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Making the White Folks Feel Better: Memory and Race in Four Best-Selling Southern Novels

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MAKING THE WHITE FOLKS FEEL BETTER:

MEMORY AND RACE IN FOUR BEST-SELLING SOUTHERN NOVELS

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Title: Making the White Folks Feel Better: Memory and Race in Four Best-Selling
          Southern Novels

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Palliative memory is a new theoretical term used to explain how white readers engage with and embrace a racist text. This unique type of memory can be integrated with other theories, such as nostalgia, reciprocity, and prosthetic memory. Many memory theorists agree that memory is fluid. It changes and can only become a "fixed" memory if it is inscribed. Pierre Nora writes that these inscriptions are sites of memory. Sites of memory can include monuments or other material items, such as books.

This dissertation seeks to show the influence of palliative memory on race in the South, and how it has influenced the collective memory of this subject. I utilize the following texts: Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, Stockett's *The Help*, and Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman* to demonstrate how palliative memory can be both within a character in a text and about a reader and a text.

The term *palliative memory* comes from the medical field and is typically related to end-of-life care where patients are made to feel comfortable as they move through the death process. Palliative care does not change the outcome for the patient; it only makes the patient comfortable in the process. I use this term as a way to interrogate how readers embrace a text that is essentially racist as well as relational to the collective memory of race in the South during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

More specifically, the chapter on *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Go Set a Watchman* addresses the notion that Atticus is a racist—not just in *Watchman*, but also in *Mockingbird*. However, because of palliative memory, readers are able to overlook that racism in *Mockingbird*. *Watchman* is an example of how palliative memory can be interrupted, and (white) readers must decide whether to re-engage with palliative memory or accept the new reality—that Atticus is a "good" man who is a racist. While others, like Monroe Freedman and Malcolm Gladwell, have called Atticus a racist in *Mockingbird*, I demonstrate that he is not only a racist, but that his ubiquitous message to crawl into the skin of another actually perpetuates racial issues between whites and blacks.

Criticism of *Gone With the Wind*'s (*GWTW*) racism has progressively increased over time. Even so, the text remains popular with white, middlebrow, female readers. Even southern scholar Patricia Yeager is mystified at her attraction to such a blatantly racist text. In this chapter, I focus on how restorative nostalgia helps readers connect with *GWTW* as a site of memory. Palliative memory is a way for readers to see the nostalgia and text in a positive light. *GWTW* has also impacted the collective memory of race in the South by spawning secondary sites of memory, such as in the tourism industry.

The Help was a wildly popular, middlebrow novel. Often passed from friend to friend, the book also found a home in thousands of book clubs. Readers often perceive this book as a positive and accurate representation of the South during the Civil Rights movement. In this chapter, I demonstrate that, rather than identifying with those in an oppressed position, the domestic workers, readers identify more with those in the

hegemonic position—Skeeter. Palliative memory masks the racism within the text and its

effect on collective memory.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PRINT THE LEGEND

In the 1962 Western classic, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, directed by John Ford, Jimmy Stewart's character, Rance Stoddard, is credited with killing the town's menace, Liberty Valance, in self-defense during a duel. As a result, Stoddard goes on to a highly successful life; he "gets" the girl and has a long career in elected politics, including the governorship and Congress. He will soon be running for vice president of the United States. While Stoddard is home for his friend, Doniphon's, funeral, a reporter requests an interview. Stoddard talks about his life, and then he confesses that it was actually his friend, Doniphon, who killed Valance, not him. At this point, the reporter destroys his notes. Stoddard asks whether or not the reporter will be exposing this lie, and the reporter responds, "No sir. This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." In these few lines, a Hollywood film delineates the critical link between narratives of historical fiction and a society's collective memory.

This sentiment, printing the legend, remains a common practice in contemporary society. While there may be a considerable discussion among academic scholars or cultural critics regarding reductive or inaccurate, if not potentially dangerous, misinterpretations of history in a particular narrative, the majority of mainstream audiences may never enter such a discussion. This is true even in cases where the narrative is widely embraced by the public.

This dissertation will explore the cultural and historical factors that contributed, and still contribute, to the popular reception of four "southern" novels:[1] *Gone With the Wind* (1936)*, To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), *The Help* (2009), and *Go Set a Watchman* (2015). These works perpetuate stereotypes or myths about the antebellum South, the Civil War,

and life in the Jim Crow South that are well-documented and commented upon by academics and critics. Yet, the texts remain popular with mainstream American readers. This dissertation seeks to understand the appeal of such texts and their influence on cultural memory. That is, this dissertation is mostly interested in interrogating paths that readers may use to engage with racist literature or characters without negative feelings. I propose a type of memory, palliative memory, as a primary way of understanding the public's positive regard for texts that are deeply problematic in their presentation of cross-cultural and interracial interactions in the imagined South.

In this project, I use the lenses of cultural criticism and memory theories to examine the four novels in order to interrogate the relationship between these novels and the collective memory about race relations in the South during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. I will examine how each novel affects the cultural discourse of race not only at the time of its publication, but also in the ongoing, collective memory of race in American society. I argue that because of the wide embrace and the perception of historicity in these novels, they have become sites of cultural memory that minimize the experiences and oppression of African Americans (Nora 15). As sites of cultural memory, the texts become further embedded in the American collective memory about the South, further impacting the political decisions and the power structure of the country in the contemporary moment. America's collective memory about race reinforces the privileged position of whites over other races, in particular blacks. An engagement with palliative memory masks the racism in the texts and in society's collective memory. Theorizing palliative memory helps me to explore how narratives either support or discourage personal (and collective) responsibility for social change.

There are other published texts that could be used in this dissertation, but these four novels share similar characteristics: their popularity was unquestionable and their influence over American cultural memory renders them important to study as a group. In examining the relationship between narrative and storytelling on the one hand, and collective memory on the other, I find it useful to think in terms of how a narrative functions in cultural discourse or as a vehicle for memory. For each novel in this study, the collective memory of the readership (primarily white women, as noted in literature related to book clubs and middlebrow literature studies) shapes the cultural understanding of the work and the narrative that develops about the work, the history touched on in the work, the history at the time of the work's publication, and the continued transformation of memories over time. Astrid Erll states:

> Literary works can vividly portray individual and collective memory—its contents, its workings, its fragility and its distortions by coding it into aesthetic forms, such as narrative structures, symbols, and metaphors. Literary representations of memory not only exist in a dynamic relationship to cultural concepts of memory; they also change along with them. (79)

It is this dynamic relationship that this project seeks to explore, focusing on the relationship between the novels and cultural memory and exploring how white readers utilize palliative memory to comfortably engage racist material. This project asserts that at least part of the popularity of these novels stems from the fact that they tapped into the country's fear about the potential crumbling of the white social and political power structure of the time.

There is a chasm between academic readers and mainstream readers in terms of the acceptance and understanding of such texts. Academics have a responsibility to

bridge that gap in a way that offers the reading public an opportunity to see texts from different perspectives and, perhaps, alter the stereotyping related to race, cultural memory, and the South. In keeping with this ethical mandate of our profession, I consider that Wayne C. Booth's *The Company We Keep,* as I examine the ethical risks of writing and reading fiction that relies on historical elements, does not only establish verisimilitude, but also connects with readers in such a way as to influence personal politics and societal power structures. We must consider whether such works challenge the essentialist logic of group identities, such as race. I hope to extend Booth's important work by examining popular texts in the southern literary canon with an eye toward understanding how we, as academics, can more effectively engage the popular reading in resistant, self-aware reading practices that disrupt white privilege and silent racism.

MEMORY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Memory is a physiological process, but it is also a psychological and behavioral process in which we consciously and unconsciously engage. Jeffrey Olick describes the formation and recollection of memories:

Memories are not unitary entities, stored away as coherent units to be called up wholesale at a later date. Neural networks channel bits and pieces called "engrams" to different places in the brain and store them there in different ways. The process of remembering, therefore, does not involve the "reappearance" or "reproduction" of an experience in its original form, but the cobbling together of a "new" memory. People do not perceive every aspect of a situation, they do not store every aspect they perceive, and they do not recall every aspect they store. (340)

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Scholar Astrid Erll states, "Memories…[are] highly selective reconstructions, dependent on the situation in which they are recalled" (8). In short, memory is fluid. What we remember changes over time, as do the details of the memory, in that "versions of the past change with every recall" (Erll 8). There is an immediate memory— those things we remember for a brief second. There is also a short-term memory and a long-term memory, where short-term memories become incorporated in our brains and literally change the neural pathways involved. Outside of medicine, memory as a field of social study—as a way of looking at what people remember, how they remember, and how that memory affects individual and group identity—is also important. As Jeffrey K. Olick, Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy explain:

> The new insight of memory studies is thus not merely that memory is omnipresent but that it is at once situated in social frameworks (e.g., family and nation), enabled by changing media technologies (e.g., the Internet and digital recording), confronted with cultural institutions (e.g., memorials and museums), and shaped by political circumstances (e.g., wars and catastrophes). (37)

Memory is complex, and it becomes even more complicated when talking about how societies "remember," or perhaps memorialize, significant moments from the past.

While many may think of memory as an individual process, there are those who believe that we only remember because of the social context—the social framework or group—in which the element to be remembered occurs. We also only retrieve memories in a social context. Maurice Halbwachs, often considered the father of memory studies, states, "It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (38). This societal memory is

described by terms such as collective memory or cultural memory.[2] In short, with few exceptions, memories are created in the context of society, and it is also society that triggers and shapes memories, permitting, and sometimes even demanding, them to morph over time.

In *Memory in Culture*, Erll provides a succinct historical recounting of cultural memory, which reaches back to the 1920s. Halbwachs and Aby Warburg, working independently, were the "first to give the phenomenon of cultural memory a name 'collective' and 'social' memory, and to study it systematically within the framework of a modern theory of culture" (Erll 13). Warburg's theories are more specifically related to art, but Halbwachs "was primarily interested in social groups' creation of a past related to their identity" (21). Halbwachs argued that memory is not something that is "preserved," but remembering and forgetting are "reconstructed," positing them as a conscious action rather than a passive experience (Halbwachs 40). He states:

> It is necessary to show, besides, that the collective frameworks of memory are not constructed after the fact by the combination of individual recollections; nor are they empty forms where recollections coming from elsewhere would insert themselves. Collective frameworks are, to the contrary, precisely the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society. (40)

A collective framework is the social context within which memories are generated and remembered. Cultural memory is not simply a collection of individual memories; rather, individual memories often change to conform to the collective framework. As Halbwachs states, "The framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate

remembrances to each other" (53). This binding occurs because "when reflection begins

to operate, when instead of letting the past recur, we reconstruct it through an effort of

reasoning, what happens is that we distort that past, because we wish to introduce greater

coherence" (Halbwachs 183). In other words, our desire is to have a coherent memory

that conforms to the accepted collective framework with which we identify.

The study of memory and culture began to expand broadly in the 1980s, primarily

because of the work done by Pierre Nora on "sites of memory" (Erll 13, 23). A site of

memory is "any cultural phenomenon, whether material, social or mental, which a society

associates with its past and national identity (25). Nora states that sites of memory are

necessary because there are no longer "real environments of memory" (7). In other

words, as generations fade away, their memories also fade. Erll describes a site of

memory as an "absence of living memory" along with signs that point to aspects of the

past (24). As more time passes beyond the original event, first-generation memory

disappears; a site of memory is then required to perpetuate the memory.

Aleida Assmann and Jan Assmann have expanded the field of memory studies in

important ways. Their primary addition to the discourse has been to clarify that "Cultural

Memory is founded on 'myths', [sic] stories about a common past, which offer

orientation in the present and hope for the future" (Erll 34). A. Assmann and J. Assmann

focus on a difference between two different memory frameworks: communicative

memory and cultural memory (28). By their definition, cultural memory has a "high

degree of formation" and is mediated through actions such as texts (A. Assmann and J.

Assmann 117). Olick differentiates between "collected" memories, which are simply

aggregated individual memories of a group, and "collective" memories, which relate to

Halbwachs' social frameworks. Olick writes that collectives "have memories, just like they have identities, and that ideas, styles, genres, and discourses, among other things, are more than the aggregation of individual subjectivities" (342). In other words, collective memories are not simply a mashing together of individual memories; collective memories are shaped and re-shaped as individual memories are added. This project does not only focus on the "collective" memory, but also uses "cultural memory" as an interchangeable term.

While memory theorists, particularly Halbwachs, discuss the idea of collective memory, there is only minimal discussion of cultural memory that is shaped by or mediated through literature. Erll talks about collective memory and literature, and that information is a solid foundation. Erll sees literature as a re-collection of memory and that "Literature takes up existing patterns, shapes and transforms them, and feeds them back into memory culture" (148). For this project, I want to look specifically at how the collective memory of race is shaped by popular literature in the U.S., engaging with the four texts in this project—*Gone With the Wind*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Go Set a Watchman*, and *The Help*. The previous information on memory does not address the power that popular texts have on the cultural memory of race.

Alison Landsberg furthers the research on memory with her theory of a new form of cultural memory—"prosthetic memory." Landsberg wants to interrogate the way people use media, such as books and film, to experience memories that are not actually their own. These memories, she hypothesizes, influence a person's identity and politics. Prosthetic memory, she argues,

emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past.

… the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more

personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live.

The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person's subjectivity

and politics. (2)

In prosthetic memory, a person adopts the memory of events as his or her own even

though they were not personally experienced. The information for this memory comes

from the experiences of others; however, adopting these memories is possible because of

"advance capitalism and an emergent commodified culture capable of widely

disseminating images and narratives about the past, these memories are not 'natural' or

'authentic' and yet they organize and energize the bodies and subjectivities that take them

on" (Landsberg 26). It is often the case that the further away from an event, like slavery

or the Holocaust, one is, the easier it is for individuals to engage in prosthetic memory

because there are fewer people with first-hand knowledge. Prosthetic memory is acquired

through sites of memory, such as novels, films, and other mass media. Prosthetic memory

has been expedited, facilitated, and intensified through modern media and technology. It

is worth noting that prosthetic memory adoption is neither limited to people of a

particular race, culture or gender, nor is it restricted by geography. Contemporary blacks

and whites in the Midwest, for example, may adopt prosthetic memories of slavery, as

might Latino men in the west and Native Americans in the northeast. Anyone can adopt

prosthetic memories, attaching the memories to themselves like an artificial limb.

While Landsberg successfully develops her theory from earlier memory work, as

noted above, she fails to consider the societal impact of identifying with those in

hegemonic positions rather than those who are marginalized or oppressed. In all of

Landsberg's examples, the prosthetic memory occurs because one enters into an

"experiential relationship" to events through which they did not live (113). Connecting

with someone in an oppressed position, as opposed to those in the hegemonic position,

the prosthetic memory permits the possibility of identifying with the oppressed person or

group in a positive manner and demanding social and political change that empowers that

group. Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory is helpful because it provides a frame

to consider how people "gain access to memories of events through which they did not

live"; however, prosthetic memory does not grapple with why or when a person might

instead choose to graft memories that originate from the hegemonic position.

Specifically, this project seeks to understand the factors that might drive a long-term

attachment to memories that promote a racist[3] viewpoint. I use the term "palliative

memory" to explain not only the adoption of these memories, but also the reason why the

attachment to them is so strong.

PALLIATIVE MEMORY

Like prosthetic memory, palliative memory is a response triggered by a material

narrative, such as a novel, and is a way to explain the material narrative's rise to mass

appeal in certain cultural moments. The term, "palliative," is commonly used in the

medical field, particularly in the context of end-of-life care. The goal of palliative care is

to keep the patient comfortable during the dying process. Palliative care is referred to

when, regardless of any attempts at treatment, the patient will not recover. I have adopted

this term for my project as a way to explain how readers engage comfortably with racist

material. Like a patient who is in pain, palliative memory can soothe pain or alleviate discomfort that might be caused by experiencing a connection with racist material.

As it translates to memory, palliative memory is a way for readers[4] to accept racist texts and characters. In an effort to assuage the negative responses and consequences of such ideology, readers engage in palliative memory. Like prosthetic memory, palliative memory is triggered at the interface between a person and a narrative with historical elements,[5] and as with prosthetic memory, in that moment of contact people suture themselves to the larger history. The place where palliative memory diverges from prosthetic memory, however, is in the development and perception of identity. According to Landsberg, "Prosthetic memory creates the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by encouraging people to feel connected to, which recognizing the alterity of, the 'other'" (9). Rather than taking on the prosthetic memory of the disenfranchised or those who have lost privilege, palliative memory attaches to those who remain in hegemonic position, those in control of the power structure in the narrative's setting and in present time. Palliative memory does not challenge the essentialist logic of group identity, as does prosthetic memory. Rather than prompting ethical thinking, palliative memory creates a barrier against it. This barrier permits a continued negative impact on collective memory.

Like prosthetic memory, palliative memory is also reliant on commodification so that it "enables the transmission of memories to people who have no 'natural' or biological claim to them" (Landsberg 18). For example, rather than identifying with enslaved people in *GWTW*, readers identify with racist and oppressive characters, such as Scarlett O'Hara, as a way to palliate themselves from the realities of these historical

events. Palliative memory also substantially influences current views on race and past events and, as these narratives are commodified and spread, the palliative memory influences society's collective memory as well.

Palliative memory is flexible; it can be expressed and utilized in different ways. For example, characters within a text may engage in palliative memory. Ashley Wilkes longs for the past in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*. He sees times past as more desirable than his present, and he remembers that time without the associated pain and suffering of American slaves. Scout engages in palliative memory as she remembers her father as anti-racist without recognizing his racist behavior even during her childhood. Readers often engage in palliative memory as they read texts with historical elements. When reading *The Help*, readers may remember the Civil Rights movement without the danger to blacks during that time.

Those engaged in palliative memory are able to accept racist ideology without negative feelings through a variety of reactions. First, readers may re-create the past by inserting themselves into it and declaring that they would never have behaved that way. By inserting themselves into the narrative as saviors, which I discuss in detail in a subsequent chapter, the readers can attach themselves to such events in a more positive light. Second, readers may sympathize with the hegemonic character's position in a past culture where it is perceived that a person could not choose different behaviors or attitudes. By identifying with the hegemonic character and redeeming him, the readers can engage with memories in an affirming manner. Third, readers can minimize the power of those in control, which also minimizes the effects of the hegemonic group on the disenfranchised in the narrative. This provides a less disturbing memory of the actual

events. Finally, readers may also determine, perhaps in an artificial manner, that the text represents a great opportunity for dialogue about race even if the issues are minimized or details are blatantly incorrect. How audiences engage in palliative memory regarding race affects the identity of individuals and cultures.

LITERATURE AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

This project focuses on literary texts as a way to affect collective memory about race. Before looking at the specific texts in this project and their influence on cultural memory, I want to consider whether or not texts, overall, have this capability. Scholar Ann Rigney asserts, "literature is a 'counterforce' which provides a means for recording details and complexities left out of 'public history'" (374). Literature, particularly literature that functions within the structure of what is historically plausible, becomes a site of memory. Assmann and Assmann state:

> On the social level, with respect to groups and societies, the role of external symbols becomes even more important, because groups which, of course, do not "have" a memory tend to "make" themselves one by means of things meant as reminders such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions. (111)

Literature has long been associated with what and how a society remembers, most recently through genres, such as biography, memoirs, oral histories and documentary film. Erll argues, however,

> Literary works can vividly portray individual and collective memory—its contents, its workings, its fragility and its distortions by coding it into aesthetic forms, such as narrative structures, symbols, and metaphors. Literary

representations of memory not only exist in a dynamic relationship to cultural

concepts of memory; they also change along with them. (79)

Such triggers of the past then evolve into a public memory of the events, whether or not

the historical elements in the trigger represent the historical elements with any accuracy.

In the last several decades, more attention has been paid to the impact fictional narratives,

in both written and film format, have on cultural memory. W. Fitzhugh Brundage states,

"Because memories are transitory, people yearn to make them permanent by rendering

them into physical form" (94). Literature is one example of a physical form that settles

memories into a fixed place. Literature is a stable image of the past where fluid

remembrances can be solidified into an organized and re-assembled story; one that a

collective framework can claim as its own story.

One risk to such re-assembling memories is that any aspect of what is historically

plausible becomes reductive; Erll uses the term, "condensation" (145). If the text is

reductive from its inception, then as time moves past the original text, the historically

plausible becomes even more reductive. Though historical events trigger memory, collective

memory and history are different. Erll points out that for Halbwachs, "History deals with the

past. Collective memory, in contrast, is oriented towards the needs and interests of the group

in the present, and thus proceeds in an extremely selective and reconstructive manner" (7).

In short, with few exceptions, memories are created in the context of society, and it is also

society that triggers, shapes, and commemorates memories, allowing or impeding them to

morph over time. Because memory is fluid, it cannot provide a faithful reproduction of the

past, which is problematic if it is relied upon to be historically accurate[6]—this is when

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myths are written and perpetuated. Literature is one way to fix those memories into a permanent narrative.

