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The Ways of White Women: Literary and Pedagogical Responses to Blackness

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THE WAYS OF WHITE WOMEN:

LITERARY AND PEDAGOGICAL RESPONSES TO BLACKNESS

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As a text within the genre of the literature of white exposure, Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks* provides valuable insights into the consciousness and racial performances of its white characters. This dissertation specifically analyzes the collection's white female characters and their responses to blackness, noting a variety of responses, but recognizing a singular effect: the reproduction of systems of white male dominance, even at risk to self, and almost always at risk to others. These responses can be categorized into three behaviors that ultimately reinforce white patriarchy: 1) Performances of Purity, 2) The Pursuit of Ownership and Control, and 3) The Maintenance of Ignorance and Blindness. However, Hughes' characters at times act against these norms, creating possibilities for alternative white "ways." Of all the white characters in his collection, only the white female characters embody such possibilities.

My investigation is especially important for white women in educational settings, as these settings consistently reproduce the cultural discourse of white supremacy, and are overwhelming staffed by white women. I therefore respond to my literary analysis by investigating corresponding behaviors within the pedagogies of white women, including performances of purity within the classroom, ownership and control within the scholarship of African American literature, and ignorance and blindness within the racial consciousness of white female teachers. Following the qualitative research practices of autoethnography, I frame these theoretical inquiries with my own experiences. I also

offer pedagogical methods of resistance to these responses, including the development of what I term an 'associative consciousness' and a pedagogy of white exposure that builds on the insights of the genre. Such work contains the potential to create and establish new "ways" for white women teachers.

This dissertation contributes to scholarly research by conducting a thorough analysis of *The Ways of White Folks*, a text that has been sorely overlooked by literary scholars; in addition, this study brings together this literary text with Critical Whiteness Studies, performance theory, and critical pedagogy in order to argue for pedagogical practices that are cognizant of, and resistant to, systems of dominance and the performances they prescribe.

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> "Curiously, most white women look[ing] at 'difference' and 'diversity' do not make white women's lives, works, and experiences the subject of their analysis of 'race' . . . White women who have yet to get a critical handle on the meaning of 'whiteness' in their lives, the representation of whiteness in their literature, or the white supremacy that shapes their social status are now explicating blackness without critically questioning whether their work emerges from an aware antiracist standpoint" (hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* 103-4).

I am a white female teacher who has come to understand my positionality through the insights of African Americans who theorize about the white condition, and I acknowledge, regretfully, that my understanding has been dependent upon the experiences of those who are oppressed by whiteness. In 2007, I attended a session on whiteness at a conference on race and ethnicity, and I listened intently as an African American woman recounted her experiences as a child of a black domestic laborer for a white family. She turned to the mostly white audience, and pleaded, through strained tears, "How many times do I have to bleed for you people? How many times do I have to tell you my pain to get you to understand?" The room was silent. In that moment, it occurred to me that her suffering, her story, was "a tale twice told,"[1] but a narrative too often unacknowledged by those of us who are racially constructed and perform ourselves, knowingly or unknowingly, as white. With the availability of an extensive tradition of African American writing about whiteness, the audience did not need to depend upon her retelling and reliving her pain in order to understand the operations of whiteness. In this dissertation, I argue that white people have a critical need--and responsibility--to read the

[1] In *The Souls of Black Folks,* W.E.B. DuBois uses this language to describe his chapter "On the Coming of John," which recounts the struggles of an African American working towards personal and social progress.

texts of African American authors in order to understand the ways in which performances of whiteness enable and support systems of domination. Specifically for this project, I read *The Ways of White Folks* by Langston Hughes in order to understand the ways in which white women participate in these systems; in addition, I extend his insights into classroom spaces to interrogate how white women teachers contribute to the reproduction of hegemonic subjects and structures. Within the course of this study, I attempt to write a self-consciously white, female analysis of a literary text, of myself as text, and of my teaching experiences as text. I am grateful for Renee R. Curry's work, *White Women Writing White: H.D., Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath, and Whiteness*, in which she identifies characteristics of white women's writing, or "a poetics of presumption." I attempt to write this study with an awareness of these poetics, especially the tendency towards power evasion, as identified by Ruth Frankenberg in *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Race*. I write with consciousness of my standpoint[2] as an act of resistance to the normalization of white patriarchal power structures.

There are dangers to this approach. bell hooks writes that "many scholars . . . preface their work by stating that they are white, as though mere acknowledgement of this fact were sufficient, as though it conveyed all we need to know of standpoint, motivation, direction" (*Yearning* 54). Ann duCille examines a pattern of "I-once-was-blind-but-now-I-see" narratives in the works of white scholars of African American literature, noting that within these narratives, white scholars often write of transformative experiences with the Other wherein "the privileged white person inherits a wisdom, an agelessness, perhaps even a racelessness that entitles him or her to the raw material of

[2] This terminology comes from Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought.* Her "standpoint theory" argues that a subject's position frames the way in which she understands and interprets society.

another's life and culture but, of course, not to the Other's condition" (41). In her study, she begins "to delineate the difference between critical analysis that honors [African American studies] and guilty conscience rhetoric that demeans it" (45). To mitigate these dangers, duCille calls for "complementary theorizing" (51) between white scholars and scholars of color, and hooks calls for "persistent, rigorous, and informed critique[s] of whiteness" (*Yearning* 54). I have positioned this study to accomplish both of these tasks; this dissertation is a comprehensive, sustained inquiry that partners with Langston Hughes in complementary theorizing about the ways of white women.

Another danger to this project is the potential reification of whiteness. In a seminal text of Critical Whiteness Studies, *White*, Richard Dyer writes, "My blood runs cold at the thought that talking about whiteness could lead to the development of something called 'White Studies'" (10). Yet today, Critical Whiteness Studies has become a scholarly enterprise with new publications emerging regularly. This study contributes to that industry, though I hope that it contributes to the deconstruction of white patriarchal structures (even as it participates in them), rather than playing a supportive role. My strategy is to deconstruct and de-center whiteness by disabling its invisibility, its assumptions of normalcy, and its presumptions of authority. I also intend to emphasize Hughes' role in this study and acknowledge the African American traditions that make this interrogation of white female identity possible.

The Literature of White Exposure

In 1995, Robert Fikes, Jr., a librarian at San Diego State University, published an article in which he began to define and categorize the "white life" novel. His article identified novels published between 1946 and 1994 that were written by African American authors and featured primarily white characters and episodes of 'white life.' The following year, he published a second article identifying white life novels from 1890-1945. Within these two articles, Fikes uncoveres a tradition in which African American authors primarily concern themselves with the portrayal of whiteness. This tradition of white life literature (black authors writing primarily about white main characters) includes well-known authors such as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes and Richard Wright. Fikes' articles were an important step in discovering African American writing about whiteness; however, his articles were only concerned with novels, and there exists an even larger tradition of other works--including creative non-fiction, autobiographical narratives, drama, sermons, journalism, poetry and short stories --that also concern themselves with the analysis of whiteness. This tradition dates as far back as 1860 and includes authors such as W.E.B. DuBois, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison. In 1998, David Roediger published a collection of these works in *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to be White,* but he did not provide definitive terminology for this genre. In "Lillian B. Horace and the Literature of White Estrangement," Veronica Watson uses the terms "literature of white estrangement" and "literature of white exposure"[3] to identify works by African American authors that contain analyses of whiteness, regardless of the type of text. Watson writes that these

[3] Her term "literature of white exposure" is especially appealing because the literature often acts as an exposé--that is, it attempts to bring unflattering, discreditable, and even criminal behavior to notice of the public. It is this term that I will use throughout my study.

texts "deconstruct the mythology of whiteness by revealing it as a constructed racial identity and by challenging it as a progressive and civilizing social structure" (6). Watson's terminology serves two important purposes. First, it begins to establish these works as a genre within African American literature. And, second, it not only testifies to the attempts of these authors to make whiteness 'strange' to a white audience, but also to 'expose' the consciousness and behaviors of white people that have been assumed (by the white people themselves) to be both normal and universal. Thus, the literature of white exposure provides white people with the opportunity to examine their own consciousness and behaviors from the perspective of alterity.[4]

In the introduction to Roediger's collection, he writes that "few Americans have ever considered the idea that African Americans are extremely knowledgeable about whites and whiteness" (4). He later states that "from folktales onward African Americans have been among the nation's keenest students of white consciousness and white behavior" (4). The literature of white exposure provides valuable insights into the consciousness and racial performances of white characters and people, but they have been long overlooked as serious analyses of whiteness. In "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian examines the disregard for theoretical analysis by African Americans, and asserts that "people of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing . . .

[4] In *Beyond the Big House: African American Educators on Teacher Education*, Gloria Ladson-Billings discusses an analytic tool referred to as "alterity," originally developed by Sylvia Wynter: ". . . those constructed as 'the other' have a perspective advantage. This advantage does not speak to the economic, social, and political disadvantage that subordinated groups may experience but rather to the way that not being positioned in the center allows for a "wide angle" vision . . . This advantage is not due to an inherent racial/cultural difference but is the result of the dialectical nature of the constructed otherness that prescribes the liminal status of people of color as beyond the normative boundary of Self/Other" (23).

is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language" (2257). The literature of white exposure--within its narratives, riddles, proverbs, and play with language--provides a serious and legitimate theoretical inquiry into white consciousness and behaviors that has largely been ignored and undervalued. Currently, only two anthologies bring together these works, Roediger's collection and Gene Andrew Jarrett's *African American Literature Beyond Race: An Alternative Reader*, and most anthologies of American literature and African American literature contain few, if any, of these texts.

Critical Whiteness Studies and New Directions for Development

Unfortunately, the literature of white exposure has also remained on the periphery of race studies, even in the burgeoning field of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS). This field is often recognized for providing original insights into white consciousness and behavior, but clearly African American writers have been making these observations for over 150 years, leading one to ask if CWS has not taken "everything but the burden" (Tate).[5] Today, hundreds of articles, chapters and books have been published as part of CWS. Much of this work began in legal studies and includes "Whiteness as Property" (1993) by Cheryl Harris and *White by Law* (1995) by Ian F. Haney Lopez. Other important studies are socio-historical and stress the social construction of whiteness. In *The Invention of the White Race* (1994), Theodore Allen sees whiteness as an invention

[5] In his book *Everything But the Burden*, Greg Tate argues not only that African Americans were America's original commodity fetish, but also that black culture continues to be imitated, adapted, co-opted, and purchased by white Americans who have not had to endure the social and historical conditions that have influenced the culture.

for "social control"; in *White* (1997), Richard Dyer examines the ways in which whiteness has historically been characterized as unnamed, unraced, and normal; in *How the Irish Became White* (1995), Noel Ignatiev studies the changing definition of "white"; in *Wages of Whiteness,* Roediger (1991) writes about whiteness, economics and labor movements; and in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (2006), George Lipsitz exposes political, cultural, and economic structures of white supremacy. CWS also contains important works by Peggy McIntosh, Frances Kendall and Tim Wise that expose white privilege, and works by Roediger and Ignatiev that discuss the abolition of whiteness. But despite all of this work, the field of CWS has been slow to recognize the contributions of the literature of white exposure, with the early exceptions of Toni Morrison's *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992) and Valerie Babb's *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (1998). A more recent contribution is Matthew Wilson's *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chestnutt* (2004).

