8-4-2015

Emasculation and Emancipation: African American Masculinity in African American Women's Literature, 1955-1985

Lana N. Lockhart
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: http://knowledge.library.iup.edu/etd

EMASCULATION AND EMANCIPATION: AFRICAN AMERICAN MASCULINITY IN

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE, 1955-1985

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Lana N. Lockhart

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2015

Indiana University of Pennsylvania
School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Lana N. Lockhart

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

_____   _____
David Downing, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Advisor

_____   _____
Mike Sell, Ph.D.
Professor of English

_____   _____
Todd Thompson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

_____   _____
Randy L. Martin, Ph.D.
Dean
School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Emasculation and Emancipation: African American Masculinity in African American
         Women's Literature, 1955-1985

Author: Lana N. Lockhart

Dissertation Chair: Dr. David Downing

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Mike Sell
                                Dr. Todd Thompson

The 1950s to the 1980s were a critical period for the twentieth century African American experience in both social and literary terms. This dissertation examines the impact of Black Nationalism and the Black Arts Movement on the development of African American masculinity as well as the African American woman's depiction of that masculinity in the middle to late twentieth century. Using African American masculinity and African American feminist studies as my framework, I examine the emasculated male characters in three literary works by Black women: *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry; *Third Life of Grange Copeland* by Alice Walker; and *Linden Hills* by Gloria Naylor. Considerable scholarship has been dedicated to the issues of womanhood addressed by these authors; however, there remains much to be said about the plight of African American men. Although the works of these women writers were not directly involved in the Black Nationalist and Black Arts Movements of the 1950s to the 1980s, the historical influences on their depictions of masculinity are definitely significant in the male characters that these authors portray. Some critics argue that these particular texts illustrate the archetypal male character because the content champions the causes of African American women and because these authors need to have a voice for the issues of their own doubly burdened race and sex. However, I suggest that these women were also presenting concepts for redefining masculinity. Hence, in this dissertation I scrutinize the three characteristics of this

recurring male character who is trapped by his economic circumstances, subjugated to the

pressures and standards of white society, and disdainful and misogynistic toward women,

especially African American women. I demonstrate how these writers imagine the possibilities

for emancipation of the male characters, from their emasculated state.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Why should one explore the concept of emasculation and domination among the precepts of Black masculinity? Why should one take a perceptive look at the gender issues that govern Black[1] males' lives? Why is it that, historically, the same issues concerning Black males have emerged repeatedly, with very little change, over a period of several decades in the works of African American women authors? It is because for years, Black women authors and artists have utilized history and the reality of their current plight as an inspiration for their literature. When history and literature merge, literature is no longer just the contents of a story, but it is a reflection of the ideology and practices of the society in which it is set. Additionally, when history and literature merge, literature is no longer a mere form of protest, but it echoes and critiques society's beliefs and values. It also purports the necessary principles of a new society that desires to be free from sexism or racism. Therefore, it is not surprising that literature often reflects the gender roles that have governed the lives of men and women over the years, and it reflects what society deems as acceptable behavior for someone of either sex. It also offers a critique of the dominant culture and its traditional gender ideologies. However, what happens when those non-fiction gender roles become a literary reflection of the plight of a particular community and their universal struggle?

Throughout the middle to late twentieth century, the intersection of history and literature created a framework for developing scholarship on a variety of factors affecting the African American community. One of those factors that I explore is the perception of African American masculinity as seen through the African American feminists' lens. As bell hooks says in, *We Real Cool*, "As a black woman who cares about the plight of black men, I feel I can no longer

wait for brothers to take the lead and spread the word… Black women cannot speak for black men. We can speak with them. And by doing so embody the practice of solidarity wherein dialogue is the foundation of true love" (xvii). This dissertation is a manifestation of what I believe the Black women authors that I have selected are trying to say about the plight of Black men. I do not believe that that they are attempting to speak for Black men nor do I believe that they are attacking Black men, but I do I think that these authors are using their fictional male characters to create a powerful new discourse about masculinity.

In Helene Cixous's *Laugh of the Medusa,* the author admonishes women to write and explains that, "It is time for women to start scoring their feats in written and oral language… It is by writing, from and toward women and by taking up the challenge of speech, which has been governed by the phallus, that … women should break of the snare of silence" (338). Essentially this theory advocates oral and written acknowledgement of the plight of women and encourages women authors to force changes or bring to light the social conditions of their sex. However, one cannot address the plight of Black women without addressing the dynamics of a traditionally oppressive patriarchal system. So, like many historical symbols, this dissertation explores how selected Black women authors have taken the pen and turned it into a prop of change. Even in twentieth century African American women's literature, the pen was the weapon of choice for sparring with manifold systems of subjugation, the portrayal of struggle, and the path of self-discovery. Since literature is often a reflection as well as a critique of the dominant culture, I explore how the same ideas and ways of thinking that were presented historically about African American masculinity often appear in African American women's fiction, especially from the 1950s to the 1980s, which was a critical period to the twentieth century African American experience in both social and literary developments.

During this critical time period, the re-emergence of Black Nationalism greatly influenced African Americans as a whole and had a far reaching scope in multiple sectors such as art, drama, theater, publications, newspapers, political organizations, and social movements throughout the community. Originally the Black Nationalist concept was attributed to author, physician, and activist, Martin Delany, who wrote *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* in 1852. He emphasized that Blacks needed to be politically united and separately establish their own socially equal living conditions and organizations. He argued that this was the method by which Blacks would gain greater freedom from their oppressors. Although there were other forms of Black Nationalism that emerged after the 1850s, the Black Nationalist ideology that came to the forefront during the 1950s to 1970s is my focus.

Throughout this paper, the terms Black Nationalism, Black Arts and Black Power will be used repeatedly and sometimes interchangeably. Author Dean Robinson calls them "interwoven terms" that "worked to reinforce the idea of black nationalism as a real, historically determined nationalism" (86). Thus, when I refer to either term, I am not denying the varying focuses of each movement but recognizing their fundamental ideological connections to the overarching concept of Black nationalistic thought. I further justify my usage with Bracey, Meier, and Rudwick's definition which states that:

> The term 'black nationalism' has been used in American history to describe a
> body of social thought, attitudes, and actions ranging from the simplest
> expressions of ethnocentrism and racial solidarity to the comprehensive and
> sophisticated ideologies of Pan-Negroism or Pan-Africanism. Between these
> extremes lie many varieties of black nationalism, of varying degrees of intensity

… The varieties of Black nationalism are often not sharply delineated, nor are they mutually exclusive categories. (xxvi - xxix)

They note that these varieties include racial solidarity, cultural nationalism, religious nationalism, economic nationalism, politics, and emigration. Thus Black Nationalism during the middle twentieth century was so important because it was significantly impacted by the other social, economic, religious, and political factors occurring within the African American community at that time.

One area in particular, in which the influence of Black Nationalism was felt and on which I focus in this study is the area of gender dynamics between African American men and women. As a result of Black Nationalism, I address the concerns that resulted from traditional gender roles and examine how traditional patriarchy significantly influenced several Black women authors' perceptions of Black masculinity. Using African American masculinity and African American feminist studies as my framework, I examine the "emasculated" male characters in three literary works by Black women: *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry; *Third Life of Grange Copeland* by Alice Walker; *and Linden Hills* by Gloria Naylor. I acknowledge that there are several other African American women authors who I could have chosen for this study. However, Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor most accurately reflect the points that I am making in this study about Black masculinity and they are good representatives of the historical influence of Black Nationalism on authors who were not directly involved in the movement. Furthermore, even though, several critics have written about these texts from a plethora of perspectives, fewer have taken a similar approach to the texts as I have, which allows me as a scholar, to make more of a significant contribution to the field. Hence, within these

texts, I examine how these artists have utilized the social, political and economic conditions of the1950s to the 1980s as an inspiration for their literature.

Considerable scholarship has been dedicated to the issues of womanhood addressed by these authors. However, there remains much to be said about the plight of African American men. Although one of these texts is a play and the other two are novels, they are thematically connected in that they each present what I call the "emasculated black male" character who is trapped by his economic circumstances, subjugated to the pressures and standards of white society, and disdainful and misogynistic toward women, especially African American women. While there are other works and other authors that reflect similar depictions of African American males, these works were chosen because they each appear around the time of the Black Arts Movement, a crucial period within African American history between the late 1950s and the early 1980s. Although the works of these women writers were not directly involved in the Black Nationalist and Black Arts Movements of the 1950s to the 1980s, the historical influences of Black Nationalist ideology on their depictions of masculinity are definitely significant in the male characters that these authors portray.

The texts *A Raisin in the Sun, Third Life of Grange Copeland*, and *Linden Hills* are representatives of the Black Nationalist concepts of addressing racial oppression and advocating racial unity. However, they diverge from the central masculinist ideology of the movement in that they also address the intra-racial conflicts that existed concerning gender and sexuality in the African American community. One could argue that these particular texts illustrate this archetypal male character because these texts champion the causes of African American women and also because these authors need to have a voice for the issues of their own doubly burdened race and sex. I further suggest that these women are presenting manifestos for redefining

masculinity. The questions that I address are: What were the historical views of African American masculinity from 1955 - 1985 in relation to the Black Nationalists and Black Arts Movement eras? How are these perceptions of masculinity in the real world reflected and critiqued in the imagined male characters of selected African American women authors? How do the male characters provide insight into the plight of gender issues and the authors' lives during that time period? How do the depictions of African American men in the selected novels, which have traditionally been read as being focused on women's lives, illustrate the social, political, and economic concerns of the African American community during those eras? How do these works foreshadow present-day masculinity studies?

As aforementioned, my exploration of these research questions is grounded in an examination of the socio-historical realities of the Black Nationalist Movement during the same historical periods represented in the texts. Through a close analysis of the prominent emasculated male characters in these texts, I suggest that these authors use their works as a form of resistance to and reimagining of traditional gender roles. Also, I contend that these male characters come to one of two fates: either they excel by taking a non-conformist stand to traditional roles and their relationships with women, or they are destroyed by their determination to fulfill dominant society's view of successful masculinity which usually entails being the dictatorial leader of the home, family and community as well as forcefully requiring the submission of the aforementioned parties. Although Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor have traditionally been read as writing in response to their own realities, I believe that their works are also representing the internal debates about the state of the African American male during these particular historical moments. Furthermore, I demonstrate how these writers imagine the possibilities for

"emancipation" of the male characters, from their "emasculated" state and present concepts about manhood that would later reflect modern trends in masculinity studies.

Traditional Gender Roles and Imperialist Patriarchy

More often than not, writers tend to reflect or critique the values of a society in their works, which, is why a clear understanding of the part that gender roles and traditional patriarchy played during the 1950s to 1980s is essential to the framing of my argument. Traditionally, the roles of gender are often associated with one's biological sex, as a kind of biological determinism. This means that those who are born male usually have the role of masculinity while those born female tend to have the role of femininity. Hence, as is well established in Simone de Beauvoir's work, *The Second Sex*, the idea of womanhood is not natural and neither is manhood, but it is the result of what one is taught is the essence of his or her gender. Thus, one may be born female as their biological sex, but that does not necessarily make them a "woman," she becomes one. The same concept applies to males. Although his biological sex dictates that he should follow the patterns of his gender, he still must accept a set of societal norms that are considered masculine in order to become a man.

Many contend that one's gender or acceptance of traits associated with masculinity and femininity are innate, however, evidence suggests that gender is a result of social construction and not determined by one being born male or female. In the article, "Subjects of Sex/ Gender/ Desire," Judith Butler poses a series of questions on this issue, asking, "What is the manner or mechanism of [gender] construction? If gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently or does its constructedness imply some form of social determinism …" (9). These gender constructions that have turned into what society deems as traditional gender roles have had a significant, and in some cases negative effect on American society. As traditionally depicted, the

essence of masculinity meant that to be a man, one must dominate over and impregnate women, protect any dependents from danger, and financially provide for the family, which David Gilmore in *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* coins as the "Man-the-Impregnator-Protector-Provider" (223). On the contrary, femininity or womanhood meant that the woman had to be a chaste, modest, submissive, loyal and a happy housewife, who lovingly supported her husband and nurtured her children, with no aspirations or desire to focus on anything other than her home. Although Butler's argument that gender can be performed differently is well established, I suggest that these new constructions of gender were reflected in the works of the selected African American women writers, particularly, in the constructions of the African American male characters.

Furthermore, I suggest that the root of the traditional gender roles and expectations within American society that appear in literature are the result of a patriarchal system. According to bell hooks in "Understanding Patriarchy," traditional patriarchy is, "a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence" (18). My reading of Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor's texts suggest that they were demonstrating how the intersection of gender roles and traditional patriarchy affected the African American community and produced internal and external conflicts among those who were seeking to uphold what hooks calls "imperialist white supremacist patriarchy" (29). Not only were these gender roles not fitting for Black men and women because of their status as second-class citizens in American society, but these gender roles proved to be complicated and confusing because they forced skewed views of masculinity and femininity within the Black community.

Often, traditional forms of femininity and masculinity did not apply to Black women and men because oppression caused a lack of conformity to traditional gender roles during slavery, and survival within the African American community mandated that the non-traditional roles continue as a way of life after slavery. According to Angela Davis in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," the Black woman:

> was not sheltered or protected; she would not remain oblivious to the desperate struggle for existence unfolding outside the "home." She was also there in the fields, alongside the man, toiling under the lash. ... This was one of the supreme ironies of slavery: In order to approach its strategic goal to extract the greatest possible surplus from the labor of slaves, the black woman had to be released from the chains of the myth of femininity. ... The black woman shared the deformed equality of equal oppression with the black man. (7)

Thus, I concur with Davis that the gender roles of Black women and Black men in the United States during and post slavery were constructed by their position in society. James Oliver Horton's article in *Feminist Studies*, "Freedom's Yoke: Gender Conventions among Antebellum Free Blacks," further supports this idea when he writes:

> Slavery sought to reduce black people to dependent, passive, childlike characters. It especially tried to make black men irrelevant as far as their women and children were concerned. Male slaves could neither provide for nor protect their families … Effort was made to emasculate male slaves … making the master more manly by comparison … the punishment of slave men in the presence of … family members … served to make the master's point; slave men could not play the complete masculine role. (59)

As demonstrated in both of these passages, traditional gender roles were generally not feasible in the lives of Black women nor Black men. With less economic advancement opportunities and fewer civil rights due to laws that inhibited their freedom, often Blacks had to abide by roles that were dictated by their survival and not their sex. This concept of one's survival over one's sex remained a consistent factor from the mid- nineteenth century to the middle twentieth century when the struggle to attain basic human rights was still a major element of the African American experience. The imposition of traditional gender roles and traditional patriarchal ideals were the genesis of an on-going plight for the post-slavery African American man and woman. As will be discussed in detail later in the chapter, these concerns about the roles of men and women would later manifest themselves in the ideology, literature and social movements of the 1950s throughout the 1980s.

The Masculine Mystique

During the middle part of the twentieth century between the 1950s and early 1980s, masculinity and femininity studies acquired new critical frames – Feminism was on its second wave and concepts of masculinity had been studied for years but had not yet come together into a formal area of study. From a broad historical perspective, the Seneca Falls Convention in which men and women came together to discuss women's rights on July 19-20, 1848, is recognized as the commencement of the first wave of feminism in the United States.[2] The second wave of feminism arguably commenced during the 1960s with Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* in which she suggests that the "problem that has no name" is that, "We can no longer ignore that voice within women that says: 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home'" (32). Since masculinity concepts were often discussed, perceived, and written about, by male authors in contrast[3] to the aforementioned feminist concept, this new wave of thought

also impacted concepts of manhood. Influenced by the academic theories of feminism, queer theory, gender studies and race studies before becoming its own area of study, the concept of masculinity during this period, developed its own "mystique." [4]

Although the issues of manhood have been discussed in literature dating back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the formal academic inclusion of masculinity studies as an independent field of study came about primarily in the early 1990s. According to Michael Kimmel's *Manhood in America* published in 1996, "American men have no history" (1). He further argues, that in spite of the fact that men, "have libraries filled with the words of men about the works of men … such works do not explore how the experience of being a man, of manhood, structured the lives of the men who are their subjects, the organizations and institutions they created and staffed, the events in which they participated. American men have no history of themselves"(2).

In addition to Kimmel's work, texts such as *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* published in 1987 by Harry Brod and *Masculinities* published in 1995 by R.W. Connell are considered to be foundational texts that emerged early in the men's studies movement. Kimmel's work focuses solely on the American male's changing definition of manhood from the late 1700s to the present and argues that the journey to prove and achieve this manhood is a controlling factor in men's lives. Brod argues in the introduction to the interdisciplinary collection of articles by various authors on masculinity, that, "In inverse fashion, to the struggle in women's studies to establish the objectivity of women's experiences and thereby validate the legitimacy of women's experiences as women, much of men's studies struggles to establish the subjectivity of men's experiences and thereby validate the legitimacy of men's experiences as men" (6). And Connell, who just happens to be the only woman on this

brief list of scholars, and who was the first to use the term "hegemonic" masculinity[5], argues that there are multiple masculinities which are based on positions of power in society. Although the authors of these works made concerted efforts not to be seen as anti-feminist, it was also clear that these works embody the varying perspectives on masculinity that were shaping the newly formed field of men's studies.

However, I suggest that the long journey from "no history" to a formal history came about because as a newcomer to gender studies, masculinity studies was and still is a reaction to and attempt at diverging from the traditional hegemonic white male identity. As established in the section of my chapter on patriarchy, and reiterated in Bryce Traisters' article, "Academic Viagra: the Rise of American Masculinity Studies," this means that the core of masculinity studies often begins with the white, educated, middle class, heterosexual male as the archetypal figure against whom all "others" are measured. From that standard comes an interdisciplinary field that examines how women, homosexuals, and non-whites have been discriminated against based on this model and looks at how men of any race who follow this model of masculinity can be enlightened.

I concur with Kimmel that the idea of manhood must take into account the changing version of ideal masculinity and also acknowledge the parallel and competing versions of manhood that co-exist with it (6). However, Kimmel presents an interesting view of defining ideal masculinity when he says that, manhood is less about the "drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us" (6). Although he suggests that analyzing masculinity from a feminist perspective does not resonate with men's experiences because it is told from the way that women experience masculinity and asserts that masculinity is driven by power and domination; he argues that "The fear of not measuring up

…causes them to act the way that they do …The truth is that men do not define themselves in relation to women but in relation to other men" (7). However, I believe that Kimmel's perspective stems from a culturally dominant point of view.

While I can see the validity of Kimmel's argument in terms of white masculinity and I see how it is true to some extent in African American men, I believe that Black masculinity is slightly more complex because of the many socio-historical influences that helped shape it. As Judith P. Zinsser argues in *History and Feminism: A Glass Half Full*, the inclusion of social and political protest movements for civil rights, Black Power, and Black Feminism, which will be discussed in detail in the chapter, further complicated the contrasting politics and ideology of informal masculinity studies during the early to middle part of the twentieth century. Hence, I challenge Kimmel's argument by suggesting that white men who fit the ideal male archetype, could easily see themselves as competitors with other men because their privilege and history of dominance allowed them to control the groups that were comprised of the "others." On the contrary, even though Black men also had a fear of being dominated by other men, they could not see other men as their sole competitors because their status in society caused them to see women, especially Black women, as a part of their competition for dominance too. This concept lends itself of the concept of "emasculated" Black men.

Although the emasculation of Black men has some physical consequences, the traits of emasculation on which, I focus in all of my chapters, is psychological and is a reaction to white dominance, economic trappings and a somewhat oppositional relationship that developed between Black men and Black women, due to the other two aforementioned factors. The idea of white standards and economics being a source of emasculation for Black men initially appeared in St. Claire Drake and Horace Cayton's work, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a*

Northern City. Drake and Cayton argued that these two factors were at the center of a national psychological problem that first needed to be corrected by whites who needed to rid themselves of their white supremacy, and then Blacks to get them to reorganize their communities, both socially and economically to achieve racial equity. Furthermore, they attributed Black men's emasculation to the gender battles among Black men and "forceful" Black women (582). Although I agree with Drake and Cayton's original thesis that economics and white standards of masculinity are a main source of Black male emasculation, I disagree with their assessment of Black women as a further source of emasculation for Black men.

When I suggest that Black men are emasculated by the pressure and standards of white society, I am suggesting that it has a negative psychological effect on them, when the ideal by which they are measured is the same idea through which they have traditionally been oppressed. As Richard Majors and Janet Mincini Billson argue in *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America,* African American men have traditionally defined their own manhood in terms familiar to white men such as breadwinner, provider, procreator, and protector. However, Majors and Billson further argue that unlike white men, Black men have not had consistent access to the same resources to fulfill their dreams of masculinity and success (1). They write,

> Historically, racism and discrimination have inflicted a variety of harsh injustices on African-Americans in the United States, especially on males. Being male and black has meant being psychologically castrated—rendered impotent in the economic, political, and social arenas that whites have historically dominated. Black men learned long ago that classic American virtues of thrift, perseverance, and hard work did not give them the same tangible rewards that accrued to whites. (1)

By not being able to fulfill white standards of manhood through lack of access to the means that allow them to fulfill those traits, this issue lent itself to the next contributor to Black emasculation, which is economics. As I will illustrate in later chapters, Black men were psychologically and in many cases physically trapped because of economics. The few Black men who had attained wealth were placed in positions of maintaining that wealth by distancing themselves from other members of their community in order to keep their semblance of ideal manhood and those who had not attained economic freedom were psychologically emasculated because of a lack of available fiscal opportunities to acquire that which had been associated with traditional hegemonic masculinity. As Majors suggests, "If equity prevailed, black men would be equally distributed throughout the upper and middle strata of economic, political and entertainment arenas" (109). However since that is clearly not the case, the disparities that are between "ideal" man and economically being able to attain this position continues to be a point of mental emasculation for many Black men.

Both of the previously mentioned traits of economic constraints and being subjected to the pressures and standards of white society are inextricably linked to another area that I suggest is a source of emasculation for Black men, which is a strained relationship with women, especially Black women. Author Robert Taylor argues in *The Black Male in America: Perspectives on his Status in Contemporary Society,* that black women who expect their men to act according to white standards (or admire the image of manhood portrayed on TV, in the movies, and in romance novels) should rethink their vision of love and how they respond to Black men. Instead, Taylor suggests that we need much more research on how race, class, gender and social economic forces help to shape and define masculinity among black males (57). Although to some extent Black women may expect some semblance of ideal masculinity from

Black men, Black women have been socialized under the same racist system as Black men. However, I do believe that many Black women are willing to support a redefined idea of masculinity, as long as they are not viewed as the enemy or put in a position of being a victim with this new ideology.

As Ronda Henry Anthony suggests in her work, *Searching for the New Black Man*, I too find the concept that Black women are co-conspirators with white men in the emasculation of Black men troubling. I use the works of Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor to challenge that notion. Furthermore, Anthony argues that this concept that Black women helped to emasculate the Black man stems from Richard Wright's portrayal of the character, Bigger Thomas, in *Native Son*.[6] Published in 1940, Wright notes the oppressive system of racism as the main culprit of African American emasculation but does not discount the role that Black women play as the facilitators of this emasculation. Furthermore, in the novel, there is also severe violence portrayed against women, which I find very disturbing because it is these recurring images, which make the reader wonder about the purpose of these depictions. Why are Black women viewed as culprits and conspirators against black masculinity? Is it being suggested that Black men should deal with these issues through means of violence? I believe that Hansberry, Naylor, and Walker write about Black women's challenges with traditional Black masculinity, not to hurt them, but, to attempt to help them. And one cannot begin to heal a problem without first acknowledging the gender problems that existed during that time and still exist today.

This dissertation enters the conversation about masculinity by analyzing the historical influences of Black Nationalism and the literature that was produced about men by women as a result of these influences. Essentially, I argue that the trend during 1955-1985 was to use Black Nationalist ideology to construct one's view of masculinity, however, when African American

women authors observed that the trends in Black Nationalist ideology were not inclusive of the entire community, they utilized their writing as a form of activism, or their art as a form of political engagement, to suggest changes and more inclusive ways of viewing masculinity and its construction in relation to the rest of the community. Furthermore, I suggest that these three authors were acknowledging the negative forces of racism that led to the emasculation of Black men, but they were also presenting new possibilities in their fictional characters as to how Black men can reclaim and reform their masculinity, outside of the paradigm of traditional white patriarchy. Thus, in my reading of Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor, I suggest that the influence of socio-historical factors on their literature allowed these women authors to use their novels to address within their works, the specific trends that would later become key concepts in the field of masculinity studies.

First, they demonstrate the concept that masculinity does not intrinsically imply a relationship of domination and subordination because in order to have a successful family, African American gender roles and familial patterns do not necessarily have to mirror the gender roles and familial patterns of traditional white patriarchal structure. Author Clyde W. Franklin in "'Ain't I a Man?' The Efficacy of Black Masculinities for Men's Studies in the 1990s," suggests that Black men's struggles and common bond created several forms of black masculinities. First, there is the "Conformist Black masculinity" in which the man accepts mainstream society's prescriptions for heterosexual males. Next, there is "Ritualistic Black masculinity" in which, the Black man recognizes that some of his opportunities are blocked by oppression, but he continues in the game of life without questioning it. Then, there is "Innovative Black masculinity" which "exaggerates one aspect of traditional masculinity which can be achieved in order to receive desired responses" (280). Also, there is "Retreatist Black masculinity" in which Black men are

tired of the system that does not allow them to achieve their goals and thus they have given up trying. Finally, there is "Rebellious masculinity" which rejects the concepts of domination in ideal hegemonic masculinity. Athena Mutua argues in *Progressive Black Masculinities* that "rebellious masculinity" is where one can find the concept of progressive masculinity that does not rely on the subordination of others (21). In this study, I argue that the women authors who I discuss, present lessons on "rebellious masculinity" by creating male characters who present alternatives for success or liberation from their emasculation, which are in line with the current twenty-first century trends in masculinity studies.

Additionally, I suggest that their works illustrate the concept that in order to fight racism, one does not have to ignore gender and sexuality discrimination because in order to truly heal the African American community, one must focus on all members of the community and not just the plight of Black men. As Patricia Hill Collins points out, after the civil rights era of the 1950s and 60s, gender emerged as the new form of racism. One cannot address racism without addressing the issue of sexism that is ingrained within it. I concur with Collins that these two issues are inextricably linked and cannot be resolved without addressing both. Collins calls this link, "Black gender ideology" which is a set of ideas about Black masculinity and Black femininity that is used to produce the discriminatory practices that affect all aspects of African American men and women's daily lives (6). I utilize Collins' theories on Black sexual politics to illustrate the problems of gender issues within the African American community. Although I will demonstrate in the chapter dedicated to each author that the aforementioned concepts about manhood were already espoused in their works, I also suggest that these concepts affirm the current trends in formal masculinity studies, especially Black masculinity.

During the 1950s to the 1980s, the idea of struggle, whether internally or externally, was at its height for the African American man, and much of what they were experiencing bound them together Author Ronald Jackson argues in *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media,* that Black masculinity identity theory is founded upon seven thematic patterns in literature. All of these patterns center on the idea of a common struggle and tie into my argument about the tremendous impact of Black Nationalism. He asserts that struggle is a human activity that solidifies one's sense of community, and it is defined by group experiences. Jackson also suggests that because of the complexity of defining and negotiating Black masculine identity, struggle is at the centerpiece of the Black masculine identity model. Additionally, he notes that Black masculinity is often culturally, historically, and socially founded and offers a sense of self efficacy, when life satisfaction, autonomy, and stability are achieved within this realm. Finally, Jackson states that, "Without struggle, recognition, independence, and achievement, commitment to community is virtually impossible." (135). I concur with Jackson's argument that common struggle was at the heart of the Black man's concept of masculinity and his need to attain it. It is through these patterns in literature that I tie in my argument about Black Nationalism having such a great impact on the definition of Black Masculinity between the period of 1955 -1985.

The Black Nationalist Connection

Centuries of injustice, lynching, and degradation as well as the physical and emotional rape of African Americans and their culture were all sparks that led to the call for revolution, redefining Blackness and the creation of social movements in which African Americans demanded their basic human and civil rights. Within this revolution was the cry for African Americans to recognize the need for addressing the "triple front"[7] of economics, politics, and art.

In order for African Americans to know what they were demanding from others, they also had to have a keen sense of self and community awareness. Although the notions of racial uplift and cultural pride were not new to the African American community, the movement's focus on art, politics, rights, and revolution served as a catalyst for Black Nationalism and pride that came together in a communal literary crusade that would later become known as the Black Arts Movement (BAM). Thus, with the post-1950s period being heavily influenced by these social movements, I analyze how literature both reflected and offered critical appraisals of the perpetuation of masculinity issues within the African American community.

Within the Black Arts Movement, not only were African American men of American society striving to gain the social freedom that they had traditionally been denied, but they were also seeking to make their mark as leaders of that era. Figures such as Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, and Ed Bullins emerged as proponents of the aesthetics of the Black Arts Movement in the late 1960s and shaped the actions and ideology of African American society well into the early 1980s. As both an ethical and aesthetic movement, the Black Arts Movement sought to merge politics and art through the use of performance and the use of language as a weapon. As Larry Neal implied in *Visions of a Liberated Future: Black Arts Movement Writings,* the leaders in the Black Arts Movement desired intimacy with the people; participants in the movement were opposed to anything that would alienate one from a true connection with the community (24). As a result, this movement provided a surge of African American playwrights, poets, and artists who challenged Western constructs and re-defined what it meant to be Black in America.

Unfortunately, the rise of Black Nationalism and the growing number of male leaders during the 1960s and 1970s often leant itself to the repression of African American women. In an effort to combat white racism and oppression, African American males sought to make

themselves patriarchal leaders of the Black community by requiring that Black women take on a

subservient role to them in order to restructure the Black family and validate their dominance in

society. This meant that in their efforts to support Black manhood and to put Black men at social

and political ease, Black women were often expected to assume a position of passivity. Some

Black women who were young, college educated, and middle class accepted the Black

patriarchal structure and "were seduced in the 60s and 70s by romanticized concepts of ideal

womanhood," a position that had been long held by white women in relation to white men which

emphasized her dependent and subservient role (*Ain't I a Woman* 184). Those who accepted the

patriarchal structure contended that a woman's role was to be a helpmate to her man and argued

that to do so was "for the good of the race" (*Ain't I a Woman* 184).

Therefore, as a demonstration of support for Black men who often felt challenged,

slighted, and deprived of their masculinity, more often than not, Black women writers found

themselves caught between promoting the causes of their race or the causes of their gender.

Black women artists who wanted to utilize the power of their pens to speak out against

discrimination had to make a decision as to whether they were going to challenge sexism or

racism, and many writers chose the latter. Choosing to fight for racial issues as opposed to

gender issues was in large part due to the fact that Black women had to struggle to find their

place within the mainstream Feminist movement that often left them in a lesser role as well.

In addition to dealing with intra and outer- racial male oppression, the racism and

Eurocentric ideals of womanhood from white women within the Feminist movement only

exacerbated the double burden of racial and sexual subjugation that Black women faced on a

daily basis. According to Kimberly Springer in *Living for the Revolution*, "Historically,

womanhood and femininity were white women's exclusive domains; tradition defined them as

delicate, ladylike, and in need of protection … Black womanhood was a non-existent category …

The majority of black women were not eager to join political organizations with their socially

constructed opposite" (32). Hence, some African American women involved in the Feminist

movement chose to focus on race beside Black men instead of gender with white women because

they felt that concentrating on gender oppression was merely a diversion from the main goal of

the movement – Black liberation. However, as women who were involved in the Black

Nationalist movement illustrated, choosing to submit to the traditional gender roles and the

masculinist ideology that the movement espoused only made women culprits in perpetuating

sexism and it "was neither revolutionary nor acceptable behavior for black freedom fighters of

either gender"(Springer 28).

Unfortunately, Black Nationalist propaganda during the 1950s through the 1980s, seemed

to suggest that in order to improve their situation that Black males needed to embrace patriarchal

ideology. Author Dean Robinson in *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*,

attributes the male-centered, Black Nationalist ideology of the middle twentieth century to the

rise of Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam, who emphasized "themes of uplift,

racial determinism and gender subordination" by way of the Nation of Islam. Robinson also

argues that the mentality about the social conditions in America were influenced by Horatio

Alger, a nineteenth century novelist who wrote about impoverished boys going from "rags to

riches" (Robinson 35).   The combination of the aforementioned messages about racial and

gender relations from Muhammad, coupled with Alger's critical analysis of the self-made man,

made the Black Nationalist message which addresses all of these areas, even more appealing. In

1959, fifty percent of Black families were classified as poor. The median family income for

Black families was roughly 54 percent that of whites. In 1960, 17.9 percent of Black eighteen-

year olds, 13.8 percent of twenty-four year olds, and 13.5 percent of thirty-five year olds were unemployed, out of the labor force or in jail (Robinson 36). Therefore, an ideology that focused on Black self-sufficiency, Black pride, Black control of their own community, and Black male leadership was highly appealing to a predominately male working class audience who for many years had been losing their place in society. Although Black Nationalism of the 1950s to 1970s rejected Eurocentric concepts concerning beauty and culture, the movement did embrace a familial structure similar to traditional white patriarchy as part of its formula for producing separatism, nationhood, and identity within the African American community. However, prior to the early 1920s this patriarchal emphasis was not so pronounced. As a matter of fact, Black Nationalism was originally formulated in response to white nationalism and many nationalists believed in racial equality and assimilation. Unfortunately, this new idea of Black Nationalism, which was prevalent from the 1950s to 1970s, often served as an inadvertent way of intra-racially producing another form of oppression within the Black community, in terms of gender. Thus, many African American women authors and activists were concerned with the general lack of recognition of female artists because to embrace the ideology of the Black Nationalist and Black Arts Movements also meant accepting a masculine-centered dogma. Yes, there were Black women writers such as Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, and Toni Cade Bambara who emerged during the Black Arts Movement, in spite of the challenges they faced from their male counterparts. However, I maintain that the masculinist ideas, works, and actions of Black men during that time often inhibited the expression of female voices and perspectives. I concur with Calvin Hernton in "The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers," that the primary concern for Black women writers coming out of the Black Arts Movement was the legacy of male chauvinism and the unequal recognition and treatment of Black women writers (40).