In their text on American Cultural Studies, Neil Campbell and Alasdair Kean write, "… myths are the stories we tell each other as a culture in order to explain complexities and to banish contradictions, thus making the world seem simpler and more comfortable for us to inhabit" (9). Once told primarily through oral history, stories are now also encoded into written or visual narratives, cementing a more uniform and permanent version of a narrative. These transmissions from orality to the written form can, in American culture at least, translate the myth from a general ideology to a perception of a historical fact. Campbell and Kean assert, "The power of discourse can contribute significantly to the formation of powerful notions of 'Americanness' [or 'southernness'] or national identity" (15). In an ongoing cycle, the writer, even a fictional writer, functions as a cultural recorder whose perception is then reflected back to influence a culture's view of itself. This overall cultural view rebounds between individuals and society, forming, reforming, and informing the culture's shape. With time, this shape stabilizes to become the society's story and its cultural memory. All literature, to some extent, functions in this way; literature that is based on historical elements is likely to have a greater influence because of its verisimilitude, and the because many readers accept the story as truth. Further, texts that are popular have the greatest impact because of their wide and varied audiences.

Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz states, "The ethnographer 'inscribes' social discourse; he writes it down. In so doing, he turns it from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its

inscriptions and can be recounted" (19). Though the author's intended purpose may not be to re-tell the "facts" of history, but by connecting fictionalized narratives closely to historical events, writers mimic the work of ethnographers and re-present history to the reader. Novels set in the South, by southern writers who invoke significant historical events, such as the Civil War, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights Movement, are inscriptions of social discourse that mold the view of that time and place, as well as how future readers engage issues of racial identity, race relations, and social justice. This discourse is widespread in books with mass popular appeal, like *Gone With the Wind*, *To Kill a Mockingbird, Go Set a Watchman,* and *The Help*. The popularity of these works creates a need to consider how the writers represent historical elements as well as the potential political and cultural ramifications of producing what has become a historical, collective memory through popular literature.

SELLING CULTURAL MEMORIES

Decisions regarding how historical details are represented for mainstream audiences in print and in film are often, though not always, based on financial viability and success. *The New York Times* Op-Ed writer Ross Douthat summarizes challenges faced by such artists. There is tension between honoring historical events as accurately as possible and succeeding at the box office or bookstore because what is historically accurate does not always make the most interesting novel or film. Success is necessary for an author's financial stability and future project options. There are also length and time limits for specific projects; while a few artists are privileged to have extended length books and high budget films, most are not. Walking the line between representation and success means writers must decide what to include as well as what to exclude, which

shapes the final narrative. While the decision of what to include is true of all writers, those decisions influence cultural memory when historical information is involved. Using the 2012 Steven Spielberg and Tony Kushner film, *Lincoln,*[7] as an example, Douthat writes:

> The problem is that every historical film [or text] has to "ignore the big picture," because actual history is just too big to fit the screens and stories that we have. The question isn't whether to edit; it's where and how and what, and how to balance the requirement to win a contemporary audience with the obligation to do justice to the actual historical record. ("Spielberg's 'Lincoln'")

Fans, according to Douthat, praise "Its determinedly narrow focus on the month or so of politicking and debate that pushed the 13th Amendment through a reluctant House of Representatives." However, Douthat also notes that detractors criticize the limited scope of the film, stating:

> This narrowing is a betrayal of the true story of emancipation, which was actually settled on the ground more than in the halls of Congress, through the agency of slaves as much as by the votes of politicians, and which failed to deliver fully on its promises (thanks to Reconstruction's failures, and Jim Crow's ascendance) precisely because of the kind of compromises that 'Lincoln' the film treats as the better part of political valor. ("Spielberg's 'Lincoln'")

While not all authorial failings are intentional, authorial failings in representation are nearly universal. Most likely, Spielberg and Kushner did not set out to misrepresent the complex occurrences surrounding the thirteenth amendment and the ending of formalized slavery; however, artistic and financial decisions regarding the film's scope, point of

view, and interpretation of events still open the door for substantial criticism. While many audiences, at least on some level, understand the limits of accuracy in any text, there remains a willingness to accept information if it is entertaining and accessible. Audiences too easily believe that any written narrative claiming a "historical" connection represents that history fully and accurately, even when the narrative is designated as "fiction," or "*based* on a true story."

Perhaps no historical event has had such a profound effect on U.S. collective cultural memory as the Civil War and the rhetoric surrounding its commemoration. In *Race and Reunion*, historian David W. Blight recounts early Civil War commemorations, stating, "At the end of the Civil War the American people faced an enormous challenge of memorialization" (64). An early, if not the earliest commemoration was four thousand blacks marching in a March 1865 victory parade in Charleston. Blight refers to it as a "collective public performance" (67). There are more celebrations followed over the next several months, culminating in what would become "the ritual of Memorial Day" (70), founded by blacks, but appropriated by Charleston whites a year later. Initially, these events did not glorify the South or its efforts to succeed. Initially only Union soldiers were honored. Eventually, however, the commemoration narrative changed and, along with it, so did the collective memory surrounding the end of the war and its commemoration.

The celebrations expanded to national participation—each with whites seizing ownership, determining speakers and content, and dictating the Civil War memorialization narrative. These celebrations, and the human need for them, reflect Nora's definition of *Les lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory:

Our interest in *lieux de mémoire* where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. (26)

Though initially marked by public sorrow for the dead, mourning ceremonies quickly transformed into political events with speakers, and, even in the North, re-framing the South's defeat into "passionate, heroic history" (Blight 79). By the late 1860s, the collective memory of the Civil War had shifted; the reasons for fighting and even the idea that the South had never lost on the battlefield were often reemphasized as part of a "propaganda assault" on popular history and memory by southern leaders, even those invited to speak to northern audiences (Blight 79). Blacks were now excluded from ceremonies they initiated only a few years prior. American whites from both the North and the South collectively embraced the content of the public rituals, which had less and less to do with verifiable war events, or the abolition of slavery; therefore, it sharply changed the overall understanding of the antebellum South, the Civil War, and the war's outcome.

Even the smallest embrace of a narrative as history influences an individual's memory and shapes a person's identity and thinking. As time moves further away from the actual events, and the narratives are repeated like concentric circles through commemorations, oral history telling, "non-fiction" accounts (like Capote's *In Cold Blood*), and fiction, each repetition increases the likelihood that the story will shift, and become a reductive representation of complex, layered details. However, reductive tales

are easier to tell, easier for audiences to grasp and remember, and often feed into the previously mentioned challenge of balancing a reductive and amalgamated version of a "real" event created with a contemporary audience's preferences, and a reasonable representation of a historical event. As the reductive narratives are accepted and spread, they are integrated into a society's collective memory. The collected memory impacts the political and power structure of society, both in present time and for the future. The way readers engage with these novels has a significant impact on why the texts influence so much of society's memory.

In chapter two, I propose that engaging in palliative memory makes it possible for readers to feel nostalgic for the antebellum time period or for the context within which they first encountered *Gone With the Wind*. There are an overwhelming number of pages dedicated to scholarship on *Gone with the Wind*. Writers have covered topics ranging from gender and race to the Agrarian society of the Old South. Mitchell's life has been covered in biography and biopics. Much of the literature about *Gone With the Wind* is situated in terms of reading the text as a southern plantation novel and its problematic, stereotypical representations of the South, slavery, and blacks, overall. What is missing in *Gone with the Wind*'s scholarship is the discourse about cultural memory and the text, why the text was, and continues to be, so popular, and the implications of that for academic professionals. Further scholarship could help readers avoid a static, somewhat fixed view of race in the narrative and complicate what is often a reductive, binary treatment of the issue. I approach the text's influence on collective memory through Svetlana Boym's definitions of restorative and reflective nostalgia. I argue that in order to remain positive toward *Gone With the Wind*, readers engage in restorative nostalgia

through palliative memory. These readers look toward the past with the sense that the past was correct; there is a desire to move the past forward into the present. Readers who engage in restorative nostalgia are longing for an idealized past. Palliative memory helps those readers minimize the effects of slavery during the Civil War, at the time of publication, and in current thinking.

Academic writing about *To Kill a Mockingbird* often focuses on themes of "racism, sexism and the 'coming of age' typology of the novel" (Murray 75). However, chapter three of my dissertation veers from the traditional thinking that elevates Atticus Finch to the status of ethical, anti-racist superhero. Rather, this chapter focuses on how Atticus Finch is not as anti-racist as he is typically viewed. I utilize Iris Marion Young's theory of symmetrical and asymmetrical reciprocity as a foundation for this chapter to examine how palliative memory is subtly encouraged in readers. *To Kill a Mockingbird* establishes itself as a site of memory, offering opportunities for whites to feel better that there are at least some "good" white people in the Jim Crow South—influencing the subsequent collective, cultural memory.

Until 2015, both readers and scholars had only one book from Harper Lee—*To Kill a Mockingbird*. Now, we have two. I contend that *Go Set a Watchman* must be considered when studying *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The newer text provides added depth of perspective, particularly about Atticus Finch, given its recent, public unveiling. In this chapter, *Go Set a Watchman* functions to demonstrate Atticus Finch's clear racist actions; it is a way to highlight the racism that already exists, but is often ignored, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. While fans of *To Kill a Mockingbird* overwhelmingly accept the Atticus of that text, and the elevation of Finch to nearly saint status, many of those same fans reject

similar details in *Go Set a Watchman*. The public interest and controversy around the text's publication adds evidence to the importance of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. *Go Set a Watchman* further shows Finch's lack of engagement in symmetrical reciprocity with black characters. I argue that the text demonstrates not only the popularity of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but also the investment society has made to the legend of Atticus Finch as a non-racist character.

Kathryn Stockett's novel, *The Help*, published in 2009, attracted a mixture of responses, though many of the mainstream comments were positive. Perhaps the most concentrated criticism is collected in the September 2011, issue of *JENdA: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies*. Beginning with "An Open Statement to the Fans of *The Help*," this issue takes on both the novel and the film adaptation as "a disappointing resurrection of Mammy," and states that both "misrepresent African American speech and culture" (*JENdA*). In chapter four, I question the disconnection between critics, such as those published in *JENdA*, and the strong embrace of the mainstream reading public. This chapter considers *The Help*'s influence on collective memory through Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory, and how palliative memory is required in order for one to embrace this text without embracing its racism. Further, I assert that the collective memory of race in the South is impacted by readers who seek to minimize racist ideology from the Jim Crow era, and that *The Help* contributes to that racist ideology.

Palliative memory is an important aspect of memory that has yet to be discussed in the literature. It is also missing from academic curriculum. Only by considering palliative memory as an element of how readers understand racist texts, and how those texts then

impact the collective memory, can academics begin a discussion to increase self-aware

reading practices that may interrupt racism in texts and society.

CHAPTER II

"FRANKLY MY DEAR…":

NOSTALGIA, ROMANCE, AND FORGETTING IN *GONE WITH THE WIND*

> Tara, Twelve Oaks, the Wilkeses' barbecue, the armory dance, the flight to the country, the murdered Yankee "bummer": everything from Mitchell's epic is so familiar now that it is difficult to imagine the time when her creation was all new.
> —Darden Asbury Pyron, *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell*

When Margaret Mitchell began writing what would become *Gone With the Wind,*[1] it was, by her own account, something to fill the time while housebound and recuperating from an injured ankle. Mitchell's husband had grown weary of trying to entertain his debilitated wife and, as Mitchell states, "Finally he brought home a pound or so of copy paper and said 'write a book. I can't find anything at the Carnegie [library] that you haven't read, except books on the exact sciences'" (*Letters* 5). According to Mitchell's biographer Darden Asbury Pyron, sometime in 1926 Mitchell began to write a novel about the Civil War (*Southern* 223). She did not expect the novel to be successful, nor did she expect the Pulitzer Prize, at least according to what she wrote to *New York Post* critic Herschel Brickell: "I will bet you $50.00 (Confederate) with the poem 'Lines on the Back of a Confederate Note' upon it that I do not win the Pulitzer Prize" (qtd. in Pyron, *Letters* 80). *Gone With the Wind* not only won the Pulitzer in 1937, but was also extremely popular, particularly with white, female, middlebrow[2] readers.

Ashley Wilkes and obtaining enough money to preserve her family home, Tara.

Gone With the Wind is a sweeping story set in the South around the Civil War. The heroine, Scarlett O'Hara, is a feisty young woman interested in two things: marrying Ashley Wilkes and obtaining enough money to preserve her family home, Tara. However, Ashley does not return her love and instead marries his cousin, Melanie

Hamilton. After two marriages, Scarlett gives in to the advances of Rhett Butler, a well-to-do blockade-runner more interested in financial success than the war, and marries him. Through it all, Scarlett remains infatuated with Ashley. When Scarlett finally has the opportunity to be in a relationship with Ashley, she realizes she loved Rhett after all. Rhett, however, now rejects her. Scarlett moves on with her life at Tara, promising in the last line of the novel, "[T]omorrow is another day" (Mitchell 959).

This chapter interrogates the popularity of *Gone With the Wind* and considers how white middlebrow readers did, and still do, embrace a text fraught with racism. I propose the way readers justify the value of *Gone With the Wind* and the desire for a restored past when whites were clearly in the dominant position is palliative memory. In this chapter, palliative memory is used as a reader response to engaging with nostalgia about the text. Readers begin to feel nostalgic about the perceived simpler antebellum life, but need to mask the slavery and oppression that was part of that time period. Palliative memory masks those negative memories and allows the reader to remember only the parts of that time period that carry positive feelings.

I theorize that white audiences engage in restorative nostalgia as a way to connect with an idealized past. Despite its fictive nature, *Gone With the Wind* continues to maintain a prominent place in America's collective memory, often as a definition of the antebellum time period. *Gone With the Wind* does contain many historical details based on Mitchell's extensive research of the period. The air of realism that those details create cloaks the entire novel and obscures the fictional elements that are historically inaccurate, misleading, nostalgic, romanticized, and false, including the idea that slavery was not destructive to either the master or the slave. Some current, racially conscientious readers

still enjoy *Gone With the Wind* for many of the same reasons as the initial, middlebrow readers did—it is a compelling, romantic narrative. However, an inherited, collective understanding of a fictional text also influences contemporary readers; such readers view *Gone With the Wind* as an accurate representation of historical reality, rather than as a highly romanticized fictional narrative that is set in a fictional southern past.

Based on book sales alone, there is no arguing about the book's appeal to readers. *Publishers Weekly* reports that *Gone With the Wind* was translated into sixteen languages by 1939 and that between 1939 and 1975 combined paperback and hardback sales for the novel were 8,630,000 (10). Critic Malcolm Cowley summarized a series of press releases by publisher Macmillan in his September 1936 book review that highlighted that the novel had accumulated the "largest advance sale of any book in recent years" (161). Other publication details from Cowley's review include that the book was out of stock the week of its release, demonstrating the anticipation readers held for the novel. Critics, however, offered mixed reviews. They were often confused about how to review a novel that was a compelling narrative yet lacked highbrow literary qualities. Mitchell's early critics vacillated between their desire for high literary art, which *Gone With the Wind* was not, and their acknowledgement of the novel's impact on the reading public. Cowley, who reluctantly admitted that he found the novel engaging in spite of its appeal "to the lowest common denominator in the American reading public," was "the first of the major reviewers to consider Mitchell's epic a phenomenon" (Pyron, *Southern* 335). Many critics seemed to agree that while the book was not a challenge to read—i.e. high literary art—it was memorable and should be read by all who love a good story (331). Often

critics, like those noted above who were typically favorable only towards highbrow literature, were still captivated with Mitchell's story.

Other reviewers were not so positive. *The Nation's* Evelyn Scott criticizes Mitchell's use of "clichés and verbal ineptitudes" as well as "the vocabulary of platitude" (19, 20). Scott also claims that the text is "shallow" and "soporific" (19, 20). Ralph Thompson of *The New York Times* notes that the book would probably be the "biggest" of the year—mockingly referring to the 1,037 pages rather than its potential sales. Thompson finds the novel entirely too long and believes that it would be better if edited to five hundred pages. Though Thompson did write some positive comments about the main characters and their complexity, as well as "lively" writing and the novel's ability to give readers "a background of present-day Southern life," overall he indicates that *Gone With the Wind* is essentially undisciplined writing (17). *The New York Times'* book editor J. Donald Adams printed a high-profile, second review—a full page—on the front page of the literary supplement (Pyron, *Southern* 332). Readers seem to have found Thompson's critique confusing, and in an attempt to rectify that, Adams published his own criticism.

Adams's review is important because it was the second review from one of the most important critical sources of the time, *The New York Times*, demonstrating the powerful impact *Gone With the Wind* was already exerting and the perceived impact the novel would have on the mainstream reading public. As with other critics, J. Donald Adams emphasizes the historical and cultural familiarity of the story to those from the South. He had followed the lead of *The New York Post* reviewer, Herschel Brickell, and *The New York Sun* reviewer, Edwin Granberry, in praising the novel and Mitchell's

ability to tell a story well—a story essentially believable as history despite its

categorization as fiction. However, Thompson was one of the few early critics to

comment on the text's racism. With its "conventional characters (darkie hummin', banjos

strummin', hard-riding colonels, sallow Yankee owners),"[3] Thompson asserts that *Gone*

With the Wind is similar to the film *The Birth of a Nation* (17). It is difficult to know

whether or not the public received Thompson's comments as valid, but given the high

sales volume of the book, it is doubtful. At the time of *Gone With the Wind*'s publication,

Jim Crow laws were in effect and racism remained an expected way to think of, and to

treat, blacks, particularly in the South. While later twentieth century and then twenty-first

century critics would eventually disapprove of such portrayals of African Americans and

the false, romantic depictions of slavery, critical concerns about the racism in the book at

the time of its publication were not central to discussion within the white community

(Patterson *Gone With the Wind*).

There were some, however, who found racism offensive, particularly as it relates

to history. In a 1934 *Daily Worker's* column, David Platt rails against Mitchell's use of

historical information. Platt blames the "contemptible bourgeois literary hacks" for

convincing the public that the book was a "masterpiece of literary genius" (7). He states

that *Gone With the Wind* gives a "complete and deliberate misreading of history" (7).

Platt's article was a call for stopping the production of David O. Selznick's film version

of *Gone With the Wind,* but in doing so, he details the effects the novel has already had

on its millions of readers. Given what is in the novel, Platt is concerned that the film, with

the addition of sound and Technicolor, might have had even more influence on

perpetuating the dangerous myths surrounding the Civil War and the treatment of slaves

than Thomas Dixon's *The Klansman* or D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*. In calling

for the film's stoppage, Platt explicitly states the already negative effects the novel has

had on readers' perception of blacks and slavery. There were also blacks who attempted

to influence the film adaption. Among the black community, NAACP secretary, Walter

White, "pushed [David] Selznik to hire black consultants for the [1939] film" (Rosenberg

"'Gone with the Wind'"). White encouraged Selznik to read W. E. B. Dubois' "Black

Reconstruction," "which debunks more sentimental ideas about the end of the Civil War"

(Rosenberg "'Gone with the Wind'"). White was concerned, based on the novel, about

how blacks would be represented in the film. By combining the story with the historical

elements in the text, Selznik was able to reinforce and extend this romanticized cultural

understanding of the Civil War South despite White's objections. *Gone With the Wind*

was a book in favor of the southern side of the war, and those who read the novel as

history could easily favor the southern perspective. In most cases of war, it is the winner

who writes the history; in the case of the Civil War, Mitchell wrote a subversive history

through the eyes of the loser.

While race was not considered important in most of the criticism of *Gone With

the Wind* at the time of its publication or for decades thereafter, racism is foregrounded in

more recent criticism of the novel. In 2015, the *New York Post*'s Lou Lumenick

articulates this line of thought when he writes, "If the Confederate flag is finally going to

be consigned to museums as an ugly symbol of racism, what about the beloved film [or

book] offering the most iconic glimpse of that flag in American culture?" ("Gone with

the Wind Should Go the Way"). Included in some criticism, however, is a defense for the

need to use the text as a way to provoke discussion about race. In other words, some

argue that the racial issues identified by scholars and critics should be used to promote

dialogue about racism and understanding of its continuing role in American society. For

example, in 2017, *Chicago Tribune* writer Dahleen Glanton reported on the subject of

race and *Gone With the Wind*. Glanton, who identifies as African-American, believes that

there are teachable moments available through dialogue about *Gone With the Wind.*

Initially, Glanton's comments may echo an element of palliative memory, as noted in the

introduction, which glosses over racism by identifying a work as something that would

promote dialogue about race; this is often a distraction rather than an honest discussion of

race. However, Glanton's suggestions are not merely theoretical or a distraction; she

offers a real situation, real time and place, and specific suggestions. She notes that the

Orpheum Theater in Memphis, Tennessee, decided to remove the film from its summer

series "after featuring it for the past 34 years … because it was 'insensitive to a large

segment of its local population'" ("Cancellation"). Glanton calls for fans of the story,

"Windys," to be able to "have their say." She also calls for Windys to listen to the other

side about how the story "glamorizes a period of American history when black people

were bred, bought and sold like cattle to enhance the lives of [white] people"

("Cancellation"). There is value, she writes, in appreciating the strength of Scarlett or the

entertainment value of the romantic relationship between Scarlett and Rhett. However,

she also believes that the flawed representations of the black characters, such as Prissy

and Mammy, need to be acknowledged. Glanton's criticism acknowledges the racism and

the problematic nature of the text; it also recognizes the story's draw for white readers.

As noted in this chapter, that draw remains the compelling story combined with the

verisimilitude of the text. Glanton's criticism presents not only a balanced consideration

of the text, but suggestions for how the text might be used by mainstream middlebrow audiences to address current racial issues.

