VOICE AND VOICELESSNESS: THE SOCIOPOLITICAL CHARACTERIZATIONS OF WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF PAULINE ELIZABETH HOPKINS AND JESSIE REDMON FAUSET

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation focuses on the voices of African-American women during the antebellum period of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century in United States literature. The voices of many nineteenth century narrative women and African American women writers in the early twentieth century have been misrepresented or ignored by many literary critics. In an effort to recover the voices of some of the nineteenth century African American women subjects and writers, this dissertation offers a cursory history of responses to the voices of Negro women from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Such background demonstrates the violence and misunderstandings linked to the voices of laboring Negro women. Consequently, the second chapter focuses on the contradictory meaning of "sass." Some listeners referred to the women as sassy to dismiss or ignore what the women were saying. However, their sassy articulations characterized the sociopolitical environment in which they existed. Furthermore in the narratives seven nineteenth-century women experience their need to encourage and share their experiences with others.

The narrative women paved the way for novel writers such as Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins and Jessie Redmon Fauset to construct Negro women

characters in the likeness and variety of Black women. Both writers construct sassy female characters who resist stereotypes and challenge the sociopolitical environments that confront them. Chapter three is primarily concerned with the mixture of Plantation Creole and Standard English to well-rounded and stereotypical challenging female characterizations in Hopkins' serialized novel Hagar's Daughter. Chapter four examines Jesse Redmon Fauset's presentation of working-class and middle-class women in her novels along with her use of dialogue in Black English, Standard English, and slang.

This study concludes with the understanding that many women with limited resources made themselves heard over the sirens of oppression and denunciation blaring from a ruling class.

Dedication

To the memory of my parents
Clarence Neal and Haroldine Vertell Tillman Jones
and
Ms. (Wanda) Hogg

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Introduction

OVERVIEW OF BLACK WOMEN'S VOICE AND WRITING TRADITION IN THE U.S.

Producing intellectual work is generally not attributed to Black women artists and political activists. Such women are typically thought of as nonintellectual and nonscholarly, classifications that create a false dichotomy between scholarship and activism, between thinking and doing. Examining the ideas and actions of these extended groups reveals a world in which behavior is a statement of philosophy and in which a vibrant, both/and, scholar/activist tradition remains intact.

Patricia Hill Collins, Black Feminist Thought

At the Charleston marketplace, during the colonial period, slaves could buy or sell on behalf of their masters, thanks to the Negro Act of 1740. Interestingly, "most of the marketeers were slave women...As market traders these women took on the roles traditionally allocated to women in West African, Caribbean, and most other preindustrial societies" (Olwell 99-100). In 1772, the market women were described as "'insolent,' 'abusive,' 'notorious,' and 'impudent.'... When complainants described the resistance of market women they referred mostly to verbal aggression and linguistic 'impudence.' Ridicule, bluster, and wit were the market women's strongest weapons" (Olwell 104). Robert Olwell believes that "a black man would hardly have been permitted to make such an overt challenge to the authority of the slave society. Consequently, only the continuing subordination of the slave marketeers as women may have allowed them momentarily to overcome the limitations imposed by slavery and race" (104). Olwell seems to suggest that the women's verbal

aggression was tolerated because of their gender implying that no penalties resulted from talking back.

Verbal skills mixed with the ability to trade had allowed West African women to assume "almost complete control of the city's [Charles Town, South Carolina] food supply. In 1686, a law was passed forbidding the purchase of goods from slaves. It had little effect" (Hine & Thompson 47). In an attempt to prevent the dominance of enterprising enslaved Black women, an official marketplace was set up in 1739. "That didn't work either. In fact, none of the many attempts to take control of the marketplace out of the hands of enslaved black women worked" (Hine & Thompson 47). The haggling Black marketwomen disregarded the law, threats and a new marketplace and continued to talk and sell.

At the end of Reconstruction in the United States, and in the face of oppression and terrorism, Negro women continued to employ assertive communication. In her important study, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow, Jacqueline Jones finds that fifteen years after the Civil War, in relation to the South, both Northern and foreign observers "conveyed the distinct impression that black women were particularly outspoken and aggressive (by implication relative to black men) in their willingness to confront white authority figures" (70). Jones maintains that defenders of the cult of true womanhood

> ...could not help but be struck by black women who openly challenged conventional standards of female submissiveness. Freedwomen were described as "growling," "impertinent,"

> "impudent," "vulgar" persons who "spoke up bold as brass" and, with their "loud and boisterous talking," demanded fair treatment for "we people [left] way back." In the process of ridiculing these women, northerners often indirectly revealed their ambivalent attitudes toward black men. Apparently an aggressive woman existed outside the realm of "natural," male-female relationships; her own truculence must be counterbalanced by the weakness of her husband, brother, or father. But ironically in such cases, male relatives were often perceived to be much more "reasonable" (that is prone to accept the white man's point of view) than their vehement womenfolk (70).

Such speaking women faced fatal or nearly deadly punishment for their fluent acts of resistance.

Women who questioned, disagreed, labored and earned wages outside of their homes were beyond the ideologies of true womanhood or rather the Victorian notion of the cult of true womanhood. True women were middle to upper-class, Euro Americans concerned with the proper operation of their homes and the needs of those therein. To further enhance their domestic preoccupation, true women were pure, pious and submissive to their husbands. True women, it seems, were silent and obedient to what they were told to do when it came to politics and acts occurring in the public realm. The duties of true women were confined to the domestic sphere where they were generally allowed to make decisions.

Jones reports the consequences to toiling black women for their objections about "the amount and quality of work performed...and disagreements over the compensation due her..." (71). These women were dragged, beaten, choked and susceptible to multiple corporeal punishments for any perceived offenses. Jones finds that "the viciousness aimed at freedwomen was particularly significant as a phenomenon in American women's history. Unlike the cold-blooded slaughter of Native Americans, these were personal attacks, carried out face-to-face by men who knew their victims and their families" (72). These outspoken Negro working-class women, assailed by white men in the South during the 1880s, are reminiscent of the market women's voices in the eighteenth-century Charleston, South Carolina marketplace. Enslaved and working-class women used direct verbal resistance to articulate their oppressions and requirements; they spoke fully aware of the numerous possible forms of punishment they could receive.

My opening epigraph, the voices of these market women and the beleaguered post-Reconstruction laborers suggest a consciousness and an activism that trespass ideal genteel feminine behavior when one looked from the position of the ruling class. As a sociopolitical act the communication of that consciousness, embodied in the use of voice on the part of varying social classes of women, is part of some women's agenda to confront the anti-revolutionary activity of silencing the voices of women. Yet, African American women speaking through the reality of racism, sexism and classism in the United States find that our voices, if heard, in the ruling culture are filtered through social,

historical and cultural channels that can cause a disruption in the message. This process leads to a silencing of our voices—voicelessness. Nevertheless, African American women continue to speak while understanding that others critique our transmissions as loud, senseless and vulgar—the twentieth-first century equivalent to "insolent, abusive, notorious, and impudent." Such public dismissives work to deflect the intentions, motives and messages of less politically powerful speaking women by those in power.

Karla Holloway warns "If black women behave as if race and sex are peripheral rather than central, we participate in these [public] encounters at considerable risk" (1995 29). At an academic (Women's Studies) conference, addressing both her anger and racism, Audre Lorde recalled that, "...a white woman [said], 'Tell me how you feel but don't say it too harshly or I cannot hear you.' But is it my manner that keeps her from hearing, or the threat of a message that her life may change?" (125). Professor Lani Guinier was nominated, by then President Clinton, as deputy attorney general for civil rights in 1993. Guinier was persuaded to keep silent during the public lynching of her writings and consequently her person. The mainstream news media saw fit to move beyond her legal writing to a discussion of her name and appearance—"strange name, strange hair, strange ideas—she's history" (Baer 38). Her gender and appearance was made an issue. Former U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders' voice "retains some of the nonstandard features that identify her region and ethnicity" (Holloway, Codes of Conduct 94). Holloway finds:

> ...when Elders speculated that legalization of some drugs could lead to a reduction in urban crime, Reagan-era Secretary of Education William Bennett felt no compunction calling her "nutty" on a C-SPAN call-in show. During the same interview ...Bennett easily acknowledged that conservative pundit William Buckley had expressed the same sentiment as Elders's. Buckley was merely "mistaken" in his view, according to Bennett. Elders he repeated, was "simply nutty" (95).

Bennett's bias against the speaking Elders is clear. According to Holloway, Elder's dialect "continues to make her vulnerable to the public abuse that Bennett's offensive comment typifies" (95). Former President Clinton fired Elders for a statement she did not make "that schools should teach children how to masturbate" (95). The public manipulation and judgment of Guinier and Elders demonstrate that silencing a woman includes more than just the act of preventing her from speaking. African American women who are in public view must remember their gender and race because the media, it appears, will make it an issue. Like voice, silencing includes myriad techniques and includes a range of practices.

Ironically, Essence magazine, originally published over twenty-five years ago for "Today's Black Woman," in 1999 counsels African American women that "he'll be putty in your hands—if you'll just watch your mouth" (McIntosh 135). The essay begins with a photograph of a speaking obviously black woman's lips; it includes mouth, teeth and tongue. Her mouth and lips are so enlarged they

cannot be contained within the width of the page. Between her parted, purple painted lips, above her tongue and just below her top front sparkling white teeth are where the title has suggestively been placed, "How To Talk To A Black Man," in all capital letters. It appears she could unconsciously yet quite easily consume the title if she chose. The author, Claire McIntosh, asserts "There's an art and a science in how to talk to a Black man, one that respects his significance in a world that often doesn't" (136). One would then assume Black women lived in a world where they are respected. Ostensibly, in intimate heterosexual relationships, beyond public dialogue, Black women's voices still provoke negative responses. McIntosh, a woman, sees nothing wrong in her public participation for the oppression of her gender when she suggests that African American women, once engaged in intimate relationships with African American men, should soften our verbal intercourse.

According to McIntosh's expert, (Dr. Ronn Elmore), "too many sisters suffer from the Sapphire Syndrome" (136). "Sapphire. She's an unfortunate and much-despised stereotype—a swivel-necked, hip-holding, eye rolling, teeth-sucking, acid-tongued caricature of the women who love Black men," explains Elmore (136). Who exactly despises the woman he describes? He fuels an acknowledged stereotype of Black women with a supposed mental ailment, undoubtedly, unique to some Black women. To clarify, a confused reader is informed that "any tendency to dog, diss or deflate your man as you attempt to get your point across is a sign you may be afflicted" (136). As a woman and probably a woman of African American descent, family psychologist Brenda

Wade is used to help legitimize, soften and reinforce her male colleague's point. She finds, "Black women adapted this behavior as a way of coping with suppressed anger during our centuries of oppression" (136). Rather than using the term Sapphire, she conjures up a description of such verbal women as "evil." Evil sisters, she points out, "should take time out for self-care and seek therapy" (136). Neither expert, it seems, believes that "Sapphires" or evil sisters are acting in their own best interests. Furthermore, and after centuries of oppression, some mental health care professionals advise evil sisters to repress their voices—not a novel concept. For example, "Find ways to show your approval of him as a person even while you disapprove of his behavior, advises Dr. Grace Cornish, a New York City social psychologist" (136). And, "Elmore strongly advises that you choose the right time and place for criticism: 'Praise in public; protest in private'" (136). Although the experts, in McIntosh's essay, strongly disapprove and criticize the articulations of some African American women, interestingly, they do not indicate that the vocal women's observations were incorrect. Yet in intimate, heterosexual relationships the voices of African American women describing their displeasure are viewed as hostile acts that have the power to topple the psyche of healthy African American males. According to the essay, "we've [African American women] learned to use words as a shield, as a sword and as a way to take care of business" (136). Vocal African American women continue to be labeled and censured for expressing our dissatisfaction with personal and professional relationships.

Communications Scholar Marsha Stanback's labeling of African American women (in "Language and Black Women's Place") contrast with McIntosh's essay. Instead of referring to some middle-class African American women as evil or classifying our communication style "Sapphire Syndrome," Stanback refers to it as "smart talk." She agrees that African American women are verbally assertive as a result of the way we are socialized. Centuries of socialization, seemingly, reinforces an African American women's communication style that many find intimidating and aggressive. One of the reasons for assertive communication style is the ongoing struggles which Black women face (Troutman 215).

There are differences in the ways that Black women communicate. Marsha Houston's article, "When Black Women Talk with White Women," states that "researchers have noted the high value African American women place on talk that is forthright, sincere, and authentic" (136). Linguist Denise Troutman points out "research conducted to date has not fully considered the impact of gender and race on language when the women are African Americans," she does, however, find that one way to view this intersection "is by examining two cultural habits, or 'carryovers': the code of feminine politeness and agonistic behavior" (213). Troutman points out the crucial difference in the code of feminine politeness between African American and Euro American women. In general, for Euro American women from the eighteenth century forward the code of feminine politeness, or rather the cult of true womanhood, affected their communication styles. Troutman determines:

> ... dictates concealing true feelings and thoughts from those in power, in this sense, politeness remains uppermost in interactions between European Americans. In verbal interactions, politeness remains a central modus vivendi, because European American women have been socialized to wait their turn to speak and not to interrupt violate another person's turn (214).

Politeness norms for African American women, according to Troutman, differ.

> African American women appear to learn, at some point, how to tread the nebulous line between being polite and being assertive. Although the reproof, or its equivalent, "Don't be so womanish" is heard in many African American households, when African American females reach an appropriate age, they are expected to take on "womanish" ways. One mark of attaining womanhood is knowing when to be polite and when to assert oneself. This aspect of African American women's code of feminine politeness is passed on verbally or learned through nonverbal behavior (214).

Alice Walker also acknowledges a code of Black woman decorum and verbal inheritance in her first definition of black feminist that she identifies as Womanist. Walker defines womanist as:

> from the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "you acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one.

> Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. Serious (xi).

However, there are some Black women who, when speaking to one another sound extremely aggressive and threatening to outsiders; yet, they are merely enjoying a verbal exchange. I will point out aspects of feminine politeness as I consider the voices of women in this dissertation.

Many women of color understand their oppressions and have experienced abuses and public bigotry; therefore, when we speak publicly and transgress the ruling culture's ideology it is understood that we risk punishment or ostracism of some sort. Like the market women, many African American women penetrate public dialogue though self-assertion.

Until recently, I have rarely come across literary criticism that seriously addresses the role and influence of enslaved or working-class Negro women's voices in United States literature authored by Negro American women in the nineteenth century or during the Harlem Renaissance. Often, the turn of the century interested, concerned, and opinionated voices of the enslaved or wage/laboring black women characters (nineteenth to twentieth century) are minimized or ignored by critics at the time of publication and for years to follow. This study is concerned with the act of voice, in works by African American women writers, performed by their female characters, primarily their working-class characters, and the subsequent critical voicelessness of Hopkins and Fauset and their female characters. Working-class women are characters who

earn money to support themselves or their families. Voicelessness is used to describe the critical neglect that Hopkins and Fauset's works have received until quite recently. More directly, this dissertation will focus on characters in the novels of Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins and Jessie Redmon Fauset. Much criticism that underprivileges the voices of black working-class women either dismisses them as minstrel folly, plainly ignores them or disdains their work as novels of manners or passing. The market women and the post-Reconstruction laborers exhibited behavior that appeared to be shocking, brazen, willful and independent to a ruling culture and as a result they were manipulated in the media, labeled, beaten and forced to the rear. As Olwell points out the market women as traders, for example, performed duties expected of Black women in West Africa and Caribbean societies. Taking over the market and controlling the prices was characteristic behavior for the market women. Although they were certainly aware of how others viewed them, I doubt that the market women considered themselves loose, idle and disorderly (as they were identified). Likewise, keeping in mind that the nineteenth century narrative women were mindful that the ruling culture held them in low esteem and therefore did not value their voices; I want to feature their voices, and allow them to resonate with the force and meaning characteristic of Negro women. This means that the women talked back, talked with, answered and responded to the ruling culture and to one another invoking an African and consequently African American oral aesthetic.

Voices Defined

Voice is defined as any articulation, quotation or related gesture attributed, specifically, to a speaking African American woman, character, narrator or authorial utterance. In chapter two voice is an action that refers to nineteenth century narrative women, writers and female characters. By the nineteenth century Black women in this country had dealt with complex forms of dehumanization, oppression, domination and other forms of violence. Consequently, their public response to such terrorism was just as elaborate. The ruling culture made space for the voices of former or run-away slaves in the genre of escaped slave narratives and related literature. They found the narratives to be a safe and controlled place to read about the barbarity of Southerners, for example. Nevertheless, after the domination and humiliation of slavery it appears that the nineteenth century narrative women were more prone to directly articulate their history and emotions concerning their lives in bondage. They wanted their stories told for various reasons. This also accounts for how direct, in some cases, they allowed their voices to become. Interestingly, when nineteenth-century Black women are perceived as articulating an authoritative stance, their voices are characterized as sassy, saucy and unladylike by the ruling culture in the text, and are often ignored by literary critics. During the nineteenth century their sassy manner was met with violence of some sort. Sass, which will be elaborated on in chapter two, is usually a direct verbal and physically punctuated response to one in close emotional proximity. The voices of African American women, as described in this paper, illuminate issues of

power in the United States from the antebellum period to the early twentieth century. Their stories involve sociopolitical issues. However, a twenty-first century reading of the narrative women suggests they were not as discreet as their literary offspring became. Further the narrative women, I believe, shared stories of which their mothers would approve. (Their mothers were usually included in their narratives.) Chapter two points out and describes the influence of resistant women's voices in nineteenth century Black women's narratives. It appears that mothers or maternal figures had a significant amount of influence on the narrative women. I suspect tradition and the immediate community dictated that if given the opportunity there were particular stories that the larger society should be told. In other words, they revealed the hardships and degradations of slavery tempered by the importance of family (which extended beyond a biological boundary). However, it is understood that the ruling culture of nineteenth century North America would not be interested in the voices of Black women articulating their sociopolitical issues that challenged or misrepresented ruling class ideology. During their bondage the narrative women were subject to extended portions of their lives under close surveillance while simultaneously working to resist oppressions in the face of danger. I use the term Negro or Black interchangeably as proper nouns at times because they were the descriptive terminology used by a group of people to describe themselves.

When Hopkins and Fauset began to publish fiction they were aware of the sociopolitical climate, attitudes toward Negroes and women. They knew that their work required a publisher if it was to be read by or read to a larger

population. Publishers served as one of the gatekeepers for the ruling culture. Writers could be kept under surveillance via their work or at least publishers could make certain writers' work fit the publishers' ideologies. To preserve the moral conscience of "true women" publishers participated in reinforcing the code of true womanhood. Giddings found:

> As the women's magazines and romance literature of the period suggested, madness, sometimes death, and always tragedy were the fate of a woman who could not fulfill the "attributes" of true womanhood. To be lacking in any of those qualities meant a woman was unnatural, unfeminine, and thus a species of a different—if not lower—female order (48).

Hopkins and Fauset were clearly concerned with confronting issues of race, sex, women's rights, and economic class (to identify just a few points) propositions that were in conflict with what the masculine ruling culture wanted discussed. Furthermore, when it came to issues concerning Negro women, they were encouraged to focus on issues of racism, femininity or middle-class standards rather than women's issues. "Early in his public career even W. E. B. Du Bois, like [John] Hope, put femininity above feminism" (White, Too Heavy 67). With such opposition Hopkins and Fauset, therefore, had to mask their sociopolitical messages. In Hopkins' fiction the middle to upper-class characters are not necessarily who they seem to be. This is discussed in chapter three. She invites a reader to recall history and decloak or unmask the sociopolitical issues surrounding the mystery of who the individual character actually is or what s/he

are intended to represent. Hopkins makes it clear that the middle- to upper-class characters are in disguise. Likewise, she constructs her enslaved and working class characters with less ornamentation or genteel behavior and more vocal range. Enslaved or working-class Black folk become hidden in plain view or stereotyped, for those who accept banal characterizations. Consequently, they are considered by some critics as less complex, more comic and thus less apt to make complex sociopolitical statements, if they are acknowledged at all. In Hagar's Daughter, for example, the enslaved and working class Blacks speak Plantation Creole which seems to be a cue for some readers and critics that its speakers are comedic or worthy to be ignored. Moreover, I suspect that both Hopkins and Fauset understood the mockery of Black dialect and used Plantation Creole or Black English speaking characters to make statements that had nothing to do with comedy. In Moorings & Metaphors Karla Holloway observes that "in societies that are both racist and sexist, bias is a distinction of culture *as well as gender*" (sic 20). Certainly those who have a respect for African American Vernacular English (AAVE) could appreciate its' adapted use. In addition, it has become the custom in this country to mock and ridicule speakers of AAVE.

> The use that could be made of a rendering of Black English was familiar enough to northerners; such "humor" had been ubiquitous in the almanacs and the newspapers of the 1790s. But from the early years of the nineteenth century, when more African northerners were achieving their freedom, the character of both the

> humor and the black dialect took on a harder, nastier edge. This change is most easily seen in the jokes and broadsides concerning "Bobalition" (abolition), a brand of humor which was associated most closely with Boston, and which constitutes perhaps the earliest extensive and regular seam of black caricature in America (Sylin' 108).

Consequently, such speakers were perceived as unintelligent or nonscholarly by those who believed that the nineteenth century Boston, for example, and related versions of standard English were the only utterances civilized individuals employed. Therefore, one of the best places to deliver an important message or make a rebellious statement in fiction to a Negro and female audience could be with a Plantation Creole speaking Negro character. This simultaneously exposes the partiality of readers who automatically ignore such characters or view them as comic.

As mentioned, Hopkins was literary editor at Colored American Magazine. "Her writing for the journal included historical and social literature, asserted the bonds of racial brotherhood, and used biography, history, adventure and tradition in an attempt to render into words the unique experience of a people" (Carby 123). The Colored American Magazine was unique because it was a cooperative publishing venture, its target audience "American citizens of color," was "an attempt to define as well as create the boundaries of a black magazine-reading public and was therefore a pioneer of the contemporary black magazine market" (Carby 125). Hopkins (editor of the Women's Department) saw to it that Negro

women were represented in the magazine. Although her writings were not limited to fiction she believed that through fictions ability to entertain readers would discover the historical, cultural and political significance of Negro life. Her 1902, 1903 serialize novel, Of One Blood, reminds readers that there were a line of ruling women in Cush known as "Candaces"—"but the title of Candace was applied to just four—some say five—of these queen-mothers who became independent rulers" (Williams and Finch 20). Almost one hundred years since the publication of Of One Blood and many folk are still generally unaware of that fact today. Her melancholy protagonist Reuel Briggs studies super natural phenomenon, escapes unknowingly consummating an incestuous relationship and literally discovers his Ethiopian roots and finds his family. Though this is all most fascinating I wonder why this novel escaped critical attention until recently. Hopkins voice, like Wilson, is direct. Her fictional women challenge ruling culture's conventions of womanhood and her narrative voice deliberately intervenes to make certain a reader understands the intention of particular scenes. There are extensive topics and themes that Hopkins incorporates probably because her goal was to educate. Moreover, as a novelist she probably enjoyed less restrictive interference since her publisher was the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company.

Jessie Redmon Fauset was an important novelist, essayist and poet during the 1920s and 1930s. Between 1919 and 1926 Fauset was literary editor for The Crisis magazine. She also edited (1920-1921) its children's magazine, the Brownies Book. As a literary editor, Fauset was instrumental in publishing

the works of Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Anne Spencer and Jean Toomer. She discovered one of the most well-known and accomplished poets of the twentieth century, Langston Hughes. In his autobiography, The Big Sea, Hughes describes Fauset, Charles S. Johnson, and Alain Locke as the three "midwives" of the Harlem Renaissance (218). Like Hopkins, Fauset too was well connected in the literary realm.

Harlem Renaissance chronicler David L. Lewis describes the dinner, given for Fauset in When Harlem Was In Vogue, as "the dress rehearsal of what was soon to be known as the 'Harlem Renaissance'" (90). The legendary Civic Club Dinner (21 March 1924) was organized by Charles S. Johnson for Fauset's newly published book There Is Confusion. Carl Van Doren, Century magazine editor, spoke on "The Younger Generation of Negro Writers." Lewis writes, Van Doren advised a "happy balance between rage and complacency" (93). Van Doren concluded "What American literature decidedly needs at this moment is color, music, gusto, the free expression of gay or desperate moods. If the Negroes are not in a position to contribute these items, I do not know what Americans are" (93-94). Fauset's publisher Horace Liveright (Boni & Liveright) challenged "his competitors to test the waters of black talent with a few publishing contracts" (Lewis 94). Walter White, assistant secretary of the NAACP, urged "new writers to put aside racial stereotypes" (Lewis 94). The new generation of Negro writers were advised to pen cheerful conservative works befitting their experiences yet they should reflect assimilation while being cautious of what they wrote, to insure the publication of a few more Negro writers.

Although she met the suggested criteria the speakers espoused, Fauset faced difficulties finding a publisher for her first novel, There Is Confusion. "Publishers rejected her first manuscript because 'it contains no description of Harlem dives, no race riot, no picturesque, abject poverty'" according to Hiroko Sato (69). Sato charges such rejection indicates the real attitude of publishers to Negro writers. He, however, affirms that "the publication of her first novel was a memorable event in the Negro literary world" (67). W. E. B. Du Bois, Fauset's mentor, reported in the Crisis magazine that There Is Confusion "is not merely a race story told from the inside, but a cross section of the race life higher up the social pyramid and further from the base-line of the peasant and the soil than is usually taken" (162). Likewise, William Stanley Braithwaite reasons "She has taken a class within the race, given it an established social standing, tradition, culture, and shown that its predilections are very much like those of any civilized group of human beings" (210). Du Bois and Braithwaite viewed Fauset's There Is Confusion as an urban novel of manners and encouraged its sale.

David Lewis contends "Sales were to be good, and reviews in the white press were generally favorable, although Fauset was mistakenly described as the first female writer of fiction of her race" (123). However, Mary White Overton, in her syndicated column "Book Chat," questioned "if this colored world that Miss Fauset draws' really existed" (Lewis 124). Ms. Ovington echoes the apprehensions of a rejecting publisher who charged, "White readers just don't expect Negroes to be like this" (Lewis 124). Over fifty years later, Lewis proclaims,

> Yet the world of There Is Confusion was real. A few hundred families strong, living (like the author's own ancient Philadelphia family) on the margin of affluence in a style of worn fustian gentility, clinging to pedigree, color, and gracious manners, Fauset's characters have the straitened pretensions of aristocrats after a revolution (124).

Fauset is applauded, ostensibly, by some of the Negro intelligentsia for writing acceptable, affluent, polite Negro characters who do not riot or gamble. Yet, Fauset's novels are about different classes of women and a deconstruction of feminine politeness. Lewis is mistaken when he likens her characters to her own "ancient Philadelphia family." The last few paragraphs have described Fauset's first publication and its aftermath but little is heard of Fauset's voice or a sense of what she actually wrote about in the novel other than affluent Negroes. Like Hopkins, Fauset is concerned with history. Fauset is perceived as so gracious and ladylike that many critics neglected to see her humor and focus on the plight of middle-class Negro women. Chapter four will focus on Fauset's female constructs, related protests and other voices in her novels.

When Celia allows her natural voice to emerge, in Alice Walker's renowned novel The Color Purple, she is provoked to curse Mr. Mr. laughs. He disregards her words, offering the following reason: "Who you think you is? he say. You can't curse nobody. Look at you. You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam, he say, you nothing at all" (187). Though this is a more contemporary novel, Mr.'s remarks embody what happened when some African

American women characters spoke in literature, they were perceived as funny or ignored as "nothing at all."

I'm pore, I'm black, I maybe ugly and can't cook,
a voice say to everything listening.
But I'm here.
Alice Walker The Color Purple

Public Spaces and Literary Conventions—Charged Voices of Negro Women

Through voice and language the women emphasize the importance of history, identity, culture, the repression of women, the influence of racism, sexism and classism, and an aesthetic of African American womanhood in the United States. A chronicle of the many voices of Black women is another example of how power is exerted from the bottom up. Early African and African American women's literature was easily overlooked. To be heard the women in some manner had to assert themselves. I think it is important to keep in mind what Troutman identified as feminine politeness to compare it to what the women faced and how they voiced their positions in a few well documented circumstances.

Blyden Jackson marks the beginning of African American literature with the poem "Bars Fight" (29). Composed in 1746, "Bars Fight," a poem by a West African teenager (Lucy Terry) enslaved in Rhode Island, was published in "1855 in History of Western Massachusetts by Josiah Gilbert Holland" (Hine and Thompson 2). The poem commemorated the events of an Indian attack in Deerfield. Most scholars agree that one cannot tell Terry's nationality from the poem. Terry is characterized, by Jackson, as "a person of considerable vitality,

ability, and forcefulness of character," was "widely esteemed in Deerfield as a storyteller of parts" (30, 31). She believed in the American system and relied on her voice to articulate wrongs. When one of her sons was refused admission to Williams College on racial grounds Terry made "a three hour verbal appeal" quoting law and the Bible (Jackson 32). Though unsuccessful in gaining admittance for her son, she was victorious in her argument before the United States Supreme Court after one of her neighbors tried to claim her family's land. "Justice Chase said that Lucy made a better argument than he had heard from any lawyer at the Vermont bar" (Hine and Thompson 3). Terry is remembered in the area for being witty, shrewd and attracting boys to her house "to hear her talk" (Hine and Thompson 1). It appears she believed in talking up for what she believed and letting others know her stand on issues. By the way, if "Bar's Fight" signals the beginning of African American literature it should be stated that African American literature begins with the voice of an African woman.

When acknowledged, the public voices of African American women in the United States have been greeted with close scrutiny. Charles W. Akers finds that "early in her teens she [Phillis Wheatley] began writing poetry for her own amusement, but by New England standards her verse proved too good to escape notice" (1). Wheatley's 1773 volume, Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral, is prefaced by what appears to be one of the most imposing interviews visited upon a teenage or an adult poet. In a note to the public the leaders of the colony assure readers that "Phillis, a young Negro Girl, who was but a few Years since, brought an uncultivated Barbarian from Africa, and has ever since been,

and now is, under the Disadvantage of serving as a Slave in a Family in this Town. She has been examined by some of the best Judges, and is thought qualified to write them" (np). Her eighteen examiners included the governor and lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts, judges, attorneys and reverends all of whom are listed in the preface of her collection.

Sojourner Truth is said to have had a "powerful speaking manner and independent spirit;" as a result "she was often accused of being a man dressed in women's clothing" (Fish 19). To dispel the accusations, in Silver Lake, Indiana "she exposed her bared breasts to the audience which had accused her"[1] (Fish 20). Painter points out that Truth "responded with a tongue-lashing that shamed her questioners and impugned their manhood" (139). As Truth authenticated her womanliness for the coed Silver Lake audience she sassed some members by inviting them to suckle (Painter 139). Truth demonstrated that it would take more than labeling and taunting to make her voiceless.

Frances Ellen Watkins Harper raised questions concerning her femininity as a writer, speaker and abolitionist during the mid-nineteenth century. Frances Smith Foster makes clear that during "the mid-nineteenth century professional women speakers were rare and highly suspect. Women who spoke in pubic to mixed audiences were considered by most people to lack good sense and high moral character" (Foster 11). "Denying the womanliness of women speaking in public was a familiar ploy. Hostile audiences questioned the sexual identity of American women ... like the antislavery poet Frances Ellen Watkins Harper...The challenge was to the woman's authenticity" (Painter 139).

Ostensibly the intense insults and scorn was meant to expose Wheatley, Truth or Harper as frauds and thus to render them voiceless.

During their lifetime, Wheatley, Truth and Harper were public figures and Terry was a private citizen. Nevertheless, Wheatley, Truth, Harper and Terry confronted authorities, claimed their right to speak and were heard. Was their experience unique to women in the public arena or did African American women in the private sphere face a similar battle in laying claim to their voices? Terry seems to be a woman of some economic standing in her community. Although the public women represent different economic classes they each, seemingly, responded to a need to articulate their oppressions and the degradation and humiliations of their people. Black women, it seems, believe that they have a right to articulate their concerns to whom they choose and where and when they find the need. Their use of voice becomes more of a revolutionary act when considering that the antebellum courts also worked to silence Black women.

In 1855 the value and meaning of the voice of an enslaved black woman and her womanhood was defined legally; thus providing a legal basis on which to judge the voices of other black women. The 1855 antebellum case of the State of Missouri v Celia[2] more directly demonstrates the attempted dehumanizing relegation of black women to voicelessness in the United States, and justified ignoring our voices. As has been pointed out time and again, Celia was a young woman without a last name. Apparently the court recorders did not see fit to offer a surname. At the age of fourteen, Celia was purchased by Robert Newsom, a seventy-year-old farmer in 1850. On the way home, the licentious

Newsom stopped to rape Celia. "The historical record indicates that this was very likely Celia's initial sexual experience" (McLaurin 25). Subsequently, Newsom was the father of one of Celia's children and he was rumored to be the father of her other child as well. According to Leon Higginbotham's account Celia had been sick since February of 1855.