The need for Black women authors to assert their voices in the midst of a time when Black male writers and editors dominated the literary field was an important factor that led to the emergence of the Black Feminist Movement. Springer notes that the period from 1968 to 1980 is the closest approximation of a formal and contemporary organizing cycle for the black feminist movement (10). In addition to racial and political uplift, many Black women authors took advantage of the Black Feminist platform to discuss a variety of issues, such as motherhood, relationships among women, economic struggles, domestic violence, marriage, etc. Although differences in education, class, and sexual orientation among African American women made it difficult to establish a collective identity for Black Feminism, it was still a part of their goal to create characters that displayed the struggles and realities that were present in their own lives. Concerns that these women writers had been holding for years were released in their writings and performances, which often challenged the assertions of Black male writers and critics.

Nonetheless, the literary practice of undervaluing the Black female experience and exalting Black masculinity ideals was very apparent during this period. Many of the women authors who were seeking to be published experienced a publishing bias whereby male editors favored male authors' literary writings that were male-centered, misogynistic, and homophobic with an emphasis on traditional male gender roles. According to author Ajuan Maria Mance in *Inventing Black Women*, the exclusion of Black women by the male literary tradition was in large part due to the perception that writings about women's daily lives which, included child rearing, domestic labor, and intra-marital relations were not essential to the overall purpose of the Black Revolution (96). Similarly, Cherise A. Pollard suggests in "Sexual Subversions, Political Inversions, Women's Poetry and the Politics of the Black Arts Movement," that Black male editors, often preferred works that emphasized Black manhood over Black women's texts (174).

Often Black women novelists were credited with creating three dimensional and multifaceted women characters that exemplified the plight and positive images of Black women. However, they were often met with contention from their male counterparts if the male characters in their works did not display a unifying image of Black life and masculinity.

In addition to dominance over women, inherent in the heteronormative leanings of Black masculinity is the idea that it left no room for some Black men to be placed in what was considered to be another discriminatory position as homosexuals. Cheryl Clarke asserts in *After Mecca* that many of the male proponents of the Black Arts Movement sought to erase the influence of authors such as James Baldwin merely because of his homosexuality and viewed lesbianism as "gender dysfunction" and "rejection of the body" (51). Author Mark Anthony Neal refers to this period as Reactionary Black Nationalism. Although both traditional Black Nationalism, which commenced in the 1850s under Abolitionist Martin Delaney, and Reactionary Black Nationalism both advocated self-love, self-respect, self-acceptance, self-help, pride and unity, the Reactionary Black Nationalist period also included hate, bigotry, and intolerance as a part of its main ideas. Due to the intense struggle for civil rights between the 1950s to the 1970s, homosexuality and lesbianism, in the estimation of several Black male authors of the BAM such as Eldridge Cleaver, Minister James 3X, and Amiri Baraka, did not comply with their promotion of traditional gender roles, especially when it came to their agenda of promoting Black masculinity and dominance of Black men in their homes and communities. For Black women writers to portray male and female characters who embraced homosexuality or for them to embrace lesbianism within their real lives was viewed as yet another act of rejection toward Black males and seen as a threat to the new Black male image that the Black Nationalists movement was attempting to promote. Many Black Nationalists and BAM leaders felt that if

Black men were going to advance only one model for ideal Black masculinity was feasible and that was the prototypical male leader and subordinated female.

Therefore, the literature of the BAM sought to construct the perception of Black identity by pointing out racial differences while downplaying and in some instances ignoring the issues of gender oppression and discrimination. Often, the literary works were rooted in the historical search for Black manhood, especially in opposition to Black women. Neal confirms this thought process in his essay "The Black Arts Movement," when he suggests that much of African American literature has depicted the strong Black mother figure with "awe and respect" and as the "economic mainstays of the family," a position that caused great tension between her and the Black man because, "The oppressor allowed them to have jobs while at the same time limiting the economic mobility of the Black man … Since he cannot provide for his family the way white men do, she despises his weakness" (78). Furthermore, Pollard contends that these Black male authors' emphasis on Black male talent was "indicative of an even greater issue of aesthetic values that reflects a fusion of the categories of Blackness and maleness" (175). In other words, being Black and being male were inextricably bound in the Black Arts Movement and the profound reevaluation of the Black man's presence in America emerged as a central critical pillar of the movement. As male writers took on the mission of defining the "identity, essence, knowledge, and activism"[8] of Blackness and masculinity in their writings and performances, essentially, they promoted Black male heroes and Black male protagonists and ignored the complexity and vitality of the Black female experience.

Many Black women artists and authors who disagreed with the hyper-masculine, homophobic, misogynistic ideology of Black Nationalism were shunned and made to feel as though they had abandoned the movement and turned against Black men. Authors such as Nikki

Giovanni in her collection of poetry called *Black Feeling Black Talk*, Michele Wallace in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Toni Cade Bambara in *The Black Woman: An Anthology,* and Ntozake Shange in *for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf* took stances in their writing that were against Black male oppression. As a result, these women were rejected by many Black leaders because they were "unwilling to acknowledge Black male sexist oppression of Black women because they do not want to acknowledge that racism is not the only oppressive force … Black men can be victimized by racism but at the same time act as sexist oppressors of Black women" (*Ain't I a Woman* 88). Although these texts and several others by Black women authors were viewed as airing the Black community's "dirty laundry" and presenting a villainous image of the African American male, they would later be hailed by the Black Feminist Movement for promoting "gender consciousness integral to the struggle for black liberation in the 1970s" (Springer 5).

In spite of the philosophical and ideological conflicts around gender that the Black male and female writers of the Black Arts Movement often experienced, at the heart of what each group wanted was to advance Black pride and unity within the African American community. Although Black women authors of the BAM often critiqued the flaws of Black men, they also supported the African American man's reclamation of his manhood. Essentially, advocates for Black Nationalism and Black Feminism sought to construct a potent collective identity and a strong communal voice; participants in both arts movements shared the same utopian visions, and placed the same premium on awareness and consciousness as advocates and adherents of the respective larger movements; and members of the Black Arts and Feminist Movements firmly believed in the necessity of cultural work in the struggle for social and political change (*From Black Power to Hip Hop* 278).

Despite the social, economic, and political changes that occurred from the late 1950s to the early 1980s in the literature of many African American women writers, the depiction of African American masculinity remained consistent. As aforementioned, current theorists in masculinity studies have developed a more enlightened and progressive view of manhood that differs from the traditional patriarchal structure that dominated the social movements within the African American community from the late 1950s to early 1980s. Whether it was Hansberry or Walker or Naylor who was using their literature as a form of social activism, they all had aspects of their works that challenged traditional gender roles, views of sexuality, and perspectives on what it meant to be a Black man during that time. Thus, I examine the impact of the social movements of Black Nationalism and the Black Arts Movement on the development of African American masculinity as well as the African American woman's depiction of that masculinity in their literature during the middle to late twentieth century. Also, I frame that depiction of masculinity within the framework of current scholarship on masculinity studies by demonstrating that many of the theories that are currently being espoused about Black masculinity actually materialized in the fictional male characters of Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor who utilized their literature to present new concepts of emancipation for the emasculated Black male.

In the chapter, "Black Is. Black Ain't: Plays, Nationalism, and Manhood," I examine Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. One of my favorite poems by Langston Hughes is "Harlem" which is most widely known as, *A Dream Deferred.* It is on the concept of deferred dreams that Lorraine Hansberry builds the play for which she is most noted, *A Raisin in the Sun*. As Hughes questions the possibility, sustainability, and reality of fulfilling one's dreams in the poem, he causes the reader to wonder in dismay whether it is possible that dreams that do not come when and how one expects them will ever come at all. The differences in the dreams and

actions of the men and women characters in this play are where I focus my analysis. I analyze how Lorraine Hansberry uses DuBoisian concepts of Black plays to make commentary about significant issues within the African American community. I analyze how Hansberry uses her writing to show her commitment to the Black community by both affirming and challenging the Black Nationalist concepts of manhood that existed during the late 1950s and early 1960s. Finally, I analyze how Hansberry uses the male characters in her play, particularly Walter, as the embodiment of bold statements that she is making as a forerunner in gender and masculinity studies. Her use of theater as a platform for social justice makes her a predecessor to the Black Arts Movement (BAM) in which art was used as a form of activism.

Although one could suggest that Walter ultimately gains respect by taking on the traditional leadership role in his family, I disagree. I argue that he gains that respect as a result of his fulfillment of the dream of Mama rather than his own.   Thus, I contend that Hansberry's play embraces a more subversive message about African American masculinity: 1) Black Masculinity does not have to exist in opposition to Black Feminist ideas; 2) often the Black man's greatest success comes when the dreams of the Black man and Black woman merge; and, 3) the dreams of the Black man cannot be accomplished without the help and support of Black women. Thus, Hansberry challenges the divisive, patriarchal ideology of that period and models a specific type of intervention in the discourse of masculinity in which manhood is reclaimed by seeking new, more progressive relationships with women.

In the next chapter, "'Paying the Rent' of Manhood: Grange's Grapple and Brownfield's Battle," I examine the struggle of two male characters to find their manhood in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Although Hansberry wrote in the 1950s and early 60s and Walker emerged at the heart of the Black Arts Movement in the late 60s and early 70s, I will

analyze why the archetypal emasculated man appears in both novels even though the social conditions, legal situation and critical focus of Black empowerment that influenced these authors had somewhat changed. Published in 1970, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* was written at the heart of the Black Arts Movement when African American political thought, feminists, Black Nationalists, and Civil Rights discourses were at war. Walker's novel is an indication of how crucial this time period is to her development as a writer. Although *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* does not have the civil rights and Black Nationalist setting that Walker's second novel, *Meridian,* has, she uses *Third Life* to critique the realities of masculinity in her contemporary society. I assert that the ideals of masculinity that appear in her novel were a result of what Walker experienced coming of age in the 60s and 70s at the height of social change within the African American community. I also suggest that they were influenced by Walker's father who ruled his house with a heavy-hand and taught her brother's to do the same. Walker was also influenced of course, by many of the men she encountered. Thus, I argue that the combination of these ideas of masculinity heavily influenced Alice Walker's writing.

One of the harsh realities that Walker critiques is the depiction of violence against women due to these masculine ideals. I believe, however, that Walker's reason for depicting this type of violence against women was entirely different. She is highlighting the connections between the Black man's often troubled social positions in their society and their treatment of Black women and children. I argue that Walker, like Hansberry, presents a form of protest to the masculine-centric ideas that were present in the Black Arts Movement while simultaneously offering a reformed idea of masculinity. I assert that Walker is illustrating that: 1) patriarchy should not include violence against women as a means of compliance; 2) oppressing Black women by perpetuating the patriarchal hegemony of White males will not garner their

acceptance by White society; and, 3) Black men must atone for their sins against the black woman. Walker is calling for a new idea of manhood as a reaction to the beliefs of the society and political movements of the time period by which she was influenced. Unlike many male writers of the BAM, Black women were not trying to be a dominating force in the family or in the community. Rather, Black Feminists authors were trying to get their male counterparts to become "comrades" against the patriarchal position that dominated their society.

Finally, in the chapter, "The Men of Linden Hills: Manhood, Materialism, and the Movement," I examine Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills.* I also examine the social, economic, and historical changes of the 1980s as I analyze why the male characters in the novel, even in a Black-owned neighborhood created by Luther Nedeed, still represent the classic mold of the emasculated black male, in spite of being in a different set of social and economic conditions than the other male characters in Hansberry and Walker's works. In the 1980s there was a revival of Black Nationalist thought and in spite of the challenges of poverty and discrimination that African Americans stilled faced, several Blacks benefitted from new job opportunities that were conducive to their upward mobility. Naylor uses the novel to criticize the multiple ways in which the African American community had turned away from the positive messages of racial unity and pride from the Black Arts Movement. However, she also illustrates, like the other women authors who wrote during the heart of the BAM, how the traditional rules of masculinity created a form of gender oppression for both women and men, similar to that of the Black Nationalist movement. Although Naylor's *Linden Hills* was published in 1985, I will explore how the influence of the Black Arts Movement is still evident in the depiction of Black male characters in her work. Often citing Toni Morrison's, *The Bluest Eye*, as the inspirational genesis to her writing career, Naylor, like Morrison, uses her literary voice to engage the issues of society.

Like the other texts in my dissertation, *Linden Hills* encompasses a message concerning masculinity and the destruction that comes when one attempts to forcibly uphold traditional gender standards. I assert that Naylor is attempting to present a new idea of manhood by: 1) encouraging the "talented tenth" and the new hip hop generation male (that bears great resemblance to what author Mark Anthony Neal would later call the "hip hop" man) need to find a healthy common definition of masculinity; 2) illustrating that masculinity does not have to be anti-homosexual; and, 3) demonstrating that attempts to silence the black woman in an effort to display one's masculinity ultimately leads to the destruction of the African American community. With this chapter I intend to prove the influence of Black Nationalism on Naylor's work as well as analyze the greater message that she was trying to say about African American masculinity using the male characters of the novel, particularly Luther Nedeed.

In conclusion, I argue that authors Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor, all of whom were Black women writers who came of age and published significant texts between 1955-1985, used their literature to present a re-imagined concept of Black masculinity. Not only was this period significant to the development of these women authors but it was also significant to the African American community's struggle for civil rights. Just as Black Nationalists ideology heavily influenced the community's views on rights, it also influenced the community's views on masculinity and gender roles. As a result, I assert that these women authors used their literature as a form of activism to address the misappropriations about masculinity that Black Nationalist philosophy had projected into the community at the time. Also, I assert that the re-imagining of Black masculinity that these women authors presented often presages some of the tenets of the field of masculinity studies that emerged in the late twentieth century.

Modern masculinity studies now aids us in seeing how these African American women writers were engaging the Black Nationalist ideology of manhood and writing about how the real issues of masculinity, before, during, and after the mid-twentieth century's Black Nationalist period, created the fictional, yet very realistic views of manhood within African American women's literature. I assert that their purpose for doing so was to demonstrate that Black men must become comrades instead of combatants against their Black feminist sisters. Just like many of the male characters come to understand themselves as men by choosing to accept or deny society's traditional masculine roles for them or to accept or deny their role as a "new black man,"[9] the men of African American society must do the same thing. Finally, Black men must redefine masculinity outside of the parameters of traditional white patriarchy. Often, the depiction of these males' characters in the works of African American women and the influences that it has had on the dynamics within the African American community and family are very telling of how much both Black men and women have been indoctrinated over several centuries with the Eurocentric concepts of masculinity. Therein lies the importance of examining Black gender roles; exploring the concept of Black masculinity; and taking a perceptive look at the images of Black males that have emerged repeatedly, with very little change, over a period of several decades in the works of African American women authors. Therein lies the usefulness of exploring these concepts in the selected works of Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor. These authors provide vital critical reassessments for overcoming the constraints that traditional gender constructs place on Black masculinity.

CHAPTER TWO

"BLACK IS. BLACK AIN'T": PLAYS, NATIONALISM,

AND MANHOOD IN *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*

The combination of art and activism was significant to the African American community during their struggle for freedom in the twentieth century. Often writers of this period, and even those dating back to the 1800s, produced what was called protest literature which focused on a particular social problem and used the characters in their works to illustrate the adverse effects the issue was having on society.[10] In the prologue of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Ma*n, he pens the famous words, "Black is" and "Black ain't" to commence what many would come to hail as a protest novel concerning the plight of a Black man in America. Although Ellison states in a 1955 interview with the Paris Review, that "I wasn't, and am not, *primarily* concerned with injustice, but with art," the fact that his literary work, like those within the protest literature genre novels, dealt with a problematic issue of great social importance, we can arguably put it in the protest category, whether it was intentional or not (Chester and Howard 5). Contrastingly, for the playwright Lorraine Hansberry, whose plays are often at the center of an argument about their universality or their blackness, [11] I would argue that her primary concern was just as much or even more about justice as it was about art, due to the social issues that she addresses within the works. This was particularly true of her play *A Raisin in the Sun* which was produced in 1959, during the critical period of 1955 to 1965 when the fight for civil rights was at its height.

Although current scholarship discusses Hansberry's activism, I highlight a different set of parallels that exists between her life, her work, and the emergence of the Black Arts Movement that was in its infancy at the time of her death. Though Hansberry did not advocate the separatism of Black Nationalist thought that was on the rise in the late 50s and early 60s, her use

of writing and performances as forms of protest are forerunners to the modalities and approaches that would be embraced by the Black Arts Movement. Her belief in civil rights, gender equality, African American business ownership, and desegregation were all aspects that manifested themselves in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Author and theorist Toni Morrison argues in "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," that the use of Western culture as the ultimate standard of superiority and success only leaves those seeking to attain it in a position of constant struggle (125). Hansberry demonstrates this concept of continuous struggle through Walter Younger's character, whose desire for the "American Dream" is met by several opposing forces. Not only does Walter feel oppressed by white society, but he also experiences some adversity within his family, particularly from the women with whom he interacts. Walter Younger feels unfulfilled as a man because of his subordinate class status outside of his home and because of his frustrating status as a "child" within his home (Domina 109). While I concur with critic Lynn Domina's viewpoint, I suggest that Walter's continuous struggle against emasculation is a result of his embrace of dominant expressions of masculinity circulating in the 1950s and 60s. Scholar Paul Carter Harrison argues that white oppression in America is such a treacherous force that it causes Black men to lose their sense of manhood, affecting the entire community. Harrison further contends that it is white society rather than the women in Walter's life that cause his emasculation and silencing because, "It would be fallacious to assume that the matriarchal syndrome among Blacks results from male-female conflict. It is rather, the direct result of oppression which forged conditions that create the appearance of such conflicts" (67). In this chapter, I embrace and expand on the parts of Harrison's argument that suggest that the African American man's oppression by white society had a significant role in his emasculation. However, I also believe that his emasculation stems

from how he chooses to interact with Black women. In my reading of *A Raisin in the Sun*, I suggest that white society and traditional male /female relationships did, indeed, play a role in Walter's emasculation. But, significantly, the Black male's acceptance of the dominant-masculine ideology, inherent within the civil rights era and the early ideology that was the groundwork for Black Nationalism, also fostered his emasculation and thus appear as factors within Hansberry's text.

The concept of using art as a form of activism would become particularly significant under the artistic and cultural umbrella of that segment of the Black Nationalist Movement known as the Black Arts Movement, which took place between 1965 and 1975. Although it occurred after Hansberry's death, like her, the movement focused on using art as a method for improving the conditions of the African American community. According to Larry Neal's summer 1968 essay, called, "The Black Arts Movement," the movement,

> is radically opposed to any concept of the artist that alienates him from his
> community. This movement is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power
> concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and
> aspirations of Black America…. The Black artist takes this to mean that his
> primary duty is to speak to the spiritual and cultural needs of Black people.
> Therefore, the main thrust of this new breed of contemporary writers is to
> confront the contradictions arising out of the Black man's experience in the racist
> West. (1)

As Larry Neal argues, art is for the community's sake, and thus art and activism must go together if one is going to improve the community. Hence, one of the primary goals of the movement was

to provide a deep sense of appreciation for the aesthetics of Black culture that clearly distinguished it from the Euro-centric worldviews that had dominated American society hitherto.

A Raisin in the Sun, probably the most famous of all Hansberry's plays, is one of the works that is central to this study. The play opened on March 11, 1959 at the Ethel Barrymore Theater in New York City.[12]Although it eventually became the first play written by an African American woman that was produced on Broadway, it was initially turned away from the Broadway scene because a Black play with its themes and content was considered to be too risky for that particular venue. This story of the Younger family explores the struggle that comes with unfulfilled dreams and racism. The family is poverty-stricken until a $10,000 insurance check comes as a result of the death of Lena Younger's (Mama) husband. Each family member has ideas of what to do with the money, especially Walter, who wants to open a liquor store as a means to making the family rich. However, Mama decides to use a portion of the money to buy a home in an all-white community. She entrusts the money that is left to Walter with the stipulation that he put away a portion of the money for his sister Beneatha to go to medical school. The rest belongs to him. However, in an effort to manifest his own dream, he loses the money in a bogus deal. He must then find another way to realize his "manhood." He does so by not accepting the buy-out money from the whites of Clybourne Park and insisting that his family move. Through Walter and other male characters in the play, Hansberry addresses the social issue of what a Black man *is* and what a Black man *ain't*.

Black Plays

In the article, "Black Women on Broadway," author Diana Adesola Mafe questions whether a play about a lower class Black family can "become 'universal' [and] critically acclaimed by white hegemony as successful? Can these theatrical representations of 'ethnic'

culture be 'authentic' if they are also read as 'universal'? And furthermore, what are the implications of hegemony reading these 'ethnic' plays as exclusively representative of ethnicity?" (30). By posing these questions Mafe is essentially asking whether it is possible for audiences of different racial and ethnic backgrounds to be able to relate to the content and characters of the same play and still have that play be considered representative of a particular ethnic group. From my reading, I concur with Mafe that it is possible for a play to serve these dual purposes. Not only can a play be a "universal" representation of American life that just happens to center on African American characters, but it can also be a genuine display of the Black experience. In spite of the fact that white audiences may not be able to identify with the fear that comes with racism or integrating a neighborhood, which makes the play authentically Black, the themes of desire for a better life, the American dream, and wanting the best for one's family are a part of the universal human experience (at least for those living within the United States).

Although all of Hansberry's works possessed a theme of social activism, the two that dealt heavily with the Black experience other than *A Raisin in the Sun* were *The Drinking Gourd* and *Les Blancs*. In1960 after her great success with *A Raisin in the Sun*, which will be discussed in detail later in the chapter, Lorraine Hansberry was asked to write a screenplay about slavery that was going to be aired before a television series about the Civil War. *The Drinking Gourd* was centered on a rebellious slave named Hannibal, who is the son of Rissa. She is her master Hiram's favorite slave. It demonstrated the inhumanity of slavery even on a plantation in which the master tried not to be cruel. Hiram hires Zeb, a poor white man, to be the overseer of the slaves. When Hiram gets older, his son Everett takes over the plantation. They both make up in cruelty what Hiram lacks. One day they discover that Everett's eleven year-old son has been

teaching Hannibal to read and write in exchange for teaching him how to play the banjo. As punishment, they permanently blind Hannibal. Hiram is sorry for what happened to Hannibal and conveys this to Rissa. However, on his way back to the master's quarters he has a heart attack and dies, because no one, including Rissa, would come save him when he cried out for help. Rissa and Hannibal escape to freedom. The ultimate demise of the master served as an allegorical tool to promote Black unity against the oppressor's system, a message that would have held strong nationalists and liberatory meaning in the 1960s. In spite of, or perhaps because of, the powerful message of the story, NBC deemed it as too controversial, and it was never aired.

Hansberry's other powerful work that centers on the Black experience is *Les Blancs*. This play was written in response to Jean Genet's *Les Negres* that negatively depicted black characters.[13] Hansberry wanted to depict an alternate view of Black Nationalism different from the racial stereotypes that Genet presents. The main conflict in Hansberry's story centers around brothers, Tshembe and Abioseh, from the fictionalized African Nation of Zatembe, who have returned home for their father's funeral. Even though Tshembe has been living in London, he essentially believes in African freedom from the Europeans. Abioseh, on the other hand, has adopted euro-centric values along with the Catholic religion and is not as concerned about African liberation. Their half-brother Eric fights against the Europeans, while Tshembe feels that Charlie, an American journalist, has not done enough to help their people. Eventually, Tshembe joins the revolution. Although the setting is in Africa, some readers argue that it is metaphorically about the struggle for civil rights that Blacks were enduring in the United States. In "History, Myth and Revolt in Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs*, author Phillip U. Effiong writes,

In *Les Blancs* Hansberry expands on the attention given to Africa in *Raisin*, where

Asagai the Nigerian intellectual and activist is used to fortify and scrutinize the

familial, political and cultural bonds between Africa and Black America. … The

juxtaposition among the play's realism, sporadic expressionism, and black

aesthetic ritualism … corroborates Hansberry's ability to tap African and western

concepts and to fuse history with myth, drama and folklore. She achieves what

would become a central goal of the 1960s Black Arts Movement and what Paul

Carter Harrison in the 1980s … would describe as 'the urgency to formulate an

aesthetic based upon the American experience but informed by the ethical

sensibilities of Africa'. (274)

Even though one focuses on slavery while the other focuses on Africa, both plays, like *A Raisin

in the Sun,* demonstrate the injustices that Blacks have experienced.

Not only were the aforementioned plays that Hansberry wrote a form of social activism

and representative of the Black experience, but they were also significant because they embodied

what W.E.B. DuBois calls the role of the Black Theater. This concept of Black Theater was built

on DuBois' proclamation about theatre which states:

The plays of a real Negro theatre must be: 1. About us. That is, they must have

plots which reveal real Negro life as it is. 2. By us. That is, they must be written

by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it

means to be a Negro today. 3. For us. That is, the theatre must cater primarily to

Negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and

approval. 4. Near us. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass

of ordinary Negro people. (DuBois 135)

In an interview with Mike Coleman, Amiri Baraka, a leader of the Black Arts Movement, exclaims that Black Theatre has to deal with the lives of Black people, and it has to instruct them on ways of attaining their own liberation. Baraka also says that Black Theatre has to emotionally involve the community by being in tune and dealing with the intricate issues of Black lives (Reilly 84). I suggest that Lorraine Hansberry does this in all of the aforementioned plays.   Not only do the plots about slavery, protests against white rule, and struggles with racism accurately portray Black life, they are also written by an African American woman who has been living with those experiences her entire life.

One of the main concerns that Hansberry's critics have had was whether these plays were written for the African American community or whether they were just about African American characters. Author Stephen Carter in *Hansberry's Drama: Commitment Amid Complexity*, says that Hansberry has often been misrepresented, "which has permitted critics and students -- on too many occasions – to succumb to the myth that Hansberry was an 'establishment artist' less interested in changing the system than in getting a home in suburbia, a television, and two cars" (39). For many years this assumption stemmed from Hansberry being quoted by Nan Robertson as saying that, "I told them this wasn't a 'Negro play.' It was about honest-to-God, believable, many-sided people who happened to be Negroes" (21). As one of her most quoted statements, it has been used to try to prove that Hansberry was unconcerned with the African American community and culture. However, I, along with other supporters of Hansberry, feel that based on the content of her plays and her many forms of activism, to say that she was unsupportive of the Black community was yet another misrepresentation of Hansberry by her critics.

Although the question of whether Hansberry's plays were intended specifically for a Black audience may be somewhat unsettled, thus ushering it into the "universal" category, the

"About us" and "By us" portion of DuBois' theory is evinced in her depiction of the realities of African American lives and the idea that her plays, "legitimate those values and experiences as being worthy of artistic representation" (Young 4). Whether it was Hansberry's intention to write traditionally defined "Black Plays" or like author Suzan Lori-Parks, just to write plays that were for everyone, I still believe that Lorraine Hansberry's works are a form of social activism, or art as propaganda. For centuries the Black actor had been playing roles that appealed to predominately white audiences and fulfilled stereotypes about African American life that did not reflect the actual experience of the community. Therefore, my reading of Hansberry's text suggests that as an African American woman and playwright she did not disassociate herself from the injustices that were occurring with Blacks of that time period. In spite of its classification and its audience, Lorraine Hansberry's play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, is definitely one that speaks to various issues within the African American community. I suggest that to deny that A *Raisin in the Sun* is a work of activism would be to deny Hansberry's contributions to Black advancement in her general body of work that existed in her short life.

A *Raisin in the Sun* was also very controversial given the social, political, and economic climate for African Americans in the United States at that time. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Civil Rights Movement was well underway, Black Nationalist ideology was spreading by the thousands and "Black Power" was becoming the new mantra for many African Americans. Contrastingly, violent acts, racist sentiments, and discriminatory practices were at an all-time high. In spite of some of the negative actions of those against racial unity, legislation to ensure desegregation, Black rights, and combat Jim Crow laws was still moving forward to the Supreme Court. As a long-time civil rights activist and budding writer, Lorraine Hansberry was in the midst of the African American battle against injustice. In 1952 she attended and spoke at

the Intercontinental Peace Conference in Uruguay in place of actor and activist Paul Robeson

whose travel privileges had been banned by the United States government. In 1961 she

participated in a radio symposium on WBAI NYC with James Baldwin and Langston Hughes on

"The Negro in American Culture." She and other civil rights leaders met with U.S. Attorney

Robert Kennedy in 1963, in an effort to demand change for African American citizens in the

United States. Hansberry even participated in nationally televised debates and interviews in

which she challenged the injustices that existed in American culture. Being involved in such a

climate was a key factor in Lorraine Hansberry using her writing as a form of activism during

that time.[14]

My reading of various sources suggests that Lorraine Hansberry's deep connection to the

issues and concerns of the Black community did not start in the latter part of her life, with *A

Raisin in the Sun*. Hansberry's passion for writing with the greater purpose of helping her

community was in her blood. She was born on May 19, 1930 as the youngest child to Carl

Hansberry, a real estate broker, and Nannie Hansberry, a teacher. Both of her parents were from

the South, but they were raised in families who were considered well-off for their time. Carl's

parents were respected teachers in the community, and Nannie's father was a high-level

clergyman in a church, who believed in education for his children. After getting married, they

made their home in Chicago, which would bring some very influential experiences for Lorraine

Hansberry, in terms of social activism. Both of her parents were active in the NAACP and Carl

Hansberry, a U.S. Marshall, ran unsuccessfully, for congress in the 1930s. The Hansberry home

was host to a number of influential Black leaders such as Paul Robeson, Duke Ellington, Jesse

Owens, and W.E.B. DuBois. I believe the conversations that transpired between the Hansberrys

and DuBois could possibly be another connection between Lorraine's activism and her use of

DuBois' concept of the "Black Play," which I previously discussed. Of greater significance to Hansberry, however, is the experience that she and her family went through when seeking to integrate a white community. In 1938, Carl Hansberry bought a house for his family in a predominantly white neighborhood, during which time they received death threats, hostile attacks, and a plethora of racist encounters. Initially, Carl Hansberry was determined to fight the neighborhood's racial restriction and took the case to court. The state and district courts upheld the unfair code, at first, but then the U.S. Supreme court overruled the lower court decisions in 1940. It is often suggested that these experiences and series of events within her family were the inspiration for *A Raisin in the Sun*.

For many African American artists and authors, including Lorraine Hansberry, it is often hard to ignore the influence of history and racial challenges on one's work. Hansberry's existence began during the heart of the Great Depression, and her life ended early, in 1965, of pancreatic cancer, at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and at the onset of the Black Nationalists Movement. As aforementioned, the social climate during this period for African Americans was tense. African Americans and other Americans spent that decade of the 1930s recovering from the economic downturn that had shattered the financial circumstances of many in the United States. During this time the Hansberrys were actually considered affluent; they were doing better than those who were around them. In fact, many African American families during and immediately after the Great Depression fared just fine. They were used to struggling, and there was no significant difference in how they lived before the Depression versus how they lived after the Depression. Another reason, I believe that the African Americans survived is because they were not limited to the traditional western patriarchal gender roles that prevented women from working outside of the home.

The 1940s was significant to race relations in America and it was also the period during which World War II began. In spite of the injustices that were occurring in the United States during this decade, millions of Black men registered to serve in the United States armed forces (Manning 13). Hundreds of thousands of them were stationed overseas in European countries that did not have the same racially restrictive laws that they had experienced in the United States. Thus, upon their return at the end of the 1940s, many Black men were dismayed at returning to a system that perpetuated hate against them after they had so valiantly fought for their country. Furthermore, many were unwilling to accept this social injustice any longer without making a serious effort to fight for their rights. Although not a part of the war effort, Lorraine Hansberry had watched her father, Carl Hansberry, commit to battle after battle, against injustice, while she was growing up. Finally, tired of fighting the ills of racism, Carl Hansberry bought a home for his family in Mexico City, but the idea of relocation was short-lived because he died in 1946, before they could move, when Lorraine Hansberry was fifteen years old. She is quoted as saying, "American racism helped kill him" (Cheney 8).

The 1950s commenced a period of great social change within American society, and it was also the period in which Lorraine Hansberry would really begin to make her mark as a writer and advocate for justice. After having spent two years, from 1948 to 1950, at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where she attended college and was the president of the "Young Progressive Association," a leftist organization for students, she moved to New York City. She wanted to pursue her writing career as well as be more involved with revolutionary Black and Communist Activists. During this period, Communists and Leftist activities had been outlawed in many states like Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. Some states, like Massachusetts, were even requiring jail time for those who were involved in any activities pertaining to the spreading

of these politics and schools of thought (Manning 21). In spite of the serious laws and

sentiments against Communist and Leftist ideology that were spreading across the United States,

Hansberry remained true to her politics. In fact, two of the most noted African American

advocates of Leftist politics, Paul Robeson and W.E.B DuBois, were very influential in

Hansbery's life. In 1950, Hansberry began working as a writer for *Freedom Magazine*, which

was founded by Paul Robeson. While working for the magazine, in 1953 she met and married

Robert Nemiroff, a white writer and activist, who was involved in similar political activities as

herself. She continued there as a writer and the associate editor of the magazine until 1955.

Though she and Nemiroff eventually divorced in 1964, he remained Hansberry's friend and was

named literary executor, after her death in 1965. Although Hansberry officially began her writing

career in the early 1950s, the late 1950s to early 1960s, what would become the later part of her

short life, is when her level of social activism was at its height.

Given that Hansberry focused on African American life in her plays, fulfilled DuBoisian

concepts of Black plays, and actively advocated for social justice for African Americans, the

question still remains as to what were the messages that she delivered to the community by way

of her texts. I suggest that not only did Hansberry convey messages of liberation for Blacks as

they faced the outside turmoil of white oppression, she also addressed the social struggles that

existed among Blacks within their own community. In *A Raisin in the Sun*, one can see the

injustice of racism as well as the injustice of sexism. Therefore, in this chapter, one of the

significant factors that I analyze about Hansberry's play is the gender issues that occur in the

African American community as they relate to Black masculinity. Although the play has already

been analyzed for its integrationist leanings due to the Youngers moving into a white

neighborhood, and for its depiction of gender, I discuss how the events that happen in the play

both challenge and affirm Walter's manhood. As with each of the chapters of this dissertation, I

demonstrate how Walter has been emasculated in three primary ways: 1) he is trapped by his

economic circumstances; 2) subjected to the standards and pressures of white society; and 3) at

odds with Black women within the play. I demonstrate what I believe Hansberry is trying to

suggest as keys to his emancipation and how those keys are essential concepts that emerge in

masculinity studies. I assert that Hansberry is using *A Raisin in the Sun* to demonstrate that Black

masculinity does not have to exist in opposition to Black Feminism, Black men need the support

of Black women to accomplish their dreams, and that ultimately their greatest success comes

when those dreams merge and they work together to fulfill them.