VERISIMILITUDE AND THE MIDDLEBROW READER

Mitchell vacillated between whether she was a fiction writer or an historian, and this tension between fact and fiction is evident in her personal communication. On some occasions, she maintains a distinction between her function as "only a story-teller" and the work of historians (*Letters* 325). On other occasions, Mitchell vigorously defends her research and her work to portray accurately the details within the novel—offering verifiable history to readers. As with many critics and readers, Mitchell seems unsure of the line between storytelling and historical representation. Her uncertainty, as it influenced the text, may have also influenced critics who vacillated between approval and tolerance of the novel. Her white readers often see the details in *Gone With the Wind* as historically accurate, which adds weight to the story's influence within cultural memory.

One thing that makes the story so believable is that many details are based on Mitchell's understanding of her family's history. Mitchell uses her family's stories as fodder for *Gone With the Wind*. There are similarities between Mitchell's family and the O'Hara's, as though Mitchell was recreating aspects of her own family's past in *Gone With the Wind*. There was a business deal for lumber mills; these deals helped make both Mitchell's grandfather and Scarlett O'Hara rich. There were Irish immigrants and Catholics in Margaret's background as well as in O'Hara's. Margaret's childhood tomboy alter ego, Jimmy, is a pre-cursor to the gender bending Scarlett would display. Yet, what is most evident in *Gone With the Wind* is the impact of her older family and friends— their tales of the Civil War. The fact that Mitchell's details came from research as well as

her own childhood added authenticity to the novel. Similar to any well-trained

ethnographer, Mitchell listened carefully to the stories she had heard for most of her life.

She was born within the cultural world of the Civil War and its aftermath, even though

the war itself had been over for decades by the time of her birth. Her Grandmother

Stephens's house, which "marked the city's inner defenses [where] Sherman besieged the

place in 1864," served as a stage for the storytellers; Mitchell's grandfather fought in the

war and often told stories as his grandchildren "traced the scars of the bullets on his

scalp" (Pyron, *Southern* 5, 11). It is easy to imagine the multiple sensory inputs a young

Margaret absorbed as she touched her grandfather's head wounds while sitting on the

family's porch. In essence, that porch became a place for young Margaret to appropriate

the memories of her grandfather and others into her own; these are memories that would

make their way into *Gone With the Wind*. Pyron writes, "… the children lived daily with

history and tradition. The past imposed itself everywhere" (*Southern* 33). However

reductive or stereotyped those perceptions were—the benevolent slave owner is a good

example—they became a foundation for Mitchell's memory and *Gone With the Wind*,

and they persist in the cultural memory about the antebellum and Civil War South as

readers appropriate those images and stereotypes as their own and as part of history.

The verisimilitude in *Gone With the Wind* is also one factor that explains why the

text has continued to be popular and has had such an impact on collective memory. For

readers to engage in palliative memory, there must be an element of believability in the

story, and even Mitchell's critics saw historical value in *Gone With the Wind*. Attaching

great value to the research involved in the text, Thompson writes, "The historical

background is the chief virtue of the book" (17). According to Mitchell, her research was

detailed and verifiable (*Letters* 140); even though she claims to not be an historian, it is

the historical elements, and the believability of those details in *Gone With the Wind* that

continue to influence American culture. In his essay on the loss of American innocence,

Gerald Wood refers to *Gone With the Wind* as a novel that is "surrounded by an aura of

historical moment[s]" (127). He also reports that "Margaret Mitchell prided herself on the

historical authenticity of *Gone With the Wind*; the history of her tale 'was as water proof

and air tight as ten years of study and a lifetime of listening to participants would make

it'" (127). Accepting *Gone With the Wind* as historically accurate gives white readers a

past to long for; readers desire a time when life was simpler and easier, and whites were

clearly in a position of power—something for which to be nostalgic. For example, if

readers believe Mitchell's account of slavery as accurate, it perpetuates the notion that

slavery was not destructive to either the enslaved or the white slaveholder. Jeremy Wells

and Amy Clukey state, "In *Gone with the Wind*, at least, the plantation serves as a place

to which one returns in order to be able to go forward" (6). This returning is often

through nostalgia. J. Donald Adams ("Books of the Times") writes that *Gone With the*

Wind "seems to me the best Civil War novel that has yet been written. It is an

extraordinary blending of romantic and realistic treatment as any worthwhile re-creation

in fiction of those years should be" (31). While J. Donald Adams is not directly stating

that the novel is historical, his terminology regarding "re-creation" and "realistic

treatment" seem to point in that direction. The book not only hooks middlebrow readers,

but also gives those readers permission to see the text as a test of truth.

Evidence of *Gone With the Wind*'s appeal to white, female, middlebrow readers

can be observed through its selection as a Book of the Month (BOTMC) selection. Its

selection by the BOTMC also meant that *Gone With the Wind* would see a huge increase

in book sales, with an initial extra printing of 40,000 copies (Pyron, *Southern* 324). Good

commercial books are generally sold in large numbers "because they provided buyers

with something they desired *and* because they managed to do so with striking originality,

particular thoroughness, or unusual dedication (Radway 77). The very objectives of the

BOTMC place *Gone With the Wind* as more than simply a novel, given its status as a

main selection. The "object status [of books] was redeemed by their connection to a

higher purpose, the purpose of imparting at least the vestiges of instruction, education,

and enlightenment to readers with a longing for something beyond the merely mundane"

(86). All of these characteristics were essential, as long as they existed apart from self-

indulgent fiction, and as long as they existed within high-quality writing. In other words,

reader accessibility to the text was a key factor, in tandem with strong writing, and the

BOTMC was a "consumer-oriented business" (76). It is not that BOTMC subscribers

were less intelligent or had a decreased literary acumen; these readers simply sought

material with a compelling and not convoluted story, a readable story rather than difficult

to decipher language, and characters that were not "fractured." BOTMC subscribers

"were intelligent generalists looking for the kind of rewarding book that would inform

them at the same time that it would capture their imagination and entertain them"

(Radway 91). BOTMC readers had higher expectations for *Gone With the Wind* than it

simply being an engaging text. The combination of the writing and the audience

established the text as middlebrow, appealing primarily to white women. Middlebrow

novels by definition straddle the line between highbrow and lowbrow publications. *Gone*

With the Wind was able to straddle that line successfully, often because of its perceived historical nature.

By the time Margaret Mitchell started writing *Gone With the Wind* in 1936, America had already experienced tremendous change; the novel was published during a time of additional upheaval in American culture. Industrialization was transforming the country and the world. Richard King states, "It [was not] surprising that a novel set during the harrowing years of the Civil War and Reconstruction should find a response in the 1930s, a decade of unprecedented economic and social distress" (p. 167). In 1907, the United States faced and rebounded from an economic panic, and a decade later survived World War I (WWI). Economically, the US was struggling through the Great Depression; the stock market crash of 1929 had crippled the world's economy. The country also found itself in a time of cultural dichotomy: on one hand the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution was passed in 1919, prohibiting alcohol, while on the other hand, the country entered into the Jazz Age, a time of material excess and wealth that also encouraged a substantial amount of illegal alcohol consumption. Scarlett was an appealing character during this time, as Ron Briley reports: "The resilient spirit of Scarlett also worked well for Americans in 1939, who had survived the worst ravages of the Great Depression" (462). Between the stock market crash, impending WWII, and the threat of loss of white superiority, the world of the 1930s was seemingly as unsettled as the world of *Gone With the Wind*. White women in particular, who were the primary readers of *Gone With the Wind*, were often poor and struggling for existence. Middlebrow readers, after World War II (WWII), could hope their story would eventually follow that of Scarlett. Scholar Marian J. Morton writes, "Mitchell created in Scarlett a

heroine whose painful choices between new and old roles, between earning money and maintaining custom, were precisely those which faced millions of American women in the 1930s" (52). Scarlett was once rich; though now poor, she would fight through that poverty and make her own way to wealth once again. Scarlett gave hope to readers facing economic hardship.

Along with the economy, society was changing in ways that threatened white hegemony. By the mid-1930s the United States had fought in World War I (WWI) and WWII was already on the horizon. Blacks who served in the military travelled both within the United States and abroad, which led to a change in their world-view. As they returned from war, "Black soldiers and workers believed their participation in the effort to make the world safe for democracy had earned them the equal rights they had been promised in the Constitution since the close of the Civil War" (McWhirter *Red*) WWI also coincided with the beginning of the Great Migration of blacks from the southern states to the North. As white men left to serve overseas, there were new job opportunities in northern factories. Initially, companies hired women, but there were still too many unfilled positions and blacks moved North in search of a better life economically and racially. Though not the hoped-for Promised Land was completely void of racism, blacks found more freedom outside the Jim Crow South; they were also able to better support their families. These experiences, along with those in the military, created an environment prepared for radical change. Whites were angered as they began to see blacks functioning beyond the stereotyped roles of being incompetent and dangerous, and this led to violence against blacks. McWhirter reports, "Even in communities where blacks were not killed or injured by white mobs, racial tension rose to levels not seen

since Reconstruction." Increased violence, like lynching, occurred as whites looked for ways to restore their perceived loss of power; this prompted whites both to violence and to nostalgia for a time when white supremacy[4] seemed largely uncontested (Sheley 1). Jeremy Wells and Amy Clukey make the case that by the early twentieth century "historical developments perceived by many at the time [represented] threats to white hegemony (38). The white culture of United States was prepared for a book like *Gone With the Wind* that seemed to celebrate the hegemony of whites in American society.

MYTHOLOGY AND NOSTALGIA: THE SOUTH WILL RISE AGAIN

As white society saw increasing African American agency, whites chose ways to remind themselves of life in the past when they wielded unrestricted power and control. *Gone With the Wind*, as another Civil War tale, emphasized the white South as an underdog oppressed by the North and showed that the white South would once again rise to its height of power, which meant white supremacy. While it might appear that only the South would be interested in a story about its rise from near destruction, it is apparent that those in the North were and are also invested in *Gone With the Wind*. Jessica Adams states, "*Gone With the Wind*'s appeal to a variety of audiences who have no vested interest in the South, New or Old, attests to the way in which it has managed to transform Southern resistance into a sign of American values" (166). Published in 1936, *GWTW* arrived somewhere between the second and third generation after the Civil War. By this time, Civil War tales were becoming formalized, especially through elements such as textbooks, memorialization events, and statues. As time progressed, these tales became more reductive and mythical. What white people longed for was a past represented by these constructed myths. *Gone With the Wind* depicts the southern slave master as a

benevolent caretaker of the land and of his slaves, and offers white women a romanticized notion of life as a southern belle—a beautiful woman who is also a powerful heroine. Writer Jeremy Wells states that in the years between the end of Reconstruction and the middle of the Great Depression, "the plantation [in general] came to seem, to many, a miniature version of present-day 'America'" (4). By this time, other events were perceived as threats to white hegemony. Some of those threats included: "increases in foreign immigration, escalations of conflicts with indigenous groups in the Great Plains and southwestern territories" (Wells 38-39). The early twentieth century context in which the novel was published parallels that of the time of the novel's setting. This parallel at least partially explains the novel's continued popularity.

The Mythology of the South

The people of the South longed for a revisionist history, and went to great lengths to embed that history, that mythology, into the collective memory of American society. The desire for a South that was, somehow, victorious, began almost immediately after the Civil War. The South perpetuated the myth of returning to its former glory as one way to demonstrate the desire for the Civil War era. There is *something*[5] readers are looking for that they believe exists in the world of *Gone With the Wind*. Wood states, "When *Gone with the Wind* finds the pre-Civil War past more attractive than the future, the film's [or book's] nostalgia reflects the post-World War I anxiety over America's unique place in history, the complexities of modern life, material well-being, and uncertainty about the future" (133). One historical example that supports the mythology of the South rising again is that of Decoration Day.

Historian David Blight tells the story of Decoration Day, which evolved into the current Memorial Day. Approximately ten thousand South Carolina Blacks and northern abolitionists held the first Decoration Day on May 1, 1865 (65). The ceremony took place at the horseracing track that, during the war, had been converted to a Confederate prison. The ceremony included marching around the infield of the racetrack, honoring the over 257 Union soldiers buried there, and children singing patriotic songs such as "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "We'll Rally around the Flag." Blight states, "The war was over, and Memorial Day had been founded by African Americans in a ritual of remembrance and consecration. But the struggle to own the meaning of Memorial Day in particular, and of Civil War memory in general, had only begun" (70). Memorialization became a ritual, a fixed time for remembrance, and an expression of collective grief.

As Memorial Day observances spread to different communities, they became political. Northern observances initially focused on reunion and solidifying why their soldiers died "necessary deaths; they had saved the republic, and their blood had given the nation new life" (Blight 72). Within a few years, however, southerners were growing angry about the version of the war that painted them as traitors. Former Confederate General Jubal Early and the Southern Historical Society worked to change the narrative. His messages focused on "southern honor" and he "forged defeat and victimhood into a passionate, heroic history," even arguing that "confederates never lost on the battlefield, and that secession had been right and honorable" (79). Eventually blacks were discouraged or even barred from attending celebrations. In the 1870s northerners and southerners began to celebrate Memorial Day together. This resulted in more revision of the South's role in the war focusing on themes of "shared soldiers' valor" (86) and

"equality of the Blue and the Gray veterans" (87). Reconstruction, as is evident in *Gone With the Wind*, was painted as evil. The horrors of slavery and war first became whitewashed and then disappeared. With each passing year, more people were indoctrinated to the revisionist history, and this "new" history became the collective memory of a society. As Halbwachs explains,

> Individual memory is nevertheless a part or an aspect of group memory, since each impression and each fact, even if it apparently concerns a particular person exclusively, leaves a lasting memory only to the extent that one has thought it over—to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu. (53)

Gone With the Wind only reaffirms this revisionist tale. Its impact on society was so pervasive, its story so compelling, and the publicity surrounding both the novel's publication and the film's production and premiere so extensive, that the narrative has become not only a ubiquitous icon of American society, but it is also a site of American collective memory, particularly for those nostalgic for a past when the privileged position of whites was unquestioned.

Nostalgia is often considered a generalized, emotional response that occurs when one is not satisfied with today; nostalgia "impels us to try to recover yesterday" (Lowenthal 33). Maurice Halbwachs explains that we are drawn to nostalgia, "a kind of retrospective mirage by which a great number of us persuade ourselves that the world of today has less color and is less interesting than it was in the past" (48). Readers may want something better than their current circumstances. Some scholars consider nostalgia to be based on personal experience and argue that it cannot be drawn only from

commemorative items: Nostalgia requires a specific experience for which a person is nostalgic (Davis 8). Nostalgia scholar Svetlana Boym, however, disagrees with that position. She includes in the definition of nostalgia "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (XIII). I concur with Boym as she continues her definition that nostalgia is "about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory" (XVI). In some ways, *Gone With the Wind* has become a type of biography of the South as people embrace the book's veracity. Boym further delineates nostalgia into two categories: reflective nostalgia and restorative nostalgia; this delineation assists in understanding how one might move from nostalgia—longing for that re-visioned past, to palliative memory—remembering a negative past, real or imagined, in a positive light.

The reflective nostalgic sees the past through a patina finish; it is a soft, fuzzy kind of remembrance that does not require the nostalgic to believe he sees fully complete, untarnished, clear memory. The reflective nostalgic looks back with fondness and with a wistful remembrance of the past. For example, he (the reflective nostalgic) may think about a decade of his childhood and consider it through rose-colored glasses. He believes that life was simpler, people were nicer, and growing up was a positive experience. There may be a longing for the past, but it is generalized; the reflective nostalgic sees the past as the past and the present as the present.

In contrast, restorative nostalgia occurs when one looks back on a specific past with a longing to have that past continue into the present. The image is clear, detailed, and "proposes to … patch up the memory gaps" for the restorative nostalgic (41). Rather than a simple fondness, restorative nostalgia is about recovering what one perceives as

the "truth." Though it has been established that memory is not clear, complete, or reliable, and that memories shift over time, the restorative nostalgic still believes that the past is a reliable, remembered truth. Often concerned with larger issues of society, a restorative nostalgic believes the past is the truth about how the present should be constructed. For example, a restorative nostalgic may view *Gone With the Wind* as not only the "truth" about the antebellum South—that there were benevolent slave owners, for example—but also that in the present day whites could be benevolent as a superior race. According to Boym, this kind of nostalgia

> … characterizes national and nationalist [or regional—such as the South] revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbol and myths and, occasionally, through swapping conspiracy theories. Restorative nostalgia manifests itself in total reconstructions of monuments of the past, while reflective nostalgia lingers on the ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time. (41)

The past the restorative nostalgic believes in may not have been personally experienced, or may not have even existed. Contemporary people lived neither during the antebellum time period nor during the Civil War or Reconstruction. However, one who is a restorative nostalgic believes in a home that never was, a memory that was not lived, and invented traditions that never existed; even though he remembers something that never was, the restorative nostalgic still appropriates that memory and those traditions as his own. The restorative nostalgic does not believe he is nostalgic; he believes he remembers correctly, and rightly, and he seeks to bring the "right" past to the "wrong" present.

Nostalgia is as much about the individual or societal present as it is about the past; therefore, restorative nostalgic readers seek a story that reminds them of a past they prefer over their present circumstances. While readers may not actively long for plantation life specifically, the racial hierarchy and roles are appealing. *Gone With the Wind* can become a type of history book for white, racist readers even outside of the South, providing settings for which one can be nostalgic.

GONE WITH THE WIND AS A SITE OF MEMORY

Readers can feel nostalgic about places or ideas, but these notions of nostalgia of need are situated as a site of memory. Pierre Nora introduced the concept of "sites of memory" as a way for France to account for its national past, particularly the French Revolution (Rothberg 3). Books, such as *Gone With the Wind*, can account for the South's past and become fixed memorials for the nostalgic to return to; *Gone With the Wind* is like a repository for the nostalgic's longing. Monuments, or other special places of significance, can be considered sites of memory—places where people can go to ponder and remember the past. Media genres, such as a novel, can also be considered sites of memory (Rothberg 3). Texts become, as Nora states, "an apparently purely material site, like an archive. … *Lieux de mémoire* are created by a play of memory and history, an interaction of two factors that results in their reciprocal overdetermination" (19). *Gone With the Wind* functions as a site of memory because it has been memorialized as a point of southern history; it gives members of the imagined community of the South a way to envision their past. There have been other iconic southern texts. Literature prior to *Gone With the Wind* includes Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman*, as well as works by Thomas Nelson Page. Yet, as perhaps no other narrative

before it, *Gone With the Wind* solidified these southern myths in the minds of its readers, becoming a site of memory. A site of memory exists to bridge a gap between memory and history; it is a reductive version of history that has become memory. When considered as a site of memory, *Gone With the Wind* affects not only individuals but also collective society by offering a (false) projection of antebellum life. As a site of memory, *Gone With the Wind* gives readers a place to express their nostalgia.

Audiences often place reading *Gone With the Wind* as a specific event that is significant for reasons other than the text alone. One example of *Gone With the Wind* as a site of memory is the experience of southern author Pat Conroy. Conroy wrote the introduction to the 75th anniversary edition and states that his primary connection to *Gone With the Wind* was through his mother. The book itself became a site for him and his mother to visit as she re-read the text every year. Conroy's mother described Atlanta's reaction when the book was published; she pointed out local areas of Civil War significance and she took him to visit Margaret Mitchell's grave (15). Conroy acknowledges the detractors of the novel, and the narrative's issues with race, and that it often picks up where *Birth of a Nation* leaves off (18). However, Conroy also identifies some of the primary reasons the novel was so popular. It is a story of a woman fighting through the horrors of war, starving, who promises to never be hungry again; it spoke to generations who had survived WWI, were hungry through the Great Depression and who were seeing WWII on the horizon. Conroy admits that *Gone With the Wind* has influenced collective memory. He states, "Few white Southerners, even today, can read this book without conjuring up a complex, tortured dreamscape of the South handed down by generations of relatives who grew up with the taste of defeat, like the bluing of

gunmetal, still in their mouths" (11). Conroy's memory of the text is intertwined with the experiences of reading it with his mother; *Gone With the Wind* is a site of memory he can return to in order to connect with his past. Conroy's experience of a specific encounter with the text is most likely not unique given the various forms in which *Gone With the Wind* exists throughout American society, not only to southerners.

Secondary Commemoration Sites

Gone With the Wind's popularity produces the opportunity for the text to create secondary commemoration sites, which also contribute to the novel's influence on collective memory. I use the phrase "secondary commemoration sites" to refer to those sites of memory that are borne out of other sites of memory. Often people visit these sites for remembrance and entertainment. Wells and Clukey state, "Plantation romance was immensely popular in the early twentieth century, and as anyone who has toured a southern plantation during the last few years can attest, versions of it remain popular in the twenty-first century" (5). An example of *Gone With the Wind*'s influence on collective memory can be seen through the tourism industry. Jessica Adams states that plantation tours have become

> highly successful enterprises … Although the nation continues to be haunted by racial tensions, the reconstructed plantation appears to provide a respite from them, a respite made all the more potent and convincing because it occurs at a point of their origin. (168)

Charleston Plantation Tours offers tourists the opportunity to visit plantations and the slave mart. Their plantation tour information states,

Listen to stories about the local families that built these beautiful homes and the people who once walked their halls. Your tour guide will take you on an amazing journey so rich and vibrant you will feel like you just stepped into a novel. See the settings of scenes from classic movies like…Gone With The Wind as you stroll through rows of majestic oak trees and landscapes that have survived wars, earthquakes and hurricanes.

