this time, while Karla and her staff serve other people of color and occasionally a white family, Black families remain the primarily customers of the Cole Funeral Homes.

⁴⁴ Recent literature on U.S. families shows more critical analyses in family studies. For example, some researchers of Black families place emphasis on the cognitive, social, and political consequences of certain concepts and terminology. In this vein, Niara Sundarkasa explains the difference between family and household. Sundarkasa finds that policy makers make the mistake of collapsing these two units of analysis. Sundarkasa believes that the traditional household structure of most Black families often includes people outside the nuclear construct. Therefore, fathers or husbands tend not symbolize household stability as they do in nuclear family representation. Whether or not men comprise the decision makers of the family, the household as a functioning unit within Black communities needs serious attention. This focus helps balance pervasive, disparaging portraits of Black family life. Niara Sundarkasa, "Interpreting the African Heritage in Afro-American Family Organizations," in *Black Families*, Harriet Pipes McAddo, ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.

⁴⁵ Karla Cole relies on her only sibling, a school teacher, for sporadic help with accounting. She calls on her sister whenever she needs some assistance with Cole's financial matters and books. While her sister shares this responsibility for the family business, she expressed early on her decision to pursue an alternative to the funeral home industry.

⁴⁶ While Cole Funeral Home is the oldest, Black-owned funeral establishment in Detroit, it is not the only Black-owned funeral establishment. There are, however, only a few business which handle a comparable volume of customer calls, i.e. the number of funerals per month. Swanson, McFall, and Thompson Funeral Homes of Detroit all contend with Cole Funeral Homes in terms of their customer base and revenues.

⁴⁷ The relationship of Black service professionals and the communities probably reflect the dynamics of other urban populations in modern America. While the neighborly doctor or banker of rural imagination may not be evident in the urban centers, comparisons of immigrant, working class, and "old guard" middle income areas within a particular metropolis may reflect more personal interaction between professionals and the neighboring society. What maybe helpful are national investigations of communal issues such as health insurance, death benefits, and supplemental resources through the presence of extended family members within emigrant, immigrant, and migrant communities in modern U.S. history. The significance of extended family members enjoys a central role in many studies of African American history, especially in discussions on the survival of Black families. For some examples of this literature see: Sundarkasa, "Interpreting the African Heritage,"; Carol Stack *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. (New York: Harper & Row, 1974); Andrew Billingsley, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African- American Families Climbing*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992; Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976.

⁴⁸ Tenisha Mercer, "Black-owned funeral homes feel threat." *Crain's Detroit Business*. September 8, 1997. However, Mr. Alonzo Betts serves solely as the manager/funeral home director at Browne's Mortuary in Saginaw while Karla Cole, Michael Johnson, and James Riley are all owner/operators of their respective enterprises.

⁴⁹ For a more in depth look at this development and specific responses see: Ian Portsmouth, "The Trial of Ray Loewen: Funeral-home mogul Ray Loewen built an industry giant by expanding almost effortlessly into the U.S. Then he was blindsided by a legal and cultural gap he never knew existed," *Profit: The Magazine for Canadian Entrepreneurs*, Vol. 15, no. 1 (February/March 1996): 24-32; Ross Laver, "Bargain priced burials," *Maclean's (Toronto Edition)*, vol. 110, no. 28, (July 14, 1997): 38; author not cited, "Takeover fight livens up death-care business," *Financial Post*, vol. 90, no. 38, (September 21/23, 1996): 78; Jennifer Hunter, "Taking on the giants: a consumer revolution is shaking things up in the funeral business," *Maclean's (Toronto Edition)*, vol. 110, no. 40, (October 6, 1997): 62. The Loewen Group, Inc. listed their company on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE) in October 1996 under the symbol LWN. As of Friday, May 14, 1999, their earning per share reflected -8.50 loss. Since its initial public offering some ten years ago, according to The Loewen Group web site, the company grew ... "from owning 47 funeral homes and one cemetery to its position today of owning and operating over 1,100 funeral homes, 500 cemeteries, and 50 crematoria." In addition, The Loewen Group, Inc. home page claims that the company "...is the world's second largest publicly held funeral service and cemetery corporation in terms of revenues and assets. The Company employs some 16,000 people and owns and operates...funeral homes...[and] cemeteries in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom." See also: The Loewen Group, Inc. <http://www.loewengroup.com> In addition to falling stock prices, Loewen faces a particular stumbling block in the state of Michigan. To counter monopolies in the funeral industry, Michigan enacted an anti-combination law which prohibits one company from holding both cemeteries and funeral homes.