> One witness at her later trial testified that she threatened to hurt her slavemaster if he continued to force her to have sexual intercourse with him while she was sick. From the summarized testimony, one could find that on June 23, 1855, Celia told Newsom that she would hurt him if he would not stop sexually abusing her. The master had told her that he was "coming down to her cabin that night." She told him not to come and that she would hurt him if he came. Celia then "armed herself with a stick." He came down that night, and she struck him with the stick twice. He apparently died immediately. (Shades of Freedom 100).

Although Newsom believed that there was no reason to listen to Celia's warning to leave her alone, witnesses heard her admonition. Celia, it is said, apprised Newsom of her intent to be left alone in front of others. According to McLaurin, "it is almost certain that Celia approached Virginia and Mary" (Newsom's two daughters) (31). McLaurin maintains that Celia, without the support of a slave community, or any community "was forced to confront her dilemma alone" (31). The judge, like Newsom, found that statutorily, as a Black woman, Celia did not have a right of self defense, that it was not "a crime to defile her by duress or

force" (Higginbotham 1996 100). In short Newsom had no legal reason to listen to Celia's warning. Apparently he purchased her for sex labor and that is what he acted on prior to his death. She was convicted of murder in the first degree and sentenced to be hanged. After conviction Celia's only legitimate worth to the ruling culture was as breeder. Therefore, she was not hanged until she gave birth. Her baby was stillborn.

Celia's case is a blatant and *perhaps* extreme example of the voice of a Black woman being ignored, her identity obscured, and her life doubly stolen to prove that Black women may have the power to keep their pledge but ultimately lacked power over their bodies. As a young woman, Celia bore the responsibility of defending herself. After years of abuse she told others and directly warned Newsom to leave her alone, then armed herself with a stick. As a woman and as a slave Celia was certainly an individual whose only reliable means or resources were within herself. Knowing the consequences of her actions, Celia recognized the value in her voice and gave herself permission to fight back. Celia is one example of many enslaved and formerly enslaved African American women in this country who utilized the most familiar tool at their disposal to reinforce their humanity, satisfy their psyches, articulate their experiences, express their intent and attempt to combat abuses—their voices. Celia, clearly, was as good as her word.

Some of the places to study the voices of African American women during the nineteenth century are diaries, newspapers, oral interviews, speeches, literature and women's escaped and former slave narratives, and the Schomburg

Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers collection. Nineteenth-century women's narratives are a good place to begin because the narratives establish a tradition of voice and public response. In his foreword to the Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers Collection Henry Louis Gates, Jr., demonstrates that "the progenitor of the black literary tradition was a woman" (x). He goes on to acknowledge that "despite this pioneering role of black women in the tradition... many of their contributions before this century have been all but lost or unrecognized" (xi). Although black women writers dominated the final decade of the nineteenth century, Gates adds that:

> many of the books reprinted in this set experienced a similar fate, the most dreadful fate for an author: that of being ignored then relegated to the obscurity of the rare book section of a university library. We can only wonder how many other texts in the black woman's tradition have been lost to this generation of readers or remain unclassified or uncatalogued and, hence, unread (xii).

Ignoring the works of African American women writers is tantamount, for me, to dismissing what the women had to say. Furthermore, because there is a tradition of overlooking the works of Black women writers, critics decide who they will critique and what is commendable in the texts. Critiques often parallel the aesthetics and thoughts of the general public—i.e., who is worthy, who is a heroine, and who and what is beautiful. This is also a justification as to why McIntosh, a woman, can write an essay on how vocal Black women should talk

to Black men in relationships. As one can see from the State of Missouri v. Celia the emotions, physical ailment and voice of a Black woman were statutorily valueless against unwanted sexual assault and state sanctioned death. But if he valued his life he would heed her words.

Our Nig is the first novel published in the United States by an African American in 1859; it is another location to begin a discussion on power, voice and voicelessness. Racial constructions of gender, class and sexuality tensions in this novel begin with its title and title page. It reads:

OUR NIG

or,

Sketches from the Life of a Free Black,

In a Two-Story White House, North

SHOWING THAT SLAVERY'S SHADOWS FALL EVEN THERE.

BY "OUR NIG"

The title cover sheet suggests the race and gender of its author. The title begins with the possessive Our Nig. All in capital letters (OUR NIG), it highlights an expletive; moreso, it represents an introduction and a vociferation or bellow from a group of individuals, connected in some way, who claim custody or tenure to the free Black described on the third line. The free Black tells the potential reader that the book contains sketches from her/his life, not from the life of a "Nig" living in Southern bondage, but one living in the North, period. One imagines that up to that point the potential reader has hypothesized that the story takes place in the antebellum South. The parenthetical placement of the

significant but unexpected location, "North," is anything but incidental; it directly confronts Northern residents who liked to frown on the brutality and gaucheness of Southerners. The author then reinforces the emphasis on the North by alerting or reminding the public, in all capital letters, that her/his take will be "Showing that Slavery's Shadows Fall Even There." The author seems determined to let the public know that in 1859 the South was not the only place that misused, oppressed, and subjugated human beings. Blyden Jackson also finds that the title "argue[s] against too much optimism in comparing the lot of the Negro in the North with the corresponding disposition of the Negro in the South" (351-352). In the spirit of continuing to air what some (Northerners?) would want to be hidden, the author identifies him/herself as "Our Nig" (enclosed within quotation marks). This mocking reinforcement of "Our Nig," as author, is derisive, caustic and (with tongue in cheek) playful ridicule. "Our Nig" claims voice and talks back.

This mixture of direct address with "in yo face signifiyin" in this declamatory title is usually attributed to Negro women identified in other nineteenth-century narratives as sassy or saucy. Like the market women of Charleston, South Carolina "Our Nig" is disorderly (in terms of the ruling culture) because her speech, manner, tone and thesis are less than accommodating by Northern standards of mid nineteenth century day. Moreover, with increased disregard to public opinion, but acknowledging the public's preoccupation with women's morality and racial prejudice, "Our Nig" employs selected verse (by Holland) on the title page to remind the public that for many women, virtue is

crucified, the guiltless suffer bloody punishments and innocent gentle spirits respond to heavenly guise only to fall prey to the ubiquitous temptations of hell. Moving beyond the poetic metaphors, the author testifies to and manipulates the situational and ideological contexts of the time on her title page by bringing issues of race, gender and class into focus as she simultaneously begins to offer a vocal but unembodied critique of power. I think it is clear that the author of Our Nig is unquestionably a Black woman—Harriet Wilson.

At a time when the literacy rate for Negroes was minimal, Wilson directly appeals to "...my colored brethren universally for patronage, hoping they will not condemn this attempt of their sister to be erudite, but rally around me a faithful band of supporters and defenders" (Preface). She also directs her book to "my colored brethren universally" rather than to "the refined and cultivated" (Preface). It appears that Wilson is appealing to a working or enslaved class of colored folk. Harryette Mullen in "Runaway Tongue" states that writers like Wilson "conscious of the inaccessibility of literacy to the majority of black women, deploy the trope of orality to represent in their texts a 'social diversity of speech types' or 'heteroglossia'" (254). Wilson's numerous unpleasant experiences make her publicize what she believes needs to be known or reinforced to a public with the understanding that she could expect some sort of a backlash, as example by her selection of poetry on the front page of her novel.

I wonder if Wilson, like the other nineteenth century women discussed in chapter two, expected decades of critical textual voicelessness as her punishment for sassin a public that allowed a child like Frado (Wilson's

protagonist) to be unloved and tortured? Curiously, Wilson's unequivocally historic novel remained in the shadows for over sixty years. Regarding the disappearance of Wilson and her novel Gates conducted an exhaustive search for critiques on Wilson's novel, which he details in the introduction. Although he researched many sources for some mention of Wilson's work (Catalogue of Anti-Slavery Publications in America, 1750-1863, U.S. Bureau of Education Report of 1893-1894, and Catalogue of Rare Books and Pamphlets...upon Subjects relating to the Past Condition of the Colored Race and the Slavery Agitation in this Country 1894) including "late nineteenth and early twentieth-century black biographical dictionaries" he was unable to find any mention of Our Nig (xxxi-xxxii). Gates goes on to mention more omissions. Such disregard would lead one to question if Wilson existed at all regardless if she were a Black woman. Her identity is confirmed by Gates, in one way, by matching Wilson's name "that appears on the copyright page of the first edition of Our Nig" to a name listed on the obituary of George Mason Wilson (Wilson's son) as it appeared in the Amherst, New Hampshire's Farmer's Cabinet (xiii). I, like Gates and other scholars, am curious as to why Wilson's historically significant Boston publication was ignored. To compound this disregard, "...Boston in 1859, [was] a veritable center of abolitionist reform and passion, and ...a growing black press [was] eager to celebrate all black achievement in the arts and sciences" (xxx). Neither Gates nor historians Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson (A Shining Thread of Hope) know why Our Nig was ignored. However, Gates points out that Wilson's "...text seems to have been ignored or overlooked both by her 'colored

brethren universally' and by even the most scrupulous scholars during the next one hundred and twenty-three years, for reasons as curious and as puzzling as they are elusive, reasons about which we can venture rather little more than informed speculation" (xiii-xiv). He speculates that Wilson's bold themes and title were reasons for her silencing. More specifically, I believe Wilson and her work were forced into a critical voicelessness because there was not one literary critic or historian willing to testify to the significance of Our Nig.

What does it mean to testify? In Black Talk Geneva Smitherman defines testify as: "in the Traditional Black Church to give affirmation to the power and truth of something; when Gittin the Spirit, people often testify. By extension, to celebrate through verbal acknowledgement the greatness of anything, or one's strong feelings about something" (222). Testify according to Clarence Major, in Juba to Jive, means "to confess one's sins, bad deeds, life story (originally in church but now in music, in literature, and through other forms of art); to ritually comment upon any cultural experience understood by all black people; a secular or religious confession" (469). Testifyin in church could also be considered part of the emotionally charged religious services of many black churches which many middle-class colored folk found shameful. Late nineteenth century early twentieth century found many middle and upper-class colored folk promoting cultural refinement and intellectual development rather than emotionally charged religious practices, of which testimony is a part. "The educated ministry and laity in the late nineteenth century commonly encouraged a less demonstrative worship style than the 'shout,' bodily movement, or moaning and clapping

prevalent among the folk" (E. Higginbotham, 1993, 44). When I invoke aspects of testimony embedded within its use is also a question of economic class. Wilson recognizes this when she makes the distinction between "my colored brethren universally" rather than to "the refined and cultivated" (Preface). As stated previously, it could be such a marking that contributed to her silencing. Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary Tenth Edition defines testify as: "to make a statement based on personal knowledge or belief: bear witness...to serve as evidence of proof. To express personal conviction. To make a solemn declaration under oath for the purpose of establishing a fact (as in a court)" (1218). Merriam-Webster's definition is also part of testifyin without the celebration, emotion, culture and economic class. Nevertheless, it is the testifyin quality in their works that make the voices of the women stand out to me.

Karla Holloway, argues for an Afrocentric interpretive model for black women's literature, while focusing on metaphors she identifies a transformational-generative theory "language is understood to have at least two levels of meaning—one having to do with performance, and the other with comprehension" (22). The surface structure of the language, for example the traditional lexicon theory (white, male and Western), Holloway finds are "semantically meager in comparison to the linguistic deep structures they represent. In these (deeper) places, the sounds and sense of culture and experience generate within the linguistic surface structures" (22). The nineteenth-century narratives bear witness to the fact that the women existed; but more than that, they testify to what it meant to be a Black woman in the

nineteenth century Southern United States. However, within each text exists places "within the linguistic surface structures" where some readers can "witness" culture and experiences of African American women. Even today, 2001, there are folk who understand the strange dance involved in being referred to as "Our Nig." There are more who would glory in the power step that mocks and puts back in yo face the same name you tried to condescend and oppress me wit. In a testifyin mode, I attempted to recreate Black English in the previous sentence. Further, in responding to their testifyin there are times when I believe my sister/ancestors need the acknowledgement of a capital letter/proper noun when standard English deems it inappropriate. I incorporate a capital 'B' for Black women or I use the proper noun Negro which also speaks to a particular time frame in American history. The storytellers want the readers to feel the power of their experiences but for a testifyin tribute the reader must go beyond the surface structure of text and acknowledge the passion involved in the women's experience.

Though I have limited my discussion of Our Nig to the title page and Wilson's Preface, Mullen is also compelled to comment on the language of main women characters in this novel:

> The novel's protagonist, Frado, counters the compartmentalized language of the "two-story white house" with a resistant sassiness, while the narrator appropriates the literate, public, and euphemistic language of the sentimental novel and condemns Mrs. Bellmont for the private, abusive speech she uses, as she-devil of the house, to

> discipline the colored servant confined with her to the domestic sphere. Because Frado's sass challenges the assumption that her body "belongs" in the kitchen rather than the parlor, or elsewhere, (254-255).

It is not until Our Nig reemerged, toward the end of the twentieth century, that critics have had an opportunity to respond to the voices in Wilson's novel. Wilson's voice in the Preface is direct. The reader is able to see Frado, the protagonist, come to voice.

Well over a hundred years after its publication, this reemergence begins to dismantle the critical voicelessness and give way to new exploration of Our Nig. K. Holloway (1992) finds in the African American literary tradition there is a displacement of the hegemony of Western ideology with the "occupation of the necromancers—the creative crafters of the word—within the black literary tradition. Their contemporary and historical work persistently dislocates the superstitions of Western ideologies (23-24). Wilson's work was easily forgotten because "its motivation has been to assert the voice and to affirm the humanity that the Western world has conspired to suppress and deny. ... An essential loss of critical substance occurs in this failed acknowledgment. The dialectic between the critical audience and the text is diminished. A result of this subjective/objective fragmentation is theoretical invisibility or silence" (K. Holloway 23). In articulating her own cultural identity Wilson wanted to negate white stereotypes of blacks and "in their place insert a black worldview or standpoint" (E. Higginbotham 15). Evelyn Higginbotham underlines the

importance of "the dialogic racial representations effected by blacks themselves against negative representations—or more precisely, blacks' appropriation of the productive power of language for the purpose of resistance" (15). Wilson unquestionably claims her power to tell her story beginning with her title. Because she had the power of the pen, she inverted, subverted and played with "our nig."

Critical voicelessness, like voice, can assume many forms. In Boston, 1861, two years after the publication of Wilson's Our Nig Harriet Jacobs, using the pseudonym Linda Brent, published the now classic account of her twenty-seven years in slavery in her narrative titled, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. Like Our Nig this narrative also suffered critical silence. One can immediately see the difference in voice between Wilson and Jacobs. An enslaved North Carolinian woman by birth and a bit more diplomatic than Wilson, Jacobs asserts on the title page that "'Northerners know nothing at all about Slavery...They have no conception of the depth of *degradation* involved...if they had, they would never cease their efforts until so horrible a system was overthrown'" (sic n. pag.). Wilson, a Northerner, would differ with Jacobs' observation; however, I do not think she would differ with Jacobs in urging that the North continue efforts to dismantle slavery. Jacobs also worked with abolitionists and identified her audience as "the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse" this too may also account for her literary diplomacy

(Preface). Although diplomatic, Jacobs makes it clear that enslaved Black women lived under very different conditions than Euro American women.

Today Incidents is heralded as an historic text unique in the annals of escape slave narratives. However, during most of the twentieth century Incidents was believed to be a fraud. Ironically, Mary Helen Washington finds that:

> In his 1972 edition of his landmark study of slave narratives, Slave Testimony, John Blassingame dismisses Jacobs's story as too melodramatic to be authentic. Using the male slave narrative as the standard, Blassingame cannot accept this "nonstandard" female slave narrative with its peculiar form, the many examples of "miscegenation and outraged virtue, unrequited love, and planter licentiousness appear on practically every page" (sic 7).

John Blassingame's conclusion, one hundred and eleven years after the publication of Incidents, demonstrates how an eminent historian can continue the disruption and repression of a black female voice.

In order to reinforce cultural identity, articulate racial and gender oppressions and provide psychic relief from subjugation, Black women writers use sass as an aspect of oral communication style. "Linda [Jacobs] uses sass the way that Frederick Douglass used his fists and his feet, as a means of resistance" (Braxton 32). Like Wilson when identifying the author as "Our Nig," Jacobs uses sass and indirection but hers is a more feminine double entendre. Mullen asserts:

> within the oral tradition black women have been anything but silent, unless literally beaten, muzzled, starved, or otherwise suppressed to the point of speechlessness. As for black women writers, if anything, their discursive silencing has been itself a by-product of literacy and of their inability to control sites and conditions of their own textual production, or ensure it an appropriate reception (259).

On the cover sheet the author is identified as "Written by Herself." The escaped slave narrative convention identified authors as "Written by Himself;" however, the name of the escaped slave usually appeared in the title. For example: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself, History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave. Related by Herself and Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave Written by himself. Claiming authorship in ways such as Wilson and Jacobs calls attention to the collective abuses enslaved Blacks and women suffered at that time. Also on her title page Jacobs immediately addresses her intended audience. "'Rise up, ye women that are at ease! Hear my voice, ye careless daughters! Give ear unto my speech'" (n. pag.). She is urging true women, with exclamation, to action. Jacobs immediately insures that her voice is softened for public consumption with the inclusion of her famous editor's name on her cover—L. Maria Child.

Jacobs assumes the format of both an escaped slave narrative and the sentimental novel. The tone of this merger also causes Jacobs to appear less

assertive than Wilson. In her introduction to the Schomburg edition of Incidents, Valerie Smith critiques the genres Jacobs appropriates:

> Jacobs's readers were accustomed to a certain degree of propriety and circumlocution in fiction. In keeping with cultural injunctions against women's assertiveness and directness in speech, the literature they wrote and read tended to be "exercises in euphemism" that excluded certain subjects from the purview of fiction. The tension between the decorousness of the genre and the urgency of the slave woman's situation thus underscores how inadequate the sentimental novel's techniques are in telling Jacobs's story. They fail, like those of the slave narrative, to meet the demands of her situation. If the male context of the slave narrative renders her invisible, then so too do the white middle-class assumptions of the sentimental novel marginalize her (xxxiii).

Jacobs then is attempting to speak, navigating between "multiple and complex social, historical, and cultural positionalities" (Henderson 19). Again, here is the emphasis that Black women's voices must attempt to be pliable and adaptable while simultaneously moored in African American Vernacular Culture. Conversely, Smith sees the power of Jacobs' voice in her narrative.

> ...although Jacobs's account is closely circumscribed by the conventions of these two genres, she is able to negotiate her way around their limitations in a manner similar to the way she negotiates her freedom. By manipulating linguistic spaces—verbal

> equivalents analogous to the garret in which she hides for several years and from which she orchestrates her freedom—she interrogates the two genres and points out their inadequacy to her story (xxxiii).

Although Jacobs appealed to a particular audience her testimonial voice is loud and clear: "I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery really is" (Preface). Mae Gwendolyn Henderson observes "black women writers enter into testimonial discourse with black men as blacks, with white women as women, and with black women as black women" (20). In a related footnote Henderson goes on to state:

> Black women enter into dialogue with other black women in a discourse that I would characterize as primarily testimonial, resulting from a similar discursive and social positionality. It is this commonality of history, culture, and language which, finally, constitutes the basis of a tradition of black women's expressive culture. In terms of actual literary dialogue among black women, I would suggest a relatively modern provenance of such a tradition, but again, one based primarily on a dialogue of affirmation rather than contestation (217 n15).

Issues of testifyin enter this discussion often; for that reason I intend to include Testifyin Theory as my approach to the materials in this dissertation.

> To testify theory is to acknowledge that African American testimonial discourse has been a site for "insurgent black

> intellectual life." It is to affirm that one of multiple locations for theory production is the oral tradition and that testifying as a speech act within black church services has always been preceded by the open invitation, "Can I get a witness?" It is not simply the learned who may answer this call, but anyone who is lucid, the granny as well as the scholar (Lee 79-80).

Testifyin Theory Represents an Angle of Vision...

As I have tried to make clear, when one testifies another must be there to witness. To witness, however, one must connect, relate or feel energy of the testimony. Witnessing is an inspired act causing one to respond in some way. One witnesses in various ways—nod of the head, a raised arm with an opened palmed hand, standing, tears, clapped hands, such actions may include the following mournful or jubilant exclamations "yess," "Aman," "mmm," uh ha" and so on. As part of the oral tradition witnessing is a spontaneous act of discernment, comprehension, awareness and agreement. There is an unmistakable testifyin quality in the conjure women stories to whom Charles Chesnutt devotes a book.

An example of the curious but blatant literary critical stereotyping and voicelessness of Plantation Creole speakin Black women can be found in the work of another Negro writer from North Carolina, Charles W. Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman. Unlike Wilson and Jacobs, Chesnutt's literary fame has remained consistent since his turn of the century publications. The Conjure

Woman is generally hailed for its sense of justice and plantation tales that differed from Thomas Nelson Page, Harry Stillwell Edwards, George W. Cable and so on. In his introduction to The Conjure Woman, Robert M. Farnsworth finds that Chesnutt abandoned "the sentimental fantasy of plantation life..., he was deliberately cautious in what he said to a white audience whom he suspected of being hostile and knew to be uninformed" (vii). Although the book is a series of frame stories, those filtered through the "folk" wisdom of the character Julius include stories that feature the exploits of several conjure women and one conjure man. "The Goophered Grapevine" and "Po' Sandy" are often anthologized. Ironically, rarely does a critic focus on the contributions of the conjure woman or women. I find this especially bizarre because Chesnutt titles his collection The Conjure Woman and not Uncle Julius' Plantation Tales. If the conjure women characters were removed from the stories "The Goophered Grapevine" could not exist and "Po' Sandy['s]" life would be quite different, for example. Farnsworth acknowledges "implications in the folk nature of the stories" that hinge on "blacks' identification with mysterious natural forces" (xiv). Perhaps the references to "mysterious natural forces" is Farnsworth's coded description for Chesnutt's conjure women; otherwise he fails to acknowledge their significance to the collection. Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman is significant for many reasons; however, I am concerned with the orality of the Black characters and the fact that the occupation of the woman is respected and uniquely ascribed to people of color in this country. In her unconventional study Granny Midwives & Black Women Writers, Valeria Lee appropriately reminds

readers that "rather than the negative associations of witchcraft, conjuring has been an empowering concept for many black women. Nancy and Peggy's angle of vision suggests that conjuration is one of the most natural abilities/skills of which to avail ones self. Conjuring pays homage to an African past, while providing a present day idiom for magic, power, and ancient wisdom within a pan-African cultural context" (13). Chesnutt's book, The Conjure Woman demonstrates, that Plantation Creole, Black dialect or Black speech placed within the mouths of Black women reinforce the stereotyping and voicelessness that related Negro women characters suffered in literature.

Chesnutt's conjure woman, Peggy, is described as a single, self-employed Negro woman who has her own cabin in a neighborhood of free blacks. She is specially trained, expects respect, is approachable but perceived as dangerous by the community. In addition to being a conjure woman who "'could wuk de mos' powerfulles' kin' er goopher'" Julius discloses "...'she wuz a witch 'sides being' a cunjuh 'oman'" (15). In "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," Chesnutt assumes the role of ventriloquist and demonstrates the communication style of two Negro women in antebellum North Carolina and how they worked together to solve a familial betrayal. "Sis" is a telling aspect of the title because the women (Peggy and Nancy) work together like sisters to bring about a solution for, their sister of the skin, Becky. Nancy is the plantation nurse who cares for the children while the parents are forced to work in the fields. Becky's son is Mose. His father was sold away, and subsequently, Becky too is sold without Mose. Nancy assumes responsibility for Mose who becomes sick for want of his mother. Although the

mistress of the house found Mose a "lackly little nigger" whom she would be willing to summon a doctor to examine, Nancy decided to take Mose to Peggy, the conjure woman along with an offering of green peas (145). Like market women, Nancy and Peggy begin to haggle:

> "'Dat is a monst' us small mess er peas you is fotch me,'
>
> "'Yas, I knows,'...'but dis yere is a monst' us small pickaninny.'
>
> "'You'll hafter fetch me sump' n mo',...'fer you can't spec' me ter was'e my time diggin' roots en wukkin' cunj'ation fer nuffin.'
>
> "...'I'll fetch you sump'n mo' nex' time."
>
> "'You bettah,' sez Aun' Peggy, 'er e'se dey'll be trouble. W'at dis yet little pickaninny needs is ter see his mammy. You leabe 'im heah 'tel ebenin' en I'll show 'im his mammy'" (146).

Peggy uses an assertive, direct tone with Nancy. Nancy hears the culturally intoned 'monst' and 'marks'[3] it in a humorous and indirect way in her response. This is the first and only time in the collection that an individual challenges Peggy (face to face) about her unspoken fee. Peggy is a professional and demands respect as demonstrated by her direct response to Nancy when she described why she requires an increase. Acknowledging the skillfulness of Peggy's work Nancy is still direct, open and bold when she tells Peggy "...nex' time." However, when will next time arrive? Once Peggy is satisfied with Nancy's recognition of her position the signifyin smart talk continues and Peggy has the last word and keeps Mose with her. Peggy does not tell or send Nancy to bring something

back immediately or give her a date to return her payment—in Colored People's Time (CP time) next time could be any time in the future. Peggy ends their exchange with humor and indirection toward Nancy—"'er e'se dey'll be trouble.'" Peggy's final remark marks her peer status with Nancy. "Among peers...smart talk is revered, applauded, and celebrated because of the mental skill and acuity required in outsmarting a conversational partner" (van Dijk, Ting-Toomey, Smitherman and Troutman 156). Peggy, more relaxed, offers an apparent diagnosis and tells Nancy to leave Mose with her until the evening. The exchange between Nancy and Peggy demonstrates a bit of the complex communication styles Black women include. They are direct but respectful in their speech and there seems to be signifyin on Nancy's part.

Their direct verbal exchange gives way to comfortable, pleasant and playful articulations. Nancy gets tired of taking Mose back and forth and finding items with which to pay Peggy and she proposes: "'Aun' Peggy, ain' dey no way **you** kin fetch Sis' Becky back home?'" (emphasis mine 150).

"'Huh! I dunno 'bout dat. I'll hafter wuk my roots en fin' out whuther I kin er no. But it'll take a monst'us heap er wuk, en I can't was'e my time fer nuffin. Ef you'll fetch me sump'n ter pay me fer my trouble, I reckon **we** kin fix it'" (emphasis mine 150). Peggy's tone is even more comfortable with Nancy. They communicate like sisters who have taken on the responsibility of a toddler. Neither Mose's plight nor Nancy's compassion must be suffered alone. Peggy's use of the pronoun "we" indicates that responsibility for solving this situation rests on both women—Peggy and Nancy. Nevertheless, Peggy maintains that she

must be paid for her services. She no longer condescends to offer another obvious prognosis of the situation, only that she be given some compensation for her "trouble." Nancy offers her Sunday head-handkerchief and asks "'Will dat do?'" (150). A pleased Peggy "look' at de head-handkercher, en run her han' ober it, en sez she:—'Yas, dat'll do fus' –rate'" (151). It appears that Peggy appreciates the dignity and grace of Nancy's offering; furthermore, there must be an impregnable relationship between the women for Nancy to make a gift to the conjure woman of something that she has kept so close to her body. Peggy and Nancy's selfless acts reunite mother (Becky) and with her son who later frees his mother and himself. Peggy and Nancy's accomplished good deed is its own reward.

Robert Bone devotes thirteen pages to Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman, and six or seven lines to Peggy—the conjure woman. Peggy is undoubtedly the conjure woman to whom Chesnutt's title refers. Bone mentions the name Aunt Peggy when summarizing the story "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny," Chesnutt's abbreviated version of Biblical Moses. Bone holds that mother (Becky) and son (Mose) in the end are "reunited, but not until the devious maneuvers of a conjure woman trick the white folks into canceling the trade" (86). Like Nancy and Peggy, Bone too has an angle of vision. In the following paragraph, Bone decides to name the "devious maneuvering conjure woman." He states that "the center of the fable consists of two metamorphoses performed by Aunt Peggy, the plantation conjure woman" (86). Overall Bone fictionally affirms "the blacks, however, with their belief in magic, conjuration, and the like, are seen to possess

in ample measure the saving quality of imagination. ...Bourgeois civilization, in short, suffers from a contempt for the imagination" (86). Bernard W. Bell in The Afro American Novel and its Tradition, (identified as an update or replacement for Bone's The Negro Novel in America), uses less space to ignore Aunt Peggy and her ilk, and states that "Uncle Julius ...spins off a series of wry wonder tales that exploit the ignorance of whites about the ways of black folk while simultaneously affirming the humanity of both" (65). Peggy and Nancy represent camaraderie among the oppressed women, resistance to the degradations of slavery and triumph over corruption.

Though Charles W. Chesnutt like his stories from the book The Conjure Woman are remembered by critics and in literary collections, why is the conjure woman, as a character, quickly forgotten by many scholars? Sociolinguist Keith Gilyard, in his study Let's Flip the Script, credits Chesnutt use of "alternate voices" in "The Goophered Grapevine" and "Dave's Neckliss"[4] (54). As previously stated, Chesnutt titles his book The Conjure Woman for a reason. It seems to me that he wanted to feature the conjure woman, not make her invisible. In addition, the conjure women in the book are round and often heroic characters in many instances. One could argue that Chesnutt suppresses the voices of the conjure women within the frame of his collection. However, I believe that his title forces the conjure women from the confines of the frame to a critically larger portion of this work. I believe it is Peggy's voice, confidence, abilities, sense of fair play rather the verisimilar nature of her character that make

some readers want to ignore her—she's too accomplished. Yet, when one looks from an angle of vision similar to Peggy and Nancy, they stand out.

Chesnutt's conjure women suffer the same critical silencing that was meted out to Wilson, Jacobs, many nineteenth-century Black women writers, Hopkins, Fauset, and others. Chesnutt was redeemed, I assume, by his maleness. As a writer Chesnutt is remembered; he is even remembered for penning The Conjure Woman though few, it seems, can recall who or what the significance is of the conjure woman. Rickford and Rickford, in Spoken Soul, assert that "through the years, the caravan of black storytellers who spun yarns with the vernacular did so because they acknowledged, publicly or privately, that 'homely' speech patterns carried currency in their own community" (16). More specifically, it is apparent that Chesnutt recreated the speech patterns of women he probably heard as a child. Perhaps he tapped into what Collins calls a Black women's standpoint, a standpoint that carries currency with a certain community of women. It is from that angle of vision that Peggy and Nancy, for example, can be appreciated. The sass, use of Plantation Creole and other aspects of voice of Negro women in nineteenth century writing, for example, is valuable for those who recognize the testifyin quality and the harmony of their multi-voiced messages. Ignoring or minimizing the voices of Negro women has deprived American literature of wider audiences and other critical insights. "Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social

structure" (Collins 5). The voices of Black women in literature offer insight into how women met the social structure.

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins' birth and novel publication mark two significant moments in literary history. At the same time that Chesnutt's The Conjure Woman appears, Hopkins copyrighted her first novel Contending Forces—1899. Moreover, Hopkins is born in Portland, Maine, 1859, the same year that Wilson published her novel, Our Nig. Interestingly, many early Negro women writers honed their writing skills in the East or more specifically as in the instance of Harriet Wilson in New England—Lucy Terry, Phillis Wheatley, Ann Plato, Nancy Gardener Prince, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, for example. Hopkins grew up in Boston and begins to gain literary recognition at the age of fifteen as a student in Boston Girls High School. According to Ann Allen Shockley, William Wells Brown, "first black novelist and playwright," presented Hopkins with her "prize of ten dollars in gold for writing the best essay on the 'Evils of Intemperance and Their Remedy'" (289). Five years later, "she continued her writing pursuits as a playwright, composing a four-act musical drama, "'Peculiar Sam; or, the Underground Railroad (1879)'" (Shockley 289). In 1880, Hopkins along with her family and others performed a modified version of her play to receptive audiences. Shockley also states "The Hopkins Colored Troubadours also gave recitals and concerts ...Pauline was praised by the press for her 'beautiful voice' and was called 'Boston's favorite Colored Soprano'" (290). It must have been quite a confidence builder to have one's voice reaffirmed in such positive ways, by parents, friends, strangers, and the press, while so young. Such

accomplishments and accolades must have reassured Hopkins that not only did she have something to say, but the public was eager to hear and respond. Hopkins, therefore, had a voice that was acknowledged, accepted and recognized, not one made voiceless. Additionally, she became a stenographer working for two affluent Republican politicians and later for the Bureau of Statistics on the Massachusetts Census of 1895. I assume Hopkins realized that she needed a skill in addition to writing. Shockley points out that Hopkins also lectured on black history in churches and schools during the four years she worked for the Census. Hopkins, it appears, was steadfast and energetic in her pursuit of educating the public. Her legacy is one of struggle, creativity and literary achievements.