Atlanta.net offers a variety of day tours with a *Gone With the Wind* and Civil War theme. Stops on the tour include the Marietta *Gone With the Wind* museum, The Margaret Mitchell House, the cemetery where Mitchell is buried, and plantation homes. Dinner at the *Gone With the Wind* themed restaurant, Pittypat's Porch, includes dishes like Aunt Pittypat's fried chicken and Rhett's mixed grill. The *Gone With the Wind* Trail promises tourists that they will "discover the history and legacy behind one of the world's most beloved novels through the *Gone With the Wind* Trail in and around Atlanta. Step back in time with the sights and sounds of Atlanta during the Civil War and Reconstruction as told through the eyes of Scarlett O'Hara and her dashing romancer, Rhett Butler." It is important to note the concept of "history" in the above advertisements; one is "stepping back in time" as though *Gone With the Wind* accurately represents the Civil War and Reconstruction eras. All of these tourism sites reinforce the collective memory of race in the South.

With regard to plantation reconstruction and tourism, Jessica Adams writes that tours of plantation houses "manufacture a nostalgia for the days of slavery as a tragic tableaux of an American dream rudely curtailed by war" (168). She goes on to discuss the shrinking importance of the slaves' role in plantation life and that "images of leisure

rather than labor" are now promoted in these reinvented plantations. She states, "Plantation tours create the impression that work is not relevant to plantation life; indeed, the point of its status as a tourist attraction lies in its ability to enable an escape from mundane cares" (169). I have visited many plantations throughout the South and there has rarely been a time when *Gone With the Wind* was not mentioned in some context, including whether or not the plantation owners were "good" slave masters or "bad" slave masters; modern plantation tours often defend slave owners who were "good" to their slaves. Not only is slave labor minimized, but tour guides also praise the plantation owners and slave masters.

Another way to consider the influence of *Gone With the Wind* is to examine the massive interest in the screen adaptation. The American public was so invested in the novel that it also became obsessed with David O. Selznick's film adaptation.[6] The making of the film was a national event, with audiences particularly interested in the stars who screen-tested for the role of Scarlett ("Search"). The public followed the process and even wrote letters to Selznick suggesting actresses for the role. Selznick sent an assistant to search women's colleges and universities "from Maryland to Georgia" that had theater departments in search of an unknown actress to play the role. This search continued for over a year. Eventually Selznick decided to try a lesser-known but experienced actress for the role and conducted dozens of screen tests including Susan Hayward, Jean Arthur, and Dianna Barrymore. None of these women were right for the role, and the film actually began shooting before Scarlett was cast. Finally, Vivien Leigh was signed for the part. The public was outraged at the choice of a non-southerner, so much so that "Selznick's publicity department … went to work to persuade the public that Leigh was right for the

part" ("The Search"). The public was so demanding about the authenticity of the story

that the idea of anyone from outside the South playing Scarlett was unthinkable. Aside

from the search for Scarlett, the public was also deeply invested in the opening of the

film in Atlanta, staging a three-day event, thus creating another site of memory. While

the movie gathered its own audience and exerted its own influence, there would not have

been initial interest in the film without the success and influence of the novel.

PALLIATIVE MEMORY AND *GONE WITH THE WIND*

The challenge for nostalgic readers who do not see themselves as overtly racist is

what to do with the racism in *Gone With the Wind*. Some white readers are able to ignore

the reductive presentation of blacks in the novel. They are able to overlook the realities of

slavery in exchange for the reading experience or other parts of the novel not related to

slavery or racism. What readers can focus on, instead, is the love story of Rhett and

Scarlett as well as Scarlett's pursuit of financial success and the recovery of Tara. Yet, is

that enough to make it possible for about 75,000 readers a year to accept such a racist

text? (Andriani, "*Gone with the Wind* Going Strong"). Southern women's scholar Patricia

Yeager speaks to the conflict surrounding the novel's popularity and its compelling story:

> I made the mistake of picking up *Gone With the Wind* again—and then had
>
> trouble putting it down. This is a long book…whose racial politics are absolutely
>
> abhorrent. … I find myself completely at odds with my own position as a liberal
>
> academic … empathizing with the Klan after they've brutalized the inhabitants of
>
> shantytown, identifying with Scarlett as she abuses convict labor, admiring
>
> Melanie Wilkes, who is afraid to go North because her son might have to go to
>
> school with "pickaninnies." (21)

How can I become so embroiled—so sentimental, so hyperidentified, so

whitely forgetful of my own literary critical agenda—as I reread a story whose

politics (and, for that matter, whose writing style) drives me over the brink? (21)

One way of answering Yeager's question is to understand the role of palliative memory.

As discussed in chapter one, the concept of memory is difficult to define. One

could consider it as the purely biological process of storing information in the

hippocampus of the brain, but this definition does not seem to suffice because it does not

acknowledge the active nature of memory. Memory requires an act of remembering; we

remember something—an object, an event, a conversation—and recognize that there is a

line of demarcation—a before and an after (Rićoeur 16). However, memories cannot be

isolated individually as something only in the past. Astrid Erll states that memory is "an

umbrella term for all those processes of a biological, medial, or social nature which relate

past and present (and future) in sociocultural contexts" (7). Paul Connerton explores the

way present circumstances can influence our memories. It is difficult to separate the past

from the present because our memories are always influenced by our present (2). People

see the past only through the lens of their current circumstances. This lens, then, can

change as conditions change; memories can change along with those conditions. In other

words, as William Faulkner writes, "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (92). One

explanation for a reader's ability to over look the racism in a text is palliative memory.

There is no question whether or not *Gone With the Wind* is a racist text. Yet, there

are millions who love the book, the story, and the characters, and for whom *Gone With*

the Wind represents romantic nineteenth-century plantation life in a way that provokes

nostalgia. *Gone With the Wind* provides white readers a way to believe in a past that

favored white hegemony—a past to look back on with nostalgic longing—even though the text perpetuates racism. The novel's main characters are racist, and the book promotes racist ideology. Even Rhett Butler, who is often viewed as heroic, kills a "nigger" who was "uppity to a [white] lady." He says, "What else could a southern gentleman do?" (583). Racism in *Gone With the Wind*, at the time of publication, was not a surprise to whites. The black characters drawn by Mitchell are one-dimensional, stereotyped "Negroes" who did little more than think about how to serve their white masters. Nostalgia, even for a troubled past, is possible through palliative memory.

In the case of *Gone With the Wind*, white readers are often engrossed with the story, as noted earlier by Patricia Yeager. Though it is a racist text, readers still "feel good" about reading it because texts like *Gone With the Wind* are compelling and romantic with their wide, sweeping stories of war, loss, and rising from the ashes of defeat. Through palliative memory, memory that allows readers to accept racist texts and feel positive about them, readers can re-imagine the actual past of a deadly war and slavery. Readers can then transform that past story into a palatable story for the present by remembering it through palliative memory. Within this re-imagining, the reader identifies with those in the hegemonic position. Readers identify with Scarlett and Rhett and their wartime hardships rather than the devastation of slavery. Marginalized characters and racism are eliminated from the palliative memory because the focus is on those in power and readers accept Mitchell's historical representations. Because Mitchell's story is so compelling, it is easy for readers to disengage from any criticism directed toward a racist text. There is a "feel good" factor, provided by palliative memory, which allows readers to overlook the trauma of slavery. In the case of *Gone*

With the Wind, readers can take the position that perhaps past racism was not as detrimental as it seems. The slaves appear happy and are only punished, or killed, when it seems they have hurt a white person. If white readers do not recognize the trauma of slavery, they are more likely to consider the antebellum time period in a positive, romantic light and the reality of the past is re-inscribed into *Gone with the Wind* and consequently into individual memories. While identifying with racist characters should be uncomfortable at best, palliative memory soothes and eases the discomfort of remembering our racist history in the present. As individuals view the past through palliative memory, those memories then influence the cultural memory from the perspective of the present.

Palliative memory related to *Gone With the Wind* can only impact cultural memory because of the novel's popularity across a vast audience and because it re-presents what seems to be a "true" plantation tale, or what whites want to be a true plantation tale. It is not only the book's popularity, however, that permits *Gone With the Wind* to influence collective memory. Its popularity, combined with the perceived historical nature of the story, helps define what readers should think about the Civil War time period. Since the Civil War and Reconstruction, the South has worked to redefine itself by shifting its identity from the *loser* of the Civil War fighting for a lost cause, to a resurgent phoenix rising again from the ashes after heroically fighting for a just cause.

Palliative memory is a way to engage in such nostalgia while masking one's support for a racist vision of America's preferred social order. It is not simply a forgetting of those racist aspects of the past; one engages in palliative memory to re-interpret those aspects in a way that is comforting, and in a way that makes it acceptable to engage with

51

a racist text that offers a sanitized, euphemistic version of plantation life that remains acceptable to contemporary white readers. White readers desire narratives like *Gone With the Wind* for reasons that may not be totally clear, but they know they enjoy the text. The racism in *Gone With the Wind* is not subtle, but palliative memory makes is acceptable. Some, like Gribben, even believe that *Gone With the Wind* has helped the nation heal the wounds of slavery over time because so many find pleasure in reading it (Andriani, "*Gone with the Wind* Going Strong"). Texts like *Gone With the Wind*, that evoke nostalgia and allow readers to engage in palliative memory, are often the texts that can gain traction in popularity and influence collective memory.

With few exceptions, memories are created in the context of society, and it is also society that triggers, shapes, and commemorates memories, allowing or disallowing them to morph over time. Though engaging with historical writings or other commemorations may trigger memory, collective memory and history are different. Maurice Halbwachs believes that history is more concerned with the past, while collective memory is the present focus of a group. Collective memory is "selective" and "reconstructive" (Erll 17). However, collective memory of the same event may vary between groups because of group differences. For example, the collective memory of the Antebellum South is different between a group of middlebrow, white, female readers and a group of black historians. The memories are collective within each group, but they are different between groups. In order to accept a collective memory that overlooks racism, individuals within the group must adopt palliative memory. In turn, palliative memory shapes the identity of the individuals in the group, including their views on politics or power. Their individual identity then re-informs the collective memory of the group.

CHAPTER III

SYMPATHY AND AFFECTION: THE CAUTIONARY TALE OF ATTICUS FINCH

> As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations.
> *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* by Adam Smith, 1759

To Kill a Mockingbird, by Harper Lee, has been one of the most revered texts of the twentieth century, frequenting lists of favorite books and best books during that time period. The book tells the story of the Finch family—Atticus, the father; Jem, the oldest child; and Scout, the youngest. The children's mother died when Scout, who is now six, was about two years old. The story is told from Scout's point of view, in first-person, as she looks back on her childhood as an adult. *Mockingbird* was published in 1960 and won the Pulitzer Prize for that year.

Go Set a Watchman, however, did not receive the critical acclaim of its predecessor. In fact, it was positioned as a lightly edited first draft of a novel—an early draft of what would later become *Mockingbird*. In other words, *Mockingbird* was published first, but *Watchman* was written first. The writing in *Watchman* presents elements of Lee's wit, wisdom, and lyrical style; however, it remains a draft. This novel, told in third person, follows Jean Louise[1] as she travels from New York City back to Maycomb for a visit with her father. While in Maycomb, Jean Louise discovers that Atticus is now a leader in the White Citizen's Council and his racist views are on full display.

Mockingbird was written and published during a time of racial upheaval. One of the contributing factors to this upheaval was a monumental 1954 Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* which overturned the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision. In the *Brown* case:

> The Supreme Court ruled that separating children in public schools on the basis of race was unconstitutional. It signaled the end of legalized racial segregation in the schools … overruling the "separate but equal" principle set forth in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. (Brown v. Board of Education)

Between the Brown decision and Lee's completed draft four years later, however, two major, racially-motivated events occurred. The first was the August 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a black teenager murdered for flirting with a white woman; the second was Rosa Parks' refusal to take a seat in the back of the bus. Parks' action ignited the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which is commonly viewed as the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. The two events are linked, separated by only one-hundred days; Parks states, "I thought of Emmett Till and I couldn't go back" (Eubanks). Though Till's story has been frequently told by historians, he is often forgotten as a motivator for Parks.

Fourteen-year-old Till was visiting family in Money, Mississippi, when he was accused of flirting with a white woman. Four days later he was kidnapped by the woman's husband and brother, brutally beaten, shot, tied to a cotton gin, and thrown into the Tallahatchie River. Till's mother insisted that his body be brought home to Chicago for burial. Rather than hide her murdered and disfigured son's remains, Mamie Bradley held a public funeral and Till's photo appeared on the cover of *Jet* magazine. Soon after, mainstream media reported on the story. Though arrested and charged, both men were

found innocent of the crime. Only a few months after Till's death, Rosa Parks acted. In 1956, the Supreme Court forced Montgomery to integrate its busing system and end the boycott. During the bus boycott, which lasted from December 1955 to December 1956, Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged as the leader of the Civil Rights Movement. This was the world into which *Mockingbird* was published, and the world the book began to influence. It is also the world in which *Watchmen* is placed, and Atticus Finch states that the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* and other Civil Rights activity triggers much of the racist activity in *Watchman*.

Atticus Finch, through *Mockingbird*, is typically viewed as heroically anti-racist. I assert that he is, in fact, racist in *Mockingbird*. In order for both audiences and Scout to overlook Atticus' racist behavior, each must engage in palliative memory. In this chapter, palliative memory functions for both the reader and for Scout/Jean Louise. In *Mockingbird*, Scout views Atticus through the lens of palliative memory, only seeing and remembering him in a way that reinforces her love for a "perfect" father. The reader follows Scout's lead in *Mockingbird*; readers fail to see evidence of Atticus' racism in *Mockingbird* and remember only his defense of Tom Robinson. Ironically, this defense is problematic as well. However, *Watchman* disrupts palliative memory for Scout and reader, and each must then cling to their palliative memory of Finch or accept him as a flawed racist.

In order to consider the use of palliative memory as a way to veil the racism present in *Mockingbird*, it is important to understand the relationship between the two texts and that the Atticus in *Mockingbird* is the same Atticus in *Watchman*. The two books, *Mockingbird* and *Watchman*, are linked in several ways; the first is the connection

in their publication history. For over fifty years, *Mockingbird* has been seen as a singular entity—the only book written by its author, Harper Lee. When asked about writing a second book, Lee once commented that after a book as popular as *Mockingbird*, there was no place to go but down (Johnson 13). Lee worked on a murder mystery, but eventually abandoned it (12). Rumors floated from time-to-time that a second book was in the works, but the world eventually accepted that Harper Lee would not publish any books beyond *Mockingbird*. Then, in 2015, news broke that a second Harper Lee novel had been discovered, and *Watchman* was published under controversial circumstances. Lee had retreated from public life soon after *Mockingbird* was published and declined all interviews or even personal discussion about the book. After *Mockingbird*'s publication, Lee's older sister Alice became the gatekeeper for her sister, limiting public access to Harper. Lee flatly refused to talk about "the book." When asked to write an introduction for the 50th anniversary edition, she acquiesced, but it was primarily a diatribe on how introductions are not needed, often ruin the anticipation of the text, and that *Mockingbird* "still says what it has to say" (*Mockingbird* Foreword). However, after Alice's death, Lee's new lawyer, Tonja B. Carter, discovered the *Watchman* manuscript in a safe deposit box.[2] While Carter stated that Lee was thrilled that the book had been found and would be published, many doubted this claim considering Lee's previous statements about her aversion to publicity and that there was no need for another book. Both the public and some friends were concerned about Lee's mental health and whether or not she understood what was happening. Lee had never mentioned the manuscript, nor had Alice. Social services visited her to assess her mental capacity. In the end, Lee was found to be coherent, though nearly blind and deaf, and she was clear that she wanted

Watchman published in a lightly edited version. *Watchman* does demonstrate the importance of *Mockingbird* to the general public. During its first week of publication, *Watchman* sold more than 1.1 million copies (Alter *Go Set a Watchman*). The immediate popularity of *Watchman*, the massive concern for Lee's cognitive state and well being, and the amount of publicity the text received surrounding its controversial publication are further indications of *Mockingbird*'s importance to American culture. If people had not been so invested in *Mockingbird*, *Watchman* would most likely not have been published.

Should each book stand alone, or are there connections between the two? For example, there are those who consider the Atticus of *Watchman* a completely different character from the Atticus of *Mockingbird* —with one that is racist (*Watchman*) and the other who is not (*Mockingbird*). A relationship between the texts and the Atticus characters does exist. While not every aspect of the two texts line up perfectly, the Atticus presented in the two novels is a consistent, developing character across the two texts. While Atticus is an overt racist in *Watchman*, he also clearly promotes racist ideology in *Mockingbird*. The difference is that in *Mockingbird*, Jean Louise tells the story of herself as a child whose father could do no wrong in her youthful eyes. In *Watchman*, Jean Louise is a young adult coming to terms with her father's failings and humanity. *Watchman* sheds light on the person Atticus has always been, but that both Scout and many readers fail to see in *Mockingbird*.

The second connection the books have is that both Atticus characters are modeled after Lee's father. In his recent book on the character of Atticus Finch, which includes an analysis of *Watchman,* Joseph Crespino details the relationship of Harper Lee, her father, and the development of Atticus Finch, and presents compelling evidence that Finch is

based on Harper Lee's father, Amasa Coleman (A. C.) Lee. A. C. Lee was a leader in the

community of Monroeville, Alabama, and was the editor of the *Monroe Journal*. In his

newspaper editorials, A. C. was clear about his politics, his views on race, and was

adamant that the federal government should not interfere with states' rights. In

Crespino's view, "This was the conservative, dignified way to speak about white

supremacy" (47). A. C. saw "Negroes" as a "special matter" and supported whites as "the

advanced race" (92). But his belief in white supremacy did not extend to support for the

extra-legal crime of lynching. Crespino states:

> On display year after year on the *Journal*'s editorial page, in [A. C.] Lee's
>
> earnest, labored prose, are many of the attributes commonly associated with the
>
> Atticus Finch of *Mockingbird*: integrity, idealism, and seriousness of purpose,
>
> along with a bedrock commitment to the political and legal structures of
>
> government by the people, and a determination to ensure that the individuals who
>
> administered those structures lived up to the high ideals necessary to ensure their
>
> success. (8-9)

Like the Atticus of *Mockingbird*, in his younger days A. C. Lee "valorized southern

politicians and lawmen who stood up to the lynch mob" (12). As A. C. grew older, as

with Finch aging from *Mockingbird* to *Watchman*, he became more cynical about the

federal government and more interested in protecting states' rights. Crespino states that in

Watchman Harper Lee condemns the "segregated South's respectable white fathers while

maintaining her evocation of children as the conscience of the white South" (117). In

Mockingbird, Lee "abandons her earlier condemnation" (117). She demonstrates changes

in Atticus's view of race from *Mockingbird* to *Watchman*, as well as the changing

perspective from a love-blinded child to a reality-seeing adult in Scout/Jean Louise. Lee

essentially wrote the later years of Finch's story first in *Watchman*, and then developed

the younger Atticus in *Mockingbird*. The primary difference is that the Atticus of

Mockingbird is a kinder, gentler racist.

ATTICUS FINCH AS A RACIST IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD* AND *GO

SET A WATCHMAN

The public typically views Atticus Finch as an upstanding, moral individual, and

lawyers cite Atticus as an ethical model for the profession. In fact, legal scholars have

interrogated *Mockingbird* more frequently and more substantially than literary scholars

and most have lionized Finch. Law professor Teresa Godwin Phelps states,

> Atticus is held up by those in legal circles as the quintessential lawyer, the lawyer
>
> unafraid to confront his community with its own prejudices. So ubiquitous is
>
> reader reverence for him that we, like his daughter Scout, the book's narrator, call
>
> him by his first name: not "Finch" but "Atticus." (511)

Scores of lawyers report making their vocational choice because of Atticus Finch, "the

most enduring fictional image of racial heroism" (Flynt 10). Finch's character is included

in legal ethics courses, and in 1994 the *Alabama Law Review* viewed *Mockingbird* so

important that it devoted a symposium to it. But like many readers, most legal scholars

seem to overlook both the overt and the subtle clues about Atticus's racism in

Mockingbird.

However, not all readers have a positive opinion of Atticus Finch. Law professor

Monroe Freedman and journalist Malcolm Gladwell have been two of the loudest critical

voices regarding Atticus' character and racism. Freedman accuses Finch of racism and of

defending Tom Robinson out of a sense of noblesse oblige rather than as a fight against racism (Freedman 20). For example, Freedman notes that Finch took the case only after being asked to do so; he did not volunteer. He does not vigorously question Mayella Ewell on the witness stand, and elsewhere in the book, he seems to defend the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and other racist activity in Maycomb. Agreeing with Freedman, Gladwell also states that if Finch truly cared about segregation, if he were an authentic "civil-rights hero," he would have been "brimming with rage" at the verdict, rather than walking out of the courtroom softly and quietly. Both Freedman and Gladwell see Atticus's state legislator role as a path to improve the treatment of blacks, yet he appears not to take advantage of his leadership position. That legal and political work is always depicted as far away from Maycomb and it does not effect change at home.

Atticus demonstrates his racism through his treatment of Calpurnia. In *Mockingbird*, Atticus's sister Alexandra has come to stay with the Finches, and she tells Scout that she needs a "feminine influence" (*Mockingbird* 45). Atticus explains to Scout that it is because the children need supervision, but he seems uncomfortable stating exactly why Alexandra has arrived (147). Her arrival indicates that Atticus perceives a gap in Calpurnia's care for the siblings, particularly for Scout. Later, Alexandra attempts to convince Atticus that the family no longer even needs Calpurnia, but Atticus rebukes his sister and says, "She's [Calpurnia] a faithful member of this family" (156). Many white employers of domestic workers during this time period would have referred to their employees as members of the family, so Atticus' pronouncement is not unusual. However, also like most white families who proclaim that the domestic help was part of the family, domestic workers are not treated as part of the family. For example, while

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Atticus proclaims that Calpurnia is a member of the family on one hand, on the other hand he does not grant her access to the unused guest bedroom when he travels out of town for the state legislature sessions. She sleeps on a cot in the kitchen.