Black Nationalism

Although *A Raisin in the Sun,* was produced nearly three decades before masculinity

studies became popular in the early 1990s, I suggest that the play still provides messages about

masculinity that were ahead of its time. In the late 1950s, Black Nationalist ideology was

beginning to spread and the Black Feminist Movement did not manifest itself until nearly a

decade later. I believe that the social conditions for Blacks that later produced both of these

social movements, also had an impact on Hansberry's writings about men. Though scholars in

masculinity studies seek ways to be inclusive of all men, Hansberry, who I believe was

influenced by the time period, bases her play around the traditional nuclear Black family, which

was a fundamental idea in the BAM. Basing her play on the traditional Black family does not

negate that Hansberry doubly challenged this model in her personal life by marrying a white man

and being rumored to have been a lesbian due to her involvement in the gay rights organization,

"Daughters of Bilitis."[15] Hansberry is even noted as having linked the oppression of women to

the oppression of homosexuals. She is quoted saying,

The relationship of anti-homosexual sentiment to the oppression of women has a

special and deep implication. That is to say, that it must be clear that the reason

for the double standard of social valuation is rooted in the societal contempt for

the estate of womanhood in the first place. Everywhere the homosexual male is,

in one way or another, seen as tantamount to the criminal for his deviation; and

the woman homosexual as naughty, neurotic, adventurous, titillating, wicked or

rebellious for hers. (Lipari 51)

Although this chapter relies heavily on examples of heterosexual relationships of Black men and

women, it is important to note that it is not the only model through which Hansberry viewed

familial relationships. However, to demonstrate how Hansberry uses the main model of the BAM

to challenge and critique some of its practices and to evince the importance of Black men and

women in relation to each other, I analyze Black masculinity within the context of the nuclear

Black family.

During the late 1950s and 1960s, Nationalists leaders built their concepts of community

uplift around the traditional family. The traditional family model came from mainstream

American society which was based on White, middle class, heteronormative ideals. Amiri

Baraka would later express his support of the nuclear Black family in his 1970, "Black Woman"

essay, when he argued that Black men and women must complement each other. He says,

We have certain functions that are more natural to us and you have certain graces

that are yours alone … a Black woman must first be able to inspire her man, then

she must be able to teach our children, and contribute to the social development of

a nation. How do you inspire a Black man? By being the conscious rising essence

of Blackness … the house, the smallest example of how the nation should be …

and that must be the microcosm, by example, of the entire Black nation. (8)

Those in the Black Nationalist movement felt that they were putting the Black family at a

political, economic, and social disadvantage by not adopting a traditional family ideal. Hence, I

believe that Hansberry uses the model of the movement in order to provide her strongest critique

of it. Although, it has been noted that Hansberry was an activist via her art, a DuBoisian concept

which would later become a key component of the Black Arts Movement, her work was also a

predecessor to gender studies which encompassed both Black Feminism and Black Masculinity.

I suggest that by critiquing the social issues of Black Nationalism, Hansberry was also making

commentary on what would later become the tenets of Black Feminism and Black Masculinity.

Therefore, in my analysis of Walter's emasculation in the play, I link these three concepts of

nationalism, Feminism, and masculinity together by examining how Walter's emancipation

comes when he realizes that Black masculinity does not have to exist in opposition to Black

Feminism, that Black men and women should merge their dreams, and they should also work

together as a communal unit.

Black Manhood

While Hansberry paints Walter's situation sympathetically, she also displays the realities

that existed within the Black community during the 1950s, especially for Black men. Just like

the other male characters that I discuss in subsequent chapters, I suggest that Walter's

emasculation is not physical, but it is mental and based on three factors – poor financial standing,

white standards of manhood, and negative interactions with Black women. As mentioned in

chapter one, the use of the aforementioned traits as tools of mental emasculation for Black men

stem from the traditional western patriarchal ideals of manhood[16]. Historians note that the 1950s

were hard for men, especially Black men, because the "trappings of gender failure" were all around and "American men discovered what happened to men who failed as breadwinners and fathers" (Kimmel 237). By this time in the middle twentieth century, traditional gender roles were well established and society deemed men as failures if they could not support their families financially and provide at least a middle-class standard of living. Hence, given this general mindset in American society, we can see from a macrocosmic perspective, how Walter could feel despondent about his manhood as well, within the microcosm of his own family.

First of all, at the onset of the play one notices the poor living conditions of the Younger family that include an apartment that is too small for the five people who occupy it. One also notices the tense relationship between Walter and his wife Ruth concerning their finances. This is the first indication about Walter's emasculation because all textual evidence points to the fact that he is concerned about being held back by his economic circumstances as well as his son's perception of him. These factors were so important to him because, "Even in the face of crushing poverty, most black males have accepted the basic masculine goals of wanting to raise and provide for a family. This inclination to take this road to manhood is strong, despite obstacles to supporting families; children are an important statement for declaring manhood" (Majors and Billson 16). Hence, the couple's first interaction in the book is a battle in which their son, Travis, is asking for money to participate in an activity at school, but Ruth tells Travis, "no" due to their current financial situation. Hansberry writes,

> TRAVIS: (Eating) This is the morning we supposed to bring the fifty cents to
>
> school.
>
> RUTH: Well, I ain't got no fifty cents this morning. …
>
> TRAVIS: (Quickly to the ally) I have to -- She won't give me fifty cents …

WALTER: (To his wife only) Why not?

RUTH: (Simply, and with flavor) 'Cause we don't have it.

WALTER: (To Ruth only) What you tell the boy things like that for? (Reaching

down into his pants with a rather important gesture) Here, son – (He hands the

boy the coin, but his eyes are directed to his wife's …)

TRAVIS: Thanks, Daddy. (He starts out. Ruth watches both of them with

murder in her eyes. Walter stands and stares back at her defiantly …). (1. 28-31)

Walter's "manhood" within the traditional patriarchal structure is challenged at this point because not having the money is an indication that he cannot fulfill his desired role as a provider for his family.   This character trait is one of the key components of the dominant masculine ideal. Author Athena Mutua in *Progressive Black Masculinities* argues that often Black men are blocked from opportunities to be providers due to limited economic prospects. Mutua also argues that the limited opportunities prevent men from developing a sense of competence, self – esteem, and self-fulfillment (21). As Walter continuously realizes that his dreams for his own life and his family are limited due to his finances, I suggest that he feels emasculated, especially in front of his son, who is looking at Walter for his example of manhood.

Furthermore, not only does Walter have trouble fulfilling ideal masculinity because of his economic status, but I suggest that Walter feels emasculated because he cannot fulfill the standards of ideal manhood in a white-dominated society. I argue that he feels emasculated because he desires and embraces a lifestyle that he has mainly seen being held by white men, as a marker for the status, which looks nothing like his own life. Walter is distraught because he is thirty–five years old, has been married eleven years, "got a boy who sleeps in the living room," and has nothing to give his family besides, "stories about how rich white people live" (1.34). He

works as a chauffeur for a white family, and each day he walks downtown and passes the "cool, quiet-looking restaurants where them white boys are sitting back and talkin' … turning deals worth millions of dollars … sometimes I see guys don't look much older than me" (1.74). When his mother questions why he is so focused on money, he retorts, "Because it is life, Mama!" (1.74).   This example of Walter's emasculation due to the standards and pressures of a white-dominated society tie into the European American perspective on Black masculinity that scholar Ronald Jackson presents in "Black Manhood as Xenophobe: An Ontological Exploration of Hegelian Dialectic." Jackson argues that whether intentional or not, white Americans impose a universal, hegemonic view of masculinity that is accepted as normal. This dominance has been supported for centuries by fundamentalist thinking and Biblical argument about the natural order of society. However, Jackson argues that the limitations of white American masculinity on Black masculinity are that it: poses as a universal irrespective of cultural differences of race, class, and gender; maintains a competitive male ethos; seeks validation from males only; is patriarchal; is materialistic or acquisition oriented; and is hegemonic or non-ambivalent (738). By embracing white hegemonic masculinity as his ideal, we can see that Walter is confining himself to only one view of manhood—one which he may not be able to fulfill as opposed to creating his own definition of manhood based on the aspects of his life that he does well. These "limitations" are at the core of Walter's emasculation when it comes to the pressures and standards of hegemonic society.

In addition to Walter being subjected to the aforementioned universal standards, some of which he tries to fill by being a father and a husband, we can also see how Walter feels the need to be competitive with other men who have already attained what he desires. I suggest that this desire to compete with other men (which, Hansberry illustrates through Walter's character)

foreshadows and anticipates a key concept that will be developed later in masculinity studies. As mentioned in chapter one, author Michael Kimmel of *Manhood in America* argues that American men define their manhood more so, in relation to each other than, they do to women (7). This just means that the path to attain ideal masculinity is often viewed as competitive in nature and men seek to be validated by other men. This is because for Black men like Walter, "achieving masculinity is complicated by the threats of marginality and anomie that plague his race, and if he is of lower-income status, his social class. The subcultural press toward innovative and rebellious modes of achieving success in the face of remarkable odds shapes his pursuit of masculinity" (Majors and Billson 7). Thus, when interacting with George, one of Beneatha's suitors, whose family is wealthy, Walter attempts to share his ideas for acquiring wealth with him. Hansberry writes,

> WALTER: … (To Murchinson) How's your old man making out? I understand you all going to buy that big hotel on the Drive? … Shrewd move. Your old man is all right, man … I'd like to talk to him. Listen, man, I got some plans that could turn this city upside down … Me and you ought to sit down some times, man. Man I got some ideas …
>
> GEORGE: (With boredom) Yeah – sometimes we'll have to do that, Walter.
>
> WALTER: (Understanding the indifference, and offended) Yeah – well, when you get the time, man. I know you are a busy little boy. (2.84)

Although it could be argued that Walter is materialistic, I suggest that his dismay at his ideas being rejected by George is still an issue of manhood because Walter's first attack toward George is to refer to him as a little boy in spite of George possessing many of the traits of ideal masculinity. Walter says, "I know aint't nothing in the world as busy as you colored college

boys … they teaching you how to be a man? … Naw – just to talk proper and read books and wear them faggoty-looking white shoes … Here I am a giant – surrounded by ants! Ants who can't even understand what the giant is talking about" (2.85). Walter's need for validation, and his desire to acquire materialistic riches as well as a sense of patriarchal entitlement to them are what causes him to feel emasculated and ultimately leads to destructive decisions that cause him to lose the family's money.

Furthermore, I believe that in the process of seeking validation of his business ideas from George, Walter is hurt because he is dismissed by George in the same way that he has been dismissed by white society and other men. In spite of the fact George is a Black man too, Walter realizes that George is successful because he has conformed to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity that Walter is trying to attain. George is upper middle-class, educated, and male with a level of affluence in the community. Just like the white men who have attained ideal masculinity, George is distancing himself from males like Walter, who he claims is, "all wacked up with bitterness, man" (2. 84). Author Ronald Jackson argues that being subjected to these white standards for Black men means that they have historically, "felt the need to function with a double consciousness or a negotiated cultural identity that is constantly in flux from one cultural identity position to another. This was and is still being done with the understanding that complete denial of either frame of reference will restrict alternatives, choices, interaction, personal growth and financial security" (735). Essentially, even if George is sympathetic to Walter's circumstances, I suggest that he realizes that if he wants to survive in a world where white standards are the norm, then he must maintain distance from any semblance of manhood that does not fit the mold.

Finally, I believe that Walter feels psychologically emasculated based on his interaction with the women in his family. As mentioned, men like Walter often seek validation from other men. However, as I argued in chapter one, for Black men, the view of other men as their sole competitors for ideal manhood is inaccurate because of the positions in which Black men and women have held in society. Although I am not suggesting that Black women are actual emasculators of Black men, I do believe that the lack of traditional gender roles, which mandate that both sexes contribute toward "breadwinning" in many Black families' for their survival, often leaves Black men feeling that Black women contribute to their emasculation when in fact, they do not. For instance, not only is Walter still living in the home that his father and mother once occupied but his mother, Lena Younger, still views him as the little boy she raised and not as the grown man that he is now. His mother declares, "There some ideas we ain't going to have in this house. Not long as I am at the head of this family" (51). The assertion by Mama Younger, that she is the head of the family is significant because it creates a discussion about the matriarchal and patriarchal dynamics of the African American community. In Fred Hapgood's *Why Males Exist: An Inquiry Into the Evolution of Sex*, he argues that men are natural patriarchs because there is no historical evidence that women as a group have ruled over men (7). Although, he acknowledges that some societies have traced their lineage through women, he still asserts that patriarchy is the natural order (113). However, I challenge Hapgood's critique by arguing that in a post-slavery American society, the Black family, to a large extent, exhibited both patriarchal and matriarchal importance.

While I am not suggesting that the African American community should be matriarchal or patriarchal, I am acknowledging that there are some historical factors such as survival and economics that have influenced gender dynamics within this community which would make

dominance of either system an oppressive force. On the subject of matriarchy and patriarchy, author Angela Davis, analyzes the Moynihan report and E. Franklin Frazier's *The Negro Family,* in her text *Women, Race and Class*.   Daniel Moynihan, Assistant Secretary of Labor argued in "The Moynihan Report" published in 1965 that a matriarchal family structure dominated Black communities due to male and female relationships during slavery, which often debased the male figure, even if he was present in the home, and had lasting effects on the family even into the following centuries (15). E. Franklin Frazier, while acknowledging that the effects of slavery were horrendous, argues that "neither economic necessity nor tradition had instilled (in the Black Woman) the spirit of subordination to masculine authority" (102).   Davis counters both Franklin and Moynihan by noting that it was not possible for Black men and women to conform to the "dominant ideological pattern" because "The economic arrangements of slavery contradicted the hierarchical sexual roles incorporated in the new ideology" (14). Furthermore, Davis argues that not only was it not possible but it was not realistic. Davis further writes,

> Black women, … because they were workers just like their men—were not debased by their domestic functions in the way that white women came to be. Unlike their white counterparts, they could never be treated as mere "housewives." But to go further and maintain that they consequently dominated their men is to fundamentally distort the reality of slave life. The special character of domestic labor during slavery, its centrality to men and women in bondage, involved work that was not exclusively female. Slave men executed important domestic responsibilities and were not … the mere helpmates of their women. For while women cooked and sewed, for example, men did the gardening and hunting… The labor that slaves performed for their own sake and not for the

aggrandizement of their masters was carried out on terms of equality. Within the

confines of their family and community life, therefore, Black people managed to

accomplish a magnificent feat. (18-19)

As Davis suggests, having different roles does not necessarily imply a hierarchy; it suggests that

Black men and women work together for a common goal. Trying to assert positions of

dominance and subordination only leaves each member of the community in a negative position.

Thus, the non-matriarchal and non-patriarchal system that I believe works best, and system that

Davis says existed during slavery, is one in which both Black men and women worked together

as a cohesive unit.

Furthermore, I suggest that Davis' analysis of Black men and women's roles during

slavery is the same concept of Black family life that Hansberry is illustrating in *A Raisin in the*

Sun. Although Black women are sometimes depicted as castrators and emasculators, the woman

as an emasculator is only possible when the man assumes a position of entitlement to certain

roles and positions within the family. When he assumes that he is entitled to be the primary

breadwinner or entitled to be the head of the household, he is accepting a set of "Black sexual

politics" that do not work well with the structure of the family. According to Patricia Hill

Collins, "Black sexual politics are a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race and

sexuality that frame Black men and women's treatment of one another, as well as how individual

men and women are perceived and treated by others"(6). As mentioned, gender roles in the

African American community were controversial because socio, political, and historical factors

that existed in the African American community did not lend themselves to support the

dominance of either the matriarchal or patriarchal system of thought. Hence, family decisions,

living conditions, and leadership were collective in nature because life's circumstances demanded that they be that way.

Therefore, given that mainstream gender roles were not typical for African American families well into the twentieth century, I suggest that Hansberry used her writing to critique the complexities of African American gender experiences long before the recognized Black Feminist movement took place between the late 1960s and early 1980s. Mainstream feminism generally upholds the belief that women can have lives in which they are free to make choices and have the necessary support and resources to do so (Sheftall 21). Black feminism considers the racial and sexual barriers that hinder this notion of choice and freedom among women of color. Author Kimberly Stringer writes that, "described as a period of abeyance in the feminist movement, in the 1950s, artists, academics … questioned the dominant mentality of home and hearth for women and how that played out in black women … black women adeptly cared for their families under … slavery and since then were present in the workplace long before white American women" (20). Though the 1950s may have been a period of "abeyance" in terms of formal feminists' activities, Hansberry's feminist messages within the text were directed to the Black community in general, but especially to Black men. The explosion of Black feminism in the 1970s was spurred by " the refusal of Black women activists to take a back seat to men within both the civil rights and Black Nationalists political movements" (*Black Sexual Politics* 48). Although Hansberry's writings were at the forefront, instead of the later rise of the Black feminist movement, I believe that she was also refusing to take a back seat to the male-centered ideologies of her time period.

For example, in the play, we see that Walter's perspective is reflective of the traditional male-centered society of the 1950s in which, few women were encouraged[17] to become

physicians but were spurred instead toward domesticity. He says, "If you so crazy about messing 'round with sick people -- then just go be a nurse like other women – or just get married" (38). His traditional set of social views about men and women's roles allows Walter to see Beneatha's desire to become a doctor as a joke. Never is it implied by Hansberry that Beneatha, a college student, lacks the intellectual ability to accomplish her dream. However, not only is Walter not supportive of Beneatha's dream because it is a non-traditional field for women, but he also sees the fulfillment of Beneatha's dream as a threat to his own dreams of owning a liquor store. In an exchange between the two of them about the money, they have the following exchange:

> WALTER: Ain't many girls who decide
>
> WALTER and BENEATHA (In unison) "to be a doctor."
>
> WALTER: Have we figured out yet just exactly how much medical school is going to cost? …
>
> WALTER (Looking at his sister intently) You know the check is coming tomorrow.
>
> BENEATHA (Turning on him with a sharpness all her own) That money belongs to Mama, Walter, and it's for her to decide how she wants to use it. I don't care if she wants to buy a house or a rocket ship or just nail it up somewhere and look at it. It's hers. Not ours hers.
>
> WALTER (Bitterly) Now ain't that fine! You just got your mother's interest at heart, ain't you, girl? You such a nice girl but if Mama got that money she can always take a few thousand and help you through school too can't she? (1.37)

Walter's discouragement is not just about Beneatha being a woman, but it centers on his view that Beneatha's advancement is a danger to his own accomplishments. But was it not possible

for both of them to get what they wanted? In spite of the fact that Mama gives him the money and instructs him to "take three thousand dollars and put it in a savings account for Beneatha's medical schooling," he later takes all of the money, even "Beneatha's money too" to put toward his investment in the liquor store (1.107). He later regrets this decision when he loses all of the money, including his sister's school money, simply because he puts the fulfillment of his own dreams above hers.   I believe that this is at the root of the Black sexual politics that Hansberry addresses within this play. In a parallel to this situation with Walter and Beneatha, I question why it is not possible for both Black men and Black women to advance without seeing each other as opponents instead of comrades?   From my reading, I suggest that this incident between Walter and Beneatha, among many other situations in the play, makes Hansberry a precursor to the larger concept of cooperative gender relations in the African American community, which later becomes the basis for several concepts in Black feminism and Black masculinity studies. Some of the cooperative gender ideas that Hansberry represents in *A Raisin in the Sun* are that Black Nationalist notions of masculinity and Black feminist issues do not have to exist in opposition to each other; Black men need the support of Black women to fulfill their dreams; and the greatest level of success within the African American community comes when Black men and Black women's dreams merge.

Black Masculinity and Feminism Co-Exist

As mentioned, although Hansberry's work*, A Raisin in the Sun* was written before Black feminism and Black Nationalists' ideology on masculinity became formal areas of study, she still uses her characters to address concepts that later become a part of these two movements, which illustrates that it is possible for both to peacefully co-exist. During the 1950s to 1980s, one of the concepts that is a point of contention between these two areas is the idea that race must take

precedence over gender issues. As demonstrated earlier in the chapter, Black Nationalists male leaders' saw their role in the community as synonymous with their roles as Black men. In order to fight racial injustice Black men felt that Black women must step back and submit to their leadership. As bell hooks notes, in *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* "Our struggle as Black people is made synonymous with the efforts of Black males to have patriarchal privilege … Until Black people redefine in a nonsexist revolutionary way the terms of our liberation, Black women and men will always be confronted with the issue of whether supporting feminist efforts to end sexism is inimical to our interests as a people" (178). Thus, strong Black masculinity was often linked with Black women's subordination. However, as I suggest Hansberry illustrates in the play, if the men were to embrace Black women's desires as well as their own, then their masculinity would not be threatened and they would both be able to advance.

Furthermore, I suggest that Hansberry demonstrates that Black men should realize that inextricably tying their manhood into racial advancement is not threatened by the progression of Black women but enhanced when Black men choose to perform masculinity differently. As bell hooks further elucidates in her work, *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, many Black men believed that feminism, especially Black feminism and pre-Black feminist concepts of gender equality were a threat " to erase their voices" and "to usurp focus on racial oppression" (66). However, Black feminism need not threaten Black masculinity. Like hooks, I believe that strong Black masculinity and strong Black feminism do not have to cancel each other out. I suggest that Hansberry illustrates this by letting the reader know that it is possible to be actively involved in fighting both racial discrimination and sexual oppression by presenting a different view of masculinity. As critic Michael Awkward proposes, Black men should adopt

"Black male feminism" by being actively disloyal to the current patriarchal structure. He further states that if Black men do not take a stand, then "androcentric practices are learned, are transmitted by other means of specific sociocultural practices in such effective ways that they come to appear to be normal" (Awkward 178). Although Awkward was writing in 1995, long after Hansberry's time, I believe that Hansberry demonstrated the former's key point about the co-existence of the traits of Black masculinity and Black Feminism in Beneatha's interaction with her male suitors.

Through Beneatha's interaction with the men in the play, I believe that Hansberry displays what would later become feminists' ideas and the necessity for an evolved view of Black masculinity. The patriarchal, subjugated, and antagonistic relationship between Black women and Black men is seen mainly in Beneatha' interaction with George Murchinson. As mentioned earlier, George and his family have adapted to mainstream culture due to their affluence and unfortunately, their attitudes toward other Blacks have adjusted as well. When referring to George and his family, Beneatha says "the only people in the world more snobbish than rich white people are rich colored people" (1.50). Beneatha's character is portrayed as anti-assimilationist to euro-centric values, especially when she chooses to wear her hair in a natural, closely cropped cut and when she defies George's espousal of mainstream gender roles. George challenges her Blackness by referring to her ceremonial robes as a costume and tells her that her, "heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy-assed spirituals and grass huts" (1.81). Furthermore, George displays negative views of a woman's place in society. When Beneatha is trying to talk to George to tell him what she is thinking, George gets frustrated because he is focused on kissing and groping her. When she turns him away he says, "You're a nice looking girl … all over. That's all you need, honey, forget the atmosphere … I want a nice – simple – sophisticated

girl … not a poet … I don't go out with you to discuss the nature of 'quiet desperation' or to hear all about your thoughts" (96).   George's idea of interacting with women follows traditional patriarchal notions. Beneatha, like the Black women who would later become key figures in the Black Nationalist movement, was among the "Strong African American women in Black families and Black civil society [who] were labeled deviant" (*Black Power to Black Hip Hop* 52). Because George is not able to control Beneatha, her thoughts and actions can potentially be seen as an emasculating force because they do not conform to the desires of the men in her life. However, if he were to redefine his own masculinity by viewing her propensity toward intellectualism as an asset, then they both could experience progress together.

In contrast to George Murchinson's character, the interaction between Beneatha's character and Joseph Asagai allows us to see a different performance of Black masculinity. Similar to those who came later in the Black Arts movement, I believe Hansberry emphasizes her affinity for Blackness by including Joseph Asagai, a Nigerian male character, to promote the positive message of Africa and encourage an authentic Black experience. When he returns from Africa he has brought Beneatha "the colorful robes of a Nigerian woman" (1.61). Although some may argue that he is trying to get Beneatha to conform to his ideas of beauty and love which is chauvinistic too, I suggest that the masculinity that he portrays is one that is assertive and strong but essentially not threatened by Beneatha's non-traditional leanings of choosing a career that at the time had very few women and even fewer Black women. In fact, he encourages her to pursue her dreams even when Beneatha faces dismay over Walter losing the family's money. Beneatha says, "I wanted to cure. It used to be so important to me …while I was sleeping in that bed in there, people went out and took the future right out of my hands" (2.133-134). Asagai both challenges and consoles her by telling her to stop pitying herself and stop

basing her decision to not fulfill her dreams on her brother's mistake. Asagai says, "there is

something wrong in a house – in a world – where the dreams, good or bad, must depend on the

death of a man? I never thought to see you like this … Your brother made a mistake and you are

grateful to him so now that you can give up on the ailing human race on account of it" (2.135).

By using the male character Asagai to encourage Beneatha's dreams, I suggest that Hansberry is

illustrating that new, emancipated Black masculinity involves encouraging the success, not

subordination of women. I concur with author, Steven Carter's article, "Beneatha Fights Male

Chauvinism as well as Her Own Flaws" when he states that, "Unlike Murchinson … he is

willing to listen to Beneatha and take her career goals seriously, thus enabling their relationship

to grow and leaving open the possibility that he may eventually free himself from his remaining

chauvinism"(99). Also, by making both Asagai and Beneatha strong, she is enacting activism by

mentioning that one's dreams should not be built on the death of another's. Furthermore, I also

believe that Hansberry is illustrating that Black men and women do better when their dreams are

supportive of one another instead of in opposition. Although Asagai asks Beneatha to marry him,

it is not at the expense of her dreams of becoming a doctor. Though she is not sure whether to

marry him, he is understanding and reinforces her right to choose in a supportive manner.

Black Women's Support

This supportive interaction lends itself to the next concept that I believe Hansberry is

illustrating in the play which is that the dreams of the Black man cannot be accomplished

without the support of Black women. In *Black Men, Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The Afrikan*

American Family in Transition, author Haki Madhubuti argues that one cannot discuss the Black

man's identity without acknowledging the key role that Black women play in the development

and completion of that identity. He also notes that our survival as a community requires that we

work together and not against each other (6). I agree and assert that working together to accomplish common goals is the type of communal unity that is necessary if the African American community is going to progress and also if new Black masculinity is going to be created. Although Walter Lee has plans and aspirations, he is constantly looking to Ruth to be a supporter and advocate for those dreams. When Ruth refers to Walter's potential business partners as "good-for-nothing loudmouths," Walter immediately refers to Charlie Atkins, a man that Ruth had previously referred to as such, but now he was doing well, making over "A hundred thousand dollars a year" (1.32). He had tried to get Walter to enter the dry cleaning business with him, but as Walter points out, when Ruth, "Wouldn't do nothing to help" and would not be on his side, because a "man needs for a woman to back him up," then he turned down the opportunity which is the reason that Walter feels hopeless as a husband, a father, and a man. Walter says, "That's what's wrong with the colored women in this world … Don't understand about building their men up and making 'em feel like they somebody. Like they can do something." (1.35) He further says, "We one group of men tied to a race of women with small minds" (1. 35). Here I believe Hansberry is building the idea of support and cohesiveness in the dreams of Black men and women. Not only does Walter want her support, but he also wants her aide in the fulfillment of these dreams' fruition. In spite of the fact that Walter perceives that Ruth is against him, she actually comes to his defense when she addresses her mother-in-law, Lena Younger. She supports him and is an advocate for his dreams even though he may not realize it.

Viewing Walter and Ruth's relationship as a microcosm of the community could be viewed as a similar message to Black Male leaders about their relationship to women. Many male leaders viewed Black women's criticism as though the Black woman was against their

dreams, when in fact that was not true. Just as Ruth criticizes some of the decisions that Walter makes, she still supports his advancement and dreams. The same parallel can be drawn between Black women activists and the Black male leaders' dreams of being recognized as real men in society. Although she criticizes his oppression of her in order to fulfill his dreams, she is still in support of his advancement because she recognizes the burden he has been bearing for so long as a Black man in American society.

In spite of the many trials that Ruth and Walter experience, their love for each other is still apparent. They each lament the unfulfilled dreams that they have as a result of their lot in society. Walter lovingly acknowledges to Ruth that he understands how rough their lives have been. Ruth says to Walter, "You remember how we used to talk when Travis was born … about the way we were going to live … the kind of house … (she is stroking his head) Well, it's all starting to slip away from us … (He turns her to him and they look at each other and kiss, tenderly and hungrily ...)" (1.89). Although they each struggle in their own way, each recognizes that their struggles are not totally of their own making and that turning against each other in difficult times is not the answer. bell hooks says,

> We do not commonly hear about the males and females who love each other...
> The collective silence in our culture about healthy black male and female
> relationships damages us…. Black male and female relationships have the same
> difficulties that appear in all relationships in a culture of domination where
> patriarchal thinking prevails … Because of the added impact of racism, the
> dysfunction in African American life is often more extreme. (*We Real Cool* 116-
> 117)

Although Walter and Ruth are struggling and their ideas for handling the various situations in their lives differ, at the heart of what each wants is the best for the other.

Black Men and Women's Dreams Merge

When it is understood that Black men and Black women should support each other, then another aspect of Black male emancipation or new masculinity happens: the dreams of Black men and women can merge. This is the final lesson that I believe Hansberry illustrates about African American masculinity. Walter's character is an example of the concept that often Black men's greatest success comes when his dreams and Black women's dreams are fused rather than separated. Initially when Mama Younger announces that she has bought a house, Walter is incredulous and furious toward his mother. Though Ruth is concerned about there not being any "colored people living in Clybourne Park," she ultimately reacts joyously when the dream of homeownership that commenced with Mama is fulfilled. Contrastingly, Walter feels that his mother's decision undermines his dream of owning a liquor store. He says, "You the head of this family. You run our lives like you want to … So you butchered up a dream of mine – you – who always talking about your children's dreams" (95). After noticing what her treatment of Walter's dream, combined with the pressures of society, is doing to him, she has a change of heart. Mama says,

> There ain't nothing worth holding on to, money dreams, nothing else … if it mean it's going to destroy my boy … I paid the man thirty-five hundred dollars down on the house. … take three-thousand and put it in a savings for Beneatha's medical schooling. The rest you put in a checking account – with your name on it … I'm telling you to be the head of this family from now on like you supposed to be. (1.107)

It is interesting to note that after noticing how despondent Walter is about not fulfilling his

dream, Mama passes leadership of the family on to him. And it is also interesting how Hansberry

makes Walter's first decision as the "head of the household" an unsuccessful one, when he loses

his mother's money in a business deal gone wrong. Thus, I suggest that Walter's character

demonstrates the idea that when the men of the community attempt to fulfill dreams that do not

include the aspirations of the women in their community, they fail. Mama is against the liquor

store from the beginning for moral reasons, and Ruth does not think very highly of Walter's

friends who had proven themselves undependable. Hence, when Walter goes against the wishes

of the women in his home and tries to assert his dominance as the leader of the household

without their approval and support of his dreams, his decision hurts the entire family. Not only

does Walter's blunder hurt himself and destroy his own dream, but it dampens Beneatha's dream

of becoming a doctor; it's hurts his wife and son's dreams of better living conditions; and it

destroys his dead father's dream of a better life for his family. Mama is in such a rage when she

hears the news that she looks at her grown son and "without thinking about it, starts to beat him

senselessly in the face" (1.129). Walter's actions, coupled with Mama's response, are examples

of how attempting to follow the mainstream patriarchal system negatively impacts the Black

family. Scholar Paul Carter Harrison in *The Drama of Nommo*, writes,

> The traditional matri-focal relationship has been shaken out of focus, and
>
> suddenly becomes a complex, a condition, an unnatural product of that assault.
>
> When a man is not able to designate his own goals, he cannot be considered a
>
> determining force in the life-style of his community. Women then are obliged to
>
> shoulder greater responsibilities. Still, it would be fallacious to assume that the
>
> matriarchal syndrome among blacks results from a male-female conflict. It is,

rather, the direct result of oppression, which has forged conditions that create the

appearance of such conflicts. (67)

Although the conflict appears to be an issue between Walter and his mother, Harrison recognizes

that both of them are suffering from greater conflicts that exist between themselves and

mainstream society. Walter is trying so hard to fulfill ideal hegemonic masculinity because of the

emasculation that he feels from his poor living conditions and economic failures that he is

willing to risk everything at a better chance in life. Mama has to endure the burden of leading the

family, both with and without her husband for years. Then, just as she is going to receive some

relief by transferring those responsibilities to her son, it is all lost in her son's quest for ideal

manhood.

In "Confrontation and Commitment," C.G. Bigsby draws a parallel between Walter's

manhood and a story by Richard Wright, called "Man of All Work" in which a Black man

dresses up as a woman in order to get a job working as a cook. Bigsby argues "His action

emphasizes what Baldwin has called the demoralization of the Negro Male when his position as

breadwinner is usurped by the woman. It is this agony with which Walter Younger lives. He has

been desexualized and his dignity has been crushed. It is this knowledge which underlies his

bitter disgust and self-contempt" (58). Walter has felt emasculated by various factors his entire

life. He feels even worse when his attempt to lead and to financially advance the family fail.

However, after coming to understand both of their struggles, one realizes that their battle with

each other is reflective of the life that has been created by the harsh conditions that they have

been forced to endure for so long.