This lack of interdisciplinary merging between CWS and the literature of white exposure is both remarkable and strange, as the literature of white exposure reveals the ways in which race has been historically and socially constructed, and offers the very insights that CWS seeks. Nevertheless, little has been done to desegregate these projects. This study differs from the majority of Critical White Studies by integrating the insights of white life literature with the theories of CWS. I begin my study with a short story collection from the literature of white exposure, Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks,* a text that has been sorely overlooked by literary scholars. By examining Hughes' white female characters, I excavate performances of identity and theorize white female

subjectivity, topics that are currently underexplored in CWS. I have chosen this focus for two reasons. First, *The Ways of White Folks* itself foregrounds white female characters, something which is uncommon in other works of white exposure which focus primarily on white male characters. Charles Chestnutt, James Baldwin and Richard Wright all wrote white life novels containing white male protagonists, and Lorraine Hansberry's white life play, *The Sign in Sidney Brunstein's Window*, also contains a male protagonist. Chestnutt asked in his essay "What is a White Man?", while Baldwin wrote of "The White Man's Guilt." Correspondingly, most of the criticism on white life literature, sparse as it is, focuses on the white male. There are currently no publications that primarily focus on analyzing white female characters in the literature of white exposure.[6] Similarly, CWS also often focuses on the white male, perhaps as recognition of the locus of power and control within American society. The histories of white labor movements are largely male histories, and the study of white cultural artifacts is largely a study of male-authored maps, advertisements, and other visual images. There exist only a few exceptions: Ruth Frankenberg's *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, a sociological study of the ways in which white women understand race, and Vron Ware's *Beyond the Pale, White Women, Racism and History*, a historical analysis of American and British ideas about white womanhood. More recently, Marilyn Frye's "White Woman Feminist" differentiates whites from "whiteliness," a particular way of behaving, and Linda Martin Alcoff's "What Should White People Do?" contains a few

[6] Two publications examine white women in the broader genre of African American/Ethnic literature (Anna Maria Chupa's Lacanian analysis, *Anne, The White Woman in Contemporary African American Fiction* and Samina Najmi and Raijini Srikanth's edited collection, *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature*), but they include only brief references to two texts of the literature of white exposure. Another collection, *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism,* edited by Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helene Moglen, analyzes black and white female subjects also taking a psychoanalytical approach.

paragraphs tracing how white women have come to understand whiteness, largely through feminist studies.

Second, I have also chosen to focus on white women characters because my work as a white female teacher of African American literature in classrooms with a diverse student body can be radically informed by such examination. By analyzing the actions of the white female characters of Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks*, I will posit a framework for understanding white female responses to blackness, and analyze how these responses manifest themselves in the performances and ideological enactments of white women. Thus, I bring together the literature of white exposure and CWS in order to argue for pedagogical practices that are cognizant of systems of dominance and the performances they prescribe.

Bringing the literature of white exposure into dialogue with CWS and feminist perspectives provides a framework for interrogating white female identity, an interrogation which can expose how white women participate in patriarchal, caucacentric dominance. W.E.B. DuBois once stated that "the Negro race has suffered more from the antipathy and narrowness of women both South and North than from any other single source" (*The Correspondence of W.E.B. DuBois* 127). This potential to inflict suffering becomes even more unsettling as I examine the extensive role of white women in our educational systems, systems that typically reproduce white domination and supremacy.

Constructions of Identity and Performance Theories

Most scholarly circles now acknowledge that race is not biologically determined, but rather a social construction that is maintained through individual and collective performativity. While critical race theorists interrogate the ways in which race has been historically and socially constructed, performance theorists investigate the ways in which these constructions are scripted and performed under the force of hegemony. The theory of performativity is rooted in the speech act theory of J.L. Austin who brings attention to "performative utterances," words that actually make things happen (6). He notes that these utterances take a form of action, and thus contain a performative function, bringing thoughts and ideas into a condition of being. Dwight Conquergood studies what he calls "performance poetics," or "the fabricated, invented, imagined, constructed nature of human realities"; he suggests that we deconstruct our 'realities' (which include race and gender) in the same manner that we might deconstruct a work of fiction, including the analysis of settings, symbols and the structures of our lives (qtd. in Pineau 23). Erving Goffman adds the concept of "fronts" and "personal fronts" in the creation of identity, which include, respectively, arrangements of ourselves (clothing, facial expressions) and of our surroundings (living spaces, neighborhoods, schooling situations). All of these theorists inform this study and offer strategies for interrogating performances of race and gender, including the examination of linguistics and contextual determinants in our various 'realities.' However, perhaps most critical for this study is Judith Butler's discussion of performativity in relation to identity construction; for her, a series of "repetitive stylized acts" determine gender, and her analysis can be extended to the concept of race. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes, "Gender ought not to be construed as a

stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (179). For her, gender construction is a "sanctioned act of essence fabrication," a creation that has no ontological referent and is regulated through punitive measures. In her theory, gender is a "social temporality" determined by dominant, regulatory discourses.

However, while race and gender might be understood as social constructions within much of academia, this idea is not as widely circulated in the rest of American culture; instead, visible signs such as perception of skin tone are usually used to determine racial categories. This is one of Linda Alcoff's points of concern in *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self*, in which she amends Butler's theory by emphasizing not only the materiality of the body, but also its visibility to others. She writes that

> . . .the social identities of race and gender operate ineluctably through their bodily markers; they do not transcend their physical manifestation because they *are* their physical manifestation . . . [Both race and gender] are most definitely physical, marked on and through the body, lived as a material experience, visible as surface phenomena, and determinant of economic and political status. Social identities cannot be adequately analyzed without an attentiveness to the role of the body and of the body's visible identity. (102)

Alcoff addresses Butler's concept of an empty referent not by denying it, but by emphasizing ocularist cultures: "In our excessively materialist society, only what is

visible can generally achieve the status of accepted truth" (6). She reminds readers that race and gender visibility are "key to the ideological claims that race and gender categories are natural" and as such, must be addressed in order to appropriately deconstruct their power (103). Laurie Fuller In "Where's My Body and What's On It?", and John T. Warren, in "Performing Whiteness Differently," also transfer the theory of gender performativity to racial performativity. Fuller examines the potential to "drag" race, but more pertinent to this study is Warren's interest in historical sedimentation which is an acknowledgement that "a subject is not accidental but rather a product of historical choices and discursive norms" (454). He understands whiteness as a "product of time," not "something that began at . . . birth" (454). His discussion centers on the amount of agency available to a body historically read by others and reproduced as 'white,' and therefore complements Alcoff's major concern.

In this study, I approach both race and gender[7] as socially-constructed identities, enacted through and over time. It is evident in *Ways* that race and gender act as Butler's "regulatory fiction" as the white female characters organize their lives, and the lives of others, around their understanding of race and gender. But in Hughes' collection, both race and gender are also visible identities, performed by the bodies on which they are materially inscribed, and also perceived by others. The visible identities of Hughes' white female characters often determine the actions of others, including the white men who act to interrupt their interactions with racialized others. However, these female characters also provide and enact moments of potential disruption to these regulatory fictions,

[7] Although I understand that the words "black" and "white," and "male" and "female" are fabricated categories, I use these terms throughout this study to refer to the ways in which people have been racially-categorized. I use this language as a way of recognizing the power of these social constructions and their regulatory nature, not as an endorsement of this continued categorization.

revealing the complexities and degrees of agency within white womanhood. In these stories, white women are perceived as white women, but they also perform as white women; they inhabit an identity that has historically oppressed and endangered others. But it is also an identity that positions them to understand both domination and oppression.

The Ways of White Folks

As stated earlier, Langston Hughes' first short story collection, *The Ways of White Folks,* published in 1934, provides the framework for this study. Half of my study is a literary analysis of the white women characters in eight of the fourteen short stories, while the other half is dedicated to applying Hughes' observations about the performances of white femininity to my classroom experiences as a white female teacher. Hughes began writing these short stories in 1933 during an extended stay in Russia, and immediately after reading D.H. Lawrence's short story collection *The Lovely Lady.* As recounted in his autobiography *I Wonder as I Wander*, Lawrence's stories had a dramatic effect upon him, so much so that when Hughes sat down at his typewriter to write an article for a newspaper, he instead wrote his first short story since high school, "Cora Unashamed," which became the first story in the collection. By this time in his career, Hughes was an accomplished poet and no longer relied upon his patron, Charlotte Mason, for support. The end of their relationship, though initially incredibly hurtful to Hughes, allowed him to experience a new sense of freedom; he was writing what he wanted, when he wanted, something quite different than what he experienced with Mason. Hughes

finished the collection in December of 1933 while living in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California.

Perhaps Hughes' feelings of freedom contributed to his decision to challenge the publishing industry and the reading public with stories that openly named and studied the "ways of white folks." During an era of legal segregation and continued oppression and white violence against black Americans, some of the stories were, in the words of *Esquire* magazine, "the kind of story no commercial magazine would touch with a ten foot pole" (qtd. in Rampersad 282). If Hughes had acquired a new degree of boldness (perhaps due to his growing success and independence, or even his increased political radicalism), he nevertheless tempered it with his sensitivity, sincerity, and desire to bring a new understanding of whiteness to a white audience. When scholar James Emanuel asked Hughes to clarify his thoughts on white Americans, Hughes explained,

> I feel as sorry for them as I do for the Negroes usually involved in hurtful . . . situations. Through at least one (maybe *only* one) white character in each story, I try to indicate that 'they are human, too.' . . . What I try to indicate is that circumstances and conditioning make it very hard for whites, in interracial relationships, to his 'own self be true.' (qtd. in Emanuel 150)

There are several indicators that Hughes was attempting to reveal these "circumstances" and this "conditioning" to a white audience. First, he dedicates the book to Noël Sullivan, a white friend, and second, he also uses a passage from his story "Berry" as an epigraph which mitigates any assertions of a homogeneous white condition: "*the ways of white folks, I mean* some *white folks* . . .". The dedication assures white readers of Hughes'

benevolent spirit, while the epigraph cleverly allows for the exceptionalism that might alleviate the discomfort of becoming an object of examination. In addition, the narrator in the first story, "Cora Unashamed," seems to speak specifically to a white reader unfamiliar with the workings of severe economic oppression, to a reader more accustomed to the position of oppressor rather than oppressed. When the narrator states that Cora, a black domestic laborer, was in "the trap of economic circumstances that kept her in [the white family's] power practically all her life," he follows with the question, "You want to know how that could be? How a trap could close so tightly?" (4). This passage appears on only the second page of the collection and assumes a reader unfamiliar with this type of social and economic entrapment. Moreover, Hughes' agent, Maxim Lieber, was sending his transcripts to magazines with largely white, if also literary and left-leaning, audiences, such as *Scribner's, Esquire,* and *Atlantic Monthly*.

After the collection's initial publication, *Ways* was reviewed by over ninety critics. Most of these reviews were positive and commended his style as "natural, humorous, restrained and yet powerful" (Emanuel 148). However, the book was not a commercial success. Perhaps a review from the author Sherwood Anderson entitled "Paying for Old Sins," helps explain the lack of sales. In his review, Sherwood asserts that Hughes must bear a "deep resentment," and writes that the whites in his stories are all "caricatures" of "silly pretense, fakiness" (*Southern Odyssey* 197). He closes with a direct statement to the author: "Mr. Hughes, my hat is off to you in relation to your own race, but not to mine" (*Southern Odyssey* 197). Anderson's comments perhaps reveal an unspoken and underlying assumption--that black writers do not have the intellectual acumen, sensitivity, or perhaps even the right, to investigate and theorize whiteness. The

review indicates that Hughes did, in fact, reach his intended audience, but that they may have been unprepared for his perspective. If this is true, such a lack of readiness may not only have influenced the book's sales in 1930s, but also its exclusion from serious literary study. Even today, there exist only a handful of critical essays and chapters devoted to the short stories in *Ways*, and there has yet to be a book-length study devoted solely to this collection. I found only thirteen articles specifically dedicated to the short stories, each tackling different aspects of the stories--moon imagery, narrative structure, modernism, the role of music, etc.--indicating that there is an absence of scholarly discussion surrounding the stories. The most comprehensive discussions of *Ways* occur as chapters in James Emanuel's *Langston Hughes* (1967), and Hans Ostrom's *Langston Hughes: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1993). This absence of scholarly analysis is both misleading and unfortunate because it implies a lack of substance, and because it keeps the text hidden from students and well out of the literary canon. This study attempts to show the richness of the text by analyzing its literary craft, by revealing its connections to its socio-historical context and Hughes' life narrative (including the Harlem Renaissance and its white patronage, as well as depression-era race relations and politics), as well as by unveiling its insights about the constructions and performances of race and gender. As an incredibly complex text with an engaging tone and voice, ranging from satire and humor to lamentation and sadness, *Ways* is a text in need of readers.