Calpurnia is also not invited to eat with the family in the dining room; rather, she eats in the kitchen. Even more, in *Mockingbird*, eating with Calpurnia in the kitchen is a form of punishment. When Scout misbehaves at a noon meal in the dining room, Calpurnia calls her into the kitchen. Calpurnia threatens that if Scout "can't act fit to eat at the table you can just set here and eat in the kitchen" (Lee 27). It is not that Atticus is treating Calpurnia any differently than other families of the time period; however, that is part of his racism. In fact, the commonality of Atticus' attitude and behavior makes his racism all the more evident.

Other instances of Atticus' racism in *Mockingbird* include his minimization of the presence and impact of the Ku Klux Klan. Atticus tells Jem, "Way back about nineteen-twenty there was a Klan, but it was a political organization more than anything else. Besides, they couldn't find anybody to scare" (Lee 167). Atticus goes on to tell Jem, "The Ku Klux's gone … It'll never come back" (*Mockingbird* 168). Atticus also minimizes the meaning of the term "nigger" by telling Scout "ignorant, trash people use it when they think somebody's favoring Negroes over and above themselves. It's slipped into usage with some people like ourselves, when they want a common, ugly term to label somebody" (124). Even in the 1930s "nigger" was much more than simply a label from "trashy" people. Readers, however, tend to overlook these acts of racism. However, when *Watchman* was published, readers clearly saw Atticus' racism. What readers were

able to ignore in *Mockingbird* is an issue that they were not able to overlook in *Watchman*.

Watchman is set after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and the *Mockingbird* characters are about twenty years older. In *Watchman*, Jean Louise discovers that her father has joined the White Citizens' Council (WCC), a group often considered the "businessman's Ku Klux Clan." The group's primary tenet was that "African Americans were inferior to whites and the races must remain separate" (White Citizens' Councils). *Watchman* focuses on the relationship between Atticus and Jean Louise, and their reaction to the country's changing racial climate. In the end, Jean Louise learns that Atticus is not the anti-racist hero she, as the child Scout, believed him to be; Atticus' racism in *Watchman* is unquestionable.

Atticus shows his racism in *Watchman* through his membership and leadership in the WCC. Jean Louise discovers that Atticus and Henry (her love interest) are part of the WCC after she finds a racist pamphlet at Atticus's home while he and Henry are out at a "business" meeting. She summarizes a section of the pamphlet by saying, "We must all be very kind to them ["Negroes"] and not let them do anything to hurt themselves" (*Watchman* 102). Jean Louise then discovers that the courthouse meeting Atticus and Henry are attending is a WCC meeting. Much like she did as a child in *Mockingbird*, Jean Louise walks "up a small covered stairway to the Colored balcony, walked out into it, and took her old place in the corner of the front row, where she and her brother had sat when they went to court to watch their father" (*Watchman* 105). During this meeting she listens to a racist speaker spew venomous comments regarding the implications of the *Brown* decision, such as the government taking over individual and community lives, and

the dangers of "mongrelizing" the races. The speaker, Mr. O'Hanlon, also characterizes blacks as "inferior … kinky woolly heads … greasy smelly …" and more (108). Atticus introduces and supports O'Hanlon. To make matters worse, Atticus is not only a member of the council, but he is also on the WCC board of directors. Jean Louise is stunned and "hears" her father's voice from the past: "… equal rights for all, special privileges for none" (108); she realizes that this present-day Atticus, the one attending this council meeting, has changed from her remembrance of the Atticus of her childhood. She believes he has betrayed her (113). In reality, however, Jean Louise has simply had her eyes opened to the truth of Atticus's racism.

Atticus also demonstrates his racism through his response to Jean Louise when confronted with his participation in the WCC. Perhaps Finch's most damning comment is:

> Honey, you do not seem to understand that the Negroes down here are still in their childhood as a people. You should know it, you've seen it all your life. They've made terrific progress in adapting themselves to white ways, but they're far from it yet. They were coming along fine, traveling at a rate they could absorb, more of 'em voting than ever before. Then the NAACP stepped in with its fantastic demands and shoddy ideas of government—can you blame the South for resenting being told what to do about its own people by people who have no idea of its daily problems? (Lee, *Watchman* 247)

Atticus Finch divulges the full force of his racism. He identifies whites as being in the hegemonic position over blacks, and that blacks are expected to understand and adapt to "white ways." Atticus not only sees whites in a hegemonic position socially, but he also

believes that blacks are, as a bottom line, an inferior people—in their "childhood" as a people group.

Another way that Atticus demonstrates his racism in *Watchman* is through his handling of Calpurnia's grandson's legal trouble. Atticus agrees to represent Calpurnia's grandson, who has been charged with murder. Atticus is confident Frank will be convicted; there is no doubt that he, Calpurnia's grandson, ran over a white man crossing the street. Yet, Atticus agrees to help him. However, he only agrees to assist Frank because he wants to keep northern, NAACP lawyers from getting into Maycomb County and asking for blacks to be seated on the jury; these are demands that Atticus and the Maycomb white community see as unreasonable. Unlike Tom Robinson's case in *Mockingbird*, Atticus voluntarily takes Frank's case; however, it is only for political reasons.

Shocked by what she has discovered about her father, Jean Louise needs to speak with Calpurnia to verify Jean Louise's childhood memories. When Scout visits the now elderly Calpurnia, it becomes clear that Calpurnia is aware of Atticus' racist work. Rather than treating Jean Louise as Cal had treated her in the past, like a child she raised, Calpurnia reduces Scout to "company." Jean Louise is devastated and asks Calpurnia: "What are you doing to me?" (Lee, *Watchman* 160). In response, Calpurnia asks a question of her own: "What are you all doing to us?" This question helps demonstrate that Atticus' role in the racism of Maycomb was well known, even to Calpurnia. She is aware of the efforts in Maycomb to keep blacks "in their place," separate from whites, and that whites believe they should be uppermost in the power structure. Calpurnia also knows that Atticus is a leader in these efforts.

Atticus's racism in *Mockingbird* is overlooked, and he remains an iconic, idolized figure; readers believe he is an anti-racist hero, primarily because of his signature message: the directive to stand in the shoes of another, or to crawl into the skin of another, in order to understand the person. This message has risen to legendary status for those who believe it is both possible and positive to attempt such a feat. Atticus's message is at the heart of *Mockingbird* and one reason that drives its popularity. This section will first examine how Atticus uses this directive.

Atticus first expresses this idea in *Mockingbird* with his daughter, Scout. Early in the novel, Scout Finch tells the reader about a hard day she had at school. After several missteps with her new teacher, Miss Caroline, Scout finds herself "'start[ing] off on the wrong foot'" at school and getting into more trouble at home (*Mockingbird* 25). That evening, Atticus listens to Scout's problems and offers her his famous advice:

> "'First of all,' he said, 'if you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot
> better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you
> consider things from his point of view—'"
>
> "'Sir?'"
>
> "'—until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.'" (*Mockingbird* 33)

Elsewhere in the novel, Atticus refers to the same concept as standing in the shoes of another. One does not have to be familiar with *Mockingbird* to be familiar with some version of Atticus's directive to Scout.

Atticus's message is frequently called upon in American society as an example of tolerance and understanding, often regarding racial issues. Even former President Barrack

Obama, in his farewell address, spoke about the ongoing racial divide in the United States and offered Atticus's directive as a partial solution to racial intolerance,

> If our democracy is to work in this increasingly diverse nation, each one of us must try to heed the advice of one of the great characters in American fiction, Atticus Finch, who said, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view … until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." (Johnson 129).

In this statement, Obama both highlights the greatness of Finch as a character and highlights Finch's philosophy as a way to improve race relations in the United States. Finch's statement is so well known that there was no need for Obama to explain the context or what the statement means. He believed all who heard his reference would understand it, most likely because it has become ubiquitous in American society. The importance of Atticus' statement is not only in its commonality, but it is in the philosophy regarding race it promotes. According to Atticus, it is possible for people to understand one another by fully entering into the life, the skin, of another. Atticus' philosophy could be categorized as an engagement of symmetrical reciprocity.

Political philosopher Seyla Benhabib developed the theory of "symmetrical reciprocity." Benhabib states that effective communication with others

> requires us to view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity, and affective-emotional constitution … we abstract from what constitutes our commonality and focus on individuality … Our relation to the other is governed by the norms of *equity* and *complementary reciprocity*: each is entitled to expect and to assume from the other forms of behavior through which the other

feels recognized and confirmed as a concrete, individual being with specific needs, talents and capacities. Our differences in this case complement rather than exclude one another … I confirm not only your *humanity* but your human *individuality*. (159)

Rather than focusing on generalized norms that apply to all, Benhabib calls for a specific and an imaginative exchange of viewpoints and a symmetrical exchange of places for moral discourse and understanding.

It is important to differentiate the philosophy of symmetrical reciprocity from that of "The Golden Rule" because the Golden Rule is a similar, popular notion. Quotations and paraphrases of "treat others as you want to be treated," or The Golden Rule, permeate American culture, signifying the supposed ethical norm for the treatment of others. While the Golden Rule is often equated with Atticus's call to walk in the shoes of another, I contend that they are two different philosophies. The Golden Rule calls for treating others with what knowledge we have about ourselves—our own definitions of what is fair or just, for example. With the Golden Rule we use what we know about ourselves and offer that to someone else. The Golden Rule assumes that what we would want for ourselves is something positive. A simple example is that I do not want to be lied to; therefore, I do not lie to others. In contrast, Atticus is requiring something else. He suggests reciprocity in relationships whereby one can imaginatively exchange places with another to experience each other's life from the inside out. Atticus is not giving from the perspective of himself, but rather, he suggests that a person can know the other's history, social context, and what the other wants, needs, feels, desires, etc…, and that knowing comes from an imaginative changing of places with another.

While theorist Iris Marion Young agrees with Benhabib's philosophy of reciprocity in general, Young disagrees with the specific concept of symmetrical reciprocity and the concrete other. Young believes that it is "neither possible nor morally desirable for persons engaged in moral interaction to adopt one another's standpoint" (39). Symmetrical reciprocity is not morally desirable because it essentializes those in the communicative exchange. In response, Young offers the theory of "asymmetrical reciprocity," which develops an "account of the nonsubstitutable relation of moral subjects" (39). Young continues, "A communicative theory of moral respect should distinguish between taking the perspective of other people into account, on the one hand, and imaginatively taking their positions, on the other hand" (39). Unlike Benhabib, Young does not propose that a person's past, experiences, feelings, etc.… can be symmetrically exchanged with another. She believes that it is possible to take into consideration what can be known, externally, about another, but it is not possible to know a specific person from the inside out. Young sees symmetrical reciprocity as impossible, politically suspect, and even dangerous.

Atticus's instructions for Scout—to walk in the shoes of another—indicate his belief that Scout has the ability to enter into an imaginative exchange of places with another. This philosophy is what readers typically remember from the text, what children are taught from the text, and what influences society's collective memory regarding race. In theory, this directive calls for a positive reaction. However, rather than encouraging greater understanding and respect between individuals, this philosophy of crawling into the skin of another actually establishes expectations that cannot be met, creates misunderstanding, and minimizes the individual needs and respect of others because one

is simply assuming what are those needs. Engaging in symmetrical reciprocity, according to Young, diminishes a person's individuality because "each participant in a communication situation is distinguished by a particular history and social position that makes their relationship asymmetrical" (39). To assume that one can imaginatively change places with another for understanding is not only impossible, but it is also not morally desirable because symmetrical reciprocity is, according to Young, actually a false projection of one's own "fears and fantasies about themselves" (42). An example of the impossibility of symmetrical reciprocity is found in responses to cases of women coming forward after years, or even decades, to identify a sexual abuser. Those who have never dealt with abuse may have difficulty understanding why an abused woman would wait so long to speak about their violations. Those who have been abused understand many factors related to why a woman might not come forward immediately; however, even that identification has limitations. No woman can exchange places with another to fully realize the abuse survivor's background or individual complications. To assume that one can identify with such women through symmetrical reciprocity minimizes the trauma experienced.

Another danger occurs when those in a hegemonic group believe they can engage others in an oppressed position through symmetrical reciprocity—such as whites and blacks. When whites believe that symmetrical reciprocity is possible with blacks, that belief actually masks the black person's point of view, needs, wants, or experiences. There is nothing "wrong" with trying to understand each other; the problem is not in attempting to imaginatively exchange another's point of view, needs, wants, or experiences with one's own. The problem is believing that it is possible to do so, and then

acting accordingly. In other words, it is not the attempt to understand, to be empathetic, or to engage in a relationship that is problematic. What is problematic is the belief that a white person *can* symmetrically engage with a black person—that the white person can exchange places to understand the racial oppression experienced. If whites, for example, acknowledge that there is no way to symmetrically exchange positions with blacks, and rather, focus on asymmetrical reciprocity, understanding and improvement in relationships are more feasible. However, when whites acknowledge an inability to trade places for understanding with a black person, true communication and learning can take place.

Symmetrical reciprocity is dangerous even to oneself, because it promotes a false sense of understanding. Because of Atticus's belief that he can step into the mob's shoes, and Bob Ewell's shoes, and that he can see the world as they see it, he fails to protect his family. Jem asks Atticus about the people who "wanted to get you"; Atticus denies that there are any gangs, or mobs, or "non-sense" in Maycomb (*Mockingbird* 167). Jem reports that the KKK is a mob who "got after some Catholics one time," and Atticus's response is that he "'Never heard of any Catholics in Maycomb,'" and that Jem was confusing the KKK with something else because, "'Way back about nineteen-twenty there was a Klan, but it was a political organization more than anything else…. The Ku Klux's gone,' said Atticus. 'It'll never come back'" (*Mockingbird* 168). Atticus assumes he knows this mob's mentality, the KKK's, and even Robert Ewell's, who later attacks Scout and Jem. Jem, however, does not minimize risks, nor does he assume symmetrical reciprocity despite Atticus's admonition to do so. Jem understands that even after the trial is over, Robert Ewell remains dangerous. Jem confesses his fears to Atticus, who

responds, "He [Ewell] meant it [that he would hurt Atticus] when he said it [meaning he no longer means it] … Jem, see if you can stand in Bob Ewell's shoes a minute … We don't have anything to fear from Bob Ewell, he got it all out of his system that morning" (*Mockingbird* 250). Atticus believes that Ewell will not come after him or his children. Atticus is able to believe Ewell is harmless because of his privileged whiteness and class, but the belief is rooted in symmetrical reciprocity. Atticus believes he can walk in Ewell's skin to know how he will respond. Atticus also seems to believe that Ewell can walk in his shoes, understanding that Atticus was simply doing his job. Yet, Atticus is wrong on both fronts. In fact, the climactic scene in the novel involves Bob Ewell attacking Jem and Scout as they walk home after dark. Atticus puts the children in harm's way by believing he could anticipate Bob Ewell's motivations and plans. Symmetrical reciprocity blinds one to the truth of others—whether good or bad.

Asymmetrical reciprocity, as introduced by Young, allows communicants to respect individual differences and allows the open and free expression of ideas. With asymmetrical reciprocity.

> Participants in communicative interaction are in a relation of approach. They meet across distance of time and space and can touch, share, overlap their interests. But each brings to the relationship a history and structured positioning that makes them different from one another, with their own shape, trajectory, and configuration of forces. (Young 50)

Individuals can positively engage in reciprocity, but only if it is asymmetrical and involves learning something new about the other, specifically, and not in a generalized manner. Asymmetrical reciprocity involves appreciating differences and valuing others,

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without minimizing or essentializing any person or group. In asymmetrical reciprocity there is an appreciation that one cannot change places with another in communicative actions, and understanding is improved when asymmetry is embraced. Along with the impossibility of symmetrical reciprocity, it is also politically suspect. For example, in the case of women speaking out about their sexual abuse, there are laws in place, such as the statute of limitations, which prevent some women from seeking justice. This limitation magnifies the notion that every woman (or child) who is abused will bring charges against their abuser within a certain amount of time; those who establish such laws are behaving as though they know how an abuse survivor would react. Although symmetrical reciprocity is impossible, politically suspect, and dangerous, it is easy to understand how, on the surface, both white readers and Scout view symmetrical reciprocity as a tool for understanding—something to which one should aspire.

PALLIATIVE MEMORY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

While memory is fluid and changes, societies prefer to have a fixed narrative to hold memories in place; narratives like *Mockingbird* help establish a permanent and unified memory for individuals and for a collective society. Though not a historical novel, *Mockingbird* is often viewed as a realistic text and so can fix in place memory of the setting and elements of the story. Texts like *Mockingbird* can help a society get its story straight about what it believes to be true. Because *Mockingbird* is so often a shared experience—school, parents and children, even an entire city—those experiences can "provide us the stimulus or opportunity to recall; they also shape the ways in which we do so, and often provide the materials" (Olick, Seroussi, and Levy 19). Sundquist further adds:

[*Mockingbird*'s] careful deployment of familial genealogy, state, history and the

romantic stereotypes of southern "breeding" create a context in which the

pressure of contemporary time, with its threatened destruction of a white southern

way of life, becomes urgent. (186)

Mockingbird focuses on genealogy at the beginning of the novel, establishing its

importance early. In almost a "who begat whom" of biblical proportion, Scout details the

genealogy of the Finch family and how it arrived at the Landing and in Maycomb. As

with most southern families, the Finch's genealogy is important in grounding the family's

position in present society and history. Scout's genealogy also grounds the Finch family

as "real" in the minds of *Mockingbird*'s readers. Scout's genealogy reminds white readers

that whites have a history worth preserving and worth remembering, even if the

memories are romantic notions of southern stereotypes. If the white, romantic notions of

family history are disrupted or threatened, then palliative memory provides a way to

rehabilitate the past.

Mockingbird is told through the eyes of adult Scout as she looks back on those

few years of her childhood. She does so through the lens of palliative memory. Scout

does not see her father's faults. She does not question Atticus when he suggests walking

in the shoes of another. She asks for clarification; she does not question the idea,

however. In Scout's childhood eyes, Atticus can do no wrong.

Readers also see Atticus and the past through the lens of palliative memory.

Rather than identifying with those oppressed in the novel, like Calpurnia or Tom

Robinson, readers identify with Atticus and his struggle to handle the situation he is in.

White audiences remember the context of a time when it was difficult for white people to

help black people rather than as a time of systemic racial injustice for blacks. Palliative memory makes it easier to embrace the text because what white audiences want to remember is Atticus as a hero rather than as a racist.

Go Set a Watchman Disrupts Palliative Memory

It is only now, when his racism is so undeniable, that Jean Louise can no longer engage in palliative memory to rehabilitate Atticus's past. She states, "You who called me Scout are dead and in your grave" (*Watchman* 151). The narrator in *Watchman* also states, "She [Scout] had been half willing to sponge out what she had seen and heard, creep back to New York, and make him a memory. A memory of the three of them, Atticus, Jem, and her, when things were uncomplicated and people did not lie" (241). Jean Louise prefers to be Scout, to be able to look back and overlook Atticus's racist ideology. Yet now, her ability to engage in palliative memory is no longer available to her. Jean Louise has lost her innocence and her ability to resist Atticus's racist beliefs. She is now required to see the world as it is and not how she longs to remember it in *Mockingbird* through palliative memory. Jean Louise's loss is also the reader's loss, which is why *Watchman*'s story can be so unsettling.

As noted earlier, Atticus encourages Scout to engage in symmetrical reciprocity by crawling into the skin of another; both Scout and readers see this philosophy as a positive way to build communication and racial understanding. Because of the questionable reading of Atticus' racism in *Mockingbird*, both readers and Scout's symmetrical reciprocity is possible. However, Atticus clearly rejects any equality with blacks in *Watchman*, explaining both Jean Louise's and the audience's devastation with the publication of *Watchman*. In that text, Atticus's image as a non-racist, false as it may

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have been, is shattered; he will not crawl into the skin of Maycomb's blacks, or even see them as equals. *Watchman*'s narrator provides insight into Jean Louise's thoughts after she witnesses Atticus at the WCC meeting:

> The one human being she had ever fully and wholeheartedly trusted had failed her; the only man she had ever known to whom she could point and say with expert knowledge, "He is a gentleman, in his heart he is a gentleman," had betrayed her, publicly, grossly, and shamelessly. (*Watchman* 113)

Jean Louise is devastated and believes her entire childhood with Atticus was a lie; he is not who she thought he claimed. In reality, though Atticus never promotes himself as an anti-racist in *Mockingbird*, Scout believes he did. Scout sees her childhood world, and particularly Atticus in it, through the eyes of a naïve child. She believes that what he says about how others should be treated applies to all, including the black citizens of Maycomb, and she is distraught at learning the truth. Atticus' "goodness" in *Mockingbird* provides a distraction from his true racist beliefs. In *Watchman*, Jean Louise takes readers with her as she dives into the depths of despair over Atticus. The blinder of palliative memory is removed; Atticus is no longer the father she remembers. Her choices for how to view Atticus are limited. The disruption of palliative memory is clear.