Nonetheless, the play ends on a lighter note with the Youngers deciding to move to

Clybourne Park. Although the play does not address what happens to them afterward, it is

generally seen as a positive ending. However, authors C.G. Bigsby and Paul Carter Harrison both

assert that Walter Lee's change of heart at the end of the play is unconvincing. I disagree with

Bigsby and Harrison in feeling that Walter's transition as a man was unrealistic because I believe

that he learns to perform masculinity differently. However, I agree that the Youngers move into

a White neighborhood should not bring the euphoric feeling of a happy ending because their

trouble has really only begun. Harrison writes,

> It is highly improbable that a woman of her intelligence could have construed the
>
> inappropriate happy ending of the play as being meaningful unless it was in
>
> response to her deep-seated desire to accomplish what reality could not achieve.
>
> Even Hansberry could not have been so naive as to think that the modality of
>
> white oppression could be broken because of a black family's integration into a
>
> white neighborhood. (70)

Patricia Hill Collins says that the concept of "home" reinforces racial hierarchies in American

society. The housing system in the United States is a form of "American Apartheid" that keeps

white children in white families in all-white neighborhoods and mandates that families and

neighborhoods of varying ethnic and racial groups be kept separate (43). Collins further states

that reinforcement of this type of racism comes from "the ability of White people with money to

purchase racially homogenous experiences for themselves and their offspring. What remains

noteworthy about these practices is that these practices are defended as being nonracial because

they allegedly occur in defense of family" (44). Creating a racially homogenous family

environment is exactly what Mr. Lindner and the Clyborne Park neighborhood association is

trying to do. I agree with Collins that reinforcing this idea of racial hierarchy is also reinforcing

the racism and gender oppression that exist within society because it perpetuates a system in

which everything has a proper place. Furthermore, I believe that it also affects African American masculinity because it creates yet another unattainable ideal of hegemonic masculinity the Black men will not be able to reach. Thus, by choosing to defy racism with this move to Clyborne Park, I suggest that Walter redefines masculinity for himself because by the end of the play, his manhood is associated with racial and familial pride and the unity of the dreams of himself and the other members of his family. Hansberry writes,

> WALTER: (Really like a small boy, looking down at his shoes and then up at the man) And uh well, my father, well, he was a laborer most of his life …Well what I mean is that we come from people who had a lot of pride. I mean we are very proud people. And that's my sister over there and she's going to be a doctor and we are very proud … Travis, come here. (TRAVIS crosses and WALTER draws him before him facing the man) This is my son, and he makes the sixth generation our family in this country. And we have all thought about your offer … And we have decided to move into our house because my father, my father, he earned it for us brick by brick….
>
> LINDNER: (Looking around at all of them) I take it then that you have decided to occupy . . .
>
> BENEATHA: That's what the man said….
>
> MAMA: I am afraid you don't understand. My son said we was going to move and there ain't nothing left for me to say. (1.149)

As can be seen Walter transitions from feeling and acting like a boy into manhood in this portion of the story because his masculinity has been redefined. He now sees ideal manhood as having pride in his family, by having common goals and dreams with his family, and by standing up

along with his family against a common oppressor. And I believe that these traits were

Hansberry's message to the coming generation about masculinity. Contrary to Black Nationalist

ideas about masculinity, new manhood does not required the subordination of women but the

support of women; new manhood is not just providing for one's family but promoting pride in

one's family; and new manhood is not about silencing the dreams of one aspect of your

community so that your personal dreams can flourish but about choosing, pursuing, and

achieving common dreams.

Conclusion

It is undeniable that the American literary tradition in the past has been a predominately

masculine domain and many men literally echo the words of Anne Finch[18], Countess of

Winchilsea, who sarcastically says that a woman who "attempts the pen" is an "intruder on the

rights of men" (Norton 238). However, activists such as Lorraine Hansberry realized the

necessity to expand the American literary canon with works that reflected her experience as an

African American and her experience as a Black woman. Hansberry understood that it is

imperative that African American women embrace writing and use their pen as a weapon against

society's refusal to acknowledge their literary presence and contributions. During her short life,

Hansberry used her writing as a form of social activism to impact her community. In addition to

A Raisin in the Sun (1959), the other plays that Hansberry wrote include: *The Sign in Sidney*

Brustein's Window (1965), which was the second and last play produced while she was living;

To Be Young, Gifted and Black (1969), *Les Blancs* (1972), *The Drinking Gourd* (1972), and

What Use Are the Flowers (1972), all of which were partly written, edited and published

posthumously by her former husband Robert Nemiroff. Like *A Raisin in the Sun*, all of these

plays contain powerful social messages, most of them can be considered "Black Plays" because

they focus on the issues affecting the Black community. Black plays were significant because they provided messages to the community that communicated ideas about liberation from their struggles. Although she did not embrace the Black Nationalist concept of separatism, I still suggest that, not only was Hansberry a front-runner for Black plays, but she was also a front-runner for the Black Arts and Black Feminist Movements with her innovative ideas on African Americans relationships with one another. Even more so, she was using her play to give the community concepts on how to improve gender relations between Black men and Black women. I have applied this theory to the Youngers, by illustrating again, that Walter's sense of emancipation comes from being unified with his family. Furthermore, I suggest that the main point about masculinity is that Walter is taking control over a domain in society that had caused his emasculation by being subjected to white standards and breaking free of the fetters that economic dismay can bring. Walter is also taking on a position of unity with his family by allowing his dreams to merge with theirs. This is his emancipation when he realizes that true manhood is when he and his family can face whatever the world attempts to do to break them, when they act in collaboration and not antagonistically toward each other. Thus, I assert that the "happy ending" of the play is not that they move, but that they work together in a sense of unity. These liberatory ideas provided suggestions for emancipation for Black men from their emasculated state and became the crux of some key theories in masculinity studies. Thus, Hansberry's work, especially her classic play, *A Raisin in the Sun*, helped to shape the social activism and art of an entire generation.

CHAPTER THREE

"PAYING THE RENT" OF MANHOOD:

GRANGE'S GRAPPLE AND BROWNFIELD'S BATTLE

"Activism is the rent I pay for living on the planet," is the mantra by which author Alice

Walker has lived her life. As an advocate for the rights of women, her writing and her work have

been shaped by her belief that women should exist, love, work, and play in a world that supports,

affirms, and enables their humanity. She, like other advocates of women's rights, would

probably be labeled by many as a feminist, but the term, feminist does not fully encompass

Walker's ideology. In "Cartographies of Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,"

author Chandra Talpade Mohanty asks, "How do we/ they define feminism? ... Whose history do

we draw on … How do questions of gender, race and nation intersect in determining feminisms

… What are the politics of the production of this particular knowledge?" (3). Although

Mohanty's article focuses directly on Third-World women, the questions that she poses are the

same that one would use to conceptualize African American feminist cultural criticism.

Recognizing the need for African American women to have their own cultural theory, Walker

defines African American feminism in her own term, Womanism. A womanist is defined as a

"black feminist or feminist of color … A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or

nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility … and

women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to

survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically,

for health. Traditionally a universalist" (xi). As Walker states the case, the African American

feminist must be concerned about the plight of women and committed to making sure that her

entire community survives and flourishes. This is exactly what Walker has done in her writing.

By addressing the aforementioned questions in her texts, she has been a leader among African American feminists and women authors who have taken on the role of theorist to promote the study of how to advance gender relations within Black communities.   Furthermore, I suggest that some of the key concepts on which Walker focuses are that women must embrace writing, a traditional tool of the phallocentric social order, as their own; men must recognize that women who speak up for their rights do not automatically denote anti-male rhetoric; and furthermore, that the African American community should not limit the representations of themselves in literature to proscribed gender roles but have the freedom to construct their own identity.

Why is it important to embrace writing, speak up, or shape one's own identity? It is because Black women must write the type of literature that they want to read, produce characters that are reflective of their own experiences, and be a model for the authors and artists that are coming after them. Over the years, the pen has remained a male-dominated entity because male writers were the first to have access to writing as a vehicle for their own voices. Because men had established the tradition of writing and publication, it served as encouragement to later male authors to continue utilizing this particular avenue. Often the works that these white male authors produced reflected their hegemonic ideals and perpetuated their notions of dominance as the norm within American society. As the literary canon slowly expanded and was forced to include white women and later Black men, Black women were still struggling to find a place for their own voices. Black women who had been depicted as mistresses of white men, the servants of white women, and the subordinates of Black men, now wanted to tell their stories from their own perspectives. Walker illustrates this concept in the collection, *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden,* when she notes that when she, like author Toni Morrison, began writing there were not many authors whose works reflected her experience and point of view. Most of the Black women

authors who had written prior to the middle twentieth-century were either out of print, discredited, or maligned (9). Walker argues that "accepted literature" is often, "sexist and racist and otherwise irrelevant or offensive to so many lives" and that therefore, a Black woman author must be "her own model as well as the artist attending, creating, learning from, realizing the model, which is to say, herself" (8). Walker further notes that in her own work, she writes not only what she wants to read but what she "should have been able to read" because otherwise Black women's experience are "misrepresented, distorted, or lost" (13). Thus, by using the power of the pen to speak out to construct her own identity, and advocate for Black women's rights and experiences, Walker knows that her writing is a form of activism through which, "the life we save is our own" (14).

Embracing these Womanist concepts since her first publication in 1967 has made Alice Walker one of the most acclaimed, and controversial, Black women authors of the late twentieth century. At the time she first arrived on the literary scene, civil rights, Black Arts, and Black feminism were all intersecting and diverging under the communal umbrella of Black Nationalist ideology. Leaders of the community, such as Medgar Evers, Lorraine Hansberry, and Malcolm X had been murdered or had passed away, and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination would soon follow. America was in a state of political unrest and the fight for freedom was at its height. "Black Power" was becoming the slogan of choice for many African Americans within the community. This battle cry was representative of the six goals of the "Black Power" movement which were: 1) Growth of political power; 2) Building economic power; 3) Improvement of self-image; 4) Development of Black leadership; 5) Demanding federal law enforcement; and 6) Mobilization of Black consumer power (Bracey 469). Black leaders of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) like Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown, believed that if the African

American community embraced the aforementioned fundamental values the community would advance. The period was a time when many believed the African American community needed to come together and provide a united front in order to make progress.

To complement the aforementioned Black Power ideals as well as incorporate them into a more artistic form, author Larry Neal says, "We must find a way to overthrow the idea on this planet that whites are superior … take pride in our beingness and drown that part of ourselves out that fears self-realization. We have to … seize our own reality … seize our history – retell it! Liberate it"(148). This point is magnified in Neal's essay, "The Black Arts Movement." There he argues that Blacks must create their own culture and destroy many of the white ways and ideas that they have accepted for so long; Blacks must create their own truth and no longer accept the vision of the oppressor; and that Black artists must use their work to transform society. I suggest that these are tenets that Walker seems to have embraced. She uses her art to work for social change, to promote progress in the community, to suggest concepts for liberation, and to overthrow the idea that whites are superior. However, her early writing also helped change gender dynamics in the African American community. By promoting different social roles between Black men and women's relationships, she suggests liberation theories for black men from emasculation by requiring that they overthrow the hegemonic ideals that caused them to hurt Black women. Thus, though Womanism is typically considered to be a combination of Black Nationalist and Black feminist philosophies for African American advancement, one of the reasons that Walker is often criticized is because of her portrayal of Black men within her novels.

According to some critics, her depiction of African American males within her works violated the concept of Black solidarity. For years the African American community, which had

been abused and oppressed by a racist society was taught that silence about internal racial

problems was better than the betrayal of one's own Black brother or sister. As a matter fact, the

idea of unity within the Black community for the purpose of advancement had been around for

more than a century prior to Walker's emerging as a writer. Author Tommie Shelby, in *We Who

Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*, identifies five components that

must be present in order to have Black unity. First, Shelby argues that identification with the

group is the most salient aspect of solidarity because doing so means that Blacks see other

members of the community as an extension of themselves, with whom they feel pride when

someone does something praiseworthy and shame when someone does something embarrassing.

Next, he argues that solidarity comes from special concern for other members of the community

because African Americans are supposed to comfort and assist those with whom they identify.

Then, Shelby asserts that the Black community must have shared values and goals and fellow

members must believe each member is committed to these values and goals. Shelby further

acknowledges that loyalty is another aspect of Black solidarity and probably the most

controversial component because it involves an "us" and a "them" or an "in-group" and "out-

group." This usually implies a common enemy outside of the group but does not account for the

possibility of a foe within. And finally, Shelby states mutual trust is important in Black solidarity

because fellow African Americans must believe that the others will not let them down or betray

the values of the group (68-71). In essence, members of the Black community were expected to

"put aside individual goals that would conflict with the good of the team" (71). Hence, given the

high level of commitment to group goals as opposed to personal battles that Shelby outlines in

this Black solidarity concept, it is possible to see how Walker's portrayal of Black men in her

novel can be viewed as betrayal.

Often leaders of the community questioned how African Americans as a group were going to move forward if those within the race are operating against the goals of the entire group by exposing the flaws of a sub-group within the race. As Patricia Hill Collins further theorizes Black solidarity in *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism,* such solidarity reflected a Black Nationalist concept that encouraged a group solution to racial inequality over individual liberalism. Collins also notes that within Black solidarity those who had special interests such as feminists, homosexuals, and multi-ethnic men and women were met with criticism when they raised or exposed issues outside of the groups' main goal of social justice (132). Like them, Walker was expected to suppress her disdain of intra-racial injustice by depicting Black men and Black families in a positive light for the good of how the community was to be viewed in mainstream society. This was an unspoken rule between the Black artist and the Black community with which Walker refused to comply.

Probably the most controversial of all of the texts in this study, Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* presents a hauntingly different perspective of African American family life. Many who read it at the time of its publication in 1970 felt as though it was negatively presenting the African American community as well as demonizing Black men. Although the setting of the story takes place in Southern Georgia during the early 1920s and continues through the early 1960s, the central concern with the novel was that, at the time that it was published, African Americans were fighting white oppressors for their rights. Additionally, as mentioned, in the previous chapter, the general consensus among the Black community at the time was that the Black artist was supposed to be a spokesperson for the community. This philosophy was a product of the Black Arts Movement, which purported that the artist had a responsibility to his or her community just as much as he or she did to art. Hence, when artists and authors such as Alice

Walker spoke out against homophobia, sexism, or classism, it made the community look non-unified because it showed that Blacks who were supposed to be fighting oppression together were speaking out against each other.

In the article "To Build a Nation: Black Women Writers, Black Nationalism, and the Violent Reduction of Wholeness," author Amanda J. Davis writes that "black nationalism required literary affirmation of a cohesive racial community," and that the women writers of the time such as Alice Walker, "challenged the movement's reluctance to articulate viable alternatives for African American women and brought issues surrounding women's victimization to the fore-front. Their texts, in turn, continue to serve as a critical re-centering and examination of violence against women and the challenges violence poses to women's attempts to achieve and maintain wholeness in a society where liberation itself is often gendered" (25). The idea that liberation was gendered seemed apparent to Black women because typically Black men were considered to be privileged because of their sex but discriminated against because of their race. Contrastingly, Black women often considered themselves to be doubly burdened because they faced oppression because of their race and their sex. By writing about the struggles of the Black woman's "double burden," I suggest that Walker's writing is demonstrating that being united as a group does not negate the need to handle the issues within the group: for African Americans to be united in front of others, they must first begin by being united amongst themselves. In spite of this, Walker, like other Black women who spoke out against the sexism that they were experiencing from Black men, were still met with contention because Black men had been emasculated for so long by white society that they did not want the art of the community to be yet another emasculating force, in terms of negatively portraying them to the public. Hence, the problem with Alice Walker's *Third Life* emerges.

Third life is the story of two men, a father named Grange and a son name Brownfield, who struggle to find their manhood amongst a racist society and within their family. By depicting these two characters as she does, I suggest that Walker explores the following questions: How are Grange and Brownfield emasculated? How is their manhood impacted by the pressures of white society and impacted by their interactions with women, especially Black women in the text? In the novel, Grange leaves his family behind in search of a new life up north, but he soon discovers that life is just as challenging up north for a Black man as it is in the south. He returns to the south only to see the disarray that his son Brownfield and his family have fallen into. In their quest to discover their manhood, each of them perpetuates a life of violence and abuse toward Black women, which is probably the most pivotal point of contention within the novel. Walker's depiction of these two male characters is considered to be airing the community's "dirty laundry." However, Collins writes, "African American writers whose work seems to challenge dimensions of essential Blackness depicted as 'Truth' often encounter censure. For example, criticisms of Alice Walker's novels … often challenged Walker's accuracy in portraying the Black experience. Even though Walker never claimed that she was trying to represent or depict the Black experience, holding her work to this standard allowed for its dismissal" (*From Black Power to Hip Hop* 104). It was really challenged by African American male leaders who despised her depictions of African American men. For instance, Addison Gayle's disapproval of the novel hinged on Walker's alleged "inability to create complex male characters" (Leak 108). However, I suggest that Walker's portrayal of men in her novel exhibits great complexity because of what she is saying about Black masculinity.

As author Jeffrey B. Leak points out in *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature,* the goal of being united was often hard because representations of Black

Masculinity usually emerged in problematic relation to the construction of Black femininity

(155). This is especially true because Walker, like other African American feminists, was trying

to demonstrate the right of women not to be limited by the traditional gender constructs that were

too often ideologically inscribed within the project of Black unity. Being limited to depicting

characters in the ways that the Black male leaders "approved," or that did not reflect her true

experience went against Walker's principle of using her writing as a form of activism. She states,

> The writer … must be free to explore, otherwise she or he will never discover
>
> what is needed (by everyone) to be known. This means, very often, finding
>
> oneself considered 'unacceptable' by masses of people who think that the writer's
>
> obligation is not to explore or to challenge, but to second the masses motion's,
>
> whatever they are. Yet the gift of loneliness is sometimes a radical vision of
>
> society or one's people that has not previously been taken into account.
>
> (*Everyday Use* 74)

Walker and other women authors felt that they should have freedom to choose and create these

African American images that would influence social justice and change within their community.

Although there are often powerful depictions of Black femininity which Walker

demonstrates when she engages Womanist ideas in her texts, my reading of the text suggests that

Walker is also open and systematic to the exploration of Black masculinity by widening its

definition and depiction in terms of gender roles. In Elaine Showalter's essay "Feminist

Criticism in the Wilderness" the author declares that, "The feminist obsession with correcting,

modifying, supplementing, revising, humanizing or even attacking male critical theory keeps us

dependent upon it and retards our progress in solving our own theoretical problems" (247). Just

as Showalter implies about women's writings in general, Walker's works hold a larger

implication. In spite of the fact that Walker's work is not promoting the patriarchal world-view as superior, this does not necessarily mean that it is anti-male. By closely examining the characters in the novel, I suggest that Walker demonstrates that it was not her goal to attack male theories of masculinity and femininity, but to present her own. The focus is not for women authors or theorists to correct centuries of wrong against women by attacking men, but it is to set their own sense of purpose, goals, and objectives that are not based on their past limitations but on the future expectations of gender construction. I assert that this is exactly what Walker is doing in *Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Walker is unapologetically presenting the problematics in the relationships of Black men and women, as she sees it, and presenting new concepts of masculinity through the characters, Grange and Brownfield.

Though not purely auto-biographical much of Alice Walker's writing, particularly her views on men, were heavily influenced by her family and her life during the early to middle part of the twentieth century. Born on February 9, 1944 in Eatonton, Georgia, as the eighth and final child of Willie Lee and Minnie Walker who were both sharecroppers, gender roles within Walker's family were very traditional, and it is against those limitations that she ultimately rebels. By the time that she was born, her parents were much older and were not as actively focused on her during childhood as they were to her older siblings.[19] On one hand, she lovingly describes her father as a, "fat funny man with beautiful eyes and subversive wit," but on the other, she acknowledges that he was extremely sexist, subscribed to strict traditional gender roles, and ruled with a heavy patriarchal hand (Bates 4). In *Living by the Word,* Walker further describes her relationship with her father saying, "In my heart I have never wanted to be at odds with my father, but I have felt, over the years that he gave me no choice" (11). She often remembers him for being domineering and having "very confused notions of what constituted

behavior suitable for a male" (14). Walker even says that as he aged, he became like some of her worst male characters and resorted to violence as a method of control.

In spite of this, not all of Willie Walker's influence was negative. Being born to parents who were sharecroppers, Alice Walker witnessed first-hand, the evils of the sharecropping system. In spite of the circumstances of such an existence, Walker's father still took an active stance against racism. He was among one of the first African American men to be allowed to vote in Putnam County and even though he was not educated, he did believe in Black rights, activism, and access to decent schools for Black children. He was influential in making sure that the first school for African American children was constructed in Putnam County. When she was four, he and Alice Walker's mother enrolled her in school so that she would not be subjected to labor in the fields.

During her earlier years there was another life changing event with the men in her family that would alter her life permanently. When Walker was eight years old, her brother Curtis accidentally shot her in her right eye with a BB gun. This caused scarring and disfiguration outwardly that made Walker retreat inwardly in order to cope. It was during this time that Walker turned to books and writing as her outlets for her dismay. It was also disheartening to Walker that her brother received very little punishment for the anguish and disfigurement that he had caused her. Instead, Walker's parents sent her to live with her grandparents for a year, which Walker felt was an unfair decision since she had done nothing wrong. Although, the eye scar was later corrected, Walker never regained vision in her eye. In spite of her lack of physical sight, Walker had keen insight. When she returned home to live with her parents, she noticed the sexist ways of her father and brothers to an even greater extent. Like the men of the Black Nationalist

movement, Walker's father believed in fighting for racial rights but ignored the sexist oppression

that he was imposing upon his own family. Willie Lee Walker believed,

> the role of a wife was to cook, clean, and care for children; male children
>
> never washed dishes or swept floors; the wife and female children did that. Why?
>
> The answer was simply that boys did not do household chores because they were
>
> boys. Girls, however, performed house labor and adhered to certain restrictions.
>
> They had to be enclosed, shielded, and kept from doing active things (Bates 5).

Being subjected to these patriarchal rules at home and being given a formal education at school,

combined with the love for reading and writing that she developed after her accident were all

autobiographical factors that lead to Walker using her writing as a tool of her activism.

Furthermore, we can see that there are parallels that can be explored between the male characters

within the work and the males in her life, especially in the novel *Third Life of Grange Copeland*.

It is also because of these reasons that most of her works contain autobiographical

connections and focus on the themes of racial segregation, sexist oppression, and women's

liberation. On March 17, 1967 Alice Walker married Melvin Leventhal, a white Jewish lawyer

and with him she had a daughter named Rebecca. Together they fought for civil rights until their

divorce in 1976. Walker chronicles her experience with her daughter in "One Child of One's

Own: A Meaningful Digression within the Work(s)" and her former husband in "To My Young

Husband," an essay included in the book *The Way Forward Is a Broken Heart*. In the essay

about her daughter she discusses the connection that she feels to all women who have borne

children. And in the essay about her ex-husband she discusses their struggles as the first legally

married interracial couple in Mississippi, fighting together for African American rights.

Walker's first work, "To Hell with Dying," published in 1967 was inspired by her own thoughts

of suicide and depression from an unwanted pregnancy while she was an undergraduate at Sarah

Lawrence College. At the time legal abortions were not an option so Walker had an illegal

abortion to terminate the pregnancy. Prior to attending Sarah Lawrence College, Walker attended

Spelman College at the height of the Civil Rights movement in the early to middle 1960s. Her

collection of poems called *Once* was published in 1968 which included revolutionary writing

protesting various issues at the time. She used her novel, *Meridian* to discuss the sexism that

pervaded the Civil Rights movement. She published another collection of poetry in 1979 called,

Goodnight Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning, in honor of her mother. The title is based on

the final words that her mother said to Walker's dead father at his grave. In 1982 Walker

published, what can be considered the most famous of all of her works, *The Color Purple*. When

Walker left home to go to college, her mother gave her three gifts – a sewing machine, a

suitcase, and a typewriter. In the novel, *The Color Purple*, Walker makes sewing the skill that

she gives the character Celie to earn a living after she survives a life of being abused by the men

in her life. The *Temple of my Familiar* has strong connections to Walker's experience in

Australia with the aboriginal women who had been subjected to colonial invasion. And the work

Possessing the Secret Joy deals with the misogynous practice of female genital mutilation that

Walker learned about on her trip to the African country of Kenya. Although this is not an

exhaustive list of all of the many works that Walker has written, one can see how the

aforementioned themes permeate several of her works and are reflective of the period during

which Walker was coming of age.

In *Third Life Grange Copeland*, Walker uses her experiences in her hometown to help

shape the novel. Both Grange and Brownfield are sharecroppers like Walker's parents. In the

afterward of *Third Life*, Walker remembers that her inspiration for the novel came from a visit to

a funeral home that was next door to where she would babysit when she was younger. Her sister worked as a beautician at the funeral home and while visiting her, Walker saw the body of a woman who had been abused and murdered by her husband. In the novel, Mem, Brownfield's wife, faces a similar fate. Walker's father was a violent man too, and she sympathized with the dead woman because she knew that had a few things been different, the dead woman could have easily been any of the women in her family. Walker writes that the violence that the men use on their families is a form of self-hatred through which, "we have become more like our oppressors than many of us can bear to admit … The white man's oppression of me will never excuse my oppression of you … This is the understanding that is encoded in the lives of the 'soul survivors' of the novel, Grange Copeland and his granddaughter, Ruth. It is an understanding about the possibility of resistance to domination that all people share" (345). By examining the concept of oppression within the novel I analyze what Walker is saying about the oppression of Black women because of patriarchal structures and warped views of masculinity within the novel. I argue that just as Walker is paying her rent to humanity by using her writing as a form of activism, she is also illustrating how Grange and Brownfield are paying the price to be seen as men in their society.

Black Emasculation

The psychological emasculation of Black males in the United States dates back to the slave trade, and it is rooted in Black men's need to feel affirmed as complete citizens and viable leaders in American society, just as their white male counterparts had been for centuries. As I previously established, Black men recognized that the norm for this performance of ideal manhood was not based on their circumstances but rather on the norm for white men. Again, it was clear to Black men that the ideal man is white, middle class, married, heterosexual,

protestant, a father, college educated, and fully employed (Kimmel 231). As a result of this concept of manhood, author Michael Kimmel argues that the early to middle twentieth century was a time that "resounded with voices of rage and pain" from Black men because they were a group of men who "had historically been marginalized and emasculated by such self-made middle class white men," and they were "a most potent screen against which middle-class white men played out their masculinity" (6, 195). Perpetual images of this ideal manhood made it tough for Black men to feel like "real men" because it was difficult for them to fulfill all of these aspects of masculinity in a society in which they were oppressed. According to Judith Kegan Gardiner in *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*,

> All men are harmed by 'hegemonic masculinity'… because it narrowed their
> options, forced them into confining roles, dampened their emotions, inhibited
> their relationships with other men, precluded intimacy with women and children,
> imposed sexual and gender conformity, distorted their self-perceptions, limited
> their social consciousness, and doomed them to continual and humiliating fear of
> failure to live up to the masculinity mark … Men are just beginning to realize that
> the traditional definition of masculinity leaves them unfulfilled and dissatisfied.
> (6)

Attempting to fulfill the hegemonic masculinity about which Kegan speaks is at the core of Grange and Brownfield Copeland's problems. Just as illustrated in the other texts of this study, the men of the novel, Grange and Brownfield, are mentally emasculated by their economic status and are held captive by the pressures and standards of white society. I will discuss both of them together in this portion of the chapter because the setting of the novel links the two men with the two ideological constructs of both black and white standards of masculinity.

In *Third Life*, Walker sets the novel during the decades from the 1920s to the 1960s, which not only was a time in which white men hailed as the standard of masculinity because of their race but also because white men often controlled the economic mobility of many Black men due to the setup of the employment system. Like many black men historically, Grange and Brownfield are the targets of this larger system of racism, the share cropping system which Walker describes as one of the worst forms of racism because it left Blacks with nothing but a miserly lifestyle and insurmountable debt (Bates 8). Furthermore, like many Black men during the first part of the twentieth century, their greatest example of "manhood" came from the men around them that they saw enjoying and doing well in life – White men, who were the standard by which many Black men measured their own success. For example, Brownfield realizes after watching the loading of the truck for several weeks that, "it was the man who drove the truck who caused his father to don a mask that was more impenetrable than his usual silence … the man was entirely different from his own father ... Brownfield … filled with terror of this man who could, by his presence alone, turn his father into something that might as well have been a pebble or post or piece of dirt" (9).

In this passage, I suggest that Walker is illustrating a concept about Black men that would later become a theory in formal masculinity studies. The idea that Black men must have the ability to present themselves in multiple ways and play according to the expectations of their audience for the purpose of their own survival, especially when interacting with someone who has superior power is called impression management (Majors 61). Being able to "manage" is a part of the "Cool Pose" concept that Majors and Billson developed which analyzes how Black men interact with those around them. These authors argue that, "The black male is socialized to view every white man as a potential enemy, every symbol of the dominant system as a potential

threat. As a result, he is reluctant to expose his innermost feelings. Playing it cool becomes the mask of choice. Cool pose is a well-developed and creative art; it also exacts a stiff price in repressed feelings and suppressed energy" (27). Thus, in *Third Life*, Grange's comparison to something as low as dirt further demonstrates his position in society and why he acts the way that he does. His son Brownfield understands that the man whom his father fears is both white and successful – two things his father was not, and that he had enough control over their lives to turn his violent and boisterous father into a den of silence. The social order was clear. They farmed the land that white men owned and they lived in a society in which they had to beg white men for rights. Hence, Black men understood that because whites controlled their rights and their wages, they were basically slaves without the physical chains. However, if they wanted to survive in these conditions they had to put on a mask of contentment.

Underneath this symbolic mask, many Black men coveted the patriarchal privileges that they had come to view as white hegemonic masculinity. To them, white hegemonic masculinity or ideal manhood encompassed social power, economic freedom, and societal respect. Unfortunately, Grange, like a plethora of Black men during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, struggled mentally and emotionally because he had neither. When Brownfield was younger, he experienced his first sense of the concept of emasculation when he realized that his father did not possess the socio-economic supremacy included in ideal manhood . When his cousins came to visit him, they tell Brownfield, "that his father worked for a cracker and that the cracker owned him. They told him that their own daddy, his Uncle Silas had gone to Philadelphia to be his own boss… They bewildered, excited and hurt him…. He felt … as if he were waiting for something to happen that would take a very long time to come" (4). At this point in the story, Brownfield does not fully know how to articulate how he is feeling, but he senses that in the

future, his pride and worth as a man will probably be controlled by this same set of societal rules, just as much as he knows from his cousins' mean comments that Grange's sense of manhood is currently controlled by the dominant culture's power. In "Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinities," author Athena Mutua describes this power as a force that is socially structured but individually embodied. However, this power does not belong to all men equally, and it is perpetuated in society based on the hierarchy of races and the domination of men over others as one of the "central understandings and practices of masculinity" (17). Thus, Grange and Brownfield knew all too well that in terms of power and economic freedom, they had none. Thus, their "manhood" is continuously being questioned by themselves and challenged by others.

To further illustrate the effects of economics and white standards, we can see how Walker effectively highlights the extent of Black men's psychological emasculation by demonstrating how these notions of ideal masculinity caused some Black men to alienate themselves from their only intangibles riches – their families-- to pursue the tangible riches of money and status. For instance, knowing that he cannot hide his powerlessness because his son is observing him and knowing that his family does not think very highly of him only makes Grange's feelings of emasculation worse. His lowly state is likely the reason why he thinks of his family as a burden instead of a blessing. When examining their economic status, Walker writes,

> From the corner of his eye Brownfield noticed that his father was also surveying
> the house… While his son watched, Grange lifted his shoulders and let them fall.
> Brownfield knew this movement well; it was the fatal shrug. It meant his father
> saw nothing about the house that he could change and would therefore give up …
> When Brownfield's mother had wanted him to go to school, Grange … Knowing
> nothing of schools but knowing he was broke, he had shrugged; the shrug being

the end of that particular dream. It was the same way when Margaret needed a

dress and there was no way that Grange could afford to buy it. He merely

shrugged. (14)

These are examples of Grange feeling trapped by his economic circumstances, and consequently

he feels emasculated. He is powerless in his efforts to support his family or to give them a decent

place to stay. Legal scholar Nancy E. Dowd notes that historically Black men's most

fundamental way of proving their masculinity was by being an economic provider, and it was

precisely in that respect that Black men were denied the means to be men in traditional terms

(Mutua 264). Not only did the Eurocentric notion of success and inability to provide lead to

problems within themselves, but it also led to problems with how they viewed and treated their

families as well.

For many years Grange had dreamed of escaping to the north, but he was trapped by his

economic circumstances and believed his family was an additional burden that kept him in his

emasculated state. For instance, when Grange leaves, "Brownfield was crying silently and

wanted his father to touch the tears … He saw his father's hand draw back, without touching

him. He saw him leave the room. He heard him leave the house. And he knew, even before he

realized that his father would never be back, that he hated him" (21). Grange is determined to be

free and to him that means that no one who would be a hindrance to that freedom could come

with him. Like men during slavery times, the degradation of the first two emasculating factors

caused Grange and some other Black men of that period to see their families as an obstruction or

hindrance to their own freedom. Hopelessness produced fatherlessness. Although historian

Tristan Tolman argues against critics who say that many African American families during and

post slavery were left fatherless, the author does recognize the helplessness of many African

American fathers who attempted to protect their families from the abuse and exploitation of the harsh circumstances that they were in (8). While I am not denying that there were a significant number of fathers who chose to remain with their families whenever possible, I am agreeing that those who did leave, did so because of their hopelessness as they dealt with their circumstances.

Grange's situation shares traits with author Ronda C. Henry Anthony's analysis of *The Narrative of William W. Brown, A Fugitive Slave* in her text *Searching for the New Black Man*. As we have seen throughout this study, when faced with disheartening economic conditions and racists standards, Black men sometimes viewed Black women and children as forces that held them back from attaining their freedom from slavery. As a result of this notion, Anthony points out that attaining their manhood then becomes a game of deceiving whites as well as deceiving Black women and families (40). In both Brown and Grange's situations, they both must choose whether their "manhood," which they envisioned as a reliable degree of financial stability and freedom from the confines of their white male oppressors, could happen while being honorable and staying with their families in the south, or, in contrast, whether it could ever come about as a result of them escaping to the North. Although Grange was not a literal slave, like Brown, his status in life made him a slave to his circumstances. For Grange, to stay would make him feel like the, "overworked deacons, with rough pious hands that beat their women to death when they couldn't feed them" (154). Thus, in both cases, I suggest that the men choose freedom over family responsibility because they each believe that if they escape to the North, they will then have the opportunities to pursue "ideal manhood." As Collins argues, not being able to feed your family or advance in life is a violation of the " social class dimensions to hegemonic masculinity" because "real" men are not "financially dependent on others, but instead support others" (191). With Brownfield and Grange, the emasculating forces that come with economic

status and white ideals of masculinity are so devastating that they, like some Black men, chose to

seek their freedom from this emasculation even at the costs of hurting others in their lives. In

each case the men demonstrate that they would rather have the benefits of hegemonic

masculinity than the combined burdens and benefits that come with a family.