⁵⁰ Hylan Lewis. "Small Southern Town," in The Black Church in America. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1971.

⁵¹ Karla F.C. Holloway. Passed On: African American mourning stories: A memorial. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002). State penitentiary guards shot and killed Karla's son as he was trying to escape. She wrote her book to display her love for him. Gomez and Roediger argue that the physical embrace of the dead Black body is definitely

an African retention. Therefore, Dr. Holloway's memorial to her son, the publication of a book about African American mourning maintains the academic and spiritual integrity of the historical significance of funerary display. Gomez, Exchanging, 274-78; Roediger, "And Die in Dixie," 168-70.

CHAPTER FIVE

¹ The literature on the Till lynch-murder includes published materials such as monographs, anthologies, popular magazine features, pamphlets, newspaper articles, and broadsides. There are also other media such as film documentaries as well as research papers. For lengthier descriptions, analyses and reports of aftermath and legacy of the Till case: See, for example: Clenora Hudson-Weems. Emmett Till: The Sacrificial Lamb of the Civil Rights Movement. (Troy, MI: Bedford Publishers, Inc.), 1994; Christopher Metress, ed. The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2002); William M. Simpson. "Reflections on a Murder: The Emmett Till Case," in Southern Miscellany: Essays in History in Honor Glover Moore, Frank Allen Dennis, ed. (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi, 1981); William Bradford Huie, "The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi," in *Look: America's Family Magazine*. v 20 n 2, (January 24, 1956): 46-50; William Bradford Huie, "What's Happened to the Emmett Till Killers?" in *Look: America's Family Magazine*. v 21 n 2, (January 22, 1957): 63-66; Stephen J. Whitfield, A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till. (New York: The Free Press, 1988); Anne Sarah Rubin, "Reflections on the Death of Emmett Till," in *Southern Cultures*. v2 n 1, (Fall 1995): 45-66; Jacqueline Goldsby, "The High and Low Tech of It: The Meaning of Lynching and the Death of Emmett Till," in *The Yale Journal of Criticism*. v 9 n 2 (1996): 245-282; Editorial Advisory Board, "L'Affaire Till in the French Press," in *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*. v62 n10 (December 1955): 596-602; chapter 14, "Emmett Till: Impudent Young Upstart Asking for Trouble," in Ira B. Harkey, Jr., The Smell of Burning Crosses: An Autobiography of a Mississippi Newspaperman. (Jacksonville, Illinois: Harris-Wolfe & Company), 1967; William B. Huie. Wolf Whistle and Other Stories. (New York: Signet Books, 1959); Warren Breed. "Comparative Newspaper

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² William M. Simpson. “Reflections on a Murder: The Emmett Till Case,” in *Southern Miscellany: Essays in History in Honor Glover Moore*, Frank Allen Dennis, ed. (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi, 1981), 183.

³ Initially, Mr. Rayner had refused to pen the casket when Mrs. Bradley asked him if he had a hammer to pen up the nailed shut box. In response to Rayner’s explanation, she replied, “I haven’t signed anything, and I haven’t made any promises, and if you can’t open that box, I can.” Mr. Rayner opened the casket. The conversation between Mr. Rayner and Mrs. Bradley has been transcribed from the 2003 PBS documentary, “American Experience: The Murder of Emmett Till.” The entire transcript of the documentary is also on-line at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>.

⁴ For the PBS documentary, Mrs. Bradley confided that she had actually tried to coax the idea of visiting Money out of her son’s mind with a bribe. She herself had planned to take a road trip to Nebraska and thought that if she told Emmett he would get some time behind the wheel that he would prefer to stay with her for the summer. 2003 PBS documentary, “American Experience: The Murder of Emmett Till.” The entire transcript of the documentary is also on-line at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>.