Chapter two will focus on Hopkins' serialized novel Hagar's Daughter. I will take a close look at the characters with particular attention given to women's voice. In my discussion of the character Venus Johnson, I will demonstrate how Hopkins use of Plantation Creole/dialect/Black English is linked to minstrelsy in literary criticism. Claudia Tate in Domestic Allegories of Political Desire and Kristina Brooks in her essay, "Mammies, Bucks, and Wenches" agree that the working-class, Ebonic speaking, character Venus can not be the heroine of Hagar's Daughter. I intend to challenge their positions. Additionally, their points of view help to reinforce some of the reasons how and why working-class Black women are made voiceless in literature. Hopkins' working-class women characters reflect a polyphonic discourse—they speak through more than one language at once. Additionally, the chapter will compare the characteristics of

female characters who speak standard English to those who speak Plantation Creole—their familial and romantic relations, economic class, heroine status, intellect, and whether they are assertive or passive, for example. Finally, in the spirit of testifyin theory the chapter will listen to what the women characters testify. This analysis includes the clarifyin and attentive narrative voice. The narrative voice occasionally and heavy handedly interrupts the flow of the novel to make sure the reader understands the point being made. Hopkins employs the term amalgamation and critics generally agree that that is Hopkins' message to the larger society. After highlighting the testifyin voices in Hagar's Daughter this chapter will examine what the idea of unity possibly meant for the women in Hagar's Daughter. Ultimately, I believe it is the testifyin quality in Hagar's Daughter and her other works that lead John Gruesser specifically to characterize Hopkins as The Unruly Voice.

Just as Wilson's voice testifies to questionable intentions of some abolitionists, Pauline Hopkins, bears witness to a similar problem. Hopkins goes beyond Wilson's affront to abolitionists with her character Cuthbert Sumner in Hagar's Daughter, for example. Cuthbert Sumner falls in love as slowly as snow melts in the deep South; and his character unfolds as quickly as a hot summer day in Georgia. In Reconstructing Womanhood, Hazel V. Carby finds that in Sumner:

> Hopkins combined a New England background and heritage with a family history of abolitionism to situate Sumner's professed sympathy for blacks and black equality. But he was also a figure

> Hopkins used as a representation of the limits of white liberalism and New England philanthropy, an illustration of the inherent and disguised racism below the professed sympathy for black people (151).

There is a reason why both Wilson and Hopkins (Eastern women writers) take time to comment on New England abolitionists. Sumner, like most of the other male characters in Hagar's Daughter, ruled Black women outside the statutory rubric "woman." Through the genre of the escaped slave narrative some abolitionists were able to manipulate the way Black escaped slaves told their stories, and how their subjectivity was portrayed. This control contributed to essentialist views of the American South and former slaves. Henderson finds:

> If black women speak a discourse of racial and gendered difference in the dominant or hegemonic discursive order, they speak a discourse of racial and gender identity and difference in the subdominant discursive order. This dialogic of difference and dialectic of identity characterize both black women's subjectivity and black women's discourse. It is the complexity of these simultaneously homogeneous and heterogeneous social and discursive domains out of which black women write and construct themselves (as blacks and women and, often, as poor, black women) that enables black women writers authoritatively to speak to and engage both hegemonic and ambiguously (non)hegemonic discourse (20-21).

Linguists Teun A. van Dijk, Stella Ting-Toomey, Geneva Smitherman and Denise Troutman find a different set of speech norms in the African American community as a result of history, belief system and relationships "especially for African American women, who hold a central role in the expression of the social reality of the entire speech community" (150).

In The Myth of the Negro Past, Melville J. Herskovits argues that African-American culture retains African survivals—Africanisms. Africanisms are clearly observed in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), Ebonics or Black English. Africanisms are defined as "those elements of culture found in the New World that are traceable to an African origin" (J. Holloway ix). Pioneering work in the area of AAVE can be read in Lorenzo Dow Turner's Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect; J. L. Dillard's Black English; Geneva Smitherman's Talkin and Testifyin; and other sources.

In the Gullah dialect, linguist Turner found a preserved language saved from disruption by a larger culture. Smitherman verifies,

> Turner's influence was to be short-lived and his work largely ignored until its revival by Creolists in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Bailey 1965). American race relations in the 1940s entered its period of the denial of differences ...by demonstrating that blacks were just like whites—only darker. And given Anglo bias and racism, certainly whites were not about to acknowledge that there had been borrowings into white American speech from African

languages, as Turner's work implied and as McDavid noted in his review of Turner (Talkin That Talk 76-77).

The influence of languages and dialects other than Standard English on American culture is a deeply sensitive area and one that can cause ridicule and rejection by many in American culture. Nevertheless, both Hopkins and Fauset recognized the use of Black English as a significant part of Negro culture and its influence on the ruling culture. Further, Dillard finds that in being brought to America, Negroes acquired a pidgin English through slave factories of the West African Coast and barracoons. Retention of this pidgin became the basis for Plantation Creole. The creolization of Plantation Creole gave way to a distinctive language among American blacks separate from that of American whites. Smitherman combines Africa and African-American oral and folk historical and cultural presence to the technical and rule based aspects of dialect reinforcing Black English as a language. I believe that some critics and readers, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries misunderstand, misread or ignore the voices of African American women once they moved outside of a middle-class, Anglo woman paradigm that was considered the standard in which to judge acceptable female behavior. Unquestionably many Negro women writers in the United States, during the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, found it necessary to incorporate the acceptable construct of woman but on occasion the voice, language and behavior of woman exceeded the limits of true womanhood protocol. I believe the women writers mentioned and discussed in this paper show themselves or constructed women characters not for shock value but to

more closely represent the myriad voices and values of Black women found in their families and communities. Like Celia who understood the consequences of her act, early Negro women creating Negro women in print probably understood the expectation and perceptions of the general public toward the formerly enslaved and recently freed human beings. I suspect, that they took their writing seriously and worked to create characters that they could respect and understand. Simultaneously, they had concerns that they wanted to reinforce or make the public aware.

Angela Davis' Blues Legacies and Black Feminism, grounded the blues lyrics and early blues singing women, like Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Bessie Smith for example, to black feminism. Davis' book reinforces that working-class women had a way of articulating their oppressions and concerns as outlined in the various themes that the women sang —migration, spousal abuse, sexual intercourse, work, racism, power, violence, travel so on. Further, the singers offered lyrical advice to their listeners. There appeared to be some sort of solidarity or sisterhood in this blues community. In one part Davis likens what women blues singers did to "a consciousness-raising strategy from the Chinese women's movement referred to as 'speak bitterness,' or 'speak pains to recall pains' (28-29). By articulating/singing about a problem (even without a critical perspective) it is ushered "out of the shadows of domestic life where society had kept it hidden and beyond public or political scrutiny" (29-30). Davis pays close attention to voice in her work as she distinguishes between when a singer is being playful, satiric, and mournful, for example. Blues Legacies is important

because it reminds readers of the consciousness of working-class women during the 1920s and 30s and of Davis' dogged determination to attend/understand the tonal delivery of the lyrics. In understanding the lyrics Davis also calls attention to the need to comprehend Ebonics and African American culture.

In African American culture, as Davis points out, speech is not taken for granted. She states:

> In daily speech as well as in the aesthetic dimension, language has always been rewrought and recast, playfully coaxed toward new meanings, and sometimes ironically made to signify the opposite of its literal meaning. Distinctive patterns both of everyday speech and of slave songs manifested cultural connections between West African linguistic customs and African-American English as it was forged within and often against the system of slavery. While these patterns were ritualized in the musical tradition, from the field hollers and work songs to spirituals and the blues, daily speech patterns acquired a decidedly aesthetic character (166).

Daryl Cumber Dance edited an anthology of African American women's humor, Honey Hush!, and in her introduction she declares:

> In addition to a propensity for subject matter and themes that most often speak to our experience in this nation, African American women's humor is often characterized by a certain style that includes a predilection for satire and irony, a delight in the irreverant, a vigorous sense of *force vitale*, an insistance of reality

("be real"), a love of contest/challenge/ debate, and a delight in drama and kinesics: the black woman worldwide is noted for that most atavistic of all African American gestures—cut-eye, suck teeth, an insulting gesture of disdain, ...The black woman is also noted for that arching eyebrow and "the stare," as well as some unique head bobbing, neck swiveling, hip swinging, finger pointing, hands on hips stances, and other gesticulations that form a dynamic vocabulary of their own (xxxii-xxxiii).

Dance also asserts, as does many linguists, that well educated and middle- and upper-class African Americans appropriate Ebonics and slang usually in private conversations. This appropriation of language (Black English) can be witnessed in the works of the women detailed in this dissertation. The work of Smitherman, Troutman, Davis, Dance, and Lee reinforce the need for understanding the linguistic aspects associated with the orality/voice in the writings of African American women.

Critic Mary Helen Washington asks "How does the heroic voice and heroic image of the black woman get suppressed in a culture that depended on her heroism for its survival?" (xvii). In her work Invented Lives, Washington determines that the silencing of black women writers and their work has to do with patriarchal power. She points out that "our 'ritual journeys,' our 'articulate voices,' our 'symbolic spaces' are rarely the same as men's. Those differences and the assumption that those differences make women inherently inferior plus the appropriation by men of the power to define tradition account for women's

absence from our written records" (xviii). Literary scholars like Washington, Hazel Carby, Ann Allen Shockley, Claudia Tate, Nellie McKay, Gloria T. Hull, Carla Peterson, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Frances Smith Foster, Jean Fagan Yellin, Deborah E. McDowell and many others have worked assiduously recovering and critiquing the works of many African American women writers whose work was paralyzed by voicelessness. Writers such as Harriet E. Wilson and Harriet Jacobs, for example, did rely on a unified understanding that Negro American women resided within a larger culture that served to subordinate, terrorize, sexualize, racialize, and silence them. They began to define, denote and explicate, for the public, what it meant to be Negro American women in the United States where they were devalued as human beings.

There is also a silencing that goes on today when critics decide that there is one authentic black female voice in American literature rather than many. The women writers detailed in this study precede Zora Neale Hurston who is viewed by some scholars as a writer whose voice captures the reality of black women's lives. Her work is also heralded as capturing the history and aesthetics of the Negro in this country. One usually pays close attention to voice when reading Hurston. As duCille points out "Hurston did not give birth to herself, unread, and unassisted by literary models and inspiriting influences" (1993 83). DuCille asserts "Hurston's use of folklore and folk English seemed to respond to the primitivist impulses of the era, but it placed her fiction outside the realm of what the black intelligentsia considered positive representations of the Negro" (80). Hurston's novels, for example, generally feature the South and heavy use of

Black English; perhaps that is why critics consider her the authentic voice of African American females in American literature. Hurston is not the first African American woman writer to use Ebonics, Black dialect, or African American Vernacular English. Her use of Black English, for some, means that she constructs the authentic Negro voice. However, it is clear that like stories there are many voices. This dissertation will look at some early voices of African American females in American literature.

My first chapter will prepare the ground for the discussion of Hopkins and Fauset. I will locate an African American woman's literary culture of public voice and assertive communication style in seven nineteenth-century black women's narratives: Lucy A. Delaney, From the Darkness Cometh the Light or Struggles for Freedom; Kate Drumgoold, A Slave Girl's Story; The Narrative of Bethany Veney A Slave Woman; Louisa Picquet the Octoroon; Memoir of Old Elizabeth, A Coloured Woman; Susie King Taylor, Reminiscences of My life in Camp; and The Story of Mattie J. Jackson. Negro women's nineteenth century narratives are rich with the voices and experiences of the enslaved and working-class women who were faced with and managed abusive events that are so deeply planted in the furrows of United States history they are ignored. Their voices and experiences lay fallow between the covers of literary criticism but quickly bloom when one is familiar with the communication styles of African American women. In reading the narratives the oral quality of the women's voices rise from their pages to testify and thus reveal their poignant and heart-rending experiences that

antagonize some and offer personal views on the antebellum through post-Reconstruction periods of United States history.

Intra-culturally or familiarly and within certain economic classes, the voices of African American women are not dismissed for an obvious reason. Understanding the forum, we are not perceived as comic, rude or obtuse by one another, generally, unless that is the goal. In approaching the material I acknowledge the use of Black English as a language familiar to most Blacks in America, particularly during the nineteenth century into the early to mid twentieth century. Further, there are aspects of Black English (proverbs, tales, conventions, tactics, expressions and strategies) that are cultivated and thus appreciated primarily in some African American communities. Such a linguistic and cultural background present a different set of standards by which a body of work is judged. When I, as an African American woman, read the work and voices of Negro women I hear generations of my ancestors speak.

Oral tradition, voice and testimony are so primary to African American women's culture that even in narrative form women's voices can be heard. Furthermore, when an amanuensis is used the testimonial quality of her voice still emerges. Focusing on granny midwives in the writings of African American women Valeria Lee maintains "the writers try to maintain the spirit and language of oral forms, inviting us to 'hear' their novels as well as read them" (9-10). Along with hearing their novels some readers also understand the significance of what is simultaneously not said.

During the nineteenth century who could bear witness to the Black women's narrative testimonies? Undoubtedly any number of their family, friends and most Negroes could testify, however, Western literary aesthetic required that members of the literary elite had to recognize the value in the material to keep the women's narratives in print. Most slave narratives were written by fugitive slaves who wrote about 35 percent of all narratives, black women wrote less than 12 percent, bondsmen wrote less than 5 percent and the "...overwhelming majority of the narrators were among the most perceptive and gifted of the former slaves" (Blassingame 1985 83). During much of the nineteenth century in the antebellum South, where a large population of Negroes existed, it was illegal for blacks to learn to read; therefore, who was left to testify to the value of the nineteenth century women's narratives?

Chapter one focuses on a group of formerly enslaved women most made voiceless for at least half a century. They emphasize the prominence and significance of Black women's public voices collectively referred to as sass. Sass is an act of resistance by a group of women who flexed their verbal skills rather than their muscles. Yet while sass can function as a form of resistance in public discourse, among black women the act of sass is familial, and can be characterized as testimonial. There is a tradition of Black women's sass that can be traced throughout the African Diaspora. The derivation of the word is attributed to an unknown location in West Africa, more specifically according to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) an African tree "Erythrophlœum guineense (Cynometra Mannii); also in sassy bark, -wood, the bark of this tree, a decoction

of which is used in West Africa as an ordeal poison" (493). The OED characterizes sassy as colloquial U.S. term meaning "impudent, saucy, 'cheeky'; outspoken, provocative; conceited, pretentious; self-assured, spirited; bold; vigorous, lively; stylish, 'chic" (494). There is plenty of sass in the women included in this dissertation.

Jessie Fauset, like Hopkins, has four published novels. Her novels suggest a concern with conflicts in women's sexuality, independence, family loyalty, economic classes, success and intracultural issues involving African American culture. Often (in her novels) she employs some female characters who appear to be other than Negro. She is remembered for helping to usher in the Harlem Renaissance. It seems to me that Fauset is a most misunderstood writer. Because she is stereotyped as being preoccupied with Black middle-class culture, folk often dismiss her novels characterizing them as "novels of manners" and her many female characters are read summarily as innocuous, inoffensive, fluffy creations who seek to maintain, marry up and attain this lifestyle.

Focusing on her major and secondary female characters in her novels I will demonstrate her appreciation of language and voice. In The Chinaberry Tree, for example, Fauset plays with language and voice and exhibits its relationship to American culture and related Negro intracultural issues. She pokes fun at a public for characterizing the progeny of miscegeny as having bad blood. She bestows the surname Strange on a family, in The Chinaberry Tree, then throughout the novel she puns on the word strange and invokes it as a trope to demonstrate the ridiculousness of identifying one as having bad blood. It also

becomes a name associated with a woman centered family; a family that was Strange before Colonel Halloway fathered a daughter with Sarah Strange. The Strange women are workers and Laurentine, the daughter, wants to be accepted by the larger black community. Because many critics failed to recognize Fauset's knowledge of African American culture, American history, world literature, manipulation of voice, Anglophile love of language and overt feminist focus ostensibly, they also missed her use of humor. Chapter three will begin with observations from various critics from the Harlem Renaissance and beyond on Fauset and her work. Though not as skilled as Hopkins when creating characters who speak Ebonics, Fauset also uses African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speaking characters and pays special attention to slang as a verbal activity used by middle-class Negroes and a separate linguistic activity from Ebonic speaking characters. Fauset's testifyin stance includes language and word play. Fauset's Strange women must learn and come to terms with their family history and their community after which one needs to ask if their family is that removed from other families of Red Brook. The lives of the Strange women become a testimony to the pressures of nubile single Black women living in heterosexual society. However, the Strange women are empowered when they are able to testify to one another and the other women about their emotions, experiences and men. Fauset's strength lies in her focus on the roles of women and her testimony to the multiple relationships among and interdependence of women's experiences and consciousness.

In the mid 1960s, Robert Bone proclaimed Fauset's novels as "uniformly sophomoric, trivial, and dull" (101). Though one of the most productive writers of the Harlem Renaissance and a prominent promoter of new literary talent, critical acknowledgement escaped Fauset's novels. Both Fauset and Hopkins were magazine editors and though prolific in the critical realm they were overlooked or trivilized. There are many similarities between Hopkins and Fauset. As mentioned previously, both women wrote novels, short fiction and articles. Both were editors for magazines that served the Negro community. Both were concerned with Blacks in the African Diaspora. Both grew up without a biological parent—Hopkins' father, Fauset's mother. Both published four novels; although technically Hopkins published one novel and three serialized novels. Their works testify to their ideals related to women's dignity, freedom, motivations, wage/labor and relationships.

In chapter two Hopkins is also concerned with representing womanhood from various points of view and subsequently questioning what is valid knowledge. Consequently, she recognizes value in folk culture. Hopkins understood that women were being denied decision making or leadership positions in governments as well as in businesses and she created in her literature places where daring women could challenge authority and win. Listening to the voices from her remaining novels this chapter will focus on how women's voices are used to cultivate leadership and heroines. As her narrative women advance and their testifyin intensifies their link to the nineteenth century idea of home and hearth wavers.

Chapter three finds that overall Fauset is concerned with families and the plight of the common working woman. She is less assertive and direct in her use of voice than Hopkins but she is just as effective in rebuking oppressions while highlighting racism, sexism and classism. While Hopkins uses folk culture, Fauset constantly reworks the folk tale Cinderella demonstrating how ridiculous its premise is for women, particularly Black women. Fauset's Cinderellas, however, talk back to the prince and those who think women should marry up the economic ladder. In Fauset's first novel, There Is Confusion, there are at least two versions of Cinderella—one African American the other Euro American. Fauset's subversive thematic repetition of Cinderella plays out in all of her novels and one could ask is she testifyin to the same thang? In The Chinaberry Tree young Malory is engaged to Melissa. Yet in some scenes he is feminized and even Cinderellized. One man observing Malory thought "the lad whom he didn't recognize had a nice open face he noticed—there was something a little feminine, womanish about it" (171). His intended wife, Melissa, thought, "Malory, she knew now positively, was a snob. Not in the ordinary sense" (251). Thus far he is characterized as an effeminate snob. While enjoying a party at the home of Gertrude Brown, who unbeknownst to Malory has taken a romantic interest in him, after hearing that it is half-past eleven, Malory "caught up his hat and hastened out" (285). The next evening Gertrude recalls "He was at her house again the next evening, enjoying himself obviously, but at eleven he arose and with quiet determination announced his intention of leaving" (285). Interestingly,

Malory will be available for marriage. His family does not appear as successful as Gertrude's and she has strategized on having him as her beau.

Unquestionably, male critiques devalued the woman centered messages both Hopkins and Fauset conveyed. Fauset's failure according to some critics from the thirties to the seventies is her focus on middle-class settings and values. They generally want to ignore her feminine convergence. Further, as the literary editor for The Crisis magazine Fauset was industrious giving many Negro writers their first chance in print. Yet her recognition was minimal. Fauset critic and biographer Carlyn Sylvander notes "W. E. B. DuBois later remembered her only as 'a very brilliant colored girl..., who was born in Philadelphia and has written some lovely things about Philadelphia Negroes'" (82). Along with other misconceptions, Fauset was not born a Philadelphia Negro in a middle-class family—"she was born 27 April 1882 in Camden County, Snow Hill Center Township, New Jersey"—such misleading information serves to be dismissive when some critics combine her work with whom they think she is (Sylvander 23). In When Harlem Was in Vogue, David Levering Lewis maintains that during the Harlem Renaissance "with the exception of James Weldon Johnson, she [Fauset] knew a good deal more about the world of literature than the academics and civil libertarians in Harlem who were becoming overnight experts" (121). Lewis, however, does point out that "there is no telling what she would have done had she been a man, given her first-rate mind and formidable efficiency at any task" (121). Nathan Huggins confidently asserts that "Jessie Fauset delineates middle-class Negro life, contrives problems to generate stories" (236-237).

Nevertheless, if she only concentrated on the black bourgeoisie that is certainly an area worthy of study.

Some Negro women writers during post Reconstruction and into the Harlem Renaissance endowed their Negro American poor and working-class women characters with dialogue that represented a Plantation Creole or dialect. Some critics believed that Plantation Creole or dialect speaking Negro characters signaled a character's singular role as comic minstrels, and disregarded any other substantive insight or comments related to that character. Other critics simply ignored characters whose speech did not reflect Standard English. Because of the multiple sociopolitical oppressions and repression that Negro women faced I believe it is an insult to dismiss or ignore women characters as comic when they speak Plantation Creole or occupy an enslaved or wage/labor position without close examination.

Henderson, in a process she identifies as "speaking in tongues," asserts that "black women must speak in a plurality of voices as well as in a multiplicity of discourses" (22). There are competing and complementary discourses in the voices of Wilson and Jacobs, but I do not think that they can adjust their timber to assuage all folk who initially made up their reading public. However, I do believe that there is within their work places where readers can testify. As I disregard the limited classification some critics have given to Hopkins and Fauset I see many places in their novels where I can and will testify.

Much of African American women's literature in the United States is rooted within a climate of multiple oppressions, suppressions and repression, and there

is an undeniable confrontation of blatant inequality, not only between women and men but among women in various economic groups as well. Many literary critics ignored their voices for many years, possibly because their novels reflect the testimonial discourse to which many critics were unable to bear witness. However, their novels echo the voices of some women whose stories did not ordinarily get told. Their novels exhibit the sassiness of Black women in various classes. Their novels embody a testifyin quality in the oral tradition of African American culture. Perhaps Hopkins and Fauset, as Black women in the United States, wrote conveying what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as a Black women's standpoint. According to Collins such a standpoint includes core themes and the interdependence of Black women's various expressions, experiences, consciousness and actions when encountering (32). Nonetheless, in their novels I recognize the voices of women I've known.

Hopkins and Fauset's novels demonstrate the complexity of voice and a multitude of women's issues. Additionally, their characters confront or expose abuses and survive. Therefore, whether they speak in Ebonics, Plantation Creole, dialect or standard English their characters make statements about the time in which they lived and to stereotype certain characters because they speak in other than standard English is to miss out, perhaps, on some important statements, characters or plots in American literature. The nineteenth-century women's narratives and novels of Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins and Jessie Redmon Fauset demonstrate, for me, that there are many women's voices waiting to be heard.

Notes

[1] For a detailed description of Truth's action see: Frances Titus, Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from her "Book of Life" (1878; New York: Oxford UP, 1991) 139. Nell Irvin Painter also explicates the event in her study, Sojourner Truth A Life, A Symbol (New York: Norton, 1996) 138-141.

[2] For a detailed description of the Celia case see: Melton A. McLaurin, Celia, A Slave (New York: Avon Books, 1991).

[3] The Black English style of marking indicates that one is mimicking the speech of another person. For further discussion see: Teun A. Van Dijk, Stella Tink-Toomey, Geneva Smitherman and Denise Troutman, "Discourse, Ethnicity, Culture and Racism," Discourse as Social Interaction, ed. Teun A. Van Dijk (California: Sage, 1997) 144-180.

[4] Charles W. Chesnutt, The Conjure Woman (1899; Ann Arbor, U of Michigan P, 1969). The short story, "Dave's Neckliss" is not part of Chenutt's collection, The Conjure Woman.

Chapter 2

"SASS" CLAIMED TERRAIN OF NARRATIVE WOMEN

> Manage your own secrets and divulge them by the silent language of your own pen.
>
> Mattie Jackson, The Story of Mattie J. Jackson

The confrontational communication style of the narrative women in this chapter are often identified as sass by their oppressors. Whether written by another, their ghosts writers seem amazed by the manner in which the women described their conditions or talk back to tyrants. All the narrative women, their female relatives and fictive kin employ sass in one form or another to demonstrate self-respect and assert their liberation while simultaneously resisting the terrorism, perversions, and degradations of United States slavery during the antebellum period. In short, when the women exercised their inclination and ability to speak to those in power they were often perceived as sassy or threatening. Traditionally, for a member of the ruling culture to designate a woman's word or behavior as sassy served to dismiss or silence her message, victimized the woman and concomitantly sexualized her. In American culture sassy Black women are stereotyped as masculine and sexually aggressive. Sassy behavior fed into the fallacy of the domineering black woman who emasculates men; further, this assertive act connects African American women in the racist American psyche to the Mammy, Jezebel or Sapphire mythology. The Mammy figure is past her sexual prime and her sass becomes one of her

endearing qualities. The Jezebel figure is perceived as sassy and insatiable. Sapphire is the know-it-all shrew who consumes her spouse with sass. The use of sass by black women hardly justifies the associated sexual connotations.[1] Moreover, sass for the narrative women is an obligatory and liberating act.

The narrative women understood the labeling and the backlash that accompanied their sassy articulations. In the extreme, a slave's resistant act could be answered with the death of the insurgent or disobedient slave. For example, a 1705 amendment to Virginia's slave code of 1669 states:

> And if any slave resist his master, or owner, or other person, by his or her order, correcting such slave, and shall happen to be killed in such correction, it shall not be accounted felony; but the master, owner, and every such other person so giving correction, shall be free and acquit of all punishment and accusation for the same, as if such accident had never happened (A. Higginbotham 1978, 50).

The 1705 amendment acknowledges that the murder of a resisting or run away slave was an accepted (albeit extreme) legal penalty enforced by the master or her or his agent. By the antebellum period a slave was well acquainted with the issuance of punishment if she or he was accused, suspected of or actually committed a crime or a minor infraction. Therefore, when the following nineteenth century women employ sass it was with the knowledge that some form of punishment would surely follow.

The magnitude of sass in early Black women's autobiographies provides revealing aspects, according to Joanne Braxton. Her investigation revealed that

sass is associated with the female trickster and that it is a word of West African derivation (31). It is also connected to witches. As mentioned in the Introduction the word's origin is connected to a "sassy tree." Braxton points out that

> A decoction of the bark of this tree was used in West Africa as an ordeal poison in the trial of accused witches, women spoken of as being wives of Exu, the trickster god. In her 1893 Autobiography, Amanda Smith, an independent black missionary, wrote: "I don't know as any one has ever found what the composition of this sassy wood really is; but I am told it is a mixture of certain barks. They say that it is one of their medicines that they used for punishing witches so you cannot find out what it is. The accused had two gallons to drink. If she throws it up, she has gained her case." So, obviously, "sass" can kill (31)[2].

Sass is a potent aspect of the female trickster figure and is associated with female conjuration. According to Braxton, former and fugitive women slaves used "her tools of liberation include sass and invective as well as biblical invocation: language is her first line of defense" (16). Presumably the word "sassy" comes from West Africa. There seems to be a relationship between the women's act of sass and traditions and rituals in West Africa. In the antebellum American South many members of the ruling class attempted to inhibit sassy women by repressing their sass with legal threats, imprisonment, stripes, and other forms of mutilations to their bodies and spirits. The history of African American women's voices in America literature is connected to violence and is

often muffled by a tradition of silence. When the women invoke sass they are participating in an oral tradition passed on through generations.

Whether the narratives were written by themselves or an amanuensis, the sassy focal women emerge as hopeful, self-assertive and rebellious. These women demonstrate that there was a limit to what and how far they would submit their will, allegiance and obedience to mortal masters and institutions. The fact that the women were able to tell their version of herstory and respond to a system that literally, physically, psychologically, socially, economically and spiritually silenced them (temporarily) reminds one of the spiritual work of the ancestor. The ancestor is not separate from the word and both are forces.[3] Like the ancestor, the reissue of their narratives indicates they were never quite gone. And like the phoenix, the magnitude and strength of sass can reemerge. Sassy women speak for many. The insurgent power of the women's sass echoes from the pages of their narratives. Notably the pen of an amanuensis in the narratives of Picquet, Elizabeth, Veney and Jackson can not contain the flair and spirit of their sass.

The opening epigraph, taken from The Story of Mattie J. Jackson, is a compelling statement that invites a reader to interpret or reinterpret clues contained in her narrative. A curious reader is haunted by Jackson's cryptic riddle in an attempt to discover, decode or unlock her secrets. A reader can infer that Jackson's secrets are disguised through some type of linguistic code. Jackson indicates that she is not the only person who has secrets. She confidently makes her declaration not to an objective third person audience but to

second person others. Jackson advises others to be cryptic in revealing their "secrets" within narratives. However, when Jackson mentions silence she is probably referring to what Toni Cade Bambara refers to as untalk.

> To clarify untalk, Old folks are articulate masters. Their silences crash glass. And don't let Grandma cut her eye...internal bleeding. And please don't let her hum. When we were real little we learned to read with geiger counter accuracy the language of the body and the language of silence. And we became bone-deep sensitive to the channels language operates within, a fact which makes many verbal statements, frequently, redundant if not foolish (Bambara 337).

The silence that Jackson refers suggests the multiple levels to whom she directs her narrative. Jackson claims agency over her voice and suggests multiple meanings advising others to do the same. Ironically, Jackson does not write her own story; yet she is confident that her voice will reach the intended audiences. The use of sass in the narratives is political and symbolic.

Born a slave circa 1846 in Missouri, Mattie Jackson, a Black woman, escaped slavery and was able to tell her story. My assumption is that Jackson's secrets had to do with resisting the machinations of American slavery that served to humiliate, degrade and dehumanize enslaved Blacks, and specifically, women. Jackson signals other Black women who are resisting racial repression. Other narrative women with similar backgrounds or experiences may be key to unlocking the secrets of Jackson and her second person others.

Random House Webster's College Dictionary defines secret as "done, made, or conducted without the knowledge of others. kept from general knowledge. carrying out activities in a manner that prevents them from being observed or detected." Louisa Picquet, Elizabeth, Mattie Jackson, Bethany Veney, Kate Drumgoold, Lucy Delaney, and Susie King Taylor all participated in personal narrative activities (constructed their stories by writing it themselves, through an interview format or using an amanuensis) that divulged secrets. Tables 1 and 2, found on the preceding two pages, outline the narratives referred to in this chapter. Although the majority of the women begin their lives enslaved, by law, they were free in spirit. One can get a sense of their unshackled spirits through an examination of vernacular performances found in their narratives. Although Jackson claims that she has enclosed secrets in her narrative, her voice and the voice of her mother resonate with the words of wit, ridicule and revolution toward those that enslaved and oppressed them. Often Jackson's loquaciousness appears so direct one imagines that her secrets are connected to her style of communication. "Within the African-American community in the United States, verbal acts also function to save face as they address multiple audiences, some aware and some unaware, through camouflaging" (Morgan 257). At the same time that Jackson is being sassy she employs indirection. Marcyliena Morgan points out that "most non-African Americans were unaware" that Blacks "resisted rules which governed how they talked in public by adapting indirect language and communication system(s) inherited from Africa" (256).