Although Grange's journey is filled with many negative experiences because of

economics and the pressures of the dominant culture, I believe that Walker is illustrating some

very significant lessons about Black masculinity in *Third Life*. I suggest that Grange's life is

reflective of the idea that many African American men have failed to define their own

masculinity for themselves and thus, attempting to fulfill the Eurocentric masculinity is leaving

them with nothing to call their own in mainstream society. In the essay, "Bearing Witness and

Paying Mind," Griffin argues that, "black males are often seeking Eurocentric notions of success

attributed to manhood that are characterized by wealth, notoriety, power, competition, and

individualism opposed to embodying an Afrocentric worldview that positions relationships,

reciprocity, interconnectedness, and collectivism as vital to being and becoming a successful

black man" (171). We can see that Walker illustrates the latter in Grange's life.

Although the battle to attain his manhood based on economics and white standards is

initially the catalyst through which Grange tries to experience his three lives, I assert that the

"masculinity" through which he finds the greatest fulfillment is attained when he pursues

different goals in order to redefine manhood for himself. In his first life, he is a hopeless

sharecropper with the burden of a family. In his second life, he goes north in an attempt to pursue

"ideal manhood" through economic freedom. However, he discovers that the North is just as

prejudiced as the South, and he is forced to hustle and steal just to survive. In his third life, he

changes many of his negative ways and gains a sense of manhood by owning his own farm and

land as well as returning to his family. Thus, he also gets a glimpse of the idea that true freedom and manhood come from being one's own boss, making one's own decision about your livelihood, and interconnectivity with family and others.

By allowing Grange to commence his emancipation from his emasculation when he returns home, we can see that it was not just Grange's hard work that afforded him a sense of emancipation: it was Josie's money, Ruth's love, Mem's death, and the memory of his dead wife that ultimately shape his perspective on his own masculinity. Walker writes, "With his money and hers he bought a farm. A farm far from town, off the main road, deep behind pines and oaks. He raised his own bread, fermented his own wine, cured his own meat. At last, he was free. But his freedom had cost him" (156). By using this as an aspect of Grange's liberation from emasculation, I believe that Walker is illustrating several lessons. First, I suggest that Walker is giving a positive nod to the Black Nationalist concept of ownership in the Black community by allowing Grange and Josie to own their own land. Although Walker was probably not endorsing separatism, especially given her marriage to a white man, and her activism in the civil rights movement, I do believe that she was acknowledging that Black men gained greater fulfillment when they create their own opportunities because it allows them to exist in an environment free of economic struggle due to the pressures of the dominant culture.

Also, I believe that by allowing Grange to attain his manhood with the help of Josie's money, it is an illustration that Black men's greatest success comes when they work as comrades for community advancement with Black women instead of in competition. I suggest that she is acknowledging that Black men's concept of masculinity can include some aspects of traditional masculinity but that their greatest triumphs will come when they embrace a more relational approach to defining themselves. Grange finds his first sense of manhood when he returns to his

family and embraces the members of his personal community. He also finds success when takes

on the role of nurturer to his granddaughter, Ruth, which is a rejection of ideal masculine traits in

exchange for a more progressive perspective. Although Grange takes on some traditionally

female gender roles by becoming the primary care-taker of his granddaughter, I am not

suggesting that Walker presents a "feminized" Black masculinity which author Frantz Fanon

suggests is an emasculating factor for the African American man in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Rather, I am arguing that Grange ultimately feels like a man when he accepts a more progressive,

non-restrained masculinity that possesses some traits of hegemonic masculinity such as

providing for his family and achieving a degree of economic advancement. To this extent, the

Black Nationalist beliefs in unity and ownership within your community, and the idea of

Womanism such as being focused on relational worth and positive relationships with Black

women, now join together to shape his own definition of manhood.

Although we can see that Walker uses Grange's new mindset to illustrate that a

progressive view of manhood garners the most fulfillment when faced with the pressures that

come from outside of the African American community, Walker also uses *Third Life* to address

the intra-racial issues of the community as well. I suggest that while Walker is acknowledging

that Black men have been the victims of a racist society, she is also presenting lessons about how

they have victimized Black women in their effort to combat these pressures. As mentioned

earlier in the chapter, although Grange finds a sense of peace by changing his idea of masculinity

toward the end of his life, it does not negate the cycle of negative interactions with Black women

that he creates throughout his life and in his son Brownfield's life. Contextually, I find that

Walker is using the male characters in her novel to illustrate that their emancipation from

emasculation will also come when they cease using violence against women as a means of

compliance and stop oppressing Black women because doing so will not garner greater acceptance of Black men in white society.

Black Masculinity, Violence, and White Society

First of all, Walker demonstrates that Black men's emancipation will not come at the cost of hurting black women. Having seen violence against women in her home and in her community, Walker uses the novel to demonstrate that this was an issue among African American men and women about which she could not be silent, even in the face of harsh criticism. Walker's characters were reflective of the significant problem of male dominance and female subordination within the community. In the 2007 dissertation, "How to Become a 'Black Man,'" author Kimberly J. Chandler offers an interesting perspective on the perpetuation of this problem among Blacks which I believe was reflective of the same sentiments in *Third Life*. Chandler contends that Black men are often seen in mainstream society as the "oppressed Black male" (82). As a result of being viewed in this way, Black men are able to play the "victim trope" which essentially affords them a pass on their own oppressive behavior. Thus, Black men take advantage of the African American community's familiarity with the victimization that comes from racism. Chandler goes onto explain,

> This perception creates a perpetually subordinate position for Black females
> while guaranteeing a dominant position for Black males … the forces that
> support the privileging of black males assist in creating the perception that *that*
> privilege is extended because of the oppression they receive from greater society
> …To not privilege Black males is to mirror the behavior of their oppressors…
> They can use their oppressed position within society to substantiate their place of
> privilege within the black community … all the while, they benefit from having

the privilege of remaining oblivious to the sexism impacting Black females. (82-

83)

Like the other authors in this study, Walker acknowledges that Black men were the victims of their own oppressive forces, but she does not ignore that they could also be oppressive forces themselves.

This concept interconnects with the idea that Walker addresses in her text which is that when Black men felt emasculated, their frustrations often became apparent in their relationships with Black women. As a result of this frustration, Black men were often misogynistic and disdainful towards Black women. Like many Black men, Grange's violent nature was often in response to how he felt about his own life and prospects for happiness, which were very grim. Not only do his circumstances kill his personal dreams but also prior to his transition, they kill the dreams of his family as well. Although Brownfield later attains the same lowly status in his own life and adopts the same traits of dominance with his wife and family, he initially observes his mother's blind submission to his father with disdain. Walker writes, "Brownfield frowned. His mother agreed with his father whenever possible. And though he was only ten Brownfield wondered about this. He thought his mother was like a dog in some ways. She didn't have anything to say that did not in some way show her submission to his father" (5). Although Brownfield recognizes that there is something inherently wrong in the dominate-subordinate relationship that exists between his parents, he later adopts the same behavior toward his own family. Just as his father Grange requires the childlike submission of Brownfield's mother, Margaret, Brownfield requires the same behavior from his wife, Mem. The reason for this requirement of submission is heavily connected to the previous two factors of emasculation, economics and white standards, because Black men know that they cannot control the white

world outside of their home so they seek to control the world within their home. Grange had found that, "wherever he went whites were in control; they ruled New York as they did Georgia; Harlem as they did Poontang Street" (140). Brownfield feels similarly, telling his wife, "you know how hard it is to be a black man down here … You knows I never wanted to be nothing but a man! … the white folks just don't let nobody feel like doing right" (95). In each case both Grange and Brownfield just want to be seen as real men, but in every way that they attempt to do so, they are held back by the emasculating factors that Black men face.

Yet it is important to recognize that their emasculation is not caused nor perpetuated by Black women. It is caused by the controlling forces of racist mainstream society which cause him to take it out on the only factor he can fathom controlling – the Black woman. Essentially, if the male did not have the resources to maintain his position as symbolic head of his family, he may seek to maintain a semblance of position through other means, which included the use of superior physical force because, "The language of violence is one way to write a more dominative masculine script" (Majors and Billson 33). Author bell hooks notes that there are large numbers of underclass black who are actively violent (*We Real Cool* 56). She also argues that many of these Black men will never act violently outside of the home but are abusive and violent in their private lives (*We Real Cool* 56). Furthermore, hooks notes that, "Black male violence against black females is the most acceptable form of acting out. Since the racist sexist white world sees black women as angry bitches who must be kept in check, it turns away from relational violence in black life" (*We Real Cool* 57). Hence, I suggest that when later masculinity studies examined the perpetrators of violence, the sentiments of the men involved echoed what Walker had already expressed through the characters Grange and Brownfield.

Walker had essentially captured both the theoretical perspectives of the women victims and the male perpetrators in *Third Life*. For example, another aspect of the "Cool Pose" mentioned earlier in the chapter is the link between intimate partner violence, socio-economic status, and Black masculinity. In this aspect of the "Cool Pose," it is a "construct of manhood (in a culture where mainstream norms of manhood are rooted in White male Western patriarchy) which forms sub cultural traditions in which violence is an acceptable defense of manhood" (259).[20] As previously established, African American men who are economically disadvantaged will often struggle to a greater extent with fulfilling ideal hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, the economic stress combined with having limited opportunities for improvement affect the Black men's self-esteem as well as his expression of his frustration about his circumstances. These frustrations lead to situations in which violence is the vehicle chosen to handle these exasperating circumstances. This also leads to Black men's frustrations being taken out on the ones closest to him -- Black women and Black children.

Walker's depictions of Black life that included violence toward Black women from Black men was sometimes received negatively because her writing appeared at a time during the Black Power movement in the 1960s and 70s, during which the artist was supposed to be representative of the Black voice and the artist was supposed to use his or her work to display the unity of the African American community. Although her writing depicted African American life, it did not do so in a way that reflected a positive image of Black families and her portrayal of Black men as domineering and violent was considered to be a factor that was against Black Power instead of for it. Black Nationalist male leaders such as Amiri Baraka, who did not believe in the "'equality' of men and women," and Eldrigde Cleaver who was known for his sexism argued that Black men dominating Black women was the natural order (Breines 56). I suggest that it

was sentiments like Baraka's and Cleaver's that pervaded the period during which Walker's novels first appeared, which demonstrate why it was so important that Walker be a voice of the alternate reality that existed between Black men and women.

In *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*, Walker argues that the men depicted in her novel *Third Life of Grange Copeland* were, in fact, real portrayals of men in the African American community. She notes that for many years the Black men of the community have been taught that in patriarchal society that manhood is synonymous with controlling and dominating over others. Inherit in this teaching is the male attitude that assumes they have authority and should use violence and other means of control in order to maintain it. This type of patriarchal teaching is why Walker asserts that the depictions of domestic violence in her novels are realistic. Furthermore, in response to the Black Nationalism, Walker agreed that Black artists should portray and affirm a strong Black community, but she contended, "How can a family, a community, a race, a nation, a world, be healthy and strong, if one half dominates the other?" (107). I assert that unfortunately the concepts of masculinity that most men learn require that they suppress their emotions and perform in ways that are socially harmful to other members of the community, especially women. I further suggest that the assumption that the man has the right to dominate is often the main vehicle that leads to violence. In bell hooks' essay, "Understanding Patriarchy" she writes,

> Clearly we cannot dismantle a system as long as we engage in collective denial about its impact on our lives. Patriarchy requires male dominance by any means necessary, hence it supports, promotes, and condones sexist violence. … But the most common forms of patriarchal violence are those that take place in the home between patriarchal parents and children. The point of such violence is usually to

reinforce a dominator model, in which the authority figure is deemed ruler over those without power and given the right to maintain that rule through practices of subjugation, subordination, and submission. Keeping males and females from telling the truth about what happens to them in families is one way patriarchal culture is maintained. (2)

Walker displays how the male characters in *Third Life* were maintaining this patriarchal culture by way of violence, but as I suggested earlier, she also demonstrates how the perpetuation of patriarchal violence stemmed from Black male subjugation to economic woes and racist oppression caused by White society.

As established through Grange and Brownfield's stories, as well as Walker's other male characters, Walker is clearly recognizing, though certainly not justifying, the Black man's own oppression. Though espousing her Womanist values by highlighting the sexual, economic, and physical oppression of Black women, Walker is also creating spaces for the reader to sympathize with the Black men oppressors by demonstrating how they too suffer at the hands of white men. In their study, "Male Perpetrators of Heterosexual-Partner-Violence: The Role of Threats to Masculinity," authors Robert L. Peralta and Lori A Tuttle argue, just as Walker does through her characters, that the intersection of masculinity pursuits, economic stress, and control are inextricably linked to intimate partner violence. They assert that it is not only the state of being economically disadvantaged that increases the risk of intimate partner violence, but also the internalized implications of what such disadvantage implies about one's male identity (255). Though their study appeared in the early 2000s, the link between domestic violence, economics, and Black emasculation had been made by Alice Walker nearly 40 years prior in Walker's *Third Life.*

For example, Walker illustrates the disturbing images of violence that occur sometimes between Black men and women in an effort to gain domination, as when Grange threatens to kill his wife, Margaret; and Brownfield would later do the same to his wife Mem and their daughters. Walker writes that "Late Saturday night Grange would come home lurking drunk, threatening to kill his wife and Brownfield, stumbling shooting off his shot gun" (12). Later she writes about Brownfield who beat "his once lovely wife now, regularly, because it made him feel, briefly good. Every Saturday night he beat her, trying to pin the blame of his failure on her by imprinting it on her face" (55). By telling these stories Walker is using her work to expose the Black woman's oppression and bring communal and political awareness to this sensitive matter. She writes that liberation would require, "survival and wholeness of [the] entire people, male and female" (Walker xi). I believe that Walker knew that the Black Nationalist philosophy of focusing on the Black man's liberation as a means to liberating the entire community was not a good strategy because to do so would be forgetting about the other, very intricate part of the Black community.

The next lesson of liberation from emasculation that Walker explores is that oppressing Black women will not garner the Black man's acceptance by white society. Often Black men who were seeking to advance themselves in society felt that if they conducted themselves the way white men did and treated others the way white men treated them, then they would gain that same status. This mind set came about after Black men, who attained what they were told was freedom from slavery, still wanted to assert themselves as the patriarchal powers that they had seen white men be in their lives prior to that time. I suggest that by acting like white men did toward Black women, black men believed that doing so would give them the power that white men had. However, the sad truth is that not only did it not give them the acceptance as men that

they desired in white society, but it also destroyed one of their key supporters and comrades against injustice – the Black woman. In *We Real Cool*, hooks writes,

> enslaved black males were socialized by white folks to believe that they should endeavor to become patriarchs by seeking to attain freedom to provide and protect for black women, to be benevolent patriarchs. Benevolent patriarchs exercise their power without using force. And it was this notion of patriarchy that educated Black men coming from slavery into freedom sought to mimic. However, a large majority of black men took as their standard the dominator model set by white masters. When slavery ended these black men often used violence to dominate black women, which was a repetition of the strategies of control white slave masters used. Some newly freed black men would take their wives to the barn to beat them as the white owner had done. Clearly, by the time slavery ended patriarchal masculinity had become an accepted ideal for most black men, an ideal that would be reinforced by twentieth century norms. (4)

 Initially, when Brownfield imagines himself being married, he imagines himself as the benevolent patriarch. He simply wants to provide for and protect his family just as he has seen the white men of his society do with their families. Even as a young man Brownfield would daydream about what his life would be like when he got older. He imagined living in a beautiful mansion, having a chauffeur, a beloved wife, and two children. However, his dream was interrupted daily by the violent outburst of his father and the vile behavior of his mother. Although Brownfield hated his mother for messing up his dreams, he blamed his father for making her the evil woman that she had become. Although, he initially blames his parents as the

immediate interrupters of his dreams, he later realizes that their actions are a result of their own oppression.

Nevertheless, his determination to attain his manhood in white society causes him to treat his wife in the same negative way that his father does to Brownfield's mother. Initially when Brownfield meets Mem, she is educated, a beautiful "cherry- brown colored," shy, school teacher who reminds him of his mother. Their love for each other at the commencement of their marriage is strong, kind, and full of sincere dreams. Brownfield tells Mem, "We ain't always going to be stuck down here, honey. Don't you worry," and with a trusting heart she sat next to him, "holding her veil in her warm brown hands, and looking and smiling at him with gay believing eyes, full of love" (49). However, as reality set in and he was still working on the farm years later, with insurmountable debt and a growing family, Brownfield's hope faded slowly with his dreams. His dreams of a great life are doused by the need for survival.

Survival is one aspect of African American life that has made the concept of gender politics so controversial since slavery. Often African American families were unable to fulfill ideal roles of masculinity and femininity because survival needs within Black families mandated that both the mother and father work outside of the home. Brownfield realizes this at an early age. Walker writes, "His mother left him each morning with a hasty hug … She worked all day pulling baits for ready money. Her legs were always clean when she left home and always coated with mud and slime from baits when she came back." (6). Just the need to have the basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing automatically put Black men in a position of not realizing ideal manhood. Unlike the white men for whom they worked, the wives of Black men did not have the choice to tend solely to their own homes. Often their days included working very hard at the homes of their white employers with very little left of themselves to give to their

own families. Brownfield realizes this reality is in stark contrast to the dreams he had for his own masculinity as a child. As a result, Brownfield takes on the same disdain for his family that his father, Grange, had for him and his mother. Brownfield realizes that his life is becoming a replica of his father's and he has lost hope for a better life. He realizes that under the hand of white oppression he would never own his own land, never be able to give his wife all of the beautiful gifts that white men gave their wives, and that his children would not have the same opportunities as white children. His solution to try to garner the same respect within his family that the white man feels is to control all aspects of his family's life. Walker writes,

> His crushed pride, his battered ego, made him drag Mem away from school teaching. Her knowledge reflected badly on a husband who could barely read and write. It was his great ignorance that sent her into white homes as a domestic, his need to bring her down to his level … He did not begrudge her the greater heart, but he could not forgive her the greater knowledge. It put her closer, in power to *them,* than he could ever be. (55)

In this passage Brownfield turns against Mem because her education reminds him of everyone in his life, especially whites who were superior to him. He was degraded and felt less than in mainstream society. Although Mem did not degrade him, he knew that everyone thought that she was "too good" for him and that began to weigh on him. As a Black man, he does not see her advancement as an asset, he sees it as an attack on his manhood. As with the previous chapter on *A Raisin in the Sun,* Brownfield, like Walter, did not see that if they worked together, as a united unit, they could get farther. All he saw was that he did not feel like a real man in or outside of his home.

Brownfield is so determined to have control over some aspect of his life that he does not realize that their greatest advancement as a family comes when they work in collaboration to follow Mem's lead after she temporarily decides to stand up to him for the good of their home. Under Brownfield's leadership their family lived in a shack with rat holes on the land of the white man for whom they worked. Even though Brownfield hates their conditions and is insulted by the fact that Captain Davis has made a swap "as if he and his family were a string of workhorses" with another white landowner, Brownfield is still insistent that they will continue to live in these horrendous conditions simply because he said so (79). Like the men of white society, Brownfield wants to have control over his life, but he fails to see that mistreating his family does not make him any more powerful. Although Mem is initially submissive, she eventually stands up to Brownfield. When Brownfield wakes up one morning, he arises to see her holding a shotgun aimed between his thighs. Mem says,

> I already told you … you ain't dragging me and these children through no more
>
> pigpens… I want Daphne to be a young lady where there is other decent folks
>
> around, not out here in the sticks of some white man's property like in slavery
>
> times. I want Ornette to have a decent school. And little baby Ruth … I don't
>
> even want her to know there's such a thing as outdoor toilets … I ain't going to
>
> Mr. J.L.'s place … I have just about let you play man long enough to find out you
>
> ain't one. (84, 91)

Mem initially recognizes Brownfield's oppression in society and tries to make him feel like a man by following his leadership. However, when she notices that his pursuit of ideal hegemonic masculinity is destroying the family, she changes from the subordinate role to being more assertive. Her transition puts her in a kind of double role common to many working class women

that Patricia Hill Collins calls the "bitch" and the "mule." The "Bitch" is pushy, loud, aggressive and rude, while the "mule" is passively stubborn and in need of supervision and prodding (124). These terms refer to stereotypical images of working class women. Although Mem starts out as an intelligent woman of middle class status, Brownfield turns her into a "mule" in his effort to feel like a man. However, when she is scorned by him she turns into a "Bitch" in order to get where she wants to in life. Mem's transition is symbolic in multiple ways. Similar to the women during the time of the Black Power movement, Black men thought that it was fine to not focus on the issues of women and were content to let the Black women continue to be "the mule of the world,"[21] a phrase coined by Zora Neale Hurston to illustrate the hardships that Black women encounter. However, just as soon as they began to assert their rights and be more aggressive, then their image was viewed more antagonistically as a stereotypical "Bitch." The use of this negative image embodies how Black women are viewed when they get out of their allowable places.

This transition also represents the concept from the previous chapter which is that in order to gain success within the Black community the dreams of Black women and Black men must merge. As demonstrated with Mem and Brownfield, when they work antagonistically then the only result that ensues is doom. Sadly, Brownfield decides that the only way to prove that he is just as much a man and just as in control as the white men of society is for him to murder his own wife, the one person he could dominate. His actions are unfortunately representative of the findings of later masculinity studies in that,

> Black husbands are three times more likely than white husbands to hit their wives
>
> [or] engage in domestic violence. … black-female conflict leads to assault and
>
> murder of black females at a greater rate than do the intimate relationships of any

other racial or ethnic group in the United States. Male-female conflict may

develop when a female criticizes her partner for his inability to support the family.

… He takes this as further insult to an already jeopardized sense of manhood and

self-esteem, and may become violent to save face. Many black men feel that, even

though they may not be able to control how society treats them, at the very least

they should be able to control, "their women." (Majors and Billson 17)

Black men were often using dominance and violence as an expression of their patriarchal power

which mirrored what they had seen in white society. When they noticed that they would not

receive severe consequences for displaying violent behaviors toward their families, these

behaviors became the normal expressions of manhood within the African American community.

Expressing dominance through violence in an attempt to affirm his manhood is exactly what

leads to Brownfield's actions. Although he is sent to prison, Brownfield knows that Mem's

death, in the eyes of the dominant culture, is simply the death of a Black woman, nothing more

and nothing less. He is not even remorseful because his only motive for killing her was to see if

"he had any control over himself" in the oppressive white society in which he lives (165).

Although he receives a temporary masculine feeling of affirmation from Mem's death,

ultimately, Brownfield demonstrates the hopelessness that Black men of that period felt when

attempting to control their own lives and have an impact on their families. As hooks says:

Black males socialized in patriarchal culture to make manhood synonymous with

domination and the control of others, with the use of violence, had believed

during the slavery reconstruction and the Jim Crow era they could not claim

patriarchal manhood for fear of genocidal white patriarchal backlash. When

powerful racist white men did not immediately crush militant black males who

acted violently, raping, killing, looting, it appeared that black males had finally

arrived, their manhood was affirmed. (*We Real Cool* 54)

Brownfield's initial fulfillment is short-lived when he realizes that what he truly desires from the

dominant society he will not receive. Eventually, he comes to grips with the idea that no matter

where he goes or what he does –- controlling his family or killing his wife -- he is still not

respected as a man in white society.

Furthermore, I assert that Walker clearly demonstrates that a Black man's value cannot

come from measuring himself against ideal hegemonic masculinity because not only does it lead

to his demise, but it also hurts the Black family. Even if Black men redefine their own

masculinity and have a new sense of self, it is still important not to oppress Black women

because doing so does not change their status outside of the community, especially with respect

to their position in dominant culture.   Patricia Hill Collins supports this notion when she states

that,

> The use of physical force, aggression, and violence as tools of subordination
>
> creates problems within the African American community in three areas.
>
> Specifically, for African American men whose power within broader political
>
> economy remains compromised … violence against women, and violence
>
> against younger Black people, especially children (often under the guise of being
>
> authoritarian father figures) constitutes a triad of male aggression and violence
>
> that is damaging to everyone … the source lies in ideas about Black masculinity
>
> that in turn is situated within a larger context of hegemonic masculinity. (*Black*
>
> *Sexual Politics* 210)

For centuries Black men have been portrayed as angry and violent, which only reinforces the long held stereotypes that cultivate fear as a marker of Black masculinity. Although some may contend that African American women authors such as Walker, and the others mentioned in this study, are only perpetuating this image of Black men, I argue that their depictions are meant to produce a completely different outcome. When white society depicts the Black man as angry and violent they do so to justify their oppression. However, when Black women authors like Walker depict Black men as angry and violent, they do so as an expression of a negative reality that exists in the African American community, but also as one that has the potential to positively change if the African American man is willing to do so. As mentioned and demonstrated earlier, if Black men continue to use ideal masculinity as the sole standard by which they measures themselves, they will continue to destroy their own community.

Black Male Atonement

There is one final illustration that I suggest Walker is displaying in her text which is that in spite of the reasons for what lead to a negative relationship with Black women or the outside forces that created it, Black men must atone for their sins against Black women. The definition of atone that I am using implies that Black men must make amends by doing what is right to make up for what they did wrong. Walker's male characters illustrate that Black men's atonement shall come by changing their outlook on ideal masculinity; changing their behavior and attitude toward Black women; and changing themselves toward a more progressive ideology of Black manhood. Change is seen most fully in Grange's character who takes on the role of nurturer, teacher, and care-giver to his granddaughter, Ruth, after the death of her mother, at the hands of his son. Grange treats Ruth with the honor and respect that he had never given to another woman in his entire life. He says to Ruth "You're special to me because you're a part of me; a

part of me I didn't used to want" (196). This is an indication of Grange's change because he acknowledges that initially there was a portion of his life that he was not willing to be responsible for and care for – his family. He was so concerned with fulfilling his original ideals of manhood that he did not realize until later that even if his economic status and the oppression of white society did not allow them to take care of them as he desired, he could still be a man through his loyalty and care for them. When he finally recognizes his new concept of manhood, Grange finds his true fulfillment as a man when he returns home and determines to make amends with the one person in his family who is still intact – Ruth. Walker writes, "The older Grange got the more serene and flatly sure of his mission he became. His one duty in the world was to prepare Ruth for some great and herculean task" (198). Being a better man became Grange's personal charge. Grange also repeatedly tells Ruth of the Hebrews children's exodus because he wants her to escape the conditions that have emasculated him for so many years. He saved up more than $900 for Ruth so that she would be able to get an education and not have to become the victim of a man's mistreatment just to survive. Although Grange knew that he could not correct what had happened to Ruth's mother, he was determined to make sure that Ruth experienced a different outcome. One day as he is confronting his unchanged son and trying to protect Ruth, Grange captures the complexities of Black masculinity when he says,

> I don't love but one somebody, black or white … An' what I'm talking about ain't love but being a man! … the crackers could make me run away from my wife, but where was the man in me that let me sneak off, never telling her I forgave her, never telling her how wrong I was myself ….And the white folks could have forced me to believe f--king a hundred strumpets was a sign of my manhood … but where was the man in me that let me take Josie here for such a cheap and low-

down ride, when I didn't never care whether she lived or died … the white folks

could have forced him to live in shacks; they might have even forced him to beat

his wife and children like they was dogs, so he could keep on feeling something

less than sh-t. But where was the man in him that let Brownfield kill his wife? ...

And if a cracker did cause him to kill his wife, Brownfield should have turned the

gun on himself, for he wasn't no man. He let the cracker hold the gun because he

was too weak to distinguish the cracker's will from his! The same was true of me.

We both of us jumped our responsibility, and without facing up to at least some of

his wrong a man loses his muscle … If I had my life to live over … your ma and

me would maybe have starved to death in some cracker's gutter, but she would

have died with me holding her hand! For that much I could have done -- and I

believe she would have seen the man in me. (8)

Grange's monologue on manhood is by far the most powerful scene in the novel that captures

what Walker is illustrating about Black masculinity and the lessons that would become the

forerunner for masculinity studies. Grange recognizes that the violence and evil that he and his

son enacted upon their families was unnecessary and cruel. Grange also realizes that he was

wrong for degrading and turning his back on his wife because her liberation coupled with them

working together is a part of both of their liberation. And finally he realizes, just as he

demonstrates with his granddaughter Ruth that he must atone for the evil things that he has done

to Black women in his past by endeavoring to change and do better in the future.   I suggest that

this is Walker's lesson to all Black Men. Black men cannot go back and undo the mistreatment

of Black women and children they have perpetuated in the past, but, yes, they can make every

effort to make sure that one of the traits of Black manhood becomes a renewed attitude and dedication to making life better for those that have been previously damaged.

Although Walker makes the connection between socio-economic status, white hegemonic standards, masculinity, race, and violence in *Third Life* which was published in the 1970s, it was not until the 1990s and 2000s when scholars began to pay attention to this link in masculinity studies. I argue that in order for Black male and female relationships to grow and survive each group must be allowed to thrive and feel empowered without abusing each other or feeling that one must be lower in order for the other one to move higher. Each group must become an advocate for each other's right and accept that an advancement in one group is a positive accomplishment for both, given that each is a part of the same community. Just as author Jeffrey B. Leak says in *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature*, it is imperative that scholars neither romanticize nor demonize the lives of Black men. I argue that Alice Walker has done neither. She simply told her truth. Readers can both sympathize with Grange and Brownfield as well as hold them accountable for their actions. I agree with Leak that the study of Black Masculinity,

> in literary and cultural studies must involve analyses grounded in complexity and integrity. Such analyses will not only refute the naysayers but will also affirm the lives of black men, both real and imagined. This kind of approach also will move us closer to understanding why black men in our national literature and culture are so often emulated and emasculated. These contradictory responses in our national life and culture reveal the love hate relationship we have with black men. (139)

I assert that in *Third Life of Grange Copeland*, Walker does display a love-hate relationship with Grange and Brownfield. I believe that this is why she presents the dichotomous ending for these

two characters, whose stories present them as if they are almost the same man. I suggest that Walker could be illustrating their contrast as a part of the Black Man's solution for masculinity studies. I assert that Walker is demonstrating that advancement requires change. Brownfield does not change and as a result he lives and dies miserably, still trying to attain his manhood. However, Grange does change, and he gains fulfillment as a man in his third life because he has economic freedom by owning his own farm and land, he lives in isolation so that he does not have to be subjected of the standards of white society, and he finds a sense of purpose in his relationship with Ruth. He in turn dies a more honorable death than Brownfield because Grange dies protecting his new found manhood.

Conclusion

Sometimes in the face of great criticism one can question one's contribution and effectiveness in society. Is my voice necessary? Am I doing the right thing? Who am hurting if I choose to speak up? Who am I hurting if I do not? This is exactly what Alice Walker experienced when she endeavored to tell her story during a period when her truth and her reality, were unpopular. Truly, the middle to latter part of the twentieth century was a tumultuous time for African Americans in mainstream society, but what made it even more of a burden was a divided community that wanted to hide instead of address their problems. It was because of these problems that Alice Walker knew her charge and chose to go forth with her mission of literary activism. She continued to write, in spite of the criticism and now the world is a better place for her choosing to do so. In the introduction of *Anything We Love Can Be Saved,* Alice Walker writes,

> As a poet and writer, I used to think being an activist and writing about it
> 'demoted' me to the level of 'mere journalist.' Now I know that … activism is

often my muse. Grounded in my mother's love … and in my father's insistence,

even as a poor black man… that black people deserve the vote, black children

deserved decent schools. All we own … is our life. With it we write what we

come to know of the world. (xxv)

Writing what she knew of the world and using her writing as a form of activism is exactly what

Alice Walker did in spite of the many critics that she faced for her content. Not only have her

works been a champion for Womanism but they have also served as a fore runner for the issues

of African American masculinity. The issues of manhood have been a central topic within the

community since the time of slavery and became even more important during the Black

Nationalist Movement when Blacks were fighting for their rights. Although Walker was for

Blacks having their civil rights, she did not support the notion that the focus should be placed on

the plight of the African American man in order to attain liberation. Walker knew that if the

community was going to fight the oppression in mainstream society, then it must first commence

by acknowledging and then opposing the oppression within African American society.   Fighting

the oppression of Black women, at the hands of Black men is exactly what Walker does in her

novels, especially as we have seen in the case of *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. It is

through these male characters that the readers find solutions for male emancipation from

emasculation.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MEN OF LINDEN HILLS: MANHOOD, MATERIALISM, AND THE MOVEMENT

The early 1980s was a unique period in African American history during which the concept of Black empowerment from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s still impacted the community. Even more importantly, many Black men were still trying to validate their existence as men with Nationalistic concepts of manhood and Black women were still trying to ensure that their voices were heard as valid, contributing members of society. Although Black Nationalist discourse had somewhat died down by the mid-1970s, there was a burst of "Neo Black Nationalism" in the early 1980s, being spouted by Black Nationalistic leaders such as Minister Louis Farrakhan, of the Nation of Islam, who questioned the intentions of Black women who considered themselves to be feminists (Neal 54). As Dean Robinson points out in *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*, gender politics reflected the "problematic tendencies of its era. Claims about respect for women were predicated on a typical patriarchal nuclear family model in which, women were expected to serve men" (42). These gender politics, according to Clyde Franklin, lead to conflict between men and women within the African American community. Franklin[22] writes:

> Unfortunately, the seeds of division between Black men and Black women were sown during the Black movement. … Black men convinced themselves that they could be "men" only if they adopted the White male's sex role. An examination of this role reveals that it is characterized by numerous contradictions. The traditional white masculine role requires men to assume protective, condescending, and generally patriarchal stances with respect to women. It also requires, ironically, that men display dominant, aggressive, and often violent

behaviors toward women. Just as important, though, is that White masculine role

enactment can occur only when there is full participation in masculinist American

culture. Because Black men continue to face barriers to full participation in

American society, the latter requirement for White male sex-role assumption

continues to be met by only a few Black men. The result has been that many

Black men have adopted only a part of the culture's definition of masculinity

because they are thwarted in their efforts to participate fully in society. (149)

Just as Franklin suggests, I concur that adopting traditional white masculinity during the Black

Nationalist Movement created problems in the interaction of Black men and women. This

perception of masculinity also caused problems among Black men who were not able to fulfill

this traditional form of masculinity due to oppression and who insisted on this form of

masculinity as a justification for oppressing Black women. As demonstrated in the previous

chapters on Lorraine Hansberry and Alice Walker, the intersectionality of issues concerning

African American masculinity with the historical influences of Black Nationalist thought during

the late 1950s to early 1980s, were highly correlative. Among the authors whom I suggest

addressed this dichotomy of masculinity and historical influences as well as factored in the

changes that were occurring the African American community, is author Gloria Naylor.