⁵ William Bradford Huie, “The Shocking Story of Approved Killing in Mississippi,” in *Look: America’s Family Magazine*. v 20 n 2, (January 24, 1956): 46-50.

⁶ Huie, “The Shocking Story,” 46.

⁷ Huie, “The Shocking,” 46.

⁸ Huie, “The Shocking,” 46.

⁹ Southern historian Alferdteen Harrison used the phrase “stay-at-home” in reference to the majority of Black Southerners who did relocate to northern areas. Contrast her discussions about non-migrant and migrant African Americans during the Great Migration in: Black Exodus: The Great Migration From the American South (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1991).

¹⁰ Emmett’s father died in Europe during World War II by military execution.

¹¹ What emerged in the *Look* expose was a confession of murder that could not be prosecuted because a Sumner jury of their peers had already given a not guilty verdict. U.S. jurist prudence protected Emmett’s murders. Double jeopardy prohibited a second indictment or trial for the same crime that had previously been adjudicated.

¹² On November 9, 1955, a LeFlore County grand jury in Greenwood, Mississippi refused to indict Milam and Bryant on kidnapping charges. The two men had earlier confessed to kidnapping prior to being acquitted on murder charges.

¹³ Bryant and Milam told Huie that they made Bo load the cotton gin fan which they would later tie around the neck of his corpse, for example. Bo carried the gin to the bed of the pick up truck and laid back down in the back on the truck instead of trying to escape or resist in any way.

¹⁴ Huie, “The Shocking,” 50.

¹⁵ All pictures are copy written, but have links at the PBS American Experience website for the Till documentary: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>.

¹⁶ All memoirs are copy on-line at the PBS American Experience website for the Till documentary: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>

¹⁷ Alfred Duckett. "Teenagers Give Meaning to Money: It's the Worst," in *Chicago Defender*, September 24, 1955, 7.

¹⁸ Attorney Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr., activist Julian Bond, and historian James Horton contributed their memoirs on-line.

¹⁹ "Memoirs," on-line at the PBS American Experience website for the Till documentary: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>. Autobiographies referencing the influence of the Till murder on their ethnic identity within the United States include: Anne Moody. *Coming Of Age in Mississippi*. (New York: Laurel Editions, 1968); Mrs. Medgar Evers. *For Us, the Living*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1967); and James Forman. *The Making of Black Revolutionaries: A Personal Account*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972); Muhammad Ali. *The Greatest: My Own Story*. New York: Random House, 1975).

²⁰ Mattie Smith Colin. "250,000 View Slain Youth's Body," *Chicago Defender*. September 10, 1955. front page. Albert Barnett. "Till's Murders Didn't Know That A Drowned Body Floats to the Surface," in *Chicago Defender*. September 17, 1955.

²¹ All headlines and estimates were taken from one source: Christopher Metress, ed. *The Lynching of Emmett Till: A Documentary Narrative*. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 31.

²² A year after *Look* published Huie's article about "approved killing in Mississippi," they released an update to tell its readers what had happened to the Till killers. By January 1957, Black people would not shop at the Bryant's Grocery. African Americans had been his most frequent customers. Milam could not get any Black men to work his fields. Prior to Milam's decision to become a god and take the life of children of whom he disapproved, he had a reputation based on his effective supervision of Black employees. For full details, see: William Bradford Huie, "What's Happened to the

Emmett Till Killers?" in *Look: America's Family Magazine*. v 21 n 2, (January 22, 1957): 66.

²³ Eventually, the N.A.A.C.P. and Mrs. Bradley experienced serious miscommunications and distrust. She was uninvited, for example, from a membership drive and accusations flew back and forth concerning the misappropriations of monies collected either in the name of the N.A.A.C.P. or contributions given specifically given to support Mrs. Bradley through her ordeal. The N.A.A.C.P. used media such as the *Chicago Defender* as propagandist opportunities to channel anger into activism. See, for example, John Earl Lewis, "Lewis Says Fight Till Tragedy By Joining NAACP," in *Chicago Defender*. September 10, 1955, 4.

