#BLACKGIRLSOUTH: MAPPING BLACKGIRL QUARE GEOGRAPHIC POSSIBILITIES IN THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT

#BLACKGIRLSOUTH: MAPPING BLACKGIRL QUARE GEOGRAPHIC POSSIBILITIES IN THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

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#BLACKGIRLSOUTH examines the literary, geographic, and [counter]cultural (sub/countercultural) relationship between Black girlhood, Southern geographies, and Black girl futures. In this dissertation, I put forth Southern Black Girl Geographies as both a framework and methodology. As a framework, it centers Black girlhood in the lens of the "Quare Black South". As a methodology, it ascertains the contingencies of Black girls' past, present, and future possibilities of self- mapping and narration of their lived experiences. As framework and methodology, Southern Black Girl Geographies engages multiple ways of knowing, doing, and being and expands our understanding of Black girls as engaged knowledge and culture producers. Within this study, I interrogate the consequences and possibilities of reading both the South and Black girls as "queer/Quare" spaces through which we theorize our lives. This project uses 20th and 21st century literature to center the South as a critical geography where Black girl identities are formed and to unpack the South as a site of oppression and cultural liberation.

This is dedicated to Blackgirls who are
Learning
Unlearning
Growing
Changing
Thinking
Dreaming
Dancing
Singing
Seeing
and Being.

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PREFACE

Growing up as a Black girl in Birmingham, Alabama, all that my friends and I talked about was getting grown, moving away, and starting our lives. Our narrative of Alabama, of our home, was rooted in its history as a racial battleground that was laden with the bones of segregation. Everywhere you turned, you were faced with the ghosts of Birmingham's past. The city was too slow, too boring, too segregated, too traditional, just all around too much for a Black girl to stay in. It was not until I moved away from the South that I began to understand the impact of the South as a space and marker of who I was and who I was becoming. My identity as a Southern Black girl is significantly tethered to my identity and development. The South is not just my home, but it is an embodiment of part of my identity as a Southern Black girl.

My Southernness is formulated through my Blackness, my girlhood, the Black Church, and education. In my community, one's Black identity and the Black Church are synonymous. Sunday School, Praise Dance, Practice, Sunday Service, Vacation Bible School, 3:00 pm special services. You name it, we attended. My experiences at church shaped a lot of my thinking and being as a Black girl even if I did not understand or agree with it all. Black girls were raised to be well-behaved, "pure", quiet, obedient, and respectful. To have sex before marriage, displaying any behavior deemed "fast" by the community, be loud, or too "worldly" was seen as a crime against God and an automatic sentence to Hell. As a child, I

never believed that I was pretty. I was overweight, so the narrative that I inherited was that if I could not be pretty, I could be good and smart and that would gain me acceptance. My concept of goodness was shaped by how well I could avoid being labeled “fast”, not talking to much or too loudly, not acting too grown, and distinguishing myself from those “other girls”. Naively, I embraced this way of thinking and allowed it to shape the way that I viewed myself and other Black girls. I went through my childhood trying to obtain recognition through academics and setting myself apart from those “girls” in order to make myself feel better and allow me to be accepted. Ultimately, I developed a “good girl” mentality. I fully bought into the idea that if I maintained the status of “good girl” which consisted of maintaining an outward shield of purity, and not being perceived as mischievous, ratchet, ghetto, etc. then I would end up with the life that I deserved. A life that provided me with the wealth, house, marriage by 25 and kids by 30 that I foolishly believed that I deserved and was owed to me.

The truth was that I was miserable within this performance. I was jealous of all of the Black girls who were lived life on their terms. The girls who were othered as “fast”, “ratchet, “loud” seemed to have access to a confidence and freedom that I could not find. Although I had taken on this identity of the “good, smart Black girl” is didn't feel at home to me. I felt like I was an imposter—weighed down with the need to fulfill these expectations of myself, expectations that I felt that everyone had of me—who I didn’t know who I was. I was miserable and lost.

Literature and music became ways for to attempt to find what was missing from myself. I have always loved music. I was definitely the girl who would find a song to match my mood and play it to death. As a Black girl, some of my favorite Black women artists were Aaliyah, Destiny's Child, Monica, Brandy, Mary J. Blige, Jasmine Sullivan, Keri Hilson, Anita Baker, Whitney Houston, Ciara, Patti Labelle, Missy Elliot, etc. I was also secretly in love with B2K, Ludacris, Lil Wayne, (Young) Jeezy, Bow Wow, and later Yo Gotti. Singing and dancing in my room gave me the space and freedom to be the Black girl that I always imagined myself to be. During the summer, I couldn't wait to watch BET to see all of the music videos and learn all of the dances. These images of Black women framed my definition of beauty, sexuality, and what it meant to be a Black girl. The ways that they framed sexiness with bougieness and classiness intrigued me.

Reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Huston was transformative for me. Janie's character was the first time that I was able to see myself on the pages. Stuck between girlhood and womanhood, lost and unsure, Janie's words felt like she was speaking my life as her words and talking directly to me. Reading this novel helped me to begin to conceptualize what it exactly meant to be a Black girl trying to fit into boxes that didn't quite seem to be made for me. The second novel that changed my life was *The Coldest Winter Ever* by Sister Souljah. Similarly, to *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, I discovered this text not in my classroom but in the hands of another Black girl sitting across from me on the bus ride home I asked her about the book, and she told me that she had borrowed it

from her older sister, a 10th grader at the local high school. I asked to borrow it after she had finished, and she said yes. Reading the story of Winter Santiago felt like a whole new world for me. Winter's story represented all of the lives of those "other girls" that I had been warned about. The lives that I secretly wanted to live. Although I was living in it, the dichotomy of good Black girl-ghetto Black girl never really set well with me. It seemed like we were pitted against each other and hated each other while secretly coveting each other's lives. While we "good Christian girls" set back judging other girls, we secretly wished for the freedom and carefree attitude that they had to live life on their own terms. *The Coldest Winter Ever* provided me with a different perspective of Black girlhood that I had been shielded from and chose not to see. Despite the ending, it also ignited a small flame to imagine what life could be like if Black girls were free to create their own narratives.

This project is significant to me as a Black girl and as a Black girl scholar is representative of the continuous evolution of my seeing, thinking, and knowing Black girls. My time in Michigan was vital to me as a scholar and Southern Black girl because it in there were encounter other Southern Black girls who challenged and expanded the ways that I thought about the South, Black girlhood, and the ways that they interact. Michigan has become my place of unlearning and unknowing. I have had to disregard everything I thought I knew about myself. One of the greatest lessons that I have learned throughout my grad school experience is that none of that "good girl theology" that had been ingrained in me growing up saved me. It didn't save me from struggling with self-esteem, it didn't save

me from sexual abuse or identity issues. What it did do was breed self-hatred and toxicity toward other Black girls. A part of the work of Black Girlhood Studies as a field, scholars, advocates, and members is to address the toxic beliefs and behaviors among Black women and Black girls in order to imagine and create new spaces where both and heal and be free. It is impossible to create new futures for Black girls because the shortcomings and harm of the past and present structures are not addressed and deconstructed. Thus, Southern Black Girl Geography calls for a looking back at the ways that the toxic categorization of Black girls within families, communities, and institutions has created cultures of harm that were passed down through generations of Black women, especially in the South. In order to establish collaborative relationships and spaces that allow Black girls and Black women the freedom to write their own narratives and embraced Southernness, ratchetness, sexiness, quietness, loudness, smartness, creativity, and all the other ways that Black girls show up in the world. This project centers the rejection of methodologies and spaces that prevent Black girls from being able to be children, make mistakes, have opinions, be creative, and to bring their full selves to the table and grapples with the question, what would happen if we created a world where Black girls could be free?

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INTRODUCTION

"For Black folks in the South the porch is a therapy session, courtroom, interrogation space, dining room, and retreat from the world. We make love, justice, and memories there. We make ourselves." —Corey Miles

In order to fully explore the magnitude of Black girlhood as a field and cultural phenomenon, one must establish a firm understanding of how the field of Black Girlhood came to be. As is the practice of knowledge development, the essence of Black Girlhood existed long before the naming of it. Black girls' lived experiences have been embedded into the framework of African American literature as a part of the larger narrative of understanding Black women's experiences. Black women's literature, as a part of African American/Black Literature[1] Black women have existed at the margins of conversations surrounding racism, sexism, classism, oppression and liberation (hooks, 15; Collins 6). hooks defines the margins as "to be part of the whole but outside the main body "(hooks, x). As a Southern Black writer, thinker, and scholar of Black women and girls' experiences, hooks analyzes Black girlhood, womanhood, and feminism through the lens of Southern geography and aesthetics provides contextual blueprint for the way that landscape impacts the nuances of girlhood and womanhood based on geography. One of the byproducts of the centering of Black women has been the extrapolation of the lived experiences of Black girls outside of the guise of adulthood. Thus, Black girlhood was born out of the need to demarginalize Black girls and transition them to the forefront of conversation surrounding

the present possibilities of Black girls and women's futures. This project uses the historical framework of Black Girlhood, Southern geography, and literary studies to carve out Southern Black Girl Literature as a sub-genre of literature that engages the nuances and cultural implications of Southern tradition and culture on the development of Black girl identity. Placing "the South" in conversation with Black girls and literature allows one to not only retrace the complicated lineage of Southern Black girl history but also examine the present and future ways that Black girls are writing themselves into the land, culture, and world.

As a field, Black Girlhood Studies emerged out of a marginal cry of Black girls to be seen and heard instead of silenced, abused and ignored by society, the Black community, and other Black Women. Ruth Nicole Brown, a key scholar of Black Girlhood as a methodology, created Saving Our Lives, Hearing Our Truths (SOLHOT) both a physical and liminal space that centers Black girls' voices, opinions, and narratives through the intentional practices of love, freedom, creativity, and joy. Brown defines Black girlhood as the "representations, memories, and lived experiences of being and becoming in a body marked as youthful, Black, and female. Black girlhood is not dependent on age, physical maturity, or an essential category of identity" (1). More plainly stated, "the vision of Black girlhood is freedom and Black girls are free. As an organizing construct, Black girlhood makes possible the affirmation of Black girls' lives, and if necessary, their liberation. Black girlhood as a spatial intervention" (1). The foundation of Black girlhood is the establishment

of spaces of healing, love, and wholeness where Black girls are allowed to remove the mask of performance and identity and be real and raw. Black Girlhood Studies as a field and framework highlights an intersectional perspective on the ways that Black girls engage with themselves, their environments, their education, ways of knowing, joy, and futures. Thus, Blacks Girlhood Studies calls on scholars from Hip-Hop Feminism, Black Feminist Studies, Womanism, Education, Gender and Race Studies, History, Psychology, Memory Studies, Popular Culture, as well as poets, fiction writers, bloggers, and artists to voice more complete narratives of Black girls' lives.

This project builds upon Robin Boylorn and Dominique Hill's conceptualization of "Blackgirl: one word "to address the question of age, knowing, and the overall qualifications to be considered a Blackgirl. (Boylorn, x /Hill, 276) "Blackgirl: one word" speaks to the duality of Black women's experience as both girl and women and attempts to carve out space for Black women to embrace their girl and woman parts. This project adopts this notion of duality to reject the categorization of Black girls and Black girlhood within limitations of age. This dissertation leans on the narrative of these spaces to think through the ways that Southern Black girls and communities take up and create these spaces for themselves.

Black Girlhood Literature emerged as a field within English literary canon that contributed to the larger conversations of the legitimacy of Black women's narratives and texts. Black women authors used their literary endeavors to document their beliefs and their

experiences. Writing for Black women was as much about sharing their ideas as it was about providing voices for Black women's lives and experiences in a world that consistently tried to keep them silent. Nazera Wright's research on Black girls in the nineteenth century uncovered the earliest inclusions of Black girls within the articles in the *Freedom Journals* and pamphlets that constructed certain images of Black girls and instructed Black girls on the proper behaviors for acceptance in society. Wright ascertained that:

> "Black men tended to write the Black girls as an *ideal figure,* or precisely, *their* ideal figure. The Black girls they wrote about were flat, two-dimensional figures that modeled the behaviors and attributes male authority figures believe were essential for the progress of the race. In contrast, Black women writers tended to focus on the interiority of Black girls. They wrote about their inner thoughts, their plans, their dreams, and aspirations. They emphasized the determination and grit Black girls exhibited as they formed successful strategies for fighting and rejecting oppression. They outlined trajectories that led to adulthoods that did not necessarily include wifehood and motherhood. (3)

Early scripting of Black girlhood reveals the tensions between the imaging and expectations for Black girls between Black men and women. Wright highlights that not only did male leaders position Black girls as "ideal figures" for racial morality, but they also contributed to the early adultification of Black girls through these racial and cultural responsibility to uplift the race through behavior.

In contrast, Black women leaders advocated for the full acknowledgement of Black girls as human. One prominent example, Anna Julia Cooper, specifically focused on Southern Black Girlhood and the ways that Black girls are relegated to positions of silent servitude instead of being embraced for who they are. Cooper states:

> "I...add my pleas for the *Colored Girls* of the South: that large, bright, promising fatally beautiful class that stand shivering like a delicate plantlet before the fury of tempestuous elements, so full of promise and possibilities, yet so sure of destruction; often without a father to whom they dare apply the loving term, often without a stronger brother to espouse their cause and defend their honor with his life's blood; in the midst of pitfalls and snares, waylaid by the lower classes of white men, with no shelter, no protection...There is material in them well worth your while, the hope in germ of a such, helpful, regenerating womanhood on which, primarily rests the foundation stones of our future as a race" (24-25).

Cooper is praised for her centering of Black girls and women as essential parts of the conversation of liberation of the Black race. Cooper is not shy about calling out the overlooking of the intersection of race, gender, and class in racial politics and the ways that the poor, working class are often left out of conversations. She also makes for the protection of Black girls from sexual violence by men. Cooper's "Womanhood: A vital Element of Regeneration and Progress of the Race was delivered in 1886, just twenty-six years after the "true womanhood" era.[2] Cooper's argument for Black girls'/women's lives was written

during the time when Black girls and women were not viewed as women. They were not considered as candidates for "true womanhood" but were viewed as hypersexual, morally corrupt vessels due to their race and gender. Thus, Cooper's articulation for the status, protection, education, and validation for Black girls and women is read through the historic status of denial. A twenty-first century rereading of Cooper's argument Southern Black women allow us to ascertain some of the possible shortcomings in Cooper's logic. Similar to the "cult of true womanhood", Cooper's definition of and positioning of girlhood and womanhood revolves around the morality within the Black Church and uplifting of the race through education and resources for the working class. Her connections of forward racial and gender movement to institutions such as the Church, education, and marriage, which are home to both liberating and oppressive practices to its communities. I want to be clear here that this is not a smear of Anna Julia Cooper or a discreditation to all that she has contributed to the foundations of Black Feminist Thought and Black Studies. It is instead a call to sit with the tensions of the comparative histories of the relationships between the Southern Black Church, Black girls/women, and the working class as well as the implications of those contentious relationships.

This dissertation is a labor of love that places a myriad of voices in conversation with one another to discuss Black girls, Black being, and Black stories. Specifically, I aim to analyze the relationship between the U.S. South, as a landscape and cultural geography, and Black girls' narratives and bodily geographies in order to assess the ways that Southern Black

girls cultivate their own narratives around their bodies and experiences in the wake of historical and stereotypical narratives of Black girls and girlhood that have trapped Black girls in boxes that do not quite fit. The overall goal of the project is to offer literary texts, music, television, etc., as potential lenses through which we can view Black girls' individual and collective methods for producing alternative narratives of their bodies and lives.

Defining the South

One of the things that becomes quickly apparent in trying to cultivate a cohesive definition of the South is that there is no singular definition for the South. The (American) South as a geographic region exists fluidly from the states of the original Confederacy to other states that maintain contested identities as Southern/Non-Southern States. As a geography, culture, and politic, the (American) South narrative maintains a violently contentious history and present with its residents and those impacted by the traumas, both experienced and residual, at the hands of the South. Geographer Latoya Eaves outlines "The (American) South" as both a physical geography and racial and cultural geography that bears reckoning. The South's cultural identity has remained fixated on a set of historical moments and iconography, such as the pre-abolition South and its secession movement, the role of the South in the Civil War, deep fried and sugared landscapes, widespread persistent poverty, and widespread Christian religiosity (82).

Sherita L. Johnson defines the framework of the Old South, Southernness, and the New South" as three intersecting ideologies that encompass various experiences and

expectations of The South. These ideologies are distinguished through temporality and memory. One's "Southernness" or identification as Southern, aligned with or a part of Southern beliefs or doctrines. Thus, the narratives, culture, and ideologies of the Old and New South can dissent yet overlap in narrative and time because one's personal identification with the South. The "New South" is broadly defined as narratives and ideologies of the South outside of the lens of whiteness. Johnson highlights the power of the historic white-Black dichotomy in the South that limits and silences those that intersect and exist outside of these frames of reference. The dominant Southern ideology and identity has become synonymous with "whiteness as it solidifies in literary and political narratives. This ideology of the "Old South" is rooted in a falsified narrative of a former glory when the South reigned as a dominant force in American existence and the social order was dominated by slavery and Whiteness. For the Southern dominant ideology, the call to "Make America Great Again" [1]was synonymous with the vow that "the South Shall Rise Again.[2]" The "Old South" also represents a commitment to domination and oppression that extends far beyond race. Johnson highlights the role of the Old South and Southernness in terms of the evolving ideologies of (Black) women. Southern womanhood played a significant role in the solidification of domination for whiteness in the same ways that Southern Black women were for liberation. Black girls and women were cast as the

[1] References former President Donald Trump's campaign slogan.
[2] https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-south-shall-rise-agai_b_7684534 - References a post-Civil War saying and belief by a group called the Redeemers that sought to bring back the dominance of White Southerners as well as the Jim Crow South that oppressed the Black and other non-white, non-Christian communities.

antithesis of Southern womanhood. Thus, Black women's construction of freedom was mirrored after the status, and acknowledgement that they were long denied. As referenced by Anna Julia Cooper, there is contention that has to be acknowledged in the ways that "New South" ideas of being for Black folk required the ascribing to ideals of ladyhood, family, and community—things that have been traditionally defined and accessed only in Old South whiteness. Those who did not ascribe to these Southern heteronormative ideas of being were cast aside.

One's definition of the South is rooted in their experience of and in the South. These experiences are varied based on the political, legal, and cultural power structures that have authorized "discrimination based on race, gender, discrimination, sexuality, socioeconomic class, and migration/citizenship status" (Eaves, 82). Due to the global narrative of the (American) South as an oppressive, poor, backwards, traditional, violent, etc., the (American) South has become a contested site where some escape from instead of a place to reside in. According to interviewee Anita,

> "Any place would provide a better life for me as a gay person other than the South. [Laughter] It don't have to be a region. It could be another state out of the South... The South is just Baptists, religion, [and] the Bible Belt. And they just so stuck in their ways and beliefs and traditions" (Johnson, 22).

Anita's contextualization of the South is rooted in the trauma/violence (racial, gender and more) that she has experienced in her home state of North Carolina. However, Anita's

interview also reveals the complexity of Black Southern citizenship/ identity as a site of trauma while simultaneously a homeplace. Anita cites her connection to her family and community as a motivation to remain in the South in spite of its harm (22). This highlights an all too familiar conundrum of making peace with the South as a place of home and a place of contention. Hooks defines a "homeplace" as "the site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization; Black women made homes where all Black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied to us on the outside in the public world" (384). For Black women, the South becomes a countercultural site of resistance within its traditional geography that allowed Black women [5] and Black communities to create safe homeplaces within the hostile geographies.

For McKittrick and Woods, Black geographies not only "acknowledges the space-making practices of Black subjects and communities as they negotiate with traditional structures", but "also extending beyond the relegation of Black subjects and communities into fixed, hierarchical categories (McKittrick, 84/ Woods. 7). It is these homeplaces, or Black geographies, that invite us to rethink the ways that we conceptualize our relation to space and ourselves. Black geographies are "an intervention" that "rely on the corporeal, the aesthetic, the creative, the spiritual, and the elemental (earth, air, water, and fire) as texts with which to read into the meaning of Blackness, its accompanying implications of oppression(s), and its futuristic possibilities (Wilson 1992; Woods 1998; Gilmore 2002, 2007;

McKittrick 2006; McKittrick and Woods 2007; McCutcheon 2013; Shabazz 2014, 2015)" (84).

This alternative way of knowing and being offered by Black geographies lays the foundation for communities solidifying multiple ways of knowing while rereading the multilayered identities, histories, and futures—which we see in Eaves' "Queer Black South" Her reimagining of the "'Queer Black South" creates spaces to engage with institutions and the communities tethered histories. For example, as an institution, the Southern Black Church has shaped, and continues to shape both Southern culture and Black culture.

Southern Black Girls, The Black Church, and Respectability Politics

One of the critical and complicated relationships within Southern culture is the relationship between the Black church and Black girls. Often referenced and recreated in popular culture, the Black Church has a staple part of Black culture for both the religious and the nonreligious. The Black church and Black women have a codependent relationship built upon racial uplift, missionary work, and familial and communal engagement. Black women's commitment to the building of the Black race and the church has long extended past the recognition they have received. From coordinating food drive, to cooking Sunday dinners, to visiting the Sick and Shut In, to teaching Sunday School and evangelizing in the community and teaching the Bible (although they were not allowed in pulpits in certain denominations), Black women had their hands in every part of the Church ministry and leadership. With everything that Black women have continued to put into the Black

Church and the Black community, that energy has not always been reciprocated, especially by those in power. Social and Church cultural codes dictated what women could wear, when they could speak and what positions they were allowed to hold. The tension between racial uplift and gender uplift forced Black women into an insurmountable position of having to choose between their gender and their race. Furthermore, they were asked to patiently support the cause of racial equality and uplift, in the hopes that gender equality and sexism would be addressed afterward.

In *Righteous Discontent*, Higginbotham follows Northern and Southern club/community women, alongside members of the National Baptist Convention as they work to create educational/ employment opportunities for Black folks, create organizations and auxiliaries that centered women's voices and focused on Blac women's issues, as well as tackle sexism within the Black Church. Higginbotham states "in doing so [creating the Women's Convention, Auxiliary to the National Baptist Convention], a national constituency of Black women asserted agency in the construction and representation of themselves as new subjectivities—as Americans as well as blacks and women. They contested racist discourses and rejected white America's depiction of Black women as immoral, childlike, and unworthy of respect or protection. (Higginbotham, 186). One of the foremost goals of these Black women was change/reject the narratives of dehumanization that had been caste on them from slavery. Their resistance to the denial of humanity and citizenship was to claim it for themselves. "For Black women, purity is not necessarily a quest for or

signification of perfection but rather the right to live and be thought of as something other than immoral, reckless, or villainous. It is the desire to be perceived as good principled, and worthy of bodily autonomy and safety. It is a state of empowered decision making" (Lomax, 123). Higginbotham coined "the politics of respectability as one said strategy that was used to claim space for Black women. She states: "the politics of respectability emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations. (Higginbotham, 187) The politics of respectability functions on both an individual and national level that centers Intraracial modifications that were expected to shift interracial relationships. The boundaries and expectations for the politics of respectability bring up important questions of responsibility, care, and performance. Specifically, it challenges us to think through the politics of respectability as an act of care for the community and resistance of the denial of humanness that also places the onus on the Black community to renew their identity and institutes a level of surveillance within the Black community where we comment and control each other's behaviors.

One of the major critiques/byproducts of respectability is the class complexities that arose during and after the implementation of respectability. It is important to note that working-class Black women were not passive bystanders but actively participated in communal and racial uplift. However, the development of respectability over time has transitioned the conversation around the "proper" behaviors for the community to one of

surveillance, critique, and othering of the working-class community. Higginbotham explained the relationship between politics of respectability and the working class as such:

> "On the one hand the politics of respectability rallied poor working-class blacks to the cause of racial self-help, by inspiring them to save, sacrifice, and pool their scant resources for the support of Black- owned institutions. …..On the other hand, the effort to forge a community that would command whites' respect revealed class tensions among blacks themselves. The zealous efforts of Black women's religious organizations to transforms certain behavioral patterns of their people disavowed and opposed the culture of the "folk" – the expressive culture of many poor, uneducated, and "unassimilated' Black men and women dispersed throughout the rural South or newly huddled in urban centers.[3] (Higginbotham, 15)

The emphasis placed on the "folk" members of the working-class, members of the rural South, and those transitioned to other spaces, reinforced the cultural, geographic ideas of the working glass as backwards or needing saving. Furthermore, the lineage of respectability for working-class Black women resulted in the centering of their bodies, the hyper surveillance of their sexuality, and silencing of their experiences. Tamara Lomax states that "it [The Black Church] can be a battleground for simultaneous erasure and stereotypic seeing, or more explicitly, marginalization, and sex discrimination on some days, and sexualization, clandestine catcalling, unblinking, name calling, sexual harassment, and sexual violence- emotional, physical, epistemological, and otherwise-on others" (Lomax, ix). The Black

Church's execution of respectability for Black women resulted in the similar patterns of violence, silencing, and dehumanization that they had faced during slavery. The emphasis placed on purity and holiness reinforced cultures of separation and shame for women and girls who could not fit into these performative behavioral roles. Furthermore, it denied space and voice to Black women who rejected respectability altogether.

The Black Church's emphasis on Black girls and women's bodies and sexuality has bred a generations-long cultural dichotomy between the Black woman and the ho. Lomax references this as the "ho/lady discourse and theology". According to Urban Dictionary, "ho" is defined as "A woman who uses her body, or gives the impression that her mark can be intimate with her, for material gain or to boost her own ego.; It simply means a girl that sleeps with a lot or too many men, and is commonly used to insult people that don't sleep with many people at all."[3] Ho discourse centers women's sexuality and performativity, manipulation, and maleness without providing space for agency, sensuality, and women's pleasure. The Black Church's response to Black girls and women's sexuality is to champion purity, abstinence, and form of asexuality that renders Black girls and women's desires silenced and restricted to private spaces. As previously referenced, purity was originally linked to true womanhood, which was rooted in whiteness, sexism, and the distinguishment of white women from others. Therefore, purity was easily embraced as a standard for Black women because it offered them a designation of humanness that had been denied to them.

[3] https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ho&page=3 (8, 9,15)

Where purity and the politics of respectability transgress is their transition to a standard or expectation of all Black women as if all Black women need or want the status of purity and womanhood.

The "ho/lady" dichotomy referenced within the bounds of respectability and the Black Church became the measuring stick for Black womanhood. Behavior, bodily geography, as well as physical geographies serve as some of the factors that determine one's ability to transcend into respectable Black society or othered communities. These standards of purity and respectability introduce additional pressures to succumb and subscribe to abstinence without adequate education about all of the variances and nuances in Black girls' sexuality. Furthermore, it denies possibilities for Black girls to exist outside of these standards and produces shame for those that are not able to fit. Lomax writes:

> Whore/ho/promiscuous language/discourse/epistemologies/ideology requires further theorizing and detangling. Namely because it turns the pornographic gaze and its preoccupations away from the one "looking" and imagines Black women and girls, not the gazer, as sites of danger, evil, perversion, and mockery, thus framing their sexual experiences and choices as pathological and men's (hetero)sexual experiences and choices as evidence of true masculinity. Black women's and girls' sexual identities, possibilities, and experiences are made a problem (whether by force or consent) …. Black female sexuality is shamed into whoredom/ho-dom/promiscuity abyss (Lomax, 51).

Our current discourse around Black girls and women's sexualities rehearses the same sexist, dehumanized, hypersexualized engagements with Black women's bodies that occurred during slavery. Lomax calls us to sit with the ways that we have internalized tropes about Black women's bodies and causes us to reject our ow sexualities and those Black women who do not reject their own sexualities. Moreover, we are challenged to rethink the relationship between Black women's bodies and sexualities as well as expand out definitions of sexuality beyond the realm of sex.

Black Quare Girlhood: A Framework

Patricia Hill Collins argues that "Black women have a self-defined standpoint that is situated within a "both/and" conceptual orientation. Standpoint theory as a conceptualization of "both /and" as a representative space that holds the multitude of identities and experiences that Black women stand in simultaneously as members of the Black race and members of a gender groups; this orientation of standing with and yet apart from both groups forms the core of Black women's consciousness (Collins, 221-238). The consciousness of Black girls/women upholding multiple spaces is informed by their memories, community/culture, knowledge production, and experiences. It is this dual temporal consciousness that informs how Black girls move through and create their world, forming an awareness for resistance and resilience in Black girl being. Through reflecting upon Southern Geographies and geographies of Black girl bodies, we are able to map the ways that Black girls construct narratives around the narratives of their identities, their

bodies, and their sexuality. One of the goals of this project is to help us understand the ways that Southern identity and cultural conversations around the creation of spaces where girls are supposed to be free to be themselves in all of their complexities. By interrogating this notion of Black girl narratives, embodied knowledge, and consciousness, we are able to begin to see the ways that Black girls use their consciousness around their identities and histories in order to resist and claim a space for themselves.