    In 1989, I watched a television movie, produced by Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Productions

called, "The Women of Brewster Place." As a young girl, I was not aware that it was based on

Gloria Naylor's, 1982 novel that held the same name, which I would later read as an adult.

Reading Naylor's work with grown eyes and a new mental lens gave me an even greater

appreciation for the novel, the novelist, and the closely chronicled lives of the Black women who

are portrayed in the text. My perspective on these seven stories had been shaped by my own life

as a Black woman and the lives of other Black women with whom, I had interacted throughout

my life. The novel addresses motherhood, relationships, betrayal, survival, nationality, sexuality,

and socio-economic status. Where would Mattie Michael have ended up had she not been

betrayed by her son and forced to give up her comfortable life for the worn halls of Brewster

Place? How is Lucielia supposed to cope with the death of her child as well as the death of her

relationship with her dead-beat boyfriend, Eugene, who is not being the "man" that she needs

him to be? Why were Lorraine and Theresa shunned in the community for their sexual

preference, even though they were obviously productive citizens? How does Kiswana maintain a

relationship with her affluent parents and still live among, connect with, and help her people who

are struggling? These among other stories in the novel are key factors that affect the vein of each

of these women's lives.

As a much later follow-up to her first novel, Naylor published, *The Men of Brewster*, in

1997, which explores the alternate side of gender, sexuality, and expectations of society on men.

Maybe one would be more sympathetic toward Ben's drunkardness if they knew that he is trying

to soothe the pain of not being able to protect his daughter from the sexual demands of white

men. Perhaps, one would not perceive Eugene's long disappearances from his family as

intentional if they learned that he is struggling not just to provide for them financially but to

make sense of his own sexuality. By chance, though not excusing his behavior, one could come

to understand C.C. Baker, the main culprit in Lorraine's rape. Perhaps he is merely a scarred

little boy who is trying to fit in with the only male influences that he has known by upholding

their view of "manhood" because he does not know how to define it on his own. These among

the stories of the other men in the novel address the emasculating factors that African American

men face on a daily basis.

Although, *The Women of Brewster Place* and *The Men of Brewster Place* are important

choices for a discussion on Black Nationalism and masculinity, nestled between these two novels

is Naylor's work, *Linden Hills* which, I suggest, performs the function of both of the previously

mentioned novels. Also, these three works are interconnected in that the settings, Brewster Place

and Linden Hills, are in the same city, but Brewster Place represents the struggles of poor

African Americans while the Linden Hills represents the issues of rich African Americans. Like

her predecessors in the Black Nationalists movement, not only does Naylor use *Linden Hills* to

affirm and critique several problems within the African American community, but she also uses

the lives of the men in the novel to address the problems that exist among African American men

concerning their masculinity.

Thus, I suggest that interwoven in the stories of Naylor's characters are messages of

African American pride, communal unity, and racial uplift, which connect her, in some form, to

her predecessors in the Black Nationalist Movement, but there is also a correlation between the

negative experiences that the men in the novel incur and their rejection of Mutua's politically

active concept of progressive masculinity. According to Athena D. Mutua, progressive Black

masculinity is when Black men take "an active and ethical stance against all social systems of

domination and who act personally and in concert with others in activities against racism,

sexism, homophobia and heterosexism, class, and economic exploitation, imperialism and other

systems of oppression that limit the human potential of the black masculine self and others" (7). I

concur with Mutua that accepting progressive masculinity is challenging due to the prevalence of

hegemonic masculinity within society. However, I do believe that it is possible to adopt

progressive masculine practices. Thus, I suggest Naylor uses the men of *Linden Hills* to

challenge aspects of the Black Nationalist Movement, reject the materialism of the New Black Bourgeoisie, and make suggestions for alternative definitions of African American manhood.

Biographical Information and Black Nationalist Connection

Born in New York City on January 25, 1950, Gloria Naylor often notes that she was conceived in the southern state of Mississippi which is where her parents, Alberta and Roosevelt Naylor, lived prior to their migration to the North during her mother's pregnancy. She touts this in recognition of her connection with the plight of the southern African American's experience with racism and discrimination during that time period.[23] Although the North was similarly as racist as the South, many Blacks found that there were better jobs and educational opportunities, which is what Gloria Naylor's parents wanted for their children. Naylor confirms how significant it was for her to have northern and southern roots because it allowed her to have a broad and critical outlook on the world about which she writes. She learned early in life that in order to write good literature, first one must read good literature. As the oldest child, Naylor's interest in literature was formed at an early age when her mother, who was also an avid reader, encouraged Gloria to visit the library often and read a variety of books, especially since it was a privilege that Alberta had been denied when she was a child, growing up in Mississippi. In addition to reading, even in childhood, Naylor often used her writing to deal with or make sense of issues and events with which she struggled. This would prove to be very beneficial to her as an adult when she would have to use her writing as a way to process some of the concerns in society that she found to be difficult. Living through a volatile time in United States history, Naylor witnessed major moments such as Brown vs. Board of Education, the Civil Rights Act, and graduated from high school just a couple months after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968. This was also the year that the first Black Studies Program was founded at San

Francisco State University. The creation of this area of academic expertise was a direct effort of the Black Arts Movement – a movement that called for the renewal, redefining, and restructuring of true Blackness. Following soon thereafter, in creating a Black Studies Program was Yale University in 1969, which also created a master's program in Black Studies in 1978. Gloria Naylor graduated from Yale's master's program in 1983 and used *Linden Hills* as her master's thesis, which she would later publish as her second novel in 1985.

Initially, Gloria Naylor thought that she would make her mark on the world through her missionary zeal as a Jehovah's Witness and as a loving wife. However, when the safe and conventional confinements of religion and her 10-day marriage[24] no longer kept her interest, she would eventually abandon both of these institutions that she considered to be patriarchal and male-dominated in exchange for an unpredictable and freeing life as a professional writer. Although Naylor graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Brooklyn College in 1981, the beginning of her life as a writer occurred in the latter part of the 1970s, while taking one of the college's creative writing classes. Naylor's professor had encouraged the class to send out writing samples—advice which Naylor followed. She published "A Life on Beekman Place" in *Essence Magazine* in March of 1980. This would later become a chapter in her aforementioned first novel, *Women of Brewster Place,* which she published in 1982.

She also attributes her revelation about women writers that look like her to a class she took at Brooklyn College in which she read Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* which had been published in 1970. Concerning the novel, she says, "it said to a young black woman struggling to find a mirror of her worth in this society, not only is your story worth telling but it can be told in words so painstakingly eloquent that it becomes a song" (Montgomery 11). Often considered to be the first novel by a woman that expressed Black empowerment, *The Bluest Eye* was

instrumental in helping to channel Naylor's spirit as a writer. Furthermore, having discovered the strength and defiance that comes with being an African American woman writer, Naylor decided that she too would use her literature as a platform for the issues of her generation. As revealed in an interview with Tomeiko Ashford in 1999, Naylor wanted to use her writing to address the issues that matter most to her, which are slavery, history, the current plight of the black community, politics and art, healing, literary criticism, human creativity and resilience, the power of truth-telling, self-help, and spirituality[25]. Naylor also resented the double standard that was forced upon the women in society especially, African American women (Wilson7). Therefore, she came to admire the women authors who chose to go against traditional societal conventions for the purpose of uplifting and affirming themselves.

One of the ways that Naylor, and other women during the late 1950s to early 1980s, provided uplift to the community was by daring to use the novel form. The novel was often considered to be a "passive form" of resistance and thus not viewed as the most effective method for providing social engagement of the African American community.[26] Often leaders of the Black Arts Movement such as Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal among others, focused on performance to have a greater connection with the community and resist the Euro-centric ideas of culture. Author Mike Sell writes, in "The Black Arts Movement: Performance, Neo-Orality, and the Destruction of the 'White Thing'" that,

> The movement's exploitation of performance and theatre (1) explicitly attacked
> the materialism of American culture, including its celebration of texts, especially
> novels, as the epitome of cultural sophistication (2) enabled a re-creation and
> revision of pre-textual, orally based Western African aesthetic and ethical systems

lost during Middle Passage; and (3) complemented the tactical and strategic needs

of organizational efforts by radical intellectuals in urban ghettos. (4)

Although performance was the preferred method of social engagement for relaying a message to

the African American community, the novel was not without purpose because it is the avenue

through which Gloria Naylor fulfills what Black Arts Leader, Larry Neal, calls, "The Role of the

Black Writer." Neal suggests that the role of the Black writer is to accept the responsibility of

guiding the spiritual and cultural life of his or her community by using literary techniques and

forms of writing that reflect their community's needs. By doing this, the writer will realize that

his or her destiny as an artist is fundamental to understanding all aspects of the human condition

(Neal 24). In *Linden Hills*, Naylor fulfills all of these elements. By challenging the performance

of masculinity that stemmed from the Black Nationalists' ideology on manhood, Naylor is

guiding the lives of her people. By using the novel as the genre of choice and using her

"language as a weapon" she is demonstrating how her life and destiny as a writer are essential to

improving the human condition as well as the African American community. Although *Linden

Hills* was published in 1985, nearly two decades after the onset of the Black Arts Movement, and

is presented in a form different from the traditional method of performance used by Black

Nationalists leaders, this novel, creatively addresses several problems, such as classism, intra-

racism, sexuality, and gender roles, which were the results of the aforementioned movement.

The Novel and Nationalism

Commencing with the first sentence of the novel, Naylor draws the reader into a world

driven by money, success, and a quest for the American Dream that is hauntingly universal and

painfully familiar to far too many people. She writes, "There were other black communities with

showcase homes, but somehow making it into Linden Hills meant 'making it'" (15). This

concept of "making it" was highly reflective of the social, economic, and political climate of the African American community in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Socially and economically, some Blacks were gaining affluence and being allowed in positions and places in which they were never allowed before. Politically, this period brought about a lot of progression within the community as well. Contrastingly, a combination of some negative factors in all of these areas also meant that several African Americans remained in the same poverty that plagued them decades before and many positive polices were countered by years of retrogression. According to the National Urban League's President Vernon Jordan, in his speech, "The Black Agenda for the 1980s," there have been some significant advancement for Blacks since Brown versus the Board of Education. In general, however, Black progress is still a myth (5). Jordan further states that many Blacks were in fact doing worse at the outset of 1980s than they were in the mid-1960s. The unemployment rate for young blacks was close to sixty percent and the economic gap between white and Black families was growing instead of closing. Educationally, in some cities the number of Black high school dropouts was almost equal to or greater than the number of graduates. Author Manning Marable supports the concept that Black progress was somewhat mythical in his work, *Race, Reform and Rebellion,The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America* by asserting some startling statistics from the late 1970s to early 1980s period. Marable suggests that in 1977 Black males employed as service workers had an unemployment rate of 13.7 percent and 16.4 percent of all black men who worked as non-farm laborers were without jobs (148). Furthermore, Marable notes that by 1980, 50 percent of all American homicides were black males killing other blacks male and the number of black households maintained by women without a husband increased from 843,000 in 1960 to 1,940,000 in 1975 (152 -153). As supported in studies by William Julius Wilson[27] and Douglas G. Glasgow, unlike

previous generations of impoverished blacks, the members of this new Black underclass, especially black males had little economic investment in their communities, "were jobless and lacked saleable skills and opportunities to get [jobs]; they had been rejected and labeled as social problems by the police, the schools, the employment and welfare agencies; they were victims of the new camouflaged racism'" (155-156). In the late 1970s and early 1980s a rash of lynchings, shootings, hangings, and castrations that mirrored the early twentieth century's violence and the dissolution of many governmental policies that had been created for African American progress in the late 1960s and early 1970s had been wiped out leaving many Blacks in a state of fiscal fragility. Yes, public places were now integrated and Jim Crow laws had been eradicated. Also, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, many Blacks, especially those who were college educated became upwardly mobile into a new sector called the Black middle class. They benefitted most during this period that scholar Manning Marable calls the "Second Reconstruction" or the period after World War II in which laws concerning the inequalities of African American life were being addressed and reformed (147).   However, although Blacks were not necessarily in the same position, in terms of human rights as their predecessors less than two decades before, and even though the community as a whole was experiencing gains, there were still a significant number of community members who had not conquered the social, economic and sexually oppressive forces that existing in a racist society can create. Thus, when Naylor depicts the issues of class and economics that affect the community of Linden Hills, I believe she is basing it on aspects that reflected the African American community at that time.

Centered on the lives of the Nedeeds, a lineage of African American men who have created a seemingly normal yet internally conflicted living oasis, Linden Hills, ironically, becomes the sought-after neighborhood of the black bourgeoisie. Naylor explores the battles of

the rich versus the poor, the light-skinned versus the dark-skinned, the "haves" versus the "have-nots," and the assimilated versus the unassimilated. Thus, woven into a myriad of other issues, Naylor utilizes the localized community of Linden Hills with its deeply problematic compromises to illustrate the destructive path that forms when distorted images of success, intra-racial prejudice, and forced assimilation into traditional patriarchal familial archetypes occur in the African American community.

Similar to the Black Arts Movement, Naylor embraces exposing of the ills of capitalism and materialism, especially when it produces rifts in the African American community. One of the strong messages of Black Nationalists was that a "capitalist commercial society produces monstrous results wherever it interfaces with ordinary human concepts of feeling and care. Inhumanity and money, money, money remain America's most important products" (Thomas 61). This concept is displayed vividly in Naylor's *Linden Hills*. It is first seen in the fact that the characters want the prestige that comes with having a Linden Hills address because "practically every black in Wayne County wanted to be a part of Linden Hills" (Naylor 15). Roxanne Tilson, who has a decent job and a Wellesley degree continues to live at home with her mother and brother just so that she can maintain her Linden Hills address and hopefully marry a Linden Hills man. Norman Anderson, who is plagued by a mental illness, wants desperately to recover so that he can maintain a job and give his wife, Ruth, a house in Linden Hills. However, throughout the novel, it is illustrated repeatedly that being a part of Linden Hills costs much more than any amount of money, which is why, when one looks at the lives of those in the novel that live in poverty, their lives often contain intangible riches that the materially rich only wish they possessed. Author Charles E. Wilson, Jr. in *Gloria Naylor: A Critical Companion* writes, "Linden Hills details the various ways in which blacks have exchanged their souls for even the

slightest chance to enjoy an improved material life" (63).   These capitalist desires about which

Naylor writes affirm the message against materialism that other artists during the Black Arts

Movement also purported. As a result of the new socio-economic opportunities for African

Americans in late 1960s to early 1980s, and changes in civil rights legislation, many Blacks

became so engulfed by the idea of chasing wealth that they forsook the communal and familial

ideals that were initially of great importance within their community.

      To display the lack of a unified community, one of the issues that Naylor addresses is the

materialism of the Linden Hills residents' display of intra-racial prejudice, or a prejudice within

one's own racial group. For example, at the funeral of Lycentia Parker, a former resident of

Linden Hills, other residents of the well-off community vow their support for a petition that

Lycentia chartered prior to her death that would keep the poor African Americans out of their

neighborhood. She is remembered for saying, "I'm going to do everything in my power to keep

those dirty niggers out of our community,"-- a statement with which an overwhelming number of

her privileged African American neighbors agree (Naylor135). This is the first glimpse at intra-

racial prejudice between the rich African Americans and the poor African Americans, within the

novel. Although, prejudices are chastised when they are from one group to another, Naylor is

illustrating what happens when the prejudice is ethnically internal. Black leaders, Martin Luther

King, Jr. and Malcolm X, who were supposedly on different ideological ends of the civil rights

spectrum, similarly spoke out against this type of prejudice within one's own community. Martin

Luther King, Jr. charged that "many middle-class Negroes have forgotten their roots," and are

"untouched by the agonies and struggles of their underprivileged brothers" (Gates 10), while

Malcolm X stated that "Our people in the Negro community are trapped in a vicious cycle of

ignorance, poverty, disease, sickness, and death … The wealthy, educated Black bourgeoisie …

who do escape, never reach back and pull the rest of our people out with them. The Black masses remain trapped in the slums"(64). In spite of their ideological differences, both King and Malcolm X's sentiments were similar to the leaders of the Black Nationalist Movement and thus, Naylor, like other writers of that era, was utilizing the characters in her novel to challenge this particular way of thinking.

Finally, Naylor addresses the intra-racial prejudice that is displayed by the materialistic Black bourgeoisie who exhort Western society by adopting all aspects of their culture as markers of their advancement. Characters such as Mrs. Tilson feel an indicator of one's success is predicted and measured in even the smallest aspects of life such as one's name and his or her choice of food. She refers to her family's meal of potatoes and fried chicken as "peasants … common food" which is in sharp contrast to BAM writer's Larry Neal's poem "Don't Say Goodbye to the Porkpie Hat" in which he designates this so-called "peasant food" such as "collard greens … fried chicken … waffles," etc., as markers of authentic Black culture. She also looks at her son Lester's friend, Willie, with disdain after finding out that his name is not a derivative of a "proper name" like William (Naylor 49). Mrs. Tilson goes on to explain that the reason that she has given her son the name Lesterfield Walcott Montgomery Tilson is because it is a name she "thought would fit the heights I hoped you'd climb. It was a great name for what I dreamed would be a great man" (Naylor 50). Mrs. Tilson is an embodiment of the bourgeoisie, Eurocentric, capitalist culture that many Nationalists leaders of the Black Arts Movement abhorred. In fact, as a sign of Blackness and rejection of white culture, it was very common during the time of the Black Nationalist Movement to do the opposite of Mrs. Tilson, by changing one's name from a Eurocentric name to one that reflected one's African heritage. As examples, Leroi Jones became Amiri Baraka, Malcolm Little became Malcolm X and then El

Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, and Rolland Snellings became Askia Toure. Therefore, Naylor is yet

again exposing some more flaws in the ideology of African American who seek to conform to

the Western world views.

Masculinity and the Movement

In addition to the aforementioned messages about racial pride and anti-materialism, I

suggest that Naylor is utilizing her novel to demonstrate how Black masculinity has been

influenced by the traditional western gender roles and familial concept of white men. In the

essay, "Theorizing Progressive Black Masculinity," Mutua defines traditional ideal masculinity

as "in opposition not only to women but also to homosexuality. A real man cannot be either

feminine or gay. The idea is also racialized and classed. Men are to be empowered, to be

provided opportunities to fulfill their roles as leader, and provider and to be ensured dominance"

(13). Although, Black Nationalists shunned the materialism of their upwardly mobile, new Black

Middle class, brothers and sisters, I suggest that both groups due to the indoctrination of

American society held on to ideas of a traditional nuclear family, stereotypical gender roles, and

models of success that were the result of a white patriarchal system. As Tim Engles states in

"African American Whiteness in Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*," both the *Bluest Eye* and *Linden

Hills* deal with more:

> … abstract and insidious workings of whiteness as a set of forces that shape
>
> black lives …While Morrison depicts a desire to shed blackness and become
>
> white, Naylor dramatizes a desire to shed blackness and become rich. While the
>
> latter seems more a matter of class than of race, it nevertheless, entails a
>
> "whitening" process that parallels the workings of white racialization. (661-662)

Although Engles, continues to explore the obviously racial and class elements depicted in Linden Hills, I concur that there are some insidious manifestations of whiteness that are shaping the lives of the Blacks in the novel and furthermore, I assert that these manifestations are affecting African American masculinity. The greatest manifestation of whiteness is the traditional patriarchal rules by which Luther Nedeed governs the community. In Linden Hills men were supposed to exhibit traditional patriarchy by being financially affluent, leaders of their home and community and heterosexual. The male characters or women in the novel, who did not comply with this hierarchy, were considered to be a threat to the "successful" community that Luther Nedeed had created. As Naylor explores, "the Black middle class and critiques the misguided value system of that community," I suggest that like her literary fore-mothers, Naylor is also challenging the chauvinism, sexism and hetero-normativity that pervaded the Black Arts Movement even as she embraces the call for oneness within the African American community (Wilson 64). Although, the intra-racial issues of monetary success are displayed heavily within the novel and provide a distinct connection between Naylor and her predecessors, of even greater significance is that author Gloria Naylor uses the community of Linden Hills to critique and challenge each aspect of this ideal masculinity. The desire for upward mobility causes the community to ascribe to the only "right" view of manhood that they have known – white, domineering, heterosexual and economically-astute. Hence, they take on the mentality of the oppressor by attempting to dismantle any inklings of un-masculine behavior in Linden Hills.

Commencing during the times of slavery in America, the bodies and perception of sexuality among African Americans by Europeans was that Blacks were hypersexualized. As a result, Black sexuality was often associated with images of sexual prowess and exoticism which perpetuated the perception of a group of people that were out of control and beast-like.

Therefore, in an effort to resist these stereotypes and be viewed as civilized, many African Americans after the period of slavery gravitated toward Puritan and European concepts of manhood, womanhood, and sexuality. These concepts were known as the traditional patriarchal structure in which sex was for procreation between a man and a woman within a heterosexual marriage, women were subordinated, and the men were the leaders and providers of the home. This created what author Patricia Hill Collins refers to as "Black sexual politics" which is a "set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race and sexuality that frame Black men and women's treatment of one another, as well as how individual men and women are perceived and treated by others" (6). I suggest that the interconnection of all of these concepts in relation to what Naylor is trying to convey in *Linden Hills*, is that Blacks who were fighting for their rights were battling a system in which they were trying to resist the perception that they were less than human. In an effort to combat that perception, as Blacks gained more rights, Black men wanted to take on the semblance of power and leadership in their families and communities. However, the main example of power that Black men had seen hitherto came from the history of the master-servant relationship in America. This meant that in order to have what the dominant culture had, they had to embrace what the dominant culture did. I suggest that while Black Nationalists men criticized the Black middle class' embrace of white culture outwardly, they failed to realize that they had adopted much of the ideals of white culture internally. They failed to define their own concept of manhood outside of the one that had been perpetuated by the dominant culture. Hence, the flaw in this new concept of African American masculinity is that it excluded certain members of the community and did not fully acknowledge how African American women could be cultivators and comrades instead of mere critics of Black manhood and liberation.

Although the Black Arts Movement was not necessarily the main vehicle for the female author's voice, the movement produced a critical consciousness within the African American community to define and assert its own definitions of Blackness and identity. Thus, having come of age during the Black Arts and Women's Liberation movements, I suggest that Naylor uses her characters, especially her male characters, to address issues of class, wealth, and intolerance within the African American community in a similar manner of racial consciousness that permeated the works of Black Nationalists writers.   However, as with other African American women writers with whom Naylor is classed such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, Naylor criticizes the chauvinism, intra-racial prejudice, and forced heterosexuality that generally pervaded the masculine-focused ideology of the Black Nationalist Movement by cleverly using the fictional community of Linden Hills as a microcosm of the African American community. Thus, I suggest that, in the novel *Linden Hills*, Naylor is challenging the Black middle class's actions and ways of thinking as well as representing alternate ways of redefining the patriarchal legacy of the movement's ideology in order to form a more unified community.

Furthermore, vilifying and attacking Black men by portraying negative images of male characters was not Naylor's aim, but I suggest that this recurring image of an emasculated fictional man was a reflection of the real emasculated Black man in American society at that time. In spite of the social class of the men portrayed in Naylor's novel *Linden Hills*, they all faced the same three traits of psychological emasculation, which as I have suggested in the previous chapters, included being trapped by economic circumstances, subjugated to the pressures and standards of white society, and acculturated to a negative and often disdainful view and interaction with women. However, what is even more interesting is how Naylor uses the aforementioned issues in the lives of the novel's men. First, Naylor sympathizes with the male

characters by acknowledging the conditions in society which cause them to feel emasculated. Naylor then offers tools for emancipation by encouraging the "talented tenth"[28] and the man of the new hip hop generation (or what later becomes known as the "hip hop"[29] man) of the novel to find a healthy definition of masculinity; illustrating that masculinity does not have to be anti-homosexual and depicting that attempts to silence the Black woman in an effort to display one's masculinity ultimately leads to the destruction of the African American community. Hence, like the male authors of the Black Nationalist Movement, Naylor embraces their disdain for the ills of capitalism, which have as their offspring, a non-unified African American community. Additionally, she contests their ideas of masculinity and male sexuality which also have as their offspring, a non-unified African American community.

The Economics of Emasculation

As we have seen, many factors reflect the first aspect of my focus of African American emasculation: Black men often faced emasculation because they were trapped by their economic circumstances. Often for the black men living in low-social economic neighborhoods, the street became their place of refuge in which they could prove their worth. Majors suggest that the hustling lifestyle was an alternate form of masculinity because it allowed black men to gain economic status when mainstream forms of accessing this aspect of manhood were unavailable.[30] For example, there are the characters Willie K. Mason and Lesterfield Walcott Montgomery Tilson, through whose point of view the reader witnesses many of the events and realizes many of the flaws of Linden Hills. The reader sees how their attempts to deal with these encounters in Linden Hills bring them face to face with the issues of their masculinity. First, each of them, like several of the aforementioned African American men during that period, was in a position of economic dispair. Although Lester is a resident of Linden Hills, on One Hundred First Crescent

Drive, he still is in an emasculated state similar to Willie because he lives with his mother and does not see the path of the upwardly mobile middle class people that surround him as a viable option for him making it in the world. Willie, who is in an even greater state of emasculation based on being trapped by his economic circumstances, has dropped out of school and spends most of his days on the streets because the opportunities for his advancement are limited, given his current skill set. Naylor writes:

> So Lester then joined Willie in giving poetry readings in coffeehouses, bookstores, and the city park. They supported themselves with odd jobs because they couldn't make a living from their work. And Willie couldn't even pick up the occasional five dollars that Lester got from getting a poem into a local newspaper because he never wrote them down. … The written word dulls the mind, and since most of it was written by white men, it's positively poisonous. Willie sought out fewer and fewer jobs over the years, He became a regular on Wayne Avenue, where he'd rented a room, and could be seen sipping wine and smoking pot with other young black men who were either tired of looking for work or tired of finding it. … He was twenty years old and the last job he had he worked side by side with a twelve year old who came in after school. Would this be his fate at thirty and forty? … With jobs like that, he saw himself frozen in time, never becoming a man, just a very gray-haired boy. (29-30)

As demonstrated in this passage, Willie and Lester's initial encounter with emasculation stems from their financial woes. Although their goal is to be considered men, they cannot seem to get past the comparison of their expected incomes with their inhibited opportunities. Like Hansberry's Walter and Walker's Brownfield, these male characters are a reflection of a long-

time struggle among African American men to take on the traditional patriarchal role as the provider for their homes. Like Willie and Lester, other members of the hip hop generation are experiencing what scholar Patricia Hill Collins calls "new racism." This new form of racism is post-civil rights and post Black Arts Movement. By this time, Blacks were supposed to be a part of a fair and democratic society with greater economic opportunities but instead they have drugs, crime, poor schools, fewer jobs, and ultimately a community of African Americans that is weak (35). Willie and Lester are attempting to fulfill ideal masculinity by fulfilling the role of being a provider, however, the lack of opportunities to fulfill this particular portion of ideal masculinity is negatively affecting their self-worth. Although I am not asserting that having less economic opportunities takes away their manhood, I am arguing that it affects their perception of themselves as productive members of society. I assert that concepts of masculinity should not be limited to monetary values because to do so reduces Black men to the slave-like state from which they are attempting to disassociate themselves. However, I do suggest that masculinity, or one's sense of being, should be associated with an even greater concept of pride that comes from having the opportunity to take care of oneself whether male or female.

Although, the characters Willie and Lester were representative of a large number of Black men at the time, I suggest that Naylor is illustrating that men of wealth and affluence can be trapped and emasculated by their economic circumstances as well. While they may have the means to take care of themselves, I assert that their emasculation stems from the idea that they are trapped by their inability to advance on their own terms. This predicament is seen in the characters Maxwell Smyth and Reverend Michael T. Hollis who presides over Mount Sinai Baptist Church in Linden Hills. In the novel, Naylor describes the character Maxwell as a man who had made his Blackness, which he considered to be a handicap, disappear. He does so by

making straight A's in college at Dartmouth; only associating with those with whom he has an inner connection, which he admits are mostly whites; and being the best and most extraordinary man on his job at General Motors in which he attains one of the company's highest positions as assistant to the Executive Director (102-104). However, when interacting with the aforementioned characters, Willie and Lester, they notice that Maxwell gave them the "same feeling that you got talking to some white people" with whom, they "suddenly felt invisible" (112). The debate which ensues between these characters about whether Blacks have made progress is significant. Maxwell feels his position is proof that Blacks have great opportunities at advancement if they would stop looking backward and crying about the woes of their past oppression. On the contrary, Willie and Lester feel that progress is spelled "W-H-I-T-E," and that the thousands of Blacks who have advanced are just an insignificant fraction of the millions who remain in poverty. To Willie and Lester, Maxwell's attitude toward them and other members of the community provides painful glances into the mental distortion that occurs when "successful" members of a particular ethnic group have reaped the benefits of capitalism and begin to use irrelevant and unjustifiable discrimination practices to oppress and look down on members of their own race. Willie and Lester continue to feel emasculated because they see no hope to attain advancement in society by the means that Maxwell suggests. Contrastingly, I suggest that Maxwell, though successful, suffers from psychological emasculation too because he must ascribe to a singular view of ideal masculinity. As author Michael Kimmel argues, "from the early nineteenth century until the present day much of men's relentless effort to prove their manhood contains at its core an element of homosociality. From fathers and boyhood friends to teachers, coworkers, and bosses, the evaluative eyes of other men are always upon us, watching, judging"(8). Thus, in order to maintain all that he has attained he must adopt an

attitude that shuns African American community members, especially African American men, who have not accomplished what he has.

When referring to Reverend Hollis, in *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary*, Virginia Fowler states that "though he retains some sense of his ethnocentric identity, [he] has sacrificed both family ties and spiritual values" (64). Thus, the product of his Ivy League degrees, secret rendezvous, and hefty bank accounts is a man who stands everyday within the walls of an exquisite edifice but has an immense hole in his soul. Most importantly, Reverend Hollis realizes that the large affluent church does not give him the same warmth and connection that the small storefront church that was located in his old community once did. Naylor writes, "On Sunday afternoons he … drove past the manicured lawn … into South Philadelphia to sit in the back of the reconverted candy stores with stained-glass cellophane peeling at the windows … an oilskin cloth and plastic crucifix …the names changed … but the feeling didn't … the presence of that type of raw power connected up with something in his center" (159). However, to feel anything at Mount Sinai Baptist, whose affluent membership and large collection of tithes would deem it a pillar of success as well as a sharp contrast to the store front churches, Hollis must start each Sunday with a half of a bottle of alcohol. Through Hollis's character, Naylor is illustrating his emasculation because in order to maintain his wealth, he has to sacrifice ties to the community which leaves him continuously feeling empty.

It is very significant to note a key aspect of Willie, Lester, Maxwell and Hollis being trapped by their economic circumstances which is in order to exist in their current worlds they must maintain an unhealthy disdain for each other's place in life. To maintain their connection to the community and not become "sell-outs," Willie and Lester are stuck in a life of poverty in which they reject traditional education and the traditional constraints of the system.

Contrastingly, in order to maintain their privilege, male characters like Hollis and Maxwell must resist and turn away from any semblance of a connection with Blackness by maintaining only euro-centric affiliations. In Mark Anthony Neal's work, *The New Black Man*, he writes that given the hostile and negative treatment that Black men face in general, "It shouldn't be surprising then that many black men protect the relative privilege of being black, male, educated, and financially comfortable with a voracity that, in its worst form, creates an animosity toward the image of the hip-hop thug that rivals the animosities expressed by white racists toward blacks" (8). However, by utilizing the fictional stories of these male characters to reflect the emasculation of Black males in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I argue that Naylor is making an important point about masculinity studies. I suggest that Naylor is demonstrating that part of their emancipation will come when the upper class, more affluent, African American men and the working or lower class men of the community find a healthy masculinity that incorporates the best aspects of both of their worlds and by seeing value in working together to transform inequality that they all face in American society.

Various scholars have grouped these Black men who possess these differing traits in categories that reflect their varying ideologies. Hollis and Maxwell are examples of what scholar Timothy Brown calls the "race men" in which they have adopted ideas concerning cultural advancement by presenting images of the race that are acceptable to both Blacks and Whites. They are both firmly rooted in the Black Bourgeoisie and hence feel that other African Americans should adopt their ways of behavior and lifestyles. Brown presents two other types of men called the "new black aesthetic" and "the nigga." The "new black aesthetic" is a representation of Black masculinity that is infiltrated with dominant culture but still maintains a sense of the African American aesthetic, while the "nigga" represents a lower class man that

rejects both the race men and new black men (194). While I would not necessarily put Willie and Lester purely in the "new black aesthetic" or "nigga" categories, I believe that they possess traits of both in that they are considered to be lower, working class men, but they are very much in touch with the African American culture and can intelligently express their reasoning for their current positions in society. Though not exalting Willie and Lester's lifestyle, I do assert that Naylor is trying to convey through Hollis and Maxwell's characters that one's removal from the community, the false notions of progress and subsequent, loss of connection with one's people, is just as emasculating as those men who have no economic affluence. In either situation a part of each man is lost because without the healthy medium of connection with one's roots as well as opportunity's for upward mobility the threat of emasculation still looms.