My own reading of the collection analyzes the responses of the white female characters in *Ways* to the black men and women that they encounter. These characters' responses to blackness sometimes vary, but they consistently have a singular effect: the reproduction of systems of white male dominance and supremacy, even at risk to self,

and almost always at risk to others. Several of the stories examine the ways in which white women perform the hegemonic ideal of purity, the ways they use this ideal for their own selfish gain, and the ways the white female sublimates her own desire to preserve this internalized ideal. Other stories highlight the abuse of power within relationships between white women and African Americans, and also comment upon the commodification and fetishization of blackness. Still other stories exhibit white ignorance and blindness, and demonstrate how white guilt can manifest itself in the performance of destructive acts of sympathy. This dissertation argues that these responses can be categorized into three different methods of performing white female identity: 1) Performances of Purity, 2) The Pursuit of Ownership and Control, and 3) The Maintenance of Ignorance and Blindness. Even though the white female characters occupy an interstitial position that could facilitate the understanding of both dominance and oppression, they rarely take advantage of this liminal space. Instead, most of these women align themselves with whiteness in order to gain the advantage of the privileged status, choosing to support oppressive praxes, even at risk to themselves, their loved ones, and Others. In the few exceptions to this practice, the white female characters' lack of understanding of their own and others' subjectivity also leads to tragic consequences.

Whiteness and the Field of Education

Hughes' stories reveal the ways in which white women participate in systems of privilege, and how the social constructions and performances of white femininity harm both genders and races. This investigation is especially important for white women in

educational settings, as these settings consistently reproduce the cultural discourse of white supremacy[8] and are overwhelming staffed by white women. Thus, within each section of this study, I demonstrate that these responses manifest themselves in the scholarly pursuits and pedagogical practices of white women, but I also offer metacognitive methods of resistance to these responses. The field of Education Studies, specifically multicultural education and critical pedagogy, provides the foundation for the development of these practices. The texts within the field that address whiteness demonstrate a steady progression from the initial naming of whiteness to the exploration of the operations of whiteness in educational systems. *I Have a Kind of Fear: Confessions from the Writings of White Teachers and Black Students in City Schools*[9] (1969) and Vivian Paley's *White Teacher* (1979) are significant because they name whiteness as a racial category and standpoint. Gary Howard's *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools* (1999) is more theoretical, providing a framework for understanding the role of whiteness in teacher-student interactions, and Julie Landsman's *A White Teacher Talks about Race* (2001) extends this work into the 21st century. More recent contributions include five edited collections: Landsman and Chance W. Lewis' *White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms*, which focuses on inclusiveness and eliminating racism; Paul R. Carr and Darren E. Lund's *The Great White North? Exploring Whiteness, Privilege and Identity in Education*, which examines whiteness in a

[8] In *Other People's Children,* Lisa Delpit excavates the white "culture of power" of the American educational system and argues that this system not only prevents the complete integration of students of color, but also consistently works to reproduce itself. The works of Peter McLaren and John T. Warren also study the ways in which educational systems reproduce white supremacy.

[9] The collection of vignettes from both teachers and students could have been a ground-breaking study, but based on how seldom it has been cited in subsequent works, it seems to have had little enduring impact, perhaps because it named whiteness so openly, and also because it gave children of color equal representation in the book.

Canadian setting; Nelson Rodriguez and Leila Villaverde's *Dismantling White Privilege: Pedagogy, Politics, and Whiteness,* which focuses on reconstructing a positive white identity; Virginia Lea and Judy Helfand's *Identifying Race and Transforming Whiteness in the Classroom*, which advocates a "vigilant praxes" of examining one's own identity and assumptions; and Leda M. Cooks and Jennifer S. Simpson's *Whiteness, Pedagogy, Performance*, which studies whiteness in "the context of communication teaching and scholarship" (2). All of these collections provide important explorations of white teacher identity in the classroom, but with the exception of three essays, "White Women's Work" by Stephen D. Hancock (in Landsman and Lewis), "Where's my Body and What's On it?" by Laurie Fuller, and "White Women Teaching in the North: Problematic Identity on the Shores of the Hudson Bay" by Helen Harper (both in Rodriquez and Villaverde), they do not specifically address white female identity in the classroom, though many have been written by or about white women.

The field of critical pedagogy also provides a foundation for this study. The development of critical pedagogy can be traced to members of the Frankfurt school, including neo-Marxists Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, and contemporary practitioners like Henry Giroux and Paolo Freire. One of the goals of critical pedagogy is to help students become more aware of the ways in which 'the culture industry' informs their lives and contributes to their identity construction. This field has focused not only on student identity, but also on teacher identity. In *Practice Makes Perfect: A Critical Story of Learning to Teach,* Deborah Britzman sees teachers as "being shaped by their work as well as shaping their work" (1), and s.j. Miller, in "Foregrounding Pre-service Teacher Identity in Teacher Education," examines identity formation at the macro-level

"during the space-time that the identity is being co-constructed" (164). Since critical pedagogy is concerned with disrupting master scripts, it also merges quite well with performance theory and CWS, as we see in Giroux's "Critical Pedagogy as Performative Practice: Memories of Whiteness," an autoethnographic exploration of whiteness; Peter McLaren's "Developing a Pedagogy of Whiteness in the Context of a Postcolonial Hybridity," which links whiteness, capitalism, and the commodification of education to challenge the myth of meritocracy; and Joe Kincheloe's "critical pedagogy of whiteness," aimed at understanding power and creating healthy white identities. In *Making Meaning of Whiteness: Exploring Racial Identity with White Teachers,* Alice McIntyre studies pre-service teachers, choosing to "'zero in' on an analysis that would contribute to my/our understanding of the multiple meanings of whiteness" (4). Finally, in *Performing Purity: Whiteness, Pedagogy, and the Reconstitution of Power,* John T. Warren examines the ways in which white schooling systems recreate hegemonic structures of domination. Again, while these works make critical contributions to the discussions of the ways whiteness performs itself in pedagogical practices and within schooling systems, they have yet to significantly incorporate gender, a significant point since white women occupy the majority of teaching positions in American schooling systems.

White Women Teaching

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, approximately 76% of all elementary and secondary school teachers during the 2007-2008 school year were white women (*School and Staffing Survey)*. In contrast, the

latest data indicates that the student population in elementary and secondary schools is 54% white ("Public Elementary"). This means that the majority of teachers in American public schools are white women who teach in classrooms in which almost half of students are categorized as a race other than white. At the college level, 32% of full-time instructors in 2009 were white women (U.S. Depart of Education, "Full-time Instructional"), and 36% of students were categorized as black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander or American Indiana/Alaska Native (U.S. Department of Education, "Total Fall Enrollment"). This means that approximately one-third of full-time faculty are white women who teach in classrooms in which over one-third of students are categorized as a race other than white. Thus, white female teachers are overwhelmingly responsible for teaching the nation's children and young adults, most of whom share a differently-constructed identity. Given Hughes' insights about white women's responses to blackness, these statistics portray an overwhelming potential for white women to reproduce white privilege and power and inflict harm on students of color. In "Making Whiteness Visible in the Classroom," Laurie Lippin observes,

> Everything from the classroom protocol to seating arrangement and pedagogical style can reinforce or challenge traditional power structures. For the most part, it has reinforced the status quo, white and male elitism . . . The university is one of the last white, male, imperialist aristocracies, complete with a monarchy and a royal court of characters in charge of the business of perpetuating themselves. (111)

However, the interstitial positioning of white women contains the potential to transform these practices. At once privileged by racial categories and subordinated by gender, white

women have the potential to understand these power matrices and the power to work to disrupt these systems. As Adrienne Rich points out in "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia,"

> a black first-grader, or that child's mother, or a black patient in a hospital, or a family on welfare, may experience racism most directly in the person of a white woman, who stands for those 'service' professions through which white male supremacist society controls the mother, the child the family, and all of us. It is *her* racism, yes, but a racism learned in the same patriarchal school which taught her that women are unimportant or unequal, not to be trusted with power; where she learned to mistrust and fear her own impulses for rebellion: to become an instrument. (302-3)

Rich's observations reveal the degree to which white women, traditionally relegated to the service industry, are positioned and encouraged not only to reinforce white patriarchal structures and praxes, but also to quell their own instincts and observations about inequality and injustice. However, if white women were to choose against white privilege and align themselves with those who are also oppressed (though in different forms and to different degrees), then the potential for change becomes significant. As Rich states, "The question of accountability remains alive . . . since some women in service jobs find ways of being less instrumental, more disloyal to civilization than others" (302-303). Part of the intent of this study is to develop a cognizance of moments in which white women, including myself, have acted as instruments of this 'civilization,' and then to build acts of resistance in order to become more effectively and openly disloyal to white patriarchy.

To deconstruct my own performances of white femininity in the classroom--some of which have been instrumental to 'civilization,' and some of which have been disloyal--I utilize autoethnography as a means of qualitative research. There is a growing validity to using autoethnography and an examination of the self in research. In *Who Can Speak? Authority and Critical Identity*, Judith Roof and Robyn Wiegman state that "by exposing the way that objective and neutral methodologies repress the precise locations from which the speaker comes, academic discourses have begun to interrogate themselves from within, calling scholars to account, so to speak, for their own inescapable epistemic contingencies" (ix). Certainly, in many whiteness studies, authors have become more mindful of their own subjectivities, and respected authors such as Gary Howard and Frances Kendall, authors of *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know* and *Understanding White Privilege*, respectively, devote entire chapters to the ways in which they have come to understand the places from which they write and work. Indeed, most studies of whiteness by white scholars include an acknowledgement of standpoint both to inform readers of the advantages and disadvantages of their perspectives, but also to explain the ways in which they have gained knowledge about racial constructions.

Due to my autoethnographic approach, I realize that some may view this project as self-indulgent, while others may comment that it is made possible only due to my racial privilege. I hope that my attempts to read Hughes' work critically, to learn from his work, and to bring his observations about the machinery of whiteness to public viewing mitigate such self-indulgence. I hope that the lessons I have learned while teaching, and the pedagogical practices I now employ, problematize such indulgence. I hope that through the analyses of multiple texts (*The Ways of White Folks*, its historical context, my

own body and its ideological enactment, and the classroom situations I present), I may "find ways to live my everyday life in ways that bring less violence and oppression to the bodies and spirits of people of color" (Warren, "Performing Whiteness" 465). Thus, I hope that this dissertation is a way of "doing whiteness differently"[10]--of reading African American literature differently, teaching African American students differently, and writing about African American texts differently, with a dissertation that is both literary and pedagogical, both scholarly and personal. This work is part of an ongoing process of deconstructing my own whiteness and my responses to blackness. As such, it acts as an artifact of my present understanding of my subjectivity, and as an artifact open for analysis of its own performances and enactments of race and gender.

All of these fields--the literature of white exposure, CWS, performance theory, and critical pedagogy--complement one another in exciting, informative ways. CWS interrogates the ways in which race has been historically constructed, performance theory investigates the ways in which such constructions are scripted and performed, and critical pedagogy seeks to make these constructions and performances transparent. For people who have been socially-constructed as white, and who have lived predominately 'white' lives, the literature of white exposure challenges us to look at ourselves from a perspective of alterity, encouraging us to examine our assumptions of white normalcy and invisibility. Adding autoethnographic research to these fields pushes them towards moments of critical literacy, a concept developed from critical pedagogy. According to Margaret Hagood, critical literacy is "a means for analyzing how powerful institutional

[10] This phrase is taken from John T. Warren's "Performing Whiteness Differently: Rethinking the Abolitionist Project." In his article, Warren analyzes performances of whiteness in the field of CWS and argues for a better understanding of the performance metaphor, as well as changes to how we "do" whiteness.

contexts (such as formal schooling) act as regulating institutions for knowledge and resources" (248). Further, acts of critical literacy are initiated for the sake of "exploring subjectivity by questioning the normative practices and ideologies portrayed in texts that create and sustain stereotypical identities" (248). The short stories of *The Ways of White Folks* present tremendous opportunities for acts of critical pedagogy *and* critical literacy. With their emphasis on behaviors and performances, they hold potential to explore and explain the ways in which our lives are fabricated upon false constructions of race and gender, and challenge "normative practices and ideologies." This entire study surveys a range of behaviors of white women as well as the historical residue of those behaviors that manifest themselves in classrooms with diverse student bodies and diverse texts. My intention is to bring these texts and theories together to transform the classroom itself--not only altering my pedagogical approaches, but also transforming the classroom from a form of hegemonic reproduction to a place of disruption to forms of oppression that include both whiteness and patriarchy.