This project builds upon Robin Boylorn and Dominique Hill's conceptualization of "Blackgirl: one word" to address the question of age, knowing, and the overall qualifications to be considered a Black girl. (Boylorn x, Hill 276) "Blackgirl: one word" speaks to the duality of Black women's experience as both girls and women and attempts to carve out space for Black women to embrace their girl and woman parts. This project adopts this notion of duality/multiplicity to expand the categorization of girlhood and womanhood beyond certain limitations of age and traditional standards of being. I also draw from Loren Cahill's framework of Blackgirl Geography as a way to think through the relationship between geography, Blackgirl being, and possibilities. Cahill defines "Blackgirl geography" as "conceptual, material, and affective dimensions of spaces created by Blackgirls. They are each anchored in radical love, imagination, intention, and ritual. They honor and affirm Blackgirls' humanity in a world that diminishes our worth and worthiness and ignores our radical praxis." For her, it is a "radical orientation that has powerful implications for guiding our knowledge production and practice" that "unsettles the colonial project of mapping and

moves us away from flat definitions of boundary setting that function only to preserve empire" (58-59).

Blackgirl geography serves as a conservator of spatial knowledge production and creativity throughout Blackgirl past, present, and future. It also calls us to trace the ways that Blackgirls are reading, writing, and defining themselves in the community and the culture. I apply Blackgirl geography to Southern geography as a way to think through the ways that both Blackgirls create their own "Souths" within the South. Moreover, I see Blackgirl Geography, alongside Black Queer Geographies, Quare Theory, and Black Girl cartographies, as interlocking frameworks that map, bridge, and build the ways that Blackgirls are documenting themselves into and throughout the landscapes around them while rejecting the historically oppressive landscapes of the South.

Black Geographer Latoya Eaves theorizes the South through the lens of Queer Black geographies. For her, "Queer Black Geographies/Queer Black South" are "sites of knowledge production that center embodies practices alongside material realities in order to deconstruct traditional power structure on institutions and knowledge that dictate queer sexual identities, spatial productions, and sociospatial interactions" (Eaves, 87). These landscapes, first, establish the histories of (counter)narratives and (counter)knowledge that have always coexisted contrary to the dominant narrative of the South. Secondly, Queer Black geographies and landscapes call for space to unpack the complexities of queer identity and being as intersectional. Eaves and McKittrick urge us to explore the ways that Black

South Geographies disrupt traditional spatial patterns of imagined bodies within specific racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed constructs and intentionally interpret limitations and possibilities in place. (McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* 2; Eaves 90) Central to understanding the foundation of the New South/Queer Black South is configuration of overlapping identities and the ways that these multifaceted identities narrative the spaces and the experiences. The Combahee River Collective trailblazed centering politics around multiple oppression:

> "…. we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppressions are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face" (272).

To imagine and with the possibilities of Black Queer Souths and Blackgirl Geographies, it is imperative to maintain space for all of the ways of being and existing outside of heteronormative standards. Black Feminism and Womanism center race, gender, class, and sexuality as essential politics of Black women. As Cohen presented her case for the intersection of queerness and race, gender, and class, she reiterated the importance of holding space for interlocking oppressions within queerness while also engaging the nuances of heterosexual/heteronormative identities that still fall within queer identities. She

argues that the complete rejection of heteronormativity without consideration of the relationships that intersect within queerness and heteronormativity is consistent with the othering that has traditionally occurred with marginalized groups (Cohen, 447-450). Cohen suggests that queer theorizing which calls for elimination of fixed categories seems to ignore the ways in which some traditional social identities and communal ties, in fact, be important to one's survival. The "communal ties" refers are those that "exist in communities of color across boundaries of sexuality" (Johnson, 129). Instead, Cohen suggests that transformative theorizing begins with the understanding of the relationship between identity and community and the ability to hold space for one's identity that sits within both, even if these two spaces are in direct conflict.

Black Queer Souths and Black Queer Geographies speak to particular experiences that are informed by Southern histories and culture. "Quare(ness)" as a theoretical and embodied practice captures the essence of Southernness within queerness and centers lived experiences of marginalized/oppressed communities. Johnson was first influenced to theorize "quare" from his grandmother's usage of the word. Johnson states that "she deploys 'quare' to connote something excessive-something that might philosophically translate into an excess of discursive and epistemological meanings grounded in African American cultural rituals and lived experience. (Johnson, 126). Quareness centers Blackness and Southernness together, representing a way of life such as "doing too much" or "doing the most" with Black culture. Johnson defines "quare" as:

*n.*1. Meaning *queer;* also, opp. of straight; odd or slightly off kilter; from the African American vernacular for queer; sometimes homophobic in usage, but always denotes excess incapable of being contained within conventional categories of *being curiously equivalent to the Anglo-Irish.*

adv. A lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered person of color who loves other men or women, sexually and/or nonsexually, and appreciates Black culture and community.

n.3. one who *thinks* and *feels* and *acts* (and, sometimes, "acts up"); committed to struggle against all forms of oppression-racial, sexual, class, religious, etc.

n.4. One for whom sexual and gender identities always already intersect with racial subjectivity.

5. Quare is to queer as "reading" is to "throwing shade." (125)

Johnson's theorization of quareness puts into methodological terms what Cohen has described as the necessary bridge between queerness, community, and lived experience. Furthermore, quare possesses the ability to center the needs, space, and politics of LGBTQ+ people of color while not forcing them to deny other parts of their identities as well as holding space for those "committed to struggle against all forms of oppression-racial, sexual, class, religious, etc." (Johnson, 127). "Quare" not only speaks *across* identities, but it also *articulates* identities. "Quare" offers a way to critique stable notions of identity and, at the same time, to locate racialized and class knowledges (Johnson, 127). What is most striking

about quareness is the way that Johnson argues for and applies it within the relationship with grandmother. Johnson's grandmother, a Southern religious Black woman, is described as openly homophobic in the text, even though her grandson is gay. In order for quareness to be effective, it must still hold space for the interlocking identities and experiences of his grandmother, in the midst of her bigotry for others. Quareness is messy and makes space for the Southern, religious, political, messiness that comes with interlocking identities.

> "Quare studies can narrow that gap to the extent that it pursues an epistemology rooted in the body. As a "theory in the flesh", quare necessarily engenders a kind of identity politics, one that acknowledges differences within and between particular groups. Thus, identity politics does not necessarily mean the reduction of multiple identities into a monolithic identity or narrow cultural nationalism. Rather, quare studies moves beyond simply theorizing subjectivity and agency as discursively mediated to theorizing how that mediation may propel material bodies into action" (Johnson, 135).

Finally, quareness engages with the body/flesh as theory. This epistemology coincides with the argument for Black girl bodies as geographic landscapes through which we can map our narrative experiences. As Johnson states, rooted theory with the flesh removes the centering of a monolithic narrative the body but challenges the expansive differences that exist within these bodies and the need for space and staging of these differences.

For this project, I take up Black Quare Girlhood as a framework to examine Southern Black geographies as physical, cultural, and bodily geographies that Blackgirls use to create narratives and identities in conjunction/contrast to the monolithic narratives have been mapped onto them through collective and cultural memory and history. Black Quare Girlhood centers Blackness, Southernness, and Girlhood. Black girlhood is a particular way of being and knowing that encompasses joy, silence, trauma, adultification, creativity, rejection, resilience, erasure, and knowledge production. All of these experiences are individual yet communal. Adding in the physical and cultural geography of the South provides a starting point in mapping of Black girlhood that allows us to understand the ways that Blackgirls have always created spacing and identity for themselves in the midst of what was taught to them throughout history. Using the literature of Black girls in conversation with the fields of African American Literature, Black Girlhood Studies, Quare/Queer Studies, Black Geographies, and Popular Culture together, I highlight the vitality of Black girls showing up to witness for themselves and each other. This project builds upon the foundational work of Black Feminist Studies and Black Feminist scholars and Black Girlhood scholars who have and continue to do the necessary work of bringing Black women into conversations of being, knowledge production, liberation, healing, and wholeness.

Chapter one, "Centering Southern Geography and Black Quare Girlhood in the English Literature", explores texts that center Blackgirl in the historiography of Southern

Black girlhood. Through the lens of Zora Neale Huston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Pearl Cleage's "In the Time Before the Men Came" and Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers Gardens", I think about Southernness and the ways Black girls cultivate their understanding of girlhood, womanhood, their bodies, and their sexualities. In addition to documenting how creativity and liberty cultivate Blackgirl life, the selected texts also model how Black girls and women have used their bodies, their narratives, and their knowledge/desires/creativity to navigate their worlds. I use Black Quare Girlhood to read the texts for the Black bodies and identities as they define themselves, describe themselves and cultivate their knowledge. In order to reinforce the brilliance of Black girls' innovation and identity, these close readings center the formulation of Blackgirl knowing and push back against the notion of ignorance (Southern and Blackgirl).

Chapter Two, "'The South Got Sumthin to Say': Southern BlackGirl Geographies", continues the conversation of Black Quare Girlhood as a framework to examine Southern geographies and landscapes by centering Black girl bodies, sexuality, and knowing. The chapter begins with an examination of Black girlhood through the lens of humanness, body, and flesh. I began with mapping the geography of Black girlhood, historical and cultural, as denial of humanity. Black girls and women's identities first evolved as a claim to humanity, then a claim of ownership over their body/flesh, and finally a claim to womanhood/girlhood. This chapter examines the relationship of politics of respectability and Black girlhood in order to gain an understanding of the acceptance and rejection of

respectability, both as means of survival. Furthermore, this chapter interrogates what does it mean to be human/body/flesh and who/when do Blackgirls get to be human/body/flesh/sex through an analysis of Toni Morrison's *Sula*, and Tiffany D. Jackson's *Monday's Not Coming*.

Using Black Quare Girlhood to explore contemporary Southern geographies, chapter 3, "#BlackGirl Savage, the Black Ratchet Imagination and Black Quare Girlhood" works through the lens of the Black Ratchet Imagination. Black Girlhood as a methodology and as a practice also requires adequate spacing for Black girls' sense of pleasure surrounding the ownership of their bodies and their sexuality. The "politics of respectability" and the "culture of dissemblance", originally created as a means of protection and resistance for Black girls and women, have been weaponized against Black Girls and Black women who openly embrace their bodies and sexuality. These attempts to control the bodies and narratives of Blacks and Black girlhood has forged a distance between Black girls and Black women due to a projected of deviancy and hypersexuality that has been projected on Black girls. Therefore, I theorize ratchetness, the Black Ratchet Imagination, and Black Quare Girlhood as methodologies that support Southern geographies and as methods Black girls write their worlds. This chapter centers popular culture (hip-hop artists and television shows) as examples of how Black girls reclaim ownership of their bodies and stories. I analyze *P Valley* and Megan Thee Stallion's artistry using Black Quare Girlhood framework alongside Black Ratchet Imagination to track Black girls currently using ratchetness to

rewrite their narratives, geographies, and beings. Therefore, I argue that Southern ratchetness is an intervention for Black girls and women to map themselves outside the discourses of restriction, surveillance, and silence.

Southern Black Ratchet Imaginations: Methods

Ratchet Politics, as theorized by Nadia E. Brown and Lisa Young, was originally defined as "ghetto, real, gutter, nasty" and "it's whatever, bout it" in a song by rapper Phunk Dog. Scholar Sesali Bowen decried the term as a derogatory snipe at poor Black women. Ratchetness has come under fire by some scholars as upholding the negative stereotypes of Black communities and Black. It has been targeted as unacceptable behaviors that have been projected onto the working-class community, much like the early tenants of the politics of respectability. The Black Ratchet Imagination engages with the ways that hip hop executes a "queer performance of failure that produces empowerment" (Stallings 136). It is the complete rejection of the responsibilities and pressures of respectability that creates for new possibilities of joy. It is vital to note that ratchetness is intrinsically Southern in origin and existence. L.H. Stallings' queer reading of hip hop and its relationship to Black women's bodies and sexuality merges with Joan Morgan's theorization of the "politics of pleasure" which foregrounds Black women's sexual as legitimate. Morgan and Stallings expound upon Audre Lorde's use of the "erotic" to promote a disruptive reading of Black women's relationship to the self, the body, and to others.

Literacy scholar S.R. Toliver expanded the conversation of Black Ratchet Imagination (BRI) to encompass literature through the merging of BRI and Afrofuturist in order to reread #BlackGirlMagic and Black girl possibilities. The crux of Toliver's challenges the "binary of respectability and ratchetness" and calls for the "use of speculation and imagination to refuse damaging stories that erase the complexity of Black girlhood, to examines spaces of dissonance and tension that situate individuality as negativity, and to envision new ways of conceptualizing Black girlhood now and in the future." (21) calls to the space in between that allows Black girls and Black women to embrace both or neither. It deconstructs the categorical necessity for identity and reimagines a future where Black girls can just be. This project concludes by placing ratchetness in conversation with literature, geography, and Black girl bodies in order to expand and reimagine the ways that Black girls and ratchetness claim Southern spaces.

Nikki Lane defines "ratchet etymology" as theorized from E. Patrick Johnson [2001] and Alice Walker [1983] as the following: [4]

> "Ratchet (ra-CHit), adj. 1. meaning wretched, raunchy, and/or raggedy; also, opp. of highbrow; having low taste, or tacky; from the African American Southern vernacular for wretched; sometimes negative in connotation; denotes a purposeful or

[4] Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*. Harvest Book, 1967;1983. p. x; Johnson, E. Patrick. ""Quare" Studies, or (Almost) Everything I know about Queer Studies I learned from my Grandmother." *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*, Duke University Press, 2005, pp. 125

careless excess of funk, attitude, filth, and/or grime. Antonyms, classy, professional, and boojie.

—adj. 2. socially unacceptable, and/or outside of norms within Black sexual and cultural politics and community; often used to describe a person who acts out and "acts up" intentionally, or not, with excess.

—adv. 3. lack of pretense, or care for socially acceptable standards; often used to describe an action performed with total disregard for propriety.

4. *ratchet* is to wretched as *quare* is to queer. (Lane, 35)

Similar to "quare", ratchetness, as a framework and methodology, centers Southernness, Blackness and Queerness, as a part of behaviors of resistance, creativity, knowledge, and joy. Particularly for Black girls, ratchetness embodies an essence of sexuality that is rooted in notions of promiscuity and liberation. Ratchetness also functions as a geographic and cultural space that centers the possibilities of resistance for the Black community that allows them to reject and exist outside of cultural norms of respectability. The bridge between ratchet and wretched reflects the casting as the working class and/or those taking up ratchetness as classless, lacking respectability, control, and education. Thus, boojie/boujie is

[5]positioned as the antithesis of ratchet. The term "boojie/boujie" has longed existed as a connotation of the "bourgeois" as a part of class distinction within the societal structure. However, "boojie/boujie" not only speaks to class identifications, within the Black community, but also to specific behavioral markers of Black girlhood/womanhood. Boojie/Boujie is defined as "an elitist, uppity-acting African American. Generally, with a higher education and income level than the average Black, who identifies with European American culture and distances him/herself from other African Americans. Derives from 'bourgeois/bourgeoisie.' 2) Describes a person, event, style, or thing that is characteristic of elitist, uppity acting Blacks. 'It was one of them ol boojee thangs." (Smitherman, 66). Smitherman's definition of boujie/ boojie serves as a multigenerational link to respectability politics that continues the narrative of prioritized behaviors as a form of survival and acceptance. Yet, like respectability politics, it carries with it forms of self-surveillance and policing within the Black community by other members of the community.

The conversation surrounding ratchet/boojie being/identity, its application within academic and cultural contexts and spaces, and its relationship to Blackgirls/Black girlhood introduces the factor of intercommunal engagement and external engagement. Ratchetness, particularly, uncovers questions of performance versus being. Placing ratchetness with the context/conversation of popular culture forces us to think through questions of access,

[5] The term "boojie/boujie" has several spelling connotations that reflect both the creativity and innovation of the Black community. Here I include the spelling references by scholar Nikki Lane, as well as the spelling used by rappers Megan the Stallion and Migos to describe "classy, Black women".

ability, and appropriation. Who is allowed to ratchet? When is ratchetness acceptable? How do we contextualize Blackness, girlhood, ratchetness, boojie/bouginess are both identities/beings and performances, where individuals are allowed to try on and take off identities at will? Lane describes the messiness of boojie/ratchet politics as the following:

> ...ratchet/ boojie politics (or ratchet/boojie cultural politics) to refer to the discursive battles that occur around definitions of ratchet and boojie within contexts where we're increasingly expected to reproduce the values of capitalist accumulation through our speech, comportment, and beliefs. Thus, defining the boundaries of ratchet and boojie, is rooted in defining the boundaries of what are moral and acceptable performances of Blackness in a neoliberal racist, sexist, and homophobic society where our value is often based on our consumption of the right products (Lane, 40-41).

For Blackgirls, ratchetness serves as equally liberatory and oppressive spaces where Blackgirls resist and cultivate their own identities while balancing judgments and negative stereotypes from within and outside the community. Furthermore, processing ratchetness as a commodity that can be sold and taken up in the midst of being controlled and rejected. Within the Black community, ratchetness is a behavior/identity/performance that is observed and participated in from a distance. However, ratchetness simultaneously exists as a queer space where various forms of Blackness are able to coexist freely in the fullness of

themselves. It is also existing as a queer space that centers sexuality, sensuality, intimacy, and freedom. Black Quare Girlhood is about Black girls finding their home in quareness and the Black ratchet imagination as a way to find new homes within themselves. The Black Radical/Ratchet Imagination disrupts the class/social/cultural divisions between the ratchet/boojie (boujie) and respectability/ ratchet. Instead, Black Radical/ Ratchet Imagination rejects the categorization of Blackgirl's being, identity, and sexuality and argues for fluidity and the ability to be whatever they want to be.

CHAPTER ONE: CENTERING SOUTHERN GEOGRAPHY AND BLACK QUARE GIRLHOOD IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

> "Now that Afro-American artistic presence has been "discovered" actually to exist, now that serious scholarship has moved from silencing the witnesses and erasing their meaningful place in and contribution to American culture, it is no longer acceptable merely to imagine us and imagine for us. We have always been imagining ourselves…. We are the subjects of our own narratives, witnesses to and participate in our own experience, and, in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we have come in contact. We are not, in fact, "Other". We are choices. And to read imaginative literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the "raceless" one with which we are, all of us, most familiar."
>
> Toni Morrison[6]

In Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American in American Literature", Morrison "makes an argument for the reimagining and restructuring of the English literary canon through the decolonization of space within the canon and decentering whiteness in the literature. Despite the lack of recognition and legitimization, Afro-American literature and culture has had a significant impact on the way that literature is read and analyzed in academic and nonacademic spaces." Morrison centers her argument for Afro-American literature in her claim to humanness and imagination. She states that "we have always been

[6] Morrison, Toni. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature," *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations,* Michigan Quarterly Review 28 (1989): 1-34/ Alfred A. Knopf, 2020, 161-197.

imagining ourselves" as an academic and societal clapback to the arguments that "there is not Afro-American art", "Afro-American art exists, but is inferior", and "is only superior when it measures up to the standards of Western art. (170). For far too long, scholars have been allowed to discount African American literature as not scholarly or critical due to the inclusion of lived experiences within the texts. Thus, Morrison stakes the creativity and resilience of Afro-American culture, demands acknowledgement for the humanity of non-white forms of literature while rejecting the status of "Other" as a substandard status. Critiques of the English canon is representative of the witness, violence, and silencing present within the larger academic field and institution. Morrison chooses colonial language to describe the canon as the following:

> "Canon building is empire building. Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature, and range (of criticism, of history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principles, the sociology of art, the humanistic imagination), is the clash of cultures. And all of the interests are vested" (Morrison, 169).

What is critical about Morrison's contextualization of the literary canon as "empire" is that she centers the "clash of cultures" which is central to colonization because it focuses on occupying and centering one culture, set of ideas, and ways of thinking over another. Morrison reinforces that other non-white literatures and cultures have always existed, without the acknowledgement and inclusion in the literary canon. There is a critical

conundrum in the conversation of validation and legitimization of these literatures. Afro-American literature is not necessarily for permission to be recognized, rather it is establishing its lineage and demanding its earned space in literature. Furthermore, Morrison and Black feminist Barbara Christian argues that:

> "People of color have always theorized—but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking…My folk, in other words, have always been a race for theory—though more in the form of the hieroglyph, a written figure which is both sensual and abstract, both beautiful and communicative" (Christian, 41).

One of the critiques and justifications for the absence of Afro-American literature for the canon and academic spaces has been the language and context used in the writing. However, Afro-American literature is not just about telling stories, it is about recording histories, excavating cultures, and writing the self into existence. These "hieroglyphics" that Christian details are the evidence of survival, innovation, resistance. Afro-American literature is impactful due to its ability to capture knowledge production, intellectualism, and culture context with community centering.

Thinking specifically about Black women writers and Blackgirls' role in African American literature and the canon is considering the ways that their intersectionality further marginalizes them and questions their viability. Black women writers and Blackgirls and women's literature are central to Afro-American literature because Black women encompass narrations and politics of liberation that center not just Black girls and women but the Black community as a whole. Barbara Smith argues that "a Black feminist approach to literature that embodies the realization that the politics of sex as well as the politics of race and class are crucially interlocking factors in the works of Black women writers is an absolute necessity; Thematically, stylistically, aesthetically and conceptually Black women writers manifest common approaches to the act of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social and economic experience they have been obliged to share." (Smith 21, 22) Black Feminists writers, scholars, activists, etc. have consistently centered the politics of race, gender, class, sexuality, etc. within their literature. Moreover, Black women writers differ from other forms of literature because they immerse personal experience as embodied praxis alongside theoretical production that spanned from girlhood to adulthood from their inner selves to the community to the world.

Historian Nazera Wright has made interventions about Black girls' presence in literature since the 1800s. Starting in the early 1820, Black girls emerged in publication as the standard for morality in the Black family. These articles also detailed the fact that Black girls typically took on the role of junior mothers in the families in order to help them

survive. Black girlhood was described as the precursor to womanhood instead of its own separate entity that deserves space and analysis. More importantly, Black girlhood was influenced by the shadows of white women's standards of womanhood and Black women's aspirations for respectable womanhood. Wright highlights the difference between Black men and Black women writers' engagement with Black girls in the ways that Black men romanticized the roles and experiences of Black girls in order to project a particular narrative of the Black family. Black women writers humanized Black girls and gave a realistic perception into some of the harm that Black girls faced at such a young age. While Black male writers built symbols of hope on the backs of Black girl bodies, Black women writers attempted to garner attention to the realities of their suffering under oppression and violence. "Black women writers wrote about the struggles and strategies of Black girls who", according to Wright, "did not have the nurturing care of their biological parents and who needed to find their own way to survive hardships. These writings reveal that the middle-class family male editors had urged the Black community to aspire to a generation earlier was not the experience of many Black girls" (101). As the Black community struggled for emancipation and a familial structure post-emancipation, middle-class values and structure were established as the road to respectable standing in society. However, the violence of slavery and the separation of families made that structure impossible to obtain for Black folks. It also placed the onus of Black families and Black girls specifically, to maintain

education, morality and upright standing to improve the overall perception of the community.

The emergence of pamphlets and guidebooks that outlined decorum for Black children became popular in assisting in the restructuring of the Black family. *Floyd's Flowers, or Duty and Beauty for Colored Children*, is mentioned by Wright as one of the central texts that outline the roles of Black women and children in the family. Floyd asserts that education and behavior were the keys to advancement for Black girls. However, this advancement was tailored to the needs and best interest of the community, not the girls. "Instead of recommending that Black girls acquire an education to prepare them for uplift work or that they pursue their own career paths, conduct books instructed them to acquire an education they would use in the service of others, namely that would prepare them to care for others. Black girls were taught to defer to Black male leadership and return to the domestic sphere. They were to follow rules of "duty" and "beauty" to prepare them for their future roles as wives and mothers" (Wright, 105). The relegation of Black girl identity, education, and futures solely to the role of wife and mother denies agency to Black girls to decide their lives for themselves and reinforces a "respectable" family structure where the men were centered as the authoritarian and knowledge producer that represented the family in the community while women and girls were responsible for maintaining the private sphere. Black women writers such as Maria E. Stewart, Frances E.W. Harper, Fannie Barrier

Williams, and Anna Julia Cooper advocated for formal education for Black girls and for more attention to be paid Black girl's wants and needs instead of their outward behavior.

Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is one of the most influential texts in African American literature and Black Girlhood. Black feminist scholars have championed Jacob's harrowing tale of the lengths that she and Black girls have to go through to survived. Moreover, Jacobs's narrative served as a blueprint for Black women writing their own narratives in their own words. Jacobs' biography provided insight into the realities of the terror that enslaved Black girls experienced. Jacobs was admonished and rebuked for the strategic candor with which she describes her experiences thwarted the advances of Dr. Flint and the lengths that she took to gain agency over her body and to escape Dr. Flint's assaults. Wright theorizes two important age categories through which we can analyze Black girlhood. She states:

> "Through the stages of youthful girlhood and prematurely knowing girlhood—Jacobs exposes the sexual abuse Black girls suffer during the institution of slavery. Initially, the chapters pay close attention to Linda's youthful age of six, when Linda is unknowing yet acutely aware of her surroundings and the loss she feels as an orphan. Linda is fifteen when she endures threats of sexual abuse and rape. The prematurely knowing Linda Brent is unwilling to become a victim of sexual assault and must intervene to prevent her victimization" (103).

Jacobs separates her Black girl life into two stages, youthful girlhood and premature knowing. Unfortunately, Black girl innocence and the time that they are allowed to freely be themselves ended at age six for Jacobs. The next and final stage of Black girlhood is premature knowing, which is a stage of survival and a catapult into the beginning of adulthood. Wright states that "as raced, gendered, and youthful figures, Black girls occupy a space of in betweenness, like the Hortense Spillers labels "non-yet" subjects: they are not yet citizens and not women, In the nineteenth century, Black girls possessed little social authority and virtually no property, insignia, rank, or role. (10) The geographies of Black girl bodies begin with the state of possession of the flesh, occupation of space, and the suspension of temporality. These stages outlined by Jacobs and Wright are still relevant today, as Black girls are allotted a very limited time to be viewed as children and experience freedom and innocence. Instead of being able to fully exist as girl children and experience innocence, protection, and ease, Black girls face adultification from society and their own communities which forces them to grow up and mature in order to survive the oppression, violence, and objectification that they will face at an early age.

Black girl literature and literature written by Black women has been pivotal in capturing the personal narratives and experiences of Black girls and Black women who were once girls. This literature has given language to describe the intersections of Blackness and girlhood/womanhood while carving out space for understanding what it means to grow up a Black girl in America throughout history. Black girl literature has highlighted the role of

the environment and community in the sustainability of Black girl lives and stories. It has confirmed that Black girls have always been in the shadows of literature telling their stories, exposing their traumas, empowering their communities, and imagining their futures.

Black Quare Girlhood Literature

I apply the framing of Black Quare Girlhood to Black Girlhood literature as a way to think through the relationship between Southern geographies, Blackgirl identities, and the relationship with the body and the self. Black Quare Girlhood literature makes an intervention within African American Literature, Black Feminist Studies, Black Girlhood Studies, Quare Studies and Black Feminist geographies. This project builds upon Robin Boylorn and Dominique Hill's conceptualization of "Blackgirl: one word" to address the question of age, knowing, and the overall qualifications to be considered a Black girl." (Boylorn x, Hill 276) Blackgirl: one word" speaks to the duality of Black women's experience as both girls and women and attempts to carve out space for Black women to embrace their girl and woman parts. This project adopts this notion of duality/multiplicity to expand the categorization of girlhood and womanhood beyond certain limitations of age and traditional standards of being. Throughout the discussion of Black Quare Girlhood, I use the phrase "Blackgirls and women" to affirm Black girl youth, Black girl adults, and Black women who still consider themselves to be Black girls within the conversation of identity, community, and geography. Blackgirl also challenges the adultification and hypersexualization of Black girls because it disparages naming and spacing of Black girls as

fast, "actin grown," and other stereotypical accusations place on Black girls and Black girl innocence. Instead, it expands the space of existence for Black girls to include anyone who identifies as a Black girl and who supports the imagination and advancement of all Black girls.

I take up "quare" as coined by E. Patrick Johnson, to think about the influence of the South as a geography, culture, and politics on the ways that those part of marginalized communities see the world. I define the South through the geographic, political, and cultural lens of Black feminist scholars as well as my personal experiences as a Southern born and raised Alabamian. There is no standard agreement of which states are considered Southern states but for the purposes of this project, Southern states included: Maryland, Washington D.C., Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Louisiana, Texas, and Arkansas. The South carries certain stigmas as being overtly racist and prejudice against marginalized communities, backwards, country, uneducated, and religious. Those within the South and those who originate from the South understand that due to the troubled history of the South within the U. S. history, the Southern narrative is still divided into a white Southern experience and a Black (substitute other non-white, cisgender, heteronormative community) Southern experience. Thadious M. Davis uses the term "southscapes" to call attention to the South as a social, political, cultural, and economic construct but one with the geographic "fact of the land" (Davis, 2). It references landscape in broad geographical-social contexts and mediated symbolic structures.

As a concept, "southscape" has both subjective and objective elements, but primarily it acknowledges the connection between society and environment as a way of thinking about how raced human beings are impacted by the shape of the land (2). I want to pause here and acknowledge that I am not suggesting that the South, Blackness, or Black Girlhood are monolithic experiences that can be compressed and documented. Instead, I am attempting to offer up a lens through which we can analyze and discuss the ways that various communities engage their identities within the South(s). Thinking specifically about Black Southern identities, cultures, and traditions, I am interested in engaging Blackgirl identities and geographies through Black Quare Girlhood, specifically Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Garden's* and Pearl Cleage's *In the Time Before the Men Came: The Past As Prologue.*

E. Patrick Johnson defines "quare" as:

> "odd or slightly off kilter; from the African American vernacular for queer; sometimes homophobic in usage, but always denotes excess incapable of being contained within conventional categories of *being curiously equivalent to the Anglo-Irish.*
>
> -*adj.*2. A lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered person of color who loves other men or women, sexually and/or nonsexually, and appreciates Black culture and community.