²⁴ "Primary Sources: Reactions in Writing," on-line at the PBS American Experience website for the Till documentary: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>; "Readers Flood Defender with Letter About Till," *Chicago Defender*. September 17, 1955, 3; "Letters Blasting Lynchers of Till Still Pouring In," in *Chicago Defender*. September 24, 1955, 8; "Citizens Flood Ike, Brownell [sic] With Wires Asking Justice," *Chicago Defender*, September 10, 1955; Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley even "urged President Dwight D. Eisenhower to use all the facilities of the federal government to see that justice is served on the slayer of 14-year old Emmett Louis Till of Chicago." Daley's quote was printed in the same issue.

²⁵ D. Jones of San Antonio, Texas mailed a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Defender* that was printed in their December 10, 1955 issue which they called, "Just No Justice." Jones lamented: "I understand the Justice department says there is nothing it can do about the Emmett L. Till case, despite the evidence in the case. Well, if the Department can't act in this case, just when and where can it act?" The Justice Department received an investigative report from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, even wrote a personal letter to civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall to explain that private citizens were responsible for what had happened to Till, not an organization. The other limitation in finding grounds for federal prosecution was that

neither the body nor crime had crossed state lines. The letter from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover was dated September 30, 1955 and is reprinted on-line at the PBS at the PBS American Experience website for the Till documentary:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>;

²⁶ Mamie Till's reclamation of her son's body is no less a story of tragic loss, love, heroism than the civil disobedience of the Sophocles' classical character, making Mamie Till was a post-modern Antigone. The Greek tragedy of Sophocles' Antigone is an apt metaphor for the heartbreaking murder of Emmett Till and the national funerary drama that African Americans rendered for his mother. Antigone defied a civil command that would have left one of her brother's dead bodies unburied and dishonored. Although both of her brothers had been killed in Thebes' civil war, the new ruler of Thebes, Creon, had decreed that the bodies of those who fought against him would not receive customary, funeral rites. Antigone's sister refused to help Antigone bury the body of their brother who had fought on the losing side because of Creon's penalty of death for those who kept familial obligations to the dead of the opposing side. Antigone buried her brother's body by herself. In defense of her action, she argued unapologetically about the morality of her civil disobedience. In the end, the omniscient gods themselves are said to have sided with Antigone, although she herself would later take her own life. Mamie Bradley Till gave herself permission to publicly display the mutilated remains of her teenage son. She gave herself permission to indulge in the emotional obsessions that Northern bourgeois respectability had checked during the modern era.

²⁷ Milam told Huie that Emmett was too tall, too heavy, and too fresh for him to consider Emmett a "child." Other critiques also questioned the childhood of the youth. Emmett's peers across the country, however, saw him as a child. Most importantly, Emmett's mother had lost her only child. If not a child to anyone else, he was her baby.

²⁸ "Interview with Robin Kelley: Open Casket," on-line at the PBS American Experience website for the Till documentary: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/index.html>.

²⁹ DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro, 40-42 passim; Gomez, Exchanging, 277; Miriam deCosta-Willis, ed., The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 2.

³⁰ James A. Emanuel, "Emmett Till," in The Poetry of Black America: Anthology of the 20th Century. Arnold Adoff, editor. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1973), 179.

Conclusion

¹ Houston's biography written by Genna Rae McNeil is a must read as well as a viewing California Newsreel documentary, "The Road to Brown: The untold story of 'the man who killed Jim Crow'" for every student of the African American civil rights movement. See: Genna Rae McNeil. *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983, first edition.

² Michael Katz, ed. 1993. The "Underclass" Debate: Views from History. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

³ Activist-scholars like bell hooks for example, have encouraged theorists of the African Diaspora to tell death stories in order to present the positive functions of Black families across time and place. Like the healing power of love, bell hooks argues, not poverty or racial oppression, white patriarchy nor capitalist greed have stolen the significance of death care from Black families. Other scholars such as Audrey B. Chapman echo the undeniable power of love in the African American past and its indispensable necessity in the African American future. Cultural historians of the Black experience make their living by providing memories and lessons from the past. Therefore, historical reconstructions of African American funerary behavior are depictions of Black love. *Community clients*, as a conceptual model, simply provides a historical description that reflects it. In doing so, this historical conceptualization demythologizes misleading

perceptions of poor, Black families, exposing the imprecision of some social policies. Conceptualized in their true historical roles, poor Black families could not be stereotyped as societal pariah dependent on exhaustible, public funds. See: bell hooks. A Woman's Mourning Song. New York : London : Harlem River Press, 1993); bell hooks. Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery. (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2001); bell hooks. Salvation: Black People and Love. (New York: William Morrow); Also see: Audrey B. Chapman. "The Search for Love and Devotion: Facing the Future Against All Odds." In Black Families, 3rd edition, edited by Harriette Pipes McAdoo. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1997); And: Sharon Patricia Hollard. Raising The Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); and Karla F.C. Holloway. Passed On: African American mourning stories: A memorial. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