Dissertation Structure and Chapter Summaries

I have chosen to organize this work within a call-and-response structure in order to honor the African American intellectual tradition that is the grounding of Hughes' work and to emphasize Hughes' text as a source of knowledge for changes in my teaching practices. To this end, I analyze Hughes' short stories and excavate the white female responses to blackness, examine how these responses have manifested themselves in my own teaching practices, theorize them within frameworks of performativity and

critical pedagogy, and finally advocate for alternative pedagogical strategies. Each section or "ACT" of this dissertation includes a personal teaching anecdote that encapsulates the theme, a chapter of the literary analysis from which the theme is derived, and a chapter on its pedagogical implications. Chapters 1 and 2 examine performances of purity; Chapters 3 and 4, the pursuit of ownership and control; and Chapter 5 and the Conclusion, the maintenance of ignorance and blindness. As a white reader of African American literature, this is one of the ways I resist gratuitous consumption of black texts, a concept I explore more fully in Chapter 4: I read not to gain some form of pleasure or vicarious experience, but to see the operations of oppression, as well as my participation in them, that I have been unable, and conditioned, not to see. It is a necessary component of my work as a reader and teacher of African American literature.

Chapter 1 of this study analyzes "Cora Unashamed," "Berry," and "Little Dog," arguing that the white female characters participate in endless acts of abjection in order to maintain perceptions of purity, made especially important due to the "cult of true womanhood" and the Eugenics movement of the 1920s and 30s. These characters perform their purity by organizing their lives so as to avoid, when socially appropriate and convenient, all that is 'colored' in some way: the Studevants in "Cora" rid their town of racialized Others with a campaign of purity and simultaneously force their child to abort a child of mixed racial origin; in "Berry," Mrs. Osborn enforces racial segregation at a summer camp for physically-disabled children in order to contrast her purity against both an African American laborer and the disabled children; and, Miss Briggs of "Little Dog," upon recognizing her sexual attraction to the black janitor of her apartment building, actually moves across town, reorganizing her life to avoid the sexual

stimulation. Chapter 2 responds to this interpretation by analyzing how performances of purity manifest themselves in the classroom environment, typically by mandating classroom management practices that support authority, order, and academy-sanctioned knowledge. In this chapter, I recount a classroom experience in which I struggled to discern appropriate amounts of assertions of power and order; the anecdote reveals the socially-conditioned ways I responded to students of color, male and female. To resist this conditioning, I advocate the pursuit of a liminal norm, one that redistributes power and acknowledges subjugated knowledges, especially those produced through attentiveness to one's body.

Chapter 3 studies the pursuit of ownership and control in "Rejuvenation Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing." These stories highlight the abuse of power within relationships involving white women and African Americans, and also comment upon the commodification and fetishization of blackness. I call this response to blackness a "possessive consumption." The women in these stories exercise control through consumption, and they do so within the spaces left for them by white men--the arts and leisure time. This phenomenon certainly occurred during the Harlem Renaissance, and this chapter integrates this socio-historical context, including Hughes' relationship with Charlotte Mason. In the fourth chapter, I extend my observations about the pursuit of ownership and control into academia by examining white reading and scholarship of African American literature. As many scholars have argued, especially in the collections *White Scholars/African American Texts* and *Teaching What You're Not*, studying and teaching literature usually implies mastery over texts and includes power dynamics. In this section, I recount an incident in which I was questioned by students, on

the first day of teaching a course on African American literature, about my interests and relationships with African Americans. After a thorough examination of that moment, I advocate strategies to resist ownership, consumption, and the reconstitution of white power. To mitigate my positional authority (as teacher) as owner of texts and expertise, I offer a 'pedagogy of white exposure' that includes transparency of positionality and interest, and the decentralization of authority (both in syllabus construction and in daily classroom practices) as necessary acts of a white teacher teaching African American literature.

Chapter 5 analyzes the white female characters in "Home" and "Poor Little Black Fellow" to deconstruct the ways in which white women maintain ignorance and blindness to racial subjectivity and oppression, even in the midst of highly visible spectacles such as segregation and lynching rituals. These characters act with what I term a 'dissociative consciousness,' one which denies any connection between their own lives and the lives of others. However, within their dissociation, they also create moments of potential, moments which indicate care and concern for others, but ultimately create danger for everyone (though to varying degrees). I therefore argue that we must come to understand the cognitive mechanisms that make such dissociation possible, and that this will require greater study within the fields of sociology and psychology. As an act of resistance against such dissociation, I argue in the conclusion that white women develop methods for cultivating an 'associative' consciousness, one that associates their positionality and subjectivity with that of others. I argue that this consciousness might enable the creation of new ways of white women, ways that are more liberatory, more intentional, and more effective at eliminating oppression. The Conclusion also examines the 'signifyin' that

occurs within Hughes' title (as it references DuBois' *Souls of Black Folks* and "Souls of White Folks"), and argues that Hughes' changes, both in title and content, reveal the belief that change is possible. Ultimately, Hughes seems to argue that whites are not doomed with souls in a condition of stasis, but are products of hegemonic conditioning, a conditioning that can be undone and transformed.

ACT I: PERFORMING PURITY

As I taught African American Literature for the first time, I led students through a study of Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself.* I thought that the day's class had gone well. The students, most of whom were college juniors and seniors, had come to class prepared, were especially engaged, and had participated even more than usual. Then, right as it was time for class to dismiss, an African American female student who had been unusually quiet, burst out loudly, "Why in the hell did they bring us over here, anyway!" She was visibly upset, pushed her chair away forcefully, and headed for the door. I stood up from my seat at the front of the class, "Wait, class shouldn't end like this! Stop!"

CHAPTER 1

THE STORIES: "CORA UNASHAMED," "BERRY," AND "LITTLE DOG"

Within his first collection of short stories, *The Ways of White Folks*, Langston Hughes demonstrates the ways in which white women respond to blackness, including the urge to create order, enforce boundaries, and thereby perform an identity of both social and personal purity. This performance requires not only the rejection and oppression of Others, but also the repression of self, including emotional expression and physical desire. Ultimately, such performances of purity mandate the denial of any contaminants to the structures and praxes of white patriarchal dominance. His characters enact this denial by purging themselves of all that is deemed unclean, or 'colored,' in some way. Hughes establishes this theme immediately in his collection, as his first story, "Cora Unashamed," presents the puritanical behaviors of a family of white women dedicated to maintaining perceptions of purity throughout the community, even at risk to the life of their own daughter. Hughes continues to develop this theme with his story "Berry" which presents one working-class white woman's attempt to reach the ranks of unsullied whiteness through an intense commitment to order. And, in "Little Dog" Hughes examines the ways in which another white woman internalizes and performs this hegemonic ideal by sublimating her own desires for social and sexual companionship. The socio-historical context of Hughes' collection exposes the ideological discourses in which white women were embedded, including a transition from the 'cult of true womanhood' in the late nineteenth century to the 'American new woman' in the early twentieth century; the rise of the study of Eugenics; and an increased emphasis on

domesticity and cleanliness, including the emphasis on order to avoid contamination, and the accompanying employment practices that simultaneously allowed middle-class white women to disassociate themselves from domestic labor. These stories demonstrate that the pursuit of purity is a key performance of white womanhood, that this performance supports white patriarchal structures, and that it endangers and harms not only white women themselves, but also the people of color in their midst. Together, Hughes' characters reveal the historical enactment of white womanhood and trace the performances of purity prescribed by prevailing hegemonic structures.

The primary white characters of "Cora Unashamed," "Berry," and "Little Dog"--Mrs. Art Studevant, Mrs. Osborn, and Miss Briggs, respectively--are women whose identities were constructed during the transition between two historical eras in white women's history. Since Hughes' work is set in the 1930s, and since these women are all middle-aged, they are caught squarely between two sets of expectations and cultural messages about their femininity. As young women, these characters would have been inundated with cultural messages of "true womanhood." Historian Barbara Welter dates this era from 1820-1860, and labels it "the cult" of true womanhood in order to convey the strict, blind adherence to its "four cardinal virtues--piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (225). Regarding purity, the subject of this chapter, Welter points out that women both accepted and perpetuated perceptions of purity, which implied the possession of Christian, magnanimous minds and souls, and an absence of sexual desires. During this time period, popular magazines published works by women that emphasized such purity; in "Woman the Creature of God and the Manufacturer of Society," published in *The Ladies Wreath* in 1851, the female author, C.W. Tolles, writes, "Purity is the

highest beauty – the true pole-star which is to guide humanity aright in its long, varied, and perilous voyage" (210). It is notable that the title of the article locates women as the manufacturers of society, for women were expected and compelled to bear children, even at risk to their own health and well-being. This responsibility positioned them as reproducers not only of white children, but also, metaphorically, of whiteness itself. The middle-aged white women in *Ways* inherited this cultural discourse from the previous generation, and it is a discourse that casts them as responsible not only for maintaining the purity of their bodies and souls, but also for the reproduction of such purity.

However, during the late 1910s and 1920s, this era of true womanhood was slowly being challenged by an "American New Woman." During this era, young, economically advantaged women were challenging the norms of true womanhood by demanding the right to vote, fighting for access to birth control, proposing the Equal Rights Amendment, and even experiencing a sexual revolution.[11] While this is the predominant understanding of white women's history in the 1920s, it is important to note that the characters in these Hughes' stories would not have directly benefitted from such increased freedoms, for only the role of *some* white women in society was changing. As W.E.B. DuBois notes in *Darkwater*, the changes were primarily led by and for the women who had the time and resources to do so:

[11] This idea has been challenged by some historians who argue that the changes that occurred were not part of a sudden revolution, but part of a slow transition. Daniel Scott Smith, in "The Dating of the Sexual Revolution: Evidence and Interpretation," argues that there is inconclusive evidence for such a change when he compares statistics from surveys, as well as birthrates and premarital birthrates. He notes that sociologists have "cautiously concluded that between the 1920s and the early 1960s no marked increase in premarital coitus occurred" (328). And, Elizabeth Benson, a young contributor to *Vanity Fair* adds validity to Smith's theory in her 1927 article that stated, "Most of us talk big – and step pretty carefully" (239).

> The revolt of white women against the pre-ordained destiny ["to be beautiful, to be petted, to bear children"] has in these latter days reached splendid proportions, but it is the revolt of an aristocracy of brains and ability – the middle class and rank and file still plod on in the appointed path, paid by the homage, the almost mocking homage, of men. (181-2)

Here, DuBois notes that the majority of women experienced continued exploitation, as the middle class "rank and file" continued to labor to the benefit of white men. The stories discussed in this chapter concern themselves not with the stereotypical flapper of the 1920s, but with working class and middle class white women.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that Hughes' characters, having come of age during the era of true womanhood and lacking the resources of the upper class, have internalized the ideals of purity and domesticity; moreover, the women go to great lengths to achieve this purity, including the purging from their lives of all that is constructed as unclean. I believe such purging can be theorized and understood through the social anthropological work of Mary Douglas and the psychoanalytic work of Julia Kristeva. In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*, Mary Douglas argues that cultures are "richly organized by ideas of contagion and purification" (6). She famously uses dirt as an example of this theory, arguing that what is considered dirt is simply disorder, something that is out-of-place, but not necessarily disease-spreading or filthy. She writes,

> As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not out of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror. Nor do our ideas about

> disease account for the range of our behavior in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment. (2)

Thus, organizing one's home and life around ideas of cleanliness and purity is really a method of imposing a particular social order. Douglas expands her idea and argues that "ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created" (5). This exaggeration not only creates artificial boundaries between clean and unclean, but also exaggerates other social boundaries in order to impose morality. Douglas argues, "The whole universe is harnessed to men's attempts to force one another into good citizenship. Thus, we find that certain moral values are upheld and certain social rules defined by beliefs in dangerous contagion" (4). In my analysis of Hughes' short stories, I will demonstrate that the white female characters are consumed with order as a method of performing their personal purity; to this end, they perform their identities by positioning themselves against contagion--including the external contagion of "racial" Others, but also internal contagion such as their own sexuality--attempting to increase boundaries between themselves and that which is artificially and socially constructed as unclean.