-n.3. one who *thinks* and *feels* and *acts* (and, sometimes, "acts up"); committed to struggle against all forms of oppression-racial, sexual, class, religious, etc.

-n.4. One for whom sexual and gender identities always already intersect with racial subjectivity. (125)

A derivative of "queer" that centers a Southern Black way of seeing and knowing the world, Johnson credits the initial uses of "quare" to his grandmother, an older Black woman. Johnson's grandmother uses the term to describe things in access that cannot be explained or understood as well as her homophobic understanding of queer. Yet, in a world of cancel culture, it is her homophobia that Cathy Cohen and Johnson argue does not disqualify her from consideration and inclusion in "quareness" (125, 127). Both Johnson and Cohen state that Black women are quare and fit under quare analysis due to the oppressions they face in their various identities including their sexual identities. Janeka Bowman Lewis argues that Black girlhood is "inherently quare" (Bowman, 96). Black girls' "quareness" is built upon their ability to exist, create, and imagine in the face of immense amounts oppression and violence. Literature provides a space for Blackgirls to imagine themselves and their worlds free from expectations or stereotypes.

Black Quare Girlhood Literature explores Black girlhood through the relationship with the self (identities), with others (collective Blackgirls and Black community), and the relationship with geographies (geographies of location and geographies of the body.

Relationship with the self refers to how Black girls are defining themselves for themselves (physically, mentally, emotionally, sexually, and creatively) compared to the ways that society has tried to restrict and categorize them over the years. Blackgirl's relationship with the self-connects specifically of the adultification of Black girls, how their bodies are hypersexualized, and how respectability politics has morphed into a prescriptive/restrictive form of behavioral categorization and modification that bounds Blackgirls to dichotomies (good vs. bad, moral, and pure vs. fast and grown, respectable/bougie vs. ratchet/ghetto, etc.). (Girlhood Interrupted, 5-6). Black Quare Girlhood resists these categories and instead advocates for quare spaces where Blackgirls are able to be their full selves, write their narratives and imagine their own worlds. For Bowman Lewis, Quare

> "encompasses the whole being (or being whole) while the individual self (or who society imagines or demands that Black girls be) remains just a part. Quare narratives are narratives beyond the ordinary. They are narratives that can be found in stories told to children but that resist the boundaries of "simple" childhood. They are stories that move us from southern to northern spaces and even to outer space. They are stories that transcend history and move through generations" (97).

Black Quare Girlhood and literature it encompasses centers space: geographic Southern space, bodily space, and space of identity. As Bowman identifies, Black Girl Quare literary narratives are narratives of possibilities and include the creative potential of Blackgirls from the past, present, and future. The centering of the whole self in Black Quare Girlhood

makes space for Black girls to be intellectual knowledge producers and community-centered (loving Black women (people) both sexually and non-sexually). Kevin Quashie positioned the conversation of the self through the theorization of identity versus subjectivity.

Quashie describes *identity* as a "politic a venture or argument, that has a direct relationship to power and resources, social and otherwise, and that is relational and collective; that identity always invites and implicates a plural body (a group, a community, a nation) and is unfaithful to individuality. As such, the consideration of identity is often (always?) contested, always of interest to more than just a self" (2). Subjectivity, and its relationship to identity is described as "a dance that considers the subject's relationship to its own unending and yet finite constitution as a delicate balance, a play of willfulness and compromise, wildness and patience." (Quashie, 8) Black Quare girlhood requires both identity and subjectivity in order to narrate the whole self. The theory of (un)becoming that Quashie centers in the conversation of identity and subjectivity resists the shame and forced humility that is placed on Blackgirls. Instead, Blackgirls are encouraged to center themselves within/alongside other Blackgirls to forge community. The relationship between Blackgirls and the larger community is essential to the cultivation of Black girls' self-identity and their engagement with the larger world:

> "Through a discourse of otherness some Black women scholars represent selfhood as the dynamic relationship between one woman and her other, her girlfriend…A subject's desire and impulse toward an/other is political, aware of but not

> overdetermined by the legacies of race, gender, class; it is sisterhood as "political solidarity between women. "(Quashie, 16)

The sisterhoods, girlfriends, friendships, and relationhoods that Blackgirls cultivate in life and in literature influence how they define themselves. Black Quare Girlhood builds a codependence between Blackgirls and others that form accountable communities that allow Blackgirls to learn, unlearn, and advocate for each other together.

Black Quare Girlhood examines how Blackgirls continue the generational work of disruption and imagination of new frames of Blackgirl living. Lorraine Bethel offers an excellent description of the goal of Black Quare Girlhood literature and framing in her essay on "Zora Neale Hurston and the Black Female Literary Tradition":

> "Black woman identification, the basis of Black feminism and Black feminist literary criticism, is most simply the idea of Black women seeking their own identity and defining themselves through the bonding on various levels--psychic, intellectual, and emotional, as well as physical-- with other Black women. Choosing Black lesbianism, feminism, or woman-identification is the political process and struggle of choosing a hated identity: choosing to be a Black woman, not only in body but in spirit as well. It is the process of identifying one's self and the selves of other Black women as inherently valuable, and it is perceived by the dominant white/male culture as most threatening because it challenges that culture's foundations Black woman identification is Black women not accepting male-including Black male-

> definitions of femaleness or Black womanhood, just as Black identification consists of Black's rejecting white definitions of Blackness and creating autonomous standards for evaluating Black culture. "(17)

Bethel offers "Black women identification" as a framework for Black women to take ownership over their own lives and their interactions with others. Black Quare Girlhood builds upon Black women identification in order to disrupt the ways that Black women have centered whiteness in their practices of defining the self-such as the current framing of respectable and policing of bodies of Blackgirls. Instead, Black Quare Girlhood centers Blackgirls' geographies and theorizations around their lives and bodies.

A Quare Black Girl Literary Analysis in Three Texts- *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

Their Eyes Were Watching God, Zora Neale Hurston's first novel, was published in 1937. The novel has gained an extensive legacy as one of the foundational texts of Black feminist criticisms. Hurston blends traditional Black storytelling practices alongside autobiographical sketches from her own life in order to establish the story of Janie Crawford, a Black girl coming of age in the Jim Crow South. Hurston manipulates memory through her rewriting of Janie's tale from the end, converging her experiences of girlhood and womanhood together to cultivate a whole narrative. Janie is returning from her journey into womanhood with all of the joy and scars that come with becoming a woman. She returns to her community and home, Eatonville, which now feels familiar and foreign. We first encounter Janie through the eyes of the women of the community. As they observe

Janie returning to the town, they attempt to come to terms with understanding of Janie as the former mayor's wife and as a Black woman in the South. The women of the community possess a skewed definition of who Janie is due to their limited proximity to her during her time in the town and her return. They in turn, reject her return to the community because she did not offer them herself and her story upon arrival (2).

The communities and landscapes of the novel play an important role in establishing the individual and communal identity. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is an intrinsically Southern text. Based in three separate locations within Florida, home with Nanny, Eatonville, and the Everglades. In order to write a counternarrative of the South/home, Hurston threads pieces of her life history with the text as "Hurston's South" remained personal. It was about family and friends, acceptable and unacceptable characters, love and hate, values and norms, social rewards and social punishments, spiritual strength, and material practicality. Finally, it was about making sense of a world dominated by Jim Crow while trying to live a normal life." (Patterson, 44) Hurston's narration of the South threads her experience as a Black woman alongside the authenticity of Black life in the South.

Eatonville's history is significant due to its historic lineage as an all-Black town with Black businesses and a Black mayor. Janie's relationship with the South mirrors Hurston's personal geographical biography as a native of Notasulga, Alabama and Eatonville, Florida. It was important to Hurston to provide an alternative, interior view of Southern Black life that captured the resistance, resilience, and communal bonds that Black folks were able to

form in the midst of violence. Tiffany Patterson states, "Black southern life as recorded in Hurston's work was characterized by more than unrelenting work, violence, and imprisonment. While it was a place where bondage and racial domination persisted after the Civil War, the South, for her and her subjects, was also a place of cultural creativity, family, and religion, where everyday life was lived with integrity in the midst of struggle against racial oppression. It was, in short, a place called home (Patterson, 9). Hurston's identity as a writer from the South set apart from other writers of the time due to her allegiance to the South as "home." As Patterson asserts, Hurston's "Southern home "was a space of cultural creativity, family, and religion, where everyday life was lived with integrity in the midst of struggle against racial oppression." The South was/is more than a region of violence and oppression for marginalized communities and Black folks were/are more than victims of racist violence. Hurston's writing institutes a sense of Black Southern pride in the midst of racist turmoil.

Hurston builds the narrative geography of Janie's life and Black women's lives through her relationships with others. It is Janie's relationship to the landscape, her community, and her husbands that aided Janie in cultivating a definition and understanding of herself through her experiences. Hurston begins the novel by stating "Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act and do accordingly" (1). Janie summarizes Black womanhood as a conglomerate of experiences, memories, imaginations,

and realities. According to Janie, womanhood is the balancing act of maintaining the exterior self with your interior thoughts. The first relationship that we are exposed to is Janie's relationship with Nanny. All of Janie's relationships fit within a time/space landscape. Nanny is representative of traditional Black womanhood. Nanny was born into slavery. She was raped by her slave master right as the Civil War was kicking off. After Nanny becomes pregnant and gives birth to her daughter leafy, she is harassed by her mistress because of Leafy's light skin and grey eyes. Nanny runs away with her week-old daughter to protect them from the abuse of her mistress and her slave master. Nanny is hired by the Washington's and is able to build a house for herself and her daughter. Nanny had aspirations to protect her daughter from the perils of sexual violence and raise her up to be a respectable Black girl and schoolteacher. Nanny's is also most successful until Leafy was raped by her schoolteacher at seventeen. The repetition of rape and pregnancy between Nanny and Leafy proved too much for both. Leafy begins to drink and runs off from Nanny and her daughter, Janie. Nanny devotes the rest of her life to saving Janie from the cycle of violence that had plagued their family. We see that Janie was raised as white child alongside the white Washington children. Janie does not discover that she is Black until she is six years old (8). Janie's discovery that she is Black is a significant moment in her identity because her identity as Black woman plays a role in how she moved through the world and the novel. Nanny starred as the primary example of Black womanhood. Due to her experiences,

Nanny's definition of Black womanhood is skewed by her memories and her history, therefore, she can only conceptualize:

> "Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been ale tuh find out. Maybe it's some place way off in de ocean where de Black men is in power, but we don't know nothing 'but what we see. So, de white man throw down de load and tell the nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see. (14)

"De nigger woman is de mule uh de worls do fir as Ah can see" is one of the oft-repeated phrases, emphasizing the neglect and abuse of Black women (14). However, Nanny's narrative of Black womanhood only relays part of the story. Janie's first interactions included the innocence of expectation. While Janie was a child of rape and had no relationships with her mother, her world had been sheltered. She only had her dreams of what the world could be, not the realities of what it was. "She searched as much of the world as she could from the top of the steps and then went down to the front gate and learned to gaze up and down the road. Looking, waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting on the world to be made" (11). It is this dream and her awakening to the natural landscape of "love and marriage" that brings her first marriage. Patterson states:

> "Janie's dream then is to leave the fixed frame of the class photo, where the expectation is to blend in, for the inner spaces of a free Black girlhood, where she

> experiences the transcendence of her body into a desire for something else, something better. She both wants to blend in (and even be surrounded by a circle of friends) and stand out by having a unique experience that transcends ordinary girlhood. This opportunity comes through Janie's connection to nature, to outside southern spaces of Florida in springtime. Under her grandmother's near-watchful eye, Janie "saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace . . . Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid" (11). She wishes "to be a pear tree—any tree in bloom" and wonders, "Where were the singing bees for her?'" (11).

Up until this point, Janie had only known "free Black girlhood" which allowed her agency to explore the possibilities of building her own world. In doing so, Janie discovers sexuality through watching the bee fertilize the flower and the blooming of trees. This curiosity and freedom lead Janie to kiss Johnnie Taylor over the gatepost. What was viewed as innocent and exploratory to Janie, was a trigger and memory of the trauma of sexual violence in Black girlhood. Nanny's interpretation and reaction to Janie kiss was that "Janie was a 'oman now" and had "got her womanhood on her" (12). At sixteen, Nanny projected womanhood onto Janie because she expressed an inkling of sexual desire, for to show sexual desire opened the door for Janie to be assaulted or taken advantage of. Nanny's assertion that Janie's got her womanhood was as much an accusation against society's violence and hypersexualization of women's bodies as it was a reminder of the expectation for Black

women to police and control their own sexual desires. In this context, womanhood—linking also to Walker's "womanish"—is the equivalent of a Black girl being called "fast." The solution to the desire was to marry Janie off to Logan Killicks. Nanny's interpretation of womanhood was to have security and protection. Love and desire were not factored into the equation. Nanny believed that she needed to protect Janie from her innocent desire. The need for Janie's protection and security caused Nanny to forgo the fact that Logan Killicks was extremely old and had been asking about Janie for a while. She needed the peace of knowing that Janie was in a secure marriage arrangement with a man that would take care of her before she did. So, Janie married him.

Janie's three marriages represent three stages of time: past, present, and future. Her first marriage to Logan Killicks represents the past or the traditional framing of marriage for security. Janie struggles in the beginning because she hasn't fully grasped the concept of love and wonders when she will begin to feel love or affection toward Killicks. In Janie's romanticized version of marriage, Black women are allowed to experience love and desire in their relationships. However, Janie was ridiculed by Nanny for questioning her desires and expecting love in a marriage of security. After losing Nanny, Janie states that "her first dream was dead, so she became a woman. (25). Janie's version of becoming a woman meant succumbing to the role of wife in her marriage to Logan. While Logan started off pampering Janie in the beginning, he expected Janie to work beside him in the field and to submit her will to him. But Janie still has dreams of a world larger than the walls of her

marriage or Logan's land. Logan resented Janie because he claimed she was "spoiled" and refused to love and respect him.

Janie is seduced by Joe (Jody) Starks, a "cityfied stylish dressed smooth-talking man" who spat big dreams and plans at Janie (27). Jodie convinces Janie to run away and marry him, even though she is still married to Logan Killicks. Starks describes himself as more of a self-made man. Starks planned on using the money that he saved to move to the new all-Black town Eatonville. Both Janie and Jody entered their marriage with romanticized idea of what life should be. Joe Starks saw Janie as an object solely for his affection. He states that, "A pretty doll-baby lak you is made to sit on de front porch and rock and fan yo'self and eat p'taters dat other folks plant just special for you (29). Jody saw Janie as a trophy wife that he could parade around for others to marvelous. He believes that his wife's place was in the home and not socializing and giving speeches (43). Jody placed special emphasis on Janie setting herself apart from the other townspeople so that they would not perceive her as common. "Janie soon began to feel the impact of awe and envy against her sensibilities. The wife of the Mayor was not just another woman as she had supposed. She slept with authority and so she was part of it in the town mind. She couldn't get but so close to most of them in spirit (46). Because Janie was shut off from the townspeople, while working beside them in the store, Janie struggles with isolation and loneliness.

Jody and Janie's marriage was an outward performance of status and class. As Jody rose to fame and power as the Mayor of the town, he put more pressure on Janie to meet his

standards of perfection. Joe became increasingly abusive to Janie in their marriage. Patterson states, "For a time Janie finds the love of her dreams with Jody, but this blossoming love and attention turn to possessiveness, as she comes to fulfill her social role as the pretty mulatto wife of the mayor. We see their marriage slowly sour as Jody becomes drunk on an inflated sense of his own power and prestige, which Janie deflates in the time-honored manner of the women on Joe Clark's porch. (Patterson, 119-120) As Joe and Janie's marriage continues, both fight for control over Janie's will. Joe believed that because he provided Janie with big things and status, she should worship him like everyone else did. However, Janie realizes that love was not sustained in materialism. Despite all of the things that Starks provided, Janie still longed for partnership and companionship. The first time that Jody hit Janie, Janie shifted on her perspective of Jody and lost all respect for him:

> "She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her. Then she went inside there to see what it was. It was her image of Jody tumbled down and shattered…She found that she had a host of thoughts she had never expressed to him, and numerous emotions she had never let Jody know about. Things packed up and put away in parts of her heart where he could never find them. She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside now and suddenly she knew how to not mix them" (Hurston, 72).

Janie describes her methods of dissociation in order to survive her marriage. She shifted from loving her husband to tolerating him and their marriage. The final straw in their relationship

is when Joe took to publicly ridiculing Janie in the store for her age and her incompetence. Janie had enough and retaliated by insulting Joe's age and his manhood (Hurston, 79), which was the breaking of Joe and Janie even before Joe died. Janie hurts Janie's pride by insinuating that Janie was trying to poison him and eventually he dies.

In between Janie's marriage to Jody Starks and her marriage to Tea Cake, Janie has an important dialogue with herself. That represents her second transition in the novel. It is after Joe's death that Janie steps into another level of awareness of her womanhood. "Then she thought about herself. Years ago, she had told her girl self to wait for her in the looking glass. It had been a long time since she had remembered. Perhaps she'd better look. She went over to the dresser and looked hard at her skin and features. The young girl was, but a handsome woman had taken her place. (Hurston, 87) Janie had lost parts of herself in her marriage to Joe. She buried them away for safekeeping. This moment that Janie has with herself in the mirror is the first time that Janie acknowledges her womanhood for herself. She sees the fullness of her Black woman's body and accepts. At this moment, Janie also has another awakening about her relationship with love and marriage. She reflects her associations with love based on the lessons of her grandmother. Janie reflects:

> "She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizons in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them, and they would find her. But she had been whipped like a cur dog and run off down a back road after *things…*Here Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made—the horizon is still

> way beyond you—and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter's neck tight enough to choke her. She hated the old woman who had twisted her so in the name of love. Most humans didn't love one another no how and this mislove was so strong that even common blood couldn't overcome it all the time. She had found a jewel down inside herself and she had wanted to walk where people could see her and gleam it around (Hurston, 89-90).

Janie's horizons represented her sexual awakening and all of the possibilities of the life that she could build for herself. Janie had dreams of going out and experiencing the world for herself but instead she married to appease her grandmother. Janie resented her grandmother for forcing her to choose marriage instead of herself. After marriage, Janie had discovered that marriage did not provide the stability that Nanny had said that it would. The jewel that Janie had found herself was her voice and her decision making. Janie was learning to trust herself and use her voice after stifling it for so long in her marriage to Jody Starks.

Janie's relationship with Tea Cake directly concentrated on her first two marriages. Tea Cake was the first man that Janie was able to choose for herself. Tea Cake was significantly younger than Janie, he had no stable job or housing. The only thing that he brought to Janie was himself. But Tea Cake exposed Janie to a different way of life. He taught her checkers, took her fishing and to the baseball game. Tea Cake allowed Janie to see the world. Janie and Tea Cake were able to spend time together and build a foundation for their relationship. They both fell in love with each other quickly because they sought out

passion and desire in each other. Their relationship was most reminiscent of the desire and love that Janie had imagined in her youth. “He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom-a pear tree blossom in the Spring. Janie and Tea Cake relocated to Jacksonville and got married. Though Janie and Tea Cake’s marriage is loving, it is not perfect. Janie learns that Tea Cake is a gambler after her $200 goes missing. He returns the money and Janie moves forward, Both Janie and Tea Cake are both possessive of each other and fight each other on two separate occasions when one suspects the other is cheating. Janie was initially perceived as uppity by the people in the Everglades because she did not work but she is eventually accepted when she joins Tea Cake in the field. Their marriage hits a turning point when Tea Cake is bitten by a rabid dog, trying to save Janie in the hurricane. Janie loses Tea Cake to the rabies long before his death. Janie was devoted Tea Cake, but she ultimately had to shoot because he was trying to shoot him. Killing the man, she loved in self-defense induced a different type of suffering in Janie. Tea Cake was the only man that she truly loved. One Janie is cleared of Tea Cake’s death, she finds it impossible to stay in the Everglades without him. And so, she begins the journey home.

The novel begins and ends with Janie’s relationship with her best friend, Pheoby. Hurston describes the closeness of their relationship as “kissin’-friends for over twenty years.” (7). It is Pheoby that holds the other community women at bay as Janie returns. She welcomes Janie back by bringing her a plate. Janie chooses Pheoby to tell her story. At the

end of Janie's search for love, passion, life's meaning and the horizons, it is her relationship with Pheoby and her memories of Tea Cake that sustain her. Lewis states:

> It is also in southern terminology such as "kissin-friends" ("Pheoby, we been kissin'-friends for twenty years, so Ah depend on you for a good thought" [6]) that representations beyond Black kinship are explored. "Kissin" allows other possibilities than blood relation but include the proximity that kinship allows. It also allows additional ways of knowing: as Janie puts is, "If they wants to see and know, why don't they come kiss and be kissed" (6). Although Hurston illustrates Janie's childhood as one of coming into her own identity, this identity is not shaped in common with other children's identities. ….After her second marriage, to Joe Starks, her relationship with Pheoby (who remains Janie's "kissin'-friend for twenty years") allows her to expand her representation beyond partnership with (or possession by) a male figure. For her southern communities, this expansion into a girlhood circle (or even relationship with a singular figure who is not a spouse) seems both excessive and irregular for one who should aspire to be a good wife. (Lewis, 103)

At the end of the novel, Janie returns to herself and her best friend Pheoby. After all of the years of searching for an understanding of the self within her three marriages, Janie understands that life and love that have to be experienced, not taught. Janie's final words on love are: "..love ain't somethun' lak uh grindstone dat's de same thing everywhere and do the same thing tuh everything it touch. Love is lak de sea. It's uh movin' thing, but still and all,

it takes its shape from de shore it meets, and its different with every shore. (191) There is no such thing as standard rules and guidelines for marriage or life. Janie tried to live the life that Nanny wanted her to live, and she was miserable. She was miserable with Logan Killicks who wanted to knock her down and make her common and she was miserable with Joe Starks who wanted to sit her on a pedestal and silence her. It was only in her quare relationship with Tea Cake, a relationship that was opposed by the community, that Janie was fulfilled. Tea Cake allows Janie to fully be herself and express her passion and sexual desire. Both Janie and Tea Cake were able to appreciate each other and refuse to try to change each other. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* exists as a Black Quare Girlhood novel that centers Quare Southern practices of Blackgirl self-discovery and desire.

"In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" -Alice Walker

In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: A Womanist Prose was foundational in articulating womanism as a Southern embodied practice, tracing the lineage of Zora Neale Hurston and Black women writers, and counting the experiences of Black women. Blending autobiographical with antithetical prose and poetry to present a historical, geographical scope of Southern life, Black women, and the interiority of Black life, this is a collection of works that Walker had published throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Although Walker herself does not consider herself a Southern writer, she does extend Hurston's of praxis of complicating the narrative of the South beyond the violence of Jim Crow and racism to also include the interiority of Black folks' experiences' living there. Thadious M.

Davis argues that "[Walker's] writing creates a space, a southscape, from which to make futurity critically and aesthetically visible in the raced and gendered body with its origins in the past of the twentieth-century segregated South.

Her work, extending from the turbulent 1960s and into the first decades of the twenty-first century, has made a critical intervention in how the South as a region can be represented and studied. Walker provides a concluding southscape for meditating on the spatial-racial nexus in the construction of region (337). Davis's southscape framework positions Walker as a blueprint that composes Southern geographies, Black bodies, temporality, and artistry as a space of lived theory. As a Mississippi native, Walker embedded the experiences of the South and of her personal life, Hurston's South, other Black women's South, alongside historical narratives of the South in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Southern identity and geography.

> "Unlike analyses that confine Black culture in the South to a space that is specifically Black, Walker insisted on constructing Black culture as southern culture. Space, for Walker, is always in process and not closed, so that it is always outside of grand narratives of modernity. Similarly, unlike discourses on Black writing engaging a sanitized, glorified, and essentialist Black community emanating from the South, Walker insisted on complicated, multifaceted, multidimensional, problematic communities of raced individuals within the South and on communities that change

over time and rarely remain stable. Her South was not unilaterally rural or agrarian" (344-345).

Like Hurston, Walker was not interested in solely redeeming the South and romanticizing the Southern (Black) experiences. Instead, both Hurston and Walker were interested in centering the messiness of Southern spaces. Exposing the both/and of space, time, and culture was central to capturing multiple realities and imaginations. Hurston and Walker affirmed that Southern (Black) experience did not have to be perfected to be shared or written about. Black Quare Girlhood takes up Walker's articulation of womanism and her argument for Southern geographies and Black women's creativity and resistance to explore the messiness of Blackgirls (women's) relationship to Southern histories, geographies, cultures, and futures.

Womanism has experienced many misconceptions of its definition and function within the conversation of Black feminism. Walker does not articulate them as rivals as was perceived as by some theorists. Instead, womanism centers the "everyday" resistances and lived experiences of Black women distinctly through a Southern lens. She defines womanism as:

> "1. From womanish. (Opp. of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A Black feminist or feminist of color. 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.

2. A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist…

3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the Folk. Loves herself. Regardless.

4. Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (xi-xii)

Womanism stakes its claim in Black feminism and the feminisms of women of color. Womanist and Black feminist work centers solidarity and the working for collective liberation. Womanism has origins in Black girlhood and conversations around Black girls' bodies and behaviors. To "act womanish' or "act grown up" was a criticism used to assert that Black girls were acting in a certain way that conveyed adulthood or a nature that could be perceived as sexually advanced. Yet, Walker juxtaposes these negative connotations of "actin grown" with acting "to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behavior. Responsible. In charge. Serious," which blurs the lines of when a Blackgirl performs

womanish/womanist acts depending on the circumstance or the environment. The second definition of womanism centers the importance of relationships, first and foremost, with other women. The preservation and sustainability of women's relationships (with themselves and others), culture, emotions, and strength is prioritized over the relationship with men because of the uniqueness that community among women brings. Walker emphasizes the "love of other women, sexually and/or nonsexually" to: (1) emphasize the importance of mutual love and respect for all women and (2) combat the homophobic argument that Black feminist/womanism were solely for Black lesbian women. Black feminism and womanism seek the liberation of all women and hold space for women with intersecting identities. The third definition of womanism focuses on women's culture, prolific creativity, as well as the whole and lived experience. Womanism is a framework for the mind, body, and spirit. Walker ends the description of women's culture with "regardless" or "despite everything."[7] Womanism loves the Spirit and the struggle.

The essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" unpacks the creative resistance of Black women's artistry in the midst of insurmountable silencing and violence. She begins with an excerpt from Jean Toomer's *Cane* that describes a conversation that the speaker had with a prostitute who fell asleep on them. In this conversation, the poet talks the woman about "art that would open the way for women the likes of her" (Walker 231).[8] Walker says

[7] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/regardless
[8] Toomer, Jean. "Avery" *Cane*. New York: Liveright, 1975. Print.

that Toomer's observations of Black women in the South was that their blind commitment to spirituality prevents them from seeing all of the possibilities that they possess. Black women's response to the objectification of their bodies and the sexual violence that their experienced was to ascribe to what Walker refers to as "Saints." Walker's description of the "Saint" is reminiscent of the image of the "Black Christian woman" and the "Black respectable woman" which are sometimes synonymous. Walker states that "their bodies became shrines: what was thought to be their minds became temples suitable for worship. These crazy Saints stared at the world, widely, like lunatics--or quietly like suicides; and the "God" that was their gaze was as mute as a great stone (232). The Black Church and the standards of the politics of respectability played an important role in influencing Black women's image of themselves and the roles that they took up in the world. Evelyn Higginbotham states that the "politics of respectability" emphasized reform of individual behavior and attitudes both as a goal in itself and as a strategy for reform of the entire structural system of American race relations (Higginbotham, 187). Politics of respectability rose as a cultural overhaul in the Black community in order to shift the perspective of Black people post-slavery. The Black Church's implementation of respectability focused on shifting the perception and narrative of Black women's bodies through the shielding and privatization of their sexuality. This was carried out through the entering of modesty, purity in dress and behavior.

Walker's critique of spirituality is rooted in the "spirituality" role in suppressing Black women's creativity in other areas of her life. Searching for our mother's gardens, or taking up Black Quare Girlhood, focuses on reversing "the separation of the mind from the body and the body from the spirit" (232). I digress from Walker's complete dismissal from Black women' identity. Spirituality influences a significant portion of some Black women's lives. To totally dismiss (some) Southern Black women's relationship with spirituality causes a similar form of oppression of Black Women's spirit. Therefore, spirituality, however it is defined, holds a necessary space in Black women's identity. Walker advocates for the transition from "Saints", a performative state of perfection, to an artist, Black women's true nature that centers individualism and creativity. Sainthood, like some of the Yet, for these (our) grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints' but Artists…. They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality--which is the basis of Art" (Walker 233). Walker argues that spirituality is the basis of Art which rings true based on the dependence of the spirit to the mind. She condemns spirituality as a whole based on its inability to hold multiple truths and identities simultaneously, which was translated to Black women. Thus, some women choose one truth and stick with it. But others created their own definitions of the truths that enabled them to feed all sides of the self.