Although I understand Timothy Brown's classification of these types of men into three categories, I prefer to divide these men into two categories called the "Talented tenth" man and the "hip hop" man because I believe that they more accurately represent the male characters in the novel. Furthermore, even though my inspiration for grouping them into these two categories came from Mark Anthony Neal's *New Black Man*, my concept for them, while similar to his, reflects an amalgamation of thoughts from several masculinity studies' authors. The concept of the "talented tenth" man is originally from the 1903 essay by W.E.B. Dubois who purports that African Americans would be saved by those that were exceptional men who were leaders, well-educated and could utilize their exceptionality to transform society. W.E.B. Dubois, who himself was an educated Black man from a predominantly-White institution, believed very adamantly, at one point in his life, in the theories he espouses in the "Talented Tenth." He suggested that the "educated negro" was in fact, the embodiment of blackness and therefore, the key, politically, economically, and otherwise, to the advancement of all Blacks. DuBois states,

The Negro race, like all races, is going to be saved by its exceptional men. … It is the fashion of to-day to sneer at them and to say that with freedom Negro leadership should have begun at the plow and not in the Senate a foolish and mischievous lie; two hundred and fifty years that black serf toiled at the plow and yet that toiling was in vain till the Senate passed the war amendments; and two hundred and fifty years more the half-free serf of to-day may toil at his plow, but unless he has political rights and righteously guarded civic status, he will still remain the poverty-stricken and ignorant plaything of rascals, that he now is. … The Talented Tenth rises and pulls all that are worth the saving up to their vantage ground. This is the history of human progress; … we could give black boys trades, but that alone will not civilize a race of ex-slaves …I insist that the object of all true education is not to make men carpenters, it is to make carpenters men. (1)

Thus, according to Dubois, it would have behooved those who are not educated and not in the upper class to embrace those who are, so that those who are in the "Talented Tenth" can enhance the lives of the other "ninety" percent. His theory was also very masculinist and like Black Nationalism focused on improving the man as a means of improving society. I argue that this sentiment seems very similar to Maxwell and Hollis' thoughts throughout the novel. Based on their aforementioned comments, about their positions of affluence, educations from Ivy League universities, and how they felt about those who had not taken advantage of their "bountiful" opportunities to attain the same positions in life that they had, they embraced the idea that they were "exceptional men." Yet their attitudes and distance from those that really needed their help in the African American community was vast, thus making it virtually impossible to uplift those with whom they rarely interacted. Interestingly, it should be noted that Dubois' perspective later

underwent significant changes. In Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* he examines Dubois' later philosophy and writes that he "began to retell the narrative of western civilization in systematic ways that emphasized its African origins and expressed a deeper disengagement from modern forms of thought that were discredited by their association with the continuing practice of white supremacy" (113). As mentioned, views of Blackness and views of masculinity are significantly linked, therefore changing one's views on their relationship to the community also means changing one's view of manhood. The practice of Black masculinity that embraces economic affluence as a marker of manhood follows the traditional white patriarchal structure and inadvertently promotes white supremacy to Black men who do not fit this ideal. Dubois' transformation is a great example how a belief in one's own personal politics, with an overarching appreciation for one's culture and ancestry, is key to developing a common consciousness in the African American community. Although I assert that there is nothing wrong with Black men seeking to be "exceptional men," a sentiment with which, I think Dubois would agree, I also argue that it is imperative that the "Talented Tenth" man should use his affluence as a means to help his lower class brother not shun him. Utilizing his prosperity to uplift the African American community and his influence to tear down the systems of oppression that hinder the lower class man not only affirms his Blackness but also affirms his commitment to Athena Mutua's concept of progressive Black masculinity.

The term "hip hop" man comes from a conglomerate of sources, but it is the one that I feel most accurately describes Willie and Lester. I assert that the hip hop man represents the savvy, lower class man with potential, who has not achieved in the same way that the "Talented Tenth" man has and usually embodies some of the African American stereotypes in a way that causes him to exist in a world that is politically, socially, and economically different from the

affluent man. Willie and Lester, like other members of their generation are intelligent and willing to work, but not necessarily in the same path as the "Talented Tenth" man. Neal asserts that, "The New Black middle class man has a problem with the hip hop generation and often criticizing its lyrics and image as damaging to the community when the actions of the talented tenth man are often more hurtful than the lyrics themselves (14)." He continues by saying that, "Thus they often conform to their own source of image making in order to keep the privileges that have been given to them by white society (16)."   I argue that hip hop generation men usually recognize the flaws in the traditional patriarchal system and resist it, but it does not mean that they should be relegated to a permanently underclass status. Other definitions of the hip hop generation man tend to depict him in a strictly negative manner, saying that he is, "aggressive, prone to violence, and sexually aggressive" which, to a certain extent are stereotypical images that sometimes he does possess (Brown 192). However, the definition that I use for this dissertation, asserts that this type of Black man has something to offer the "Talented Tenth" man in a reciprocal relationship.   Furthermore, while I am not asserting that Naylor's male characters were based on Dubois's essay, nor am I claiming that she was a front-runner for Neal's theory, I do believe that the message that Dubois and Neal were attempting to evince about masculinity was similar to what Naylor wrote in her novel *Linden Hills* concerning the plight of Black men.

Not only are Lester, Willie, Maxwell and Hollis emasculated by their economic status because of the lack of a positive medium between the "Talented Tenth" and the "Hip Hop" male archetypes but Luther Nedeed is as well. Although the majority of the male characters in the book experience emasculation due to financial restrictions, it is seen foremost in him, the creator of Linden Hills. Like the other male characters, in spite of the fact that he is a successful man who achieved the American Dream, has a nice home, and extreme wealth, he is emasculated by

his economic status. Like Hollis and Maxwell, he is trapped from the opposite end of the spectrum by his wealth and not his poverty. He must be careful about having wealth in a society in which white men do not possess his same financial means. In a society in which he is still viewed as less than a white man, no matter how much money he has, the dominant society remains in control. Naylor writes that Nedeed, an undertaker, was the wealthiest man in the entire county, and he sent off to England to buy a Rolls-Royce hearse. However, "Nedeed knew that he would have to wait until almost the poorest white family in Wayne County owned an automobile before even dead blacks rode in mahogany and silver"(5). Luther Nedeed's character is emasculated because he is trapped by his desire to maintain his status in a community that is based on certain masculine, white-patterned roles of economic success. Though this name represents more than one character in the novel, the negative qualities that each generation of Luther Nedeeds' possesses are archetypically one in the same. The first Luther Nedeed, a descendent of slaves, sought to acquire land, build wealth, and only allow African Americans within his seven circles that possessed the "civilized" lifestyles that many slaves watched in their masters but were denied having. As bell hooks states in her work, *Ain't I a Woman*, "middle class black men who have absorbed standard definitions of masculinity would feel that it is important to provide economically for families and consequently feel ashamed, even de-masculized if unable to assume the provider role" (77). Thus, Luther Nedeed desires to be seen as having the traditional patriarchal masculine role of provider. Through his character Naylor is suggesting that white materialism has become the definition of success and therefore an adoption of white standards and attitudes were expected if African Americans were to be viewed as having attained the American Dream. He is not really liberated in spite of the fact that he is rich

because he still subscribes to the racism and accepted definition of masculinity that has held him captive and ultimately leads to his destruction.

Emasculation and White Patriarchal Standards

This lends itself to the next area of emasculation which is that Black men were subjected to the pressure and standards of white society, especially Luther Nedeed. In the novel, he takes on the role of the oppressor toward other Blacks because he noticeably treats them as though he is better than them and even operates in a slave master's role. He sells his "octoroon wife" and gains wealth, which he displays with "fancy changes on his house – building extra rooms and a third level" because he had "financed gun runners to the Confederacy" (6). The exploitation of the African American community for wealth has been transpiring since the time of slavery in the United States and Luther Nedeed took on a similar role to the white man in his actions and methodologies. Yet, unlike the power of white men, Luther's power leads to his emasculation. Whenever one has to take on the pedagogy of the oppressor in order to gain a semblance of supremacy, then the authority still belongs to the one who created the paradigm of oppression in the first place.

Naylor is also using Nedeed and the male characters of her novel to illustrate that if they are going to maintain or acquire status then they are going to have to assimilate into mainstream culture and values. This not only applies to economic factors, but it implies that Black men also had to adopt white men's familial and patriarchal structure if they wanted to have success like white men. As Tim Engles argues, "whiteness is used as a standard for what is normal and hence, Naylor is offering a critique of African American whiteness as a generally repressive mode of thought and behavior that paradoxically bleaches away both communal ties and individual distinctiveness" (662). Due to the fact that whiteness has been the standard for so many years,

whether they do it consciously or subconsciously, society holds it as the norm. Essentially, whiteness is the marker to which everything else is compared. And usually, all traits that affirm Blackness such as cultural traditions, viewpoints, and experiences are often the sacrifices that African Americans pay in order to gain "admission into American citizenship and the privilege of humanness" (Mutua 11). This was another aspect of Black Nationalism's influence on masculinity that I suggest Naylor was critiquing. Since Black empowerment mandated that the Black man take on traditional patriarchal roles within the home, this obligation was also a source of emasculation for some Black men. Although Nationalists were claiming that they were turning away from white culture, I argue that adopting this one particular familial type as the only right one was in fact affirming whiteness instead, because it isolated and oppressed certain members of the community.

All of the aspects of emasculation are seen explicitly in the character Winston Alcott, who is trapped by his economic status due to desiring upward mobility. However, if he wants to continue to be accepted in the community of Linden Hills, he must be subjected to the pressures and standards of white society that Luther Nedeed has adopted for all of the African American community, even in terms of familial relations. Winston Alcott is a "successful" African American male, who is an up-and-coming attorney at a prestigious law firm, and who just happens to be a homosexual. In spite of the fact that Winston has been in a relationship with his partner David for several years, and obviously has deep feelings for him, he succumbs to societal pressures to have an archetypal family structure and marries, Cassandra, a woman whom he does not love. On the way to his wedding, Luther Nedeed notices and inquires about Winston's troubled disposition. He says, "Don't let them bait you … take it from a seasoned married man -- in spite of its occasional drawbacks, it can be a fulfilling way of life" (75). To which David,

Winston's former lover who is now serving as his best man, says, "But it's not the only way of life, Mr. Nedeed" (75). Luther simply replies, "But it's the only way if a man wants to get somewhere in Linden Hills" (75). Luther Nedeed's character is reinforcing the concept that in order to be accepted as a successful man in the Linden Hills, Winston Alcott will be forced to assimilate into a life of heterosexuality. Just as with Winston, I suggest that striving for masculinity presents dilemmas for Black men because their lives are often grounded in "masking strategies that rest on denial and suppression of deep feelings" (Majors 2). In spite of how Winston truly felt, he is forced to play it safe and not display his inner most feelings for his partner, David, out of fear of being hurt and unaccepted. Winston's playing it "cool" represents his "only safeguard against what he anticipates will be further mental or physical abuse" (Majors 42). According to Cheryl Clarke, Larry Neal gives support to the traditional archetypal roles of a family that encouraged heterosexuality and condemned homosexuality because of the need for procreation within the African American community. However, I suggest that Black men during the Black Arts Movement were so homophobic and leaned toward the nuclear family because they feared receiving extra abuse in a system that was already discriminatory towards them.

This lends itself to Naylor's next critique of Black Nationalist ideology and its influence on masculinity, in that, I believe that she is purporting a message of emancipation because African American masculinity does not have to be anti-homosexual. Again, this lends itself to Mutua's concept of progressive Black masculinity which calls for Black men to take a stance against homophobia. As author Charles Wilson, Jr., notes, Winston Alcott's marriage is just a confirmation "that survival in Linden Hills requires people to lie not only to others, but also to themselves; residents must sacrifice a part of their souls (their natural selves) in order to be accepted in this community" (67). Was the sacrificing of one's soul the result in the lives of

homosexuals of the Black Nationalist Movement who wanted to be a part of the revolution?

Well, in spite of whether it was soul sacrificing or not, Naylor is illustrating that the Black

Nationalists' back-lash against homosexuality was indeed alienating to a part of the African

American community and did not fully coincide with their message of communal unity. Just as it

is suggested in the essay "Weapons Against Women: Compulsory Heterosexuality and

Capitalism in Linden Hills," forced heterosexuality is actually a political institution to which

residents of Linden Hills must conform in order to enjoy social status and economic privilege.

The same seemed to be true for homosexual African American men as a result of Black

Nationalist philosophy. Pollard writes,

> Black power theorists argued that capitalism and racism deprived black men of
>
> their manhood. Within this dynamic, powerlessness became associated with
>
> femininity and homosexuality. Literary critic Phillip Brian Harper suggests that
>
> the Black Power Movements' insistence upon a repeated invocation of an
>
> idealized black manhood reflected deeply held ambivalences and "anxieties" in
>
> relation to issues of political power and sexual prowess. According to Harper, in
>
> Black Arts rhetoric, the black man as "fag" is the educated Negro who is
>
> distanced from the black urban community because of his intellectualism.
>
> Representations of the black man as "fag" reflects the heterosexism of the
>
> movement … Images of homosexuals were often used to show what black
>
> manhood was not. (176)

Thus, in order for homosexuals to be respected and accepted socially, they had to conform to the

politics of heterosexuality within the Black Nationalist Movement. Although Nedeed embraces

the Black Nationalist thought of separatism he also facilitates a community that takes on the

mentality of the oppressor. If you want to be successful and have hopes of being accepted as a

real man in white society, you must first take on the traditional structure of the white family.

Characters like Winston Alcott are forced to take on acceptable masculinity which was really the

Black man's acceptance of the white male definition of masculinity. He is maintaining the

traditional status quo in order to keep from being emasculated by social castration. Therefore, as

one examines Naylor's messages throughout the novel one can see how African American

masculinity is being shaped in terms of race, but also as a result of class, gender, and sexuality.

This is why I argue that sexuality, gender, race and biological sex are often intrinsically

interconnected and that Naylor is demonstrating that Black masculinity does not have to be

limited to heterosexuality. I concur with author Mark Anthony Neal, in that one cannot purport

that Black gay men are irrelevant or even dangerous to the concept of rebuilding or uplifting the

African American community. Black gay men are and can be "productive citizens of black

communities, fathers, brothers, partners, and a host of other things supposedly embodied in the

'strong black man'" (Neal19). White familial standards and values are the basis for the system of

traditional patriarchal structure. Traditional patriarchal structure is supported by and perpetuated

by heterosexuality.   Often one's sexuality is cultivated as a result of what they are taught is

acceptable for their biological sex. It is further impacted by what is deemed as acceptable among

one's ethnic group. By attempting to put race as a greater problem than issues of gender and

sexuality, it only perpetuates a cycle of injustice and constantly leaves the other group with their

social and political needs unmet.

        In addition to Winston Alcott's character, Naylor challenges the hyper-masculinity and

forced heterosexuality that dominated Black Nationalists' thought, with messages concerning

masculinity and homosexuality in the homo-social descriptions used in the relationship between

Willie and Lester. Naylor critiques these ideals in the stories of the characters, Willie and Lester,

who ironically are poets but feel the need to express masculinity through sexual prowess. The

limited perspective of what characterizes masculinity is challenged throughout the novel, when

Willie and Lester express a fondness for writing and reciting poetry. However, to draw attention

to the misrepresented ideas of manhood, Naylor writes,

> Writing poems was sissy stuff in the crowds he and Willie hung with – unless it
>
> was something about Miss Thatcher's umbrella-shaped behind … But crap like
>
> this about … how he wanted to grow up and be like Malcolm X, his favorite
>
> person in all history … He didn't want Willie to think he was a fruit or something
>
> and then later in the conversation, Willie says, 'If my brothers saw me writing
>
> poems, they'd call me a queer.' (27)

Unfortunately for these two characters, they illustrate a common perspective concerning what it

means to be a man, in their environment-- an affinity for poetry is equated with femininity.

Virginia Fowler states, "Willie is at best a marginalized citizen of the streets; his working-class

status keeps him economically powerless, and … his 'penchant for writing' threatens to make

him 'seem feminine to others'" (Fowler 71). Thus, Willie and Lester must hide their passion for

poetry to maintain their semblance of masculinity. However, I think that it is ironic that these

two characters could be viewed as feminine for using the same art form of poetry that artists such

as Larry Neal and Amiri Baraka used during the Black Arts Movement which had such a hyper-

masculine philosophy. Pollard writes, "As they articulated black manhood through the pen, the

gun, the penis, and the microphone, male poets in the Black Arts Movement defined and reified

revolutionary black male identity" (173). Thus, I suggest that Naylor is illustrating through

Lester and Willie that the very art form that could have easily been used to challenge the

masculinity of Black Male artists during the Black Arts Movement was actually, one of the most powerful tools that helped them define Blackness and manhood.

Emasculation and the Black Woman

Although Naylor is making a statement about homophobia as it existed in the African American community, I contend that she is also illustrating some very powerful messages about the relationships between Black men and Black women. The constant destruction of love and marriage between the characters of Naylor's novel is representative of the destructive relationships that were required or valued in the Linden Hills community. Furthermore, the antagonistic relationship that existed between Black men and women, in general, was negative and in need of improvement in order to unify the community. These two factors are connected to the last aspect of emasculation for the male characters in the novel which is their conflict with women, in particular, Black women. I argue that the attitudes that are reflected about women in the novel from the male characters, are yet another critique of Black Nationalism's masculinist focus and misogynistic tendencies.

When African American men are subjected to the forms of emasculation that include being trapped by their economic circumstances and being pressured and subjected by the familial standards of white society, then it often leads to the last destructive form of emasculation, which is a conflict with the African American woman. Often, when they attempt to take out their frustrations with white society on the African American woman then it only leads to greater destruction within the community. Naylor commences the "December 21st" chapter in the novel with, "Xavier Donnell was falling in love with a black woman. It was one of the most terrifying experiences of his life" (97). Although Xavier is a "successful" African American man, he looks at the act of being in love with an African American woman as if it is abnormal or unnatural. He

finds it to be such an oddity that he seeks the revered advice of Maxwell Smyth. Maxwell

advises him against marrying a Black woman by saying that, "There just aren't enough decent

ones to choose from. They're either out there on welfare and waiting to bring you a string of

somebody else's kids to support, or they've become so brainwashed into thinking that you aren't

good enough for them. The few who just might be up to your standards … are into white

men"(108). Maxwell's attitude about Black women is reflective of the generally negative attitude

that Black men in the novel had toward Black women.

Although, Luther Nedeed disagrees with Maxwell's philosophy concerning not marrying

Black women, his treatment of women is just as negative and produces worse results than

Maxwell's sentiments. For instance, Willa Nedeed, the wife of the final Luther Nedeed, whose

suffering is onset by her production of a "white" son, is just one example of the many women in

the novel who were silenced by the need for male domination. Willa Nedeed is accused of

adultery and locked in a basement, even though outside of color, the boy looks exactly like his

father. Her value to Luther is limited to the household chores she once performed in service to

his needs. He justifies her imprisonment by invoking patriarchal advice about the proper

subjugation of a wife: "His father was right: breaking in a wife is like breaking in a good pair of

slippers. Once you'd gotten use to them, you'd wear them until they fell apart, rather than go to

the trouble of buying a new pair" (67). Willa's entombment is only the first step in her re-

acclimation into a subservient, wifely role. After she has "learned her lesson," Luther plans to

impregnate her so that he will "get the son he should have had in the first place" (67). By

crushing her spirit and asserting dominance over her reproductively, Luther hopes to restore

patriarchal order and control.

I also assert that Naylor was implying something significant by giving Nedeed a white son. When referring to wives that the Nedeed men have chosen, Charles Wilson points out that every generation of men has chosen a light-complexioned wife, "yet each man wants her to produce a dark skinned male like him. To be sure, the Nedeed men want to prove the potency of blackness over any complexion… but at the same time, they are placing the woman in the position for the blame if this potency is not proven" (78). In spite of Luther Nedeed's embrace of traditional patriarchy and his way of life in which he attempts to regain his manhood, ultimately his manhood is again stolen by the symbolic whiteness of his own son. His own seed represents the patriarchal whiteness that leads to his ultimate demise. Building on Homans argument, I suggest that Naylor intentionally does not "institute [a] counter-tradition of strong Black womanhood to oppose the destructive legacy of patriarchy,"[31] but she does illustrate that the destruction of the Nedeed women in relation to the Nedeed men is reflective of the destructive nature of the traditional patriarchal structure. I concur with Okonkwo that Willa Nedeed's destruction is in fact black messianism because she is representative of the self-sacrifice and violence that many Black women endured as they attempted to combat and survive in an andro-centric system. Attempting to combat this traditional structure often lead to their death, either physically or metaphorically.

Willa Nedeed was just a representative of a long line of women within the male-centered lineage of Luther Nedeed. All of them were wanted for no more than menial household jobs that have traditionally been socialized as women's work and their ability to bare an heir to further perpetuate Luther Nedeed's system of patriarchal oppression. Paula Gallant Eckard says that their position in the novel is a representation of Lacanian theory in which women lack or they are deprived of language to express their experiences. However, when Willa discovers the relics and

writings that were left behind by the Nedeed women before her, she becomes empowered because it allows her to reject the silencing of the women who have been, "relegated to the nether realms of family history, one that has both rejected and emulated middle class white America" (Eckard 798). Essentially Naylor in *Linden Hills* uses her women characters as a symbolic illustration of silent strength that the women faced and upheld during the Black Liberation movement. I suggest that Luther's assertion of power over Willa is his attempt to practice ideal masculinity in which he is strong, active, aggressive, reasoned, dominant, competitive, and in control (Mutual 12). His successful practice of these particular traits over Willa requires that she is weak, passive, receptive, emotional, nurturing, and subordinate. I argue that Luther Nedeed's evil demise comes as a result of Willa stepping out of her traditional role and taking on traits that were traditionally associated with a man. I am not asserting that a woman possessing traditionally male qualities, destroys a man, in and of itself. However, I am suggesting that when these qualities involve an antagonistic relationship between the Black man and the Black women, then just like Luther Nedeed and his family, the man, woman, and child within the African American community are destroyed.

This was the case with Luther Nedeed in his relationship with his wife as well as other women in the community. In the Nedeed family, women were only needed for procreation and virtually required to live silent, unnoticeable lives after the birth of the child. Luther Nedeed's character is the perfect example of the destructive nature of maintaining a patriarchal system at all costs. In the Linden Hills community, women are required to be subjected to their husbands as well as the rule of Luther Nedeed. In addition to the issue of colorism or intra-racial prejudices based on skin color, within the African American community, Naylor is also addressing Black manhood being equated with dominating over women. Domination and power are two concepts

of masculinity that have been used for years. It has mainly been used in the relationship of men and women as a way of controlling the perceived weaker sex. From the times of slavery white masters had taken Black women and children at will and controlled all aspects of the Black families' life. Black men were essentially powerless in this environment and thus during the Black Nationalist period the leaders of the movement felt that the best way for the African American man to correct the wrongs of history were to take over the patriarchal system of domination within his own community. As leaders and providers for their families who established control over the women and children in their lives, Black men felt that the struggle to be recognized as men could be accomplished through this process. However, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, I concur with Patricia Hill Collins that the problem is, "Physical dominance and aggressiveness have become especially intertwined with contemporary ideas of Black masculinity" (210). This system of dominance, violence, and aggressiveness that Naylor is critiquing demonstrates how the silencing of the Nedeed women is symbolic of the larger political and racial concerns of the Black Nationalist Movement.

Another example of Luther Nedeed's misogynistic and antagonistic attitude toward women is his treatment of Laurel Dumont, a long-time resident of Linden Hills, who is being evicted from the community because she is getting a divorce from her husband, Howard Dumont. Luther Nedeed makes it very clear that he will only negotiate and do business with the men of the community, yet again rendering the woman's voice silent. In a verbal exchange between Luther and Laurel, the characters say,

> I came to find out when you plan to vacate … If the Dumonts no longer wish to
>
> reside here and there are no children to inherit the lease, the property reverts
>
> back to the original owners: my family – the Nedeeds. … Howard Dumont made

that decision, not Laurel Dumont – Not me. And this Dumont is telling you that

she's going to stay here … But Howard Dumont has decided that there are to be

no more Dumonts at Seven Twenty-Two Tupelo Drive … that's how things must

stand. … I'm truly sorry Mrs. Dumont. But that's the way things have always

been here. (244-245)

In spite of the fact that it is the twentieth century, during the setting of this particular text,

Luther Nedeed is still holding on to a system of traditional hegemonic patriarchy for his all-

Black community. Although Laurel points out that Luther did not evict the male character,

Daniel Braithwaite when his wife died, Luther makes it very clear to her that this is because she

is a woman and he is a man. Enduring this level of misogyny leads Laurel to one final measure

of coping – suicide. This illustrates yet again how harmful the patriarchal system is on the

community. Although Luther is seeking to maintain the system as an assertion of his own

masculinity, ultimately upholding a system of white patriarchy leads to the destruction of the

Black community. As bell hooks says both systems of white patriarchy and black patriarchy are

equally misogynistic and "death as the price all women must pay if they get out of their place"

(61). The fact that several women die in the text as a result of dealing with misogyny is an

illustration of this point.

By creating Linden Hills, I suggest that Luther Nedeed is adopting the Black Nationalist

concept of separatism in which Black men can create jobs and own property within their own

community and reassert aspects of their masculinity not afforded to them under the white racist

system. To many African American men, this was the remedy to their problems as men and to

the problems of racism, but the problem with this system is that it did not correct or address the

other systems of oppression and discrimination that plagued other members within the

community. I believe that Luther Nedeed's willingness to only sell to Blacks and build a community of wealth and prosperity as well as sustain his own business among his own may have been a note of affirmation from Naylor concerning the Black Power Movement's focus on separatism and uplift by developing Black-owned businesses. Naylor even writes, "Watching America's nervous breakdown during the thirties, he [Luther] realized that nothing was closer to the spleen and guts of the country than success" … "Linden Hills wasn't black; it was successful" (9, 17). However, I also believe that he was willing to attempt success at the expense of hurting his own people and silencing Black women, and these beliefs are reflective of some of the Black Nationalists movement's views against which Naylor is speaking. Although I realize that changing an age-old system such as patriarchy and eliminating the other inequalities that exist in society will require more than a few people changing their way of thinking, I do believe that one's mentality is where the journey begins. What one believes affects what one practices and the actions that one takes in dealing with those beliefs. Hence, I argue that if Black men want to be liberated then their freedom must commence by liberating others and not depending upon others' subordination to make them feel their worth.

Conclusion

Often, literary movements including the Black Arts Movement are considered in isolation and thus can be perceived as dead. However, a movement can never die if its values, thoughts, and calls for revolution have been planted as seeds for growth for the subsequent generations. I believe that this is exactly, what the Black Nationalist Movement in conjunction with the Black Feminist Movement did for Gloria Naylor and other African American Women writers. In spite of the fact that African American women authors struggled to be heard, they often found that it was quite liberating to use their literature to redefine and rewrite the dominant western

patriarchal ideology. However, the task is not just to re-work these contemporary texts and their influence on culture but to destroy the current myths and symbols of oppression that have been perpetuated for so many years. Although there was initially a struggle to have their voices heard, women authors persevered and ultimately continued a legacy of feminism, while also setting the stage for masculinity studies. Hence, by using their literature to redefine masculinity, these African American women authors are challenging the ideology of the Black Nationalist Movement in order to emancipate themselves as well as the men about which they write.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

We believe that although we are oppressed because of our color, we are privileged because of our sex and must therefore take responsibility for ending that privilege; We believe that our relationships with women must be based on the principle of equality; We recognize that present Eurocentric notions of manhood and masculinity are damaging to the psyche of Black men and must be replaced with a holistic interpretation of manhood that acknowledges the oneness of women and men; We believe that sexism is a global form of oppression of no less importance than any other form of oppression; We believe that sexist oppression against women   pervades every aspect of our communities and must be eradicated. (Mutua 45)

– Black Men for the Eradication of Sexism

Synthesis

The motto above is the mission statement of an organization founded by a group of men at Morehouse College in 1994 who recognized that the oppression of women is still a major factor in society as a whole and especially within the African American community. They recognized that in our current culture masculinity came with unspoken privileges, unfair oppression, and unrealistic expectations for both sexes. Furthermore, I believe that this mission statement captures the essence of what I wanted to demonstrate with this dissertation by way of what literature has done for the subject of African American masculinity. Using the texts *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry, *Third Life of Grange Copeland* by Alice Walker, and *Linden Hills* by Gloria Naylor, I have demonstrated how, just like the Black Men for the Eradication of

Sexism, these authors have shown that "Eurocentric notions of manhood and masculinity are damaging to the psyche of Black men and must be replaced" and that the " sexist oppression against women" that " pervades every aspect of our communities and must be eradicated" (Mutua 45). Thus, these authors demonstrated aforetime, during the 1950s through 1980s, what these progressive men would later accept as their personal mantra.

Often considered to be feminists, Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor, among other women authors of color, all experienced diverse circumstances. Given the diverse needs of women, just one brand of feminism would not suffice. Recognizing the varying needs of feminism and knowing that African American women needed their own voice, Alice Walker gave a name to what she, the other Black women in this study, and other Black women authors of the twentieth century, would come to know as Womanism or African American feminism. By exemplifying Walker's principle of Womanism in their writing these authors had a responsibility to their sisters to speak up for the rights of Black women even if the dominant culture resisted these voices. To not speak through their writing would be a form of silencing the Black woman's voice. Furthermore, to do so, would be to reject their own theories of liberation, resistance, and the pursuit of happiness.

Consequently, what this study demonstrates is that Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor explore the power of their writing to re-define racial, sexual, and political oppressions that come against women in their society. They embraced the concept that Black women's emancipation can occur if women embrace the pen, effectively address their male counterparts and exercise their right to liberate themselves by way of their complex narratives and essays. During the period of the 1950s through the 1980s, many social movements such as the Civil Rights, Black Nationalism, Black Power, Black Arts, and Black Feminist Movements all converged within the

African American community. Civil rights incorporated civil disobedience tactics to garner what the community needed. Black Nationalism promoted the advancement of Blacks through economic strategies and political demands. Black Power encouraged African American empowerment through community unity. Black Arts encouraged activism by way of Black artists. Black Feminism invigorated the women of all backgrounds to speak up for themselves and their rights. And thus with the amalgamation of these movements, African American authors and artists were expected to be expressions of the people's voices from these various groups within the community. Although Hansberry, Walker, and Naylor were usually thought of as being representatives solely of the concerns of African American women, I utilized this dissertation to make connections between these authors and current theories in masculinity studies by writers such as Michael Kimmel, Mark Anthony Neal, and Robert Majors. I suggested that in spite of having written during an earlier time period, the messages that these women were demonstrating in their works could be viewed as a kind of precursor to the theories that would later become a part of the masculinity movement that commenced in the early 1990s.

Although the time period between the 1950s to the 1980s is the crux of my historical framing for this study, I recognize that the struggle for Black men to be viewed as "real" men, commenced long before this era and will continue long after. From the days when kings were crowned on the coast of Africa to their fettered dismay on the slave ship; from their swaying on the end of a noose as "strange fruit," to sitting on the back of the bus; from the poor house and ultimately to the White House, the historical elements that fashioned the complex definition of Black masculinity have been numerous. For many Black males this complexity continues to leave them in a state in which they are emasculated by white society, segregated from the Black community, and alienated by the Black family. Hence, in an effort to reclaim their position in

each of these facets of life, their journey has taken on some distinct traits. As mentioned in all of the chapters, Black men have shared three areas of emasculation which are economic constraints, the pressures of white society, and their conflict with women, particularly African American women. I utilized these three areas of emasculation to demonstrate how the three authors recognized Black men's emasculation and in turn presented lessons of emancipation for them in their texts. Many of these lessons of emancipation would later emerge as similar concepts about redefining manhood as developed in modern masculinity studies.

In Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* one can see how she was a leader in examining the complex relationships of Black men and women. She presents a feminist voice through the character Beneatha's relationship with the men of the novel. She also demonstrates the complexities of coming into manhood when lack of financial opportunities and racism present hindrances to those dreams. Furthermore, Hansberry demonstrates that the ultimate realization of manhood comes when it is a communal effort and not one in which the man acts alone. As a result, Walter, the main male character of focus in that chapter, experiences a positive ending in which he and his family hope to advance and face the trials of life together.

This is presented in stark contrast to *The Third life of Grange Copeland* by Alice Walker who presents the most dismal display of masculinity in the depiction of Grange and Brownfield. It demonstrates how Black men who believe the masculine social construction that says that they should be able to perform the basic functions of manhood such as providing and protecting their families, often have that privilege stolen or undermined by the racial burdens of their society. It displays how Black men who do not evolve from the pressures of white society will ultimately end up unfulfilled and destroyed. Furthermore, Walker shows how this destruction affects Black men as well as the rest of their family, especially Black women. Attempting to fulfill ideal

hegemonic masculinity leaves Black men holding on to the remnants of masculinity that society has left them. Hence, just like the male characters of the texts, they ultimately end up being psychologically and emotionally "castrated" anyway.

Naylor's *Linden Hills* ends in tragedy, and the novel says a great deal about love, tolerance, and most importantly, the gender issues represented by the powerful codes of masculinity and femininity. Mainly using the character Luther Needed, this text displays how masculinity is complicated by the heterosexual dominance model as well as class status. Not only does Naylor address the heteronormative aspects of masculinity, but she also illustrates that when male characters desire to have strong homo-social bonds then those bonds must challenge the accepted social gender constructions as well. These contrasting notions of Black masculinity are seen in the desire for homo-social bonds that conflict with gender constructs, as represented in the characters Willie and Lester. Though the situations surrounding these characters are different, they each add up to some key challenging factors in the realm of Black masculinity which are the desire to be deeply connected and accepted by other males without fear that if they transcend certain gender constraints they will automatically forfeit their manhood. These challenges also relate back to the basic tenets of manhood which are to be the protectors and providers in society. Naylor complicates the depiction of masculinity in her novel even more by incorporating the homosexual male character, David. Her depiction of the challenges that homosexual men face are significant because this impacts an aspect of masculinity studies as well. I do not believe that it is a coincidence that the perpetuator of the ideal manhood dies at the end of the novel.   Naylor shows through symbolic death of the patriarchal structure that the entire community of Linden Hills, which is representative of the African American community, needs to be set free from the destructive forces of hegemonic masculinity.