TABLE 1

Seven Women's Narratives

NAME	BIRTH	NARRATIVE TITLE	YEAR PUB	AUTHOR
Louisa Picquet	1830s	*LOUISA PICQUET, THE OCTOROON: A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE*	1861	Rev. H. Mattison
Elizabeth	1766	*MEMOIR OF OLD ELIZABETH, A COLORED WOMAN*	1863	Amanuensis
Mattie Jackson	1846?	*THE STORY OF MATTIE J. JACKSON: HER PARENTAGE–EXPERIENCE OF EIGHTEEN YEARS IN SLAVERY–INCIDENTS DURING THE WAR–HER ESCAPE. A TRUE STORY*	1866	Dr. L. S. Thompson
Bethany Veney	1818?	*THE NARRATIVE OF BETHANY VENEY A SLAVE WOMAN*	1889	Amanuensis?
Lucy A. Delaney	1827?	*FROM THE DARKNESS COMETH THE LIGHT OR STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM*	CIRCA 1891	SELF
Kate Drumgoold	1860?	*A SLAVE GIRL'S STORY BEING AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF KATE DRUMGOOLD*	1898	SELF
Susie King Taylor	Aug 6, 1848	*REMINISCENCES OF MY LIFE IN CAMP WITH THE 33RD COLORED TROOPS LATE 1ST S.C. VOLUNTEERS*	1902	SELF

TABLE 2

Seven Women's Narratives

NAME	BIRTH STATE	REASON FOR WRITING	STATUS	OCCUPATION
Louisa Picquet	South Carolina	Raise Money to Free Mother	Freed	Cook, Sex Worker, Nurse, Domestic, Laundress
Elizabeth	Maryland	Encourage Others	Slave?	Field Worker, Preacher
Mattie Jackson	Missouri	To Get An Education And To Help The Newly Emancipated	Escaped	"Heavy Work," Laundress
Bethany Veney	Virginia	Tell A Story of Slavery, And Deepen Sense of Responsibility Toward A Wronged and Persecuted Race	Freed	Blacksmith's Assistant, Log Hauler, Laundress, Domestic and Field Worker
Lucy A. Delaney	Missouri	To Tell Her Story	Won Freedom (lawsuit)	Laundress, Seamstress
Kate Drumgoold	Old Virgina	To Encourage Others	Escaped--after Emancipation	Domestic
Susie King Taylor	Georgia	Make Public Aware of Contributions of Black Women and Men to the Civil War	Escaped	Company Laundress, Nurse, Teacher

One should know indirection "encompassed multiple audiences, layers of understanding, and concomitant multiple subjectivities. It may not have survived and been adapted, were it not for dominant Southern society's insistent communication and language monitoring of African Americans...it is the foundation of all African-American discourse" (Morgan 256). Moreover, the same verbal aggression takes place in the narratives of the other women in this chapter.

The following narratives of seven formerly enslaved African American women with similar backgrounds—born into U.S. slavery, and most of whom were from the South—are used to decipher the secrets to which Jackson alludes in the opening epigraph. In order of publication, one narrative was published before the beginning of the Civil War—Louisa Picquet, The Octoroon: A Tale of Southern Life, (1861);--one during the Civil War—Memoir of Old Elizabeth, A Colored Woman, (1863)—one was published during Reconstruction—The Story of Mattie J. Jackson: ...A True Story, (1866)— and the remaining four (including the only autobiographies of this group) were published during the Progressive Era— The Narrative of Bethany Veney A Slave Woman, 1889; Lucy A. Delaney's From the Darkness Cometh the Light or Struggles for Freedom, circa 1891; Kate Drumgoold A Slave Girl's Story Being An Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold (1898); and Susie King Taylor's, Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33rd Colored Troops Late 1st S.C. Volunteers (1902).

In To Tell A Free Story, William Andrews finds that "The most reliable slave narrative would be one that seemed purely mimetic, in which the self is on

the periphery instead of at the center of attention, looking outside not within, transcribing rather than interpreting a set of objective facts" (6). He states, "American aesthetic standards of the time made a black narrative that exposed the institutional facts of slavery preferable to one that expressed the subjective views of an individual slave" (6). As a result Negro narrators had to discover a way to reveal their "secrets" of self and survival to an overall reading public that was primarily interested in the gory details of the institution, not in persons who experienced the terrorism of bondage. Many scholars of slave narratives maintain that the narrators of such works divulged subjective aspects of "self" through signification that, in this chapter, is occasionally played out through the women's use of sass.

Reverend H. Mattison, Louisa Picquet's amanuensis, was obviously impressed with her physical appearance. He describes her as "...easy and graceful in her manners, of fair complexion and rosy cheeks, with dark eyes a flowing head of hair with no perceptible inclination to curl, and every appearance, at first view, of an accomplished white lady" (5). Those fooled by her appearance will be convinced otherwise when, according to Mattison, she is engaged in conversation. The listener will discover that:

> A certain menial-like diffidence, her plantation expression and pronunciation, her inability to read or write, together with her familiarity with and readiness in describing plantation scenes and sorrows, all attest the truthfulness of her declaration that she has

been most of her life a slave. Besides, her artless simplicity and sincerity are sufficient to dissipate the last doubt (5).

He finds Picquet appealing, even lady-like, until she opens her mouth and speaks. Moreover, when she speaks she appears intent to recall her days as a slave. Once he establishes that Picquet is of African descent he characterizes her as a Christian woman—not a lady. Ostensibly, as a result of her ready conversational topic ladyhood escapes her and she is relegated to womanhood. Mattison apparently did not view Picquet as a rebellious individual or a threat in any way. Nevertheless, this shy, illiterate, unassuming vocal woman successfully campaigned to find and free her enslaved mother through publication of her narrative, travel and solicitation of funds from individuals and groups in various states.

As Picquet condemned slavery, themes of sexuality, intraracial division and a slave woman's morality emerge. When able, she asserts that her exposure to Biblical teachings caused her to accept beatings as an option to sex with her second master.

Mattison, however, is preoccupied with morality, sexuality and complexion as salient points to condemn slavery. Mattison offers the moral of Picquet's narrative:

> There is not a family mentioned, from first to last, that does not reek with fornication and adultery. It turns up as naturally, and is mentioned with as little specialty, as walrus beef in the narrative of the Arctic Expedition, or macaroni in a tour of Italy....if such are the

> glimpses of southern domestic life which a single brief narrative reveals, what must the remainder be, which is hidden from our "Abolition" eyes? Alas for those telltale mulatto, and quadroon, and octoroon faces! They stand out unimpeached, and still augmenting as God's testimony to the deep moral pollution of the Slave States (51).

Mattison responded to the sexual abuses involved in Southern slavery. Primarily, it appears, he had a few areas of concern; he is morally outraged by "fornication and adultery" that existed in Southern slavery, moral degradation violated God's plan and thus could justify the North's participation in the Civil War, for example. Picquet is not as outraged by the sinful behavior of Southerners. For example, after Picquet and her mother are sold to Mr. Cook in Georgia she described her mother as having,"'...a little baby sister when we first went to Mobile...She died in Alabama. She had one before that, while she was in Georgia; but they all died but me and my brother, the oldest and the youngest'" (7). Subsequently, Picquet tells Mattison that her mother did not have a husband or "one she called her husband," while living in Georgia or Mobile. When asked who was the father of the babies, Picquet states: "'I don't know, except Mr. Cook was. Mother had three children while Mr. Cook owned her'" (8). Picquet exhibited no remorse or shame that her mother gave birth to children outside of wedlock. Toward the close of the narrative Mattison contended, "Louisa's mother never would take the name of Randolph or Cook—the name of her owner—as other slaves do, so she still sticks to her first name of Ramsey, as when she lived

in South Carolina thirty-five years ago" (31). Picquet reads Mattison and a public that agrees with him. She finds his question accusatory and inappropriate. The previous point seemingly was significant for Picquet more than for Mattison. Ostensibly, Picquet is proud that her mother did not align herself, in name, to two masters who sexually violated her. Additionally, by refusing to assume their names Elizabeth (Picquet's mother) intentionally resisted her masters' objectification of her. Elizabeth also demonstrates the importance of self-identity. It is clear to a reader that Picquet and Mattison's objectives differed. As an individual characterized as menial, Picquet's voice seems clear and at times so potent the narrative becomes an interview—her response to him. Consequently, a reader responds to Picquet with"I hear you."

Picquet's and her mother's voices manage to breakout of Mattison's narrative construct. Picquet's narrative established that she and her mother were not concerned with female Christian morality when it involved black women in slavery. Her mother's freedom is listed as Picquet's reason for the book's publication and that is the goal to which the concluding portions of the book are devoted. Dogged determination allows her story to be told and to come through the filter of an amanuensis. Although Mattison describes her one way at the beginning of the narrative, by the end Picquet is not a passive freed former slave but an activist. Louisa Picquet is an intelligent woman with memories and a voice that recalls and answers the evils of slavery. Picquet refuses to allow her voice to become camouflaged as she was determined that her attitudes and beliefs be known. She ultimately gains another sense of satisfaction because

she is able to secure her mother's freedom and live with her family knowing that her story is one that will live on as part of history's book.

One way in which the voices of Elizabeth's and Picquet's stories break from Mattison is in a description of their sexuality and sexual terrorism. Because it existed outside of Christian values they did not, evidently, suffer moral shame. Picquet is portrayed as a religious woman. Their actions indicated that their bodies were owned by others but their minds and voices were their own. Picquet, though forced to live with her enslavers, identified only one man as her husband, "'Three years after I came there [Cincinnati, Ohio], I married Mr. Picquet, my husband'" (25). Picquet did not see her mother for over twenty years. When she contacted her mother, Elizabeth was enslaved and married. Elizabeth did not take on the surname of her husband and, with his blessing, is willing to leave her unnamed husband for a life of freedom with her daughter. It seemed that by not assuming the surname of men, Elizabeth was attempting to leave a type of matrilineal trail, while simultaneously subverting patriarchy in her own way. Mattison, it seems, is preoccupied with his motives in writing her narrative and views Picquet passive, redundant, violated and illiterate; however, Picquet is able, for the most part, to convey the story she wants and achieve her intended goal.

In 1863, Elizabeth's scribe failed to provide the reader with her last name, but did see fit to preface her name with "Old," reinforcing the tradition of introducing the names of black slaves and other American blacks with "Aunty," "Uncle," or "Mammy" for example. Elizabeth will forever be known in print as Old

Elizabeth. "Old" Elizabeth implies a less vigorous voice. In 1889, Veney's amanuensis, likewise, titles her narrative Aunt Betty's Story. "Aunt" Betty suggests a humble and agreeable Black servant woman. Furthermore, the title indicates that Betty's story is told by another. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's unknown amanuensis is less intrusive than Reverend Mattison. Elizabeth's amanuensis prefaces her memoir with a succinct statement: "In the following Narrative of 'Old Elizabeth,' which was taken from her own lips in her 97th year, her simple language has been adhered to as strictly as was consistent with perspicuity and propriety" (3). Propriety is a curious word to associate with the life of an enslaved then freed black woman evangelist who sermonized from the early 1800s to the early 1860s. I suppose Elizabeth's possible use of Plantation Creole ("simple language") was at times confusing to her ghost writer. The ghost writer should be credited with making Elizabeth appear lucid and adhering to standards of proper behavior. Nevertheless, Elizabeth with Christ's authority and, therefore, an anointed voice confronts a watchman (police officer), squire, and ministers (black and white) to preach a message of freedom and deliverance. For example she described an incident that occurred in Virginia (note the mingling of voices–Elizabeth and the amanuensis):

> The people there would not believe that a coloured woman could preach. And moreover, as she had no learning, they strove to imprison me because I spoke against slavery: and being brought up, they asked by what authority I spake? and if I had been

ordained? I answered, not by the commission of men's hands: if the Lord had ordained me, I needed nothing better (17).

Although she lacked what was considered the proper credentials to preach, she pushed others to the limit with her voice when she, probably, invoked some religious teaching to support her stand against slavery. Elizabeth's voice demonstrates her spiritual direction, fearless conviction and strength of purpose. Concurrently with Elizabeth's sass, I assume, was her ability to loud talk.[4] As a Black woman evangelist alone, without the support of ordained men, I believe she had to appropriate the intended pitch when needed, attract hearers, and use her pitch, timing and voice to demonstrate and reinforce God's calling. For a time, Elizabeth was owned by a Presbyterian who believed in slavery but not in holding slaves for life. She states, "Having served him faithfully my time out, he gave me my liberty, which was about the thirtieth year of my age" (8). I suspect that Elizabeth was in service and indoctrinated to the religious beliefs of this man for over ten years. Even provisionally, Elizabeth was not convinced that human commerce was acceptable.

Elizabeth's voice offers strength and power to an individual who lacks self-confidence and power. "Black, elderly, female, unmarried, and childless, Elizabeth might seem at first glance to have been among the most disadvantaged and powerless people of the antebellum era" (Andrews xxxii). As a child, she was separated from her family. The trauma of her situation caused Elizabeth to will herself to die. She experienced an epiphany (at the age of twelve) and learned that she was supposed to teach the gospel. She ignored the

message for thirty years. At the age of forty-two she pondered, "As I could read but little, I questioned within myself how it would be possible for me to deliver the message, when I did not understand the Scriptures" (9). She added, "Whereupon I was moved to open a Bible...and my eyes fell upon this passage, 'Gird up thy loins now like a man, and answer thou me. Obey God rather than man,'" (9). She sought the advice of "religious professor[s]" who discouraged her from becoming an evangelist because she was a woman. "Men in the church expected women, especially almost illiterate former slaves like Elizabeth, to keep silent and not presume to speak for God to them" (Andrews xxxvi). Consequently, "I returned to the Lord, feeling that I was nothing, and knew nothing, and wrestled and prayed to the Lord that He would fully reveal His will, and make the way plain" (9). Once convinced that she was performing God's work "she displayed remarkable courage as a minister of the social gospel" (Andrews xxxvii). She had to speak with confidence. William Andrews identifies Elizabeth's narrative as one of the earliest accounts "we have of successful black career women in nineteenth-century America" (xxxvii). He adds that, "by identifying with her divine mission, Elizabeth developed a profound self-respect that brooked no opposition and accepted no compromise" (xxxvii). Elizabeth's message, in narrative form and as an evangelist, was that one can accomplish any goal, despite masters or other hindrances or hardships if one maintains and cultivates faith in God.

Interestingly, M.W.G. regrets "that the language and personal characteristics of Bethany cannot be transcribed. The little particulars that give

coloring and point, tone and expression, are largely lost. Only the outline can be given" (Bethany Veney Preface). What remains, according to M.W.G., is a "'plain, unvarnished tale, . . . '" (Preface). All the recorders respond to the language and intonation of the women's words. One gets more of a sense of the power of a narrative women's voice and how it emerges in a text with Mattie Jackson.

Mattie Jackson's story was arranged and written by Dr. L. S. Thompson formerly Mrs. Schuyler. Dr. Thompson and Jackson shared a more intimate relationship than the other narrative women who employed scriveners. Jackson states, "I had previously told my step-mother my story, and how often my own mother had wished she could have it published. I did not imagine she could find time to write and arrange it, but she immediately proposed writing and publishing the entire story, . . . " (36). Although obvious class differences existed between Ellen (Mattie's mother) and Dr. Thompson (Mattie's step-mother) all the women shared and recognized the importance of Jackson's story and conceivably the significance of sass. Possibly it is the collective spiritual force of the women and the legacy of the ancestor that allows this narrative to come across as the sassiest of the four written by others.

In The Story of Mattie Jackson, when a newspaper picture of President Lincoln was discovered in Ellen's room (Mattie's mother) by her master, "He asked her what she was doing with old Lincoln's picture. She replied it was there because she liked it. He then knocked her down three times, and sent her to the trader's yard for a month as punishment" (14). This was not the first time that her

master had punched or sent her to the trader's yard. As a house slave, Ellen had kept silent when her mistress railed against Lincoln, the Civil War and "niggers." Well aware of the consequences of her sassy retort, Ellen maintained her self-imposed right to her opinion (notably in this situation, in a room she possibly recognized as her own) and seemingly responded in a direct and honest manner to her owner. The masked or indirect focus of this exchange is politics. Lincoln's picture signifies a political stance against slavery. The indirect exchange is directed toward a Black audience—those who can overhear the exchange between Ellen and master and "within the system of repression, the counterlanguage [in this instance sass] provided a vehicle for face-work and protected and confirmed the existence of the antisociety [Black]. It constituted speaker agency so that the act of talking was potentially political and highly symbolic" (Morgan 256). Ellen reveals her political position in an atmosphere where slavery is practiced, intentionally challenging and defying one of its practitioners with her sass. However, the master can not allow Ellen agency to think and make her own decisions. He undoubtedly heard her sassin but to attribute her ability to talk politics and have a point of view directly with him would indicate she assumed responsibility as a speaker, that she formulated intentions as a thinking human being and that she participates in a complex system of communication understanding that audiences change—from master to peers.

In addition, Ellen performed sassy deeds. For example, she helped her first husband escape and finally succeeded in escaping slavery on her seventh attempt. Ellen's continuously resistant behavior served as an example for her

children and others that self-respect, justice and freedom are ongoing battles that the enslaved must repeatedly claim.

In 1861, Union soldiers had moved into Missouri and freedom loving slaves were pleased at their much anticipated and prayed for legal emancipation. Mattie stated, "The days of sadness [the Civil War] for mistress were days of joy for us" (15). She does not separate herself from her community. Mattie's sass articulates a collective affirmation and invites her reader to talk-back or rather participate in this collective consciousness. Like her mother who honestly responded to her master's query about Lincoln's picture, Mattie's narrative observation invites her audience to say "Amen" in agreement with her insight and use of poetic cadence or close the book on her impertinence.

Like her mother, Ellen, Mattie challenged authority when she believed it was unjust. According to Mattie, the mistress had a particularly "bad day" and decided to end it with Mattie being whipped. The mistress selected a switch and placed it in a corner until her husband's return (so he could whip Mattie). Mattie states, "As I was not pleased with the idea of a whipping I bent the switch in the shape of W, which was the first letter of his name, and after I had attended to the dining room my fellow servant and myself walked away and stopped with an aunt of mine during the night" (15). Although Mattie's tone is matter-of-fact, such a defiant act carried severe consequences. One notes that after her sass, Mattie neither fled the house in fear nor does she argue with her mistress about a situation that Mattie judged unjust. Further, she and a "fellow servant" go visiting. Mattie endorsed her self-worth and confronted the legality of slave illiteracy when

she signifies her ability to read. By forming the switch into the letter "W" Mattie sassed a public that supported a law that made it illegal to teach a slave to read. On another level, by forming the switch into the shape of a "W" Mattie symbolized her ability to "read the situation" by, as she states, bending the switch into the first letter of her master's name, William. Her act was meant to provoke.

Mattie was punished three weeks later when the mistress "flew into a rage and told him (the master) I was saucy, and to strike me, and he immediately gave me a severe blow with a stock of wood, which inflicted a deep wound upon my head" (16). William continued to beat Mattie and was stopped by Ellen's physical intervention—another sassy deed.

Sass should not be read as simply a female challenge to male authority. Such a perception diminishes the tenor of the women's words and nurtures a sexual connotation of sass that contributes to stereotypes of black women as Mammies, Jezebels and Sapphires. Sass struck a chord with oppressors, I believe, because it was used by women who were supposed to be hopeless, docile and submissive. Sass is the public and private resistant and revolutionary acts of black women, enslaved or free, articulating their thoughts, often intentions (indirectly) and occasionally disagreements to white authority figures. Utilization of sass simultaneously indicates their wit, self-respect and pride. The women, ranked as chattel by the ruling class, use sass to defy white supremacy. Often when employing sass the women do not hide behind their gender. Sass represents "verbal rituals from the oral tradition and the continued importance of the word as in African cultures" (Smitherman 1998, 207). The women

recognized the power of the word and they are described in this paper as sassy because as black bondwomen or freewomen during the antebellum period they use their experience, knowledge, familial and communal connections, spirituality and ancestral influences to articulate their self-acknowledged liberties to a ruling society that incorporated all its resources—legal, religious, economic, political and social—to combat and convince the women, their swarthy families and dusky communities otherwise.

One should consider the responses created by the women's sassy actions. Whether physical performance or invoking word necromancy, sass is always an act designed to produce a transformation. Unmistakably facial and body movements are as significant to sass as the tone or pitch of the words that the women call forth. As M. W. G. states many personal characteristics cannot be transcribed; therefore, one must imagine the use of related or contrary motions as the women conjured their words.

In The Narrative of Bethany Veney, A Slave Woman, after being subjected to the violence of several masters including being sold away from her daughter, Bethany Veney responds in a sassy manner when she learns of the insolvency of her current master. Veney decides that she would never be sold again. She thinks, "I would take my child and hide in the mountains. I would do anything sooner than I would be sold" (35). She makes preparations for escape and when her employer confirmed that her master's property is to be auctioned she announced, "'I won't be sold. He shall never find me, to sell me again,' I angrily cried" (35). When Veney, whose mother died when she was nine years-old,

decides that she will not be sold, she sought and received advice from "an old negro woman [about] certain tricks I could resort to, when placed upon the stand, that would be likely to hinder my sale" (30). Raboteau states, "Elderly people are respected and revered in part because they preserve the memory of the dead and are closer chronologically to the ancestor" (12). Veney, undoubtedly, understood other ways of knowing or rather "...the interrelationship of knowledge with cosmology, society, religion, medicine, and traditions..." that was associated with an elder (Asante 164). Having executed the instructions of the old Negro woman, Veney mounted the auction block. She recalls:

> ...the doctor, who was employed to examine the slaves on such occasions, told me to let him see my tongue, he found it coated and feverish, and turning from me with a shiver of disgust, said he was obliged to admit that at that moment I was in a very bilious condition. One after another of the crowd felt of my limbs, asked me all manner of questions, to which I replied in the ugliest manner I dared; and when the auctioneer raised his hammer, and cried, "How much do I hear for this woman?" the bids were so low I was ordered down from the stand, ... (30).

Veney is made a public spectacle but she controls the performance. Through the old Negro woman's knowledge of herbs they (the old woman and Veney) objectified the gaze of perspective buyers and deprive Veney's master from his intended profit; thus allowing Veney to keep her vow.

Kate Drumgoold's master sought to keep former slaves ignorant concerning their emancipation. Nevertheless, Kate's mother (previously sold away from her children) regained custody of Kate and her older sister by having them meet her later in the day. Kate remembers:

> He, Mr. House, did not want us to go, and I took my oldest sister and marched out to go where mother was and he did not like that freedom, and he tried to find which was that we had gone to the place, but he did not find us, and we had been to the place where the people were that had homes, and that they would kill us at first sight, and that was all that I wanted to see, and I did not find one thing true of their sayings" (sic, 7).[5]

Kate equates her sassy behavior to freedom. Although Kate probably disbelieved many of the fabrications her master and mistress told their former slaves, in an attempt to persuade them to stay, her suspicion was justified when she joined her mother and sister in freedom and discovered that the people in homes did not kill them. Further, when Kate's mother was informed that the rest of her children, who were at various locations, were dead "she said that she would go and dig up their bones" (9). As a result of the mother's perseverance she was able to claim all of her children. Sassy persistence excoriates lies to reveal facts and provide renewal.

The reader is again exposed to a sassy mother and daughter in Lucy A. Delaney's autobiography. When Delaney's father is sold, her mother, Polly Crocket, "...registered a solemn vow that her children should not continue in

slavery all their lives, and she never spared an opportunity to impress it upon us, that we must get our freedom whenever the chance offered" (15-16). Crocket had two daughters, Lucy and Nancy. Nancy escapes while the mistress honeymoons in Niagara Falls. When Polly is told of Nancy's escape, Lucy remembers, "Mother was very thankful, and in her heart arose a prayer of thanksgiving, but outwardly she pretended to be vexed and angry. Oh! the impenetrable mask of these poor black creatures! How much of joy, of sorrow, of misery and anguish have they hidden from their tormentors!" (18). Lucy's youthful recollection embodies the dual nature of signifying qualities and makes her audience aware of indirection as a common rhetorical activity of blacks in bondage.

The following circumstances between Polly and her mistress and master personifies the lore of signifyin Brer Rabbit's escape from Brer Fox and the Tar-Baby.[6] The mistress threatened to sell Polly down river, Polly told her mistress "she didn't care, she was tired of that place, and didn't like to live there, nohow" (21). Polly's sass "infuriated Mr. Cox who cried 'How dare a negro say what she liked or what she did not like'; and he would show her what he should do" (21). Polly seems to stress to Lucy that she must simultaneously understand her goal and audience. Consequently, Polly is sold; she escapes, is returned, sues for her freedom and wins her independence.

Lucy, meanwhile, is just as sassy as her mother, Polly. For example, Lucy informs her mistress "'You have no business to whip me. I don't belong to you'" (26). Lucy knows she is in bondage; however, her sense of justice, self-respect

and freedom obligate her sassy responses. Sass is a psychological utility employed by the women to incite, inflame, and agitate the powerful to recognize and respect the will of the perceived powerless. (Numerous examples of this exist in the trickster tales.) Lucy's sassy act caused her mistress to justify her violent reaction. Lucy states,

> ...and when I thus spoke, saucily, I must confess, she [the mistress] opened her eyes in angry amazement and cried:
>
> "You do belong to me, for my papa left you to me in his will, ...you ought to be ashamed of yourself to talk so to one that you have been raised with; ..." (26).

Lucy's sass compels her mistress to sell her. The mistress tells her husband, "'Mr. Mitchell, I will not have that saucy baggage around this house, for if she finds you won't whip her, there will be no living with her, so you shall just sell her, and I insist upon it'" (28). Following in her mother's sassy footprints, and because a slave legally followed the condition of her or his mother, Lucy also successfully sues for her freedom.

Susie King Taylor begins her academic education with the help of a group of free, sassy African American women who impudently defy the law and educate young black children. Taylor's grandmother, Dolly, arranges for Taylor and her brother to learn how to read and write from Mrs. Woodhouse in 1858, Savannah, Georgia. The students (approximately 25 to 30) wrap their books in paper, "to prevent the police or white persons from seeing them," and enter Mrs. Woodhouse's home one at a time, assisted by her daughter, Mary Jane (5).

According to Taylor, neighbors thought they were learning a trade "as it was the custom to give children a trade of some kind" (5). The students left the same way they entered—one at a time. After two years with Mrs. Woodhouse, Taylor (in a sense) graduates to Mrs. Mary Beasley's tutelage, until May, 1860.

Taylor uses her training to benefit her community and later the country. She stated, "I often wrote passes for my grandmother, for all colored persons, free or slaves, were compelled to have a pass; free colored people having a guardian in place of a master" (7). Taylor's description of how she obtains her early education demonstrates how an oppressed community masked their opportunities. The slave community knew about and surreptitiously took advantage of educating their children.

For example, Taylor's teachers taught while disregarding possible threats to their freedom with further bondage or death. They respond to a divine purpose (to enlighten the future generation) and not profane slave codes (designed to perpetuate the ignorance of slaves). Is the ordeal of sass liberation or death? Metaphorically, Taylor's community of women provide a mutable barrier that separated the divine world of education to the profane world of bondage.

The spiritual and familial connections were so passionate, powerful and prophetic that the ironhand of the legal, social, psychological, and cultural terrors failed to convince the women to submit to a ubiquitous principle or implied natural duty that dictated that they disregard personhood or self-respect for themselves and their community. In both a religious and secular setting women employed

sass. Sass certainly was not an act that was reinforced or considered acceptable by white America's ruling culture. Relatedly, in her study Slave Women in Caribbean Society, Barbara Bush points out that enslaved Black women used sass as a means of resistance. For example Bush maintained, "Whip or no whip, a significant proportion of women slaves continued to risk the wrath of their white masters, most commonly by refusing to work and engaging in verbal abuse and insolence" (60). Sassy resistance is not unique to Black women in the United States.

Enslaved Africans and consequently African American slaves often had to transfigure or refashion West or Central African traditions and culture to their existence in the New World. Creolization contributed to the specific ways that women resisted oppression and achieved (at least) some psychological relief. In The Myth of the Negro Past for example, Melville Herskovits found that the tradition of indirection was well integrated in African culture from upper class to ordinary folk. He states it is, "...essential that this tradition of indirection be regarded as a carry-over of aboriginal culture" (156). African oral traditions, trickster tales, songs, proverbs, dance influenced African Americans faith in the power of the word or nommo (Foster 17). According to Frances Smith Foster in Written By Herself, faith in the power of the word comes "from sources religious and secular, African and American" (16). The familial and ancestral influences in the narratives provide other examples of creolization and resistance. Clearly, the women's use of sass during the antebellum period explored power relationships.

Among peers or members of the dominant culture its use held different meaning and elicited different responses.

Perhaps it is the unarticulated belief in the long-gone ancestor that compels the narrative women to flirt with death when they employ sass. In death they join with their ancestors. Sass then becomes a win, win situation—they reinforce their self-respect and sense of justice and the possibility that they will join with their watchful ancestors. In many of the narratives, sass is often performed by a senior member of the family or community.

The ancestors seem to operate in a spiritual and indirect way in the narratives. For example, in the mid to late eighteenth century eleven year-old Elizabeth is ripped from her immediate family. Longing to see her mother she escapes. Before she is forced to return to the new farm Elizabeth's mother advises her that she had "'nobody in the wide world to look to but God'" (4). Consequently, Elizabeth is depressed and wills herself to die. A voice asks if she wants to live and reassures her that she will be freed. Is this the voice of the ancestor working from a spiritual realm to instruct, persuade, and liberate the narrative subject? When Elizabeth accepts this voice as a connection to a spiritual realm she no longer believes that she is alone. This inner voice or ancestral presence is, in a sense, empowering and liberating for Elizabeth.

Delaney recalls, after discovering that her sister had escaped, that "wildly mother showed her joy at Nancy's escape" when they were alone together (19). Delaney states: "She [mother] would dance, clap her hands, and waving them about her head, would indulge in one of those weird negro melodies, which so

charm and fascinate the listener" (19). Furthermore, Delaney interrupts the flow of her narrative to address the spirit of her mother directly: "Dear, dear mother! how solemnly I invoke your spirit as I review these scenes of my girlhood, so long agone!" (50). She reinforces her spiritual and possibly ancestral or familial influence when, on the final page of her narrative, she remembers, "...I had been taught that there was hope beyond the grave,..." (57). "But every human thought, once expressed, becomes reality. For the word holds the course of things in train and changes and transforms them. And since the word has this power, every word is an effective word, every word is binding. There is no 'harmless', noncommittal word. Every word has consequences" (Jahn 133). Sass has transformative power.

Elizabeth's evangelical gift is awed, revered and supported initially by mature women in the communities she visits. Certain male communities frequently threatened and bullied her congregations. Elizabeth recalls "I felt that I was despised on account of this gracious calling," and when she looked to ministers for instruction or conversation "...some would cry out, 'You are an enthusiast;' and others said, 'the Discipline did not allow of any such division of the work; until I began to think I surely must be wrong" (13). Religious oratory was acceptable from the mouths of preaching men. Beleaguered by continuous condemnations she states "I was so embarrassed and encompassed, I wondered within myself whether all that were called to be mouth piece for the Lord, suffered such deep wadings as I experienced" (17). Nevertheless Elizabeth met her antagonists, found supporters and against great odds her acts helped others,

particularly orphans in Michigan. In her conclusion, she inspires her reader as she looks back on her evangelical works. She states "When I went forth, it was without purse or script—and I have come through great tribulation and temptation—not by any might of my own, for I feel that I am but as dust and ashes before my almighty Helper," (19). When Elizabeth went forth, seemingly, it was with the word.

Collectively "by the secret language of the pen," the women debunk a myth established by colonialists—that Black slaves had no voice, no power and no culture. Metaphorically, the narrative women can be viewed as profane manifestations of the female trickster figure. As they mediate their narrative "secrets" one becomes aware of the disruptions and connections between Central and West African, West Indies and African American cultures. Through their sassy narrative actions the women critique the institution of slavery, characterize the terrorism of their bondage, and articulate freedom.

Sass is complex. On the surface it appears to be direct speech or behavior—the actor appears to respond to an event in which she was recently involved—the receiver or his or her agent is read[7]. The receiver generally finds this behavior confrontational. Sass is stinging and not easily forgotten. If the receiver failed to fully realize the sociopolitical issue(s) involved in sass during the act, in retrospect it may become apparent later or more importantly the witness understands the significance of sass. The beauty of sass is that it lingers with the receiver or those who witness and can testify to its message. Through the use of verbal skill, for example, the narrative women demonstrate their

language acumen, knowledge of sociopolitical activities, and their cultural value and beliefs. Sass appears incidental and spontaneous but it comes from women who have long suffered and pondered the inequity of their existence. The narrative women, like other slaves, centered on a collective desire for an end to a system that enslaved them. Sass presented an opportunity to chip away at the wall of slavery. Although the women were sassing their immediate oppressors their intended audience was much wider. As an aesthetic it expressed the women's value, their needs and desires as well as the needs and desires of their community. Sass then is an aspect of signifyin–"the verbal art of ritualized insult, in which the speaker puts down, needles, talks about (signifies on) someone, to make a point or sometimes just for fun. It exploits the unexpected, using quick verbal surprises and humor, and it is generally characterized by nonmalicious and principled criticism" (Smitherman Black Talk, 206). Sass, as a witty act of criticism, is generally attributed to women.