While Douglas takes a sociological and anthropological approach to ideas of contamination, Julia Kristeva takes a psychoanalytic approach. Like Douglas, Kristeva theorizes that which is found to be dirty, disgusting, even revolting to human society. Kristeva reads the attempt to create boundaries between clean and unclean as an attempt

to preserve subject identity, calling the process of purging that which is unclean, "abjection." In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva defines the abject as that which is cast away or avoided because it threatens to breakdown the distinction between the subject and object, or self and other. She writes that the abject is "What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). Therefore, "It is . . . not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order" (4). Kristeva's primary example is the human reaction to a corpse:

> The corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, "I" is expelled. . . . The corpse, seen without god and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. (4-5)

In this process, the abject is never really disposed of, but always exists. Since the abject blurs boundaries between subject and object, self and Other, it is perceived as a threat to identity and order. In addition, abjection is not simply the attempted purging of Other in its various forms (dirt, racialized Others), but also purging of one's self. Kristeva writes, "I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (3). Therefore, abjection is also purging of self because boundaries between self and Other are false boundaries.

Reading Douglas and Kristeva together can help us understand the development and enactment of social constructions of race and gender from both social and

psychological perspectives; while Douglas provides a model for understanding the social construction of 'contaminants,' Kristeva provides a psychological understanding of the actions meant to expel such contaminants. When Hughes' characters purge the contaminants from their lives, they also purge parts of their own humanity because the distinctions between clean/contaminated, pure/impure, subject/object, white/black, male/female are all false distinctions. In my readings of "Cora Unashamed," "Berry," and "Little Dog," the white female characters purge their own humanity when they order the 'Other' out of their lives. They do this not only through organizational practices that purge racialized Others from their environment, but also through the purging of sexuality from their own bodies. Rather than face a breakdown of identity and the social order that aligns themselves with the privileges of whiteness, they perform white femininity in service to white patriarchy. While their actions can be read psychologically as attempts to preserve self-identity, they ultimately lead to destructive consequences for themselves and others.

"Cora Unashamed"

"Cora Unashamed," the first story in Hughes' collection, was written in 1933 and first published in *The American Mercury*. At the time of its publication, the story received little critical attention and the same is true today--only eight scholarly articles directly address "Cora Unashamed," and most of them do so in conjunction with Hughes' other short fiction, taking up a wide range of topics that have yet to overlap or spark scholarly debate. The most notable of these studies are Raphael Comprone's Marxist

analysis, Joyce Ann Joyce's analysis of the role of gender (which primarily concerns itself with African American women), Susan Mayberry's analysis of Hughes' use of children, and Hans Ostrom's discussion of Christian hypocrisy. While these analyses bring some deserved attention to the short story, they do not concern themselves with the white female characters who drive the plot, direction, and themes of the story.

In his autobiography *I Wonder as I Wander,* Hughes describes the development of his story, how he revised a factual story about a pregnant, young African American woman to become, instead, a story about Jessie Studevant, a young white woman who is forced by the elder women of her family to abort her illegitimate child of mixed racial origin. When Jessie dies from complications and her family disguises the cause of death, Cora, the family's African American domestic laborer and primary care-giver for Jessie, publicly grieves at her funeral and exposes the actions of the Studevant women. Hughes' racial re-staging is significant because his version presents a white family devoted to maintaining perceptions of purity within their community, even at the expense of their own child. In a letter to James Emanuel, Hughes identifies Jessie as a character meant to show that white people "are human, too." He writes, "I feel as sorry for them as I do for the Negroes usually involved in hurtful . . . situations" (qtd. in Emanuel "The Short Fiction" 150). In *Langston Hughes: A Study of the Short Fiction*, Hans Ostrom identifies with this sympathetic portrayal of Jessie and argues that the story "implicitly asks, What kind of community--what kind of society--is it that cannot permit such directness, compassion, and unadorned truth" (10). With this story, Hughes offers much more than a description of the community; he offers a glimpse at how such a community has been socially and historically constructed, and how white women participate in this

construction, even in the physical absence of men, through processes of abjection that reinforce white patriarchy. Ultimately his story reveals that these abjections are not only detrimental to others, but also to the white women themselves, for their perpetual purging not only removes the Other (in the case of "Cora Unashamed," this includes household dirt, African Americans, Greek immigrants, even Jessie herself) from their lives, but it also removes their own humanity and capacity for empathy.

Most readers of "Cora Unashamed" will situate Cora, the only African American in the story, as the main character; however, while Cora is certainly one of the main characters, she also functions as a contrasting image to the Studevant women--Mrs. Art Studevant, her cousin, and her mother--who collectively constitute a second main character. While Cora is unashamed, honest, and unconditionally loving, the Studevant women are guilty of shameful acts of dishonesty and deceit. Unlike Cora who loves unconditionally, their love seems governed by social expectations of purity. Though several scholars position the Studevants as a wealthy, even elite family, they are rather part of the middle class in Melton, Iowa.[12] The narrator states that Cora had to work for the Studevants, "or work for poorer white folks" (3-4). Further, the Studevant son manages a hardware store left to him by his grandfather, and their oldest daughter is a teacher. While this is certainly a picture of small town America, it is not a picture of the elite, especially in the town of Melton, which is described as

> one of those miserable in-between little places, not large enough to be a town, nor small enough to be a village – that is, a village in the rural, charming sense of the word. Melton had no charm about it. It was merely

[12] In "Race, Culture, and Gender in Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks*," Joyce Ann Joyce describes the Studevants as "wealthy" (104), and Ostrom writes that they are "well-to-do, well-established, and redolent of small-town values" (*Teaching* 140).

> a nondescript collection of houses and buildings in a region of farms – one of those sad American places with sidewalks, but no paved streets; electric lights, but no sewage; a station, but no trains that stopped, save a jerky, local, morning and evening. And it was 150 miles from any city at all – even Sioux city. (3)

The question of their economic class and level of privilege is important to our understanding of the story; Hughes' description of the town, and his placement in, quite literally, middle America, allows the reader to understand that the consciousness and behaviors of the people of Melton are representative of white America itself. This is not the story of an elite, propertied class, but a story of standard, white America.

As standard white Americans, the Studevants protect their social capital and economic power by maintaining respectable reputations. For the Studevant women, who are the most visible members of the family given the often-absent patriarch who travels for business, this means maintaining ideals of purity and domesticity. Outside of the home, this performance includes a commitment to Women's Clubs and civic organizations, as well as the church. In *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History*, Vron Ware connects these types of social clubs to the dominant idea that women were the "guardians of superior morality" (214). The Studevant women consistently attempt to live their lives according to this superior morality, as evidenced by their civic and religious endeavors; and, like most parents, they also try to regulate the morality of their children. The elder women try to inculcate Jessie with their ideals of purity and domesticity, but she has difficulty fulfilling their expectations. The narrator states,

> Her mother was always a little ashamed of stupid Jessie, for Mrs. Art was the civic and social leader of Melton, president of the Woman's Club three years straight, and one of the pillars of her church. Mary, the elder, would follow with dignity in her footsteps, but Jessie! That child! Spankings in her youth, and scoldings now, did nothing to Jessie's inner being. She remained a plump, dull, freckled girl, placid and strange. (10)

While the Studevant women act as models of propriety for the children, Jessie does not conform to their standards, and as demonstrated in the passage above, she is punished for it. The narrator, slipping into the Studevant consciousness, demonstrates the family's disapproving attitude toward their youngest daughter, who doesn't exude the type of piety and purity that they value and expect. At nineteen years old, Jessie continues to sully her role as a proper Studevant woman, this time by engaging in sexual intercourse with a young Greek immigrant, Willie Matsoulos, much to the horror of Mrs. Art who "had ambitions which didn't include the likes of Greek ice-cream makers' sons" (13). This performance is especially problematic because, as Dreama Moon writes in "White Enculturation and Bourgeois Ideology: The Discursive Production of 'Good (White) Girls,'" the family home is the primary site of the reproduction of white patriarchy and the illusion of white supremacy. She writes, "For white women, home is often a space in which they are trained to take their 'proper' place *within* these [racial] relations, in particular, those of white supremacy" (180). If the Studevant women fail to properly train Jessie, it reflects their inability to reproduce whiteness and its attendant purity. Therefore, the Studevant women increase their efforts, engaging in compulsive acts of ordering and abjection. When they force Jessie to have an abortion, they initiate her into this process.

Because the Studevant women are so intent on performing whiteness--of maintaining their purity and superiority--they cannot accept any breakdown of the boundaries that separate them from all that is, in their perception, raced or soiled. They therefore attempt to solidify boundaries by creating space between self and that which they prefer to think of as Other. These are processes of abjection that include ridding their house of dirt by employing an African American woman, someone who is different and Other, to reinforce their position as superior and clean; forcing their child to abort (to literally expel) a pregnancy of mixed racial origin; conducting a "campaign of purity" to rid the town of "questionable characters," including townspeople of different ethnicities; and finally removing Cora from their lives when she, too, becomes a threat to their sense of order. Ironically, these attempts at maintaining purity are acts that could be read as unclean and impure themselves; their performances of 'social purity' include economically exploiting Others, breaking the law to secure an illegal abortion, and committing acts of slander to expel racialized Others from town.

The Studevants' practice of employing a domestic laborer to rid their house of dirt is an act of abjection encoded into material action. Mary Douglas' social analysis of cleaning reads it as an act of creating order, and by ridding the house of dirt, the Studevant women continue to organize their lives around ideas of purity. They enable this ordering not by doing it themselves, but by hiring someone else to do it, thereby increasing the distance between themselves and uncleanliness. Cora's duties, which include "washing, ironing, cooking, scrubbing, taking care of kids, nursing old folks, making fires, carrying water," function to keep these white women free of that which they deem impure (4). Moreover, since they employ an African American to complete the

task, they also reinforce racial constructions while organizing their entire town's social hierarchy (since Cora is from the only African American family in their community). Through their act of employment, the Studevant women perform purity by disassociating themselves from dirt, impurity and immorality, while simultaneously aligning Cora with these things. In *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants, 1920-1945*, Phyllis Palmer explores such relationships between domestic life, dirt, and divisions among women and further explains that "'dirtiness' appears always in a constellation of the suspect qualities that, along with sexuality, immorality, laziness, and ignorance, justify social rankings of race, class, and gender" (139). However, their employment of Cora does much more than simply purge disorder from their household; it also conveniently cements the hegemonic expectations of true womanhood by continuing white women's attentiveness to domestic duties. According to Palmer,

> Successful housekeeping kept intact an image of pure women residing in pristine homes as well as making homes pleasant. . . . To succeed in this role, the model wife needed another woman to do the hard and dirty physical labor. She needed a woman different from herself, one whose work and very identity confirmed the housewife's daintiness and perfection. (128)

This employment of a woman "different from herself" was far from uncommon.[13] A large segment of white American women, middle class and higher, defined themselves against the domestic laborers they employed. Thus, part of the historical performance of purity and whiteness was the use of African American labor in order to promote one's sense of

[13] Palmer reports that "for Afro-American women . . . employment as domestics remained steady from 1890 to 1920, hovering in the 40th percentile, and rose in importance in the next twenty years, from 46 percent in 1920, to 53 percent in 1930, to 60% in 1940" (12).

cleanliness and purity. This is evident in "Cora Unashamed," as the Studevants attempt to expel dirt, its accompanying labor, and eventually Cora herself, in order to preserve their sense of identity, their systems of categorization, and their social order. The Studevant family's practice of employing Cora is not just about cleanliness; it is also about organizing their lives around perceptions of purity.