COLE WRITES WIDOW WHEELER CONCERNING BALANCE ON ACCOUNT

WEST SIDE OFFICE
5802 SCOTTEN AVENUE
WALNUT 4820

JAMES H. COLE, JR.
UNDERTAKER
TWO MODERN ESTABLISHMENTS
DETROIT, MICH.

MAIN OFFICE
3315 ST. ANTOINE STREET
GLENDALE 5841

November 25, 1929

Mrs. Ruby Wheeler
2960 Clinton Street
Detroit, Michigan

My Dear Mrs. Wheeler:-

We would certainly appreciate it very much if you would call in and make a payment on your balance which amounts to \$73.50. You promised to be in about the 10th of this month but I suppose it slipped your memory.

I have called several times but was never fortunate enough to find you at home.

If you will call me I will come for any money you may have for me or will send Miss Hurst, my Secretary. Please make payments only to her or to me.

Hoping to hear from you this week, I

am

Very truly yours,

James H. Cole, Jr.

TH:ah

APPENDIX B

WEST SIDE OFFICE
ONE BOUTTE AVENUE
WALWORTH, ILL.

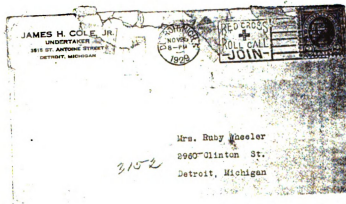
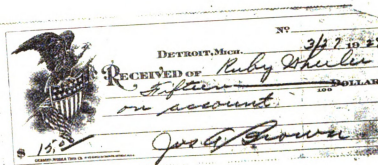
JAMES H. COLE, JR.
UNDERTAKER
TWO MODERN ESTABLISHMENTS

EAST OFFICE
2115 ST. ANTHONY STREET
CHICAGO, ILL.

Detroit, Mich. June 8 1929

Mrs. Ruby Wheeler

1031 Jos. Caspary



APPENDIX C

COLE INCLUDES AN ITEMIZED RECEIPT OF THE WHEELER ACCOUNT

808 8th Street
808 SCOTTEN AVENUE
WALNUT 480

JAMES H. COLE, JR.
UNDERTAKER
TWO MODERN ESTABLISHMENTS

1818 17th Street
1818 ST. ANTHONY STREET
GLENDALE 864

Detroit, Mich. March 13 1929

Mrs. Ruby Wheeler

3743 E. Fort

To funeral expenses of James Wheeler, deceased.

20	Casket	185.00	
22.50	Outside Box	20.00	
42.50	Embalming	10.00	
35.00	Removal charge	5.00	
7.50	2 Cars and Hearse	25.00	
281.00	Personal services	10.00	
7.50	Grave - opening	25.00	25
273.50	Burial slippers	3.50	
	COMPLETE	281.00	
	Policy Wash. H.	120.00	
	James H. Cole, Jr.	161.00	
	By Cash	30.00	
	Bal.	837.00	

over

APPENDIX D

WEST SIDE OFFICE
6002 SCOTTEN AVENUE
WALNUT 4820

JAMES H. COLE, JR.
UNDERTAKER
TWO MODERN ESTABLISHMENTS

MAIN OFFICE
2515 ST. ANTOINE STREET
GLENDALE 2641

Detroit, Mich., May 1, 1929

Mrs. Ruby Wheeler

1031 Jos. Campan Ave.

Re: James Wheeler, deceased.			
BALANCE DUE TODAY	113	80	
James H. Cole, Jr.			