In the following example of sass, Jackson takes on the role of heroine and braggart. Jackson is a "bad (wo)man" which means she is a heroine. She defied her oppressor, triumphed then recorded it and mocked him. Men were usually celebrated in this category "the exaggerated hero, black folk created secular, human figures who could contravene the established mores and standards of the society; figures who could pursue an independent course and look within themselves for the necessary strength" (Levine 407). She writes:

> When I made my escape from slavery I was in a query how I was to raise funds to bear my expenses. I finally came to the conclusion

that as the laborer was worthy of his hire, I thought my wages should come from my master's pocket. Accordingly I took twenty-five dollars. After I was safe and had learned to write. I sent him a nice letter, thanking him for the kindness his pocket bestowed to me in time of need. I have never received any answer to it.

When I complete my education, if my life is spared, I shall endeavor to publish further details of our history in another volume from my own pen (38).

In her sassy way and after her escape, Mattie Jackson testifies to injustice, claims a token compensation, identifies her former self a worker and not a slave, reprimands her former employer, denounces the institution of slavery by interjecting and affirming her ability to make decisions and articulate them in writing and finally recognizes the need to write the history of African American women. In short, she unequivocally boasts her humanity and self-respect while challenging her former employer or his agents to prove otherwise.

She is encouraging women like herself. I doubt that Jackson expected a response from her former employer. Moreover, I doubt that her former employer expected such blatant disrespect directed toward him from an old employee within the pages of a book with the promise that more is to come.

Returning to Jackson's' opening epigraph, consider her use of indirection, ambiguity and double entendre. Her recommendation is made to oppressed peoples directly by one who suffered the brutalities of slavery and contempt of tyrants. Although she refers to secrets, plural, there is one secret that the

nineteenth century women's sass illuminates. The power of the word engendered, represented and generated levels of freedom for the narrative women. One secret probably is connected to freedom—how to claim, keep or get it. Freedom is a state of mind. Perhaps part of the secret is that the enslaved must spiritually own her/his own freedom. One way to experience freedom is to profess it not with the pen literally but using what the pen metaphorically represents— owning one's own words. The secret therefore is not one kept from the oppressor but the conundrum is a spiritual reality that one keeps from ones self—freedom begins within. Jackson, like the other women in this paper, asserts freedom by recognizing, claiming and owning-up to the power of sass as a liberating vernacular performance.

I would like to suggest that the word secrets in opening epigraph be removed and voices inserted: "Manage you own voices and divulge them by the silent languages of your pen." The narrative women were aware of the books and the power of reading. They were also aware of amanuensis, publishers and what type of story the public was fed. Like amanuensis, publishers and ministers the narrative women also had agendas but moreso they maintain a cultural tradition of sass. Most of their voices became well kept secrets for over fifty years as their narratives were out of print. Aware that they had experiences that needed to be heard and remembered the women conveyed their stories. Perhaps they hoped or expect that there would be readers to understand their textual secrets and publication silences. Nevertheless, there is value and tradition in their words. The next chapter will focus more specifically on a literary

progeny of the narrative women, Pauline Hopkins, and her fictional portrayal of women and their voices.

Notes

[1] Further historical awareness concerning the United States cultural stereotypes of Black women can be found in: Patricia Morton, Disfigured Images (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991) and Deborah Gray White Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York: Norton, 1985).

[2] "Sassy" Oxford English Dictionary, 1989 ed., the sassy tree is identified as Erythrophlœum guineense (Cynometra Mannii).

[3] For a discussion of the basic principles of African philosophy in the cultures of Baluba, Ruandese, Dogon, Haitians and the Bambara peoples "who live far apart from one another. And for all the differences in detail these systems agree basically with one another" see: Janheinz Jahn, Muntu:African Culture and the Western World (New York: Grove Press, 1961) 99.

[4] "Loud Talk," Geneva Smitherman, Black Talk: Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner (Boston: Houghton 1994) "To talk in such a way as to confront or embarrass someone publicly" 156.

[5] Furthermore, is Drumgoold signifyin on the title of the most famous women's escaped slave narrative, Harriet Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of A Slave Girl, (1861; New York: Oxford UP, 1988) with her narrative title? Kate Drumgoold, A Slave Girl's Story Being an Autobiography of Kate Drumgoold Six Women's Slave Narratives (1898; New York: Oxford UP, 1988) 3-62. Through indirection, Drumgoold's title promises to go beyond "incidents" to convey the entire story of a life of a slave girl.

[6] Brer Rox resented Brer Rabbit's signifyin ways. Brer Fox trapped Brer Rabbit with a Tar-Baby. Brer Fox intended to barbecue Brer Rabbit. However, Brer Rabbit was agreeable to any torture except being thrown in the brier patch. Brer Fox was consumed with conquering or defeating Brer Rabbit so he threw Brer Rabbit into the brier patch—where Brer Rabbit had been

born and bred. Read a detailed version of the tale in: "How Mr. Rabbit Was Too Sharp for Mr. Fox," Encyclopedia of Black Folklore and Humor, ed. Henry D. Spalding (New York: Jonathan Davis Publishers, Inc., 1990) 11-12.

[7] "Read," Smitherman, Black Talk 192.

Chapter 3

PAULINE HOPKINS' SPEAKERLY HEROINES

Pauline Hopkins ...also hoped that fiction would become a tool in the struggle to change the social, political, and economic conditions of black people. The novels of black women, like the slave and free narratives that preceded them, did not just reflect or 'mirror' a society; they attempted to change it. Viewing novels as weapons for social change, literary and cultural criticism needs to consider how these novels actively structure and shape Afro-American culture and political struggles.

Hazel V. Carby, Reconstructing Womanhood

Pauline Hopkins' serialized novel, Hagar's Daughter, is a splendid collection of vocal women characters from several economic backgrounds. I will look at the archetypal and unconventional aspects of the women characters and the sociopolitical implications of their behavior. By today's popular standards, Hopkins heroine Venus (Hagar's Daughter) is unlikely. Hopkins endows Venus with the ability to speak two languages fluently—Plantation Creole (or Black English) and standard English. Her linguistic skills allow her to solve a murder mystery, recover her missing grandmother and an heiress. The protagonist, as suggested by the title is Hagar. Rather than a novel of passing, this is a novel of revelations, unmasking and untragic mulattoes. Hagar experiences at least three gradations of consciousness—believing she is an Anglo woman of privilege, as an Black woman suddenly enslaved with her infant and as a Black woman masquerading as an Anglo woman with secrets—manifested as differences in her voice and behavior.

The first speaking women in Hagar's Daughter are enslaved women. Waiting in the slave pen they cry out to God for understanding. "'O, my God!' cried one woman, 'send dy angel down once mo' ter tell me dat you's gwine ter keep yer word, massa Lord'" (9). In prayer, this woman audibly reminds God, and others who care to listen, that she believes He (God) is breaking His covenant and that it is about time to keep or reinforce a promise made. Likewise another woman prays aloud, "'O Lord, we's been a-watchin' an' a-prayin', but de 'liverer done fergit us!' cried another, as she rocked her body violently back and forth" (10). In addition to prayer this woman seems also to be answering the previous woman's inquiry. It appears the only being able to respond to the women's entreaties are other women in similar straits. Though contained in a slave pen, the women are compelled to articulate their emotions openly.

The voices, concerns and relationships of Hopkins' fictional women along with the limited traditional response from a critical audience inspired me to title this chapter "Speakerly Heroines." Gates derived the term "speakerly text" from "...Roland Barthes's opposition between the 'readerly' and the 'writerly' texts...as well as from the trope of the Talking Book, ... [it] also is a phrase used by both [Zora] Hurston and Ishmael Reed to define their own narrative strategies" (The Signyfying Monkey 198). It is the recognition of the speakerly or oral quality and ability in characters such as Venus and Henny, convey their intentions and demonstrate, through speech, the sociopolitical obstacles they must confront, simultaneously. A review of their dialogues indicate their worthiness as heroines

and the value of their speech to the story and the condition of women, sexual exploitation, economic class and racism.

The biblical story of the Egyptian Hagar and the Hebrew Sarah "encompasses more than ethnic prejudice. Theirs is a story of ethnic prejudice exacerbated by economic and sexual exploitation. Theirs is a story of conflict, women betraying women, mothers conspiring against mothers. Theirs is a story of social rivalry" (Weems 2)[1]. Like the title, naming becomes another significant aspect in Hagar's Daughter. Instead of a son, in this fictional world, a world that Hopkins creates, Hagar has a daughter, the patriarch is villainous, his decisions are questioned and the daughters stories, like their voices, are varied.

Mrs. Sargeant is a woman with limited identity and a voice to match. She has the surname of an officer and serves as Hagar's mother. Hagar is the only child of the Sargeants. The narrator states after the death of Mr. Sargeant, "Hagar...then became her mother's sole joy and inspiration. Determined to cultivate her daughter's rare intellectual gifts, she had sent her North to school when every throb of her heart demanded her presence at home" (32). Mrs. Sargeant lacks a given name and thus an independent identity. A reader believes that Mrs. Sargeant is wife of Mr. Sargeant, mother of Hagar and that she is a white woman of economic means, via her husband's business affairs. A reader later learns that Mrs. Sargeant is Hagar's surrogate mother and that her birth mother was an unknown enslaved Black woman. The reader does not know if Mrs. Sargeant knew Hagar to be Negro. Nonetheless, Mrs. Sargeant forgoes her desire to have her daughter by her side and sends Hagar away, at

age fourteen, to be formally educated, thus enhancing her already "rare intellectual gifts" (32). From Mrs. Sargeant's point of view, education will somehow further enrich the already intelligent, beautiful and sole heir to the Sargeant fortune, Hagar. Mrs. Sargeant upholds the ideals of members of the cult of true womanhood.

Hagar did not realize she trespassed the affluent socioeconomic culture of the antebellum South. Her passport was her family, face and appearance. Mrs. Sargeant's finishing gift of education helped to complete the package. Mrs. Sargeant's social and economic place was solidified because of her husband. However, if Mrs. Sargeant believed that beauty and an affluent husband were enough to secure Hagar a comfortable place among her peers there was no need to send her away to school. How many antebellum heterosexual bachelors longed for a cerebral lady to wed. The narrator reveals "Sometimes Hagar would trespass" (33). Hagar enjoyed a physical and mental trespass.

> She longed to mix and mingle with the gay world; she had a feeling that her own talents, if developed, would end in something far different from the calm routine, the housekeeping and churchgoing which stretched before her. Sometimes softer thoughts possessed her, and she speculated about love and lovers. This peaceful life was too tranquil and uneventful (33-34).

Hagar's voice was limited to her thoughts. In her thoughts she questioned the monotony of the conventions of true womanhood.

Ellis Enson, the forty-year old ideal (plantation gentleman) bachelor who "...had been so persistently pursued by all the women of the vicinity," wants only a woman "...capable of loving a man for himself alone without a thought of worldly advantage" (35). Though "he had a poor opinion of himself" he can not "bear disgrace or downfall that might touch his ancient [sur-] name" (35). When he gazes on Hagar he identifies a beauty able to "...witch a man's heart from him" (35). In Hagar, Ellis finds a woman with a "...mind that could think. She was not shy and self-conscious as young girls so often are; she seemed quite at ease, as one who has no thought of self" (35). Without intention she "witched" Ellis' heart and he made the following vow to eighteen year-old, Hagar: "'Heaven helping me, you shall be so loved and shielded that sorrow shall never touch you. You shall never repent trusting your young life to me'" (38). Educated Hagar speaks little and she probably trusted in Ellis's every word. The Sargeant women agreed to his proposal; but, on the day before the wedding Mrs. Sargeant is found dead. Sorrow touched Hagar. "At the end of a month Ellis put the case plainly before her, and she yielded to his persuasions to have the marriage solemnized at once, so that he might assume his place as her rightful protector" (39). Up to this point, one does not really hear the voice of Hagar or Mrs. Sargeant. They are women who handle proposals and need protecting and persuading. Despite Ellis' promise, he was helpless to stop death and thus sorrow touched Hagar.

Decisions are freely made and voice is often used by "Aunt Henny, a coal-black Negress of kindly face" who exercises her ability to speak throughout the

novel (33). If armed only with the moniker Aunt Henny a trained reader would surmise she is an elderly black woman, and if not a slave, probably a former slave. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries "Aunt" was not really a name but a designation for black women much like "Our Nig." Henny's daughter, Marthy, is maid to Hagar Enson. Like her mother, Marthy also speaks throughout the novel. Marthy tells her mother that she believes Hagar, since the birth of her baby, needed a protective charm. Henny makes the decision to see the conjure man and have a fetish prepared after Ellis proposed to Hagar. Though Henny knows both Enson and Hagar, it appears she has little faith that Enson has the ability to protect his bride. Both Henny and Marthy use their voices and make decisions for the unsuspecting mistress. Voice and act are connected. Henny maintains that she "'*was born wif a veil.* I knows a heap o' things by seein' 'em fo' dey happens. I don' tell all I sees, but I keeps up a steddyin' 'bout it'" (sic 43). Via Henny's third eye, apparently, the merger of Ellis and Hagar signaled trouble for Hagar. The conjure man, Unc' Demus, told Henny "'Long as yer mistis keep dis 'bout her, trouble'll neber stay so long day joy won't conquer him in de end'" (41). Subsequently, Henny puts the talisman "in Missee Hagar draw 'long wid her tickler fixins an' I wants yer, Marthy, to take keer ob it,' she concluded with a grave shake of her turbanned head" (41). When Isaac Johnson (slave of Ellis' brother, St. Clair) appears Henny is confident that trouble enters with him, just as it would with his master. Positive that Isaac portends trouble Henny warns Ellis. Hagar is concerned that Ellis looks grave. He states "'My dear, the slaves all look upon him as a bird of evil omen; for

myself, I look upon it all as mere ignorant superstition, but still I have a feeling of uneasiness" (46). Ellis must disregard the warning because it is based on something intuitive, something associated with slaves and their culture. Nevertheless like Mrs. Sargeant, both Henny and Marthy assume a need to take care of Miss Hagar beyond what her rich husband offers. Henny is confident in her decisions and voice and credits herself with insight and intelligence. The surreptitious protection of Henny and Marthy for Hagar suggests "there is nothing inherently ignoble about being a maid, nor anything inherently honorable about being an employer of a maid" just that some women need protection (Weems 9). The unnamed slave women previously mentioned prayed for such safekeeping from their heavenly guardian. Hagar, it seems, does not have to ask, seek or pray for protection, all want to insulate her. The difference among the women is their self-knowledge, class designation and awareness of race in American culture.

More apparent however, Hopkins sets up a parallel relationship to that of Hagar and Ellis with Marthy and Isaac. When Isaac returns to the estate Marthy is less than coy "regarding the athletic young Negro with undisguised admiration" (42). Though Henny tells Isaac that he, like his master, is trouble, "Isaac improved the time between the going and coming of Aunt Henny by making fierce love to Marthy, who was willing to meet him more than half way" (44). The narrator observes that "Marthy was a born coquette, and Isaac was very gallant to her" (47). Hagar is "a perfect picture of sweet womanhood" coy and unassuming during her brief wooing while Marthy shows "her tiny white teeth

...toss[es] her head" and grins as she actively participates in her courtship and talks with Isaac (46, 47). Unlike Mrs. Sargeant, Henny does not approve of Isaac. Isaac fails to make a vow to Marthy and they remain coupled longer than Hagar and Ellis. Nevertheless, all of Hagar's "rare intellectual gifts" were needed to prepare her for a racist reality that created a maternal fact with the power to transform her simultaneously from white to black, free to slave, wife to concubine, mother of a baby to a breeder of stock and from rich to poor. Hagar ponders:

> Could it be true, or was it but a hideous nightmare from which she would soon awake? Her mother a slave! She wondered that the very thought did not strike her dead. With shrinking horror she contemplated the black abyss into which the day's events had hurled her, leaving her there to grovel and suffer the tortures of the damned. Her name gone, her pride of birth shattered on one blow! Was she, indeed, a descendent of naked black savages of the horrible African jungles? Could it be that the blood of generations of these unfortunate ones flowed through her veins? Her education, beauty, refinement, what did they profit her now if—horrible thought—Ellis, her husband, repudiated her? Her heart almost ceased beating with the thought, and she crouched still lower in the dust of utter humiliation (57).

A fact of Hagar's heritage is revealed shortly after the birth of her daughter. Her biological mother was an enslaved Black woman.

The slave catcher (Walker) claims Hagar and infant as his property at her husband's estate. She is once again faced with Ellis' violation of his premarital vow; however, this time he had control over the degree of Hagar's suffering. Elllis manages to utter the following words, after paying for his wife and daughter, "'I would willingly give the money twice over, even my whole fortune, if it did not prove my wife to be of Negro blood,' replied Ellis, with such despair in his tones that even these men, inured to such scenes from infancy, were touched with awe" (56). The rejected Hagar, as a Negro woman and mother, assumes a new responsibility for herself and her infant daughter.

After authorities decide Ellis committed suicide and that Hagar is an impoverished, enslaved Black mother, she finds a voice, one that accuses, curses, and questions without permission. She tells St. Clair (her brother-in-law)"'I have come without your bidding, sir, for I have something to say to you,'" (69). Hagar speaks when and where she deems it appropriate. As she recalls the suicide for St. Clair and Walker, the narrator observes that "A chill crept over her listeners. No one had ever seen the gentle Hagar Sargeant in her present character" (70). She identifies St. Clair as his brother's murderer; this causes him to cringe. "'This is too much for any man to stand from a nigger wench. You have sealed your own fate. Off you go, my fine madam, to the Washington market in short meter. I would have kept you near me, and made your life as easy as it has been in the past, but this settles it'" (70-71). Voicelessness could have ensured a comfortable existence for Hagar—perhaps. St. Clair has promised, is willing and has the means to sell Hagar and her daughter and for

some reason she continues to sass/resist him and behave in a more empowered manner than before when she thought herself white. Eyeing St. Clair from head to foot she remarks "'Selfish, devilish, cruel,' she said slowly; 'think not that your taunts or cruelties can harm me; I care not for them. No heart in your bosom; no blood in your veins! You are his slayer, and his blood is crying from the ground against you this very hour'" (71). The narrator states her last assertion is more than he could bear. Before leaving the room she curses St. Clair or makes a prediction, depending on one's point of view:

> "It's the truth! you're his murderer, and in spite of the wealth and position you have played for and won, you have seen the last on this earth of peace or happiness." Then striking her breast, she added:
>
> "As I have parted with the same friends! Pleasant dreams to you, St. Clair Enson, master of Enson Hall!" (71).

The acknowledgement of Hagar Sargeant as an enslaved black woman also seem to loosen Hagar's tongue. Her vituperations against St. Clair demonstrate an articulate and passionate voice, compliments to her mother. Additionally her voice also suggests the moral conscience of the country. She escapes with her baby, and when cornered on a bridge then leaps. Hagar, then, responds as one would expect some slave mothers. The story moves from the antebellum period to the 1880s, and Hopkins' women characters have much more to say and do.

During the antebellum period, Mrs. Sargeant's identity was erased. All she had was a name. Unfortunately, she lacked a first name; and when she wed

she sacrificed her family surname as well. Therefore, Mrs. Sargeant, although a woman of means, was bereft of self-identity and of her family history because of tradition. On the other hand, Henny forgoes any acknowledgement of a surname, previous family history or an identity of the father of Marthy. Marthy also lacks a surname. However their given names seem to help in the development of their personalities—their identities are not smothered and obscured by a surname. Hagar manages to obtain two "respected" surnames (Sargeant and Enson) but they could not save her from the enslaved unnamed Black woman who gave birth to her.

Mrs. Sargeant and Hagar are portrayed as women who would not directly exploit their slaves. Whether Mrs. Sargeant knew of Hagar's birth mother or not she used the little power endowed her by her husband and enhanced Hagar's intellectual capacity. Additionally, Hagar's identity, like that of Marthy and Henny, is extended because she can be recognized by a first name. Beyond the law, Hagar's reenslavement was paternalistically reinforced through her humiliation, dehumanization, and an attack on her identity. The crashing blow, her husband, the dashing Ellis, broke his premarital vow and participated in her humiliation.

Though Hagar has been unmasked as a slave, the women who cleaned her messes and waited on her, seemingly, never varied in their concern for her. Did Henny know Hagar's mother was enslaved, and if so, how did she know—from being with the family or her third eye? What made Marthy care about Hagar's well being? Henny was with the Sargeant family for years, according to the text, yet Henny did not have the same concern for Mrs.

Sargeant as she did for Hagar. And like the biblical story of Hagar, Hopkins' novel Hagar's Daughter is also about class difference. Hagar seems passive and utters few remarks until she is revealed as a black woman.

She is immediately acceptable because of her initial appearance as a young, beautiful, smart, rich and energetic white woman who, while cleaning the colonial china, is innocently waiting for a rich bachelor to pluck her from the dining room so they can unite resources as husband and wife and merge their capitalist chords in the song of love and spring. When the perfect plantation platform is in place and Hagar is wed to the ideal husband, one needs to remember the title of Hopkins' tale. This Hagar, unlike Abraham and Sarah's Hagar, gives birth to a daughter—Hopkins takes on a traditional plot. What appears too perfect and pristine even to the characters, which adds to the significance of this plot, is that seemingly neither Hagar, Ellis nor Marthy know that Hagar is a Black woman. Further, if Hagar knew of her biological mother this would be a novel of passing rather than a novel that confronts the conventions and ideologies of race. The voices of the Sargeant women, pre-Negro revelation period, varied from those of Henny and Marthy.

Nonetheless, Hagar as a mulatta figure, along with Estelle, Jewel and Amelia/Aurelia, (other characters in the novel), allow a reader to explore the issues associated with the designation "tragic mulatta." Carby finds:

> In relation to the plot, the mulatta figure allowed for movement between two worlds, white and black, and acted as a literary displacement of the actual increasing separation of the races. The

> mulatta figure was a recognition of the difference between and separateness of the two races at the same time as it was a product of a sexual relationship between white and black (90).

Barbara Christian points out that the image of the mulatta "has been with us since the beginnings of the American novel. Cora Munro, one of the minor characters in Cooper's The Last of the Mohicans (1826), is an octoroon, and she is a foreshadowing of the many octoroons who appear in the literature of the nineteenth century, for she meets with a tragic end" (16). Christian goes on to state that as a result of an illicit relationship the mulatta "suffers from a melancholy of the blood that inevitably leads to tragedy. In contrast to the southern lady, whose beauty, refinement, and charm bring her admiration, love, and happiness, the fruit of miscegenation is Tragedy, regardless of what other positive characteristics the mulatta might possess" (16). It would appear, initially, that the antebellum Hagar and her infant daughter suffered the typical plight of the tragic mulatta. However, Hopkins quickly revises that plot line and character tragedy with the Post-Reconstruction entry of Aurelia Madison.

Aurelia Madison is an articulate woman character who transcends the image of the tragic mulatta and propriety. The narrator describes Aurelia as "a woman—young in years, but with a mature air of a woman of the world...The girl had a woman's voluptuous beauty with great dusky eyes and wonderful red-gold hair" (90). Aurelia's foil, the perfect Jewel, is described as follows:

> Jewel Bowen's beauty was of the Saxon type, dazzling fair, with creamy roseate skin. Her hair was fair, with streaks of copper in it;

her eyes, gray with thick short lashes, at times iridescent. Her nose superbly Grecian. Her lips beautifully firm, but rather serious than smiling.

Jewell was not unconscious of her attractions. She had been loved, flattered, worshipped for twenty years. She was proud with the pride of conscious worth that demanded homage as a tribute to her beauty—to herself (82).

Like Hagar, Jewel is raised by a surrogate mother, Estelle Marks Bowen. Prior to marrying Zenas, Estelle, a waitress in a Bohemian resort in San Francisco, is described as "a young woman of great beauty" and "an honorable woman who would not betray his confidence" (81). The nouveau riche senator, Zenas Bowen, also has working-class roots and his appearance is characterized as "peculiar. Middle height, lank and graceless. He had the hair and skin of an Indian,... There was no denying his awkwardness; no amount of polish could make him otherwise. His relation to his family was most tender, his wife and daughter literally worshipping the noble soul that dwelt within its ungainly casket" (80-81). The dark Zenas is the father of the most fair Jewel; and Jewel's mother, the reader assumes, must have been quite flaxen. Millionaire Zenas, though dusky hued, is elected state senator from California. Zenas is understood as one other than Anglo Saxon not only via appearance but in his speech:

Every characteristic of his was of the self-made pattern. In familiar conversation with intimate friends, it was his habit to fall into the use of ungrammatical phrases, and, in this, one might easily trace

> the rugged windings of a life of hardship among the great unwashed before success had crowned his labors and steered his bark into its present smooth harbor (80).

Zenas achieves his elected position with the help of his wife, who "recognized her husband's sterling worth in business and morals, and insisted upon his entering the arena of politics. Thanks to her cleverness, he made no mistakes and many hits which no one thought of tracing to his wife's rare talents" (81-82). Estelle also reminded him to speak standard English when he lapsed into his "ungrammatical phrases." Mrs. Bowen finds that speaking the "'vernacular of the gold mines here in Washington. You'll be eternally disgraced'" (88). Language or rather vernacular can be used as a marker which enables some to decide what economic class in which to place a speaker. Language will again become an issue when the characteristics of feminine perfection are reviewed in Venus. Mrs. Estelle Marks Bowen is actually Hagar Sargeant Enson. As a former white, then enslaved black and currently undeclared but apparently white woman (again) the new Mrs. Bowen understood the importance of language, voice, gender and color.

During the late nineteenth century "in order to gain a public voice as orators or published writers, black women had to confront the domestic ideologies and literary conventions of womanhood which excluded them from the definition 'woman'" (Carby 6). In Hagar's Daughter, Hopkins confronts the construct of womanhood with female characters who create and claim themselves as subjects and rulers of their own bodies in the face of ideologies

and conventions of nineteenth century womanhood. Jewel Bowen's whiteness is celebrated and reason for heterosexual reward and reverence. Aurelia acknowledges Jewel's beauty when speaking with Sumner, adding "'and she is good, not like me'" (103). Sumner, Jewel's fiancée, exclaims "'She is an angel, my white angel of purity,' he replied with a look of reverence on his face" (103). At this point the narrator interrupts for a comparison and contrast of the beautiful women:

> Aurelia was a gorgeous tropical flower; Jewel, a fair fragrant lily. Men have such an unfortunate weakness for tropical blooms, they cannot pass them by carelessly, even though a lily lies above their hearts. Cuthbert [Sumner] could not ignore this splendid tropical flower; it caused his blood to flow faster, it gave new zest to living—for an hour. Jewel was his saint, his good angel; and he loved her truly with all the high love a man of the world can ever know. He trusted her for her womanly goodness and truth (103).

Aurelia is constructed to be the antithesis of Jewel. Metaphorically, Jewel is a "fair fragrant lily" named and classified while Aurelia is likened to a "gorgeous tropical flower" no genus but cultivated in a warm climate thus exhibiting dark or colorful features. Although men have weaknesses for "exotic" beauties who could witch a man's heart for a time, it is the genealogy and cultivation of white womanhood that provides a high love, truth and goodness. The narrator's observation suggests that Sumner salutes and reveres Jewel while his baser desires are stimulated by Aurelia. Finally, if Jewel represents goodness and

purity then Aurelia represents wickedness and depravity. Such binaries were used during the turn of the century in literature as instruction for ladies concerning the proper behavior and expected punishments for those who failed to conform. Hopkins clearly took exception to such conventions.

Hopkins' character Aurelia is particularly exciting because she is constructed like a trickster figure; if she were male, she could be an epic hero. Lawrence Levine, for example, finds that black epic heroes "could stand within the very center of white society, and they could stand there as black men operating victoriously on their own terms" (438). Aurelia knows that her mother was an enslaved black woman. She does not deny her blackness or pass for white nor does she herald the issue. When Benson, a long time friend of the family, attempts to recruit Aurelia for his scheme to steal millions she tells him "'I have a hankering for respectability that amounts to a passion'" (97). After Benson asks if she ever thought of marrying for money she responds:

> "'But you know too well my reasons for hesitating in such a course.'
>
> Benson moved uneasily in his seat, and for a moment his eyes dropped under the steady gaze that the girl bent upon him—eyes large, dreamy, melting, dazzling the sense, but at this moment baleful" (97).

Aurelia's gaze and ambiguous wording cause a nefarious villain like Benson to cringe. She goes on to reveal "'It is the wrong lead for a woman like me,—an adventuress, to forget her position for one instant and allow her heart to guide her head'" (97-98). Aurelia characterizes herself as one who lives by her wits.

She is previously described as "aiding her father in his games of chance, luring the gilded youth to lose their money without murmuring. Hers had been a precarious life and a dangerous one" (92). And though she has a hankering for respectability Aurelia views honesty "as a luxury for the wealthy to enjoy" (92). Aurelia knows the truth about her mother and Benson does too. As a speaker she is assertive in her interaction with Benson whose gaze lowers under her response. Benson's mistress, Elise Bradford, reveals to Sumner that Benson rejected her for Aurelia. "'That is not the worst thing about her,' replied the woman with a bitter smile. Will you believe me when I tell you that she is a quadroon? ...the child of Major Madison's slave, born about the time the war broke out. This is why the two men find in her a willing tool'" (158-159). The worst aspect of Aurelia, according to Bradford, is that she is a product of miscegenation. Benson, apparently finds that Aurelia's acceptance of her maternal roots and unhesitating ability to offer confident, quick, witty replies makes him somewhat insecure including her in his sinister machinations.

Sumner, on the other hand, responds like a rejected Victorian woman when he hears of Aurelia's maternity. "'My God!' exclaimed Sumner as he wiped the perspiration from his face, 'a negress! this is too horrible.' Repeated shocks had unnerved him, and he felt weak and bewildered" (159). Consequently, Sumner sees Aurelia as a hazard to marriageable white men "'But a white man may be betrayed into marrying her. I certainly came near to it myself'" (160). Three years prior to his engagement to Jewel, Sumner pledged himself to Aurelia. The narrator recalls:

> They [Aurelia and Sumner] had loved and been betrothed; had quarreled fiercely over a flirtation on her part and had separated in bitterness and pain; and yet the man was relieved way down in a corner of his heart for he had felt dimly, after the first rapture was over, that he was making a mistake, that she was not the woman to command the respect of his friends nor to bring him complete happiness (92).

Sumner, although a man moved by his passions, submitted to the discernment of the public, like Ellis. Sumner, it appears, is also a character easily manipulated, and as Aurelia is a clever woman of the world, she undoubtedly understood the whims and desires of Sumner and intentionally engaged in a "flirtation" as she prepared to tell him the truth. At the time Aurelia believed "Cuthbert Sumner's wife could afford to be honest" (92-93). She certainly could not tell others the truth without revealing the truth to him. However, as the narrator outlines, Sumner, like Ellis, did not embody the same love that he professed when becoming engaged to Aurelia. While facing first degree murder charges Sumner, a prisoner, allows Jewel to sully her good name when she secretly weds him. Aurelia offers to save him from prosecution "'All I ask in return is that you take me to your heart again as your affianced wife, and I shall be content'" (236). Proud Sumner exclaims "'If my acquittal depends upon the plan you have mentioned, Miss Madison, I shall never be free'" (236). Sumner, ostensibly, is embarrassed by his passionate emotions for Aurelia.

The jail cell incident between Aurelia and Sumner is quite telling. When Sumner threatens to make Aurelia a social outcast if she remains in Washington, D.C., "she laughed aloud ferociously and then began a tirade of abuse that would have honored the slums" (238). The historic metalanguage of race grouped all blacks no matter their beauty, income, education, morals or manners, "into a normative well of inferiority and subserviency" (E. Higginbotham 8). Higginbotham points out that "Until the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, race effectively served as a metaphor for class" (8). The exposure of Aurelia's racial configuration ideally would cause the rejection of prior suitors, party invitations and her being considered a lady in Washington D.C. Sumner decides to end all future relations between them adding "'if you were as pure as snow, and I loved you as my other self, *I would never wed with one of colored blood, an octaroon!*'" (sic 238). The intrepid and earnest Aurelia states "'I will not fly—I will brave you to the last! If the world is to condemn me as the descendant of a race that I abhor, it shall never condemn me as a coward!'" (238). Aurelia is sassy and refuses to deny her heritage and be made voiceless. The implied author immediately interrupts, offering something akin to a chorus, to contextualize this situation and its impact on Aurelia:

> Terrible though her sins might be—terrible her nature, she was but another type of the products of the accursed system of slavery—a victim of "man's inhumanity to man" that has made "countless millions mourn." There was something, too, that compelled admiration in this resolute standing to her guns with the

> determination to face the worst that fate might have in store for her. Something of all this Sumner felt, but beyond a certain point his New England philanthropy could not reach (238).