While the Studevant women align themselves with purity by creating boundaries and distinctions from dirt and racialized Others, they also create boundaries through their use of domestic space. The short story makes it clear that the kitchen is a separate, even remote area of the Studevant house, used primarily by Cora, who is often visited by Jessie. Much of Cora's work takes place in the kitchen and since, "like all the unpleasant things in the house, Jessie was left to Cora," much of their interaction also takes place within the kitchen (11). In the kitchen, "Jessie bloomed. She laughed. She talked. She was sometimes even witty. And she learned to cook wonderfully" (10). Thus, while the layout and use of space in the Studevant home is used to separate Cora and her labor from the Studevant women, it also aligns Jessie with Cora's 'otherness' and her association with contamination.

When Jessie becomes pregnant with the child of a Greek immigrant, she solidifies Mrs. Art's perception of her impurity. The short story contains no more literal act of abjection than the act of Jessie's abortion, for it literally removes from the body that from which it seeks to disassociate. In this case, however, the abjection is enforced not by the host body (Jessie), but by the elder Studevant women who deem themselves regulators of purity. When the elder women become aware of Jessie's pregnancy, they fall "into uncontrollable hysterics" (12). As stated earlier, young Greek men were not part of Mrs.

Art Studevant's plans.[14] The abortion is an attempt to remove that which is undeniably part of the subject (in this case, a non-white child), and make it object or "other." The child must be aborted in attempts to maintain these artificial boundaries between self/Other, or subject/object. The elder Studevant women's rejection of the child can be read through the psychoanalytic lens of Kristeva; they reject the child not just because it is non-white, but also because it is symbolic of a shared humanity and the artificiality of racial boundaries. Thus, with the singular act of the abortion, they not only protect the purity of their reputation, but they also preserve the next reproductive generation of whiteness. However, since the purging of other is always an act of purging the self, they also expel parts of their own humanity, including the ability to share emotional connections with their own family members.

Put in historical context, Jessie's forced abortion, a singular act of abjection, represents what I would argue was a collective, even communal, act of abjection for white society *en masse*--the Eugenics movement. Eugenics, rooted in the work of Sir Francis Galton who was highly influenced by Charles Darwin, was the "science of improving stock" (Galton 17). In the late nineteenth century, Galton created a hierarchy of races which positioned white, Northern Europeans at the top of his social stratification. The goal of Eugenics was to develop "the more suitable races or strains of blood" and

[14] In *Greek Americans: Struggle and Success,* Charles Moskos, Jr., documents anti-Greek sentiment and violence from the early 1900s into the 1940s. He demonstrates that Greeks were subject to some of the same terroristic measures that African Americans encountered; in 1917, a young Greek was almost lynched in Salt Lake City, and in 1909, the Greek quarter of South Omaha, Nebraska, was destroyed by a mob that was outraged over a young Greek male walking with a white woman (16-17). In addition, Greeks were called "the scum of Europe," "a vicious element unfit for citizenship," and "ignorant, depraved, brutal foreigners" (16). In addition, in *The Greeks in the United States,* Theodore Saloutos outlines anti-immigration policies that disproportionately affected Greek immigrants; his study demonstrates that Greek immigration increased steadily until the late 1920s, but decreased sharply in the early 1930s when anti-immigration measures decreased the amount of Greeks that were permitted to become naturalized citizens.

provide "a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable than they otherwise would have had" (qtd. in Roberts 59). While Galton theorized these ideas in the 1880's, they did not reach their peak popularity until after the turn of the century, both in scholarly circles and in popular culture.[15] For this study, one of the most notable aspects of the rise of eugenics is the way in which it was supported by white women. According to Martha H. Patterson, editor of *The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader 1894-1930*, "Many leading feminist intellectuals, most notably Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Margaret Sanger, expressed support for it" (24). This support is noted by other scholars as well, including Dorothy Roberts, who, in *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*, credits much of the popularity of eugenics to the white railroad heiress, Mrs. E.H. Harriman who financially supported the movement. As I will demonstrate, the buttressing of eugenics by white women was itself a performance of purity--one that solidified order, social stratification, and boundaries between races.

Eugenics existed in two different forms--positive eugenics and negative eugenics. Positive eugenics was the process of improving the human race through promoting the birth of America's best "stock." When, in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt responded to the declining birthrate among white women by lambasting those who failed to reproduce, he inspired the term "race suicide" (Gordon 86). Roosevelt stated that women who did not have children were "criminal against the race," and neglectful of their reproductive obligation, which he compared to a soldier's duty (qtd in Gordon 86).

[15] According to Roberts, the *Readers Guide to Periodicals* "listed 122 articles under 'eugenics' between 1910 and 1915, making it one of the most referenced topics in the index" (62). In addition, "ordinary Americans attended lectures and read articles in popular magazines on the subject" (62). People who were interested in eugenics could join their choice of several organizations devoted to the study. And, "the American Eugenics Society reached a less erudite audience by sponsoring Better Babies and Fitter Families contests at state fairs across the country" (62).

Negative eugenics, conversely, was the process of declining the birth rate among the less desirable of the American population. It was first leveraged against those considered mentally ill when state governments began using it as justification for compulsory sterilization laws.[16] Negative eugenics also provided justification for anti-immigration laws and anti-miscegenation laws. In addition, as another policy of negative eugenics, birth control was disproportionately offered to African American women.[17] Thus, the burgeoning positive eugenics movement, the fear of race suicide, and the state-run negative eugenics movement all converged to create discourses that conflated white femininity with the socially-coerced production of white babies; conflated immigrant and black populations with inferiority, and even waste; and gave authority to control the female reproductive system, especially of women of color, not to the birthing mother herself, but to others deemed more responsible to make those decisions.

For the majority of women, this meant that the control of their bodies was given to the mostly white, male legislative branches, judicial branches, and mental health specialists and scientists in the United States--all ideological state apparatuses[18] in the

[16] The state of Indiana was the first to pass such a law when, in 1907, it authorized the state-sponsored sterilization of women deemed mentally impaired. Other states followed, and Harry Hamilton Laughlin, the superintendent of the Eugenics Record Office, proposed a "schedule for sterilizing 15 million people over the next two generations" (Roberts 67). "Between 1907 and 1930, according to American cultural historian Daylanne English, twenty-four states legalized 'compulsory sterilization of the feeble-minded or otherwise dysgenic state residents'" (Patterson 24). These state laws were challenged up to the Supreme Court when, in 1927, it upheld the constitutionality of the compulsory sterilization laws in Buck v. Bell.

[17] When Margaret Sanger aligned herself with the eugenicists to legalize and promote birth control, contraception became more readily available to the black community through government programs. Sensing some resistance from black communities, Sanger was involved in correspondence that included, from Dr. Clarence J. Gamble, the following statement: "There is a great danger that we will fail because the Negroes think it a plan for extermination. Hence, let's appear to let the colored run it" (Roberts 78).

[18] In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,* philosopher Louis Althusser theorizes the ways in which society reproduces compliant and complacent subjects. He argues that a variety of institutions, which he calls "ideological state apparatuses," function to train citizens to act according to hegemonic standards. These apparatuses include a variety of institutions, including government, educational systems and religious systems.

business of reproducing white supremacy and its attendant purity in white women. For Jessie Studevant, this meant that the elder Studevant women, in place of the often-absent Mr. Studevant, would control her body, including when and with whom she could reproduce. Thus, the elder women of the family deploy these white patriarchal decisions against their child. The Studevants create a distraction by informing the weekly newspaper that they have left "for an Easter shopping trip" to Kansas City and instead procure for Jessie an illegal abortion (13). When she becomes ill with complications, they further enact the performance of purity with desperate attempts to save their reputation by creating stories of Jessie's "indigestion." Though Mayberry, in "Ask Your Mama: Women in Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks,*" contends that her death is from heartbreak, the text supports her physical deterioration: "Her eyes grew yellow, her tongue white, her heart acted crazy" (14-5). Jessie's death is therefore a direct result of the elder Studevant women's insistence on performances of purity.

While Jessie is dying, the Studevants continue their acts of abjection through a stylized "campaign of purity," which is conveniently timed to expel those people who know the truth about Jessie's condition. The narrator states that Mrs. Art Studevant started a "campaign to rid the town of objectionable tradespeople and questionable characters. Greeks were bound to be one or the other" (15). Willie Matsoulos is driven from town and his father's ice cream business is shut down due to complaints from mothers who were part of the Woman's Club--of which Mrs. Art is president. This public campaign secures the Studevants' position as civic and social leaders and parallels their private action of the compulsory abortion. Through their public performances, the Studevant women attempt to create a reality which obscures the dissonance and

hypocrisy of their private actions which are based in lies, deceit, and slander. Positioned as guardians of moral superiority, they can think of themselves as pure and good, even as they harm their child and disenfranchise members of their community.

Even Jessie's funeral can be read as an act of abjection, for at the funeral the Studevants not only lay to rest Jessie and her imperfections (reminders of their own imperfections and guilt), but they also expel Cora by forcing her from their home. Hughes exaggerates the performative nature of these actions by situating this section of the story within a performance metaphor complete with allusions to acting, costumes and ritualized performances of song and eulogy. By situating the funeral within this metaphor, he emphasizes the contrived, superficial nature of the event. Mrs. Art, though outwardly forlorn, "revived, however, and ate an omelet" (15). Costumes were also in place: "All the family dressed in deep mourning," "the Woman's Club came with their badges," and "The Reverend Doctor McElroy had on his highest collar and longest coat" (15-16). In addition, "a special soloist" was brought in to sing, the Reverend gives a eulogy, and the senior class reads memorials. The funeral is, in fact, a highly contrived show devoid of emotion and representative of the destructive nature of such persistent acts of abjection.

Only Cora demonstrates signs of grief. In the midst of the funeral, Cora interjects and speaks directly to Jessie, "Honey, I want to say something." She proceeds to vocalize the actions of the Studevant women, "They killed you! And for nothing.' . . . They killed your child. . . . They took you away from here in the Springtime of your life, and now you'se gone, gone, gone!" (16). She continues her exposé by bringing attention to the stylized elements of the funeral show: "They preaches you a pretty sermon and they don't

say nothin'. They sings you a song, and they don't say nothin'" (17). To this, Mrs. Art literally says nothing; instead, she screams loudly and falls, "stiff as a board" (17). Cousin Nora and sister Mary "sat like stones" (17). This silence provides cause for their defense by the Studevant men, and, in the chaos that ensues, Cora is physically assaulted as she exposes the truth, "accusing their women" (17). In this moment, Cora, no longer silent and submissive, is out of place and must be expelled to preserve the purity of the Studevant women; she is therefore pulled and pushed "through the aisles of folding chairs, through the crowded dining-room, out into the empty kitchen, through the screen door into the backyard" (17). By the end of the funeral scene, the Studevants have reinforced boundaries that protect them from their own culturally-conditioned ideas of impurity--there are no more visible reminders that they share their humanity with imperfect children or African American laborers.

This episode also demonstrates the operations of white patriarchy and the ways in which white women reinforce patriarchal standards even in the absence of white men. The white men in this scene, absent from the story except this final episode, perform their power and supremacy by taking ownership and physically removing the disruption to "their women's" purity (17). Cora believes Mr. Studevant, "[b]ig and gruff as he was, . . . had more sense than the women. He'd probably make a short-gun wedding out of it. But left to Mrs. Art, Jessie would never marry the Greek boy at all" (12-13). Cora's statement, as well as the Studevant women's established facility with abjection, implies that the Studevant women are more invested in their whiteness than the patriarch of the family. This is true precisely because Mr. Studevant doesn't *have* to be; the women of his family will ensure that even he never sees impurity, for it is the purity of the women that

he values and expects. Thus, Mrs. Studevant will protect the perception of her purity, and that of the child she has reared, even to her own husband. This is precisely what Cora fails to see--that Mr. Art is, in fact, present, not corporeally, but ideologically. In fact, he is always represented through the story, as his wife is defined through his name--Mrs. Art Studevant. She accepts, protects, and maintains his values and his norms. She has no other name, and no other ideological position than as a reproducer of whiteness.