With the publication of *Watchman*, readers are also limited in how to think about Atticus' racism and his directive to walk in the shoes of another. Some readers elect to see *Watchman* as a poorly written draft or something that should be relegated to a literary or historical artifact rather than a readable book. Other readers may cling to their palliative memories of Atticus, despite the evidence. Finally, there are those readers who accept Atticus as a racist. One Colorado couple, for example, changed their son's name

from Atticus to Lucas because they did not want him to be associated with a character "that evolves into a racist old man" (Hensley "Colorado"). The palliative memory of these readers has been disrupted.

Collective Memory, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Go Set a Watchman*

In *Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch is the icon that whites can attach to in order to successfully rehabilitate their past. In some respects, readers ask, "WWAD," or, "What would Atticus do?" What Atticus and *Mockingbird* do helps perpetuate racism through the notion of symmetrical reciprocity. Sundquist argues that where Atticus is concerned, "the book's [*Mockingbird*] evasion of the hardest moral questions is usually ignored in favor of his commanding pedagogy" (192). *Watchman*, however, seems to clarify Atticus's position on race and destroys the power of palliative memory evoked through symmetrical reciprocity in *Mockingbird*.

Mockingbird teaches that people *can* engage in symmetrical reciprocity. Palliative memory allows one to overlook and redeem any of Atticus's racist behavior or thinking. Whites see Atticus through palliative memory and believe they can engage with blacks in the same manner, only to essentialize them. Yet, for all of Atticus' espousal of symmetrical reciprocity, nothing at the end of the novel is different, or for the better, than at the beginning. Atticus remains a lawyer dedicated to upholding the law; Scout and Jem are safe at home again; Boo Radley, who had come out of his house, is back inside; and Tom Robinson is dead. Sherriff Tate approves of Robert Ewell's death, so much so, that he will lie about the murder's circumstances to protect Boo Radley. However, *Watchman* may open the reader's eyes to Atticus's reality, just as it did for Jean Louise. Along with that new vision, readers can release the romantic notions of symmetrical reciprocity and

more accurately remember the history of race in the South. Lee's contribution to the collective memory of that time provides an opportunity for readers to gain a greater understanding of race relationships where white hegemony was unquestioned and complete. In turn, this understanding points readers in the direction of dealing with the past of the United States, including slavery and white guilt. Looking to the past changes the political and power structure of individuals and society in a way that offers more understanding because the relationships or historical understandings are not built on a false sense of symmetrical reciprocity—the idea that we really can change perspectives with others. Collective memory must be, however, based on an understanding of the limitations in trying to reverse perspectives because of our varied history and backgrounds. Understanding the limitations reduces the risk of offensive appropriation and increases respect for individual differences and needs. Though *Mockingbird* teaches symmetrical reciprocity, it is a false ideology. Rather, we should try to acknowledge differences and admit that we cannot fully understand one another.

CHAPTER IV

NARRATING THE WHITE SAVIOR: CREATING SPACE FOR WHITE

READERS TO MIS-IDENTIFY AND MIS-REMEMBER THE PAST

> There is no trickier subject for a writer from the South than that of affection
> between a black person and a white one in the unequal world of segregation. For
> the dishonesty upon which such a society is founded makes every emotion
> suspect, makes it impossible to know whether what flowed between two people
> was honest feeling or pity or pragmatism. Indeed, for the black person, the
> feigning of an expected emotion could be the very coinage of survival.
> —Howell Raines, "Grady's Gift"

Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help* was published on February 10, 2009.

Commercial success came easily to this novel and the subsequent film adaptation. The

book was a *The New York Times* best seller and *IMDb* reports that as of March 2, 2012,

the movie grossed $169,705,587, while its estimated budget was $25,000,000 (*IMDb*).

While writing about the reception of *The Help,* Christopher Lloyd states, "Public

responses to the novel and film have been largely positive" ("Bodies"). While the book

was popular, it also garnered considerable criticism. In 2009, the Association of Black

Women Historians (ABWH) published a scathing and methodical analysis of *The Help*,[1]

stating that the book "distorts, ignores, and trivializes the experiences of black domestic

workers" (ABWH 43). Other critics echoed the ABWH critiques by claiming that the

novel is a cliché and uses stereotyped characters and dialogue. Janet Maslin, writing for

The New York Times, states, "Here is a debut novel by a Southern-born white author who

renders black maids' voices in thick, dated dialect. … It's a story that purports to value

the maids' lives while subordinating them to Skeeter and her writing ambitions" ("Racial

Insights"). Despite this and similar criticism, by August, 2011, *The Help*'s total sales had

exceeded seven million copies, providing a tremendous opportunity to influence its

readers (Lewis, "The Help's Strong"). The public ignored the critics' warnings or never

heard them at all; instead the public overwhelmingly embraced the novel and the

subsequent film. However, questions should be raised concerning the impact that such a

lucrative popular story may have had on America's cultural interpretation and collective

memory of the racial interactions between blacks and whites.

To many critics the story is a positive and significant Civil Rights novel that

offers insight into the issues and people of the time period. NPR reviewer Karen Grigsby

Bates states, "The author has put us in the shoes of three extraordinary women at an

extraordinary point in American history" ("A Nuanced Novel"). CBS's *Face the Nation*

broadcasted an episode that featured host Bob Schieffer interviewing a panel of authors

that included Stockett. He praised *The Help* as "pitch perfect" in its depiction of the

"black women who raised white babies—across the South." By the time Stockett

appeared on *Face the Nation*, *The Help* had been on the bestseller list for almost three

years. It was both a book club favorite and a trigger for some discussions about race, a

point raised by defenders of the text (Rountree 59). Some critics disagree, however. Uli

K. Ryder writes in JENdA:

> Perhaps this is the most troubling aspect of *The Help* phenomenon. Whites can
>
> come away from the film feeling good (or at least not-so-bad) about segregation.
>
> … The black women in the film [or book] are often strong and sassy. … The
>
> white women are often vapid and foolish. … And because white women are
>
> seeing this movie with other whites, there is little opportunity for frank
>
> discussions of race from both sides of the experience. (33)

The Help captivates a readership of primarily white women who read it individually, pass

it along to friends, and discuss it in book clubs or similar groups. Such an audience makes sense; as reported by The *Guardian*, "Statistically, about 85% of books are bought by women" (Jaffe "What's So Shameful"). Essentially the coming of age story of a young, white woman, *The Help* was written by a white woman for white women. Susan V. Donaldson describes these white readers as "eager for confirmation that the country's legacy of racism and injustice has been left safely in the past" (39). Trysh Travis argues that *The Help* offers readers a sense of realism. She states,

> The average white woman reader in the U.S. … finds Stockett's novel 'realistic' not only because it is the story of someone like her, but also because it is the story of an individual struggling to become a better person … in a specific social location and invested in that location's idea of 'realism'. ("Is the Help")

The Help entices readers to easily embrace what seems to be a positive outcome for the "good" characters in the novel—namely, the domestic workers, and Skeeter, who tells their stories.

The Help offers a pleasant, Disney-esque ending in which the workers remain safe after revealing the secrets of the white families they have served and sharing stories of white racism. In a classically happily-ever-after ending, the main characters appear to emerge stronger and in better circumstances than they were at the start of the novel: Aibileen decides to be a writer, Minny secures a job for life, and Skeeter gets her big break as a New York writer. However, all is not as it first seems. Though Aibileen decides to be a writer, she makes her decision only after she is fired from her job. Where will she find income while she pursues her new dream? Minny has a job for life, but she is essentially a "mammy" to an infantile employer. Other domestic workers experience

ruthless consequences; several workers, as well as Minny's husband, are fired from their jobs. Perhaps Skeeter, the white savior[2] of the book, is the only one who truly has a happy ending, even though Aibileen's decision to be a writer attempts to convince the reader otherwise. Yet, Duchess Harris continues, "I can see why white women relate to her [Skeeter]" (" Kathryn Stockett is not my Sister"). Suzanne W. Jones believes that the primary criticism about the book has been about "making a white character the heroic savior of helpless black people" (12). Skeeter is able to leave the racist South for her dream job in the North at the urging of Aibileen and Minny, while the women whose stories she told remain behind. Readers who approve of *The Help* seem to ignore the lack of veracity in its ending. This ignorance, however, is not passive. Somehow, readers must find a way for the feel-good story to win out over the story's racism in order to enjoy the fairy tale ending. The avenue through which readers can effectively deal with the dilemma of enjoying a book consisting of racist content is palliative memory.

Palliative memory provides a way for audiences to feel better about enjoying a story that promotes and perpetuates racism; it allows one to look backward and recall racist events in a narrative through a lens that permits one to appreciate and accept the story, despite the representation of racism. "Palliative" is a term borrowed from the medical field where it typically refers to care given to someone in the end stages of life. Palliative care is only to make the person feel better; it does not cure the disease process. Palliative memory is applicable to the study of literature and memory because it provides a way for readers, particularly white readers, to enjoy and accept a racist text. Palliative memory palliates the affects of racism; it makes the reader feel better. For palliative memory to impact the collective memory of a society, the text must be widely read and

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perceived as having a positive message. The text must also contain enough historical

details or verisimilitude that audiences can accept that the text contains historical facts.

The Help meets these criteria; it contains many historical references to the Civil Rights

movement and those who participated in it. When readers fail to engage with a text like

The Help in a sophisticated manner and fail to see the book's reductive representation of

such complex social issues, myths are born. Readers often then accept that myth and

perpetuate it. Stockett's text easily enables readers to create palliative memories that

identify with the employers, who are in the hegemonic position. Jones states, "In general,

… The Help [sic] is not an accurate or realistic portrayal of black people or the time

period, but rather 'the coming-of-age story of a white protagonist, who uses myths about

the lives of black women to make sense of her own'" (12). *The Help*'s fantasy of the

1960s as a fairly peaceful time period, with the exception of important Civil Rights

workers, like Medgar Evers, allows audiences to identify with Skeeter, the "good" white

woman. This identification minimizes the collective memory of racism in the past and is

more likely to enable racist thought in the present and for the future.

  The use of palliative memory in this chapter is an extension of Alison

Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory. For Landsberg, prosthetic memory "emerges at

the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential

site such as a movie theater or museum" (2). Landsberg further states,

  In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures

  himself or herself into a larger history … the person does not simply apprehend a

  historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past

  event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has

the ability to shape that person's subjectivity and politics. (2)

In short, prosthetic memories are "privately felt public memories that develop after an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past" (19). *The Help*, through its mass appeal and historical details, offers readers such an encounter with the 1960s, Civil Rights, and black domestic workers of that time. The key difference in what I am claiming and what Landsberg understands with prosthetic memories is that palliative memory enables and encourages readers to identify with those in power and their ideologies. In the case of *The Help*, those ideologies are white supremacist and deeply problematic.

PROSTHETIC MEMORY AND PALLIATIVE MEMORY

In order to achieve mass appeal, a book must be available to a mass audience. Technological reproducibility, such as book printing and film, provides an opportunity for people to "experience a bodily, mimetic encounter with a past that was not actually theirs" (Landsberg 14). In explaining her theory, Landsberg argues that "technological reproducibility" applies to books, threatens to "dissolve the difference—or an individual's ability to discern the difference—between 'authentic' and mass-mediated memories, between individual and collective memories" (15). One example that Landsberg cites is the final scene of *Schindler's List*. In this scene, Jews who were actually rescued by Schindler are paired with actors from the film to lay memorial rocks on Schindler's grave. *Schindler's List* "stages—and acts as an instantiation of—the possibility of a responsible mass cultural transmission of memory" (111). *The Help*, because of its large readership, can also affect the transmission of cultural memory. *The Help* was featured not only in mainstream media such as NPR and *Face the Nation*, but

also in individual and mediated blogs and list serves. *The Help*'s popularity was bolstered

by the release of the movie adaptation, which is another technological medium that serves

to facilitate prosthetic memory.

Prosthetic memory is unique, according to Landsberg, because it relies on

commodification, which "enables memories and images of the past to circulate on a

grand scale" (18). She states, "Prosthetic memories originate outside a person's lived

experience and yet are taken on and worn by that person through mass cultural

technologies of memory" (19). Prosthetic memories have "a unique ability to generate

empathy" for those oppressed or in the margins (24). Perhaps most importantly, "the

resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape the person's subjectivity and

politics" (2). Prosthetic memory "creates the conditions for ethical thinking precisely by

encouraging people to feel connected to, while recognizing the altering of, the 'other'"—

challenging "essentialist tendencies of identity politics" (9, 22). These conditions are

created by the audience's identification with characters in marginalized positions. This

identification can lead to changes in personal and collective politics because prosthetic

memory encourages individuals and groups to make ethical decisions based on the needs

of all, rather than on the needs of only the privileged. Prosthetic memories both blur the

"boundary between individual and collective memory," and they also "complicate the

distinction between memory and history" (19). Palliative memory functions in a similar

way. The first factor to consider with palliative memory is the identification with those in

a hegemonic position.

In *The Help*, the blurring of memory and history occurs for several reasons. One such reason is the novel's use of multiple first-person narrators, who encourage the reader to imaginatively participate in the story. Although other novels use first person narrators, Stockett pairs this point of view with a setting based in the reality of the Civil Rights Movement. She attempts to embed the story into the movement as if the characters are living through it, and the characters pull the readers along with them. Stockett uses specific details, such as Medgar Evers' murder, and it would be easy for readers to struggle with discerning what is fiction and what is fact in the novel. The line between history and memory is indistinct, and readers can take on the characters' lives as their own. However, Stockett not only blurs the lines for readers, but she also misrepresents historical information. This historical revision negatively affects collective memory because it provides a sanitized version of the challenges to black Americans during the Civil Rights Era.

The Mammy Stereotype: Misrepresentation of Authentic Domestic Workers

One way that Stockett misrepresents historical elements is to rely on mammy tropes to develop her black characters. While Stockett's reliance on the mammy tropes makes Aibileen and Minny both endearing and familiar to American readers, it also diminishes their roles as oppressed. In *Mammy*, Kimberly Wallace-Sanders illustrates characteristics of this archetypal caricature:

> "Mammy" is part of the lexicon of antebellum mythology that continues to have a provocative and tenacious hold on the American psyche. Her large dark body and her round smiling face tower over our imaginations, causing more accurate

representations of African-American women to wither in her shadow. The mammy's stereotypical attributes—her deeply sonorous and effortlessly soothing voice, her infinite patience, her raucous laugh, her self-deprecating and her devotion to whites—all point to a long-lasting and troubled marriage of racial and gender essentialism, mythology, and southern nostalgia. (2)

Mammy remains familiar because of her commodification, for example, as a pancake mix saleswoman.

In her text on representations of race, scholar Diane Roberts laments that even though the United States is decades beyond the Civil Rights events of the 1960s, and despite decades of "powerful, passionate images of black women," the "best-known black woman's face in the land looks out from a box of pancake mix" (Wallace-Sanders 1). The image of Aunt Jemima increases the visibility of mammy in contemporary society (59). Roberts states, "Aunt Jemima had been reinvented as a repository of Old South romance and 'modern' domestic convenience" (157). She no longer wears a head-rag or has a "shiny, scrubbed black face beaming," but Aunt Jemima remains a modern-day reminder of plantation fiction and slavery (Roberts 1). What better way to experience comfort in the face of racism than through warm pancakes and syrup? Aunt Jemima serves as another way to engage palliative memory. The company's web site encourages customers to "make any moment memorable when you serve a stack of pancakes made with our Aunt Jemima" (*Aunt Jemima*). Though removed from her horrific past, Aunt Jemima still signifies a black woman providing the nourishment and comfort of a mammy. In this case, Aunt Jemima offers both a cozy memory and a satisfied stomach. She allows purchasers to pair special memories of a family enjoying a pancake breakfast

with romanticized images of blacks in the past, softening the messages of slavery, oppression, and violence. Aunt Jemima provides a reference point for white memories of the role and treatment of black domestic workers.

Not only is the mammy image common, it is also a stereotype. In her text on domestics in American literature, Trudier Harris states, "The literary and historical image of the domestic as mammy is one easily recognized and much maligned, a type which invariably tends toward stereotype" (35). In their open letter, the Association of Black Women Historians states,

> Up to 90 per cent of working black women in the South labored as domestic servants in white homes. *The Help*'s representation of these women is a disappointing resurrection of Mammy—a mythical stereotype of black women who were compelled, either by slavery or segregation, to serve white families. (43)

All Stockett's black characters reinforce aspects of mammy in various ways, including their physical shape and size as well as their speech patterns.

Stockett seemingly bases the stereotype on the most famous Mammy, from *Gone With the Wind*. Both Aibileen and Minny exemplify characteristics of Mitchell's Mammy, including the way they look and the way they talk. Like Mitchell's Mammy, both Aibileen and Minny appear as wise blacks who have perception and understanding that their white employers do not possess. While Margaret Mitchell did not invent the mammy character, she immortalized Mammy for the world, describing her as one with small "eyes of an elephant," a "pure African" devoted to her owners, one who is strict with both the family's children and other servants, and one with high standards and pride

(42). The mammy character has become so standardized that even those who have never read *Gone With the Wind* can recognize the mammy icon via product marketing from past decades and current time.

Aibileen's physical appearance mirrors the stereotypical mammy. On the first pages of the novel, the reader learns that Aibileen is large enough to soothe Mae Mobley, a job Mae Mobley's mother cannot do because she is too angular. Aibileen compares herself to Mrs. Leefolt, saying, "Fact, her whole body be so full a sharp knobs and corners, it is no wonder she can't soothe that baby. Babies like fat. Like to bury they face up in you armpit and go to sleep. They like big fat legs too. That I know" (2). Aibileen serves as a soft place for Mae Mobley to land, and Aibileen's physique affords a magic touch for quieting the child—another mammy characteristic.[3] Roberts discusses physical representations of the bodies of whites and blacks and notes that exaggerated size is one element of the degradation of black bodies (3). Stockett does not establish an extended comparison of white and black bodies, but the features about which she does write— Aibileen's size and shape compared to Mrs. Leefolt's size and shape—align Aibileen with the mammy stereotype.

Minny is also described as a large woman with superhuman strength. Aibileen says, "Minny could probably lift this bus up over her head if she wanted to" (13). In *The Help*, the reader does not see Minny care for children other than her own; however, she infantilizes both women for whom she works. Minny's primary job at the beginning of the novel is taking care of the elderly Miss Walter, who was slipping into dementia, until Miss Walter's daughter Hilly places her mother in a convalescent home. Minny then goes to work for Celia Foote. With Celia, Minny takes full charge as a maternal figure. She

teaches Celia to cook and clean and mothers Celia through a miscarriage. She attempts to protect Celia by offering suggestions for less garish and more modest clothing in an effort to shield her charge from added embarrassment. Minny is loyal to Celia, though perhaps more out of her desperation for a job than for loyalty alone.[4] These stereotypical characteristics make both Minny and Aibileen seem familiar to readers, but the story also softens the harsh realities that actual domestic workers faced.

Mammy stereotypes are further caricatured by the use of artificial black dialect as a way to add "local color" (Wallace-Sanders 98). This non-formal, "broken" English is present in Stockett's characters' dialogue. Aibileen writes her prayers daily and even sets out at the end of the novel to be a writer; yet, she speaks in a stereotypical "black" vernacular that is often a trope to hint at a lack of the speaker's intelligence. For example, when describing her employer, Aibileen states, "Here's something about Miss Leefolt: she not just frowning all the time, she skinny" (Stockett 1). In describing Skeeter, Aibileen states, "Miss Skeeter real tall and skinny. Her hair be yellow and cut short above her shoulders cause she get the frizz year round" (4). The Association of Black Women Historians agrees, stating in their "Open Statement to the Fans of *The Help*," "The appropriate regional accent gives way to a child-like, over exaggerated '*black*' dialect" (44). Aibileen's speech pattern has a "yessum" quality, often sounding like an acquiescing "Uncle Tom performance" (Rollins 179). Wallace-Sanders discusses the importance of local color, which Aibileen's dialect provides, stating,

> Local color stories emphasized black dialect and the quaintness of African
> American folk culture as seen and interpreted by white authors who were
> essentially writing about the domestic bliss of their childhood allies: the African

American men and women called uncles and aunties who seemed to exist solely

for their entertainment. (98)

Aibileen's dialect provides an appealing local color and reflects the notion of quaint "African American folk." Nkiru Nzegwu, editor of JENdA, refers to this speech as "the false southern black vernacular that comes across as infantile speech" (4). Even Skeeter, who comes to the aid of the black women by telling their stories, has a mammy-figure about whom she continues to fantasize. The issue with Skeeter is not that she had a mammy-figure; the issue, according to Duchess Harris from *The Feminist Wire*, is that Skeeter is "not a true white civil rights activist." Stockett has stated that she is speaking about the domestic worker from her childhood ("Too Little, Too Late") and writing the character as remembered, including the dialogue. She has attempted to recreate the dialogue she heard from a white person's perspective and write the black dialect as she heard it as a white child. In this case, Stockett is engaging in palliative memory; she feels loved and comforted by hearing the voice of her childhood caretaker without recognizing her own racist commodification of the caretaker she claims to love. Stockett portrays a romanticized notion of the care of a mammy; also, she provides expressions of that character and provides a way for readers to engage in palliative memory. While Stockett touches briefly on the employment issues faced by domestic help, such as Minny's inability to find another position after she leaves Hilly's employment, Stockett fails to appreciate the true employment difficulties domestic workers faced.