Our mother's gardens are a multigenerational, multifaceted, and multi-placed process of knowing and being. "There is a strategic threading of "Ordinary, regular great

grandmothers, grandmothers, and mothers alongside more prominent Black women figures such as Phyllis Wheatley, Bessie Smith, Nella Larson, Frances Harper, Zora Neale Hurston, Lucy Terry, Elizabeth Catlett, and Katherine Dunham (238). Walker deconstructs the notion of the artist as a form of celebrity, but instead centers the struggle of our mothers and grandmothers, both those in obscurity and those in the spotlight. The word "our" is used to be collectively relational. They are both our individual familial mothers and grandmothers but also communal mothers and grandmothers. Walker juxtaposes the journey of Phyllis Wheatley, with the lives of our mothers and grandmothers, alongside the life of her own mother. Wheatley, an enslaved woman, used poetry to document her experience and to cultivate a sense of self and home in the midst of foreignness. Yet, Wheatley, Hurston, and several Black women artists died in obscurity with their artistry and work misunderstood or lost, just like our foremothers. In searching for our mothers' gardens means we have to look "high and low" (339). Walker names poetry, gardening, and quilting as examples of our foremothers' artistry. Their cooking, sewing, storytelling, the songs they sung, the dances they created, their hairstyles, forms of dress and more are examples of how they wove their creativity in their everyday lives. Davis takes up Walker's theory of the everyday to discuss women's artistry. She states:

> "Understanding the commonplace, the ordinary, the everyday became possible as a direct result of reading the domestic landscape of quilts and gardens. The identification that Walker makes with the everyday is revolutionary, as she terms it:

> "*The real revolution is always concerned with the least glamorous stuff.* Walker's identification and embracing of Black women's space and the everyday, however, is not intended to bring a release from the indignity of the closed space of the segregated world of inequities for women workers. Neither does it suggest that access to the experience of the everyday in women's lives is adequate for comprehending the complexities of social and cultural relations. (Davis, 346).

Both Walker and Davis highlight the resilience and artistry of creating the space within a space. While Walker asserts that the lack of creativity produced madness and insanity, I believe that our foremothers' resistance and resilience allowed us to cultivate inner spaces that allowed us to unload their thoughts and creative expressions. Our mother and grandmothers understood that life was messy and that they had to pull from it what they could. As Beyoncé's grandmother shared, "when life gave me lemons, I learned how to make lemonade."[9] Our mothers and grandmothers passed on their survival, their resilience, resistance, creativity, and artistry to the next generation. Each generation is responsible for searching for and discovering their own "garden", whatever expression caters to their spirit. "To be an artist and a Black woman, even today," Walker reflected, "lowers our status in many respects, rather than raises it: and yet, artists we will be. Therefore, we fearlessly pull out of ourselves and look at and identify with our lives the living creativity some of our

[9] Quote from home footage from Beyoncé's Lemonade album and "All Night" Video. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gM89Q5Eng_M

great-grandmothers were not allowed to know. I stress *some* of them because it is well known that the majority of our great-grandmothers know, even without "knowing" it, the reality of their spirituality, even if they didn't recognize it beyond what happened in the singing at church--and they never had any intention of giving it up (237-238). One important area that is not addressed in the conversation of artistry and Black women's being is the relationship between creativity, sexuality, and spirituality. Black women's creativity is Black women's sexuality and sexuality is their creativity in the same ways that Black women's spirituality is their sexuality, and their sexuality is spirituality. Walker's call for us to discover our gardens is also a call for us to evaluate the ways that the South as a culture and aesthetic nurtured and restricted these senses of creativity in Black girls and Black women. Black Quare Girlhood is a returning to and recentering of the creative, the sexual, the sensual, the South, the self. It supports thinking through the ways that we as Blackgirls hold space for the "Saint" and the "Artist" by disrupting the categorization of Blackgirls and Black women and instead allowing them to exist as their full selves.

"In The Time Before the Men Came- The Past as Prologue" -Pearl Cleage[10]

Pearl Cleage's essay "In the Time Before the Men Came- The Past as Prologue" reads as a foundational creation story written in the Afrocentric tradition. Cleage recalls the story of the Amazon women, an all-female society that possessed the ability to build communities,

[10] 1989 Winter, "In The Time Before The Men Came," *Catalyst*, Winter 1989, pages 13-15 (https://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/cleage1223/printable/)

reproduce, fly, and operate societies on their own. Cleage, a renowned playwright and writer was born in Massachusetts but centered her works in Southern aesthetics and culture based on its impact on her personal life and on Black culture.[11] This essay was first published in the *Catalyst: A Magazine of Heart and Mind*, a literary journal in 1989, based in Atlanta, Georgia.[12] Although there is not much scholarship engaging with Cleage's essay, this essay is profoundly aligned within the Afrofuturism tradition of Black Girlhood.[13] S.R. Toliver describes Afrofuturism, as "a space to reclaim literal and figurative space, refuse strict spatial and temporal binaries, subvert language, and genre restrictions, create economic opportunities with new economies, and recognize the precariousness of Black bodies in the past, present, and future (6). "In the Time Before the Men Came: The Past as Prologue" challenges the logic of temporal space even as the story is set as a recollection of the past that is functioning as a present and future telling of Black women's lineages. Cleage chooses to not name the specific time before the men entered but keeps the time period fluid in order for each generation of Blackgirls and women to place themselves in a time before the men.

[11] https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/pearl-cleage-39

[12] https://news.emory.edu/stories/2012/08/upress_pearl_cleage_places_archive_at_emory/campus.html

[13] The term 'Afrofuturism' was coined in the 1990s by cultural critic Mark Dery in his edited collection *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*. Dery uses the term Afrofuturism to define "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of 20th century technoculture — and more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future." (Dery 1994: 136) Afrofuturism is defined by Ytasha Womack, in which she defines Afrofuturism as " an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation." (Womack 2013: 9). Lastly, Adriano Elia describes Afrofuturism as "a transdisciplinary cultural movement based upon the unusual connection between the marginality of allegedly "primitive" people of the African diaspora and "modern" technology and science fiction." (Elia 2014: 83) (https://haenfler.sites.grinnell.edu/afrofuturism/)

She also mentions at the end that the presence of men ushered in a block of amnesia and forced forgetting of the time before because of the pain remembering caused. Yet, time and space function both as circular units of power, narrative, and resurgence. The figurative retelling of the "Creation" story sits between the past, present, and future and a retelling and foretelling of what happened when the men came as well as the possibilities of what could happen when the women rejoin the society of unity.

The first line of the essay declares that "in the time before the men came, we could do everything. We were fearless, brave, trustworthy, clean, mentally awake, and morally, straight" (65). The absence of men and the sisterhood of the Amazon women introduced a world of possibilities that has not been seen since. The women were unstoppable and lived in community. The key to the Amazon women's power was their collectivity: "Our magic was completely dependent on the strength of our collective concentration. Our ability to sit within the magic circle, join hands, and collectively focus our minds on one thing and then achieve it" (66). Creation required the women to sync their minds, hearts, and spirits together on a singular thought and focus. They had to sync physically in the same space within a circle but also mentally and emotionally. This kind of unification amongst the women requires a certain level of transparency, vulnerability, and accountability that Cleage alludes that we have not known since. She states that the women "knew how to call a spade a spade" which denotes that the women did not hold back in their honesty and accountability for each other and the community" (65). The strength of the collective

sisterhood was greater than the temptations for individual validation which allowed them to be on one accord in the midst of different opinions. The community's confidence in its structure and the commonality of the women allowed for the women to bask in their unique perspectives as they were not a threat to the collective.

Each of the women held a position that only they could fill. The removal of gender roles and expectations allowed for the free reign of innovation and creativity. Cleage highlights women as builders, philosophers, warriors, strategists, generals, and magicians, explorers, dreamers, schemers, and wanderers. The society that the women created was not perfected but it functioned as a space of wholeness that worked for the women. There was a sense of individual and collective ownership that kept the women focused on their goals. One of the prominent innovations of the Amazon women was the ability to fly through groupthink. What does it mean for Amazon to create the ability to fly by using their minds and their unity? The Amazon society represented an image of Black Quare Girlhood that bridges creativity, intimacy, sensuality, sexuality, community, individuality, explorations of body, mind, and spirit, and imaginations.

Reproduction was respected as a part of womanhood. In the community, reproduction was achieved through "positive groupthink. The women joined together in the circle when one woman gained the desire for a baby. The women would unify on thinking about the production of the baby. The baby would only produce if the "time was right, the woman was ready, and concentration was total" (67). Only Black girls are born in

the community through communal concentration. The removal of sexual intercourse from reproduction in exchange for spiritual and sensual intimacy among the women serves a twofold purpose. This exchange counters the history/future that commodified Black women's bodies for reproduction. Furthermore, the society is able to separate birth from the violence that Black enslaved women experienced before, during, and after procreation. Instead, the Amazon women imagined sensuality, sexuality, and reproduction as a full body experience that required unity and agreement. The Amazon women restored the choice of reproduction to women by giving them agency over their bodies while also establishing an "extrasensory method of birth control" that discerns the internal preparation of the women to mother. While this "birth control" borders on contradiction of the Amazon women's support of individual ownership of their bodies, it also highlights the importance of preservation and stewardship of each new Amazon child/woman that is born.

Relationships in the women-centered community adopted a mutual benefit approach that centered on serving each other as a way to serve the self. The women "lived in harmony with each other and in constant search for the truth of this world and the next one" for they "were responsible, caring for [their] own and each other with a bone-deep understanding of what it really means to be a part of a whole, a sister among [their] sisters…In the time before the men came, [they] were loving, treating each other and those [they] trusted with a sensuality and sweetness unmatched before or since" (Cleage, 65-66).

The Amazon women's relationships with each other reverberated the foundations of Black feminism and womanism which promote the love, support, sustainability, and elevation of the whole. The Amazon women's philosophy on relationships: "We had integrity, scorning the petty and the vicious, avoiding the obvious, sidestepping the curse of sloppy thinking and obsessive, possessive love that shrinks and strains and trains the ear for bickering and mediocrity" (Cleage, 66). They valued the individualism of each member of society and rejected the notion of women and individuals as objects or possessions that could be purchased or exchanged. More importantly, the Amazon women countered the belief that women had to conform themselves into relationships instead of conforming the relationships to themselves. "Amazon women didn't put much energy into the discomfort of their male friends. When it got to be a real problem, they simply cut their lovers loose. Their society recognized no intrinsic value in heterosexual unions and held no censure for any kind of sexual coupling that took place between consenting adults. Men, however, were not allowed to sleep within the gates of the Amazon city" (Cleage, 67-68). The Amazon women's existence was difficult to comprehend by the men because they were able to exist fully within themselves and their society without the presence or contributions of men. The women were able to hold sexual encounters with whoever they chose but men were not allowed to live or sleep in the society. There is a distinction between sexual coupling and intimate sisterhoods. The sisterhood was held at a higher standard of acceptance and functionality that "heterosexual unions". Men were not considered valuable to the Amazon

society because they did not possess the unique powers of the Amazon. Furthermore, their continued presence in the society served as temptations and distractions for the women that prevented them from doing and being all that they needed to. “See, the problem wasn’t so much in their coming, but in what their coming meant to us as Amazon women. Our magic was completely dependent on the strength of our collective concentration; sisterhood was survival (Cleage, 66-67). The breakdown of society occurred when one Amazon woman became distracted by a man and assumed that he was different from the other men, and she was strong enough to resist him. She was overconfident in her singular judgement that she was overcome by him. The story shared that Amazon women had partook in sexual relationships before. However, this encounter was different because the woman submitted to the temptations of the man and chose him over the call of unity in the sisterhood. The sisterhood was preparing to enter the groupthink sister. The woman knew this but thought that she could do both. When she failed to show up for her sisters because she was under the spell of the man, the Amazon lost their magic. The ending of the essay summarizes the fate of the Amazon after their sister had succumbed to the magic of the Black man and the men infiltrated their city.

> “And the man smiled when he saw them running toward their fallen sister, and tightened his arms around her, and she purred in her sleep like a cream-fed cat, and that was when the men came.
>
> And the Amazons became their slaves.

And had their babies.

And cooked their dinner.

And listened to their stories

And dreamed their dreams.

And darned their fucking socks.

And our slavery, and our powerlessness, and our longing for the campfires where we once held hands and sang with our sisters, drove us to acts of madness and self-destruction and amnesia until we arrive at the quarter of the twenty-first century, weakened by oppression and self-hate, degraded, and distracted by all the things that don't have anything to do with being a woman. An Amazon woman" (Cleage, 69).

While the essay came be read as a man-hating Black feminist text, as was the general pushback against Black Feminism during the 1970s and 1980s, Cleage is using storytelling to capture the essence of Black women's power and creativity as an individual collective. When one woman chose the pleasure of the man over the power of unity of her sisterhood, all of the women in the society suffered. This choice was not due to a lack of love and respect for the sisterhood. It was the arrogance of solely self-determination and self-prioritization outside of the accountability of the collective. Black Quare Girlhood requires the individual and the community together, because one without the other leads to destruction. The men were able to gain power and submission over the Amazon women because the women lost the magic and power of collectivity of mind, body, and spirit. "In

Time Before The Men Came" is a foretelling/retelling of the narrative within the oral tradition of the creation of Amazon (Black) women strength and sisterhood that is passed on in hopes that Black women will be able to return to and reimagine the society of the Amazon women. Black Quare Girlhood is an attempt to reimagine a society of the Amazon women where Blackgirls individualism and collective functions alongside one another as an extraordinary power and magic of new possibilities.

Conclusion

A quare imagining of BlackGirl South as a geography and politics allows us to acknowledge the harms that Black girls faced in trying to ascribe to a raced, gendered, and classed standard that provided resources and opportunities while instituting a deep divide between those who followed and those who resisted. More importantly, we have to come to terms with the ways that liberatory strategies used to free us from ourselves derived from the very communities that were oppressed by the original strategies of uplift. Black Quare Girlhood as a framework engages multiple ways of knowing, doing, and being in order to expand the ways that Black girls are engaged as knowledge and culture producers outside of traditions methods within institutions of power. All three texts, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, "In Search Of Our Mothers' Gardens", and "In the Time Before the Men Came" center methodologies of Blackgirl self-discovery through the exploration of the creative, the inner self, sexuality, and the power of sisterhood. Black Quare Girlhood is invested in

exploring how Blackgirls be, do and know themselves outside/within the restriction of historic oppressions.

CHAPTER TWO: "THE SOUTH GOT SUMTHIN TO SAY": SOUTHERN QUARE BLACKGIRL GEOGRAPHIES

In the final moments of Toni Morrison's *Sula,* Nel stands in the road remembering the things she had forgotten as the leaves and nature stir up old and peasant memories. Nel realizes that she has not been missing her husband but has been missing Sula who was a part of herself (174). Though Sula was physically dead, she lived on in the leaves, in the land, in the memories inside of Nel. The relationship between Nel and Sula extended far beyond physical friendship. The connection between the two girls transcended time, space, place, and body. The calling of Nel by Sula from the land and grave represents the final reunification of the two girls who are both separated but also one and the same. Similarly, the ending of Tiffany D. Jackson's *Monday's Not Coming* also speaks to the individualism and collectivity of Black girlhood. In the novel, Claudia tries to come to terms with her latest remembrance of the death of Monday through buzzing noises in her ear. These buzzing noises have persisted with Claudia since Monday's disappearance. Mrs. Roundtree, Monday's next-door neighbor who reveals that she also hears the buzzing states, "You've got to decide what something is or isn't. It may have been buzzing, but I decided it's humming. Someone is just humming a song in my ear" (435). The buzzing began shortly after Monday was discovered in the freezer in her humming. It was as if Monday was sending Claudia a message that she was still with her after she had been missing for so long. Like Nel and Sula, Claudia and Monday's friendship/sisterhood was one that encompassed

time, space, place, and body. Their friendship extended beyond boundaries of common understanding with many on the outside unsure of the separation of the boundaries between the two girls. They were so close that they tended to blend into each other. These collective bonds of Black girlhood/womanhood and Black friendship have undergone queer readings to unpack the intimacies within the relationship between the girls. Building upon the queer/quare reading of connectivity, intimacy, and identity between the two pairs of Blackgirl friendships/"relationhoods"[14] in *Sula* and *Monday's Not Coming*, I explore the ways that Black Quare Girlhood functions as a roadmap through which we can examine Black girls' interactions with the self and the Southern as geographies of being, space, memory, body, and creative mapping of temporal possibilities.

These two texts, published in 1973 and 2018 respectively, present two examples of Black girlhood and the intricacies within their individualism and collective bonds. Set in Medallion, Ohio and Washington D.C., the texts make two complex arguments about the nature of Black girlhood as visible yet invisible spaces that exist as global, transitional, and transverse entities. Both texts place emphasis on the recognition of space and the intersection of identities. We see a distinction between the space marked as home and the outside world. Both the physical locations and the bodies/identities of the Black girls centered in these novels serve as reference points through which we map Blackgirls' past, present, and futures.

[14] I use the term "relationhood" to refer to the vast variety of relationships/sisterhoods that Blackgirls and women occupy and take up with other women.

In *Sula*, "The Bottom" sits as a point of origin that allows readers to explore the geographical movement of Black people from the South to the North alongside the establishment of the "The Bottom" at the top of the hill. In *Monday's Not Coming*, Washington D.C., a territory considered to be a neutral othered space between the North and the South, becomes not only the capital of the U.S. but also a crucial site for unpacking the neglect of Black girls and Black girlhood. Both texts center physical geographies more specifically Southern landscapes, as a part of the telling and knowing of Black girl stories. They offer us Southern geographic spaces and places as sites of origin and dwelling for Black Girlhood present and future possibilities. These texts reflect the significance of the lack of Blackgirls' texts set directly in the South and the ways in which this influences the experiences of Southern Black girlhood. Moreover, they highlight the South as a location that influences Black life and Black memories in various parts of the United States. Finally, they challenge the centralized narrative of the South as a place that Black folks escape from and works to represent the experiences of those who remain. The South referenced in these texts transcend the boundaries of geographic lines and markers. Washington D.C. and Medallion, Ohio are both origins and extensions of Southern aesthetics that shape Black girl tradition, imagination, and possibilities. It is the cultural characteristics of Southern characteristics and place that that bell hooks established in her writing that lay the foundation for the community. Hooks defines southern living and sensibility as "the values of relating, civility, courtesy, and mutual caretaking" (60, Belonging). The South,

geographically and culturally, serves as a "homeplace" within the space. These "homeplaces" are spaces that Blackgirls and women creatively constructed interiorly "safe spaces" where Black people could affirm one another and by doing so many of the wounds caused by racism (sexism) (384, Homeplace). *Sula* and *Monday's Not Coming* demonstrate how hooks "homeplaces" are internalized—inward home landscapes that center the resiliency and resistance of Black women and girls to create what they need to survive.

I place Black Quare Girlhood alongside the works of cultivators of Black Feminist Geographies—Hortense Spillers, Katherine McKittrick, and Loren S. Cahill—to imagine the ways that Black Quare Girlhood Geographies allows Blackgirls to reimagine their bodies, relationships with the self, and others as sites of geographic possibilities. Cahill uses Boylorn's term *Blackgirl,* defined as a phrase that "speaks to the twoness and oneness of my raced and gendered identity. I am never only Black or only girl/woman, but always both/and at the same time . . . I merge the words to make them touch on paper the way they touch in my everyday existence" (49). Blackgirl geography "always carves new roads that unsettle colonial projects that do not allow them to chase their freedom dreams and bring other Blackgirls along to freedomland(s)" (Cahill, 51).

Blackgirl geography articulates the ways in which Blackgirls that Black girls cultivate space in which they are able to imagine their worlds, their bodies, and their cultures in the fullness of themselves. I build upon Cahill's framework and center the South in Black Quare Girlhood and BlackGirl Geographies as a way to: (a) establish the relationship between

Blackgirl (physical) bodies and the bodies of geography/landscape of the multiple Souths, (b) to unpack the layeredness of personhood as it applies to the citizenship/noncitizenship of Black girls and the quare ways that Black girl bodies/persons navigate space/place; and (c) to cultivate Blackgirl Quare possibilities in terms of identity, culture, and community as it pertains to Southern aesthetics and adaptations of bell hooks' concept of home. Hortense Spillers and M. Nourbese Philip begin with the foundation of the role of the body and the evolution of the definition of the body as a way to understand the foundation of what it means to be a girl/woman. Both authors highlight the role of sex, sexuality, and the body in cultivating the body. Imani Perry and Aimee Meredith Cox explore the ways that Black girls and women have been historically and systemically disqualified from personhood and citizenship in order to maintain the hierarchical order.

When I speak of Blackgirl bodies, I refer to the physical body as well as the subconsciousness of the mind that help to inform their identity and word formation. It is necessary to highlight the similarities and distinctions between the physical space/place of geography (i.e., location, land, city, state) and the material geography (people, bodies, culture) to align how both land and Black girl bodies are objectified and commodified as means of commercialization. Consider the ways that both land and Blackgirls bodies contain narratives of cooptation and ownership that produce maps of identity, culture, and community. Black Girl Cartographies is defined as the study of how and where Black girls are physically and socio-politically mapped in the types of knowledge Black women

education researchers connect to Black girls' geopolitical and social locations (e.g., race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, and class). (Butler, 29). Butler's definition considers both traditional and nontraditional sites of education and knowledge building for Black girls. As we build upon the framework of BlackGirl geographies, we have to examine the ways that various institutions from schools to family impact the way that Black girls identify themselves individually and collectively. Black Girl Cartographies not only offer us a way to map the relationships between geopolitical and social locations but also the relationship between the material flesh, the geographic, and the abstract. These cartographies help us to connect Black girl bodies to their memories, identities, their bodies, and themselves. Furthermore, it helps us to document how Black Girl Geographies coexist individually and collectively in order to understand Black Girl pasts, presents, and futures. Black Quare Girlhood comes alongside BlackGirl Geographies to directly speak to the identity, body, and politics of Black girls. Black Quare Girlhood centers the embodiment of Southern culture and community alongside the resistance of oppressive politics of Southern tradition in order to narrate Blackgirls' creative definition and expression of the self.

BlackGirl Geographies: Mapping the Body

Blackgirls as both bodies and subject/objects hold a complicated history in the understanding of the evolution from object to self-ownership. The prevalent introduction to Black women's bodies was within the context of slavery, which completely disregards the

lineage of Africana bodies, communities, and cultures that existed pre-enslavement. [15] However, the body also serves as a "landscape", as theorized by Radhika Mohanram.[16] She states that "it is commonplace to point out that the concept of race has always been articulated according to the geographical distributions of people. Racial difference is also spatial difference, the inequitable power relationships between various spaces and places are rearticulated as the inequitable power relations between races" (3). The landscape of the body is built upon the foundation of identity (race, gender, etc.). The relationship between racial landscape and spatial landscape not only reveals the connections between the bodies, communities, and culture, but it also helps to chart the ways that both racial and spatial landscapes contribute to both inner and outer identity formation. Mohanram suggested "that the women's body, at some level, is like maps of/within the nation in that it has triple functions: to encode boundaries, to reproduce sameness, and to reveal difference simultaneously" (61). Mohanram argues that these bodily landscape maps produce narratives of being and knowledge production. Within the framing of the bodies and being of Blackgirls, the question of power and ownership are centered. Black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers theorizes the body-flesh dichotomy to understand the fluidity and transferability of the categorization of Black bodies for the sake of commodification. The

[15] In this context, *Africana* refers to the "interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach to studying and understanding the experiences of African people and African-descended people across the Diaspora." (https://afs.ku.edu/what-africana-studies)

[16] Mohanram uses Claude Levi-Strauss's "The Science of the Concrete" and Alfred Crosby's Ecological Imperialism to theorize the body as a landscape. (3)

"captive body" and the "hieroglyphics of the flesh" unpack the ways that memories physically and emotionally embed themselves in the consciousness of Black bodies. In regard to Black girls and Black women, this embedding involves a sexualization and ungendering of their bodies. Spillers defines the body as "(1) the captive body as the source of an irresistible, destructive, sensuality; (2) a thing, a being for captor; (3) distanced from a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of "otherness"; (4) as a category of "otherness", the captive body…. Embodies "powerlessness" (206). Spillers' construction of the historic definition of the black female body from object to subject traces the relationship between ownership and citizenship of black women relationship to the land.

The distinction between "the body" and "flesh" is the distinction between captive and liberated body. (206) The framework laid out for us explores the dissection and deconstruction of Black female bodies through the capture and possession. The consequence of the conquest of these bodies results in the separation of the body from identity which leaves an object to be possessed. She refers to "American Grammar" as the ungendering of Black female bodies within the space in between the body and the flesh. This particular spatial language serves as a landscape that assists in deciphering the evolution of Black girl/women bodies in terms of their relationship to land and being. Borrowing from Spillers' theorization of "grammar" as a tool to deconstruct Black women's disembodiment, these "hieroglyphics of the flesh" are embedded cartographies that map the ways that Black

women possessed their own bodies and their selves. Both Spillers and McKittrick build their epistemological frameworks of Black feminist geographies and Blackgirl knowing through analogical readings of Harriet Jacobs/Linda Brent's telling of her own narrative in I*ncidents in the Life of A Slave Girl.* Harriet Jacobs' story of refusal, resistance, survival is foundational to the field of Black Girlhood as well as Black geography due to the centering of the Blackgirl body as a source of trauma and a source of liberation. It is the procurement with Jacob's body, sexuality, and innocence that causes her to face trauma and assault at the hands of her master. Yet, it is Jacobs' resolve to hide and contort her body in the small crawl space in her grandmother's house that leads to her freedom. Jacob's body serves as a narrative map by which her Blackgirl life is mapped. McKittrick invites Valerie Smith's and Hortense Spillers reimagining of Jacob's tale of "garret/garreting" as a "female gender for captive women's community" is the tale writ between the lines and in the not-quite space of American domesticity (Spillers 222/223). The garret was the small crawl space "nine feet long, seven feet wide, and three feet high" in her grandmother's storeroom that she hid in for several years to escape Dr. Flint (114). The in-between and "not quite" spaces of Black girl/womanhood refer to the various dimensions and gaps that exist between girlhood and adulthood that Black girls hold luminally that causes them to coexist in both spaces at once.

The geographies of Black girl bodies begin with the state of possession of the flesh, occupation of space, and the suspension of temporality. Spillers and McKittrick enlist epistemological frameworks to examine Black women's geographies and bodily geographies

through the lens of slavery and the impacts on the body. Black writers and activists associate the trope of "premature knowing", Black girls in the North with trying to survive a hostile northern landscape, follow expectations about moral behavior, and find ways to secure their futures. For authors who depicted the plight of enslaved Black girls in the South, the trope of prematurely knowing, Black girlhood represented victimization, at once a critique of the unlawful actions of whites and a call for the end to the physical and sexual violence toward Black girls in the South (13). There was a distinct relationship between the governance of Southern geographies and the temporal and body knowledge of "premature knowing." As a temporal state of consciousness rooted in survival, this knowledge called for a special cultural and spatial awareness that attempted to help Black girls try to protect themselves from violence and corruption. McKittrick argues that "the ties between ownership and blackness rendered the Black body a commodity, a site of embodied property, through ideological and economic exchanges. For Black women, this legacy of captivity and ownership illustrates how bodily geography can be" (44). In investigating Black women's bodily geographies, we understand the complexities that lay within Black women, power, and ownership of their bodies and their beings.

The first/second layer in contextualizing Black Quare Girlhood with Blackgirl geographies is analyzing the relationship between bodily geographies, sex/sexuality, and ownership/possession. Scholar Janell Hobson presents a case that Sara (Saartjie) Baartman, or The Hottentot Venus's, body and image has been hypersexualized and objectified to serve as

a cast as not only a standard for the Black female bodies but also as a state of otherness that solidified these bodies as less than others.[17] Baartman was born approximately 1789 and died in December of 1815 at 26 years old. Her international legacy only encompassed a small portion of her life and reduced her existence to the external gaze. Hobson states:

"Moreover, Baartman's genitalia, dissected, and preserved in ajar for public viewing after her death, became the subject of scientific inquiry because the nature of her private parts--the subject of rumors from European travelers to the African continent who observed that women from Baartman's ethnic group possessed an "apron" or extra flap of skin covering the labia--dramatized this ultimate "difference" in race and gender. both human status of South Africans--later to impact all Africans and their descendants--underscores the role of racial ideology in framing sexual oppression." …… "Whereas the Black Venus is an enticing representation of sexualized, exotic Black femininity, the Savage Hottentot is a repulsive icon of wildness and monstrosity. Yet both representations elicit fear and attraction, which are combined and reflected in grotesque images of Hottentot Venus. (Hobson, 20-21)

The emphasis placed on the size and description of Baartman's genitalia by scientists and society reinforces the trope of Black women as hypersexualized, sexualized objects. The Black female body is read as both grotesque and undesirable while also objectified and

[17] In the context of this chapter, the term *female* is used within this chapter not as derogatory but to represent the ways that Black girls and women's bodies and selves were considered to be less than human.

demanded. Black women's sexuality has become a political argument of their role as breeders and who has control over their bodies and their sexual activity, devoid of agency, intimacy, or care for them. The separation of Black women from their genitalia, their bodies, identity, and sexuality were due to the denial of humanness to Black people.