Hughes' short story exposes white women's performances of purity and the abjections that support them: their employment of a black domestic worker to rid the house of contaminants; the arrangement of their home and family life; the forced abortion of Jessie's child, a child who would have undermined the whiteness of the Studevant family; their "campaign of purity" to rid the town of racialized Others; and Jessie's funeral which exposes their expulsion of humanity. Hans Ostrom describes the story as one that "exposes hypocrisies," but perhaps more importantly, it presents the ways in which the Studevants validate their own behaviors in order *not* to see them as hypocritical (*Teaching* 139). For the Studevant women, their focus on purity is a means of social preservation within Melton. When they solidify perceptions of social purity, they can internalize these perceptions to disguise the methods they used to achieve it. In doing so, they strengthen social constructions of race and gender, for they not only rid the town of racialized Others, but they solidify familial hierarchies and position themselves as proper supporters of the status quo. It is through this series of actions that the Studevant women deploy their whiteness and their femininity. It is not enough to only enact whiteness singularly. Kristeva argues that even in abjection, there is always something left behind: "And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master"

(2). The Studevant women must daily reaffirm themselves as morally superior, physically cleaner, and sexually purer than those with whom they coexist.

As a text within the tradition of the literature of white exposure, the story successfully makes the actions of this white family strange, unfamiliar, and unacceptable to the reader. This is, in part, made possible through Hughes' use of a third-person omniscient narrator. From a different perspective, the Studevants may have been portrayed as a family willing to protect the innocence of their young daughter from the lower-class boy who corrupted her. They may have been understood as a family attempting to shield their daughter from a soiled reputation that might ultimately end her chances of marriage and endanger her ability to support herself in a reputable manner. However, from the perspective of the omniscient character, the Studevant women are steeped in a deep tradition of enacting purity, a tradition that is enforced through legislation, punitive measures, and economic structures. Their support of this tradition indicts them through acts of collusion. As Hughes demonstrates, their collusion is not only detrimental to those around them, but also to themselves. While the Studevants may be materially unscathed, their reputation has been soiled, they have lost their daughter, and they have purged their own humanity by attempting to create space between themselves and that which has been falsely deemed Other.

"Berry"

Hughes wrote his short story "Berry" during the same writing surge that produced "Cora Unashamed," and the two stories contain many similarities, including an isolated

African American character aligned with labor, as well as a contrasting white female character. "Berry" also contains the passage used as the epigraph to the entire collection: "*The ways of white folks, I mean* some *white folks* . . ." (original emphasis). The epigraph's placement within this story makes it especially important to analyze the "ways" of Hughes' white characters in this particular narrative; oddly enough, only three scholars have published analyses of the story, and their comments are situated within larger studies of the entire collection. David Nifong calls the story a "straightforward character sketch" (93), Ostrom comments on the similarities to "Cora Unashamed," and Mayberry argues that Hughes humanizes the white female main character, Mrs. Osborn, by exposing her hidden desires. It is unfortunate that scholars have not more thoroughly interrogated the "ways of white folks" that "Berry" refers to, for this short story provides a less-than-subtle account of the performances of whiteness. "Berry" contains both highly-contrived, fraudulent performances, and less obvious ideological performances that position whiteness against that which it deems soiled, imperfect, and therefore Other/abject. For white women, this abjection is once again embodied in an intense ordering of environment in order to achieve perceptions of purity.

One of the main characters of "Berry" is Milberry, a young, African American man who takes a job as a dishwasher and laborer at a summer home for disabled children. But "Berry" also contains another main character, Mrs. Osborn, the head housekeeper at the camp who harbors an unrequited love for the proprietor, Dr. Renfield. The story recounts Mrs. Osborn's attempts to frame herself within domestic organizational practices and cleaning duties as a method of performing her purity to Dr. Renfield. The setting in which she performs this identity is particularly important because it not only

continues Hughes' theme of performativity, but also because it situates Mrs. Osborn within the abject, in this case the disabled children who are cast out of 'normal' white society, and the racial and working-class Others who care for them. Within this context, Mrs. Osborn attempts to differentiate herself from others and align herself with the doctor; her longing for Dr. Renfield can thus be read as a desire to rise from her environment in order to reach the ranks of a more perfect, more 'normal' whiteness. Due to its setting, "Berry" exposes such social constructions of normalcy, as well as the intersections between race, gender, and disability.

Throughout the story, the reader is allowed to see the camp through Berry's perspective of alterity, and it is through his eyes that the superficiality of the camp surfaces. The narrator states that "what really worried Milberry at this place was that he seemed to sense something wrong – something phoney about the whole house – except the little crippled kids there like himself because they couldn't help it" (182). Berry also recognizes Dr. Renfield's stylized appearance, complete with a "movie beard," as well as the façade he presents to the children's parents, for Berry "worked in the kitchen and saw the good cans opened for company, and the cheap cans opened for the kids. Somehow he didn't like such dishonesty" (182, 183). Ultimately, Berry concludes, "This here hand-out is jest Doc Renfield's own private gyp game" (182). The narrator confirms Berry's observations: "The Negro was right. The Summer Home was run for profits from the care of permanently deformed children of middle class parents who couldn't afford to pay too much, but who still paid well – too well for what their children got in return" (182-3). The "Home," physically separated from the rest of white society, is not only a profitable business venture for the doctor, but also yet another social cleansing measure within the

praxes of whiteness, one I read as an extension of eugenics and a communal act of abjection. In *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature,* Rosemarie Thomson delineates an era of freak shows (which included people with physical disabilities), arguing that

> a cluster of cultural conditions dovetailed to produce the climate in which the freak show flourished: immigration, class repositioning, and increased social stratification pressed an insecure polity to invent a corporeal other whose difference relieved their apprehensions about status. (78)

The shift from such freak shows to medical facilities occurred by 1940, and Thomson argues that the same cultural conditions that produced the freak show also produced a new medical interest: "By 1940, freaks had become inappropriate for the public eye, cast as private 'cases,' surrounded and defined by a professional apparatus of doctors, counselors and rehabilitation specialists" (79). This shift was happening in the midst of Hughes' production of his first collection of short stories. People with physical handicaps were transitioning from objects of spectacle, to objects of the margins, cast out of visibility and into the cover of separate living spaces; in "Berry," this separate space is in the countryside of New Jersey, away from populated urban centers. To put America's perception of the physically disabled into perspective, it wasn't until 1975 that the Education for All Handicapped Children Act provided handicapped children with the right to attend public schools. The fact that individuals with physical disabilities were cast to the margins reflects attempts to organize society by eliminating contamination. Thus, in the 1920s and 30s, people with disabilities were subjected to the discourse of eugenics in much the same way that immigrants, people of color, and working class

women were.[19] This "Home" therefore allows middle-class, standard white Americans the opportunity to create and maintain distance between themselves and the physically disabled.

However, this segregation of the physically disabled is not simply an attempt at physical separation, but also an attempt at psychic separation, a purging of the bodies that functioned to remind standard white Americans of their own anxieties and imperfections. In *Extraordinary Bodies,* Thomson posits a theory of social construction that combines Erving Goffman's stigma theory with Mary Douglas' work on purity and dirt. Thomson summarizes Goffman's work in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity,* in the following manner:

> stigmatization is an interactive social process in which particular human traits are deemed not only different, but deviant. . . . Most important is that these social devaluations are collective, part of a communal acculturation process. Stigmatization creates a shared, socially maintained and determined conception of a normal individual. (31)

[19] Interestingly, the social history of people with disabilities is interconnected to the social history of people of color. Douglas C. Baynton, in "Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History," demonstrates the interconnected histories of African Americans and other people of color with disabilities. He traces arguments about disability to justifications of slavery, and points out that "the most common disability argument for slavery was simply that African Americans lacked sufficient intelligence to participate or compete on an equal basis in society with white Americans" (37). He further notes that enslaved African Americans were diagnosed with mental illnesses such as Drapetomania, which was "a disease of the mind" causing slaves to run away, and Dyaesthesia Aethiopis, which caused "a desire to avoid work and generally to cause mischief" (38). Traditionally, we might think of these medical diagnoses as simply excuses and justification for slavery; however, they are also part of the history of disabilities, and part of the social construction of the physically handicapped and African Americans. Another example of the conflation of blackness with disability is from the 1904 World's Fair. In his 1996 article, "Defectives at the World's Fair: Constructing Disability in 1904," James W. Trent argues that "displays of 'defectives' alongside displays of 'primitives' signaled similar interconnected classification schemes for both defective individuals and defective races" (qtd. Baynton 36).

Building on Goffman's work, Thomson coins the term, "normate," which "names the veiled subject position of cultural self, the figure outlined by the array of deviant others whose marked bodies shore up the normate's boundaries" (8).[20] Thomson couples Goffman's stigma theory with Douglas' work to argue that "[v]isible physical disability lies outside the normative ordering system and can only be included and comprehended under Douglas's classifications of 'aberrant' and 'anomalous,' categories that accommodate what does not fit into the space of the ordinary" (33). Ultimately, Thomson argues that "human stigmata function as social dirt" (33). To link this idea with Kristeva's theory of abjection, the normate attempts to reinforce his or her own normalcy by abjecting this human stigmata, this social dirt. Moreover, as Kristeva argues, the abject is not separate from subject, but linked in inextricable ways. In this case, the normate shares a common humanity with the physically disabled, but in attempts to differentiate himself, the normate creates distance from that which reminds him of his own imperfections. In *The New Disability History*, Paul K. Longmore and Lauri Umansky argue that "Americans often perceive disability – and therefore people with disabilities – as embodying that which Americans fear most: loss of independence, of autonomy, of control" (7). In American culture, the normate--independent, powerful, autonomous--has been historically constructed as a white male. In Hughes' story, Dr. Renfield represents the normate while Mrs. Osborn's desire for him symbolizes a desire to attain his status.

As a working class woman, Mrs. Osborn finds herself within this environment of stigmata or, in my reading, the abject. Within this context, she desires the more perfect

[20] Thomson's definition has an uncanny similarity to descriptions of whiteness by scholars such as Ruth Frankenberg and Richard Dyer, and I would argue, is analogous to whiteness as normative.

whiteness represented by Dr. Renfield. In attempts to rise from her status, she dissociates herself from the disabled children, she emphasizes order and her commitment to duty, and she oversees the segregation of Berry's living quarters. Throughout the story, Mrs. Osborn is rarely seen with the children at all; instead, she is seen only when searching for the doctor, talking with the doctor, or while working in her "little office where the housekeeper held forth over her linens and accounts" (179). Throughout the story, she is also careful to support the established order; the summer home is, after all, a home owned and operated by a white male, managed by a white female, and done so to the exploitation of handicapped children and their families. All of her actions support this hierarchy, and she takes seriously her duty to Dr. Renfield, always consulting him and carrying out his wishes.

The story presents Mrs. Osborn's longing for Dr. Renfield in conjunction with Berry's arrival, situating her desire within the arrival of a "racial" other. Thus, Berry's presence provides the context and catalyst for Mrs. Osborn's desire. When Milberry first arrives at the camp, Mrs. Osborn's response is clear, "When the boy arrived on the four o-clock train, lo and behold, he turned out to be colored! . . . Her wire to the employment office in Jersey City brought results – but dark ones" (177). The previous help had been Scandinavian, and while the camp's need for labor can be met through Berry, his "dark" presence creates new problems for Mrs. Osborn who presides over the Home's living quarters. In an era of segregation, she is faced with deciding how and where to lodge Berry. However, she turns this problem into an opportunity to visit Dr. Renfield about "this Negro in their midst" (178). She therefore frames herself within a concern for purity and order, appealing to both Dr. Renfield and the social construction of white femininity.