Work Agency and Minimized Violence

Domestic workers faced low wages and inadequate protection for their jobs; there are those who equate domestic work with another form of slavery. An article in *The*

Economist reports, "Under segregation, black women were so rigidly excluded from good jobs that 60% of those who were employed in 1940 worked as maids" ("The Help, Updated"). In a study of household workers, the *Household Employment Bulletin,* Herbert R. Tacker reports the following data regarding household workers and social security between 1951 and 1966:

- The median age was 52, though it was only 37 for all wage and salary workers

- About 1 in 10 were men

- Slightly more than half were Negroes[5]

- 4 out of 5 had no other type of covered employment

- The average annual household income was $800, but it was $3,100 for all wage and salary workers

- When household work was combined with other types of employment, the average wage for the year was $1,480 for workers with both household and other types of employment

- About half of the workers earned fewer than 4 quarters of coverage in household work, but even with all the covered work counted, only 6 in 10 had as many as 4 quarters.[6] (10)

Tacker's information demonstrates the low wages paid to the domestic workers. His data further reveals how little money was paid into the social security program, which would have implications for income once the worker retired. This report does not account for the money paid to workers in cash, without any reporting or employer taxes paid; because of such practices, many workers might have made even less than the $800 per year indicated in the report. The profile for those workers who did have funds paid into the

system were that they were older than the general working population, were 90% female, and made nearly four times less salary—again, for those who reported employment. While some employers paid for doctor visits, this was not guaranteed and was at the discretion of the employer. These domestic workers were not treated well financially; they were not part of any employer's family, despite inclusive, familial language in the book is used to describe the relationship between employers and employees.

Many contend that in the social hierarchy under which domestic workers lived, segregation was simply another form of slavery. Scholar Elizabeth Beck states, "Practices established under slavery continued to affect the association between race and domestic work. Specifically, black women ran the households for whites under slavery, and this norm continued after abolition for those whites who could afford it" (196). While Skeeter proclaims her love for Constantine, Skeeter voices no objection about her father putting "the [Constantine's] cot into the kitchen, next to her bathroom," while Skeeter's parents were away (65). Skeeter engages in palliative memory to remember Constantine's time with her family; however, Skeeter forgets how Constantine was actually treated by her family. For example, it also appears that while it may be indoors, Constantine has her own bathroom. Stockett demonstrates that it is possible to believe that one's mammy-figure is truly part of the family, regardless of her low wages, her highly demanding work, and her sleeping on a cot in the kitchen.[7] Brundage states, "Within collective memories a dialectic exists between the willfully recalled and deliberately forgotten past" (6). In such actions, white women can engage in palliative memory, overlooking a character like Skeeter's power and ability to oppress blacks in the story. Judith Rollins comments on the reality of the domestic worker's life:

The relationship between domestics and their employers … is one of exploitation.

… What makes domestic service as an occupation more profoundly exploitative

than other comparable occupations grows out of the precise element that makes it

unique: the personal relationship between employer and employee. (155-156)

Aibileen, Minny, and the other maids are exploited not only by their employers, but also

by Skeeter. Skeeter uses the women's stories to advance her own career. While she seems

genuinely concerned about the maids' welfare, her motivation for her project is to use

their stories to write her own compelling book. Stockett also exploits these characters as

she presents a mythical world in which employers are simply elevated mean girls and the

reality of violence and danger is largely ignored. This exploitation creates a myth that life

was not as difficult as historical records demonstrate.

Fantasized Black History

In the book, Stockett integrates historical information from the Civil Rights

Movement into *The Help*. She mentions, by name, Medgar Evers, Rosa Parks, and Dr.

Martin Luther King Jr. The information, however, is not always correct, or it minimizes

the role of the person under discussion. In some cases, Stockett presents a fanaticized

version of black Civil Rights activists.

First, Missus Stein, a white woman, is Skeeter's book editor. By Skeeter's own

admission, Stein must educate Skeeter regarding what is happening in the world outside

of the university from which Skeeter has just graduated. Skeeter states, "The truth was, I

had very little idea how dangerous things were. I'd spent the past four years locked away

in the padded room of college … worrying over term papers" (107). Though Skeeter is

working with black domestic workers, she remains uneducated about the lives of blacks.

Later, Stein intends to confirm to Skeeter the danger she may face with this project. Stein mentions "the marches in Birmingham, Martin Luther King. Dogs attacking colored children" (107). In another conversation, Stein teaches Skeeter about King and the upcoming march on Washington, D. C. Skeeter pretends she knows about the event, but later admits to her lie. She states that she has not read the paper for the past week and that she "sounds like an idiot" (159). Stockett also fails to have the black characters pay close attention to King Jr.; this seems unrealistic given the black women's dedication to telling their own Civil Rights story.

Aibileen mentions watching King's "I Have a Dream" speech while she is in the church basement. Notably, the main focus of her comment is not on the speech, but on the size of the crowd. She also points out the fact that sixty thousand people in the crowd are white—as though it is more important that whites are present at the event (294). Even Aibileen is focused on the white crowd and not on Dr. King or the blacks who are at the event. Aibileen desires to teach Mae Mobley about King Jr., as well as other aspects of the Civil Right Movement. Rather than teaching the child about King Jr. in a truthful, age-appropriate manner, Aibileen uses the analogy of a Martian to teach about Martin Luther King Jr. (296). Later in the novel, Aibileen refers to King as "Green Martian Luther King," changing the color of King's skin, even though his skin color is the reason he leads the Civil Rights movement. While Aibileen "teaches" Mae Mobley about Dr. King, she teaches about him as a fantasy and not as a real person fighting for Civil Rights. Stockett minimizes not only the violence against blacks of the time, but also the importance of Martin Luther King Jr.

Despite Skeeter's lack of knowledge about King and the Civil Rights movement,

readers still believe the representation of the time period. Donaldson cites a University of Mississippi article whose author had interviewed students regarding *The Help*. Students thought it "interesting to see how far we have come and how people used to treat other humans during the time of the Civil Rights Movement and Segregation" (45). Other students indicated that they saw the novel as historically accurate and that many of the conflicts represented in the novel had been resolved (45). Donaldson recognizes that readers assume that Stockett's portrayal of this time period is accurate and thus perpetuates a false sense of what was realistic during the setting of the novel.

PALLIATIVE MEMORY AND PERSONAL EXEMPTION

One of the tenets of palliative memory is that audiences will identify with characters in the text. With prosthetic memory, the identification is with those in the oppressed position; conversely, with palliative memory the identification is with those in the hegemonic position. In *The Help*, Stockett creates both a "good" white woman in Skeeter as well as "bad" white women in Hilly and her cohort. Stockett establishes Skeeter as a white savior and minimizes the violence against the black characters as ways to allow audiences to engage in palliative memory.

Instead of prompting ethical thinking, palliative memory creates a barrier against it. The barrier is created when one engages in a narrative with individuals or groups, such as whites, who have power over other individuals or groups, such as blacks. Rather than identifying with marginalized characters, the reader identifies with those in power. Audiences find the hegemonic position and those in it more desirable than those beneath it. In *The Help*, readers engage with the powerful characters who fall into two categories: the "bad" white women, and Skeeter, the "good" white woman.[8]

The first group consists of Hilly and the other women of the Junior League, who are referred to as the "bad whites" earlier in this chapter. The "bad" white women are easy to identify; Hilly Holbrook is the leader of the group and few people would identify with her. She is a "Jim Crow defender … defined as much by her smug confidence in representing white southern ladies as she is by her irredeemable racism" (Donaldson 45). Though she carries power in the novel, Hilly is a caricature of racist women from that time period. She is also emblematic of a "bad" white woman. In contrast, Skeeter becomes, in the view of white readers, a hero to the black women in the story, and someone with which to identify. White readers are more likely to identify with Skeeter than with Hilly because Skeeter succeeds in helping both the "less fortunate" and herself.

Palliative memory requires a character to be somehow worthy of identification despite the character's racism. Readers from the University of Mississippi identified with Skeeter because she is changed and "redeemed [in the opinion of those interviewed] by the black stories she is told" (Donaldson 45). By identifying with Skeeter, readers can recall the Civil Rights era without envisioning fire hoses spraying children or police dogs attacking innocent blacks (Levingston, "Children have Changed"). Instead, readers can play out the white memory of the Civil Rights era as embodied in a character like Hilly who is a "mean girl," but not the violent racist who better represents the racists of the 1960s. In essences, Skeeter was "not that bad"—an element of palliative memory.

It is an understatement to say that, in real life, race is a complex issue; yet, it is one. In Stockett's narrative, however, only the bad whites are shown as racists. Patricia A. Turner, from *The New York Times,* sees a problem with Stockett's characterization of good and bad whites. She states, "To suggest that bad people were racist implies that

good people are not." While Skeeter is perceived as good, she is also racist and in the hegemonic position. It is Skeeter who owns the pen and paper to write the women's stories. Even though Aibileen writes her own story, Skeeter has the editing power. Skeeter also owns the connection to have the book published. Still, white readers are likely to align themselves with Skeeter, who is white, educated, and comes from an economically privileged family. Because readers perceive Skeeter as using her power for good, she is not viewed as oppressive. Skeeter is also a likable misfit who first tries to reform the racism of the other white women, but who ultimately plans against them by helping the domestic workers. Skeeter is further set apart by her unruly hair and her tomboyish behavior, much like Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*; this makes her more familiar to many readers. She is a strong woman during a time period when women were valued even less than they are presently. Stockett's representation of racial issues is often too simplistic, with clearly "good" and "bad" characters. This representation makes it easier for whites to identify with Skeeter, who is good.

While Skeeter is only one of three narrators, readers have the opportunity to see the goodness of Skeeter as she is valued and esteemed by Aibileen and Minny. Much like the blacks in Maycomb honor Atticus Finch, the members of the black churches of Jacksonville honor Skeeter. The church has one quiet celebration for Aibileen and the book. The pastor presents Aibileen a copy of the book with the signatures of people from her church as well as members from other churches. The pastor states, "We know you couldn't put your name in it, so we all signed our own for you" (397). After promising Aibileen that the church would stand by her if "there are some hard times ahead" (398). Aibileen then states, "Then the Reverend hands me a box, wrapped in white paper, tied

with light blue ribbon, same colors as the book. He lays his hand on it as a blessing. 'This one, this is for the white lady. You tell her we love her, like she's our own family'" (398). Readers can attach themselves to Skeeter, believing that racism during the Civil Rights Movement "was not so bad," and that blacks honored whites for their efforts to rescue them. Including scenes where blacks honor the efforts of whites minimizes the impact of racism, in the context of the Civil rights movement, and enhances palliative memory of the time.

Even Skeeter engages in palliative memory. Constantine was Skeeter's childhood caretaker; Constantine was Skeeter's family's help. While Skeeter is away at college, Constantine is fired; however, Skeeter does not find out this news until she returns home, and no one will tell her why Constantine was fired. Neither the reader, nor Skeeter, is shown Constantine's response to being let go. Until the truth about Constantine is later revealed, the reader only knows that Constantine has been fired, and neither the reader, nor Skeeter, know what Constantine really thinks about Skeeter and her family. The reader hears Skeeter's longing for the person she loved more dearly than her own family and believes that Constantine felt the same way. Yet, Skeeter may be wrong. As historian Rebecca Sharpless observes, *The Help* isn't about black people, rather, "it's about white people's fantasies about the love of black women" (Ray and Sharpless). The reader never knows Constantine's true feelings about Skeeter or the rest of her family; they are all filtered through Skeeter's memory. The fantasy, however, ends when Skeeter learns the truth: Constantine chose her own daughter over Skeeter and Skeeter's family. Constantine, who once abandoned her daughter, now prefers her more than Skeeter or her family. Constantine chooses Lulabelle over Skeeter. Palliative memory holds onto the

fantasy that black nannies loved their white charges at least as much as their own

children. While reciprocal love might be true in some cases, according to Susan Tucker,

it is truer in the minds of whites than it is in the reality of blacks. Having a black woman

as a nanny does not necessarily render one racist. Even though she is not a violent racist,

Skeeter endorses and perpetuates the notion of palliative memory through her fantasies of

Constantine. Given that memory is easily manipulated until the memory becomes a more

fixed narrative, Skeeter's recollection of her relationship with Constantine could be

whitewashed palliative memory. Rebecca Sharpless writes, "While it is clearly

documented that white children loved African American women, it's much less evident

that African American women reciprocated that love" (Ray and Sharpless). Still, a large

percentage of black women earned their living as domestic workers. However, this was

often the only form of employment available; domestic work was not their ideal career

choice.

The White Savior

Whites can view the domestic workers in *The Help* as those "others" who need

help from their white savior. Whites can identify with Skeeter, in particular, who does the

saving. One could argue that both Aibileen and Minny also exhibit a type of "savior"

complex while caring for their charges. Aibileen is Mae Mobley's caregiver who steps in

for an unloving mother. Aibileen knows best how to rescue the child from her mother as

long as she can. Similarly, Minny is a type of "savior" to Celia Foot who is incapable of

fulfilling the expected female roles of cooking, cleaning, and running a household. The

difference between the black help and Skeeter is that the domestic workers are doing the

work they were hired to do; Skeeter is perceived to be going above and beyond to "help

the help" and make their lives better. She is not acting heroically, however. Her motivation is to complete a project for her own career development and success. Though Aibileen and Minny sacrifice their safety to write the book, Skeeter alone becomes a positive role model for white readers who do not recognize her racism.

While those who are not white women can engage in palliative memory, white women are the group focused on in this chapter. One of the tenets of palliative memory is the belief that if someone from the present day could have been inserted into the past, the present-day reader would have changed the situation or circumstances of the time for the person in power. In essence, the present-day individual becomes the "savior" for disenfranchised people, but the focus is on the savior and not the saved. In the case of *The Help*, readers, particularly white readers, can imaginatively place themselves in the story's setting. The individual's concern is the circumstances in which the hegemonic person, in this case, specifically, Skeeter, finds herself. The person engaging in palliative memory identifies with the actions of the person in power but believes she can improve upon them. The focus is not on the disenfranchised, but on the rehabilitation of the hegemonic person or group and their circumstances. In the case of Skeeter, it is a means to identify with the "good white" person rather than those deemed "bad." The present-day reader can recall the time period in a benign manner. The reader's response may include accepting the actions of whites in the past, as they would accept Skeeter's actions. The white reader may also adopt the position that if the racist behavior had been present during the past, he could have changed the good white person or could have found reasons to accept and understand the white person's behavior. Because Stockett's

portrayal of this time period is nonthreatening to blacks, it helps readers engage in and reinforce palliative memory.

Yet, Stockett is not entirely wrong in her representation of relationships between domestic workers and their employees. For example, regarding the open discussion of race, Susan Tucker states, "White and black women did not speak to each other about race and class, and yet both of these were key factors involved within their lives and their interactions with each other and with other people" (3). Stockett does represent challenges in having those conversations. Even as the women begin to tell Skeeter their stories, it is difficult, at first, for the domestic workers to be honest with Skeeter about their circumstances. While the discomfort abates over time, the women are mindful of their compromised position. Stockett, however, never really offers the reader a true picture of the potential violence at hand.

A text like *The Help*, set during the Civil Rights Movement, should acknowledge the cloud of violence and danger under which domestic workers lived. Otherwise, it will risk distorting the cultural memory about these women by minimizing their suffering. Regarding the novel, Tikenya Foster-Singletary states, "readers and a wider film audience are not forced to fully acknowledge either the violence constantly swirling around black life or the role white women play in it" (96). Stockett barely scratches the surface of violence. In the novel, Stockett keeps violence outside the workplace. Despite the fact that it was common for domestic workers to be sexually harassed and even raped, no incidents actually occur in the novel perpetuating a false narrative concerning a major risk factor for maids. In *The Help*, there is a "telling" of violence, but there is no "showing" of it in the text. As with most pieces of writing, "showing" versus "telling" is

what often adds depth to the story and makes the action in the scene realistic. Stockett keeps the violence in the story impersonal and distant, even from the domestic workers.

One example of Stockett's false portrayal of violence occurs during a conversation between Aibileen and her employer, Mr. Leefolt, who appears in the novel only a few times. Initially, he enters a scene to complain about the cost of the newly installed "colored" bathroom. In another appearance, he threatens consequences for Aibileen if she does not obey his directive. In this conversation, Leefolt commands that Aibileen not talk to Skeeter anymore regarding cleaning tips or to even say, "Hello" (291). Leefolt states, "'I hear you two talking and you'll be in a heap of trouble. You understand?'" (292). Based on the context of the conversation, the threat seems to be related more to the possibility of Aibileen losing her job than to that of threatened violence. Further, this scene is also only one of two scenes that place Aibileen or Minny alone in the presence of a white male. Aibileen is not shaken or nervous when Mr. Leefolt comes home for lunch; she simply notes the rarity of such an event (290). Minny, in contrast, reveals fear when she is also in a situation alone with a white male. Celia Foote, whose husband is not supposed to know about their working relationship, employs her. He comes home one day to talk to Minny, who fears she will be attacked because she is a black woman in their house. As it turns out, Foote has known that Minny has been working for his wife. As their conversation continues, Minny's fear dissipates.

Stockett avoids the issue of violence not only toward the domestic workers, but also toward blacks in general. Given that *The Help's* major themes relate to race and racism in the 1960s, and that so much violence was perpetrated against blacks at that time, the lack of violence against women in *The Help* is a gross misrepresentation of the

time period. Alabama's *Lynching in America Report* indicates that between 1877 and 1950 there were 4,084 lynchings in most southern states.[9] Mississippi was one of three states with the highest number of lynchings, and it had the highest lynching rate per capita. Hinds County, where *The Help* takes place, had the fourth highest number in the state at twenty-two (*Lynching in America*). While Stockett does include Medgar Evers's murder, and it occurs on a street near where Minny and Aibileen live, the murder is kept at a distance in the story. The whole episode surrounding Evers's murder plays out as the women listen to its coverage on the radio. The murder does not enter their world; rather, it is a story someone else is telling. Aibileen recalls meeting Evers' wife, Myrlie, but comments primarily on the woman's clothing—another connection that takes place only on the surface and is only concerned about a superficial subject. There is no mention of Emmett Till, who was killed in Mississippi and whose murder was a national news story. Of all of Skeeter's interviews, only one paragraph addresses abuse. Skeeter states, "Angry stories come out, of white men who've tried to touch them. Winnie said she was forced over and over.[10] Cleontine said she fought until his face bled and he never tried again" (258). Immediately after these sentences, however, in the same paragraph, Skeeter shifts her discussion to the "dichotomy of love and disdain living side-by-side," attempting to balance the love between employer and employee with such violent behavior (258). This relationship between the black and the white women is one of Stockett's main points, and this "balancing" perpetuates a myth that there can be a balance between love and danger. White women can speak about their domestic help as being "part of the family." However, there is always potential danger coming from within

that very same "family." White readers are offered a sanitized version of real danger to remember.

In contrast, researcher Susan Tucker offers examples of real women working in the authentic world of domestic service. Tucker interviewed Priscilla Butler, a "baby nurse." Butler's mother gave Priscilla a warning as the mother was dying: "Young black women who worked within white homes were vulnerable to the worst aspects of the segregated South," including the "unfair and even violent actions of employers, particularly male employers" (19). Butler knows that "everything is to protect the good name of the white men" (27). Stockett's minimizing the presence of white men in the story minimizes the violence perpetuated in reality. Stockett does offer a glimpse of potential violence Aibileen, who provides a detailed account of what she believes would happen if the domestic workers were discovered writing about their employers. Her description begins with, "Womens, they ain't like men. A woman ain't gone beat you with a stick. … No, white womens like to keep they hands clean" (188). Aibileen traces the possibility along its logical course: being fired and unable to get a new job, being evicted, suffering a husband's loss of employment, and fearing violent visitors appearing at one's doorstep in the middle of the night. Aibileen concludes, "You realize something you known all your life: the white lady don't ever forget. And she ain't gone stop till you dead" (188). Such is the reality for all Blacks in the 1960s; however, Stockett never shows any of this happening to her characters despite their actions. Though she includes this example, the threat of violence against domestic workers, or any blacks, was and is deeper than isolated, single experiences; the treatment of blacks is about the systemic exploitation and abuse of all blacks. Professor Claire B. Potter notes, "The fantasy is that

racism is a personal problem, not a political one, a social issue that can be overcome by honest communication across the color line rather than a fundamental redistribution of power, money and public resources" ("For Colored Only?"). Journalist and cultural critic Toure' states,

> The specter of violence surrounds them, though it all occurs offstage, whether it is the assassination of a black leader or domestic violence visited upon a maid by her husband. The total lack of physical consequences for the maids' courageous act of literary civil disobedience is historically absurd, though it does fit with the sanitized tone of the movie. People who argue that it is a realistic movie are incorrect: the men of Jacksonville, Miss., would have killed several of these maids. The happy ending we get—Viola Davis' Aibileen walking home unharmed as the screen fades to black—is fraudulent and so surreally absurd as to be Dali-esque.

While many domestic workers feared making a mistake that resulted in punishment, they also realized that no provocation was required for the deadly consequences to occur.

The most egregious act in the book, which would surely elicit a violent response from whites living in this time period, is Minny's "terrible awful." Minny, who is known for her chocolate pie, bakes one under the guise of offering Hilly an apology for earlier telling her to "Eat my shit" (339). However, Minny also bakes her own excrement into the pie. After Hilly eats two slices, Minny again tells her to "Eat my shit" (339). In the text, this episode is used against Hilly to prevent her from exposing the maids as the authors of the new book. Of course Hilly, who leads the Home Health Sanitation Initiative, would not want anyone to know that, while she will not allow her "colored"

help to use the indoor bathroom because of their germs and diseases, she has ingested the feces of a black woman.[11] Stockett leads the reader to believe that Hilly cannot retaliate against Minny without the specific information about the pie becoming public; however, it is not necessary to have an exact reason to violently retaliate or terrorize Minny.