M. Nourbese Philip's *Dis Place- The Space Between* is a narrative poem within an essay that attempts to trace the lineage of the relationship between the land and the Black female body. The geography and body, and the relationships that develop, evolve, and die out of this place. This poem capitalized on the sexual objectification of a Black woman "freak" and cemented scientific debates, begun centuries earlier, about the female body is centered around the space between their legs. "THE BODY- which is to talk about the space that lies between the legs of the female and the effects of this space on the outer space- 'place.' Philip delineates the body into boundaries of inner and outer space. Inner spaces are historically designated as sacred, protected areas that have selected access in order to protect the person/place/thing inside. Interestingly, this space remains unnamed throughout the essay. This sacred space, the womb of Black women is known only in its relationship and space to others. "When the African comes to the New World, she comes with nothing. But the body. Her body. *Body*-repository and source of everything needed to survive in any but the barest sense. Body Memory, bodymemory. The African body. Its resource strength resistance to disease. The African body. Including the space between the legs (Philip, 256). Philip's argument that the space between the legs as the most powerful part of Black

women's being aligns and reinforces Black Quare Girlhood's centering of body geographies and sexual identities as a part of Black women's identity and creativity. The "bodymemory" of the space between the legs holds the past, present, and future Black girlhood and womanhood on the individual and collective. This space is resistant, resourceful, and resilient. It is Blackgirls' homeplace within their bodies. Philip refers to this bodily geographic space as public. "Space and place-the public space- must not only be read and interpreted from the point of view of space between the legs, but also from the perspective of how safe the space between the legs is or will be." (Philip, 243) Presenting this space/place as public directly contradicts the narrative of this space as private and hidden. Philip's declaration of the space between as public serves 1), as a body memory to mark the ways that enslaved women bodies and sex organs were objectified and publicized for the consumption and reproduction, and 2) to reclaim agency of the space between, Black women's bodies and sexualities. McKittrick reads Philip's theorization of "the space between the legs' ' as reentry to Black women's sexualities and creative (re)production. (McKittrick, 47) The essay centers three uses of the space between the legs as traced throughout the Old and New World: rape, slavery/reproduction, and pleasing the Black man sexually to keep him calm. (Philip, 242-243). All of these uses center the space between as an object and reject the notion of choice or pleasure for Black women. The Jamette character emerges as the "anti" figure due to her rejection of the boundaries of womanhood. "Jamette: (diameter)divides the world between the space and place of respectability and the

other/lower class. Jamette! A loose woman, a woman of loose morals, whose habitat is the street. A woman possessing both the space between her legs and the space around her, knowing her place. (Philip, 244)" The Jamette serves as a physical body and a geography that occupies both/and spaces. She is the representative figure of Black Quare girlhood in her occupation of the "streets" and the space between. The Jamettes, this loose woman, is quintessential because she claims the space between the legs as hers. She fully takes up this space and places it on display at her will. Black Quare Girlhood centers Blackgirls taking control of the spaces between their legs and defining it for themselves. It rejects the presumed ownership of this space by the Others. Philip highlights the tension between the Jamettes and the mothers. The Jamettes function in freedom and agency while the mother's function in fear and history. Due to the history of Black women's bodies and the space between, mothers teach their daughter only from what they know. "The mothers knowing the outer space controlling the inner space which in turn inflecting and affecting the interpretation of the outer space. The mothers, therefore, intervening- *Their Loving Will and Pleasure*- and ensuring the best. For their daughters. "Don't let nobody touch you there!" So, the mother teaching fear. Naming the space Between. The legs- the young girl's legs. The MUSN'T DO" (Philip, 262) In an effort to protect their daughters from the harms they face because of the space between their legs, they instill fear and place the onus on girls to protect themselves from predators who seek to "touch" or take the space between their legs. The consequence of this tactic is that in "their will and pleasure" to do what is best for

their daughters, Blackgirls are taught to fear the space between the legs and deny themselves the resources that this space holds.

The final layer of Black Quare Girlhood focuses on the status of humanness that Blackgirls acquire/resist. Black women were objectified and viewed as illegitimate and ineligible for the status of humanness and personhood of Blackgirls within Black Quare Girlhood. Imani Perry teaches us the importance of being, in terms of personhood, and the ways that gender and race have been excluded from being as a category. "The position of nonperson is a fundamental supplementation of the idea of gender as produced by disciplinary power (essentialized concepts and rules for men and women) and the naturalization of binary gender categories that were, and continue to be, applied to citizenries. Those who lie outside citizenship and the gender binary had distinct rules applied to them, which were often mechanisms for violent domination. In addition, the coercive forms of gendering and sexuality that could not be disciplined and thus demanded absolute domination by the 'civilized' and 'disciplined' Europeans" (21). The relationship between personhood, citizenship, race, gender, sexuality, etc., is built upon the delicate power structure that sought to reinforce whiteness and patriarchy as essential parts of humanness. The conversation of humanness is as much about who is allowed to be human as it is about what it means to be human and who decides who is human. As Perry, McKittrick and Wynter assert, humanness is intrinsically linked to capitalism and currency. The denial of status to Black folks but especially Black women was rooted in the preservation of an

objectified body as a "machine of production. "Legal personhood is necessary for a person to have the capacity to exercise rights and obligations under the law. The right to own property; to enter into and be bound by, and to enforce, contracts; to participate politically; and to maintain physical integrity or self-protection are all dependent on this basic form of political recognition" (Perry, 22). Humanness for Blackgirls is tied to ownership over their bodies, geographies, and the space between their legs. As the battle for control over women's bodies today wages on, we continue to see Blackgirls and other women of color restricted as partially human based on the political/biologically/economic need:

> "The realization of the living, then, is a *relational* act and practice that identifies the contemporary underclass as colonized-nonwhite-Black-poor-incarcerated-jobless peoples who are not simply *marked* by social categories but are instead identifiably condemned due to their dysselected *human* status. At the same time, as noted earlier, "the realization of the living" must be imagined as inviting *being human as praxis* into our purview, which envisions the human as verb, as alterable, as relational, and necessarily dislodges the naturalization of dysselection. (*On Human*, 7)

Wynter and McKittrick's argument for "being human as praxis" transitions humanness from a state of being to a state of doing. Furthermore, humanness functions as relationability. One cannot perform/enact humanness individually; it requires connection to another. For Blackgirls and Black Quare Girlhood, mapping Blackgirl body' geographies coincides with enacting humanness as a form of embodies practice as a form of resistance. Humanness was

traditionally denied to Black women so to claim space and live out humanness fully allows for Black girls to define and alter humanness on their terms. Black Quare Girlhood literature explores texts that center various geographies of Blackgirl bodies the ways that Blackgirls take up defining and sculpting narratives around their bodies and sexualities and individuals and collectives.

Black Literary Geographies*: Sula and Monday's Not Coming*

Sula, the second novel by Toni Morrison was released in November 1973 as a follow-up to *The Bluest Eye*, her groundbreaking novel unpacking the nuances of Black girlhood and Black family in the twentieth century. *Sula* tells the story of a place, *Sula* also tells the story of two girls' relationship to themselves, to each other, and to the place. Morrison's novel tackles the complex intricacies of temporality, geography, and connection within Black life. The novel begins at the end of the novel but more importantly, the end/destruction of a land and a community. *The Bottom*, in Medallion, Ohio was established as an all-Black town. *The Bottom,* sitting on top of the hill, overlooked the valley where the white community resided. The irony of *The Bottom* was birthed out of a joke played on a Black man by his white landowner. The white owner promised freedom and land in exchange for labor. After the labor was completed, the white landowner decided to trick them because he wanted to preserve the best land for himself and the white community so that they could grow crops and prosper. As the Black community grew, the townspeople named the land, *The Bottom,* to remember the way that they had been cheated

out of their land. There is something particularly familiar yet haunting about the origin of *The Bottom* being built upon the fulfilment of labor and the deceit of freedom tied together in this land. *The Bottom* has both a physical cartography of memory of slavery's past and Black futures; but also, a memorial map to Black labor and Black bodies (Morrison 3-6). In Morrison's work, "time is a unified entity, rather than a chronology that is divided up into discrete fractions of past, present, and future, for it is the impact of significant events on the lives of the folk" (Christian, 57, Stepto, 359). The Bottom exists as a physical and temporal geography that maps time, place, community, and girlhood through quare characters of the novel. Both Shadrack and Sula are positioned as abstract, others in The Bottom by which the community is able to judge and mark their morality, knowledge, understanding and progress.

As an all-Black town, *The Bottom*, was significant to the community due to its positionality as a protection from the outside. Contrarily, it also trapped inhabitants inside. Movement was stagnant in the bottom and those who chose to move more fluidly within and outside the boundaries of the town were othered as outsiders who didn't fit. Helene, Nel's mother, serves as an othered body site due to their fluidity inside and outside of the community and land. Helene Wright was not a native of Medallion, "The Bottom", Ohio but was a native of New Orleans, a southern landscape. Wright's move to Medallion was as much to escape her Southern landscape and memories as it was about renewing the lineage of Black girl body landscape that had been demolished by the stereotypes of her mother,

Rochelle's, occupation as a prostitute (17). Helene's introduction of her mother emphasizes the significant relationship between Southern geographies, Black labor, and the objectification and hypersexualization of Black women's bodies. Rochelle's description as "a woman in a yellow dress", "who carried the gardenia smell", and the "tiny woman with the softness and glare of a canary" hints as the mystery of seduction between the land and Rochelle (27). Morrison's description here attempts to ascribe an obscure level of feminine landscape to Rochelle through the likeness of her to a canary. However, Helene undoes Rochelle's feminine landscape through the undercut "much handled things are always soft" (27). Rochelle's labor as a prostitute denies her access to femininity, Black girl geography, or protection. Her body is read as used waste by her daughter and is therefore marked and unmarkable.

The irony of "The Bottom" as a geographic site at the top of the hill is that it serves as a metaphorical site of consciousness for the community and the ways that we think of Black girl cartography and knowing. Sula's final words to Nel before she dies read us a chilling tale of unknowing.

"Hey, girl." Nel paused and turned her head but not enough to see her.

"How you know?" Sula asked.

"Know what?" Nel still wouldn't look at her.

"About who was good. How you know it was you?"

"What you mean?"

"I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me" (146).

The coming apart and coming together of Sula and Nel throughout the novel reveal the fragile boundaries within their identities and friendship. The surface narrative of Black girlhood that set Nel as being dominant and respectable, while Sula was untamed and evil becomes unraveled at their final meeting. Sula had been rejected from the Black women community collective and labeled pariah due to her ability to be unapologetic. Sula refused to apologize for her Black girl landscape of geography that allotted her freedom in her body, sexuality, and her - self. Nel was embraced and enfolded into the collective because of her ability to blend and adopt the collective geographic landscape of wifehood, familial support, and modest respectability.

When we rethink the boundaries and spaces of Black girlhood and womanhood, we must not acknowledge the overlaps as well as the gaps that contribute to the forging of Black girl identities. Nel and Sula are not solely representations of themselves, they are made up of the memories, landscapes, and geographies of those before. You cannot properly analyze the identity of Nel and Sula without analyzing the impact of Helene, Hannah, and Eva. In the initial presentation of Nel and Sula's families, Nel and her family are cast as the traditional representation of Southern Black girlhood which is rooted in respectability and acceptedness. Although Nel is not born in Louisiana, she is still raised/haunted by the standards of respectability and the lineage of sexuality. Thus, Nel adopts some of the virtues of Southern Black womanhood such as the emphasis in outward beauty and marriage.

Alternatively, Sula's familial narrative is initially portrayed as a traditional representation of the matriarchal family unit that reinforces negative stereotypes of the Black family such as the lack of familial structure and matriarchal fatherless home.

A closer examination of Nel and Sula's families reveal that their familial landscapes and geographies mirror each other. Nel's mother was raised by her grandmother, and was married off to Wiley Wright, in another attempt to curb the "wild blood". Helene Wright is described as a beautiful woman from New Orleans. Helene reported being thankful that Nel had not inherited her light skinned. Nel had inherited her father's wide nose, which Helene forced Nel to correct by pinching it daily. Morrison uses Nel's nose to allude to her Blackness, Helene believed herself to be distinguished from the other citizens of the Bottom due to her Creole Southern upbringing. This upbringing centered on her bodily geographic proximity to whiteness. It allowed her societal capital and currency that was forbidden to those with definite Blackness. Helene's strategic move away from New Orleans and the haunting of her mother's "disgrace" also disconnected her from the cultural market that she was used to. The community of The Bottom viewed her as uppity yet ordinary. They refused to acknowledge her social currency or her geographic difference by not addressing her as Helene but as Helen. Morrison's decision to name the family "The Wrights" aligns with the unmapping of the space/place. Just as the addition of a letter changed the connotation and spacing of Helene, adding a letter in Wright disguises, yet reinforces the Black expectation of right and goodness, Helene Wright is cast as a metaphorical matriarchal

figure that rules over her home and her daughter. We do not hear Mr. Wright's voice as an influence on her daughter or her identity because it wasn't needed. Nel's Black Girl landscape and geographies are passed down through maternal lineage's Black Girl landscape and geographies are passed down through maternal lineage. Throughout the texts we see Helene's declined presence alongside Nel's coming of age and transition into wifehood. Helene's presence is no longer needed because she had transferred her landscape over to Nel.

Eva Peace serves as a traditional matriarchal figure. The last name Peace represents an antagonistic foreshadowing of the lives of the members of the family. Eva, deserted by her husband and left to raise her children alone, decides to desert her children in order to provide for them. She returns with an amputation to her left leg and money to provide for her family. The Peace home served as a transient space for the family and those within the community. Eva Peace builds a fortress that not only keeps her family "safe" but also provides shelter for those dismissed by society. Eva took in the three Deweys, Tar Baby, and newlywed couples trying to find their way. She positioned herself as a savior who has successfully saved herself and others. However, the deaths of Plum and Hannah Peace as well as the disappearance of Pearl from the narrative trouble the designation of Eva as a matriarchal safe space. Plum, the cherish baby boy that Eva risked her life for, returned home from the war hooked on heroin. Eva describes Plum's drug habit as a regression in which he tries to climb back up between her legs. This space between her legs refers to the powerfully haunting geography of home, death, and rebirth and previous by M. Philip. This sacred

space is marked for birth, marked, for pleasure, marked, for trauma, and marked for identity. Eva's decision to save Plum from himself also serves as a reflection of Eva's power: her ability to give and take life. We see a similar circumstance when Eva throws herself out of the 3rd story window in order to try to save Hannah from burning in the fire. Hannah's death was significant for two reasons. First, Hannah's death was foretold to Eva in a dream. It can be theorized that the death of Hannah could be the karma for the death of Plum. However, Eva believes that Hannah's death was caused by Sula's darkness.

Seeing Nel and Sula through the lens of Black girl geography and landscape, I argue that Nel and Sula share the same (or similar) geographies intrinsically led to Sula and Nel to search for ways to reject the traditional scripts of Black girlhood through their lives and the lives of each other. Particularly, Sula's liberatory geography was perceived as "pariah" because it/she serves as a mirror for her family and the community around. Sula is not the villain of *The Bottom* but the reflective healer. Morrison centers the novel, *Sula,* around Sula and her refusal to conserve her Black girl geography to the confines of *The Bottom*. Sula was marked within the community from childhood. Her mother stated, "Sure you do. You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference. (57) Hannah's rejection of Sula marked the rest of her life. Sula lost her mother metaphorically before she physically lost her. Sula's realization that she had no sustainable familial relationships released her from the bondage of the community into the possibilities of her full self.

A part of Sula's shift into the fullness of her Black girl geography was shifting her relationship with men. The Peace women shared an interesting relationship with men. The "manlove" that Eva passed on consisted of different motives (41). Eva's manlove consisted of entertainment, Hannah's manlove consisted of fulfilment, but Sula manlove consisted of opportunity and curiosity, not in the men themselves but in the ways that the power of Blackgirl geography in the "space between" could lure them. "She was pariah, then, and knew it. Knew that they despised and believed that they framed their hatred as disgust for the easy way she lay with men." (122) Sula's "manlove" was the least tolerable within the community because it lacked the respect for the men. Sula's sexuality and sensuality undid the narrative of sex and marriage being centered around the man. Instead, it mapped the ways that women should center and pleasure themselves. Morrison creates in *Sula* a protagonist bent upon the aesthetic exploration of her own body and the body of others" (Dickerson, 197). The sexuality of Sula and the other Peace women served as a geographic mapping of Black women's intimacy and development of a comprehensive definition of the body and the self. While most of the narrative around the Peace's women's sexuality centers their non-respectable choice to sleep with multiple men and married men, we should acknowledge the agency in cultivating relationships with their bodies and sexualities that rejected relational structures that did not serve them. Peace women "tend not to relinquish control of their bodies to men or to spend time thinking of ways to manipulate their bodies to appear more attractive to men" (Dickerson, 204).The Peace women model their Black

Quare girlness through the focus on their desires and pleasures instead of succumbing to pleasuring others.

Sula's sexuality and sensuality also mapped the womanist approach to loving yourself and other Black girls. Womanism is defined as "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually; appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength" (Walker, 1). The geography between Nel and Sula is that they were so close that you couldn't tell where one started and the other ended. Eva Peace explained, "You. Sula. What's the difference? [...] Just alike. Both of you. Never was no difference between you" (168-169). The "intimacy" described between Sula and Nel is reminiscent of the merging of landscapes. "Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula's because he was dead; Nel's because he wasn't, they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for)" (52). Their Black girl geographies drew them to each other because they saw themselves in each other when no one else saw them. Morrison paints an intensely beautiful map of Nel and Sula as both individuals and as a collective:

> Their friendship was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other's personality. Although both were unshaped, formless things, Nel seemed stronger and more consistent than Sula, who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes. Yet there was one time when that was not true, when she held on to a mood for weeks, but even that was in defense of Nel (53).

The narrative of their Black girl geographies rejects and reinforces their identities and relationship. Morrison refers to them as "unshaped, formless things" to the outside world yet there was a distinction between them in terms of identities and characteristics. Morrison states:

> "Nel Wright and Sula Peace were both twelve in 1922, wishbone thin and easy-assed. Nel was the color of wet sandpaper--just dark enough to escape the blows of the pitch-Black true bloods and the contempt of old women who worried about such things as bad blood mixtures and knew that the origins of a mule and mulatto were one and the same. Had she been any lighter skinned she would have needed either her mother' protection on the way to school or a streak of meanness to defend herself. Sula was a heavy brown with large quiet eyes, one of which featured a birthmark that spread from the middle lid toward the eyebrow, shaped something like a stemmed rose. It gave her otherwise plain face a broken excitement and blue-blade threat like the keloid scar of the razored man who sometimes played checkers with her grandmother. The birthmark was to grow darker as the years passed but now it was the same shade as her gold-flecked eyes, which to the when, were as steady and clean as rain" (52-53).

The narrative descriptions of Nel and Sula begin with the distinction between their skin color. Nel is described as the "the color of wet sandpaper" while Sula is described as "heavy brown". Light skinned is positioned within the texts alongside goodness and stability. Nel is

described as “strong and consistent” which is assigned as a part of her maturity but also her acceptability by society. Contrastingly, Sula is described as darker-skinned and plain, as a way to reinforce the belief that beauty was tied to the tone of one’s skin and that personality also impacted one's beauty. The birthmark on Sula’s eyelid is symbolic of her marker as “darkness, evil, and/or Black girl.” Nel and Sula are cast as two different types of Black girls. Nel, light-skin, raised in a two-parent home, is positioned to be the standard for girlhood/womanhood within “The Bottom.” Yet, Nell still searched for her own landscape as a Black girl.

> “I’m me,” she whispered. “Me.”
>
> Nel didn’t know quite what she meant, but on the other hand she knew exactly what she meant.
>
> “I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me. Me.”
>
> Every time she said the word me there was a gathering in her like power, like joy, like fear.’ [....]
>
> “Me,” she murmured. And then, sinking deeper into the quilts, "I want... I want to be... wonderful. Oh, Jesus, make me wonderful.” (28-29)
>
> “Except for an occasional leadership role with Sula,, she had no aggression. Her parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or splutter she had. Only with Sula did that quality have free reign, but their friendship was so close, they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one’s thoughts from the other’s. (83)

Nel's cartography of Black Girlhood began with the narrative of her mother's geography and her struggle to create herself. As a young girl, Nel's curiosity led her to question and push back against the passivity of Black womanhood. From refusing to pinch her nose to her friendship with Sula, Nel attempted to resist the Southern respectable mapping of girlhood that tried to silence her spirit. Instead of initially following the typecast of obedient, submissive, asexual child, she sought to cultivate an identity for herself. Morrison reveals Nel's struggle to cultivate her own understanding and mapping of her geography and what it meant to be a Black girl to her. The juxtaposition of the relationship of Nel and Sula revealed the significance of the communal landscape and its impact on identity. Nel's structured, matriarchal household with a father that was present yet absent did not afford her a better life than Sula. Instead, it gave her a scripture life void of Black girl possibilities because Nel traded creativity, authenticity, and individualism for the security of the communal norm.

While Sula was raised in a fatherless, matriarchal geography that was deemed as negative due to its lack of structure, it afforded her the opportunity to construct a mappable identity that was authentic to who she was and what she wanted. Sula declared, "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" as a rejection of the girl to wife geographical timeline. She wasn't interested in building or playing house, instead she was invested in building a life that allowed her to explore the possibilities of her identity without the label of others. (92) Sula's cartography begins and ends with her at the center. Instead of

mapping her identity through the community, she maps the community through her identity and her creativity. Morrison describes Sula as

> "In a way, her strangeness, her naiveté, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of the dance, or strings, had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like an artist with no art form, she became dangerous" (121).

Sula's danger lies in her unpredictability and her untameability, especially when it comes to her relationships with men. Her constructed body geography existed outside on the contextual boundaries of relationships. Sula rejected the concept of love and the contextualization of her identity to another. She was no *one's* lover, wife, girlfriend, as she:

> "went to bed with men as frequently as she could. It was the only place where she could find what she was looking for: misery and the ability to feel deep sorrow. She has not always been aware that it was sadness that she yearned for. Lovemaking seemed to her, at first, the creation of a special kind of joy. She thought she liked the sootiness of sex and its comedy; they laughed a great deal during the raucous beginning, and she rejected those lovers who regarded sex as healthy or beautiful. Sexual aesthetics bored her, Although she did not regard sex as ugly (ugliness was

> boring too), she liked to think of it as wicked. [...] There, in the center of that silence was not eternity but the death of time and a loneliness so profound the word itself had no meaning. For loneliness assumed the absence of other people, and the solitude she found in that desperate terrain had never admitted the possibility of other people. She wept then" (122-123).

She was herself and that was enough. Sula's observation of the Black geographic lives around her in the women of the community taught her that love was overrated. Many of the women in the community built their lives around the myth of love and security in marriage. Their toleration of Eva and Hannah's sexual fluidity was based on the mutual respect of the love within the marital relationship. The women were tolerant of their lovers' affairs because they respect the men. Contrarily, Sula's interest in sex and men was based on intrigue and avoidance of loneliness. Sula's Southern Black girl geography claimed space for her curiosity and her disinterest in love during her interest in sex.

The demise and rebirth of the relationship of Nel and Sula begins with the death of Chicken Little. The death of Chicken Little also signified the death of innocence of Sula and Nel. His death not only marked the community, but it also sealed the geographies of Nel and Sula. Right before Chicken Little emerges on the scene, Nel and Sula are locked into intimate play with one another. They are situated under a four-leaf clover tree for shade, playing in the grass. The description of the "grass play" by the water under the tree presents us with a delicate introspection into how Black girls make sense of their relational intimacy

to themselves and to others. (58-61) This intimate play between Nel and Sula has been read as a moment of sensual/sexual awakening for both girls' knowledge of their sexual agency. This scene also provides a glimpse into the relationship between these Nel, Sula, and the landscape. The intimacy between Nel and Sula is built upon the foundation of the land as a part of intimate play and Black girlhood. Kyra Gaunt describes the games Black girls play as embodied discourses that Black girls pass down through memory and the body (1). These games "teach discourse about appropriate and transgressive gender and racial roles (for both girls and boys) in African American communities" (2). Gaunt's research centers the relationship between Black girls, musicology, and play. However, her theorization of Black girls' embodied discourses also highlights Black girls' play as an embodied practice *and* geography.

As previously stated, the marker of transition of Black girlhood is "premature knowing". "Premature knowing" is the significance that awakens an adultified knowledge that is necessary for survival. The introduction of the theme of death ("accidental"/ "intentional") in the lives of Nel and Sula alongside their introduction to intimacy solidified their Black girl geographies. It is after the death of Chicken Little and encounter with Shadrack that we see Nel morph into the mold of adulthood of her mother's making. Sula, the one who actually swung Chicken Little into the water, experienced the death of her mother shortly after. These two events sealed Sula's rejection of the ways of the Bottom and of Black women in the community. Sula's Black girl geography led her down the path of

unknowing. Her affair with Jude was significant due to the consequential breaking of the geography of Nel and Sula. Interestingly, it was not the death of a boy but the betrayal of a man that broke Nel and Sula. Sula and Jude's affair was based on mutual intrigue. Sula was the antithesis of everything that Nel was and everything that Jude stated that he wanted in a man. Sula was not interested in Jude himself; she was interested in the essence that had made her friend subscribe to the geographical essence of womanhood in the Bottom. Even their betrayal of Nel was centered around Nel and her geography. While this is not a justification for the affair, it is an alternative reading that allows readers to understand that both were seeking to understand Nel's landscape. The end of the novel confirms this.

Nel's visit with Eva Peace unlocked the truth of Nel and Sula along with Southern Black girl geographies. Eva's interchanging of Nel and Sula was not a dismissal of difference of Black girls' geographies or a homogenizing of Black girls' landscape. Instead, Eva's proclamation that there was no difference between Nel and Sula because although Sula swung Chicken Little over the water Nel stood and watched; serves as an indictment of Nel's definition of her own geography as well as the binary categorization of Black girl bodies. Eva challenged Nel's belief that she was somewhat better than/different from Sula because she had subscribed to the Black girl landscape of the Bottom. Instead, Eva reminds her that there is no real difference between Nel and Sula, the wives of the men and the mistresses, the mothers, and the non-mothers. The geographies of Nel and Sula push back against the good/bad and respectable/other dichotomies that were/are used to name and

label Black girls. Eva's assertion that there was no difference between Nel and Sula seeks to affirm the ways that Black girl bodies and geographies exist and embody the both/and. As seen in Nel and Sula, scripts of respectable differentiation have been used and passed down to silence parts of Black girl geographies. Nel's weeping at the end of the novel is not only for Sula but also for herself. She is mourning the parts of herself that she denied in order to ascribe to the geography of The Bottom and she is mourning Sula and the landscapes that she lost within Sula through denying herself.

Black Girl Ungeography: *Monday's Not Coming*

Monday's Not Coming, the second novel by Tiffany D, Jackson, debuted in May 2018, in response to the early 2017 campaign to #FindOurGirls/#MissingDCGirls/ #. In 2017, a crisis ensued when it was discovered that at least 34 Black girls were missing in the Washington D.C. area. In contrast to their white counterparts, Black and Latina girls are more likely to be labeled as "runaways" instead of "missing". This key designation determines the priority that is given to the cases and the resources that are used to find these girls.[18] The designation of "missing" is given top priority and receives Amber Alert status. [19] Amber Alerts are issued when:

- There is reasonable belief by law enforcement that an abduction has occurred.

[18] https://urbanfreedom.org/spring-2017/findourgirls
[19] https://amberalert.ojp.gov

- The law enforcement agency believes that the child is in imminent danger of serious bodily injury or death.
- There is enough descriptive information about the victim and the abduction for law enforcement to issue an AMBER Alert to assist in the recovery of the child.
- The abduction is of a child aged 17 years or younger.
- The child's name and other critical data elements, including the Child Abduction flag, have been entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) system.[20]

According to the D.C. officials, the Black and Brown girls do not always meet these standards. Right-wing Conservative Jesse Lee Peterson critiqued the crisis by stating,

> "Newsflash: These young people don't want to be reunited with their mothers. They ran away from home to escape unbearable living conditions. Angry, single, Black mothers (and grandmothers) who don't have any love are raising these kids. These women are often belligerent and violent toward the children. The kids are usually living in homes where the mother has a live-in boyfriend. Illicit drugs are prevalent. Sometimes the girls are made to work as prostitutes in sex-trafficking rings – even by members of their own families."[21]

[20] https://amberalert.ojp.gov/about/guidelines-for-issuing-alerts
[21] https://urbanfreedom.org/spring-2017/findourgirls

Peterson's precarious rationalization for the staggering number of Black and Brown girls reinforces historically negative stereotypes of Black and Brown mothers and families. By centering the narrative around "angry, single, Black mothers (and grandmothers)", Peterson reiterates the narrative of the Monahan report's assertion that the root of the failure of Black families is Black women. Peterson goes on to charge these Black mothers and other women with neglect and violence against the girls. While this narrative cannot be ruled out as a potential motive for some of the cases, to promote this as the sole narrative experience for Black and Brown girls pigeon-holes the experiences of Black and Brown girls as one singular experience.