Aurelia unveiled is a revelation of her influences. Yet she manages to surpass all constraints and restrictions that held her down. Further, the authorial voice questions if Aurelia committed terrible sins and suggests that there is reason to applaud her resolve and self-regard. The reader knows that although many men want to marry Aurelia, to her detriment, she loves only one man, Sumner. By Sumner's standards Aurelia's sin consists in deceiving innocent white men of means into believing that she was marriageable material. He did not seem too concerned that she lured them into games of chance to lose their money. Sumner, because he was once engaged to marry Aurelia (though only the reader knows of the engagement) whose blood is tainted (he believes via her mother), now wants to make her disappear.

Along with her other activities, Aurelia is also characterized in the novel as smoking, talking like a man, being shrewd and intelligent. She knowingly assumes an alias surname, following the instruction of her father, and agrees to manipulate the man she loves for financial independence (106). Her cultural training is authenticated by the high-brow crowd when she plays the piano, on request: "And she was worth listening to for she was a cultured amateur of no mean ability, and gave genuine pleasure by her performance. ...Mrs. Bowen thanked her warmly as she rose from the instrument, followed by the plaudits of

the company" (109). Aurelia's relationship with Jewel reinforces her multidimensional attributes. The narrator states:

> She had taken a great fancy to Jewel Bowen, not only because the latter was very kind to her—kinder than anyone had ever been to her in her lonely, reckless life, but because she really carried in her heart a spark of what passed for love and which would have developed but for Sumner. She could even admire Jewel's beauty without jealousy; she did not envy her her wealth although so pinched herself in money matters, and yet—strange nature of women, or of some women—for the reason she was the more determined to triumph over her as a woman, and, if she could, stab her. She had forced the friendship with that intention (121-122).

Aurelia is a sassy character who refuses to be limited on the basis of race, gender, sexuality or class. However, one must question how she trespasses such barriers during the 1880s in Washington D.C. Aurelia is never at a loss for words. Elise Bradford, (a poor to working-class white woman character), in her summary of the lives on "Negro women of mixed blood" finds:

> ...they refuse to mate themselves with the ignorant of their own race. Socially, they are not recognized by the whites; they are often without money enough to but the barest necessities of life; honorably, they cannot procure sufficient means to gratify their luxurious tastes; their mothers were like themselves; their fathers they never knew; debauched whitemen are ever ready to take

> advantage of their destitution, and after living a short life of shame, they sink into early graves. Living, they were despised by whites and blacks alike; dead, they are mourned by none (159).

Aurelia is not a character to be quieted or forgotten. After becoming reacquainted Sumner finds "her air was bolder" (122). She does not pass for white; she trespasses the conventions of womanhood. Her complexion and beauty allow her entree into her chosen society while voice, skill, assertiveness, intelligence and desire allow her to remain there. Ironically, Aurelia thrives in a space (of her construction) in which bourgeois notions of sexual purity and true womanhood loom menacingly. Her lack of shame also enable her to navigate the turbulent waters of race, sex, and class causing her to avoid blackmail.

The only white women who braved the rough rivers of sexual purity and true womanhood, one imagines, is Mrs. Sargeant whose history and identity remain ambiguous. Zenas Bowen's first wife, also nameless, existed before he became wealthy, therefore she could not be counted among the throngs of true womanhood members. Further, her ethnicity is unknown. Patricia J. Williams states, in her book The Rooster's Egg,

> From Revolutionary times forward, white women's lives in the United States became increasingly interiorized, their sphere of influence relegated to the domestic, until by the end of the 1800s the so-called cult of true womanhood had produced a sacralized vision of domesticity that for many was as much prison as "home." Women were privy to a domestic life that was relentlessly

> idealized—that idealization being the subject of so much of the literature of authors like Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman—and a legal life in which they had limited rights to property, contract, and divorce, no right to vote, and the "right" to be beaten by a stick of no greater thickness than the husband's thumb (158-159).

Hopkins, a contemporary of Chopin and Gilman, questions the sacredness of domestic life for women. Elise Bradford is the only fully fleshed white woman character in Hagar's Daughter. Bradford was orphaned young and brought up by her aunt in Kentucky. Seeking a position as a well-paid government clerk, she came to Washington, D.C., at the age of eighteen. Bradford, jobless, friendless and poor, secured a position as Benson's clerk in the Treasury Building. She sought a public existence rather than a domestic one. On her arrival, there is no indication that she hoped to find a marriageable partner. She is trying to fulfill her goals and desires—to earn a living wage and also provide financial support for her aunt. Bradford's goal is compelling when one remembers that she is a Southern woman from a poor, woman-centered background. During the 1880s, when Bradford becomes an office clerk, women were recent entries into office work—"in 1870, women were only about 3 percent of office workers, but by 1890, they were 17 percent" (Woloch 246). With Bradford, Hopkins highlights career ambitions for women. Before dating Jewel, Sumner, "felt a passing admiration for the good-looking stenographer" (152).

Miss Bradford is conscious of her status in the community and of other women. It should be noted that female office workers "were better educated than women in industry, they considered themselves as an elite among women employees. An office worker might earn no more than a skilled garment worker, but the work itself was more regular, 'dignified' and desirable" (Woloch 246). After five years of employment Bradford is the unmarried mother of a son who, lives with her aunt, has no friends and leads a solitary lifestyle. Her story becomes a cautionary tale about working in a dignified and desirable environment. She remembers "I had tasted poverty, I appreciated its effect on my future welfare, and I sickened at the thought" (158). Bradford claims: "'Official wealth, power and opportunity were my ruin. I was led to confide in the chief [Benson] by his high position; and he, like others in such places, deceived me and betrayed that confidence'" (158). She states "'I stood before him crushed for all eternity—to me, who had fallen, without a thought of resistance, under the charm of his manner and beauty, that have ruined more than one woman among those who are above me in wealth and position'" (161). The women above her are only distinguished by economic class not as married or single but women, like herself, who trusted in the charm and beauty of a man. She asserts "I feel my own misery and degradation. I am selfish in my despair" (159). Though she must suffer the disgrace of unwed pregnancy alone she remains voiceless in Washington D. C. In addition to being voiceless, she becomes a childless mother just to be near the man she loves.

About a year after her arrival Benson manages to further violate Bradford when he renders her silent with a threat:

> "Elise, it is particularly necessary for my future plans that this affair of ours be kept secret. If you bury it in your heart, and seal your lips upon it, you shall be recompensed finally, I will never lose sight of you and the boy, but direct that a large sum shall be paid to you yearly. If not—people have died for a less offense than that" (161).

In her years of silence, it seems, Bradford has learned many secrets but not enough about Benson. Benson achieves with Bradford what Sumner wanted to accomplish with Aurelia—silence. Being voiceless and childless become an overwhelming existence and Bradford decides to confess to Sumner; she states, "'I feel a desire to talk on forbidden subjects, to take someone into my confidence'" (153). Haunted by, as she says, her sins she feels compelled to speak and she finds her voice (153). As one who was silenced for years she now has the power to silence—at one point she shouts "'Silence!'" to the interrupting Sumner (155). Unapologetically, Bradford maintains that she silences him for his own benefit.

Bradford responds to an urge to confess; specifically, she offers a last confession. Bradford reveals to Sumner that he has been set-up by Benson, who loved her until he started an affair with Aurelia, "a quadroon" (158). Conceivably, Aurelia was used by Benson as an excuse to justify his break with Bradford. When Aurelia and Benson meet there is nothing to indicate a sexual relationship between them, but mounting proof that he finds her desirable and

knows Aurelia to be a woman of color. Further, she is one of the few women he does not threaten or unknowingly manipulate. Nevertheless, Bradford tells the visibly shaken Sumner "'Do not blame her [Aurelia]. Fate is against her. She is helpless'" (159). Perhaps Bradford is torn in her feelings about Aurelia, but she does believe that she is some sort of interloper whose appeal needs to be abolished. Her final remarks to Sumner are "I shall be repaid if only you circumvent that woman [Aurelia], and all is made right between you and Miss Bowen" (162). However, as Bradford demonstrates, it is the single, poor or working-class woman who must suffer for individualism and sensuality. She states:

> "I felt that my only chance lay in matching his cunning with diplomacy. ...I would agree to all he asked if he would allow me to retain my position in the office with him, and would provide for the boy and educate him. ...I have learned much by being here. I know enough to ruin him. I planned for it and I have succeeded. He dares not go against me now, and so he has promised marriage, and I shall once more hold my head up among honest women" (161).

Bradford wants to hold her head up among honest women and Aurelia wants wealth so that she can be honest. Bradford's plan of marriage was flawed because she, like Aurelia, did not listen to her intended. Benson, as good as his word, kills Bradford but not before she exercises her voice. Beauty or loveliness offers Hagar, Aurelia or Bradford little when it comes to romance. Aurelia, it

appears, was willing to keep her options open even when approaching Sumner. One assumes she recognizes his duplicitous behavior. However, Bradford unquestionably knows Benson as a cruel criminal and womanizer and she is satisfied with forcing him to marry her. Bradford is unrealistic in using her voice just to ensnare Benson into marriage.

Nevertheless, Hopkins further challenges an ideal of feminine perfection and power of voice with the character Venus—(Latin name for goddess of beauty and love) (Rule 117). Hopkins intentionally names a black servant woman character Venus with all that it denotes and as such gives another face and voice to love and beauty. When introduced into the novel, Bowen is immediately stimulated hearing the name of his daughter's servant. "'That the name of your new maid, Blossom?' the Senator's voice demanded...'Hump! Name enough to hang her: Venus, the goddess of love and beauty! Can she earn her salt?'" (89). Hopkins uses Bowen to remind readers the meaning of the name Venus. Furthermore, I believe that this signaling of her name and questioning of her ability also foreshadows the depths of love and beauty that a reader will come to understand about Venus.

Venus Camilla Johnson is a character who is usually ignored, and when recognized by critics, is often stereotyped as a minstrel figure. Venus is the daughter of former slaves Marthy and Isaac Johnson who are currently employed as servants to their former masters. I suspect either Venus' gender, economic status, complexion or her diglossic[2] ability—Plantation Creole to Standard

English—one or all are enough for some critics to deny her visibility let alone hero status.

The insightful study by Claudia Tate, Domestic Allegories of Political Desire, finds Venus lacking in her heroine qualities. Tate finds that all of Hopkins' novelistic heroines embody "Eurocentric beauty" (63). Physically, there is nothing to tie Venus to Eurocentric beauty: she is born into what seems like a succession of dusky hued slaves. She is judged by appearances and marked by gender and skin tone before speaking. Venus is undeniably an African American woman and no amount of dialogue, be it Plantation Creole or Standard English, can grant her heroine status. Tate states,

> ...the text reveals Venus's integrity, intelligence, and courage, but her presence does not disrupt or even challenge the viewpoint that she is not the material of which real heroines are made. Without a doubt the ideology of Western beauty had conditioned readers—black and white alike—to expect fair heroines and to bestow sympathy on the basis of the purity of character, aligned to the purity of their Caucasoid comeliness (63).

Tate's conclusion is based on her study of sentimental literature at the turn of the century. By the standards of that sentimental literature Tate decrees Venus unworthy of "real heroine" status but deserving of being a servant—honest, intelligent and courageous. When examining nineteenth-century African American women's literature, one must confront the prevailing trope of the tragic mulatto and the cult of true womanhood. A heroic African American female

character from the nineteenth century with a complexion deeper than butter would generally be thought of as an older, jolly mammy character and therefore comic.

It is Venus' intervention (on several occasions) in the kidnapping of Hagar's daughter that frees Jewel Bowen (who is actually Hagar's daughter), exposes the actual murderer and the further involvement and corruption of General Benson and Major Madison, and reunites Hagar with her first husband and daughter. It is Venus who contacts "chief of the secret service" J. Henson, revealing where she believes Bowen and his culprits to be (186). When she enters Henson's office, the narrator describes Venus as "a young colored girl who had an extremely intelligent, wide-awake expression" (223). She understands that her father (Isaac) works for an unscrupulous thief and is therefore part of the criminal life as well. Once she begins to give information to Henson the narrator states, "Venus forgot her education in her earnestness, and fell into the Negro vernacular, talking and crying at the same time" (224). After she communicates (in the Negro vernacular) to Henson where she believes the kidnapped Jewel has been taken, who the perpetrators are and two pages of interaction Henson states "I understand your drift now" (227). Chief of a government office with numerous agents Henson asks the ever clever Venus "are you brave enough to risk something for the sake of your mistress?" (227). Adding "'It comes to just this: someone must go down to this plantation in Maryland, and hang around to find out if there is truth to **our** suspicions. Can you wear boys' clothing?'" (emphasis mine 227). It is unclear if he hires or

volunteers her, but he masculinizes her. He gives her the undercover name Billy and partners her with an agent posing as her grandfather, "Uncle Henry, a crippled old Negro, fond of drink" (227). To crack the case Billy and Uncle Henry must be able to speak Plantation Creole to blend in with the people and their surroundings. Later, when Venus thinks of a way to get into the plantation where Jewel and Aunt Henny are being held, Henry respectfully acknowledges "'I take off my hat to you, young lady, I does, an' I'm goin' to give the chief a pointer to git you on the staff,'" (240). Venus saves the women without violence or further harm.

Kristina Brooks asserts that Negro characters who speak Plantation Creole contribute to discernible stereotypes such as "Mammies, Bucks and Wenches"—the title of her essay. Brooks finds Venus

> ...a figure who can mediate between the slave characters who cannot survive off the plantation and the mixed-race characters such as Jewel and Aurelia whose unhappy fates attest to persistent racism. Both chronologically and geographically, then, Venus serves as a bridge: between the (slave) ancestors and the (free) descendents, and between the southern and northern cultures where these characters are located (147).

Brooks maintains that Venus "still retains marks of a degraded past" (147). Her degraded past manifests itself in the scene with Henson where Venus "fell into the Negro vernacular..." (Hopkins 224). According to Brooks, "here black dialect is clearly represented as a step below 'white' English, which is consistently

spoken by all of the mixed-raced female characters" (148). When Brooks combines Venus' African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and related body movements and functions, she finds that "Hopkins embodies both the comic tradition of the black minstrelsy and the uncommon (i.e., unrecorded) tradition of black heroism. Though objectified in particular instances, Venus is primarily an African American subject, whose representation remains distinct from those of her ancestors" (148). In an oblique manner, Brooks acknowledges Venus' ability to speak standard English as an aspect that sets her apart from her family.

Brooks does not take into account the "variability in the judgments given about the English of the runaways" during the eighteenth century. The language of some runaway slaves was described as—"very good English, pretty good English and speaks proper English to speaks English though somewhat Negroish, He speaks remarkably good English for a Negro, speaks rather more proper than Negroes in general" (Dillard 84). Dillard states that "the majority of these advertisements do indicate that the runaways spoke 'good English'—a term which Europeans seemingly never apply to a pidgin and almost never to a creole. ...the implication of the term good English would be 'rather like the English of a white man'" (84-85). Venus' diglossia is not a reason to make her distinct from her ancestors. Smitherman points out that during slavery, "it is highly probable that the black speakers of White English, because of proximity and necessity, commanded the Black English Creole as well" (Talkin and Testifyin 13). Additionally with the diglossic character Venus, Hopkins gives

readers a deeper peek into the inner workings of gender, race, language and their relationships to power.

The response from some critics reinforces the prejudices related to AAVE. Venus is a self-defined, adventurous, thinking and controlled individual who wants Henson, a Southerner, to take action. As a close reader and as a Black woman, who is acquainted with how some forms of contestation operate within the confines of relations of power, I understand that beneath the surface of the narrator's description of Venus as one who "fell into the Negro vernacular, talking and crying at the same time" that there is some 'reading dialect' at work (224). Hopkins is reading dialect through Venus. Venus intentionally selects, not falls, into Plantation Creole. However, in speaking Plantation Creole, Hopkins reinforces to a community of African Americans, particularly women, the relationship between speaker and listener and how a message will be interpreted by a particular audience. The targeted receiver, Henson, prefers to deal with one who speaks Plantation Creole rather than standard American dialect. Why? Because as Tate established previously, Venus does not fit the norm and she transgresses the boundary of heroine when she approaches the chief of the Secret Service to give him the who, why, what and where of a major crime. With Venus, Hopkins creates layers on layers of reading dialect that confronts the public stereotype of talkin African American women as mammies or sexualized Jezabels or Saphires. Venus is too young to be a mammy and she is not being portraying as sexual when she tries to get Henson to take action. She cries,

which is a feminine act, that bolstered the psyche of some men. To make Henson feel more superior she then "fell into the Negro vernacular."

Plantation Creole talkin Venus unsuccessfully tries to mask her wisdom, ingenuity and intelligence so ultimately Henson can comfortably remark to her that he needs someone to "hang around to find out if there is truth to **our** suspicions" (emphasis mine 227). In court, under oath he affirms that after Jewel's abduction he conducted a search "...which I caused to be made for her" (259). Henson is the last person to testify, and being the expert and official/legal knower of all facts, his testimony is unimpeachable. The reader knows his information comes from Venus, who remains legally voiceless but whose actual voice and actions can transform lives and serve as the proof needed to free one white man and incriminate two others. Henson takes full credit for discovering facts for many reasons but his voice is an extension of Venus'. Racism (institutional and otherwise), manly ego, sexism and the mood in the courtroom prevent Henson from giving credit to Venus. This public disregard of Venus creates a doubt as to whether he is wholeheartedly ready to accept his former colored wife—to re-bestow upon her the sainted surname of Enson. In short, Henson still has doubts and uncertaintities with his plantation antebellum beliefs and the changing status of Negroes in America.

E. Higginbotham astutely observes that "racial meanings were never internalized by blacks and whites in an identical way" (13). Female characters in Hagar's Daughter are mindful of race, gender, class, and (in the case of Venus and this reader) language and their impact on women's lives. I do not think

Venus was making a comic idiot of herself in Henson's office. It is certainly within the realm of possibility that, rather than accept the information and aid from an "uppity" servant-class Negro gal, the head of the secret service could allow a rich man's darling debutante daughter to rot in captivity. Albeit white, the kidnapped is after all only a woman. Venus, then, speaks Plantation Creole using all of its accompanying gestures to put detective Henson at ease, causing him to think it is his/their idea to take action. Plantation Creole does not represent ignorance or shame for Venus because it was her first language and the language of her family.

In a discussion of Hopkins construction of heroes and heroines in other works, Carol Allen deduces that "if Hopkins used external characteristics as the predominant means of conveying internal traits, then she also transposed these general assumptions for her own means, turning the Euro-American defined negative connotations of black physical characteristics into heroic attributes" (36). Though Venus' voice is muted in court her grandmother is allowed to testify.

Brooks believes that "Hopkins draws attention to Aunt Henny's 'peculiar' language in order to amuse her readers" (145). When Venus rescues Jewel she delivers her grandmother, Aunt Henny, to safety as well. Henny in her capacity as cleaning woman witnessed Bradford's murder and her murderer. The murderer wanted Henny killed because she could identify him; however, her ner-do-well son-in-law could not bring himself to kill his mother-in-law. Initially, when she takes the stand to testify the courtroom is amused. The judge needs Governor Lowe to interpret Aunt Henny's Plantation Creole. Brooks states:

> This miscommunication is not simply a matter of differing language usage or pronunciation; Governor Lowe's indulgent act of translation effects a two-way conversation between the white men, while Aunt Henny is left in the position of a curiously speaking object whose words require mediation. Readers are thus encouraged to laugh at Aunt Henny but at the same time—consistent with minstrel humor—they are also encouraged to laugh at the Governor's grandiloquence... Aunt Henny's presence, not her subjective commentary is indeed the medium through which readers find amusement at the expense of the aristocratic character in this scene (145).

For example Henny states:

> "'I hern people talkin' in one ob de rooms—the private office—an' I goes' cross de entry en' peeks roun' de corner ob de po'ter—'"
>
> "'The what?' interrupted the judge.
>
> 'Po'ter massa jedge; don't yer kno' what a po'ter am?'
>
> 'She means, portiére, your honor,' explained Gov. Lowe, with a smile. 'Go on, aunty'" (254).

However, Henny demonstrates her ability to speak standard English during her testimony. Hopkins italicizes Henny's quote *"'My God, Charles, you've pizened!'"* (255). Though Henny mimics Bradford it demonstrates her capability to duplicate southern white speech while simultaneously indicating that she prefers speakin

Plantation Creole. Henny's life is spent in service to southern whites; one assumes Bradford (who was not her employer) is certainly not the only white person whose speech she can recreate.

In conduct unbecoming of a mammy figure, Henny testifying in court accuses a respected white man of lying, exposes his true identity, and is an eye witness to his act of murder. She does this, while as the narrator states making "a weird picture, her large eyes peering out from behind the silver-bowed glasses, her turbaned head and large, gold hoop earrings, and a spotless white handkerchief crossed on her breast over the neat gingham dress" (255). This description is interesting for many reasons. Henny's head is not hung and her eyes are not downcast; the passage makes one aware of black kinesics and "the informal codes that operated to regulate social interaction" of African Americans in public (Stylin' 66). The fact that her head is wrapped also suggests that Henny viewed this event as minimal[3]. Henny's language and fashion aesthetic demonstrate that she, like her granddaughter, claim social and cultural space in direct purview of whites.

At the conclusion of Henny's testimony the narrator states, "the Attorney-General then took the witness in hand and conducted a skilful cross-examination without shaking the old woman's testimony" (256). Henny's statements prove the defendant innocent and gentleman General Benson guilty. Furthermore, after the first couple of paragraphs the judge no longer requires mediation concerning Henny's observations. He understands enough of her (mis)communication, as does the rest of the court room, to get the gist of her statements. After the close

of Henny's declarations the previously amused courtroom no longer perceives her statements as comic, and seems almost ready to riot: "Instantly a chorus of voices took up the refrain—'That's the talk! No nigger's word against a white man! This is a white man's country yet!'" (257). Henny may appear to be a mammy, she may speak like a mammy on occasion but the judge, Governor Lowe, the entire courtroom and this reader understand at the end of Henny's testimony that she is there to explain and clarify the unknown to many who refuse to listen to it from the lips of a black woman.

Aunt Henny, laboring in her position as a cleaning woman, witnesses a murder. Sexism, racism, classism and linguistic terrorism allow the judge, defense and prosecuting attorneys to agree to let her take the stand for various reasons. The prosecutor is aware of the political climate of the community. How intimidating can an old turbaned head wearing Negro woman be in the 1880s? The defense attorney realizes that even a Negro eyewitness to a murder committed by a white man can, eventually, be dismissed. The courtroom uproar over the testimony of Henny is plausible. Leon Higginbotham, using Virginia statute as an example, points out that "in proceedings involving solely blacks, blacks were allowed to testify in court. But their testimony was admissible only against blacks. No white man could ever be found guilty of a crime on the word of a black person" during the eighteenth century (1978, 58). Many southern courts continued such a practice well into the twentieth century. Then Hopkins is taking literary license to make a point. The public cannot deny their ignorance of Plantation Creole and a belief that its speakers are always comic. Though Venus

saves the day by rescuing Henny and Jewel it is the multi-voiced Henny who faces a hostile public and articulates how the crime was committed and more importantly its' perpetrator. Testimony, apparently, is beyond the pale for the senator's daughter and other victim, Jewel Bowen. The hostile courtroom population would be most sympathetic to the flawless Jewel. The critics go beyond what happens in the novel allowing Henny to be viewed as a minstrel or comic character.

Hopkins creates a situation where a former slave woman testifies against a former master, a man she wet nursed as a baby and nurtured as a boy. I think Hopkins demonstrates the great strength of Negro women speaking in a public forum; furthermore, she illustrates the achievement and courage involved in the act of speaking for Negro women. Although the risk existed that Plantation Creole speaking Negro women would be thought comic or quaint from fictional narratives to actual personal narratives, they spoke up and out, articulating the desires, wants and needs of their family, friends, employers but most of all themselves. Though Carby characterizes Venus as a masculinized female, like Aurelia, she asserts that "Venus made the transition from minor character to heroine when she determined to find Jewel's kidnapper" (149). Aurelia, however, is less a heroine and more of a provocative nineteenth-century woman character. She is an unashamed grifter who wants to live comfortably, honestly and peacefully with a man of her choosing. Hopkins allows Aurelia to escape Sumner and prosecution. Although Aurelia hates her maternal connection to Negro race, when confronted with the truth of her biology Aurelia does not lie.

Perhaps Hopkins allows Aurelia to survive because the greater crime is what was done to Aurelia; therefore, a reader can imagine a happy future for the self-confident Aurelia.

Aurelia differs from Estelle or Jewel by the use of her voice. Estelle does not heed her inner voice:

> she was surprised and puzzled at the vague feeling of distrust and dislike that personal contact with her young guest [Aurelia] brought to her. It was intangible. She shook it off, however, the beautiful face and voice were so enchanting that she could not resist them, and felt ashamed of her distrust (106-107).

Estelle (formerly Hagar) freely speaks only to her husband and daughter. To some members of the public she appears frigid. Benson melts her façade and creates terror when he says he knows her true identity. Benson, who some twenty years earlier was St. Clair Enson, recognizes Hagar is now before him "passing" for Estelle Bowen. "Uncontrollable terror had spread over Mrs. Bowen's features at these words. Her lips moved but gave forth no sound" (207). Benson claims to know her true identity when first introduced to her; how could she not know him? After he whispers her secrets in her ear she says "'I admit nothing; I deny nothing. Prove it if you can,' she muttered in a strained tone" (207). She is unable to utilize her full voice as Estelle Bowen. Finally, when confronted with the truth of her identity she can only mutter. And like Henny after witnessing Bradford's murder, Estelle faints. I am reminded of Estelle's vow to Zena after he proposes marriage: "She accepted his offer, vowing he should

never have cause to regret his act. One might have thought from her eager acceptance that in it she found escape, liberty, hope" (81). The authorial voice implies that in accepting his proposal and making her vow she loses something of herself—some of the marks against her... (Prior to becoming Mrs. Bowen, Estelle had taken on the surname of Marks.) Without persuasion, Estelle gives up her voice. Why?

Hagar she becomes verbose when she learns her true identity. As a waitress she certainly had to speak up but as Mrs. Estelle Bowen, the Senator's wife, she lost the voice she exercised as the enslaved Hagar. She abandoned her identity as Hagar. This also means she had to give-up her voice. Interestingly, Hopkins limits Hagar to giving birth only once. In returning to Washington D. C. with her family she is likely to meet with individuals who knew her as Hagar, presumably. Yet, she does return. She reserves her voice for the elevation of her husband and the needs of her step-daughter.

Hopkins conflates and further complicates the issue of mulattas and their subsequent tragedy by making her women trickster figures who manipulate the strong and reverse the normal structure of power and prestige. Like Aurelia, Henny is also raised without benefit of a mother. Aurelia is non nurturing and consistently described as lonely. She survives. Jewel, constantly given maternal nurturing, is betrayed, exposed and dies. Estelle, though, beautiful, is viewed as frigid or icy. The issue of her race certainly comes up indirectly. Like Ellis' vow to Hagar, Estelle makes a vow to Zenas Bowen before they wed. The narrator tells the reader:

> Estelle Marks, as she was called, was an honorable woman who would not betray his confidence. She accepted his offer, vowing he should never have cause to regret his act. One might have thought from her eager acceptance that in it she found escape, liberty, hope (81).

Estelle Marks Bowen's true identity is Hagar Sargeant Enson. Her vow is similar to the one Ellis made to her over ten-years previously. In obscuring her identity does she pass for white? The reader knows that unlike Ellis, Estelle kept her vow to Bowen. The narrator observes:

> He had never regretted the step. Estelle was a mother to the motherless child, and being a well-educated woman, versed in the usages of polite society, despite her recent position as a waitress in a hotel, soon had Jewel at a first-class school, where she could be fitted for the position that her father's wealth would give her. Nor did Estelle's good work end there. She recognized her husband's sterling worth in business and morals, and insisted upon his entering the arena of politics. Thanks to her cleverness, he made no mistakes and many hits which no one thought of tracing to his wife's rare talents...Mrs. Bowen simply fulfilled woman's mission in making her husband's career successful by the exercise of her own intuitive powers (81-82).

Hopkins demonstrates that the issue of race is one that Aurelia/Amelia must address in her relationships. Once Hagar loses the protection of the Sargeant

family and her husband Enson, race is also an issue that she too has to address. It appears that when the opportunity to marry another affluent man Estelle believed it best to forget her ethnic past. Apparently when she decided to forget parts of her past she included the appearance of her former brother-in-law and his partner in crime Walker/Madison. When he is first introduced to her at a dance, "a puzzled look swept over his face", however, Estelle merely noticed him noticing her (114). As if using an authorial jab the narrator observes: "...there was no change in the beautiful cold face of the elegant woman of the world save that one might have imagined that she grew whiter, if possible" (114). In marrying Bowen it appears that Estelle does find escape in secrets, memory loss and voicelessness.

When Benson, aka St. Clair, confronts and torments Estelle with the fact of her past she is rendered voiceless and faints: "'I knew you instantly the first night I saw you in this house. This girl is not your child; why should you care. I have no desire to harm you'" (207). The narrator observes "Uncontrollable terror had spread over Mrs. Bowen's features at these words. Her lips moved but gave forth no sound" (207). Enjoying his torment of her, Benson "bent toward her and whispered in her ear. That whisper seemed to arouse her benumbered faculties. She moved toward him with disheveled hair, foaming lips and one arm outstretched in menace..."'I admit nothing; I deny nothing. Prove it if you can,' she muttered in a strained tone" (207). After he leaves she faints.

Estelle Bowen cannot escape her reality as Hagar Ellis. Hopkins enjoys changing the names of her characters or the masquerade. Many of her

characters assume the identity of others. Ostensibly, Estelle participated in masquerade. If she wished to pass she needed another lifestyle, one with less access to the public. There is always a chance of being recognized but more so when one is in the public eye. Estelle is in disguise. She repressed the voice she gained with her full identity as Hagar, it appears, for a life of comfort and affluence. On the other hand St. Clair/Benson and Madison/Walker only change names their personalities remain, for the most part, the same. Hopkins' women of deeper hues do not generally participate in masquerade with the exception of Venus. She is able to switch gender and an age group. Linguistically speaking, however, Venus and Marthy participate in passing. Plantation Creole or Black English allows them to pass unnoticed as unique characters or to be found childlike and amusing among the ruling culture. Likewise, this language has also allowed other characters to pass unnoticed or without critical attention in other works of fiction as well. Masquerade is significant in Hopkins' novels perhaps because when the disguise has served its purpose the reader must acknowledge and contextualize who or what remains.

Venus, Henny and Aurelia are the speakerly heroines of Hagar's Daughter. All three women represent the sassy voices of narrative women who confront an unaccepting public.

Notes

[1] See Gen. 16-21, for the story of Hagar and Sarah.

[2] J. L. Dillard, Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States, (New York: Vintage, 1973) defines diglossia as "the use of different languages (or dialects) for different purposes" 301.

[3] Though procedures were not uniform, during slavery, slave women removed the strings and bandanna's from their hair when going to church or a wedding, for example. Usually on Monday, the women would rethread or braid their hair and apply a clean head wrap. For further discussion see: Shane White and Graham White, Stylin' African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1998) 57-58; and John Thornton, Africa and Africans:In the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1680 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992) who finds "that women in this new Afro-Atlantic community began wrapping their heads, in contrast with the nearly universal bareheadedness of early descriptions of Africa, in which hair design was the most important element of bodily decoration and could still be found among some early slaves, as in Jamaica. Perhaps the covering of the head was a sign of Christian conversion, where heads must be covered in the mass. Perhaps it was the result of the racially mixed new population of the coast and islands, because the hair form was looser and straighter and thus did not hold plaits as well" (233).

Chapter 4

JESSIE REDMON FAUSET'S NOVELS, CRITICS, AND SURVIVING WOMEN

...Fauset implicitly challenges the very notion of the real and the authentic; she questions the possibility of the production of a 'real' black art in a white-controlled cultural market. For not only do white culture keepers determine what authentic black art is, they control the who, how, where, and when of public cultural production and consumption as well.

Ann duCille, The Coupling Tradition

In part of There Is Confusion, the first novel by, Jessie Redmon Fauset unbraids the history of two families of Byes. "As far back as the last decades of the eighteenth century there had been white Byes and black Byes in Philadelphia. The black Byes were known to be the chattels of Aaron and Dinah Bye, Quakers, who without reluctance had set free their slaves" (22). The narrator tells that freedom came in 1780 not because of Aaron's ethics, philosophical beliefs or his magnanimous nature but "according to the laws of Pennsylvania, which thus allowed the Quakers to salve their consciences without offending their thrifty instincts" (22). To its credit Pennsylvania was "the first state to abolish slavery in the eighteenth century by legislative enactment" in 1780 with "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery" (Higginbotham In the Matter of Color, 299). Since, as the narrator states, freedom was conferred according to the 1780 laws, "those who were already slaves when the statute was passed were not freed by its enactment; only the black and mulatto children born after the passage of the law were to be freed and those only after serving their

mothers' masters for twenty-eight years" (Higginbotham In the Matter of Color 299). Fauset reminds a reader in There Is Confusion that Quakers held slaves and were not eager to let go of their slave holding traditions. Likewise, in her Preface to Our Nig Harriet Wilson unapologetically offers unflattering comments on abolitionists, and Pauline Hopkins challenges the sincerity of some Northern liberals with Sumner a character in Hagar's Daughter. It is interesting that Fauset, like her sister writers discussed in previous chapters, reserve space in her literature to remind a reader to be inquisitive about history and its relationship, specifically, to African American women.