Hilly has already demonstrated her ability to convince other white women not to hire Minny because she was a thief; Hilly could easily convince her husband—Mr. Leefolt—that Minny deserved even more serious consequences for the false accusation of theft. As noted by Christopher Lloyd, "Eat my shit" is a phrase "which no black maid could ever dream of uttering in the Jim Crow South" ("Bodies"). Stockett presents a completely improbable way for Minny to deal with her frustration over being fired. Minny's action relegates her to animalistic behavior rather than human. In the deepest way possible, Minny marks her territory in Hilly. It is as if Stockett cannot create a wholly strong and powerful black character. Minny's use of feces in a food product makes her less desirable to identify with; while few readers are concerned with Hilly's fate, it is a struggle to identify with a character who willfully bakes her feces and feeds it to another. Along with that, Stockett reinforces, rather than diminishes the notion that blacks have diseases. After eating Minny's pie, Hilly develops a blister on her lip, which is a consequence of Hilly ingesting Minny's disease. While there were many blacks who were engaged in resistance and pushed for change under Jim Crow, Minny's actions would likely be a death sentence. Domestic workers, and slaves before them, had opportunities to sabotage work or insert foreign objects or poison into food as a silent protest; however, they would not announce their actions to owners or employers. By having Minny announce her actions, Stockett removes the possibility for realistic agency

among domestic workers. What white readers can add to their palliative memory from Stockett's depiction of these events is that domestic workers were not in danger, even for the most egregious acts and were treated relatively well. This notion of minimized violence is incorrect.

In the past few years, many books and films related to historical events have been produced. Ann Hornaday, in *The Washington Post*, writes about the recent increase in fact checking when it comes to historically-based texts.[12] The primary example she offers is that of Ava DuVernay's *Selma* (2014). She points out that while movie-makers (or authors) have a responsibility to the history of a story, they must also address their artistic need to alter some of the text's details for the sake of time and entertainment. Hornaday further states that the real burden for understanding fact and fiction is on the audience:

> That means it's incumbent on audiences to engage in a mode of spectatorship that, rather than deciding who's right, can listen to and respect expert critiques, and still open themselves up to a piece of filmed entertainment that speaks to less literal, more universal truths. The correct question is not what *Selma* "gets wrong" about Johnson or King or the Civil Rights Movement, but whether viewers and thinkers are sophisticated enough to hold two ideas at once: that we are not watching history, but we are watching a work of art inspired and animated by history. ("Film Fact-Checking")

Unless audiences can experience media critically, there is a risk that altered history will become part of the audience's thinking. Stockett, as an author, can tell her story in the way she believes is best, even if it perpetuates a racist ideology within a historical context; however, it is up to the audience to understand the difference between fact and

fiction within a work. Hornaday calls for more audience responsibility in researching characters and plots presented in films; the same responsibility applies to written texts. Other critics, such as Wayne C. Booth, discuss the responsibilities of readers and writers. Booth uses the term "occupy" to call attention to the way readers can be "occupied by a foreign imaginary world" (139). He identifies the transaction that takes place between the readers and the author's thoughts, stating, "It is not, then, that in identifying we stop thinking our *own* thoughts but rather that 'our own' thoughts now become different from what they were. The author's thoughts have at least in part become ours" (140). Booth believes that both authors and readers have responsibilities. While the accuracy of what a book teaches can be disputed, "all works *do* teach or at least try to" (152). The risk lies in texts that do not contain a high level of verisimilitude; however, I contend that there is a greater risk in texts, such as *The Help*, that interweave history with fictional stories. *The Help* receives acclaim for its "attention to historical detail, dialect, and characterization [that] creates a beautiful portrait of a fragmenting world (Dollacker "Segregation Tale"). Reading novels with historical foundations can alter the way people understand that history by creating new narratives that define it. Brundage states, "No enduring social memory can be entirely static. Each time a tradition is articulated, it must be given a meaning appropriate to the historical context in which it is invoked" (9). Immersed in a narrative, readers begin to think as the author thinks, accepting as fact text that appears to have little or no historical merit or value. These "false facts" can become fixed memories.

Without a connection to an inscribed, fixed narrative, memories are not stable. Booth states, "As almost everyone by now seems to acknowledge, the 'same event' turns out not to be the same when the presumed facts are viewed under different metaphoric

structures" (363). Further, Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy note, "Remembering is a matter not of retrieval but of recombination and creation" (45). After reading *The Help*, white audiences can engage in palliative memory to recall the relative ease with which Skeeter's book is written, the lack of daily threats of danger to the domestic workers, and the comedy of humiliation experienced by characters like Hilly. Meanwhile, white readers can forget or ignore the potential violence that real domestic workers faced. As philosopher Ernest Renan states, "Yet the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common; and also that they have forgotten many things" (80). *The Help* provides a meeting place for the nation to forget much about racism. White readers also identify with Skeeter as one who seems to be "transformed" by her experiences as she listens to the maids and writers their stories (Donaldson 45). As readers identify with Skeeter, they are able to remember the past, in this case the time of the Civil Rights Movement, in a positive light and thus engage with palliative memory.

The Help does provide many talking points for the discourse about race. One needs only to perform a cursory search for numerous articles, blogs, and other discourse related to the book to unveil the involved social dialogue. Potential discussion was furthered by the premiere of the film adaptation. Yet, did this discourse actually take place? When white women read the book or watch the film together, the communication is only from a white perspective; the same is true with black criticism of *The Help*. If the literary and cultural criticism primarily occurs in black publications, how can discourse occur? The homogenized, one-sided communication is important to note because, as Brundage states, "Groups invariably fashion their own image of the world and their place in it by establishing an accepted version of the past" (4). The more that white audiences

discuss the text, the more they will potentially engage with palliative memory, and the more palliative memory will become the accepted version of the past. When discussing literature as a "medium" of cultural memory, Erll states, "Literature takes up existing patterns, shapes and transforms them, and feeds them back into memory culture" (148). *The Help* feeds the patterns of the mammy figure. This is a figure who perpetuates a romanticized and updated version of antebellum life and a mythology regarding the realities of domestic workers' lives that propagates stereotypes in current collective memory. As these patterns are repeated through online discussions, book clubs, articles, and other media, "the work itself is being re-performed and transformed by us as we hold our conversations about it" (Booth 74). As the public re-performs the text in this way, it also collectively reshapes the larger narrative of the South itself: "The South today is as much a fiction, a story we tell and are told, as it is a fixed geographic space below the Mason-Dixon line" (Durham, "Reconstructing Dixie"). Both writers and readers have a responsibility to the text and to the collective memory it helps create.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION: COMBATING RACISM WITH REALITY

Memory changes. That notion, perhaps, is the most conclusive information known about memory. Memory is fluid and prone to stretch facts, eliminate details, and make the hero more heroic and the villain worse. Sometimes the fluctuating details in a memory can wreak havoc with a person or society, or both. In 2003, NBC news television anchor Brian Williams was in a helicopter over Iraq. At the time, a helicopter behind him was hit with a rocket-propelled grenade. When Williams returned home, he began to tell the story, but the details changed. *The New York Times* reporter, Tara Parker Pope, writes, "But over time the story changed, to the point that Mr. Williams recounted that he was the one riding in the helicopter that came under fire" ("War Brian Williams"). Eventually, Williams was confronted about this information and apologized, but he lost his prestigious seat as the anchor of the evening news. For a time, however, the public believed Williams' story to be true. It is important to note that Williams' story is not the only famously falsely perpetuated tale. Parker-Pope identifies other examples of public figures, such as Hillary Clinton and Mitt Romney, also who publicly recounted incidents incorrectly.

While many denounced Williams as a liar, scientists came forward to explain how easy, and common, it is for memories to be altered through time. This pliability accounts for why "the U.S. National Research Council recommended that the criminal justice system exert tighter control over the use of eye witness testimony in court" (Ellis Nutt "The Science Behind"). An important element exemplified in Williams' story, and of the science surrounding it is that unless something is inscribed, the story will change. This

inscription itself may not be accurate, but it does fix the story in place. As Williams'

story was becoming fixed in the media, it was challenged, and revised. What many

individuals and societies have elected to do is to inscribe memory in various forms in

order to preserve it into what Pierre Nora refers to as "sites of memory" (Erll 13, 23).

When memories that can no longer be passed from generation to generation—because

those with the original memories are no longer alive—the memories are memorialized

into tangible objects such as books, films, and monuments, to name a few. Literature is

one way society uses to inscribe its "truth." Literature is often a "reified projection of an

'ideal' America, of the society they [novelists and readers] desire" (Baker 367). Four

books used by society to inscribe its truth are the foundation of this project.

The questions that triggered this dissertation are based on the desire to explore

what contributes to the popular reception of the four novels, each with racism, studied:

Gone With the Wind (1936)*, To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), *The Help* (2009), and *Go Set

a Watchman* (2015). These popular texts perpetuate myths that have invaded the cultural

memory about race in the South. I introduce the topic of palliative memory as a way to

explain why readers accept racist texts, and even "feel good" about the racism therein.

One of the main tenets of this argument has been that the texts utilized affect the cultural

memory of race. Donald G. Baker agrees: "Racial stereotypes (or racist images) are

maintained by numerous means, including literature. Novels, for example, have

perpetuated negative images of minority group Americans" (366). Baker acknowledges

that African Americans presented in literature not only reflect societal beliefs, but that

literature also "shapes" and "reinforces" those societal beliefs. As with the report in Ellis

Nutt's article ("The Science Behind"), people, and society, want to feel good about what they engage with and remember, and palliative memory allows them to do so.

Palliative memory is flexible. It often functions with or against another theory; in this dissertation those theories include nostalgia, reciprocity, and prosthetic memory. Palliative memory also functions with texts that are perceived to have strong historical elements—texts that may be considered historical fiction. Palliative memory allows one to insert oneself into the story by re-creating the past and declaring several different responses, including a declaration that they would never have behaved in a racist manner. The reader can shift those racist events into a positive, even non-racist memory. Readers may sympathize with the hegemonic character's position in a past culture, minimize the power of those in a hegemonic position, or determine, in a patronizing manner, that a text opens the opportunity for dialogue about race. Baker notes that the fear of a loss of white hegemony can be a reason that novelists "contributed to a racist environment in American society" (373). The novelists and readers can be from either the North or the South. Overall, palliative memory offers an explanation for the continued acceptance of these texts.

The texts in this project have found popularity with mainstream, primarily white, middlebrow female audiences; however, for various reasons, the texts have not been widely accepted or utilized in higher education or among those who prefer highbrow literature. One exception is *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which has been used primarily in middle school or high school, rather than post-secondary education. The teaching about *Mockingbird* typically revolves around Atticus Finch and the trial of Tom Robinson, while ignoring Finch's racism and other troubling topics such as incest, rape, lynching,

alcoholism, drug addiction, and domestic abuse. *Mockingbird* is viewed as too simplistic

for university curriculum, which is difficult to understand given the topics covered in the

novel. The complication of Atticus, by addressing his racism, also increases the

complications of the book. In the past two decades the text has been removed from some

schools, primarily due to the use of the "N" word. For the most part, *To Kill a*

Mockingbird has not been viewed as literature worthy of serious academic study outside

of the legal profession, which has lionized Atticus Finch as an ethical icon. *Gone With*

the Wind suffers from its classification as a romance novel. More importantly, however,

is its blatant racist treatment of the black characters in the novel. *The Help* may offer

enough racial balance—everyone is a caricature rather than only the black characters—

that it might be useful in the classroom as well. If nothing else, it could be a tool for the

analysis of the realities of the Jim Crow South.

I support the use of these four texts, or texts like them (middlebrow, popular

texts), as a way to engage university students with the racist stories that have affected

American collective memory. The use of these texts, particularly *Gone With the Wind*,[1]

would certainly require pre-class orientation or other screening or warning, to ensure

students are prepared for such difficult and disturbing language and portrayals of blacks.

Engagement with these texts in a structured environment, with representatives from both

the white and black communities, can help avoid homogenous racial discussions that do

not advance thinking or understanding about the topic or each other. In *Teaching to*

Transgress, bell hooks observes that as educators, we may want to teach for more

important concerns than simply knowledge; therefore, we should educate students to

discuss more complicated issues such as racism (Chapter 1). Though controversial,

perhaps it is worth the risk of engaging with such difficult texts in higher education. This is one way to have meaningful dialogue regarding race and to facilitate change in cultural memory. This dialogue is critical. While academics do not directly engage in teaching mainstream readers, working with university students is one way to affect future readers and their identity and politics.

Along with meaningful dialogue, one should question the responsibility of writers, readers, students, and teachers. What is the role of these groups in presenting, reading, learning, and teaching as it relates to literature? Wayne C. Booth addresses the importance of responsible reading and teaching. He states that there is a need for all involved with a text to have responsibilities toward it and toward others. Perhaps in the case of these four novels, the verisimilitude with which they were written, and the level of accuracy readers ascribe to them is one problematic area, and adds responsibility to the writers, readers, and teachers. I am not suggesting that texts be written to purposely misrepresent the past, or that fiction must represent the past perfectly, but do writers have a greater responsibility to clarify fact in fiction? One might think that being classified as fiction would be sufficient, but it seems not. Booth comments that there is a blurred line between real life and the stories we tell, but that the borderline is "necessarily vague," so fact and fiction will almost always intersect (15). The verisimilitude of a work matters, and all four of the works in the project are steeped in historical information. Readers have a responsibility to consider the text they read and be cautious about drawing conclusions about people or the past based on a work of fiction. I stand with Hornaday, who believes that readers must think about they text with which they are engaging—to know the line between history and a work based on an historical event. Academic teachers should seek

to bridge the gap between scholarly readings of such literature and the way the general public receives these narratives. Academia can help students engage with texts in a way that promotes not just critical thinking, but practical thinking as well. Since such a wide audience embraces books like these, do general readers have a responsibility to the text or to the interpretation of the text? The idyllic answer is yes, but the reality is no. Ideally, readers would engage with texts in such a way that the details are questioned, or at least not taken for granted as truth. Realistically, however, most read for the enjoyment factor, though they still want quality writing, as evidenced earlier in this dissertation by selections in the Book of the Month Club. As noted earlier, however, dialogue about such difficult topics like race with university students in a way that does not shut down engagement with texts, benefits those students as future adult members of society.

There are other ways to help bridge the gap between academia and the general public. One example is having students "take it to the streets." In this scenario, even students in composition classes, rather than English-major only literature classes, can engage in such dialogue. Movie screenings with experienced moderators can draw those interested in the film adaption, much like Glanton supported. Students can engage in "public intellectualism" and develop pamphlets that target specific groups, such as book clubs. One of the goals is to avoid discouragement of reader engagement; we should not be anxious about these texts; we should, however, seek to participate in constructive dialogue about them, avoiding the traps of symmetrical reciprocity.

While palliative memory can allow readers to feel better about engaging in racist texts, the academic study of such texts can disrupt palliative memory. Black readers have little reason to engage in palliative memory with racist texts. However, as Dahleen

Glanton points out when criticizing a Memphis theater for canceling its summer showing of *Gone With the Wind*, there is value in the conversation between whites and blacks. She believes that, though difficult, "The courageous move would have been to tackle the issue head-on," rather than canceling the showing. Viewing the film would have made community discussion regarding race possible. Perhaps tackling such complex texts could be useful and both sides of the issue could be heard. Yet, where is the line for studying racist texts? Is there a limit to the type of text studied in academic settings? Should Dixon's *The Clansman*, for example, be studied? That answer falls to the responsibility of those who teach. For myself, I see no redeeming qualities in that text, as compared to the books in this project; others may disagree. There is no strong and determined heroine, like Scarlett; there is no Scout or Jem; and there is no Aibileen who, though is at times a two-dimensional character, tells the truth about many of the experiences of black domestic workers of the 1960s. It is difficult to conceive of *The Clansman* carrying any redemptive qualities other than for the study of historical context. Of course one must be mindful of the audience and the context when selecting texts.

The concept of palliative memory opens the door for much additional study. It would be interesting to apply the theory to other texts and their influence on American cultural memory. Palliative memory could also be applied internally to texts and consider how characters engage in and/or disrupt palliative memory, thus offering a new way to read and interpret texts. There is certainly room for more development of the palliative memory theory. Memory studies remains a field worth mining, and palliative memory is a useful tool.

Notes

Chapter I

1. It is important to note that, while the films may be a minor part of this discussion, consideration of film adaptations of the original novels are not this project's central focus. Three of these novels (*Gone With the Wind*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Help*) were adapted into feature films shortly after their publication. There is, of course, a relationship between the book and the film. Books create meaning and readers often want to visualize the story. While there may be challenges to separating the long-term responses between the book and the film, the original response was to the book, which prompted the adaptation to the film. It would be interesting to further study the impact of the films on collective memory and their relationship to the written texts.

2. The term "cultural" memory is often interchanged in the literature with the term, "collective" memory. Unless noted in a quotation, I will use the term "collective." Both of these terms differ from "collected" memory, which is, Jeffrey Olick's term for is the "socially and culturally formed individual memory" (qtd. in Erll 97-98).

3. Though this project speaks directly to the issue of race, both prosthetic and palliative memory can be considered in other discourse, such as about gender and culture.

4. While this project refers to written texts and readers, palliative memory could also be included in discourse about other material narratives, such as film.

5. Because the term "historical fiction" or "historical narrative" is fraught with confusing definitions, I refer to texts in this project as narratives that contain historical elements or events.

6. "Historically accurate" is problematic terminology because history is incomplete and varies widely depending upon the recorder. However, in the context of this project, "history" is used in the context of a mainstream understanding of the term.

7. While this project is primarily about texts and not films, it is important to recognize that films, both of the specific texts in this project and other films that mix fiction and fact, substantially impact the collective memory in American society by reinforcing the written and "common knowledge" of the narrative. Films provide parallel examples.

Chapter II

1. An upper case "W" is the accepted capitalization for the book's title.

2. Middlebrow readers are those who prefer texts that are typically popular and reflect a particular culture. Janice A. Radway places middlebrow work between mass-market novels and high literary works (219). These texts are typically defined as lowbrow and highbrow. Radway states, "Middlebrow culture, apparently, defined itself, first, against academic ways of seeing" (9). Academics and literati often see middlebrow texts as inferior to those high literary or academic works. Middlebrow is difficult to define because the definition is typically based on what it is not, rather than what it is.

3. Parentheses not mine.

4. In reality whites remained in a position of power during this time; however, there was a perceived reduction in agency because of blacks asserting their rights and because of disruptive economic and social issues.

5. Italics mine.

6. While the subject of this chapter is the novel, rather than the film, the film cannot be ignored; its popularity, particularly in the casting and making of the film, adds evidence to the novel's impact on society.

Chapter III

1. Jean Louise Finch is Scout's given name. In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she uses the nickname, Scout. In *Go Set a Watchman*, in which Scout is now grown, she uses her given name, Jean Louise.

2. There are those who believe Carter actually saw the manuscript years earlier when Lee's sister Alice was still alive and in charge of Lee's business dealings. Carter only brought the manuscript forward after Alice's death, when Carter was now responsible for Lee's estate.

Chapter IV

1. Similar to other texts discussed in this project, the book was adapted into a successful film, which reinforces the characters, plot, themes, and historical information for audiences as it extends the audience beyond its readership. Though this chapter does not focus on the movie, its existence must be acknowledged.

2. Matthew W. Hughey states, "The White Savior is a decidedly upright White character that enters a Black, Latino, Asian, or Native context in which the non-Whites struggle through the social order. By film's [or text's] end, and through the sacrifices of the White Savior, the non-White "others" are transformed and redeemed...Rather than promote strong Black characters previously invisible or marginal in film [or text], or cooperative inter-racial relationships across the color-line, these characters are intimately crocheted with essentialist understandings of

race: from visions of exotic Black mysticism and contented servitude alongside tales of White paternalism and Messianic morality" (752).

3. This physical description of mammy as large or overweight did not begin until the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 (Wallace-Sanders 7).

4. This same desperation may be the underlying reason for much of the "loyalty" demonstrated by black servants. Neither group had economic agency.

5. "Negroes" is the term used in the report.

6. Four quarters would be one year of contributions over a lifetime of work.

7. Note that this was the same practice utilized by Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When Atticus traveled out of town, Calpurnia slept on a cot in the kitchen rather than the guest room.

8. Minny's employer, Celia Foote, does not actually fit into either of these categories. She is somewhat of an outlier because she is not black, helpful, or racist. Her primary role in the story is that of the helpless employer, which permits Minny to engage in maternally caring for a grown woman.

9. Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

10. The meaning of "forced" is unclear in this context. It seems to relate to white men trying to touch the woman, but term also connotes rape.

11. From literary, psychological, racial, and other perspectives, there is much to discuss regarding Minny's action. However, the focus of this chapter is not to analyze the act itself, but to look at the act in terms of what it would mean to the safety of Minny

and the other maids. For additional reading, note Christopher Lloyd's and Stephanie

Rountree's work listed in the works cited section.

12. While Hornaday refers to films in this article, this concept applies to written texts as

well.

Chapter V

1. I must add, however, that I am white. I cannot begin to understand the effect that

these texts would have on black students, particularly a text like *Gone With the*

Wind. However, there may be those black students who are interested in engaging in

the story for the purpose of dialogue with white students. I do not wish to make

assumptions in either direction as it relates to responses of black students to racist

texts.

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