As of February 2020, "an estimated 64,000-75,000 Black women and girls are missing in the U.S."[22] According to Women's & Gender Studies scholar Treva Lindsey, "the tens of thousands of Black women and girls who are missing include abductees, sex trafficking victims, and runaways. Black women and girls exist at the intersection of racism and sexism, and quite often poverty. These barriers contribute to disparate and poor outcomes in many arenas, including but not limited to health, wealth, housing, education, employment, food security, access to water, and violence" (Lindsey, 1-2). The failure of police officials, media outlets, and devaluation and adultification of Black and Brown bodies. The message that was sent to the public was that Black and Brown girls' lives, bodies, and experiences don't matter. This messaging has continued throughout history and multiple

[22] https://womensmediacenter.com/news-features/the-urgent-crisis-of-missing-Black-women-and-girls

institutions. The 2017 and 2019 Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality reports, *Girlhood Interrupted: The Erasure of Black girls' Childhood*[23] and *Listening to Black Women and Girls: Lived Experiences of Adultification Bias*, unpacks the ways that society and social norms have categorized Black girls as adults which denies them the innocence of childhood and makes them more vulnerable to harsher consequences. The reports include firsthand accounts from Black girls and women who recalled having their experiences dismissed, receiving harsh punishments for personality offenses, and being denied the care that girls and students need to succeed. In the same ways that Black girls are adultified and criminalized in the school system, they are treated as such when they go missing. This leads us to question when do Black girls go missing? Do they disappear when their bodies are no longer located or do they disappear when their experiences are erased?

The novel centers the story of Monday through the memories and consciousness of Claudia. 8th graders Claudia and Monday are inseparable best friends. They do everything together and are often mistaken for each other and rumored to be in a relationship. As we travel through the novel to discover what happened to Monday, we learn that everything is not what it seems and Monday was much more than just Claudia's sidekick. The novel challenges the boundaries of temporality and geography through the transmission between the Present, the Before, time Before the Before, the After, alongside, the transition between

[23]This project does not wish to cast the South as a monolithic geography/ institution but as a nuanced system of geographies, cultural aesthetics, landscapes etc. that bear similarities and allows us to examine the ways that the South serves as a site of critical knowledge production, evolution and embodied practice.

the South to the North, from the hood to the semi-suburbs, from school to the streets while trying to find and reclaim what is lost. The geography of the novel sits within Washington D.C. within the Southeast and between the city and the Edward Borough housing projects. "The Capitol Housing Authority built the Edward Borough housing project during World War II on land originally given to freed slaves during the 1800s. It was meant to be a place of community, a place to start again, a place for the American dream (38).

"Folks think all of Southeast is so dangerous and ghetto. (38) "The "hood" used in this context refers to the community/neighborhood of the most vulnerable populations (physically, financially, systematically, geographically) that are culturally marked as violent, bad, negligent, dangerous, etc.[24] The hood, like the South, has been positioned as a place that Black girls need to be saved and escape from. As Kendall proposes, the hood is the place where Black girl geography, knowledge and identity comes from. Southern Black girl geographies call us to center these landscapes as integral parts of Black girlhood development. The relationship between the physical land and the Black girl landscapes opens up a conversation about accessibility, gentrification, and the displacement of Black bodies. As mentioned in the novel, the "land" and geographical landscape is dependent on the identity of the occupants of the land. The geography was designated as the "hood" when the occupants were working-class Black folks. However, once the land was designated as

[24] This definition of "hood" was generated from Mikki Kendall's embodied practice in *Hood Feminism* alongside cultural definitions of hood put forth in *Monday's Not Coming.*

prime real estate for the community, it was decided that the housing project would be demolished, the hood designation removed, and the land transformed into a profitable geography. This relationship between land and identity allows us to understand the ways that the geographies and bodies of Black girls are also discarded, demolished, gentrified, and renamed. Examining the relationship of naming and bodily geography allows us to trouble categorical markers and contextual proximities that attempt to assign Black girls to particular scripts.

Claudia, the main character, is a shy preteen from an overprotective family. As an only child to older parents, Claudia has been sheltered from much of the world. She has struggled academically and socially in school. Her friendship with Monday has kept her grounded throughout life. As we travel through the story of Claudia and Monday, we see an unraveling of Claudia and the friendship with Monday that she has painted in her head. Claudia portrays Monday as an innocent bystander of her hood upbringing who needed saving. She views their relationship as one of codependence where Claudia depended on Monday for social companionship and Monday depends on Claudia for familial stability. Monday is portrayed as an othered Black girl. She is brilliant yet trapped by the confines of her hood upbringing. While Monday is uncovered as slightly interested in boys and exploring her body and sexuality, Claudia is held up as the example of proper girlhood. She strictly obeys her parents, attends church, stays out of trouble, and avoids the temptation of

boys. Alternatively, Monday, and her sister April are cast as the stereotype of "fast ass girls."[25] Mikki Kendall defines "#fasttailedgirls as a "half warning, half pejorative" used to describe girls as sexually precocious in some way and to warn/protect young women from being perceived as Jezebels." (47) Ms. Charles, Monday, and April's mother, uses this description to chastise them anytime they do something wrong. While April and Monday's characters are frequently projected as hoes/fast/sluts due to their perceived promiscuity and location, Monday is viewed through the lens of Claudia's purity when she is around Claudia.

Monday's perception of good by society supports the belief that one's personality and behaviors can be ascertained through sight, association, and geography. Historian LaKisha Simmons refers to this as "geography of niceness." Nice was a polite euphemism for sexually and morally wholesome."[26] In each neighborhood, there were particular geographies of respectability. These geographies of niceness were also aligned with geographies of fear. Respectable girls were often afraid and anxious of what might turn them from "nice" to "bad" (112). Simmons contextualizes geography as a twofold site of respectability. Within Black girlhood, respectability takes form in the traditional sense of behaviors, actions, and consciousness that govern Black girls' ability to be accepted in society. Respectability is also formed through location/place and class. A girl living in a poor neighborhood or the

[25] "Fast ass girls" is a variation of #fasttailedgirls used as a cultural projection/ reminder for Black girls in order to prevent a negative misreading of their bodies and identity by society.
[26] Simmons, LaKisha M. *Crescent City Girls: The Lives of Young Black Women in Segregated New Orleans*. University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

modern “housing projects”, were automatically subjected to roles of non-respectability due to “roughness” of the area, the historic narratives of those who were perceived to live there and the socioeconomic politics that surround the area. April and Monday are classed and sexualized according to their location. Claudia’s new friends, Michael, and the girls, constantly question her association with April and Monday because of their reputation. They claimed, “you know how them bobblehead broads from Ed Borough be” (Jackson, 303). The naming of Black girl bodies was judged based on how they were perceived and less on the facts surrounding them or the circumstances that motivated their action. These narratives of sexuality rejected Black Girl Quareness and the inclusion of space for Black girls to define and live out what sex and intimacy mean to them. Instead, these Black girl body geographies assert that goodness is equated to privacy, having sexuality hidden and removing agency, while badness is reserved for those who live their sexuality out loud.

Monday’s Not Coming functions as a Black Quare Girl novel that examines the role of Blackgirl bodies, in knowledge production, community, memory and survival. Creativity and the act of “naming/words” is taken up as a method of mapping of Black girls' bodies and identities in the text. The “geography of niceness” that is represented in the narrative of Monday and Claudia also highlights a significant relationship between geography, the body, and language. The relational contrast between Monday and Claudia call for a particular reading of the ways that their bodies are read by the community. Claudia, Monday, and

April are presented as three different Black girl geographies that are used to explore questions of who is allowed to be a Black girl and who is allowed to matter?

Although the novel centers on the disappearance of Monday and the landscape of friendship between Claudia and Monday, there are several Black girl landscapes that interact and intersect with Claudia and Monday that shape the lives of both characters. April's Black girl landscape is significant not only because she is the link between Claudia and Monday but also because she represents an alternative reflection of Monday and exhibits the necessary unpacking of the complexities of Black girls going missing in plain sight. Understanding the nuances of *Monday's Not Coming*, require us to expand our understanding of what it means to go missing and consider that April Charles was missing long before her sister physically went missing. April Charles is cast as a secondary character within the story of Monday and Claudia. However, April's body geography provides a landscape through which one is able to map one narrative of Black Quare Girlhood. Audiences are first introduced to April as a traditional Black girl script of "bad, fast Black girlhood". Throughout the novel, we do not hear much of April's perspective of identity, body geography, or inner consciousness. We only know the ways that she is defined by and in relation to others. As the oldest of four children, April is assigned the role and responsibility of mothering her siblings. "Monday's older sister looked….older. Her pale skin. Big Black bags under her eyes, had her looking like somebody's mother rather than a sixteen-year-old. (57)" Throughout the novel, we see the toll that the weight of mothering

herself and her siblings takes on April. Both April and Monday are tasked with caring from August and Tuesday. The responsibility of caring for younger siblings is not a new concept for Black girl children. A tenant of the Black Girlhood tradition in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth century supported the rearing of Black girl children as future wives and mothers. This notion of Black girl mothering is rooted in the adultification of Black girls that denies that girlhood innocence in exchange for mothering experience. Southern Black girl geographies allow us to examine the ways that both April and Monday are missing Black girls and the ways that society failed both of them. April is described as a "hoe, slut, etc." throughout the novel. Her narrative geography is constructed based on her proximity to men and her perceived sexuality. She exists as an outcasted other within her school and larger community. April's alternative sexual landscape was not one of freedom and exploration but one of survival. Throughout the novel, we see April engage in sexual activity as a means to provide for her siblings not as a means of pleasure. When Monday discovers that their housing project is closing down, April instructs Monday to not worry because she will take care of things as she always has. April spots a group of guys and tells Monday to take the younger children inside. (326-327). April's sexuality and sexual identity is built upon survival and the need to sustain her siblings. Her engagement in sex work is not rooted in her agency and cultivation of relationships on her terms but her desperation to keep her siblings alive and together. At seventeen, we see April living out adulthood in her childhood. Although her mother, Patti Charles, is present, April has been trained to take on

the responsibilities of parenting without a guide. At the end of the novel, April states to Claudia that she "never" had a Claudia to expose her to a sense of normalcy and healthy relationships. We cannot help but wonder how April's narrative would have shifted if she had someone to advocate for her. Yet, we are challenged with the reality that Monday's proximity to Claudia saved her in one instance but cost her life in the other.

Monday's character holds a complex space/place in the novel because she is the character that we hear about the most but the character that we hear from the least. We are told of Monday from the perspectives of Claudia and April, two opposing figures who vie for the intimacy, attention, and will of Monday. We see three different geographies that she takes up during the novel: Monday at school, Monday at home, and Monday with Claudia. One of the major roles that Monday takes up is that of the protector. Monday and Claudia's relationship built upon dual saviorism with each one filling in what the other could not. While Claudia introduced Monday to stability, friendship, girlhood innocence, family structure, and provision, Monday helped Claudia survive school. Whereas Claudia was shy and unprovoking, Monday was book smart and street smart, able to blend into both worlds. Monday recognized Claudia's academic struggles with reading and writing and tried to help her blend under the radar. She cared about Claudia, admiring Claudia's creativity, and wanted her to succeed. In return, Claudia offered Monday her loyalty, fighting to protect her from the bullying in school and from the rage of her mother. Yet, we recognize that Monday's narrative is not complete. The more we see the unraveling of Claudia' s memory

we learn that there was more to Monday than on the surface. Monday exists as a Black Quare girl who desperately wanted to merge both of her selves together. She wanted to be the smart, sexual, loved and most of all the free Black girl. Monday craved the action of both of her worlds. She loved Claudia's family and the supportive familial structure that she had at home. She also loved her siblings and wanted them to be okay. She appreciated the intimacy of the relationship with Claudia, but she craved male intimacy and the care of a relationship with others, something Claudia was unable to grasp. Monday offered Claudia her first experiences of acceptance and rejection, by accepting her friendship while exploring relations with others.

To map Monday's bodily narrative is to map the complex, continuous transgressions that occur throughout the book. The more that Claudia begins to (un)know about Monday and her life outside of Claudia, the less she is able to recognize herself on Monday. Monday and Claudia's relationship blurs the queer/quare understanding according to those around her. Their intimacy served as a threat to those around them at school, so much so that their classmates took to bullying Monday and Claudia about their friendships. The students frequently alluded to a lesbian relationship between Claudia and Monday and referenced Monday's "bisexuality" due to her crush on Jacob. Shayla, one of the girls who bullied Monday and Claudia, went so far as to sneak a picture of Claudia and Monday in a compromising position and posted it on social media as a "confirmation" of the sexual relationship between the two. Increased Bullying and fights ensued as the girls sought to

maintain their "good girl" status. It is suggested that Black girl "goodness" does not hold space for same-sex love. We see Claudia grappling with the complexities of that as she tries to explain her relationship to Monday: "I loved her. Well, I mean, not like that. I didn't love her in a way a girl loved a girl, like romantically. I love her more like a soul mate loved a soul mate. Who makes up the rules for who your soul belongs to?" (276). Claudia marks a difference between romantic love and soulmates without any description. The only difference that is recognized is the sexual nature of the relationship. Claudia and Monday shared a deep level of intimacy with each other yet Claudia is disheartened to learn that there are secrets that Monday kept from her. Neither soul mates nor romantic partners are absolved from secrets. In this particular aspect, the relationship between Claudia and Monday was disproportional. Monday loved Claudia but sought other romantic relationships.

Monday expresses her interest in boys at the beginning of the novel, an interest that was not shared by Claudia. We are robbed of Monday's agency to tell her own story about her identity and journey. Instead, we learn about two sexual encounters that Monday had from the boys that she engaged with. Both boys focused on maintaining silence around their encounters Monday, a secret because they were ashamed to be associated with her publicly. This novel reinforces Black girl's responsibility to maintain purity while restricting their creative exploration of themselves and their bodies. There is a disconnect between the sexual encounters that Monday experienced from the guys' perspective and Monday's inner

thoughts and feelings. We experience Monday's first crush on Jacob Miller throughout the novel. Monday transforms herself to peak Jacob's interest and get him to claim her publicly. Monday decided to start a hair braiding business for boys at school to show off her skills. Eventually, she catches Jacob's interest and agrees to sneak into Jacob's house to braid his hair in exchange for Jacob claiming Monday as his girlfriend. However, Jacob changed his act once he arrived at school and refused to acknowledge Monday or the fact that she braided his hair. We later find out that Jacob and Monday hung out multiple times, kissed and Monday sucked Jacob's dick (113, 299). Monday attempts to dye her hair blond like Beyoncé because Jacob told her that he would claim her at school as his girlfriend if she did. Monday's relationship with Jacob and others caused tension between Claudia and Monday. April used her knowledge of Monday's life outside of Claudia as leverage against Claudia to break up her memories of Monday so she would remember the past. April criticized Claudia's shelteredness and clinginess to Monday. When asked why Monday kept her relations a secret, April retorted, "Cause you too stuck up! Monday told me how all you wanted to do was stay in the house with your bougie parents, coloring, and playing with dolls like some little kid. If she'd told you, all you would have done is judged her. (Jackson, 319)

Claudia's relationship with Monday left no room for Monday's sexual identity or exploration. When April reveals that Monday slept with Darrell, Claudia refused to believe it because of April's reputation as a liar so April called Darren over to confirm. Claudia was

raised to reject Black women that are different. We can see this in the interactions between Patti Charles and Claudia's mother. Claudia's mother is the model for respectable motherhood, nurturing her family, supporting her community, and upholding her morality. Before we realize the outcome of Patti's story, Patti is portrayed as a stereotypical "Sapphire/ghetto Black mother" who is loud, rambunctious, angry, and violent. She looms her presence over her children. While physically present, she is emotional from her family except for the abuse that the children experienced at the hands of Patti and each other. Because the novel is told from Claudia, we do not get any background information on Patti, her geography, her upbringing, or community. We are only informed that Patti is a terribly absent, abusive mother without any insight into the circumstances that might have influenced her choices.

Mapping Monday's body geography throughout the text requires us to trace Monday's narrative before and after she disappeared. Claudia's mother emphasizes the importance of Black girls leaving behind "breadcrumbs" just in case something happens (104). A part of the Black girls' survival is built in their preparation for the unimaginable. As we retrace, retell Monday's story, we learn that there were always signs of trouble with Monday. We first see Monday with bruises on her back which she dismissed as a result of her falling out of bed. (68) Claudia notices bite marks on her shoulder which she attributed to her brother Autumn's tantrums. On two separate occasions, Monday arrived at school disheveled and disoriented. It is alluded that this disorientation is a result of her punishment.

After she gets into a fight with Jacob, Monday arrives to school the following Monday in the same close from the week before, smelling like piss (139). It is in Claudia 's remembering and retelling of the story of Monday that the pieces of Monday's life began to become clearer and fit together, After Claudia notices that Monday is missing, she is told that Monday has moved, she's visiting her aunt, then her dad, then homeschooling. Claudia enlists the help of her teacher, Ms. Valente, who seems like one of the few adults concerned with Monday's absence.[27] Claudia attempts to file a police report but she is chastised by the Detective for using resources and taking them away from girls who are actually missing versus those who have run away. We discover in Claudia's present past, that Monday had a close relation with the school nurse who tried to save Monday and her siblings. It is not until the end of the novel that we realize that Claudia has been (re)membering Monday's death over the last two years. The community has come together to try to help Claudia process and move forward from Monday's death by playing along as she relives the time leading up to Monday's death. Monday and her brother Autumn were found stuffed in the freezer in her mother's apartment. Monday had been missing for 9 months and was found with over 2 dozen healed scars/ (175/375). After the funeral, April requests Claudia to visit her. April semi confesses to the murder of Monday because was trying to split up the family by asking Claudia's mother to help because the family was getting evicted.(393) Eventually Claudia's mother takes the fall for Monday's death along with Autumn.

[27] Jackson, 95, 103, 163.

Monday's Not Coming also traces the geography of consciousness, time, and memory. The novel usurps temporality and projects readers the middle of Claudia's consciousness as she attempts to unravel time and memory for herself and Monday. Toni Morrison states, "History versus memory, and memory versus memorylessness. Rememory as in recollecting and remembering as in resembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past. And it was the struggle, the pitched battle between remembering and forgetting then became a device of the narrative. The effort to both remember and not know became the structure of the text. Nobody in the book can bear too long to dwell on the past; nobody can avoid it. (324) Jackson builds upon Morrison's device of rememory to try to piece Claudia's memory back together. At the end of the novel, we discover that Claudia has experienced a psychotic break under the weight of grief from losing her other half, her best friend and leading the search for her best friend when no one listened. Claudia's rememory and reliability as a narrator are juxtaposed against her dyslexia. As we experience the unraveling of Monday's memory and story, we also see the unraveling of Claudia's concept of time, memory, and consciousness. Before Monday disappeared, Claudia had a set understanding of how her/the world works. Good Black girls were smart, moral, pure, not fast, respectable, and did not cause trouble. Claudia' s dyslexia diagnosis disrupts this narrative (122). Intellectual challenges and differences disqualify her from being a smart Black girl, which therefore remove her from good Black girl status. Contrastingly, Monday, whose geography automatically casts her as a "bad" Black girl excels academically which

disrupts the "bad Black girl" narrative. Monday and Claudia's friendship allows them to both obtain the status of goodness due to Monday's ability to maintain their academic success and Claudia's ability to maintain their morality and respectability. Without Monday, Claudia struggles academically and mentally, not only because Monday is not there to do her homework but also because she believes that her dyslexia prevents everyone from taking her concerns about Monday seriously. Claudia and Monday challenged the traditional lens of knowledge production through the excavation of multiple ways of knowing. While Monday was successful in traditional academic spaces, Claudia excelled in creative spaces. From nail design to dance routines, to noticing small details, Claudia's consciousness allows her to see the world through a different lens and ultimately saves Monday and Autumn from the freezer. She not only sees the world differently, but she also hears it differently. We get a glimpse into Claudia's psyche as you assign various characters colors to comprehend them in her mind. A part of Claudia' disassociation with her present reality begins when she starts to hear the buzzing noise. At the end, we learn that the buzzing noise is from the freezer where Monday was found. In death, Monday was talking back to Claudia. As her final act of closure to transition fully into the present and future, she revisits Monday's house to understand what happened to Monday. While she doesn't get an explanation of what happened, her conversation with Monday's neighbor helps her to help her transition the buzzing from a traumatic sound that drags back into the two-year cycle of horror to melody that allows her to still see and hear Monday as she gets older.

Conclusion

The mapping of the memories, realities, and bodily geographies of Claudia and Monday resist linear paths and instead exist as cyclic unraveling. We began with outward images of who Claudia thinks she and Monday are and end with emerged "quare" realities of who they were and who Claudia will be. Tiffany D. Jacksons *Monday's Not Coming* is written as a Black Quare Girl narrative that talks back to Toni Morrison's *Sula.* Both novels centering the relationhoods of Blackgirls Sula and Nel and Monday and Claudia as they explore the (un)learning of themselves, their bodies, and their relationships with each other. The crux of their relationships is what holds them together through the struggle to disconnect from what they thought they knew about what it meant to be a Blackgirl to the realities and imaginations of who they wanted to be. Body geographies become central within these Black Quare Girl narratives because they serve as maps that trace their understanding of their bodies and sexuality as Blackgirls in society. It allows them to imagine what it means to center themselves in their bodies, their narratives, their sexualities, and their lives. Black Quare girlhood frames the ways that the body geographies overlap and intersect. Sula/Nel and Claudia/Monday/April's understanding of their bodies/sexualities/geographies do not exist without each other. As Philip, McKittrick, and Wynter state, the space between (our humanness) is built on relation and adaptation. It the communities (ones assigned to us and ones that we cultivate) that help Blackgirls understand where they have been and imagine the lives that they want to lead where they are going.

CHAPTER THREE: #BLACKGIRLSAVAGE: THE BLACK RATCHET IMAGINATION AND BLACK QUARE GIRLHOOD

> "Wayward: to wander, to be unmoored, adrift, rambling, roving, cruising, strolling, and seeking. To claim the right to opacity. To strike, to riot, to refuse. To love what is not loved. To be lost in the world. It is the practice of the social otherwise, the insurgent ground that enables new possibilities and new vocabularies; it is the lived experience of enclosure and segregation, assembling and huddling together. It is the directionless search for a free territory; it is a practice of making and relation that enfolds within the policed boundaries of the dark ghetto...It is a queer resource of Black survival. It is a beautiful experiment in how to live. Waywardness is a practice of possibility at a time when all roads, except the ones created by smashing out, are foreclosed. It obeys no rules and abides no authorities. It is unrepentant. It traffics in occult visions of other worlds and dreams of a different kind of life. Waywardness is an ongoing exploration of what might be; it is an improvisation with the terms of social existence, when the terms have already been dedicated, when there is little room to breathe, when you have been sentenced to a life of servitude, when the house of bondage looms in whatever direction you move. It is the untiring practice of trying to live when you were never meant to survive (227-228).
>
> Sadiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*[28]

Historian Sadiya Hartman's waywardness as a theory of survival, resistance, Black being that allows Black people to resist the boundaries of expectation of living in exchange

[28] Hartman, Saidiya V. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval.* , 2019.

of living as imagination and "experiments." She declares that this way of living is queer—it is outrageous, it is countercultural and necessary. Waywardness, Quareness, and Ratchetness are all ways of being that Black folk, specifically Blackgirls take up to reimagining their worlds for themselves. There is a distinct relationship between Black (Quare) Girlhood, music, and culture. From Kyra Gaunt's assertions about music and play as vital parts of Blackgirls' embodies practices to L. H. Stallings' use of funk to hash out the past, present, and future state of sexual aesthetics, politics, and cultures to the foreground of Black Girlhood Studies in hip-hip and hip-hop pedagogies, music and culture have played a foundational role in how we see ourselves and cultivate definitions of our narratives.[29] Specifically, Black Girlhood and hip hop have had an interesting and somewhat tumultuous relationship as it has serves as a space where Blackgirls innovate dynamics of definition, creativity, and storytelling with the words that they write and sings, the way they dress, and the movements of their bodies as a part of their exploration of the self, their sexuality, and their knowing. Yet, it has also served as an oppressive space where Blackgirl bodies, knowledge, and sexualities have been objectified and subjected to violence and policing both by the artists and institutions in the music industry and by institutions that object to hip-hop such as the Black Church and education. The South as a geography/landscape and

[29] I reference the texts *Games that Black Girls Play* by Kyra Gaunt, *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* by L.H. Stallings, and *Black Girlhood Celebration: Toward a Hip Hop Feminist Pedagogy* by Ruth Nicole Brown as three central works that link the relationship between music and Blackgirl aesthetics and cultural formation.

politics functions as a space for Black girl innovation and creativity. The South serves as a "homespace" through which Black girl identity is created and evolved. Black Quare Girlhood is an inherently southern space where Black girls foster their own geographies of freedom in bodily and sexual expression and narrative identity.

I invoke L. H. Stallings' Black Ratchet Imagination alongside Nikki Lane's Quare Ratchetness and Black Quare Girlhood in order to highlight the ways that Blackgirls take up Quare ratchetness as a way to remain their worlds through Southern cultural aesthetics, body geography politics. I view ratchetness as an identity/method that Blackgirls use for the reimagination of themselves that allows to resist oppressive spaces and create spaces of freedom. Meg Thee Stallion and Cardi B's proclamation of their identity and bodies in "Savages" and "WAP" are examples of the ways that Black girls are reclaiming homespaces within and for their bodies. The birth of ratchetness, particularly in the Southern tradition, serves as an act of liberation and resistance against oppressive expectations of Southern womanhood. Black girls have been moved out of these homespaces and a part of their liberation is reclaiming those things they already are. Ratchet is defined initially by Phunk Dawg as "ghetto, real, gutter, nasty or to be 'bout it." (Brown, 45) Brown and Young borrow Sesali Bowen's assertion that "ratchetness" is a term that is rooted in the American South and working-class politics. It exists as an "othered" space where those who do not align with the standards of Southern Blackness are housed. Nikki Lane builds upon the

foundation of "womanism" and "quare" in order to trace the linguistic journey of ratchet. Ratchet as an etymology is defined as the following:

> **"Ratchet" Etymology** (with apologies to E. Patrick Johnson [2001] and Alice Walker [1983])
>
> > Ratchet (ra-CHit), adj. 1. meaning wretched, raunchy, and/or raggedy; also, opp. of highbrow; having low taste, or tacky; from the African American Southern vernacular for wretched; sometimes negative in connotation; denotes a purposeful or careless excess of funk, attitude, filth, and/or grime. Antonyms, classy, professional, and boojie.
> >
> > adj. 2. socially unacceptable, and/or outside of norms within Black sexual and cultural politics and community; often used to describe a person who acts out and "acts up" intentionally, or not, with excess.
> >
> > adv. 3. lack of pretense, or care for socially acceptable standards; often used to describe an action performed with total disregard for propriety.
> >
> > 4. *ratchet* is to wretched as *quare* is to queer. (35)"

Lane's contextualization of ratchet is intentionally Southern, intentionally Black, intentionally working-class, intentionally sexual, and intentionally messy to place it in direct contrast to Southern traditions of respectability that centers white civility. Ratchetness is a tactic of resistance; it disrupts, "acts up, acts out" and ultimately performs and identifies outside boundaries and restrictions. Lane states,

> *"Ratchet*, and struggles over who and what is *ratchet*, forces conversations about what it means for a Black person to be respectable, "a credit to the race," and the right kind of American. Struggles over ratchet also bring to light the racist ideological assumption that all Black people are, naturally, at our core, really just "niggas." In a white supremacist society such as ours, this racist idea haunts us regardless of our economic class, but it also affects our language practices and our understandings of Black "authenticity" and respectability" (37).

Ratchetness is positioned as the antithesis of respectability due to its refusal to bend and morph into citizenship. Boojie politics are synonymous with respectability politics due to their shared goal of separation from the working/lower class and ascension into a space of accepted and recognizable Blackness/humanness/citizenship. The dichotomy established between classy/boojie/respectable Blackness and ratchet niggas and hoes is rooted in remnants of the Southern racism and tradition. The danger in the status of the "rachet niggas and hoes" is that it resembles Southern racist ideologies of "niggers" and "jezebels/whores" that Black people have been trying to free themselves. Thus, spaces of freedom (of self, of body, of thought, of sexuality, of spirit, etc.,) are automatically rejected as ratchet by the mainstream because of their resistance to boundaries of being. I am particularly interested in L.H. Stallings' theorization of "stank matter" and the "Dirty South " in conversation with ratchetness as a way to think through the ways that Blackgirls and Black Quare Girlhood transgress Southern expectations of tradition and respectability.

Stallings defines "stank matter" as "a form of creative energy generated by the self and the self's relationship to sacred forces. Stank matter writes and orders my relationship as imaginative freedom for a sacred subjectivity that exists before narratives of gender hierarchy and sexual pathology can coerce it into a social and political subject that is not of my own making" (123-124)/ The "(Dirt)Dirty South" as taken up by Stallings' references "cultural production, hip-hop, regionalism, concerns of gender and sexuality; "the dirty" in its finest and filthiest iterations it exists as the simultaneous place and practice of intersectional politics, critiques of moral authority, and the development of regional aesthetic philosophies whose purpose is dismantling and reinventing southern public spheres largely erected out of the sexual economy of slavery and sustained by settler colonialism. (3-5) Stallings' layout of "stank matter", "(dirt)Dirty South" and the Black Ratchet Imagination all speak to the messiness and restriction of these Southern possibilities. They resist the structure, conformity, and cleanliness of what Zandria Robinson refers to as "(country)cosmopolitanism" or the bougie/boojie[30] class performances of niceness and morality as equated to citizenship that are denied to them. Stallings also references the ways

[30] Bougie is defined as "relating to or characteristic of a person who indulges in some of the luxuries and comforts of a fancy lifestyle; *Often Disparaging and Offensive*. relating to or characteristic of a person who aspires to the upper middle class, especially when regarded as being elitist or snobbish:". (https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bougie) Boojie refers to Nikki Lane's definition and spelling of the word. Lane, Nikki. *The Black Queer Work of Ratchet : Race, Gender, Sexuality, and the (Anti)Politics of Respectability*, Springer International Publishing AG, 2019. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy2.cl.msu.edu/lib/michstate-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5986790.

that dirt/Dirty south resist categorization and instead advocate for the unification of the whole body/soul self (43). In these same ways, I argue that Black Quare Girlhood resists categories and argues for the existence of the full self in space/time, identity.