APPENDIX E

ACQUISITION GROUPS

Betts compiled this chart from data contained in Mortuary Management. Abbott & Hast Publications. Monterey, California. Published nationwide since 1914

	STATES/ COUNTRIES	LOCATIONS	CREMATORIES	CEMENTARIES
Sentry		24		
SCI (Bay City and Flint)	18 countries	3292	174	422
ECI	35 (1 province)	326		81
Combined SCI and ECI		3618	175	503
Keystone	12	42	5	2
Prime Succession	20	144		20
Loewen~ (Saginaw) as of 11/21/97		1000	*	420 *
Liberty (Detroit)	12 *			
Stewart		507		133
Carriage as of 11/21/97	19	116		17
~Year-to- date	As of 11/21/97	Loewen Acquisitions: 236 Million	Loewen's Pending Acquisitions: 131 Million	

APPENDIX F

AFRICAN-AMERICAN DEATH CALLS/SAGINAW COUNTY IN 1998*

	BROWNE		BLACK		EVANS		OTHER		MONTH	YTD	PERCENTAGES		
	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	TOTALS	Browne's	Black	Evans	Other
Jan	59%	13	9%	2	32%	7		0	22	59%	9%	32%	0
Feb	52%	13	20%	5	20%	5	8%	2	25	55%	15%	26%	4%
March	53%	10	10%	2	37%	7		0	19	54%	14%	29%	3%
April	42%	8	5%	1	42%	8	11%	2	19	52%	12%	32%	4%
May	52%	16	13%	4	32%	10	3%	1	31	52%	12%	32%	4%
June	39%	12	16%	5	32%	10	13%	4	31	49%	13%	32%	6%
July	51%	14	6%	2	40%	11	3%	1	28	49%	12%	33%	6%
Aug	70%	16	4%	1	17%	4	9%	2	23	52%	11%	31%	6%
Sept	27%	6	27%	6	36%	8	10%	2	22	49%	13%	32%	6%
Oct	44%	14	19%	6	34%	11	3%	1	32	48%	14%	32%	6%
Nov	38%	8	24%	5	38%	8		0	21	48%	14%	33%	5%
Dec	60%	19	3%	1	31%	10	6%	2	32	49%	13%	32%	6%
YEAR'		149		40		99		17	305				
S AVG.													

*Betts explained that a high volume of calls does not necessarily indicate significant revenues.

Browne's Mortuary buries many people who receive federal assistance such as veteran's pensions, social security benefits, and other forms of welfare. According to Betts, the "class" of Browne's clientele often reflects people from modest or poor income households. In contrast, the higher "class," in Bett's wording, comfortably spends more money on funeral needs. Therefore, a high volume of lower "class" funerals fails to produce significant profits especially in cases where the funeral owner (not the manager) decides to bury an individual despite an obvious ability to pay for services.

APPENDIX G

LANSING'S BLACK COMMUNITY SURVEY**

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF CURRENT/POTENTIAL FUNERAL HOME CUSTOMERS, 1998

<u>Age Range</u>	<u>Sex</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Church Role</u>
25-40	F	clerical	Lansing	choir secretary
over 60	F	homemaker	Lansing	deaconess
over 60	F	retired	Lansing	church mother
40-59	M	laborer	Lansing	Sunday School superintendent
25-40	F	lab technician	Lansing	preacher's wife

**All respondents identified themselves as "Black" in terms of racial category.

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WSU-VF	Wayne State University School of Mortuary Science Vertical Files
UNO-APB	A.P. Boyer Undertaking, Univ. of New Orleans, Earl K. Long Library
UNO-F&S	Frantz & Schoen Undertaking, Univ. of New Orleans, Long Library
UNO-MCC	Marcus Christian Manuscript Collection, UNO, Long Library
NPL	New Orleans Public Library
H/R-CRM	Cora MacKarrow Collection, Harvard/Radcliffe, Schlesinger Library
DPL-LCCS	Leontine Cole Smith, Burton Collection, Detroit Public Library
JHC	James H. Cole, Jr. Business Correspondence and Personal Files
WSU-WR	Labor/Urban Affairs Archives, Reuther Library, Wayne State Univ.
CFM	Cole Family Memorabilia
UM-BHLC	Bentley Historical Library Collections, The University of Michigan

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