After slavery, in There Is Confusion, the closer a woman's connection to a patriarch, the more complete her identity and financial standing. The reader is not given first names of the maternal figures in the families of the Marshalls and the Ellersleys. During the antebellum and Reconstruction period, for Fauset's women, the familial proximity of Negro women to white or Negro males can mean the difference between invisibility and visibility. Invisibility indicates a missing identity. The degree of visibility or invisibility is represented by partial or full names. Marriage with a Negro male or children with a white male increases the social identity of a Negro woman and her progeny. To become visible she must become the silent object for white men or the wife of black men. Marriage kept Mrs. Marshall and Mrs. Ellersley from total namelessness. Fauset's feminist fictional voice is subtle. One needs to think about who and what she attempts to recreate and their consequential messages. Overall her many individual fictional females may not appear prominent but as a community of women they make

bold statements about American history, the lives many women were forced to live and strategies to improve their lives. To her credit, Fauset does not suggest that all women want or expect to change their conditions, but for those who do she offers encouragement and direction. The new generation of daughters, Maggie and Joanna, must avoid the namelessness of their mothers and grandmothers. Judy Bye and subsequent Bye women have first and last names. Peter Bye's mother is Alice Graves. His incestuous maternal lineage represents the privilege and oppression of some white women.

The Graves Family History begins with two unnamed white sisters in love with two of their father's black slaves, during the eighteenth century, who ran away to marry. Both families had numerous children. The townsfolk (black and white) had nothing to do with them so cousins married cousins.

> The children of each generation did the same, whether driven to it by like necessity or not, ...But by the time the next brood appeared a precedent had been established, and Graves married Graves not only as a matter of course, but as a matter of pride. They were able to do this, being automatically rendered free by the fact that a white woman had married a black man (37).

According to the law, the ability to enslave or manumit children was based on the race of the mother. Generations of Graves, traced back to the two unnamed white sisters, were free by law. The two nameless sisters brought shame on their family. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, in Within the Plantation Household, states, "during the antebellum period young women were expected to move within a

highly circumscribed world in which their fathers' and brothers' honor guaranteed their safety" (208). In addition, she finds, "That some southern white women took black lovers could be freely acknowledged, for it was assumed that the women were lower class and disreputable. But ladies?" (208). The Graves sisters, one could assume, were true women from a wealthy family. Their choice of husbands brought their family into dishonor. Their interracial marriage strips them from membership in the cult of true womanhood. They are denied first names. Although nameless, the two sisters and their offspring were protected by jurist patriarchs who had the last word on one's freedom or bondage. Gravestown provides history and proof of the family's legacy of freedom. The history of Gravestown is another example of the power of terrorism and reproduction. Peter Bye is the future husband of Joanna Marshall. After his father, Meriwether Bye, a scoundrel, dies, he lives with his maiden aunt Susan Graves. Miss Graves is a proud member of "the Graves family of Gravestown, New Jersey, a clan well known to colored people not only in that vicinity, but also throughout Pennsylvania" (37). Unfortunately, there were not enough Graves for Susan to marry. The narrator states "Yet Miss Susan Graves, in spite of three other offers soared on family pride above all this and made her career that of housekeeper for the family of a wealthy merchant on Girard Avenue, in Philadelphia" (37). As an adult female during the nineteenth century, Miss Graves rejects tradition (the cult of true womanhood) and makes a conscious decision to remain single. Nevertheless, away from Gravestown and incest,

Susan is a single Negro woman, who performs domestic work typical of colored women.

Susan Graves' two significant choices indicate she is a survivor, not a victim. Susan disregards the stigma of being labeled an 'old maid' and exercises her option to remain single. When Peter is orphaned she assumes responsibility for him. Susan becomes an othermother. Patricia Hill Collins, in Black Feminist Thought, describes an othermother as a woman other than the birth mother, who assumes responsibility for abandoned or orphaned children. When slave children were sold away from their birth mothers other slave took responsibility for them. In parenting, Collins states, "Notions of property, child care, and gender differences in parenting styles are embedded in the institutional arrangements of any given political economy" (122-123). In addition, Susan's caring for Peter challenges "one fundamental assumption underlying the capitalist system itself: that children are 'private property' and can be disposed of as such" (Collins 122). Susan Graves represents a more inclusive model for women.

Most of Fauset's characters who happen to be mothers are less than the ideal maternal figures. Fauset challenges the notion of nurturing mammies with mothers who have lives, interests and commitments beyond their children and families. In There Is Confusion, the formerly enslaved Judy Bye never revealed the truth to her son, Mrs. Ellersley (working-poor) is too busy working to care for her daughter, Maggie, and Mrs. Marshall (upper middle-class) is a good natured flat-character who has four children and says "yes" to whatever her children

need. Notably she does train her sons to perform housework. Sarah Strange, in The Chinaberry Tree, is preoccupied with her miscegenistic relationship with the Colonel and after he dies she is too haunted with the memory of her moments with the Colonel to offer their love-child, Laurentine, the support she needs. Ironically, Sarah's job, after accepting the Colonels advances, moves from a domestic slave to a freed woman waiting for him in the house he bought for them. Working-class Judy, Sarah's sister, sends her daughter, Melissa, to her Strange relatives so that Judy can move to Chicago and enjoy the pleasure of the new man she intends to wed. The widow Forten continues to cater but instills her hatred and secret family feud in her solemn daughters. Malory, her son, said "'I remember my mother used to say to my sisters 'I never want to hear the name Strange mentioned under this roof.' She was so queer about it, her voice was—it frightened me'" (261). In Plum Bun, Mattie Ford Murray, who comes from humble beginnings, is a mother with many foibles but one who at one point deliberately ignores her husband and daughter, Virginia, because of their darker complexions. Fauset attempts to use her novelistic voice to appeal to women. She creates scenarios to amuse, instruct and enrich working-class women. However, misrepresentations of Fauset's life and popular criticisms of her work persuade working-class women that her novels are unconcerned with working women.

In any comprehensive study of the literary energy and activity of the Harlem Renaissance one must include the person and works of Jessie Redmon Fauset. According to some critics and for reasons to be touched on in this

chapter, Fauset's perceived upbringing is synonymous with her fiction according to some critics. According to Nathan Huggins she "tried to project the Negro image in very conventional terms. Indeed, it was her intended purpose in writing novels to place the Negro in the context of standard American life" (146). The only novel of Fauset's that Huggins looks at is There Is Confusion. He goes on to point out that in her novel Fauset, like Nella Larsen, moves away from the conventional genteel formula. Ultimately, he finds that Fauset is preoccupied with respectability and views "Negro life as peculiarly strict and confining" and therefore, "she was not able to abandon herself to an uncritical acceptance of black primitivism" (160). Huggins observation harkens back to a 1932 article by Marion L. Starkey, who reveals that Fauset had a difficult time getting her first novel published because "it contains no description of Harlem dives, no race riot, no picturesque, abject poverty" (219). As a critic representing the early 1970s sensibilities of African American literature, Huggins finds that Fauset appropriates a unique formula but continued to portray Negroes in conventional terms.

In his 1989 study of the Harlem Renaissance, David Levering Lewis claims the following:

> Jessie Redmon Fauset's influence upon the Harlem Renaissance was not as great as Charles Johnson's, or as well-advertised as Alain Locke's or Walter White's. Yet, for honesty and precocity, it was probably unequalled. With the exception of James Weldon Johnson, she knew a good deal more about the world of literature

than the academics and civil libertarians in Harlem who were becoming overnight experts (121).

Lewis asserts (nineteen years after Huggins) that "There is no telling what she would have done had she been a man, given her first-rate mind and formidable efficiency at any task" (121). At the time her first novel, There is Confusion, was published, Mary White Ovington in her "Book Chat" column queried if "'this colored world that Miss Fauset draws' really existed" (Lewis 124). Yet Bontemps finds that "in spite of her [Fauset] acceptance of the sense of values of the white world, her novels are full of references to racial problems and bitterness toward the injustice done by the whites to her race" (69). One would think that Fauset's novels only reflect the genteel practices of Negroes. Furthermore, according to critics one would expect that her so-called conventional novels did not address women's issues or reflect Africanisms. Carol Allen asserts in her 1998 publication, Black Women Intellectuals, that "Fauset features black female figures; so, women should remain at the fore of any analysis of her work" (48-49). Many critics refused to acknowledge the diversity and significance of women in her novels because many wanted and expected Fauset herself to be limited, stilted and totally embracing of a particular type of black bourgeoisie culture.

Ostensibly, the perception of Fauset's familial background and social class somehow get connected to her novels and often cause post-Harlem Renaissance critics to summarize them in a singular fashion. During the Harlem Renaissance, Claude McKay wrote Walter White, during December of 1924, that "Jessie is too prim school-marmish and stilted for me" (Lewis 124). In retrospect

Lewis finds that in 1920 "had she been younger when she moved to New York, Jessie Fauset's own capacity for reaching out to new ideas and new forms might have been far greater. But she was already an unmarried, proper, thirty-eight-year-old Washington schoolteacher" (122). Yet when her first novel was published, reviews were generally favorable. For example the Literary Digest International Book Review finds that Fauset "neither demands nor makes any sentimental concessions. She possesses the critical insight and resolute detachment of the novelist, and her picture of the society which her novel surveys is achieved with an art as impersonal as that of Mrs. Wharton. Her novel is neither propaganda nor apology but art" (qtd in Sylvander 71-72). Writers and critics like Stanley Braithwaite and Benjamin Brawley disliked "ghetto realism" that was included in many works by Renaissance writers. Consequently, Braithwaite "preferred the novels of Jessie Fauset, which described the lives of middle- and upper-class blacks, to the novels and poetry of McKay, Langston Hughes, and other black writers who explored the lower levels of the black experience" (Wintz 132). According to Brawley's understanding Fauset's four novels addressed the subject matter that he favored—middle-class Negroes. "While he observed that not one of her books was a great novel, he commended them for containing 'strong situations, and much of tenderness and beauty,' and for directing their attention to the black middle class, 'a phase of life, that except for the work of Chesnutt, had been almost untouched in American fiction'" (Wintz 137). At the time she wrote Fauset was esteemed, it appears, for being a novelist whose work was considered conservative. One suspects that

conservative was a term that referred to the portrayal of Negro men and their families in Fauset's work.

By the 1960s critics' views changed. Robert Bone, for example, characterized Fauset's novels as "uniformly sophomoric, trivial, and dull" a flip assessment that found its place in the criticisms of other scholars (Negro Novel in America 101). Lewis finds that There is Confusion was written "to the approved literacy canons of the Talented Tenth, a saga of the sophisticated in which French and occasionally German tripped from the protagonists' tongues as readily as precise English; a novel about people with good bloodlines ..." (124). Bontemps agrees with Braithwaite in likening Fauset to the Jane Austen of Negro literature. According to Bontemps:

> The subject matter is the same, and the social status of the characters is the upper middle class. But when we think of what creates the dramatic situations in the fiction of these two writers, we come to realize the vast difference between them...In Jessie Fauset's case, though she chooses a certain class of Negro people, what really moves the story is not what is inherent to that class and hence to the character but what is imposed upon the person from outside (71).

Finally, Bontemps believes that "Jessie Fauset is not a first-rate writer. First of all she failed to attain what Alain Locke called 'the buoyancy from within compensating for whatever pressure there may be of conditions from without,' though she was not unconscious of what was happening in the Negro world of

the 1920s" (79). Therefore, he finds that strength of Fauset's novels appear only when her characters respond to matters away from their comfy middle-class environment. He seems to suggest that her characters lack inner motivations or Afrocentric aspects that would make her novels compelling. Tellingly, he concludes that:

> In a way, she shows the tragic situation which faces many of the black intellectuals: they are making too much of the white world, so that they can never escape its influence. Even if they try to create works unique to their race, they do not possess means to express them. They are deprived of the black soul. Jessie Fauset has never known the life of the black people of the rural South, nor the ghettos of the Northern cities. She came from a well-to-do old Philadelphia family, was educated at Cornell University, where she majored in French and was elected a member of Phi Beta Kappa. She did her graduate work at the University of Pennsylvania, and had been to France three times by the time of the publication of her first novel. The only thing she could do as an artist was to produce 'uniformly sophomoric, trivial and dull' novels with almost painful persistency, to show the world the goodness of the black people and to ask justice for the race. In her ideas she belongs to the older school of black writers like Mrs. Harper and Mrs. Hopkins, who wrote novels to 'raise the stigma of degradation from [my] race.' Miss Fauset never doubted the value of Western civilization.

> She only wanted her race to have a full share in the civilization" (79-80).

Bontemps repeats Bone's unflattering critique of Fauset. Further, he finds that she cannot escape what Bontemps believes is her elitist upbringing to create works that "uncorrupted" Negroes—Negroes from the rural South or ghettos of Northern cities—can relate.

A reader familiar with the critiques of Fauset could very possibly find in her novels a preoccupation with middle- and upper-class culture. In and of itself such a focus certainly seems an interesting area for study. (It was for E. Franklin Frazier.) However, that is not the extent of Fauset's themes. Barbara Christian held that Fauset "could certainly write with authority about the upper-middle-class Negro of the day. She herself came from an old Philadelphian family and, in contrast to most black women of the day, received an extensive formal education" (42-43). Christian maintained that Fauset accepted the literary conventions of the nineteenth-century black novel:

> Her heroines are proper light-skinned women who unquestionably claim propriety as the highest ideal. They pursue the values of material success through marriage and inevitably believe that refinement is a reflection of spirituality. As a result, her heroines, ... suffer crises because of a social mishap, either of birth or deportment. Nor does Fauset exercise any critical distance toward the unimportance of her heroines' major crises. She too, believes

> that not being able to take up with the "right people" is a tragedy (Black Feminist Criticism 43-44).

Again Fauset is held prisoner to an imagined background. Although Christian unfairly mocks Fauset's novelistic women, she does acknowledge their existence.

Fauset's bourgeoisie Philadelphia background needs to be amended because as duCille points out "Fauset's alleged conservatism and elitism have been perennially at issue" (The Coupling Convention 77). She was born in 27 April 1882 in New Jersey, the seventh child of Redmon Fauset and Annie Seamon Fauset. Redmon Fauset was an African Methodist Episcopal minister who later married Bella Huff, a widow, after his first wife and Jessie's mother (Annie Seamon) died. Huff entered the marriage with three children and three more children were born as a result of their union. Arthur Huff Fauset, folklorists and Jessie's younger brother, recalls that as a family "we were quite poor" (Sylvander 25). The Fauset's were middle-class according to attitudes not economics; and Jessie won a scholarship to Cornell University (Sylvander 26). Carolyn Sylvander a Fauset biographer, finds that after 1905 the two characteristics that are evident in Fauset are: "She was a very hard worker, determined to achieve excellence in whatever she undertook. Accustomed to being in a racial and sexual minority, she determined to be outstanding by other criteria as well" (31). Fauset's novels demonstrate her preoccupation with women's issues, possibilities of achievement for hard-working, intelligent and young Negro women, how working-class women can increase their status,

interest in Black English, slang and middle-class Negro culture. Moreover, according to Fauset's background, education and literary accomplishments one expects that she has a voice that certainly deserves to be heard.

Having read Fauset's first novel, There is Confusion, without benefit of related critiques I was impressed with the themes she incorporated in her 1924 novel: a Negro girl unashamed of her kinky hair and refusing hair products to straighten it, a poor family of women who increased their economic standing as a result of the drive of its younger member, a protagonist who matured hoping for a career and not marriage, descendents of two interracial couples who created a growing family of mulattoes who continued to practice inbreeding because an antebellum community initially rejected them, spouse abuse, abortion, the right of women to have and maintain professions and so on. It appears that many critics worked to deny Fauset a unique novelistic voice in American literature because they wanted her to be of the Philadelphia manor born and though erudite limited to a singular and uninspiring literary point of view. Consequently, the messages her characters (mostly women) convey were ignored.

There is Confusion seems to be a prophetic title for Fauset's first novel as there seems to be much confusion concerning her life, novelistic voice and all that goes on in her novels. There Is Confusion is a novel about families, traditional and nontraditional, the impact that American slavery had on the segregated urban Negro family and consequently how family and its members survived or perished. The middle-class black family (The Marshall's) lead the novel and provide enough characters for Fauset to articulate multiple social and

economic options for women. In each novel Fauset includes at least one strong plot about a single woman usually raised by a poor- or working-class mother in the tenderloin district—in There Is Confusion, Maggie Ellersley; in Comedy American Style, Phebe Grant; and in The Chinaberry Tree, several families of women, The Stranges, Melissa Paul and The Fortens for example. Overall the woman-headed households in Fauset's novels succeed in two areas. First they give voice and vision to families and women that the ruling culture wanted to ignore and in Fauset's hands such families usually managed to achieve economic security all while subverting the weakened "Cinderella" folktale,— a helpless heroine, "a weepy, prostrate young blonde (the instructions here are quite specific) who must be 'aroused from her sad revery' by a godmother"[1] and marry a prince (Yolen 572). Fauset also mocks the cult of true womanhood. There seems to be much confusion concerning this novel because critics fail to acknowledge the messages Fauset offers to women through her characters.

Early in There Is Confusion a conversation between the two working-poor middle-aged women reveals some of the hardships of the helpless Cinderella ideology. The two marginal characters are Mrs. Ellersley a hard-working laundress "to whom life had meant nothing but poverty and confusion," and her cousin Mis' Sparrow, a cook: "hers was a lot which had been hard ever since she could remember. She was poor, she was weak, she was ignorant. Add to that the fact that she was black in a country where color is a crime and you have her 'complex'" (55). Mis' Sparrow tells the tale of a woman marrying up the economic ladder. "She wan't nobuddy. Jes' a little teeny slip of ole white gal.

No money, no fambly, no nuthin'." (56). Sparrow makes it clear that the new Mrs. Proctor came from humble beginnings lacking in social and economic status and a family. She reinforces the fact that the new wife was poor—"'Young Mr. Proctor's sister met her in boardin'-school, poorest thing there,'" (56). The young prince, in this instance Harry Proctor, was home from college, fell in love at first sight, and "'jes' married her. Jes' wouldn't listen to nobuddy a-tall'" (56). The final remark suggests that there was no need for Proctor to marry the nameless woman as she lacked money and social standing. Moreover, after the wedding the new Mrs. Proctor achieves status along with her new surname and becomes an instant member of the cult of true womanhood. However, the new Mrs. Proctor, unlike Cinderella, is unhappy with her new husband. Mis' Sparrow reveals, "'Monia says she don't even love him. Liked some young travelin' salesman she'd known all her life. 'Monia declares she cries about him when she's by herself'" (56). It is unlikely that this union will survive "happily ever after." Deborah E. McDowell charges Fauset with using classic fairy tale patterns and nursery rhymes as protective mimicry "although these stratagems are consciously employed, they are often clumsily executed" (87). Other than being known as previously poor and pining away for a traveling salesman, the new Mrs. Proctor is given an identity (one shared with her husband's mother), her voice is a cry conveyed by another and performed in solitude. Marrying up the economic ladder, therefore, is not necessarily the ideal situation for a woman.

Mis' Sparrow's conveyance of the story suggests that the two, poor, working-class Negro women did not view marriage as an opportunity to escape

financial responsibilities—neither aspired to nor thought it a possibility—for themselves. Mis' Sparrow is a single woman and her interest in telling the story is to stress three points concerning the new Mrs. Proctor: she was poor, now unhappy and loves another man. Though working-poor and a single mother, Mrs. Ellersley considers herself fortunate to be a widow (57) and that the new Mrs. Proctor is lucky in her selection of a marriage partner. Mrs. Ellersley hopes aloud that her daughter, Maggie, will be just as lucky. Both toiling women also represent the menial service work that many Negro women were forced to perform. However, Mrs. Ellersley wants her daughter to have a better life, one without drudgery. Her twelve-year old Maggie, overhears the story and wonders aloud why Mrs. Proctor married him? Mis' Sparrow explains "'H'm child, wouldn't you do anything to get away f'um hard work, an' ugly cloes an' bills? Some w'ite folks has it most as bad as us poor colored people. On'y thing is they has more opporchunities'" (sic 56). Mis' Sparrow's observation suggests that although some whites may be forced to labor they have more opportunities to change their status based on their skin tone. If the new Mrs. Proctor was a Negro she could not be considered a true woman. "Fauset criticizes a society that encourages women to dissemble, to assume, uncritically, insulting and degrading forms of behavior in exchange for the so-called privilege of marriage" (McDowell 92). Nevertheless, believing that such a situation was far removed from Maggie, Mis' Sparrow did not respond to Mrs. Ellersley wishful remark about Maggie getting lucky.

In Comedy American Style, Fauset again flips the script on the Cinderella theme. Llewellyn Nash, the rich, white, playboy instantly falls in love with Phebe. After having lunch with her he thinks "how wonderful it would be to have this lovely, vibrant, gallant creature forever beside one...An hour spent with Phebe was the equivalent of a combination of ozone, champagne, ambrosia, the waters of the Fountain of Youth all poured in some classical goblet and mixed and blessed by some beneficent god" (255). Phebe thought Nash's preoccupation with her was his way of slumming. She tells Nicholas "'He's [Nash] so amusing...and insincere. It's quite patent that he's amusing himself with the poor working girl,... What he doesn't know is that I'm amusing myself with the grand white folks. Of course if he were the least bit serious I'd be feeling very badly'" (239). Phebe is honest with both Nash and Nicholas. She tells Nash about her love for Nicholas. From the previous quotation, she let Nicholas know about her flirtation with Nash. At one point, as she leaves Nash to meet with Nicholas and there is an allusion to Cinderella and her slipper: "In a few hours now, she thought, tripping along the street like some girl in the pictured advertisement of the perfect shoe...in a few hours all this heady anticipation would be resolved into realization" (255). Unlike the new Mrs. Proctor (There Is Confusion) a marriage between Phebe and Nash would not permit her entry into the cult of true womanhood, particularly, since Phebe insists on telling folk she is a Negro.

Fauset's novels play with the notion of women marrying and living happily ever after. Nash reveals that he does love Phebe and wants to marry her. Like the new Mrs. Proctor in There is Confusion a woman can marry up the economic

ladder if she is white. However, Phebe immediately reveals her heritage to Nash. "Nash can marry a poor girl, a shop girl, an illegitimate girl, but he cannot marry a girl of invisible Black blood, thought he does offer Phebe a permanent mistress-ship in his life" (Sylvander 216). Fauset is explicit in letting women know that there is an antithesis to "happily ever after." In Comedy American Style Christopher Cary, who later marries Phebe, recalls that his sister, "Teresa had married a Frenchman in Toulouse, 'and lived unhappily ever after,' he used sometimes to mutter to himself" (263). Teresa is a character who is taught to be obedient, programmed to pass for white and to please her demanding mother. In Fauset's novels dependence means vulnerability for many women. The positive or negative aspects of their vulnerability is contingent on the self-confidence of the women.

In There Is Confusion the narrator finds that young Maggie's charm lessened "when she opened her pretty mouth. She disclosed herself then for what she was, a true daughter of the Tenderloin" (58). Ostensibly, with the Ellersleys and Mis' Sparrow, Fauset recreates characters who appear to speak Black English. Like Hopkins, many of her Negro poor or working class fictional characters are Ebonic speakers. The narrator claims "Something within her frail bosom pulsed in a constant revolt against the spirit of things that kept her in these conditions" (58). In standard English Maggie vows to her mother "'I will not always live like this, Ma—I'll get out of it some way.'" (58). Unlike Venus in Hopkins, Hagar's Daughter, Maggie does not switch between Black and standard English. Maggie eventually begins to speak only standard English.

Fauset's Ebonic speaking characters are all hardworking and well aware of conditions around them. With Pelasgie in The Chinaberry Tree, for example, Fauset emphasizes that she is a "decent girl" who earns an "honest livin'" (234). In The Chinaberry Tree, many working-class characters speak Black English—Mr. Johnathan Stede, his daughter Johnasteen, and as mentioned previously his niece Pelasgie Stede—for example. Stede works for Sarah Strange, his daughter works for Laurentine and Pelasgie works for the Brown family. Pelasgie's jealousy is featured in most of her comments: "'for them hinckty, cullud folks, thinks-themese'fs-so-much'" (232). She usually focuses her rage in the direction of Melissa, the youngest member of the Strange women. Pelasgie fumes, "'many's the time I feels like goin' to her with her fine airs and tellin' her I may not be the high yaller she is, but at least if I'm black I'm honest. My family ain't never been mixed up with white folks yit'" (233). Fauset seems to have an ear for the speech of others. After Malory reads a passage from Hardy, the narrator observes, "He read well and with pleasure Hardy's homely verses with their strangely turned diction, their rugged sincerity" (226-227). Away from Red Brook Melissa and Johnasteen were delivering dresses when they stopped at "a little shack back from the road, where they had soft drinks" (173). The counterman's speech differed from standard English, "'Don't you girls wants to eat a sandwich or something with your sassparella? You c'n take it right in and eat it at them tables there.' I suppose he wanted us to know that we could eat there even though we were colored" (173). Perhaps the counterman's speech was to reflect an Irish American heritage; nevertheless, Fauset does demonstrate

her understanding that individuals have different languages and dialects. Though an individual's language or dialect differs from standard English in Fauset's fiction it is not an indication that one is unintelligent or comedic. For example, Mrs. Ellersley and Mis' Sparrow (There Is Confusion) both speak Black English and both are hardworking women. The reader recognizes both women as being practical in their lives and direct in their communication style. In Comedy American Style Henry an engineering student and Teresa's former fiancé, attends Massachusetts Institute of Technology and he speaks Black English. Teresa "loved him to relapse into the soft lingo of the southern immigrant whom he mimicked so perfectly" (94). It is likely that Henry becoming comfortable begins to speak in a way that was natural and comfortable for him. Interestingly, Fauset, as a Harlem Renaissance writer, seems to have entered the African American Vernacular English (AAVE) debate via her novels unnoticed:

> ...the role of the vernacular in African American life and literature has been a source of debate among African Americans for more than a century...During the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, a similar debate raged among the black intelligentsia, with Langston Hughes endorsing and exemplifying the use of vernacular, and Alain Locke and others suggesting that African Americans ought to put the quaintness of the idiom behind them and offer the world a more "refined" view of their culture. These enduring attitudes reflect the attraction-repulsion dynamic, the oscillation between

black and white (or mainstream poles that W. E. B. Du Bois defined a century ago as "double-consciousness" (Rickford & Rickford 9). Popular critics of Fauset's fiction generally prefer to view her work as conventional; therefore, many only notice that her characters speak standard English.

The refined members of the middle and upper-class Negro community in several of Fauset's novels enjoy using slang. Fauset makes a distinction between black English and slang. The narrator in The Chinaberry Tree says Gertrude Brown "had a great habit of using words correctly even when communing with herself; slang with her was an acquisition, a deliberate one; she was really an intellectual" (285). Melissa enjoys Mallory's use of slang; "'It sounds so funny for you to talk slang and yet be so precise about it'" (259). Aunt Viny (Malory's aunt) a senior citizen and a revered Philadelphia Negro enjoyed "'raising sand,' (Aunt Viny's equivalent for the modern 'whoopee,')" (188). Even masquerading Teresa, from Comedy American Style uses slang on occasion when she speaks (97). The various uses of language are so subtle in Fauset's novels that when one reviews its use one becomes aware of economic class distinctions. In Talkin That Talk, sociolinguist Geneva Smitherman indicates:

> The sociolinguistic construction of reality in the class system of the US is made more complex by the contradiction of black and white English which are the same and not the same. White English (aka standard English) is that language spoken by power elites and those who aspire to upward social mobility; non-standard English is

> that language spoken by working-class whites; black English is that language spoken by African Americans. Significant and profound social and economic distinctions accompany each of these three linguistic phenomena (99).

Currently, studies show that "at some point in their lives, 90 percent of African Americans use some aspect of US Ebonics" (Smitherman Talkin That Talk 151). Black English, during the time Fauset wrote, certainly would not be foreign to her potential readers. Rickford and Rickford find "the caravan of black storytellers who spun yarns with the vernacular did so because they acknowledged, publicly or privately, that 'homely' speech patterns carried currency in their own community, as in American fiction and popular culture" (16). Although Fauset, like many other writers, is unable to accurately recreate AAVE she recognized it as an important social issue and cultural aspect related to Negroes. Other writers shunned the use of "Black dialect" probably because whites had misrepresented it—at times suggesting that such speakers were illiterate or humorous: "Black lawyer, poet, and novelist James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) voiced in 1933 a more fundamental objection to it, as an instrument so fused to stereotype that it had become a limiting, insurmountable mold" (Rickford & Rickford 31). Fauset's use of Black English highlights a concern that African Americans have dealt with since before the "1790s when large numbers of blacks began to attain their freedom"—the behavior of ordinary African Americans (White & White 102). Fauset also claims the ability to mock middle- and upper-class society. This is also important considering that during the nineteenth

century when African Americans in the north claimed their rights other than physical violence they were targets of humor. "Stories lampooning African Americans for their pretensions, their behavior, and just about any aspect of their culture were ubiquitous" (White & White 106). It is therefore, important that Fauset tells the story and controls the joke; though most critics missed her humor.

Fauset's narrator and authorial voice from time to time make humorous quips. Ann duCille concurs, finding that critics "have often missed Fauset's irony, mistaking parody for praise" (The Coupling Convention 98). In The Chinaberry Tree, Fauset surnames the alienated female family Strange, then plays, puns, and punctuates her novel with remarks relating to "strange." When the Stranges' niece comes to live with them, the narrator finds that "her place in the community was a strange one" (23). Referring to his Aunt Viny, Malory thinks: "She was an old woman and had seen many strange things" (231). Among another group of individuals, Malory is perceived as "this new and elegant young stranger...It did seem too bad for him to come in and have to get mixed up with that 'passel of Stranges'" (242). Accordingly, there are a passel of Stranges, stranges, and strangers operating in this novel.

There are many remarks about and Fauset enjoys playing with related concepts concerning bad blood in The Chinaberry Tree. At one point the narrator signifies on the idea of blue blood. The Browns, an upper-middle-class family, are together one day when the father remembers that one of his daughters before maturing "had been positively ugly!" (279). He now believes

that both his daughters looked like princesses: "Mrs. Brown murmured something about 'blood telling in spite of everything,' very much as though he had buried the precious fluid under an avalanche of refuse but it, in its bright blueness, had seeped through after all ... The blood in question came of course from her side of the family" (279). The surname Strange also signifies on the idea of "bad blood."

> What we hear if we listen closely to her prose is Fauset's critical, mocking tone, suggesting not sympathy for or accord with the value systems of her class- and clothes-conscious heroines, as many critics have insisted, but a kind of aloof derision, perhaps at moments even disdain, for their self-deception and self-hatred (duCille 98-99).

Fauset can be heavy handed with the names, ensuring that her reader gets her point. An example of this is "Mrs. Judge Manners and her lovely and exclusive, newly-married daughter, Mrs. del Pilar" (Chinaberry 146). It is quite wonderful, hypothetically, that one who is able to judge manners gives birth to a lady who marries and becomes "de pillar of de community." Fauset constructs these comic Mes-dames to lightheartedly mock some of the class pretensions of the segregated blacks in Red Brook. There is a sense of fun and play here. It is rather unconscionable that one could read such prose and believe that the writer was being self-righteous.

Ostensibly, Fauset wants her readers to be aware of social and cultural issues, such as AAVE, and she achieves this sometimes with humorous tongue in cheek comments. "Colored Philadelphia society is organized as, and even a

little more carefully than, Philadelphia white society. One wasn't 'in' in those old days unless one were, first, 'an old citizen' and, second, unless one were eminently respectable,—almost it might be said God-fearing" (There is Confusion 31). For example, when Teresa (Comedy American Style) who has neglected to explain her mother's racist ways, asks Henry if he will prevent anything from coming between them: he confidently reassures her that he will meet any problem. This chapter ends with the narrator's related quip that "his kisses left her surer of his love than his grammar" (97). There is a farce about a soon to be middle-class housewife, in The Chinaberry Tree, looking forward to cleaning as it will bring the appreciation of her expectant husband. With the help of a magazine (where many women were given advice on how to be proper housewives), teenage Melissa imagines that house painting and housekeeping will be a joy once she is wed to Malory. She exclaims "'I'll be the sweetest housekeeper! Oh you're going to love it so. Housekeeping is lots of fun nowadays if you just know how to go about it. Dust-pans blue as the sky! Yellow kitchenware'" (272). Perhaps it was less humorous during the 1930s, when working-class women could focus on their own kitchen ware and domestic cleaning.