Quaring Ratchet Black Girlhood: Reimagining BlackGirl Possibilities

The concept of liberation for Black girl bodies and beings is not new, instead ever evolving with each generation. This current era of Black girlhood seeks liminal spaces that allow for intersectional existences in which the fullness of the self is allowed to flourish. To be a Black girl in America is to be in a constant state of fragmentation; silencing parts of themselves to assimilate into culture. Thinking through Christina Sharpe's "living in the wake" as an embodied practice of resiliency and resistance, we understand that the basis of Black life and Black subjectivity is one of trauma and suffering. Thus, "living in the wake", as Sharpe determines, is a form of resistance that allows us to live in the knowledge of the afterlife of slavery while forging new pathways of seeing ourselves and our futures. It is through this knowledge that we imagine Black Quare Girlhood as a part of BlackGirl futures and liberatory spaces. In this way, we must examine the tools that Black girls engage in and the methods that they have adopted to reimagine their worlds. L.H. Stallings', the Black Ratchet Imagination is built upon Robin D.G. Kelley's framework, the Black Radical Imagination, which centers the reimagining of worlds of freedom and possibilities for Black folks in the midst of oppression and racial violence. Kelly states "It is not enough to imagine a world without oppression (especially since we don't always recognize the variety of forms

or modes in which oppression occurs) but understanding the mechanisms or processes that not only reproduce structural inequality but make them common sense and render those processes natural or invisible. The Black Radical Imagination is not a thing but a process, the ideas generated from what Gramsci calls a "philosophy of practice."[31] Black Radical Imagination has undergone many interpretations, as a part of Afropessimism tradition, that Kelley argues are counter to radical imaginations original goal. [32] The Black Radical Imagination and its offset, the Black Ratchet Imagination, focus on the intricacies of power, time, and alternative worldmaking. More specifically, it brings itself into conversation with Christina Sharpe's theorization of "living in the wake". Sharpe antiquates that the Black community exist within the afterlife of slavery and a consciousness of survival in the midst of daily oppressions. "The Black radical imagination,..., is a collective imagination engaged in an actual movement for liberation. It is fundamentally a product of struggle of victories and losses, crises and openings, and endless conversations circulating in a shared environment." (Kelley, 150) The Black Radical and Ratchet Imaginations centers the creative consciousness to cultivate resistance practices of joy and self-identification. Furthermore, they decenter

[31] http://www.redwedgemagazine.com/online-issue/Black-art-matters-roundtable-Black-radical-imaginatio
[32] Afropessimism, coined by Frank Wilderson, is defined as "is less of a theory and more of a metatheory: a critical project that, by deploying Blackness as a lens of interpretation, interrogates the unspoken, assumptive logic of Marxism, postcolonialism, psychoanalysis, and feminism. … It is pessimistic about the claims theories of liberation make when these theories try to explain Black suffering or when they analogize Black suffering with the suffering of other oppressed beings; it is a heuristic strategy for diagnosing how Black people are positioned, contained, and punished within prevailing discourses and arrangements. It provides a way to register how they are both excluded from and necessary to the category of the Human." (https://www.aaihs.org/afropessimisms-contributions-to-Black-studies/)

whiteness and oppression as central to their narratives in order to rewrite the ways that they engage with the self, the community, and the larger world.

The Black Ratchet Imagination is Stalling's theoretical reimagining of Southernness, ratchetness, and hip hop, specifically strip clubs, freaknik, and spaces that represent digressions from the norm, (in terms of closeted spaces), as liberatory spaces in which both men and women are to consume the pleasure of performance freely. Stallings positions these spaces as "queer" spaces that resistance C. Riley Snorton refers to these "glass closets" as "simultaneity of hypervisibility and opacity that characterize representations of Black sexuality in which the closet is both "obviously" transparent and a space for subterfuge. The glass closet, for those who inhabit it, is a space of containment that comprises the possibility for constraint and the possibility of possibility itself."(96) In terms of Black girls and their identities, the "closet" functions as a translucent space where Black girls act out the complexities of existing in between identities and spaces while forging possibilities for life outside of restricted, closeted spaces. The Black Ratchet Imagination serves as a "glass closet" space that produces an unclothing of restricted ideals of sexuality and radical engagement with new notions of pleasure and play. Stallings uses queer theory and queer identity as a staple in the argument of Black Ratchet Imagination through the centering of "transitional bodies" and the designation of strip clubs as "transitional queer spaces" in order to (135). What makes these bodies and spaces transitionally queer spaces is the fluidity of the

properties of the spaces and the ways that queer Black bodies and Black women's bodies are centered within this space, even as their bodies are simultaneously marked invisible.

The Black Ratchet Imagination tackles two important factors that influence the substantiation of ratchet possibilities: geography and queer /quare identity. The birthplace of ratchetness in the South contains certain implications for those who engage in the practice of ratchetness. The definition of ratchetness is rooted in the distinction between those who are educated and respectable and those who are uneducated, "uncultured" and deviant. What makes ratchetness attractive to those outside of the scope of day to day is the ability to put on, perform, and ratchetness without the negative consequences associated with the identity of ratchetness. Similarly, the geographical and cultural reputation of the South (both the American and Global South) carries with it stigmas of ignorance, lack of advancement, and lack of culture. The relationship between hip hop and ratchetness is tied to the larger conversation of the South's contribution and place in Hip Hop. "There's long been a dismissal of Southern rap that's rooted in a kind of respectability politics that mirrors that of anti-Black racism and white classism", according to Hip Hop critic Briana Younger, "Southerners, and by extension their contributions to rap, are often treated as though they are anti-intellectual and unsophisticated".[33] For some, the South lacked the nuance to be considered a major player in hip hop culture. However, in the famous words of Andre 3000,

[33] https://www.npr.org/2020/08/03/897745376/the-south-is-raps-past-present-and-future

"It's like this, the South has always had sumthin to say."[34] The Southern style of hip hop has marked a lane of its own through the constant reinvention of its sound to reflect the uniqueness of the region and the culture. There is much contention surrounding who and what states are considered as a part of the U.S. South. According to Younger, the borders of Southern hip hop "stretches from Texas to Southern Virginia and points in between but largely skirts the Midwest (namely Missouri) and the Mid-Atlantic (namely DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia). It ends with defining its equally amorphous sounds — from Miami bass to New Orleans bounce to Memphis buck to Houston chopped-and-screwed to Atlanta trap and derivatives thereof." [35]It is important to include Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, North and South Carolina, Arkansas, and Kentucky which are often left out of conversations about Southern Hip-Hop influence.

The U.S. South, Hip-Hop, and Black women are intricately intertwined. Black women have influenced (and continue to influence) the genre's evolution and the emergence of Hip-Hop in the South. Younger highlights that 1979 group, Sequence, and their song "Funk You Up" were the hip hop song made by a Southern rap group , although they are often erased from the conversation of Southern hip Hop. This historiography of hip hop and Black women is important due the centering of Black women's bodies as a

[34] 1995 Source Hip Hop Awards- Best New Artist Acceptance Speech/ https://www.npr.org/2020/08/03/891852910/the-south-got-something-to-say-a-celebration-of-southern-rap-1989-1994 / https://www.npr.org/2020/08/03/897745376/the-south-is-raps-past-present-and-future
[35] https://www.npr.org/2020/08/03/897745376/the-south-is-raps-past-present-and-future

geographical site of desire, pleasure, and violence in music in the midst of the erasure of Black women hip hop artists, their music, their desire, their pleasure, and their labor. The reimagination of Black women's engagement with the self, the body, and the world causes us to revisit the traditional scripts of Black women's engagements with their bodies and sexuality in order to reimagine the ways that Black women have acted in resistance to negative tropes about their bodies and creative spaces of possibility throughout history. The Black Ratchet imagination challenges us to reimagine the past in order to really imagine the possibilities of the future. One way of doing that is to rethink Black women's physical, sexual, and emotional presence in Hip Hop as liberatory spaces instead of oppressive ones.

On September 8, 2020, rapper Suki Hana tweeted "I'm a city girl in my music but baby I am a wife and a mother too. So, when I sing about hoe shit just know I'm singing about what I do to my king."[36] Suki Hana calls us to acknowledge the intersections of her identity as both a rapper, a woman, and a wife. Hana, originally from Wilmington, DE and raised in Atlanta, GA, grounds herself as a "city girl" in her music. According to Urban Dictionary, a "city girl" is defined as a girl who don't "give a fuck bout no nigga in her bag one way or other; not a hoe but can be one and likes to have fun because you only live once tf ." Armoring herself with the "city girl" adjective, Suki Hana aligns herself with a class of other female rappers such as Nicki Minaj, Megan Thee Stallion, City Girls, Cardi B,

[36] Hana, Suki (@sukihanagoat). "I'm a city girl in my music but baby I am a wife and mother too. So, When I sing about hoe shit just know I'm singing about what I do to my king".9/8/20.

Flo Milla, Saweetie, Kash Doll, and others who have emerged as this generation's symbols of Black girl freedom and sexuality. Through the centering of sexual liberation, independence, and determination, these women's literary narratives (songs/lyrics) have flipped the script of the "bitch/ho"[37] dichotomy from one of insult to one of empowerment. They admonish Black women to lay claim to their bodies and own their desires. The centering of female pleasure detracts from the male centered industry and the male gaze that champions male pleasure and dismisses Black girl's bodies and desires as an unimportant afterthought. The reclamation of "hoe" in "hoe shit" seeks to acknowledge a layered ownership of the Black female body. Ho/hoe, in this context, is defined as " a U.S. derogatory term for a woman; interchangeable with video model, street prostitute, exotic dancer, freak, chicken head, and gold digger."[38]While the original definition of the "hoe" was seen as a means of degradation of Black women's bodies and desires as deviant, new age proclamation of "hoe shit" allows Black girls/women to divulge and demand their own agency around them bodies and explorations of their own pleasures. The complicated history surrounding the defining of ho/hoe is mirrored in the ways that it is engaged by the most respectable and most liberated.

[37] Collins, Patricia Hill. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, And The Politics Of Empowerment. Boston : Unwin Hyman, 1990. Print.

[38] Definition taken from *The Collins English Dictionary* and Mireille Miller- Young, " hip Hop Honeys and Da hustlaz: Black Sexualities in the New Hip-Hop Pornography." Meridians: Feminisms, Race Transnationalism *, no 1 (2008): 276; Little, Mahaliah Ayana. " Why Don't We Love These Hoes?: Black Women, Popular Culture, and THe Contemporary Hoe Archetype", In *Black Female Sexualities,* Trimiko Melancon and Joanne M. Braxton Ed., Rutgers, 90-91, 2015.

Suki Hana roots her claim to "hoe shit" in her proximity to marriage and motherhood. In the tweet, Hana links her "hoe shit" to her performance for her king (her husband). Suki Hana's tweet mirrors traditional tenets of "respectable Black womanhood" and Christianity that deem sex and pleasure as reserved for the husband. By evoking marriage as a justification for "city girl/hoe shit", Suki presents a case for wifehood as a performative shield that protects her and other wives from the negative connotations and consequences of being associated with the hoe classification. This highlights an interesting argument in the continual conversation surrounding Black female hip-hop artists, Black women, and sexual liberation. Even as Black women continually work to claim/maintain ownership and agency over their bodies, the question of "acceptable hoedom" continually arises. As Black female rappers and Black women continue to evolve in their quest to claim credibility, agency, and liberation, society seems to still be haunted by historical tropes of Black womanhood such as the Mammy, Jezebel, Matriarch, and Sapphire that seek to define and restrict the possibilities of Black woman futures.

Hot Girl Savage: Megan Thee Stallion's Blackgirl Artistry

Following a long lineage of Black women rappers who have blurred the lines of respectable/ratchet Black womanhood through their expressions of sexuality, sensuality, and their own definitions of what it means to be a Black woman. Megan Thee Stallion, born Megan Jovan Ruth Pete, was born on February 15, 1995 in San Antonio, Texas and raised in

Houston, Texas.[39] Megan has at least 3 alter egos that she describes as: "Hot Girl Meg ("my party girl, my wild side"), Tina Snow ("When I'm feeling that cocky pimp talk, that's her"), and Megan Thee Stallion ("the super-confident all-around strong woman")."[40] She developed the name Megan Thee Stallion due to her height (5'10) and her bodacious curves. Following in the footsteps of her mother rapper Holly Wood, Megan began rapping in 2016 and released her first mixtape, *Rich Ratchet*, and EP, *Make It Hot*, were released. After signing her first record deal, Megan released her mixtapes, *Tina Snow* in 2018 and *Fever* in 2019. On March 6, 2020, Megan released her EP, *Suga,* that featured her hit single Savage. Megan Thee Stallion's 2020 hits, Savage and Savage Remix (ft. Beyoncé), present the intersectional identities that represent both tropes that have long defined Black women and those long denied to Black women. In the famous chorus, Megan and Beyoncé declare:

I'm a savage (yeah)

Classy, bougie, ratchet (yeah)

Sassy, moody, nasty (hey, hey, yeah)

Acting stupid, what's happening? Bitch (whoa, whoa)

What's happening? Bitch (whoa, whoa)

I'm a savage, yeah

[39] https://www.imdb.com/name/nm10708271/bio / https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/megan-thee-stallion-freestyle-808378/ /https://www.marieclaire.com/celebrity/a31932416/megan-thee-stallion-interview-2020/

[40] https://www.marieclaire.com/celebrity/a31932416/megan-thee-stallion-interview-2020/

Classy, bougie, ratchet, yeah

Sassy, moody, nasty, huh

Acting stupid, what's happening? Bitch

What's happening? (Ayy, ah)"[41]

The chorus centers the intersections of Megan's identity as Black woman as classy, bougie, ratchet, sassy, moody, and nasty. The juxtaposition of the classy, bougie, and ratchet together represent the "positive" expectations of Black women to maintain a standard of "classiness" as acceptance in society alongside "bougieness" and "ratchetness" as alternative tropes that are placed upon Black women. According to dictionary.com, *bougie* is defined as "relating to or characteristic of a person who aspires to the upper middle class, especially when regarded as being elitist or snobbish:"[42] In the Black community, to be called bougie is viewed as a critique/insult placed upon someone, usually Black women, who are seen as stuck up or thinking that they are better than other Black people.

Beyoncé's journey as an artist and Black woman has continually evolved throughout her career. Black feminists have followed Beyoncé's journey through the lens of feminism and her transition from beheld jezebel to transformed feminist to radical Black icon. In the last 8 years, Beyoncé has become more open about her Blackness and her experiences as a Black woman. Starting with her *BEYONCÉ* album in 2013 where she proudly proclaimed

[41] https://www.metrolyrics.com/savage-lyrics-megan-thee-stallion.html
[42] https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bougie

her feminism, her body, and her sexuality, to her 2016 *Lemonade* where she stepped fully into her identity as a Black woman through the geographical and generational uncovering of the experiences of Southern Black women. Beyoncé's identity and career focused from global success to the acknowledgement of her identity as a Houston born, Black girl with Southern roots. However, Beyoncé also represents a particular type of privilege as a brown skinned jezebel-esque character who is also a married mother of three children. Beyoncé 's marriage to Jay-Z and motherhood provide her with a particular type of currency that provides her certain types of access and allowances in her expressions of her sexuality. Ashley N. Payne refers to this "ratchet-respectability complex" as the *Cardi B- Beyoncé complex,*[43] which grapples with the "intersection of ratchetness and respectability in educational settings and the influence of Hip-Hop artists and images on the construction of ratchet-respectability identities" (38). Payne notes that the Black girls in her group perceived Beyoncé as more reserved than Cardi B who they perceived as "real" or always being her loud, carefree, and "no filter" self (38). However, Beyoncé's verse on the "Savage Remix" represents another departure from her former image as a racially ambiguous, reserved musical artist. Beyoncé makes a generational connection through her embrace of TikTok

[43] Payne, Ashley N. "The Cardi B–Beyoncé Complex: Ratchet Respectability and Black Adolescent Girlhood." *The Journal of Hip Hop Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020, pp. 26-43,116. *ProQuest*, http://ezproxy.msu.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.proxy1.cl.msu.edu/docview/2435723142?accountid=12598.

and OnlyFans. She highlights her "savage" identity as being rooted in her mama, Tina Knowles- Lawson, her Texas heritage, and her wealth. Beyoncé proclaims,

Hips TikTok when I dance (Dance)

On that Demon Time, I might start a OnlyFans (OnlyFans)

Big B and that B stands for bands

If you wanna see some real ass, baby, here's your change

I say, left cheek, right cheek, drop it low, then swang (Swang)

Texas up in this thang (Thang), put you up on game (Game)

IVY PARK on my frame (Frame), gang, gang, gang ,gang (Gang)

If you don't jump to put jeans on, baby you don't feel my pain (Hol' up)

Please don't get me hype (I'm hype), write my name in ice (Ice, ice, ice)

Can't argue with these lazy bitches, I just raise my price

I'm a boss, I'm a leader, I pull up in my two-seater

And my mama was a savage, nigga got this shit from Tina (Savage Remix) [44]

Beyoncé connects her relationship to savageness to the intergenerational connections between Black women and Black girls. She highlights the sacred inheritance of being a "boss" and a "savage." Interwoven into this "intergenerational knowledge" is a geographical knowledge that embodies knowledge of the place, knowledge of culture, and knowledge of the bodies of Black women and girls that have come before her. As Beyoncé continues to

[44] https://genius.com/Megan-thee-stallion-savage-remix-lyrics

embrace her identity as a Southern Black woman, her music continues to become bolder and more unapologetic. While Payne's Cardi B-Beyoncé complex makes space for us to analyze the varying tropes, personas, and characteristics of Black women, it is missing a key element of analysis to examine the differences between Beyoncé and Cardi B: Geography. As Black Quare Girlhood emphasizes, geography shapes personal and professional identities. Cardi B, perceived as a real, carefree, "no filter" Black Dominican girl grew up in Bronx, New York, which has a historic root in the Hip Hop scene. In contrast, Beyoncé grew up in Houston, Texas. Although Houston has its own hip hop scene, Southern politics, and values such as religion, modesty, and respectability deeply informed the growth of the genre—and women's participation in the genre. Growing up in the South, Beyoncé's persona and performance was heavily influenced by her religious and communal ties to respectability, which dictate certain acts of decorum for Black girls and women (39). Therefore, the Cardi B-Beyoncé complex and ratchet-respectability politics must include an analysis of the influence of geographic and cultural influences on Black girls and women identities, performances, and presentation.

Suki Hana's tweet, as well as Megan Thee Stallion and Beyoncé's lyrics in *Savage* and *Savage Remix* represent the complexities of the relationships between Black women, their identities, and others. All three women are seeking to claim proximity to ratchetness through their proclamations of "city girl/savage." These identities provide autonomy that allows for freedom of expression, sexuality, and pleasure. However, for Suki Hana and

Beyoncé, these ratchet performances are circumvented by their marital status and the sways that this shields from social persecution. The influence of respectability and religion on the image of the "liberated woman" lays to bear the ways that women's bodies, sexuality, and identities are coexistent with their proximity to men. The heteronormative, misogynistic scoping of Black women's bodies and sexualities through the male gaze limits the ways in which Black girls and Black women are to define themselves for themselves. In particular, the geographical mapping of Southern Black girls and their bodies, is built upon the policies of politics of respectability and culture of dissemblance as means of protection.

Higginbotham's *politics of respectability* and Hines' *culture of dissemblance* served as veils of protection and surveillance that shielded Black women from the external violence of racism and sexual violence. However, these policies created internal consequences for these women for generations. Black women's relationships with their bodies and identities became ones of shame, policing, and silence. Thus, the waves of Black women in hip hop continued to push back against the argument of shame for their bodies.

Interestingly, recent conversations around Black women's bodies regurgitates the same argument that many have used previously to discredit women rappers, their artistry, and their sexuality. More contemporary women lyricists (Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, Megan thee Stallion, City Girls) are often described as desecrating the legacy of Black women in hip-hop, focusing on specific lyricists from the 80s and 90s (Lauryn Hill, MC Lyte, Missy Elliott, and Queen Latifah). By promoting their bodies and sexuality in their music, contemporary

lyricists are scolded as if Lil Kim, Foxy Brown, and others did not construct their artistry in these ways. Both groups of artists are advocating for respect for their bodies, using their words to demand ownership and material space to present their full selves. They embody Hip-Hop Feminisms, which centers women's bodies, pleasure, politics, and sexual expressions publicly. For Horsley, Hip Hop feminism:

> "Ruptures ideologies of universal womanhood, bodies, class and gender construction to center the Black identity as paramount to our experience. Seeking to develop a radical self-politic of love, empowerment, gendered perspective, and social consciousness for the historically underrepresented, hyper visualized, erased, and marginalized. Demanding that we cultivate a Black woman and women of color-centered politics to navigate Hip Hop culture and rap music" (Horsley, 103).

Building upon the tradition of Black feminism and womanism, Hip hop Feminism reimagines Black women's bodies, sexuality, and being through individual and communal lenses. In the legacy of hip hop, Black women rappers are often pitted against each other, trained to compete, and encouraged to put each other down to maintain their status. However, Hip-Hop Feminism holds space for Black women to be sexual, compete/trash talk all while holding space for one another and building community support.

Megan Thee Stallion's artistry challenges the boundaries of respectability and ratchet due to her position as an artist and advocate for change for women. At being shot by Tory Lanez (July 12, 2020), Stallion used her platform to speak out about the violence that she

experienced and society's responsibility to protect Black women. In her *New York Times* opinion piece" Why I Speak Up for Black Women", Megan challenges misogynoir [45] and the objectification of women's bodies which "helps them to justify inflicting abuse against us when we choose to exercise our own free will." She stake claims to Black women's humanity and their anger. Essentially, Black women deserved to be protected period and they have the right to be angry about the lack of respect, consideration, and protection that they receive from their communities and society. Stallion's claim that Black women deserve to be protected reiterates the slippery slope that Black women's humanity exists on. Black women can and cannot be designated as women dependent on their status, environment, and perception by others. Yet Megan's artistry and advocacy take up the political work of centering the agency and freedom of expression Black women's bodies. Stallion declares:

> "Let me repeat: I choose what I wear, not because I am trying to appeal to men, but because I am showing pride in my appearance, and a positive body image is central to who I am as a woman and a performer. I value compliments from women far more than from men. But the remarks about how I choose to present myself have often been judgmental and cruel, with many assuming that I'm dressing and performing for the male gaze. When women choose to capitalize on our sexuality, to reclaim our own power, like I have, we are vilified and disrespected."

[45] Misogynoir, as coined by scholar Moya Bailey, is defined as antiblack misogyny that Black women experience. (https://www.blackburncenter.org/post/2020/02/12/what-is-misogynoir/)

Black women, both celebrities and ordinary, have suffered under the weight of objectification, entitled gaze, and consumption. Black women's bodies have remained contested geographies that act as a tug of war between Blackgirls and women accessing ownership over their own bodies and sexualities and their bodies being coopted by others.

Stallion and other Blackgirls extend the conversation between the body and the self from twerking to dressing to existence. Megan's claim of ownership over her body, her sexuality, and the ways that she displays and performs the possibilities of Blackgirl bodily knowledge. Halliday theorizes "twerkin" as a part of Black girls' epistemology, or "an embodied conversation between one and their body – an act of vulnerability, with the possibility of healing when put on display – but, also among other bodies that privilege the controlled connection of hips, buttocks, thighs, feet, chest, arms, and hands" (Halliday, 877). Stallion asserts that her language, her dress, her twerk, her sexuality and her being are acts of resistance and reclamation that allow her to exist fully in herself. In an interview between Maxine Waters and Megan Thee Stallion, Waters references Stallion's song "W.A.P (Wet Ass Pussy)", performed with fellow rapper Cardi B, in which they boldly declare what they sexually need from their partners. Waters refers to this boldness as "audacity." Quare Black Girlhood "audacity" involves recreating new spaces and geographies where Black girl sexuality, spirituality, creativity, knowledge, activism, and more can coexist. It is the rejection of categorization and the erasure of exploration and self-definition. For this is the essence of Black girl epistemologies or Black girl knowing.

> "Black girl ways of knowing lead Black girls and women to a collective freedom that dismantles racist paradigms and misogynist dogma that keep us bound in the slavery that is dissemblance and toxic respectability. A Black girl epistemology, then, is born out of the unique and varied experiences of Black girls that we can discover through the scholarly exploration of twerking; said differently, twerking is a way to begin theorizing Black girl standpoint as we consider both the joy and pain of Black girls. If we hope to 'understand and critique [contemporary] Black sexual politics' as Durham et al. (2013, p. 730) challenge us for the future of feminism in a hip-hop world, we must turn to Black girls and the pleasure of embodiment" (Halliday, 878).

Megan Thee Stallion's artistry and advocacy embodies the foundational tenets of hip-hop feminism as Joan Morgan defines as "a feminism brave enough to fuck with the grays." (59) As an exemplar of Black Quare Framework, Megan Thee Stallion's embodied practice of Southern geography, body landscapes, quare sexual politics, advocacy, and community building models ratchet Blackgirl possibilities for a new generation.

P-Valley: Ordinary Black Girls and the Quare Black Ratchet Imagination

Black Quare Girlhood bridges the ordinary and extraordinary, ratchet, and respectable, past, present, and future together and centers existence in the messiness of memory, history, and the imagined possibilities. For Savannah Shange, "Black girl ordinary" is "that which signifies on (but does not conform to) normative notions of gender through a performative blackness shaped by hip hop, social media, and conspicuous consumption: it is

a mode of queer(ed) disidentification (Munoz 1999)." For her, it is when "Regular, degular, schmegular Black girls stay dancing in the face of state- sanctioned slow death—ours is flesh made fierce. You also might know Black girl ordinary by her government name: #blackgirlmagic. A circulated, selfied, carefree mode of Black femininity, #blackgirlmagic has been both celebrated for its affirmation of Black women's thriving despite the adversities of racial capitalism and critiqued for its association with a light and curly stratum of bourgeois negroes." (Shange, 6)[46] Ordinary Black girls reject the pressures of forced expectations and impossible standards. Instead, they pursue fulfillment, exploration, in the midst of resistance and survival. #blackgirlmagic is a celebration of Blackgirls' extraordinary ordinariness. Both #blackgirlmagic and Afrofuturism have been contested as upholding parts of respectability; however, they actually engage Blackgirl imagined possibilities and worldmaking that allow them to be who(what)ever they want to be. Black Girl ordinary conveys an alternative or othered geography within geography where Blackgirls control the

[46]#Blackgirlmagic was originally coined by Cashawn Thompson in 2013 as a way to celebrate the achievements of Black women. Since then, its utility as a frame has been hotly debated in popular media. For a nuanced intervention into #blackgirlmagic as an otherhuman, rather than superhuman, mode of Black womanhood, see Jalondra A. Davis (2018). For an accounting of the debates and the evolution of the term, see the works from Ashleigh Shackleford, Akiba Solo- mon, and Dexter Thomas below. Ashleigh Shackleford. 2016. "Hood Femmes and Ratchet Feminism: On Amandla Stenberg, Representation, and #BlackGirlMagic." For Harriet (blog). January 28. Accessed February 9, 2017. http://www. forharriet.com/2016/01/hood-femmes-ratchet-feminism-on-amandla.html#axzz51jnsWS1S; Akiba Solomon. 2016. "The Real Problem With the #BlackGirlMagic Backlash Is That You're Missing the Point." Colorlines website, January 13. Accessed December 1, 2017. https://www.colorline s.com/articles/real-problem-blackgirlmagic-backla sh-youre-missing-point; Dexter Thomas. 2015. "Why Everyone's Saying 'Black Girls Are Magic.'" Los Angeles Times website, September 9. Accessed December 15, 2017. http://www. latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-everyone s-saying-Black-girls-are-magic-20150909- htmlstory.html

happening of the space. Southern geography is characterized as an ordinary geographic space that offers little to the advancement or imagined possibilities of our worlds. Southern geographies theorize in the ordinary. They used lived experiences and embodied practices to cultivate spaces of futurity and quare imagination in the midst of sites of oppression, silencing and erasure.