Even though all of these authors present what could be considered unfavorable depictions of Black masculinity, they each sympathetically acknowledge the plight of Black men. All of these authors demonstrate the despair of the Black male concerning his employment or lack thereof, and his ability to be a source of support and income in his family. They also demonstrate the despair he feels and the coping mechanisms he uses when he realizes his inability to fulfill this ideal role. Of course, the main coping mechanism that they address is the Black man's attack both verbally and physically on Black women. This is probably the most controversial aspect of each of these texts. Nonetheless, each of these authors also demonstrates how, though the abandonment of traditional gender constructs initially garners negative responses, it ultimately becomes a source of the Black males' respect. They recognized that if gender roles are going to change then men and women cannot continue to interact with each other from a position of antagonism. Women must be positively influenced by men and men must be positively influenced by women. Although, I concur with most scholars like hooks, Harrison, Bigsby, and others that racism is the root of the issues within the African American plight, I also assert that it is the perpetuation of the Eurocentric ideals and values within the community that keep the community from progressing. In order to have redemption we must first have ratification of the Western patriarchal influences that pervade our ideology, and then we must redefine the models of masculinity that govern our current paradigm by utilizing the messages that authors Lorraine Hansberry, Alice Walker, and Gloria Naylor explore in their selected texts.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any study there are limitations and areas for further inquiry in this area of scholarship. First, of all what some may consider a limitation of this study is that the primary focus was on the heterosexual relationships of Black men and Black women. I do believe that a deeper exploration of the sub-groups within the community as they relate to masculinity would

be very insightful as well. I do acknowledge my own bias as a heterosexual Christian woman in conducting this research. Furthermore, I admit that some of this dissertation's contents required a stretching of my own personal viewpoints.

Another limitation is that my dissertation focused on women who were activists in their communities but were not formally a part of the Black activist movements around which I base my arguments. Lorraine Hansberry was a part of several political movements and had ideologies that included both civil rights and Black Nationalist concepts of change and advancement. Alice Walker was heavily involved in the civil rights movement and heavily intermingled Black feminist with Black Nationalist notions in order to create her own theories. Finally, though not of age in the 1960s, Gloria Naylor says that her writing is a reflection of her personal politics but it is not necessarily political writing.[32] Nonetheless, I suggest that Naylor wrote just as Hansberry and Walker did as a form of activism for the issues that existed in the community. Nevertheless, though each of them had clear connections to these movements in their writing, I mostly utilized the Black-centered movements as a form of historical context and to further illustrate why social activism via art was such a necessity.

Finally, another limitation of my study is that it focuses on the study of masculinity from a binary perspective of white masculinity and Black masculinity. I acknowledge that there are other viable ethnic groups within the world that share and divulge from the depictions of masculinity presented in this paper. However, given that my focus is on what Black women are saying about the masculine ideals of Black men, I had to use the dominant culture's norm in order to make my points about the contrasts that exist as well as make recommendations for future improvement. Although there are several texts that could have been used to draw my

conclusions, I believe that the texts that I selected were representative of many Black women authors' sentiments during the era of study.

In terms of further inquiry, even with all of the scholarship and literature, the major question would probably be: can Black masculinity really be re-defined? Is it possible for masculinity, especially Black masculinity to genuinely be that progressive in a society that is used to hegemonic norms? If you provide for your family, protect them from danger, and produce the seed for a new generation then, is that all that it takes to make one a man? Also, consider the complications of the masculine diaspora – Is Black masculinity defined in the same way as white masculinity? Or is the essence of a "real" man encapsulated by what is within you? These are all issues that caused me to present this particular inquiry concerning these texts and question if Black masculinity can truly be re-defined. If yes, how? If not, why? Nonetheless, I do know that for the sake of progression that it cannot continue to be defined by the traditional parameters that have been placed on masculinity because those parameters have been used as a means to oppress women and exclude legitimate members of the African American community. It also constitutes yet another means to cause division in this same community. It is because of the multiplicity of responses to these questions that I chose to join the number of scholars who have explored how Black masculinity is complicated by various factors that are not limited to the aforementioned issues but also inclusive of class, education, sexual orientation, and prescribed gender roles. Black masculinity should be based on personal values such as respect, commitment and loyalty to one's family and community. Also, it should not be limited, simply by the divisive factors that currently embody it. Thus, essentially by using a progressive definition one does not have to fit the mold of ideal hegemonic masculinity in order to create a viable masculine identity – one can be Black nationalist or male feminist; or one can be an

educated middle class Black man or a poor black man; and one can even be heterosexual or homosexual. However, it is imperative that each sub-group appreciate each other's value to the African American community by viewing manhood as a common commitment to change, family, and community, not economic status or white standards.

In conducting this study, I must acknowledge that it is not my goal in this dissertation to denigrate Black men, attack the traditional family, exalt women over men, nor reduce beliefs about gender and masculinity to a prescribed formula of liberation. Furthermore, I am not arguing for the feminizing of the Black man because I still want Black men to be seen as strong. However, in addition to them being viewed as strong, I am also very much in support of strong nuclear Black families and non-nuclear families which include strong Black women and strong Black children. My greatest point is that the strength of Black men does not have to come at the oppression and weakness of others in the community. My basic presumption all along is that the Black community is not monolithic, and thus it is my goal in this dissertation to demonstrate that all members who contribute to the collective well-being of the community have value, in spite of economic factors, sexual preferences, and viewpoints on gender. Overall, the African American community can be viewed as a strong group of people who work individually and collectively to build an even greater society.

Notes

[1] Throughout this dissertation I chose to capitalize my personal usage of the word Black when referring to Black people or when using it as a cultural identifier. I also use it interchangeably with the term African American and treat it with the same significance as it refers to much more than just a color as a racial identifier.

[2] Harlan, Judith. *Feminism: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998. Print.

[3] See my discussion about the works of authors such as Michael Kimmel, Harry Brod, and Bryce Traisters on p. 11-13.

[4] According to Dictionary.com, Mystique means a framework of doctrines, ideas, beliefs, or the like, constructed around a person or object, endowing the person or object with enhanced value or profound meaning. "Mystique." Web. 24 June 2014.

[5] Note taken from the Raewyn Connell's official website: www.raewynconnell.net. Connell, Raewyn. "Masculinities." *Raewyn Connell*. Web. 24 June 2014.

[6] Anthony, Ronda Henry. *Searching for the New Black Man: Black Masculinity and Women's Bodies*. U of Mississippi P: Jackson, 2013.

[7] Sell, Mike. "Don't Forget the Triple Front!: Some Historical and Representational Dimensions of the Black Arts Movement in Academia." *African American Review*. Fall-Winter, 2008.

[8] Sell p. 623.

[9] Neal, Mark Anthony. *New Black Man*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

[10] Definition paraphrased from: Trodd, Zoe. *American Protest Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2006.

[11] The concepts of universality and Blackness are discussed in detail, later in the chapter, in the section on "Black Plays" on pp. 38-47.

[12] All biographical information is taken from a multiplicity of sources. See C. Bigsby, M. Wilkerson, L. Lipari entries in the references for more information.

[13] Effiong, Philip U. *In Search of a Model for African-American Drama: A Study of Selected Plays By Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka, and Ntozake Shange*. Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2000.

[14] For biographical information on Lorraine Hansberry, see: Lipari, Lisbeth. "Lorraine Hansberry." *Writers of the Black Chicago Renaissance*. Ed. Steven Tracy. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2011.193-217.

[15] Houck, Davis W., and David E. Dixon. "Lorraine Hansberry." *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965*. Jackson: U of Mississippi, 2009. Print.

[16] Traditional manhood is defined as white, middle class, married heterosexual, protestant, a father college educated and fully employed (6). Kimmel, Michael S. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free, 1996.

[17] In a Gallup poll conducted in 1950, nearly a quarter of Americans said they would recommend a career in medicine for a young man but only two percent said that they would recommend it for a young woman (1). Boulis, Ann K., and Jerry A. Jacobs. *The Changing Face of Medicine: Women Doctors and the Evolution of Health Care in America*. Ithaca: ILR, 2008.

[18] Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985.

[19] Biographical Information for Walker came from multiple sources. See Bates and Walker for more information on the author's life.

[20] See Peralta and Tuttle.

[21] Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Novel*. New York: Perennial Library, 1990. p. 44

[22] Nelson, Clyde. "Ain't I a Man?:The Efficacy of Black Masculinities for Men's Studies in the 1990s." Ed. Jacob U. Gordon. *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*. Ed. Richard Majors. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1994.

[23] Biographical information came from multiple sources. See Wilson, Fowler, Gates and Montgomery.

[24] Naylor, Gloria and Maxine Lavon Montgomery. *Conversations with Gloria Naylor.* Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2004. p. 8

[25] Ashford, Tomeiko. "Gloria Naylor on Black Spirituality: An Interview." *MELUS* 30.4.

[26] The idea that the novel is a passive form was taken from Larry Neal's "The Black Writer's Role" published in the Liberator in 1966. The quote was taken from the article, "The Black Arts Movement: Performance, Neo-Orality, and the Destruction of the 'White Thing'" (Mike Sell).

[27] See Wilson, William J. *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1978. and Glasgow, Douglas G. *The Black Underclass: Poverty, Unemployment, and Entrapment of Ghetto Youth*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980.

[28] Concept of Black leadership developed in W.E.B. Dubois that said that Blacks would be saved by the exception members of their race. See DuBois, W.E.B. "Talented Tenth." *The Future of the Race*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1996. Print.

[29] Neal p. 7. Concept from Mark Anthony Neal about Black masculinity's elevation of current, negative Black male stereotypes when defining manhood.

[30] See chapter 7 on "Hustling to Fill a Void" in Majors, Richard, and Janet Mancini. Billson. *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Lexington, 1992

[31] Quote taken from Margaret Homans, "The Woman in the Cave: Recent Feminist Fiction and the Classical Underworld." Contemporary Literature 29.3 (1988): 369-402

[32] Naylor p. 123

WORKS CONSULTED

Abell, Joy L. "African/American: Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs* and the American Civil

    Rights Movement." *African American Review* 35.3 (Autumn 2001): 459-70. Print.

Anthony, Ronda Henry. *Searching for the New Black Man: Black Masculinity and Women's*

    Bodies. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2013. Print.

Ashford, Tomeiko. "Gloria Naylor on Black Spirituality: An Interview." *MELUS* 30.4 (Winter):

    73-87. Print.

Awkward, Michael. "A Black Man's Place in Black Feminist Criticism." *Traps: African*

    American Men on Gender and Sexuality. Ed. Rudolph P. Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall.

    Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2001. 177-93. Print.

---. *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality*. Chicago: U of

    Chicago P, 1995. Print.

Bambara, Toni Cade. *The Black Woman; an Anthology*. New York: New American Library,

    1970. Print.

Baraka, Amiri, and Charlie Reilly. *Conversations with Amiri Baraka*. Jackson: U of Mississippi

    P, 1994. Print.

Bates, Gerri. *Alice Walker: A Critical Companion.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2005. Print.

Battle, Juan, and Sandra L. Barnes. *Black Sexualities: Probing Powers, Passions, Practices, and*

    Policies. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2010. Print.

Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. New York: Division of Random House, 1974. Print.

Benston, Kimberly. *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African American Modernism.*

    Routledge: New York, 2000. Print.

Berg, Christine. "Light from a Hill of Carbon Paper Dolls": Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills* and

    Dante's Inferno."*Modern Language Studies* 29.2 (Autumn 1999): 1-19. Print.

Bernstein, Robin. "Inventing a Fishbowl: White Supremacy and the Critical Reception of

    Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*." *Modern Drama* 42.1 (Spring 1999): 16-26.

    Print.

Bigsby, C. W. E. "Hansberry Depicts the Struggle of an Emasculated Male Hero." *Confrontation*

    and Commitment; a Study of Contemporary American Drama 1959-66. Columbia: U of

    Missouri, 1968. 156-61. Print.

Bloom, Harold. *Alice Walker*. New Ed. New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2007. Print.

Bloom, Harold and Blake Hobby. *The American Dream.* New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism,

    2009. Print.

Boulis, Ann K., and Jerry A. Jacobs. *The Changing Face of Medicine: Women Doctors and the*

    Evolution of Health Care in America. Ithaca: ILR, 2008.

Bracey, John H., August Meier, and Elliott M. Rudwick. *Black Nationalism in America*.

    Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970. Print.

Brod, Harry. *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*. Boston: Allen & Unwin,

    1987. Print.

Brown, Lloyd W. "Lorraine Hansberry as Ironist: A Reappraisal of *A Raisin in the Sun*." *Journal*

    of Black Studies 4.3 (1974): 237-47. Print.

Bruck, Peter and Wolfgang Karrer. *The Afro-American Novel since 1960.* Amsterdam: Grüner,

    1982. Print.

Bullins, Ed. *Ed Bullins: Twelve Plays and Selected Writings.* New York: U of

    Michigan P, 2006. Print.

Butler, Judith. "Subjects of Sex/ Gender/ Desire." *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. 9. Print.

Butler, Robert. *Contemporary African American Fiction: The Open Journey.* Madison: London; Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998. Print.

---. "Making a Way Out of No Way: The Open Journey in Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*." *Black American Literature Forum* 22.1 (n.d.): 65-79. Print.

Carlacio, Jami L. *The Fiction of Toni Morrison: Reading and Writing on Race, Culture, and Identity.* Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 2007. Print.

Carter, Steven R. *Hansberry's Drama: Commitment Amid Complexity*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1991. Print.

---. "Images of Men in Lorraine Hansberry's Writing." *Black American Literature Forum* 19.4 (Winter 1985): 160-62. Print.

Chandler, Kimberly. "How to Become a 'Black Man': Exploring African American Masculinities and the Performance of Gender." Jackson and Hopson, 55-88.

Cheney, Anne. *Lorraine Hansberry.* Boston: Twayne, 1984. Print.

Chester, Alfred, and Vilma Howard. "Ralph Ellison: The Art of Fiction." Paris Review ser. 8.Spring (1955) Web. <www.theparisreview.org/back-issues/8>.

Christian, Barbara. *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers*. New York: Pergamon, 1985. Print.

Christian, Barbara, and Gloria Bowles. *New Black Feminist Criticism: 1985-2000*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2007. Print.

Cixous, Hélène and Susan Sellers. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *The Hélène Cixous Reader*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print

Clarke, Cheryl. *"After Mecca": Women Poets and the Black Arts Movement*. New Brunswick, :Rutgers UP, 2005. Print.

Cochran, Kate. "'When the Lessons Hurt': *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* as Job, an Allegory." *The Southern Literary Journal* 34.1 (2001): 79-100. Print.

Colander, David C., Robert E. Prasch, and Falguni A. Sheth. "One Hundred Years of American Economics on Race and Discrimination, 1881-1981." *Race, Liberalism, and Economics*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2004. Print.

Collins, Lisa Gail and Margo Natalie Crawford. *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*. Rutgers UP: New Jersey, 2006. Print.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

--- *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.

--- *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2006. Print.

Connell, Raewyn. *Masculinities*. Berkeley: U of California, 1995. Print.

Cromwell, Vicky and Ronald Cromwell. "Perceived Dominance in Decision-Making and Conflict Resolution among Anglo, Black and Chicano Couples." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 40.4 (Nov. 1978): 749-59. Print.

Davis, Amanda J. "To Build a Nation: Black Women Writers, Black Nationalism, and Violent Reduction of Wholeness." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 26.3 (2004): 24-53. Print.

Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race and Class*. Moskva: Progress, 1987. Print.

--- "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves." *The Black Scholar*
3.4, THE BLACK WOMAN (1971): 2-15. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Sept. 2013.

Davis, Angela Y., and Joy James. *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998.
Print.

Delany, Martin Robison. *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored
People of the United States*. New York: Arno, 1968. Print.

Dill, Bonnie Thornton. "The Dialectics of Black Womanhood." *Signs: Journal of Women in
Culture and Society* 4.3 (1979): 543. Print.

Domina, Lynn. *Understanding a Raisin in the Sun: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and
Historical Documents.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1998. Print.

Drake, St Clair., and Horace R. Cayton. *Black Metropolis; a Study of Negro Life in a Northern
City.* New York: Harper & Row, 1962. Print.

Dubey, Madhu. *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic*. Bloomington: Indiana
University Press, 1994. Print.

Dubois, W.E.B. "Krigwa Players Little Negro Theater." *University of Massachussetts*. 135. Web.
4 June 2014. Print.

---. "Talented Tenth." *The Future of the Race*. Eds. Henry Louis Gates and Cornel West. New
York: A.A. Knopf, 1996. Print.

Eckard, Paula. "The Entombed Maternal in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills." *Callaloo* 35.3
(Summer 2012): 795-809. Print.

Effiong, Philip U. *In Search of a Model for African-American Drama: A Study of Selected Plays
By Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka, and Ntozake Shange.* Lanham, MD: UP of
America, 2000. Print.

Elam, Harry Justin., and David Krasner. *African-American Performance and Theater History: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001. Print.

Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage International, 1995. Print.

Engles, Tim. "African American Whiteness in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills." *African American Review* 43.4 (Winter 2009): 661-79. Print.

Essien-Udom, Essien Udosen. *Black Nationalism: The Search for an Identity*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961. Print.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. London: Pluto, 1986. Print.

Ferguson, Roderick A. *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004. Print.

Fitzgerald, Stephanie. *Alice Walker: Author and Social Activist*. Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point, 2008. Print.

Fleetwood, Nicole R. *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2011. Print.

Fogel, Robert William and Stanley L. Engerman. *Time on the Cross: Evidence and Methods, a Supplement*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1974. Print.

Fowler, Virginia. *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996. Print.

Franklin, C. W. "Black Male-Black Female Conflict: Individually Caused and Culturally Nurtured." Journal of Black Studies 15.2 (1984): 139-54. Web.

Frazier, Edward Franklin. *Black Bourgeoisie*. Glencoe: Free, 1957. Print.

Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1963. Print.

Gardiner, Judith Kegan. *Masculinity Studies & Feminist Theory: New Directions*. New York:

Columbia UP, 2002. Print.

Gates, Henry Louis., and Anthony Appiah. *Gloria Naylor: Critical Perspectives Past and*

    Present. New York: Amistad, 1993. Print

Gates, Henry Louis, and Cornel West. *The Future of the Race*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1996.

    Print.

Gayle, Addison. "Cultural Strangulation: Black Literature and the White Aesthetic." *The*

    Addison Gayle Reader. Ed. Nathaniel Norment, Jr. Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1969. Print.

Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The*

    Tradition in English. New York: W.W. Norton, 1985. Print.

Gill, Glenda. "Techniques of Teaching Lorraine Hansberry: Liberation from Boredom." *Negro*

    American Literature Forum 8.2 (Summer 1974): 226-28. Print.

Gilmore, David D. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. New Haven, CT:

    Yale UP, 1990. Print.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge,

    Mass.: Harvard UP, 1993. Print.

Giovanni, Nikki. *Black Feeling, Black Talk*. Detroit: Broadside, 1970. Print.

Giovanni, Nikki, and Gloria Naylor. "Conversation." *Callaloo* 23.4 (Autumn 2000): 1395-409.

    Print.

Glasgow, Douglas G. *The Black Underclass: Poverty, Unemployment, and Entrapment of Ghetto*

    Youth. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980. Print.

Glaude, Eddie S. *Is It Nation Time?: Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black*

    Nationalism. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002. Print.

Glymph, Thavolia. *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation*

Household. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print.

Griffin, Rachel. "Bearing Witness and Paying Mind: (Re) Defining the Meanings of Black Male Success. Jackson and Hopson, 167-186. Print.

Hampton, Henry, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. New York: Bantam, 1990. Print.

Hansberry, Lorraine, et al. *Lorraine Hansberry: The Black Experience in the Creation of Drama.* Princeton: Films for the Humanities, 1992. Video.

---. *The Movement; Documentary of a Struggle for Equality*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964. Print.

---. *A Raisin in the Sun: A Drama in Three Acts*. New York: Random House, 1959. Print.

Hansberry, Lorraine, and Robert Nemiroff. *The Collected Last Plays*. New York: Vintage, 1994. Print.

Hapgood, Fred. *Why Males Exist: An Inquiry into the Evolution of Sex*. New York: Morrow, 1979. Print.

Harlan, Judith. *Feminism: A Reference Handbook*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1998. Print.

Harper, Phillip Brian. *Are We Not Men?: Masculine Anxiety and the Problem of African-American Identity*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.

Harris, Trudier. *The Power of the Porch: the Storyteller's Craft in Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Naylor, and Randall Kenan*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996. Print.

Harrison, Paul Carter. *The Drama of the Nommo*. New York: Grove Press, 1972.

Hillenbrand, Harold. "Speech, after Silence: Alice Walker's *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*." *Black American Literature Forum* 20.1/2 (Summer 1986): 113-28. Print.

Hendrickson, Roberta. "Remembering the Dream: Alice Walker, Meridian and the Civil Rights Movement." *MELUS* 24.3 (Fall 1999): 111-28. Print.

Henry, Anthony Ronda C. *Searching for the New Black Man: Black Masculinity and Women's Bodies*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2013. Print.

Hernton, Calvin. "The Sexual Mountain and Black Women Writers." *Black American Literature Forum.* Winter 18 (1984): 139-45.

Hogue, W. Lawrence. *Discourse and the Other: The Production of the Afro-American Text*. Durham: Duke UP, 1986. Print.

Margaret Homans, "The Woman in the Cave: Recent Feminist Fiction and the Classical Underworld." Contemporary Literature 29.3 (1988): 369-402.

hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. Boston: South End, 1981. Print.

---. "Understanding Patriarchy." *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*. New York: Atria, 2004. 17-35. Print.

---. *We Real Cool: Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.

---. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics.* Boston: South End Press, 1990. Print.

Horton, James Oliver. "Freedom's Yoke: Gender Conventions among Antebellum Free Blacks." *Feminist Studies* 12.1 (1986): 51-76. *JSTOR*. Web. 09 Sep. 2013.

Houck, Davis W., and David E. Dixon. "Lorraine Hansberry." *Women and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2009. 88-97. Print.

Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." *Nation.* 23 (June 1926): 692-94. Print.

Hurston, Zora Neale. "Characteristics of Negro Expression." *Negro: An Anthology*. Ed. Nancy Cunard. London: Wishart, 1934. Print.

---. *Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Novel*. New York: Perennial Library, 1990. Print.

Ivey, Adriane. "Beyond Sacrifice: Gloria Naylor Rewrites the Passion." *MELUS* 30.1 (Spring 2005): 85-108. Print.

Jackson, Lawrence Patrick. *The Indignant Generation: A Narrative History of African American Writers and Critics, 1934-1960.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 2011. Print.

Jackson, Ronald L. "Black 'Manhood' as Xenophobe: An Ontological Exploration of the Hegelian Dialectic." *Journal of Black Studies* 27.6 (1997): 731-50. *JSTOR*. Web. 06 July 2014.

---. *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in Popular Media*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2006. Print.

Jackson, Ronald L., and Mark C. Hopson. *Masculinity in the Black Imagination: Politics of Communicating Race and Manhood*. New York: Peter Lang, 2011. Print.

Jordan, Vernon. "The Black Agenda for the 1980s." *Journal of Southern Regional Council*, 1978 -2003 2.1 (1979): 5-9. Print.

Joseph, Peniel E. *Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*. New York: Henry Holt and, 2006. Print.

Kelley, Margot Anne. *Gloria Naylor's Early Novels.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida,

Kelley, Robin. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

Kelley, Robin D. G. *Into the Fire--African Americans since 1970*. New York: Oxford UP, 1996. Print.

Keppel, Ben. *The Work of Democracy: Ralph Bunche, Kenneth B. Clark, Lorraine Hansberry, and the Cultural Politics of Race.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1995. Print.

Kimmel, Michael S. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free, 1996. Print.

Kirubahar, J. Samuel. "The Vicious Cycle of Violence in *The Third Life Grange Copeland*."

> *Language in India* 12.9 (September 2012): 163-84. Print.

Klages, Mary. *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum, 2006. Print.

Lapari, Lisbeth. ""Fearful of the Written Word": White Fear, Black Writing, and Lorraine

> Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (Aug. 2000): 37-41. Print.

Lauret, Maria. *Alice Walker.* 2nd ed. Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. Print.

Leak, Jeffrey B. *Racial Myths and Masculinity in African American Literature*. Knoxville: The U

> of Tennessee P, 2005. Print.

Leeson, Richard M. *Lorraine Hansberry: A Research and Production Sourcebook.* Westport,

> Conn.: Greenwood, 1997. Print.

Li, Stephanie. *Toni Morrison: a Biography*. Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010.

> Print.

Lewis, Linden. "Constructing Black Masculinity Through The Fiction Of Gloria Naylor." Color,

> Hair, and Bone: Race in the Twenty-First Century. 47-68. Cranbury: Associated UP,

> 2008. MLA International Bibliography. Web. 10 Apr. 2014.

Lipari, Lisbeth. "Lorraine Hansberry." *Writers of the Black Chicago Renaissance*. Ed. Steven

Tracy. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2011.193-217. Print.

Lipsitz, George. *How Racism Takes Place.* Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2011. Print.

Locke, Alain. "The New Negro." *The New Negro.* New York: Atheneum, 1968. Print.

Loos, P. *A Reader's Guide to Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun.* Berkeley Heights:

> Enslow Publishers, 2008.

Madhubuti, Haki R. *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?: The Afrikan American Family in

> Transition: Essays in Discovery, Solution and Hope*. 1991. Print.

Mafe, Diana A. "Black Women on Broadway: The Duality of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* and Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls*." *American Drama* 15.2 (Summer 2006): 30-47. Print.

Majors, Richard, and Janet Mancini. Billson. *Cool Pose: The Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America*. New York: Lexington, 1992. Print.

Mance, Ajuan. *Inventing Black Women*. Knoxville: The U of Tennessee P, 2007. Print.

Marable, Manning. *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and beyond in Black America, 1945-2006*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2007. Print.

Martin, Ben. "From Negro to Black to African American: The Power of Names and Naming." *Political Science Quarterly*. Spring 106 (1991): 83-107. Print.

Matthews, Kristin. "The Politics of "Home" in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in The Sun." *Modern Drama* 51.4 (Winter 2008): 556-78. Print.

McKissack, Pat, and Fredrick McKissack. *Young, Black, and Determined: A Biography of Lorraine Hansberry.* New York: Holiday House, 1998. Print.

McLoyd, Vonnie C., Nancy E. Hill, and Kenneth A. Dodge. *African American Family Life: Ecological and Cultural Diversity*. New York: Guilford, 2005. Print.

Miklody, Eva. "The Fall of the House of Nedeed: Apocalypse in Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 4.1/2 (1998): 299-306. Print.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism." *Third World Women.* San Francisco: Third World Communications, 1972. Print.

Moore, John Noell. "Myth, Fairy Tale, Epic, and Romance: Narrative as Re-Vision in *Linden Hills*." *Callaloo* 23.4 (2000): 1410-429. Print.

Morris, Aldon D. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: Free, 1984. Print.

Morrison, Toni. *The Bluest Eye.* New York: Washington Square, 1970. Print.

---. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992. Print.

---. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence." *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*. The U of Michigan P, 7 Oct. 1988. Web. 12 July 2013.

Moynihan, Daniel. *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Publication. 1965. Web.

Muñoz, José. "Cruising the Toilet: Leroi Jones/Amiri Baraka, Radical Black Traditions, and Queer Futurity." GLQ 13 .2-3 (2007): 353-367.

Mutua, Athena D. *Progressive Black Masculinities*. New York: Routledge, 2006. Print.

Nagel, Joane. "Ethnicity and Sexuality." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26.1 (2000): 107-33. Print.

Naylor, Gloria. *Bailey's Cafe*. New York: Vintage, 1992. Print.

---. *Linden Hills*. New York, U.S.A.: Penguin, 1985. Print.

---. *Mama Day*. New York: Vintage, 1989. Print.

---. *The Men of Brewster Place.* New York: Hyperion, 1998. Print.

---. *The Women of Brewster Place*. New York: Penguin, 1983. Print.

Naylor, Gloria and Maxine Lavon Montgomery. *Conversations with Gloria Naylor.* Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2004. Print.

Neal, Larry. *Visions of a Liberated Future: Black Arts Movement Writings*. Eds. Imamu Amiri Baraka and Michael Schwartz. New York: Thunder's Mouth, 1989. Print.

Neal, Mark Anthony. *Looking for Leroy: Illegible Black Masculinities*. New York: New York Press, 2013. Print.

--- *New Black Man*. New York: Routledge, 2005. Print.

Nelson, Clyde. "Ain't I a Man?:The Efficacy of Black Masculinities for Men's Studies in the 1990s." Ed. Jacob U. Gordon. *The American Black Male: His Present Status and His Future*. Ed. Richard Majors. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1994. Print.

Okonkwo, Christopher. "Suicide or Messianic Self-Sacrifice?: Exhuming Willa's Body in Gloria Naylor's Linden Hills." *African American Review* 35.1 (Spring 2001): 117-31. Print.

Ongiri, Amy Abugo. *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic*. Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2010. Web. 10th April 2014.

Page, Philip. *Reclaiming Community in Contemporary African-American Fiction.* Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1999. Print.

Peralta, Robert L., and Lori A. Tuttle. "Male Perpetrators of Heterosexual-Partner-Violence: The Role of Masculinity." *Journal of Men's Studies* Fall 21.3 (2013): 255-76. *JSTOR*. Web. 06 July 2014.

Phelps, Carmen L. *Visionary Women Writers of Chicago's Black Arts Movement*. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 2013. Print.

Pollard, Cherise. "Sexual Subversions, Political Inversions, Women's Poetry and the Politics of the Black Arts Movement." Collins and Crawford, 173-186.

Puhr, Katherine. "Healers in Gloria Naylor's Fiction." *Twentieth Century Literature* 40.4 (Winter 1994): 518-27. Print.

Reid-Pharr, Robert. *Once You Go Black: Choice, Desire, and the Black American Intellectual*. New York: New York U P, 2007. Print.

Richardson, Riché. *Black Masculinity and the U.S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta*. Athens:

U of Georgia P, 2007. Print.

Robinson, Dean E. *Black Nationalism in American Politics and Thought*. Cambridge:

Cambridge UP, 2001. Print.

Rowell, Charles H., and Gloria Naylor. "An Interview with Gloria Naylor." <u>Callaloo.</u> Winter

20 (1997): 179-92.

Sell, Mike. "Don't Forget the Triple Front!: Some Historical and Representational Dimensions of

the Black Arts Movement in Academia." *African American Review*. Fall-Winter, 2008.

Print.

Shakur, Assata. *Assata: An Autobiography*. Westport: L. Hill, 1987. Print.

Shange, Ntozake. *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide ; When the Rainbow Is Enuf:*

A Choreopoem. London: Collier Macmillan, 1989. Print.

Shelby, Tommie. *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*.

Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2005. Print.

Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness." *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays*

on Women, Literature, and Theory. New York: Pantheon, 1985. Print. Spivak, Gayatri

Chakravorty. "French Feminism in an International Frame."

Smethurst, James Edward. *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and*

1970s. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2005. Print.

Smith, Barbara. *Home Girls: a Black Feminist Anthology*. New Brunswick: Rutgers

UP, 2000. Print.

Springer, Kimberly. *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980*.

Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.

Stave, Shirley A. *Gloria Naylor: Strategy and Technique, Magic and Myth.* Newark:

U of Delaware P, 2001. Print.

---. *Toni Morrison and the Bible: Contested Intertextualities*. New York:

Peter Lang, 2006. Print.

Stone, Robin. "Alice's True Adventures." *Essence Magazine* (Oct 2004): 148. Print.

Thomas, Lorenzo. *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-century*

American Poetry. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 2000. Print.

Tolman, Tristan. "The Effects of Slavery and Emancipation on African-American Families and

Family History Research." *Crossroads* (March 2013): 6-17. Web. 6 July 2014.

Traister, Bryce. "Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies." *American*

Quarterly 52.2 (2000): 274-304. Web.

Trodd, Zoe. *American Protest Literature.* Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2006. Print.

Walker, Alice. *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer's Activism*. New York: Random

House, 1997. Print.

---. *By the Light of My Father's Smile: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 1998.

Print.

---. *The Color Purple: A Novel*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982. Print.

---. *Goodnight Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning*. London: Women's, 1987. Print.

---. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace

Jovanovich,1983. Print.

---. *Meridian*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976. Print.

---. *Once: Poems*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976. Print.

---. *Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and*

Palestine/Israel. New York: Seven Stories, 2010. Print.

---. *Possessing the Secret Joy*. New York: Harbrace Pub, 1992. Print.

---. *The Temple of My Familiar*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989. Print.

---. *Revolutionary Petunias, & Other Poems*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973. Print.

---. *The Third Life of Grange Copeland.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970. Print.

Walker, Melissa. *Down From the Mountaintop: Black Women's Novels in the Wake of the Civil Rights Movement, 1966-1989*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991. Print.

Wallace, Maurice O. *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775-1995*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.

Wallace, Michele. *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. New York: Dial, 1979. Print.

Ward, Audrey. *Gender and Domination: the Problem of Patriarchal Power in the Narratives of Alice Walker, Alice Munro, Gloria Naylor, and Toni Morrison*. Ownings Mills: Watermark, 1990. Print.

Ward, Catherine and Gloria Naylor. "Gloria Naylor's *Linden Hills*: A Modern 'Inferno.'" *Contemporary Literature* 28.1 (Spring 1987): 67-81. Print.

Whitt, Margaret Earley. *Understanding Gloria Naylor*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1999. Web. 19 April 2012.

Wiener, Gary. *Gender in Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun*. Detroit: Greenhaven Press, 2011. Print.

Wilkerson, Margaret. "The Dark Vision of Lorraine Hansberry: Excerpts from a Literary Biography." *The Massachusetts Review* 28.4 (Winter 1987): 642-50. Print.

---. "Lorraine Hansberry, 1930-1965." *Words of Fire: An Anthology of*

African-American Feminist Thought. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: New, 1995. 267-279. Print.

Wilkinson, Doris Y., and Ronald L. Taylor. *The Black Male in America: Perspectives on His Status in Contemporary Society*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977. Print.

Wilson, Charles E. *Gloria Naylor: A Critical Companion*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2001. Print.

Wilson, William J. *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. Chicago: U of Chicago, 1978. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929. Print.

Wright, Richard. *Native Son*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1940. Print.

X, Malcolm. *Malcolm X: The Last Speeches.* Ed. Bruce Perry. London: Owen, 1969.

Young, Harvey. "Black Plays." *Theater* (2009): 1-6. *Project MUSE*. Web.

Zinsser, Judith P. *History & Feminism: A Glass Half Full*. New York: Twayne, 1993. Print.