On occasion Fauset's prose comically employs sexual innuendo. For example, in the following exchange, from The Chinaberry Tree, between Laurentine, preoccupied with being proper and her doctor boyfriend (Stephen): "She thought of Melissa, Asshur, the Chinaberry Tree and almost swooned with satisfaction. But aloud she said, looking toward his shapely, sizable shoes, 'You

have good understandings, haven't you, Stephen?' And his laughing answer, 'The better to support you with my dear'" (152). There is also an allusion to Little Red Riding Hood. Fauset's humor can be rather risqué but to recognize it one must get beyond the surface conservatism of her work. Hazel V. Carby argues:

> ultimately the conservatism of Fauset's ideology dominates her texts. In The Chinaberry Tree, for example, ...the movement of the text is away from the figures of isolated unmarried mothers and daughters supporting themselves through their own labor, toward the articulation of a new morality and community in which black women were lifted from the abyss of scandal and gossip, which threatened to overwhelm them, by professional black men who reinserted them into a newly formed and respectable community as dependent wives (167).

Conservatism is the façade of Fauset's novels. Along with Fauset's humor she also challenges that idea of women eager to marry. Moreover, I challenge Carby's reading of The Chinaberry Tree. It seems to me that the Strange women, along with cousin Melissa Paul, in the end decide to remain together and unmarried. The proof is the first and last paragraph of the novel. The novel begins like this: "Aunt Sal, Laurentine, and even Melissa loved the house...But what the three women loved most in that most lovely of places was the Chinaberry Tree" (1). In the beginning all the women are connected by their love of the house. The second paragraph begins the tale of how the Chinaberry Tree came to rest in Red Brook, New Jersey and the relationship of Aunt Sal and

Colonel Halloway. Implicitly or explicitly there is not one thread of evidence or suggestion that the women are married. Further, I have the sense that the women live there and are not visiting. Clearly, the women are together and have already experienced the events described in the novel. If the story is linear Melissa could not exist in the beginning, let alone as a woman. The conclusion suggests to me that both Laurentine and Melissa have developed a new relationship and new understanding of self and one another. Fauset very definitely does not include a description of the women as couples with their men/husbands but begins the novel with a description of three women who loved the house.

The Chinaberry Tree concludes with Denleigh and Asshur (single men) pondering what they can do to make life better for Laurentine and Melissa (single women), respectively. Specifically, it is Asshur who thinks of marriage: "he would order their well-being" (340). However, at the conclusion the narrator focuses on Laurentine and Melissa who were thinking "on none of these things" that the men were thinking about (340). The narrator states:

> Caught up in an immense tide of feeling, they were unable to focus their minds on home, children, their men....Rather like spent swimmers, who had given up the hope of rescue and then had suddenly met with it, they were sensing with all their being, the feel of the solid ground beneath their feet, the grateful monotony of the skies above their heads, (340-341).

The cousins survived a traumatic event, a self-defining event and an event where they gain more insight into one another. The revelations demonstrated their sameness moreso than their differences. There is another suggestion in the novel that the women do not marry. "Laurentine and Melissa looking back in later safer years on this year in which fate showed itself at its sorriest, often recalled this season, dwelt on it, relived it: Laurentine with a certain sweet poignance; Melissa with a familiar pang of terror, a prayerful sense of gratitude" (236). Again this reflection does not include or imply that the women married. It does suggest that they remained connected and safe. I maintain that Fauset kept Laurentine and Melissa single and living together.

Fauset also demonstrates that simply because Denleigh is a doctor does not make him an ideal mate for Laurentine. Dr. Denleigh tells Laurentine about her parents and how they loved one another. He maintains that Aunt Sal loved the Colonel more than her daughter (159). Denleigh freely carries on this conversation where "she answered reluctantly, ashamed and uneasy at the turn which the conversation had taken" (160). Harboring animosity Laurentine believes that she would have suffered less if her mother had relocated when she was a child rather than continuing to live in Red Brook, New Jersey and house the Colonel provided. Denleigh prefers the romantic version when explaining to Laurentine her mother's motives and her parent's love. Denleigh asserts, "She knew—before long—that she was ruining him. He, loving her more probably than anything else in the world, knew to what he was consigning her...He acknowledges her, he provides her with a home—his building it in this town was

just a flash of dare-deviltry I guess—he sees that you get an education" (160). To further enhance his perspicuity of the situation he remarks "You know if she hadn't been colored he'd have married her like a shot" (160). This exchange primarily where Denleigh is supposedly making Laurentine aware of the passion between her parents is overtly condescending on his part. She lived and suffered in Red Brook for years with her mother and occasional pats on the head from her father and being rejected by the rest of the town. Laurentine is a woman who gains standing in the community on her own and earns a living in which she supports not only herself but her mercurial mother. It is unlikely that Laurentine would marry a man who finds it necessary to talk down to her, particularly, since she followed Fauset's recipe for success—is industrious, remains tied to her community, yet independent and is an entrepreneur.

Although Laurentine seeks respectability and, initially, believes that she can attain it from marriage she is less eager to wed Denleigh. He proposes their elopement; but diplomatically and abruptly she refuses "'you're sweet Stephen—talking of marriage—we're not even engaged I'd have you to know'" (162). Laurentine knows how to gracefully avoid issues. Ironically, Denleigh was married previously to a woman, whom he claims, was beautiful and an only womanchild, "'she was spoilt...She didn't know what self-denial, or self-control meant'" (157). The now deceased Mrs. Denleigh had several affairs and in his telling of their life together she lost her identity. Denleigh describes his former wife from his point of view, without interruptions from the narrator or Laurentine. He married up the economic ladder and his story of an unfaithful, beautiful,

spoiled wife who did not appreciate his hard working efforts leaves a reader curious about this nameless woman. She is not a character to be vilified, for the reader gets the impression that much is missing from the story. After suffering such a betrayal the insightful Denleigh makes the following sage statement "'Everybody should suffer before he marries. Suffering makes for understanding and clarity more than anything I know'" (157-158). Laurentine suffers enough to avoid cohabitation with an individual who sees benefits in suffering.

Allen finds that Fauset "ponders repeatedly the mental development of young, black female subjects...During this migratory adjustment period, the subject learns how to adapt emotionally to and accept herself in a racist and sexist environment" (49). Fauset speaks moreso through the actions of her fictional women. She wants her readers to consider the possibilities for success and happiness. Particularly for young women coming from working-class woman-centered households Fauset usually offer success formulas. As a working, single mother, Mrs. Ellersley is so poor she sent Maggie to school regularly "to save fuel and gas. Evenings she went to the houses where her mother worked and got her dinner" (59). The fact that Maggie was frail kept her from the wage/labor drudgery of her mother and aunt. In addition to her wage/labor, Mrs. Ellersley also rented out one of their three rooms usually to train-men. As her mother struggles for their survival Maggie's belief system develops. Maggie intends to avoid the drudgery of her mother and cousin. Young Maggie "had sense enough to know that very often these train-men stayed poor. They made pretty good money—they did, too, in those days—but

not enough to save their wives form labor" (59). However, Mrs. Ellersley encouraged Maggie in her nubile belief that a well-to-do colored man, easily identified by his title—minister, doctor or lawyer,—could save her from a life of toil. Mis' Sparrow ignored such speculation from her cousin as she thought it too far fetched that Maggie would find herself in such a situation. True to her training, Maggie reveals that she wants to meet a prosperous colored man. She states "'I'm going to meet one,' ...and henceforth she thought, she dreamed of nothing else" (59). As a teenage girl with romantic notions Maggie vows to meet, not marry, an affluent man.

Fauset recognized the work that many Negro women were forced to perform and she wanted to offer alternative avenues of escape from the hardships of wage/labor for women. Maggie Ellersley's goal, in meeting a moneyed man, seemingly, is to gather information on how to get and maintain prosperity. As a young woman, Maggie's desire is "'if you could just get us out of this awful place, this house, this street! If I could just get to know some decent folks'" (60). She reveals her aspiration to John Howe, a divinity student that she and her mother nursed back to health, who wants to show his appreciation to the Ellersley's. Fourteen-year old, Maggie advises Howe as to how her plan could succeed; "Clearly she had nursed her project" (61). Based on their reputation for being clean and honest, the installment plan, train men and renting a house on Fifty-third Street (in New York) Maggie's plan appeared foolproof. Unfortunately, Mrs. Ellersley lacked Maggie's vision. When Howe presents the plan to "Mrs. Ellersley [she] was sure of her livelihood, her mere existence here, but she was

doubtful about a great venture" (61). Nevertheless, when Maggie's scheme works "It gave Maggie her first insight into the workings of life. If you wanted things, you thought and thought about them, and when an opportunity offered, there you were with your mind made up to jump at it" (62). Although Maggie fails to acknowledge it, early on she exhibits a successful entrepreneurial spirit and aptitude. The avenue of escape she attributed to men, she successfully employed before graduating from high school. Her next goal is to get to know decent people.

At fourteen, Maggie's voice is heard and acted upon in a society of exchange. With the initiation of her voice the material situation of her small family changes for the better. "Gradually, word of her rooming-house spread among the better class of transients. All her lodgers gave her their mending to do, she washed for some of them, gave breakfast to a few chosen spirits, and they paid willingly and well" (62). Fauset's pubescent Cinderella works, speaks and acts in behalf of her family and herself. Although the Ellersley's like John Howe and some of the other transients appeared to be decent/hard-working individuals, the narrator states "She [Maggie] had a passion for respectability and decency quite apart from what they connoted of comparative east and comfort, though she coveted these latter, too, and meant some day to have them" (64). Although the rooming house allows the Ellersleys to move to a better neighborhood they were still struggling with their finances. Mr. Marshall a successful caterer and father of Maggie's new friend, Sylvia, offers to loan Maggie money. She refuses and asks for work—"'I could take orders, count the

silver, look after the napery, pay off the men if you'd care to trust me'" (68). During her junior year in high school, Maggie gains practical knowledge, experience and money as a bookkeeper.

In Comedy American Style, Fauset creates another poor matrifocal family, the Grant family consists of, Phebe and her mother Sarah who is unmarried. Phebe exercises her voice early, unhesitant in her revelation to her elementary school class and teacher that "'I belong to the black or Negro race'" (35). Her response caused her teacher to giggle and say "'Well, Phebe, we all know that isn't true. Don't try to be funny. Now tell us what race you belong to, dear!'" (35). The narrator describes Phebe as "quiet, intense, independent little girl, made up of strange loyalties and predilections and almost as single-minded as Olivia Cary" (47). Mrs. Grant struggles to make ends meet. They live on a back street in the rear of the Campbell family (109). The Grant family, like the Ellersley's, are members of the working poor. Because the reader is able to identify both Phebe and her mother, Sarah, by name one can assume Phebe's father is white. Her mother worked for Mrs. Morton Rogers yet when Phebe graduates from high school Rogers decides to send an appreciative Phebe to school for dress design "this summer and next winter...I'm going to look after her daughters' clothes while she's away....If she likes me and I make progress, she may set me up....Pretty nice?'" (64). Fauset likes to people her novels with women-centered families. In The Chinaberry Tree, Sarah Strange's lifelong intimate affair with Colonel Halloway netted her a house, a chinaberry tree, his vengeful wife, their daughter (Laurentine) and her two step-sisters (Phebe and Diane). Bad planning

on the Colonel's part almost places the finances of the Stranges in ruin after his death. Phebe and Diane only appear once in the novel to meet their sister, Laurentine, and make her an offer: "She would not take money outright. But she would and could take training. She liked dressmaking and designing and if the girls would like to help her in her training she would be grateful" (12). Consequently, "it was arranged that she should go to Newark for instruction, her sisters would be responsible for all costs" (13). Skill and training with design, needle and thread allow Laurentine to preserve her family in a manner to which they were accustomed. It allows Phebe, (Comedy American Style) to increase her family's wealth. In There Is Confusion, Maggie cultivates skill in many occupations, including being a nurse overseas during World War I. The younger women refuse to take money but are willing to accept training or education to increase their skills and family finances. Fauset stresses training, independence and self-reliance to working-class women.

In Comedy American Style, Phebe's diligence and hard work also contribute to her financial success and dress shop. She credits Mrs. Rogers:

> "...she stood back of me all this time...And of course it isn't my shop, not yet, though I do expect to own it some day. I even have a very small interest in it already. I'd have had more only I wanted to pay Mrs. Rogers first what I owed her. I've finished with that now though and I'm concentrating on this house. I do want Mother to be able pretty soon to stop work" (109-110).

Phebe is practical and building on a life she wants to maintain. Like Laurentine, in The Chinaberry Tree, Phebe is achieving this comfortable lifestyle with the help of another woman. Fauset demonstrates that economic success does not rest with men. Phebe's middle-class friend, Teresa however, is oblivious to the type of commitment Phebe makes to succeed. Nevertheless, Teresa finds her success wonderful and remarks, "'My goodness! ...Why, Phebe, you're only a little bit older than me, aren't you? And I have never earned a cent yet'" (110). Teresa, who comes from a two parent, upper middle-class home, finds earning a living an impressive achievement and one that she admires. Teresa's lack of a voice, work ethic and a manipulative mother all lead to her downfall.

Dependence in middle- or upper-class young Negro men is solved through marriage. Cary decides he wants to wed Marise, a successful stage actress, because he believed that she could heal his family. Marise comes from a middle-class family while Cary's family is upper-middle-class. "'Marise, in my home we are heart-broken, that is my father and I, and only a woman can heal us....I am asking you to come and be that woman'" (267). Though insensitive to the needs of others outside of his family, Cary believes he needs a wife and totally disregards Marise's profession and that she is confident and assertive. Ostensibly, he is offering her something better than being on stage—to be satisfied with an audience of two ungrateful men—to be handmaiden for he and his father. Laughable, the reader is told "She could scarcely believe her ears. 'Without love?'" He replies, "'With a great deal of love...and endless gratitude'" (267). Convincingly yet tactfully, Marise declares, "'I wouldn't want gratitude from

a man...from my husband, Chris. I'd want something much wilder" (267). Marise weds Nicholas Campbell and Phebe weds Christopher Cary all grew up in the same neighborhood. Both Campbell and Cary are doctors and their wives support them—financially. Feeling a bit emasculated and remembering that she always loved him, Campbell invites Phebe to New York for a tryst and, in most un-Cinderella like behavior, she accepts. She notices that "he was...wearing her favorite, a dark blue suit, but of much better cut and quality than she'd ever seen on him" (308). She compliments him on his refined manner of dress believing that his practice must be flourishing. He admits:

> "All this comes from Marise. I wanted to live on my earnings...it was bad enough to be living in her house but I didn't feel I could take her away from all that comfort, especially since it would be years before I could make it up to her. But in every other respect, I would prefer to make my own way, which wouldn't mean a suit like this, I can tell you, or a Pierce Arrow either. I'm just a poor struggling doctor, Phebe, and if my income let me run to a Ford and a couple of suits off One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, I'd be grateful....But you can't be married to the hit of theatrical New York and look like a hick...or so Marise tells me!" (308).

Nicholas lives off the riches of Marise. By the time Phebe weds Cary his once upper middle-class family is bankrupt. She reassures Cary that she has known poverty all her life and invites the Cary family to come live in her house. In a house of five adults "Phebe and Christopher were the wage earners" (302).

Fauset's women who work themselves up the economic ladder must decide if they are willing to support husbands, the lifestyle of husbands and their families.

In addition to providing financial support to their husbands and families, Fauset's female characters can be rather provocative. As mentioned previously, married Phebe Grant Cary accepted an offer to meet Nicholas in New York. At one point "all she knew was that at last she was crushed close in his arms, feeling his hot kisses, sensing the ardor of which she had once dreamed" (309). This is not the type of behavior one expects from a woman who aspired to membership in the cult of true womanhood. Phebe, like Marise, is a woman with desires and one who makes her own decisions. She tells Nicholas:

> "I've got to go home." But even as she spoke she had a vision of that home...her ailing father-in-law, her tired and sullen mother, her weary, apathetic husband. And last of all Olivia [mother-in-law] with her infuriating, selfish silliness....In a sudden gust of repulsion, she sagged against his shoulder....He could actually feel her weakening; her moral strength ebbing with her physical (310).

Phebe's actions are in line with what the 1920s blues women sang about. She agrees to meet and consummate their affair. She tells herself "'I have a right to some happiness...It's not my fault if I have to take it where I find it'" (311). Though married, she admits to being unhappy. Arriving at the appointed location, Phebe leaves the cab and as she pays her fare she noticed another woman exiting a cab in front of hers:

> A colored woman, beautifully dressed, dismounted, looked searchingly at the house, glanced sharply up and down the street and darted into the open doorway. With her suddenly quickened senses, Phebe recognized her for what she was...a woman keeping an assignation with her lover...a woman like herself (311).

In this scene Phebe is reserving judgment and observing the trepidation of an unnamed woman. The casualness in the description of this scene also suggests that women who had affairs were not cheap, unconcerned and unattractive. Phebe then acknowledges "if he had ever truly loved her he would not be asking her now to betray Christopher" (312). In New York few stop to pass moral judgment; consequently, it is up to Phebe to question herself if she believes that she is being immoral. Further, Phebe sees herself in the unnamed woman which causes her to pause before consummating in the affair. Nevertheless, Phebe who spent most of her life expecting to marry Nicholas only to be rejected surmises:

> Nicholas had married Marise...he was complaining about Marise... he was even now planning to betray Marise. But he was remaining with her! Why? Because he had always loved her, wanted her, held himself in readiness for her beck, her call. She, Phebe had offered him the steadfastness, the loyalty of years. Marise had dallied, had flouted him, had permitted herself an array of suitors, trying them discarding them, encouraging them. And finally she had chosen Nicholas... and he had jumped to her bidding, made

himself her thrall, hugging, even while complaining of his chains. When he could so easily have walked away!

Why what was she doing here in this hateful street about to enter this house, to take a lover, when at home her husband was awaiting her responsible, uncomplaining, loyal! ...She turned and walked as fast as her feet could carry her (312-313).

Phebe is a fully fleshed character. She sees Nicholas as a cuckold dancing to the tune of his worldly wife Marise. Marise, on the other hand, is a woman who is allowed to sample all that life has to offer without penalty of societal rebuff. Moreover, she has a husband who will stand by her because he loves and has always loved her. Finally, Phebe harbors no ill will toward Marise or vice versa because in Fauset's novels the community creates a strong bond with relationships that sustain throughout the years. In There Is Confusion Maggie weds Henderson Neal, a former boarder, almost forty-years her senior who appears to have money. He takes her away from the community, reveals himself to be a gambler, eventually stabs Maggie in a jealous rage. During her recovery, he throws himself in front of a subway train. Maggie, eventually, returns to the community, is confident in her abilities and succeeds in her own business without a husband.

In Comedy American Style, the women speak and make decisions for themselves and their families, albeit not always well thought out. Olivia Cary only wants the best for herself and her preferred family members. For a while she is stimulated by a lifestyle she manipulates and enjoys. She wants to pass for

white but is forced into a masquerade—interacting with other Negroes who recognize she and her family as colored. However, hurtful decisions ultimately cause her to lose what is left of her family. Although Olivia is forced into masquerade she intends to train her children to the fine art of passing; alas, her daughter, Teresa, only succeeds to a marginal level of masquerade. Overshadowed by her mother's heavy-handed influence, Teresa fails to develop a voice for herself and is subject to a loveless marriage, abuse and obscurity.

Fauset's most tragic maternal figure is Olivia Cary in Comedy American Style. Olivia is preoccupied with passing for white and forcing her daughter to stay away from obviously colored people. Olivia's obsession appears so ridiculous it is humorous in parts. She fails to develop a marketable skill and instead marries well. Her conniving behavior produces a daughter, Teresa, who is tedious, absurd, boring and tragic. As a child, when Teresa brings little Phebe and Maria (later knows as Marise) home from school Olivia tries to shoo colored Maria away from their home and Teresa's life. Sent to an exclusive boarding school, Teresa finds the only person of color and spends her vacation with Alicia and her family. Consequently, she meets and becomes engaged, secretly, to the bronze skinned Henry Bates. Petrified at the response of her mother to her engagement, Teresa asks proud Henry, "'your Spanish, you know. Couldn't you use it most of the time and ...and pass for a Mexican?'" (143). Before leaving Teresa's life for good, Henry confronts mother and daughter exclaiming, "'Are you crazy, both of you? I'm perfectly satisfied to be an American Negro, tough as it all is... What am I going to do, throw aside all my traditions, all my friends

and be a damned gringo just to satisfy the vanity of two make-believe white women!...'" (143). Teresa is so inept at passing and Olivia is so enraged by Teresa's attempt to wed that she takes her to France where she selects an abusive, grasping, working-class mama's boy, to be her daughter's white husband. Teresa who comes from a privileged background is denied a prince, a duke, a count and even a jester, who at least worked inside the castle. Aristide, Teresa's husband, is a racist who recognizes her as an object of exchange. When she discovers this "she did not know what to make of her life" (183). Without family, community and hope, "gradually her expectation of a change died away and she settled down into an existence that was colorless, bleak and futile" (183). Though Teresa comes from a financially successful background she never exercised her voice, cultivated education or independence nor tried to improve herself; therefore, in Fauset's fictional world Teresa was primed for failure.

Olivia is obsessive and probably one of the most despicable mother characters of the Harlem Renaissance literature. Fauset demonstrates that feminine evil is not reserved for step-mothers. She unapologetically contributes to her youngest son's (Oliver) suicide. She had several reasons for marrying Christopher Cary Sr., none of which involve romance or love for him: "...it was important for one's husband to belong to such or such a class. She knew now that it was highly unlikely that she would meet with and marry a white man of Cary's education, standing and popularity. Certainly not in this section of the country where her affiliations could be so easily traceable" (28). Since Dr. Cary's

complexion was pale, Olivia approximates "They would have white children...And for that reason and no other she married Christopher Cary" (29). Furthermore as a mother of children from an influential background, the calculating Olivia thinks "...to what heights might not their children attain? And she as dowager would share all their triumphs, their opportunities, their advantages" (29). Olivia is so diabolical that she is comical. After she prevents Teresa's marriage to Henry (an obvious Negro) Olivia "...realized only two things ...first that Teresa was not to be trusted; secondly that she must make her tactics less obvious" (152). In addition to having Oliver, her youngest son, pretending to be her servant she also wanted him to slick his hair so that he could appear to be "Japanese or Mexican" (101). Olivia preferred not to have Negroid looking individuals on her premises. Part of the tragedy of Olivia Cary is the self-hatred that she passed on to her daughter and youngest son. For women who believed they were being snubbed by women like Olivia, Fauset offers a woman to be pitied, a tragic character. Fauset goes further to warn mature daughters of such mothers to continue to be respectful but to claim responsibly for their own happiness. In Fauset's novelistic world when a young woman does not accept responsibility for any aspect of her life she fails.

Fauset's novels make it clear that for aspiring young women one did not, as Miss Graves observers, "simply stumble into success" (There Is Confusion 51). Fauset's novelistic women succeed with the help of others. Most of her novels indicate that the financial, physical or verbal support of women and the nurturing of men can enable other women to succeed with minimal

complications. In There Is Confusion Mr. Joel Marshall nurtures his daughter Joanna and Maggie Ellersley. In Plum Bun, Mr. Junius Murray nurtures his daughters, Angela and Virginia, only Virginia responded. Denied a father's nurturing, Laurentine receives it in while in her twenties from a suitor, Dr. Stephen Denleigh. Dr. Cary senior nurtures his family when he is available. Teresa, for the most part, loves but has little access to her busy father.

Finally, when one of her female protagonists or antagonist characters stumble if they accept sisterhood there will be redemption. Plum Bun is tale in support sisterhood both biologically and otherwise. However, young Angela was led astray by, Mattie's, her mother's game of passing. The game was played when they were separated from the tanned husband/father and daughter/sister. Angela is in a struggle to discover who she is while seeking the good life exiled from those who know and love her. Once she is finally finished with Roger, Sylvander asserts, "Her recognition and rejection of thorough-going sex-role games has increased Angela's understanding of herself, of men, and of marriage" (182). When she decides to support Miss Powell, Angela thinks "A whim of fate had set their paths far apart but just the same they were more than 'sisters under the skin.' They were really closely connected in blood, in racial condition, in common suffering" (340-341). Angela who rejected and exiled herself from her family and community reclaims and reenters her part in the community and the sisterhood in a very public way. She reveals to reporters "'I mean that if Miss Powell isn't wanted, I'm not wanted either. You imply that she's not wanted because she's coloured. Well, I'm coloured too'" (347). In There Is

Confusion Joanna Marshall discovers "...it was women who had the real difficulties to overcome, disabilities of sex and of tradition" (234). The romantically tormented Maggie Ellersley reveals to her love, "'I've decided to not marry—anyone. I think I want to try life on my own'" (261). As a result:

> Her new-found independence was a source of the greatest joy. ...When she returned to America she would start her hair work again, she would inaugurate a chain of Beauty Shops...And she would gather about her, friends, simple kindly people whom she liked for themselves: who would seek her company with no thought of patronage. She would stand on her two feet, Maggie Ellersley, serence, independent, self-reliant. The idea exalted her and she went about her work the picture of optimism and happiness (261-262).

Maggie could appreciate a real friend not a friend who holds social standing. Further, her work will place her in a community of women. Although the small community of Red Brook alienated the Strange women, they came together to prevent the uninformed Melissa from marrying her, equally clueless, half-brother Malory. Fauset's successful women characters thrive because they are willing to confront situations, aspire to self-assigned goals, and recognize the importance of others and community.

Some critics generally view Fauset's literary women as they view her, well mannered. Tactfully, Fauset constructs female protagonists who simultaneously maintained family relationships while developing within chosen professions.

Although her female protagonists appear gracious and cultivated they sneer at conventions and exhibit brash behavior. Their thoughts as well as their lives were not shrines to saintliness and bourgeois standards of behavior. However, all her young women wanted to live well. Overall her mothers are scandalous and less than nurturing. Surpassing the antics of any evil step-mother in folk tales, Fauset's Olivia Cary in Comedy American Style is the archetype evil mother—diabolical, cruel, and malicious to her children. Mothers who are members of the working-poor do not have time to spend with their children and therefore allow them the freedom to explore the possibilities of their neighborhoods. In a hypocritical world, Fauset's novels offered a variety of female characters and women's voices who deserve more research.

Notes

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[1] Cinderella was a hardy heroine of whom stories existed in many countries. According to: Jane Yolen, "America's 'Cinderella,'" Writing & Reading Across the Curriculum eds. Laurence Behrens and :Leonard J. Rosen, (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1988), as American publishing grew in the nineteenth century children's books were produced with bright colors and "bowdlerized folk tales emerged...Endings were changed, innards cleaned up, and good triumphed with very loud huzzahs. Cinderella is the weepy, sentimentalized pretty girl incapable of helping herself" (572).

Conclusion

LAST WORD

The women in this study, because of their race, class and gender experienced the world in specific ways. Ways that some American literary scholars for many years overlooked, excused, ignored or stereotyped. Nineteenth-century African American narrative women's voices articulate rebellion against terrorism and oppression, offer advice, instruction and inspiration to others, and they remember family and community members often while being described as sassy by those who choose to ignore their words/acts. Blassingame advises historians that abolitionist editors were biased and one had to find a way to separate their agendas from the message of the formerly enslaved ("Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves" 82). Moreover, I believe that many narrative women were aware of and attempted to navigate the biases of their ghost writers and a public and persevered to tell their stories by managing what Mattie Jackson refers to as their "secrets." Because they were women and their voices did not conform to the conventions of many masculine escape slave narratives, and their voices and behaviors were so assertive, their stories went out of print. In "'I Was Born'" James Olney points out that to a greater extent in men's narratives Black women are victims of "a cruel master, mistress, or overseer" in which the narrator details a savage whipping or subsequent beatings (153). Clearly, the men articulated their concerns and what they viewed as the

violent burdens enslaved women were forced to endure. The women's act of confronting or discussing subjugation as well as conversing is often referred to as sass. In the formerly enslaved women's narratives, included in this paper, women are obligated to confront violence and terrorism with their voices (characterized as sass) which simultaneously provides them with psychological and physical relief.

In selecting voice as an aspect of inquiry I wanted to reinforce and reemphasize the importance of orality and language for African American women. As literary instruments, the early writings of Black women were often denied and neglected. The denial or limited recognition that the women received is a familiar refrain experienced by many women who were characterized as sassy. Women characterized as sassy understood its dismissive clamor as others attempted to silence or deny an unexpected and unwanted voice. Karla F. C. Holloway finds that "Black women writers seem to concentrate on shared ways of saying, [while] black males concentrate on individual ways of behaving" (Mooring & Metaphors 7). She also maintains that there is "a collective 'speaking out' by all the voices gathered within the text, authorial, narrative, characters, and even the implicated reader, is the responsive strategy in black women's literature" (11). The actions of the narrative women are so straightforward (sassy) that often their oppressors and critics are stunned and prefer not to directly acknowledge their voices. In detailing events, the women's sass achieve its intended purposes—levels of freedom and a self-imposed exercise of independence. Sass is spontaneous, timely and insightful. However many

literary critics, it appears, found the nineteenth-century African American narrative women stories unappealing which is why many of their narratives remained obscured until the 1980s. They were later taken up by those who wanted to testify to and recognized the value of their voices and work.

Pauline Hopkins sidestepped the pressure of dealing with publishers. As part of the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company she was able to make her serialized novels part of the Colored American Magazine and Contending Forces a novel published by the co-operative. Co-operative publishing allowed Hopkins to express her creative side in a less restrictive way than Fauset.

Sass is generally an unwelcomed coherent verbal act performed by those believed to have limited power. In intimate relationships sassy women are dismissed for being unpleasant, loud and having negative attitudes. In the literary realm, conceivably, critics could attempt to control how others hear sassy voices. As a woman and as an intellectual novelist Fauset is sassy. As a storyteller she assumes a public space where she controls stories that testify to the unified desire and challenge for women to succeed. Simultaneously, while demonstrating the options available to women, Fauset manages to show the diversity of women's abilities and dreams while confronting a less than receptive sociopolitical culture in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and into its early decades. Fauset's female characters speak with authority, demand respect on their own terms, and defy stereotypes associated with women of the time. Like her characters, it is Fauset's tenacity and persistence that caused her much misunderstood novels to be published.

Aware of how the ruling public perceived their voices, writers like Pauline Hopkins demonstrated confidence and pride using characters who speak Plantation Creole without being minstrels and, moreover, can be the heroine in a novel, Hagar's Daughter. Inequity, class difference, prejudice and racism become clear when Venus Johnson alternates between Plantation Creole and standard English and when Henny, her grandmother, takes the stand to testify. Likewise in Hagar's Daughter, race, class, gender and public voice are significant elements in who will be believed and who has the right to speak in public. When Hagar learns of her African heritage she becomes sassy. However, when she decides to forget she is Hagar, an escaped slave, she looses her sass, daughter, memory and identity. Hopkins demonstrates that although all have the right to speak, certain speech is more acceptable from the lips of particular individuals.

Fauset's novelistic voice and the voices of her female characters are obscured largely because critics want to see her as prim, proper and middle-class. Nevertheless, her novels consistently encourage the young daughters of working-class women to become entrepreneurs or artists, to satisfy their desires and live the lives of their dreams. She stresses the multiple challenges that Negro women faced, showing that some women possessed unpleasant personalities and proclivities. Her novels clearly, indicate happily ever after did not always follow after marriage. Additionally, Fauset is also concerned with how Negro women are portrayed in history. She reminds the public of family histories, disputes, lifestyles, languages and that women achieved their goals, faced detractors as they confronted conventions of the time.

My focus on African American women's narrative voice and its reception embodies a tradition and response that continues to this today. This study finds that the voices of many early Negro female characters are part of a larger meta-narrative where women tell their stories and what they say is neglected or their salient points disregarded creating a critical silence that needs to be filled. The voices of African American women in nineteenth and early to mid twentieth century literature need to be heard. This study demonstrates the marginalization of the voices of African American women, specifically, in literature. Previously, many critics and historians, it appears, found the voices of African American women offensive, unimportant, incoherent, or baffling; therefore they were ignored, silenced and neglected. I hope others will reevaluate the voices of Negro women characters, particularly in the writings of Black women writers, who were previously stereotyped, dismissed or overlooked.

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