STARZ series *P-Valley* coalesce Southern Quare geographies, Black Quare girlhood, Black Ratchet imaginations, and BlackGirl ordinariness to center Quare Black body geographies and worldmaking in ordinary Southern landscapes. *P-Valley* models Quare Blackgirl being and Quare community and geography building in the midst of hostile spaces. During the Summer of 2020, television series *P-Valley* took the world by storm. The show was fashioned after playwright and creator Katori Hall's stage play, *Pussy Valley*. Set in the semi-fictionally site of Chucalissa, Mississippi, *P-Valley* follows the chaotic happenings at the *Pynk*, the technically outlawed, premier strip club in the Mississippi Delta. Led by their fabulously fearless leader Uncle Clifford, dancers Mercedes, Mississippi, Gidget, alongside staff Diamond and Big L navigate their personal demons as they attempt to make lives for themselves in the small town. Each attempting to balance their dreams with the realities of their lives, they learn to lean into themselves and each other to overcome. The premise of the show centers around newcomer Autumn who blows into Chucalissa, carrying her secrets as she tries to escape her past through a new identity in the small town. Autumn who has just arrived from Houston trying to outrun her trauma and make quick

cash. After winning a booty battle, Autumn inquiries about working at the *Pynk*. Once hired, Autumn sets a plan in motion to avenge her past. Uncle Clifford's commitment to Black Quare being and community building extends to the care of the Pynk family. Uncle Clifford is the tough love giving, no nonsense, stays strapped ready to pop off , loyal, sister/auntie/Blackgirl that everyone needs in their life.

P Valley is set in Chucalissa, a city in the Mississippi Delta (The Dirty Delta). Although *P-Valley* states that Chucalissa is a fictional city, history shows that Chucalissa is an actual city located on the cusp of the Tennessee and Mississippi state line. Chucalissa serves as an archaeological site on Indigenous land.[47] bell hooks discusses the importance of *homeplaces* as spaces, physical and metaphorical, where Black women resist the violence and oppression of the outside world by creating liberatory practices and communities where they are able to love themselves and their families. hooks centers the conversation of homeplace around the roles that Black women were forced to play as domestic workers who poured themselves out for the white families they worked for within much of nothing to give to their families. For these women, homeplace represents a coming back to the self, a repositioning of priorities that center the liberation of the self and the community instead of a centering of whiteness and maleness. I would argue that the *Pynk* serves as a Blackgirl Quare homeplace for those that work there.

[47] https://www.memphis.edu/chucalissa/about/index.php#early

The *Pynk* was not just a place of employment, it was also a sanctuary and a community within a community. Uncle Clifford serves as an othermother[48], for the girls of the *Pynk* who seek sources of family as they work to provide. Throughout the season, Uncle Clifford is seen offering tough advice when the girls need to hear it, babysitting Mississippi's child as she works, comforting Mercedes in the aftermath of her volatile relationship with her mother, caring for her grandmother, and trying to save the *Pynk* and the community. *P-Valley* bridges and blurs the lines between the Old South (respectable tradition) and the New South (ratchet imaginations). The *Pynk* is quare space that fuses the rural and the cosmopolitan together. Miles refers to these to "the trap and trap feminism" as sites of messiness and contestation. He states, "Trap feminism is an intellectual framework, consciousness, and day-to-day way of being that speaks to hustling to make a way out of those spaces, physical and ideological, organized around gendered racial capitalism that are intended to keep us confined. It is the admission that Black women's aesthetic power cannot be limited to rigid American conceptions of respectability and legality (Miles, 52). The "trap" and/or "ratchet" spaces that Miles refers to are mobile spaces that one enters in and out of as necessary. Black Quareness calls us to examine the spaces of those that remain and how they transform spaces that cannot and will not depart from.

[48] An "othermother is defined as a woman)or person who care for children that are not biologically theirs.

We first meet Uncle Clifford as she is trying to maintain order at the Pynk and in town as the new mayor institutes an "No Titties and Tequila" in the city as a way to cleanse the town of ratchery. Yet, Uncle Clifford has her own rules that she abides by. Her "rules" read as a Black Quare Girlhood guidebook, a multigenerational Black girl knowing passed down and around as community knowledge. They serve as a blueprint for Blackgirl embodied theory and practice that has been passed down for generations. Uncle Clifford's Rules are as follows:

> RULE# 1: LET THAT STAGE BE A STEPPING STONE, NOT YO' TOMBSTONE. Translation: Stripping [or insert your job here] is not a forever job, so make sure that you are using your resources to secure your future. Black Quare Girlhood is a framework/practice of options and possibilities. It supports the transmission of space and landscape into whatever you need.
>
> RULE # 2: ALWAYS KNOW WHERE THE EXITS IN THIS BITCH IS, 'CUZ YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN YOU GOTSTA TURN A WINDOW INTO A DOOR. Translation: A vital part of survival is the ability to be present and in the moment while aware of the possibilities of what could happen. Black Quare Girlhood centers survive by any means necessary. Blackgirls always make a way out of no way.

RULE #24.5: NO CRYING AT THE PYNK. There is an old saying, "No use crying over spilt milk." Crying is great for reeling emotions but not for solving problems. Black Quare Girlhood focuses on providing solutions instead of dwelling unnecessarily on the problems. This is not a denial for the need of crying but a reminder to always realign your focus to the solution.

RULE #54: WE DON'T DO TAX EVASION. Black Quare Girlhood centers on living your truth in every area of your life. A part of living in truth is paying what you owe. When one denies part of themselves, they are honoring their truth. This also speaks to the importance of coalition building. No one likes taxes but they are necessary for funding the government. (We can debate the complexities of this later). In same way, Black Quare Girlhood requires the building of coalition and the sharing of resources in order to survival and thrive as individuals and collectives/

RULE #55.99: EVEN THERE AIN'T NO MONEY RAINING, DANCE LIKE TONIGHT YOUR LAST NIGHT. Whatever you decide to do, make sure that you give it your all every day, no matter what. Black Quare Girlhood, Black Ratchet Quare Imaginations etc. is about doing and being the most. It is the bold, outrageous, ratchet, bougie, ordinary audacity to do and be the best and most authentic self that you can.

RULE #57: NO COINS IN THE G-STRING. ONLY DOLLARS. Know your worth. In this particular context, coins are cheap in comparison to dollars and it

requires a larger quantity to reach the destined amount. You should never let anyone pay you or treat you less than you deserve. Black Quare Girlhood demands respect, care, and support.

RULE #67: CONTRARY TO CHUCALISSA BELIEF, AIN'T NO HOES IN THIS HOUSE! (Addition Code: - ALWAYS REMEMBER CLOSED LEGS STILL GET FED.) Black grandmothers used to say" it's not about what you are called, but what you answer to." This is a reclamation of the bodies of Quare Blackgirls' sexuality as well as a pushback against negative stereotypes of those in the sex work industry. Black Quare Girlhood supports identification and expression of one's sexuality and self on their own terms. There is a false expectation that those who work in the strip club and sex industry are hypersexual; thus, are always expected to perform sexual for others. Black Quare Girlhood rejects the judgement and objectification of bodies and give Blackgirls the choice of when, where, and how they chose to express their bodies and sexualities.

Throughout the season, we discover that everything is not as it seems at the *Pynk* and follow along as the characters try to save themselves and their community. Despite the large audience every Sunday, the *Pynk* is knee-deep in financial woes due to inherited debt and additional loans acquired by Uncle Clifford. Uncle Clifford is struggling to keep the *Pynk* afloat and battling with the corrupt mayor who's willing to do anything necessary to ensure the *Pynk's* closure. The *Pynk's* legacy as a Quare alternative space, first as a shot

house/juke joint and now as a strip club. L.H. Stallings reminds us that strip clubs are "queer spaces where transitional bodies enter and exit. The enthusiasm and excitement for this music and the space it promotes might be best understood and comprehended through the lens of queerness and sexual culture" (Stallings, Ratchet, 137-138). The *Pynk* is a distinctive queer (quare) space that center the construction and deconstructions of bodies and sexuality. Specifically, to Black Quare Girlhood, the *Pynk, is* "a space that celebrates being Southern, being ratchet, being classy, and being Hip Hop" (Payne, 30). The *Pynk* is significant because it challenges the preconceived stereotypes of the strip club and women who work there. The intentional distinctions made between strippers and people who happen to work as strippers for a living speaks to the show's goal of empowering the characters and providing an inside view of Southern life, strip club life, and life for those who work there. Uncle Clifford's RULE #67: CONTRARY TO CHUCALISSA BELIEF, AIN'T NO HOES IN THIS HOUSE and mantra ALWAYS REMEMBER, CLOSED LEGS STILL GET FED claps back at the negative connotations surrounding stripping and sex work. Throughout the show, Uncle Clifford explains to the girls that their job is to sell an experience. They are simply marketing a product to the buyers. Furthermore, a person can only be a hoe if they choose to accept the title. *P-Valley* disrupts traditional standards and expectations of Southernness and sexuality. Stallings states,

> "Black sexual cultures become a communal, embodied, and performative satirical critique of democracy, domesticity, national consciousness, capitalism, and time. If

> we think of sexual liberation as linked with racial, spiritual, and class freedom, and not as a solitary singular movement about biological gender, racial genealogy, and social and psychological histories of sexuality, we understand that everything and everyone have not been liberated. Black sexual cultures offer an alternative sexual geography in which two seemingly opposite elements, the intimate or intimacy and the ecstatic and ecstasy are placed alongside each other" (Stallings Funk, 236).

P-Valley's sexual culture centers the intimacy between the family at the *Pynk* and quare relationship between Uncle Clifford and Lil Murda. It decenters the strip club-hoe dichotomy and empowers women to define their lives for themselves. Stripping is a job that is not directly correlated to one's sexual identity. Furthermore, Black sexual cultures bridge intimacy and ecstasy which expand the ways that relationships are defined and centers mutual pleasure. Uncle Clifford, a nonbinary character who prefers she/her pronouns, cultivates quare relationships her lover, her employees, and her community. [49]As a Black Quare Girlhood character, Uncle Clifford cultivates a life that works for her. Growing up in the small town of Chucalissa, she experienced trauma around her quare identity; however, surrounded by a quare environment full of hustling for survival, Uncle Clifford had no choice but to demand visibility, respect, acceptance, and freedom. Uncle Clifford's relationship with Lil Murda, reveals the complexities of quare identity and relationships in

[49] https://www.tvguide.com/news/p-valley-uncle-clifford/ https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2020/07/p-valley-nicco-annan-uncle-clifford

the South. While Uncle Clifford was fully in her Black Quare Girlhood being, she becomes entangled with Lil Murda, an aspiring closeted rapper to get on the scene at the *Pynk*. As Uncle Clifford and Murda grow closer, they struggle to overcome the homophobia of the Black South, hypermasculine hip-hop, and Murda's own journey to define himself and his sexuality for himself. Uncle Clifford refuses to live any part of her life in the shadows and demands to be loved out loud while understanding the consequences of living boldly as a Black quare Lil Murda leans into his feelings and demands a chance to prove himself. In the last episode "Murda Night", Murder and Uncle Clifford reach an impasse, after Murda demands for him and her to go public with their love while dissing Uncle Clifford at his show and trying to hide his relationship with her in front of his friends, management, and audience. Uncle Clifford's willingness to walk away from true love in the name of self-respect and self-preservation shows that her commitment to self exists above all.

Autumn Night (Hailey), one of the main characters of the show, represents the complexities of Southern Black Girlhood. In the beginning, Autumn represented factions of traditional Black girlhood. The emphasis placed on her identity as a light skinned Blackgirl plays into long standing conversations of colorism within the Black community, especially among Black women. Autumn's character is contrasted to the other characters throughout the season. She originally clashes with Mercedes, who believes that Autumn's bouginess and

pretty (light-skinned) privilege[50] cause her to be entitled and unwilling to earn her spot at the *Pynk*. As a former corporate tax accountant, Autumn declares during her confrontation with her former lover, Delta Devoted lieutenant Montavious Hill, that people always underestimate how smart pretty girls are. He responds that "Pretty girls can get away with murder, almost." As the season unfolds, we learn that Autumn (Hailey) was dating gang member Hill but stole from the gang and ran away from Hill with her daughter. After losing her daughter in the floods of Houston, she continues to run. It is at the *Pynk* that we begin to see Autumn transition into Black Quare Girlhood. Her trajectory is rooted in her release of beauty and class as hierarchical dividers among Black women that support judgment. It is Uncle Clifford and Mercedes that teach Autumn the foundation of true family and how to trust again. They accept her without judgement and continue to use what she has to get what she needs. In *P-Valley,* relationships are both intimate, communal, and transactional. Autumn meets Andre Watkins Uncle Clifford forces Autumn to use her relationship with Andre Watkins, to gain intel on the sale of the Pynk. Autumn realizes that she cannot flip the dirty money so she must bury the hatchet with Mercedes in order to build an alliance. The true "Trinity" as Katori Hall states, fights together to save the *Pynk*

[50] Pretty Privilege is defined as "a person who has more opportunities, and becomes more **successful** **in life** because of how **attractive** they are." Pretty privilege usually includes feature such as being thin, able-bodied, cisgender, and possessing balanced and symmetrical facial features. It is also often tied to whiteness and colorism.
https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Pretty%20Privilege
/https://www.yourtango.com/2019327917/what-is-pretty-privilege-intersectionality-racism-and-how-beautiful-people-succeed-career-relationships

from killing Montavious Hill to stop him from killing Autumn, and using the money to save the *Pynk* from auction. There comes a moment in the last episode, after Mercedes comes into the VIP room to save Autumn, that Autumn has a choice to make. When Autumn goes to get the money, she runs out to the car and sits there and cries, trying to decide whether she will run again and leave the community of the *Pynk* that has helped her or she will stay and face the consequences, whatever they be, alongside her family. Ultimately, Autumn, who originally thought that she was too good for the *Pynk*, uses her money to save the *Pynk* and become part-owner of the *Pynk*.

Mercedes, the OG stripper and one of the main characters, is an example of Black Quare Girlhood, Black girl ordinary and the messiness of being a Blackgirl. After stripping for more than 10 years, Mercedes is planning her retirement from the *Pyn*k to pursue her other goals: owning her own gym and being a mother to her daughter. She has acknowledged her mistakes such as having her daughter by a married man. However, she is loyal to herself and her family at the Pynk. Mercedes has been the headliner at the *Pynk* for some time, so her pending departure brings big changes to the club. Despite her hard exterior, we see Mercedes struggle to break out of her own toxic relationship with her own mother. Mercedes's mother, Patrice Woodbrine, aspires to be pastor of her own church. She lords her respectable position over Mercedes and uses the saint/ho dichotomy to manipulate her into giving money to the Church to redeem and atone for her "sins' ' of stripping. We see that the Pastor is in on the gig and pressures Patrice to pressure Mercedes for more

money. More than anything, Mercedes strives to redeem herself in the eyes of her daughter. Because Chucalissa is a small town, everyone is aware of Mercedes's occupation as a stripper. She can only get more access to her daughter if she gains respectable employment. Mercedes battles the respectable/ratchet dichotomy of Black girlhood and survival. She is forced into the conundrum of divorcing herself from her past, occupation, and part of herself in order to gain her daughter. Mercedes's young Blackgirl dance group acts as a part of her living her dream but also her attempting to redeem/purify herself in order to qualify for respectable Black girlhood. When she hears that her daughter is twerking, Mercedes reacts negatively because she feels the shame and blame of her daughter following in her footsteps. Yet we discover that there is a lineage of sexuality, hustling, and survival from Patrice Woodbrine to Mercedes. It is hinted that Patrice possibly pimped Mercedes out at a young age to survive. Yet, Patrice embodies the stereotype of the "saved, Christian Black woman" who catches amnesia about her past life once she joins the Church.

The judgement and shame that Patrice has placed on Mercedes from childhood and adulthood, causes Mercedes to resent and reject parts of her as not good enough. Furthermore, it causes her to pass the beliefs on to her daughter. One of the pivotal moments is when Mercedes discovers that her mother has stolen the down payment for her gym, the space for the gym, her dream, and her ability to access the respectability that her mother Lord's over her. In response, Mercedes attacks her mother and they begin to fight. They both end up in jail which furthers Mercedes' dissent away from the respectable

standard. Mercedes teams up with Autumn and her neighbor Mane, to flip money in order to raise the money for a gym. Mercedes also goes against her beliefs of separation between her the personal and professional as well as her job and her identity as a Blackgirl, to ask one of her most loyal clients to loan her $10K. Coach, a coach of a national NFL team and a married man, has other plans and offers Mercedes the $10K as an investment in the gym in exchange for Mercedes retiring to Memphis to become Coach's personal side chick/mistress. He tells her that she would get a paid condo on the river and skybox access to all of the games as long as Coach has access to the condo to "enjoy his investment" and take her from the "pole to the palace." Mercedes has drawn a clear line between her job and her Blackgirl being. We do not see Mercedes engage in any intimate relationships throughout the season because she was in a committed relationship with her money. Outside of Uncle Clifford and her coworkers, Mercedes believes relationships are her downfall. Her loyalty to Uncle Clifford and the *Pynk* kept her coming back, even after she announced, "last dance." It causes her to try to save Autumn/Hailey from her ex-boyfriend and to possibly kill him (This mystery was not revealed at the end of season one). We find Mercedes searching from redemption—as she returns to the only true family that she has ever known, the quare family of the *Pynk*.

Conclusion

P-Valley and Megan Thee Stallion represent Black Quare Girlhood as seen through the usage of lens of Black Ratchet Imagination, Hip-hop feminism, and Black Girl Ordinary

in order to highlight past, present, and future methods of Blackgirl Southern geographies, and worldmaking practices of liberation and authentic being. Ratchetness, Savagery, Waywardness, and Ordinariness, and even Bougieness expose the possibilities of what Blackgirls can be when they live in the audacity to be themselves. Black Quare Framework is not a definite answer for the numerous questions and complexities of Black Girlhood but it does provide us a way to think through the nuances of Southernness, Quareness, and BlackGirlness together.

CONCLUSION: FOR GLOBAL SOUTHERN BLACKGIRLS

(For Ma'khia Bryant, Breonna Taylor, and Oluwatoyin Salau)

I am writing for Blackgirls who don't get to grow up.

For Blackgirls in defense of themselves.

For Blackgirls who are terrified.

For Blackgirls who mind their business.

For Blackgirls shot down while sleeping in bed.

For Blackgirls who defend themselves when they have to

For Blackgirls who aren't clean and fuck with the grays

For Blackgirls who are loud, sassy, regular, ratchet, smart, quiet, creative

For Blackgirls who are quare, Southern, Trans, queer, sexual, fat, thick, petite and more

For Blackgirls who are Bad Bitches, Queens, peasants, Amazons

For Blackgirls who loves themselves and others

For Blackgirls who #sayhername and #MeToo

For Blackgirls who twerk in a handstand

For Blackgirls who demand attention

For Blackgirls who Knuck If You Buck and stay about dat life

For Blackgirls who can't ask for help

For Blackgirls who are #fasttailedgirls who move in slow motion

For Blackgirls with audacity, tenacity, reclaiming their names, bodies, and time

For Blackgirls who SAVAGE with WAPS

For Blackgirls who have it together and whose lives are falling apart

For Blackgirls WHO ARE THAT GIRL, BEEN THAT GIRL, WILL ALWAYS BE THAT GIRL

For Blackgirls who are truth, who breathe light, bleed love,

For Blackgirls who be everything and in between

This project uses the relationship between Southern geographic and cultural landscapes and Blackgirl body geographies in order to map the ways that Blackgirls cultivate their own definitions around their sexualities, communities, and authentic beings. First, Black Quare Girlhood argues that Black girlhood is inherently Southern and Quare by way of geographic, theoretical, and cultural foregrounding that has been birthed from the South. This pushes back against the narratives of backwardness, and nothingness that is believed about Southern geographies. Instead, it argues that the South serves as the center of Black Quare cultural, theoretical, and geographical theorization. Black Quare Girlhood draws from Black Feminism, Womanism, Black Feminist Literary Criticism, Queer/Quare Studies, Black Feminist Geographies, Black Southern Geographies, Hip-Hop Feminism, the Black Ratchet Imagination, and Black Girl Ordinary. Collectively, they have built a foundation for understanding the ways that Quare Blackgirls reimagine their worlds and their narratives. These fields and frameworks have formed intentional spaces of centering Black girls and women's needs as well as the needs of the greater community.

Black Quare Girlhood Literature argues for the legitimacy of Black girls and women's literatures. It reinforces the necessity of Blackgirls and women telling their own stories. All of the texts in this project—*Their Eyes Were Watching God, In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens, "*In the Time Before the Men Came*", Sula, Monday's Not Coming*, Megan Thee Stallion's artistry and advocacy, as well as *P*-Valley—chart Black Quare Girlhood. Through the identity (self), the body (geographies/sexualities), and community (relationships with other Blackgirls/other communities), the texts resist stereotypes and categorization of Blackgirl bodies and identities to imagine life on their terms. Black Quare Girlhood's reimagining of the self begins the with rejection and the unlearning of negative of parts of respectability that restrict the sexuality and police their behaviors. Black Quare Girlhood resist the dichotomies of either/or for Black girls and instead supports the existence of both/and. It rejects the adultification of Blackgirls and the burden of Blackgirls' behaviors as the sole representation at the intersections of the race and gender. The lives and narratives of Janie, Nel, Sula, Claudia, Monday, April, the Amazon women, Megan Thee Stallion, Autumn, Mercedes, and Uncle Clifford, revealed unlearning forms of Black girlhood that no longer served them as they formulated a version of Black girlhood for themselves.

Black Quare Girlhood offers us entry point into conversations around Blackgirls' bodies and sexuality. Due to a history of objectification, violence, and hypersexualization, Blackgirls' bodies and sexualities have always been a contested space. Therefore, the first step toward reimagining Blackgirls' bodies and sexualities is restoring their bodies and selves to

the status of human and returning control of their sexuality and reproduction to themselves. M. Nourbese Philip offers the space between the legs as an agentive point of such a return—where, why, and how Blackgirls and women define their sexuality for themselves. Blackgirls and women as sexual humans also disrupts the argument of #fasttailed Blackgirl and the violent misreading of Blackgirls bodies outside of their beings. As sexual humans, Blackgirls can live out loud in their bodies and sexualities without judgement. The Black Ratchet Imagination and Black Girl Ordinary hold space for Blackgirls to express themselves. Collectively, they make space for us to ethically explore and position *P-Valley* and "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" at the center everyday ordinary Black women's cultivation of their sexuality. Collectively, they also highlight the bougie/rachet dichotomy as a new age reinforcement of respectability politics that reinforce class divisions within the Black community. It is these beliefs that make Black women such as Oprah, Michelle Obama, Kamala Harris, Beyoncé (sometimes), Tracee Ellis Ross, Ava Duvernay, Phylicia Rashad, Condoleezza Rice, Stacey Abrams, Simon Biles, and more as respectable women that Blackgirls should pay reverence, while denying Megan Thee Stallion, Rihanna, Big Freedia, Lil Kim, Nicki Minaj, Foxy Brown, Pam Grier, and Blackgirls in our communities whose names the world may never know as inspirational and culturally influential.

The importance of sisterhood and community emerge as one of the main themes across all of the texts. It is the relationhood (relationship/sisterhood) among Blackgirls that sustains us. It is the accountability that we have toward each other, the support we give each

other that keeps us going. Cleage highlights the power that the unity of Amazon women possessed to imagine and sustain their world in "In the Time Before the Men Came." It was the power of the relationhood between Nel and Sula that brought them back together in life and death. This commitment to the self and others helped Claudia find Monday when no one else would look for her. It builds and bridges the community between Maxine Waters and Megan Thee Stallion. It empowered Uncle Clifford, Mercedes, and Autumn, to hold themselves, each other, and the Pynk together through all of the changes. It helps us understand that we cannot afford to separate the ratchet from the bougie, because we need them all for our survival. When we fully embrace all of who Blackgirls are and can be, we accept those aspects of ourselves. We move toward individual and collective restoration and liberation. Black Quare Girlhood restores the power of existing in the authentic self and supporting the authentic being of other Blackgirls. It pulls from the power of Blackgirls and women to reimagine, build, and sustain Blackgirlcentric communities.

Why It Matters?

> "Pretty privilege is not just about dating or being desired by men. It's about who is assigned humanity by being more attractive or by virtue of confirming to Eurocentric (read white supremacist) ideologies of beauty. There's nothing odd about it. Colorism, fatphobia, featurism etc. all exist under pretty privilege or rather can be an extension of it. By virtue of proximity to who*tenses you can be afforded humanity or value non-conforming people are not." (@Chan_telle)

Black Quare Girlhood provides language to pinpoint and decenter whiteness from the conversation of Blackgirl behavior and being. It challenges the ways that the current state of respectability Blackgirl being have reinforced classism and standards of behavior for Black girls that center an assimilation to whiteness. Black girls who resist or reject these standards are marked as others. To build a frame of thinking of Blackgirls as free and Quare Black girlhood as a liberatory space of being and knowing, we have to engage the days that we carried our old ways of thinking about Blackgirls, Black women, Black women's sexuality, and Black girls' beings into these new spaces. Black Quare Girlhood hold space for Blackgirls on different levels of the spectrum of knowing and liberation. It holds space for the ratchet Black girls existing, the self-proclaimed hoes and bad bitches, the bougie Blackgirls, the hustlas, and those who are trying to unlearn and find their way. The common denominator for those within the space is community of learning and unlearning that has allowances of mistakes and mistakes, that champions accountability among Black girls and women, and that challenges the tradition notions within oneself that would judge other Blackgirls for being themselves. It redeems Blackgirls' sexuality and Blackgirls as sexual bodies and beings. It champions the space between the legs as sacred and gives power and ownership to this space and these bodies back to Blackgirls and women. Black Quare Girlhood provides space for Southern Blackgirls and women to see themselves, their worlds, their culture, their thinking and being as legitimate, influential, and necessary.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Who Gets to Be Ratchet? Blackgirls, Fatphobia, and Undesirability

As Black Quare Girlhood and the Black Ratchet Imagination makes space for multiple ways of knowing and being , both sexually and nonsexually, one question that arises at the end of this project that warrants more analysis is who gets to be ratchet and which Blackgirl bodies are centered in the conversation of Black Quare Girlhood and Sexuality. While Black Quare Girlhood makes spaces for various bodies, identities, and being, it is imperative to acknowledge and unpack the specific Blackgirl bodies that are centered in conversations of Black girl sexuality and ratchetness.

Southern queer, quare Blackgirl rap artist CHIKA is an example of a Black Quare girlhood figure pushing back on the narrative of erasure and dehumanization of fat Black girls. When she tweeted, "Black kids don't get to be kids. Then tack on the intersectionality that comes with being dark, big, queer, and confident. This world was not made for me, but it will NOT kill me. Mark my fuckin words. Y'all got the right one," she challenges the adultification of Blackgirl and the agenda of society and, at times, the Black community to tear down Blackgirls who live in the fullness of who they are. Varying examples of this can be seen in the narratives of 16-year-old Ma'Khia Bryant, who was shot down by Columbus (Ohio) Police after calling for help. When police arrived, Ma'Khia was in the midst of defending herself against three Blackgirls. In media reports, Ma'Khia is not discussed as a 16-year-old Blackgirl thrust into the foster care system, which produces its own institutional

trauma. The reports do not mention the robust confidence and creativity that Ma'Khia cultivates on her TikTok channel as she demonstrates the hair tutorials and the latest dance moves. Instead, Ma'Khia is reduced to a 16-year-old Black *woman* shot by police while welding a knife. Somehow her size denied her access to the status of girlhood and the knife she held in her defense of herself denied her life.

The denial of girlhood to fat Black girls has resulted in a history of hypersexualization and objectification of their bodies while denying them the right to be sexual. "The fear of the imagined "fat Black woman", according to Strings, "was created by racial and religious ideologies that have been used to both degrade Black women and discipline white women" (6). Juxtaposing the current narrative of fat Black girls alongside the historical narrative of the Hottentot Venus and the Mammy trope provides us a glimpse into the ways that fatness, and Blackgirl body size have been used as weapons to justify their silence and violence against. Black Quare Girlhood calls for the elevation of fat Black girl voices and experiences while also rejecting the denial of their sexuality and being.

Southernness and Blackness: Exploring Black Quare Girlhood in the Global South

In order to cultivate a greater understanding of Black Quare Girlhood and Southern geographies, the conversation of Southern geographies must extend to include the Global South. Black Feminist Caribbean Writers have been central to the theorization of Black women's bodies and livelihoods. M. Nourbese Philip's essay "Dis Place Between the Legs" was fundamental in theorizing Black Quare Girls bodies and sexualities through the

historical and cultural lens of historic violence against Blackgirls and women. Scholar Briona Jones reminds us that "theorization of Black women begins in the Caribbean." The conversation of Blackness and anti-blackness are global conversations. Taking up the works of Black Feminist Caribbean writers alongside U.S. Black Feminist writers provides a cohesive perspective of Blackgirls and women's theoretical framing of Black girlhood and the collective of Black women's experiences throughout the larger "Southern" Black Diaspora.

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RULE # 2: ALWAYS KNOW WHERE THE EXITS IN THIS BITCH IS, 'CUZ YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN YOU GOTSTA TURN A WINDOW INTO A DOOR.
RULE #24.5: NO CRYING AT THE PYNK
RULE #54: WE DON'T DO TAX EVASION
RULE #55.99: EVEN THERE AIN'T NO MONEY RAINING, DANCE LIKE TONIGHT YOUR LAST NIGHT.
RULE #57: NO COINS IN THE G-STRING. ONLY DOLLARS.
RULE #67: CONTRARY TO CHUCALISSA BELIEF, AIN'T NO HOES IN THIS HOUSE!
ALWAYS REMEMBER CLOSED LEGS STILL GET FED.
BEFORE YOU ENTER THE PYNK…. NO FUNNY MONEY, NO BULLETS, AND NO MU'FUNKIN' CHIPS!!!
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