When Mrs. Osborn makes "a bee line across the side lawn for Dr. Renfield's cottage," she laments that she may be faced with Dr. Renfield's wife and notes to herself that "she was not bound on any frivolous errand toward the Doctor's cottage" (178). When his wife treats her "coldly," Mrs. Osborn concludes that "his wife, she was certainly not good enough for the doctor" (178). Her thoughts indicate an interest in becoming the more appropriate match for the doctor, an interest that is perhaps heightened due to this new opportunity to present herself against Berry's "dark" presence, something the Scandinavian's presence did not allow. When Mrs. Osborn is informed that Dr. Renfield is not at home, she daydreams, wondering if perhaps "the Doctor was walking along the sea in the twilight alone. Ah, Dr. Renfield, Dr. Ren. . . ." (179). Finally locating the doctor (for he, like the constructions of whiteness, remains allusive throughout the story), Mrs. Osborn positions Berry's presence as a serious problem, but "bubbled and gurgled" when she discussed it with the doctor (179). When Dr. Renfield recommends that she convert attic space for Berry, she realizes that she can employ Berry without the corruption of her own performance of purity. Through her enforcement of segregation policy, she simultaneously shows concern for maintaining the organizational structure of living quarters and for securing her own purity. Such a performance might also increase her chances of securing Dr. Renfield's attentions, for her enactment of segregation practices increases the purity of her whiteness.

Mrs. Osborn again tries to align herself with Dr. Renfield after an accident in which a young white boy falls to the ground and breaks his wheelchair while in Berry's care. As Berry tries to make sure the child is unhurt, the narrator reveals that "Mrs. Osborn – well, she lit out for Dr. Renfield" (186). This is yet another moment in which

Mrs. Osborn uses Berry's presence to insert herself into Dr. Renfield's company. In this moment, Dr. Renfield blames Berry and calls him a "careless black rascal," repeating aloud "Criminal carelessness! Criminal Carelessness!" (187). This reveals not only the associations of blackness with criminality, but also the doctor's willingness to overlook the role of the nurses, for the narrator announces that "they were responsible" (186). Nevertheless, "Mrs. Osborn excitedly agrees with Dr. Renfield, "'Yes, it is! Indeed, it is!' Milberry was to blame" (187). Mrs. Osborn uses this opportunity to further criminalize Berry, but also to further align herself with Dr. Renfield. In "Ask Your Mama: Women in Langston Hughes' *Ways of White Folks*," Susan Mayberry argues that Mrs. Osborn's "unsatisfied yearning for the attentions of Dr. Renfield humanizes her villainy" (21). However, it is my contention that Mrs. Osborn's choice to align herself with the doctor/normate at the risk of others might minimize any sympathy she may elicit. This alignment with whiteness, rather than with those who are oppressed by it, demonstrates the material realities of social constructions and white privilege--there exists, within whiteness, protection and profit. Najmi and Srikanth write,

> At once racially privileged and sexually marginalized, [white women's] in-between status theoretically should give to white women the resources and the sensibilities to become a significant mediating force in bringing together the center and the periphery and eventually blurring the distinction between the two. But the practices of white women have not always optimized on this potential. (14)

And, history provides us with many other examples of white women promoting themselves while excluding other oppressed people.[21] In many ways, Hughes' "Berry" acts as a microcosm of this type of misalignment, exhibiting how Mrs. Osborn chooses to situate herself with Dr. Renfield's authority, attempting to acquire tokens of legitimacy, whiteness, and purity only by drawing false contrasts between herself and Others.

It is within this world that Milberry utters the words, "The ways of white folks, I mean some white folks, is too much for me. I reckon they must be a few good ones, but most of 'em ain't good – leastwise they don't treat me good. And Lawd knows, I ain't never done nothing to 'em, nothing' a-tall" (181). Berry's claim that "most of 'em ain't good" could easily be proven just within "Dr. Renfield's Summer Home for Children," for within the microcosm, the "ways of white folks" include the social construction of a fictional norm of whiteness, as well as the repetitive ideological enactments that perpetuate these constructions and create hierarchies that limit individual freedom and autonomy. Further, the short story demonstrates how white women perform their purity (in order to gain both personal and public advantages) through a commitment to social categorization and an alignment with the white male normate. With this alignment, white

[21] One such example of white women's misalignment is visible in the rhetoric of the suffrage movement. Only thirty years before Hughes' wrote *The Ways of White Folks*, white women were campaigning for the right to vote by contrasting themselves with people of color. In 1893, a suffragist convention "blatantly appealed to nativist fears by calling attention to the fact that 'there are more white women who can read and write than all negro voters, more American women who can read and write than all foreign voters'" (Chafe 15). In 1894, Carrie Chapman Catt announced that the government should "cut off the vote of the slums and give it to women" (Chafe 15). Given such rhetoric, it is an irony of history that "the suffragists hopes hinged on the assumption that female citizens – by virtue of their sex – would act as a cohesive force to bring about social change. . . . Pure in spirit, selfless in motivation, and dedicated to the preservation of human life, female voters would remake society and turn government away from war and corruption" (Chafe 25). In Hughes' own lifetime and only a few years before the publication of *Ways,* the Equal Rights Amendment was proposed. This movement was also largely a white woman's movement, and it also avoided alliances with many working class women, including women of color.

women collude in the oppression of others, but they also limit their concerns and interests to those of white men.

"Little Dog"

Like "Berry," Hughes' short story "Little Dog" has also received little critical attention; it is mentioned in only three critical analyses--those by Susan Mayberry, David Nifong, and James Emanuel. Mayberry psychoanalyzes the main character, Nifong again studies the point of view, and Emanuel presents it as a story about love across racial lines. However, as brief as the story is, it is rich with symbolism, insight, and even a comedic voice that allows the reader to see how 'funny' white folks really are. "Little Dog" also continues Hughes' analysis of white women, as the story is primarily a character sketch of Miss Briggs, a forty-five year-old white woman who performs her purity through an intense orderliness that eventually manifests itself in social isolation and sexual repression. The story is Freudian and comical, but it is also very sad. When Miss Briggs finds herself sexually aroused by the black janitor who maintains her apartment building, she sublimates her own desire in order to preserve an internalized ideal of purity. So strong is this ideal that Miss Briggs physically relocates in order to remove the stimulus that challenges her purity.

Having spent much of her life caring for her ailing mother, Miss Briggs finds herself middle-aged, unmarried, and childless. In this position, she cannot fulfill the pillars of true womanhood that included a domesticity bound by marriage and children, as well as a compulsory dependence on men. Because she cannot meet these expectations,

she desperately clings to purity through ordering her environment so as to create a physical and emotional distance from others. As a bookkeeper, Miss Briggs maintains order professionally, but she also maintains order socially; she has established a firm routine that involves work and then dinner at the same restaurant every night. And while she sometimes attends the Women's Civics Club, she only knows the members "in a cultural sort of way. The warmth of friendship seldom mellowed her contacts there," for "Miss Briggs always believed in keeping her distance, too" (165). Miss Briggs herself reflects that "every woman she knew had either a husband, or sisters, or a friend of long standing with whom she resided. But Miss Briggs had nobody at all. Nobody" (163). This isolation becomes an intense loneliness, especially after moving to a flat overlooking the park where she watches people, often couples, interact. At the flat, "her loneliness really come[s] down on her. There were some nights there, especially summer nights, when she thought she couldn't stand it . . ." (164). In order to alleviate her loneliness, Miss Briggs, who "allowed herself very few indulgences," purchases a little dog (164). While the dog, Flips, provides her with increased opportunities for interaction, Miss Briggs still remains quite reserved; when she walks Flips in the evening, she sees people in the park, but avoids conversations with them for fear they may be an affront to her purity: "You could never tell just who people were, Miss Briggs thought, or what they might have in their minds. No, you shouldn't think of taking up with strange people in the parks" (166). Her comment is situated within observations of couples in romantic relationships and seems to conflate social propriety and sexual purity. Thus, while her emphasis on boundaries may ensure that her purity goes unchallenged, it also leaves her without any source of companionship.

To help care for her new pet, Miss Briggs utilizes the services of the building janitor to deliver meat for the dog. When she discovers that the previous janitor, a Swede, has been replaced with Joe, an African American male, she begins to experience an intense sexual attraction. During their interactions about the symbolic "meat packages," Miss Briggs begins to gaze at Joe in detail, "He was almost as old as Miss Briggs, she was certain of it, looking at him. Not a young man at all, but he was awfully big and brown and kind looking. So sort of sure about life as he handed her the package" (169). Their series of interactions that centers on the packages of meat builds in intensity as she begins to exhibit physical reactions to Joe's presence. Miss Briggs "kept looking at the big kind face of the janitor in her mind" (170). At other moments, she "seemed to hear the janitor's deep voice, saying, 'Good evenin', to her" (171). And even though Miss Briggs had formerly only fed Flips the meat three times a week, she does "not stop [Joe], or limit him to three nights a week" (169). So it is that Miss Briggs finds herself reducing boundaries between herself and an African American male. This attraction challenges her social and sexual purity and she becomes angry with herself for the ways in which she responds to this man, asking herself, "What's the matter with me… Whatever is the matter with me?", and becoming "perturbed that it was a Negro face, … that … stayed with her so" (171, 170). While these reactions reveal the taboo nature of her sexual attraction to a black man, her subsequent reactions expose the social constructions and white female performances that maintain the taboo.

Plagued by anxiety, Miss Briggs continues to obsess over this "colored man," and she even finds herself making errors at work, something very out of the ordinary, given her twenty-one years of service to the firm, her increased wages, and her insistence on,

and near perfection of, orderliness. Miss Briggs' obsession demonstrates the hyper-sexualization of the black male body which has been historically outlined in Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black*. In his study, Jordan theorizes that the sexualization of the black male body was a reflection of white men's sexual encounters with the African American women that they enslaved and raped. George Yancy builds on Jordan's work to argue that the "structure of the white gaze" attempts "to install the Black body as inferior, a 'thing' fit for comedy, hypersexual, and animal-like" (*Black Bodies, White Gazes* xxiii). Enveloped in this discourse, yet unable to avert her gaze, Miss Briggs tries to purge her emotional and physical responses by removing the stimulus.

First, she requests that Joe leave the meat near the door in order to reduce her interaction with him. But despite this effort to control her desires, she continues to experience their physical intensity, even feeling faint during and after their interactions. After one of Joe's visits, she mistakenly says to her dog, "Oh, Flips, I'm so hungry" (172); the narrator reveals that she meant to say "*You're* so hungry" (172). In this manner, Miss Briggs projects her own desires and hungers onto her little dog. Finally, when Miss Briggs makes yet another observation about Joe's physicality, it is enough to produce preventative action; as "she watched through the window his beautifully heavy body finding the rhythm of the steps, his big brown neck moving just a little," she decides "'I've got to move,'" even though she "was never a person to move about much or change jobs" (172, 162). She performs whiteness through creating physical distance between herself and the black man that she associates with symbolic "meat" packages, endows with hypersexuality, and on whom she has projected her own sexual desires. In this characterization of Miss Briggs, she is a perpetrator of the white gaze, inscribing an

unearned identity onto Joe's black body and continuing the performances of white femininity that maintain *his* associations with hypersexuality and uncontrollable desire.

It is through these interactions with Joe that Miss Briggs is faced with her own repressions, repressions that are a result of her performances of purity. His presence, historically and socially constructed as sexual and virile, stands in stark contrast to her own historically and socially constructed identity, which is pure and passionless. "Little Dog" demonstrates how Miss Briggs sublimates these desires in order to preserve an internalized ideal of purity. Her purging of her sexuality and her self-removal from her object of desire are both acts of abjection meant to solidify her purity. Because she fails to perform femininity domestically or maternally, she performs her social purity hyperbolically. In this exaggeration, she orders her life such that she isolates herself into complete loneliness and emotional despair.

In *Darkwater*, DuBois recognizes the expectations of women of the early twentieth century, writing that "in other years women's way was clear: to be beautiful, to be petted, to bear children. Such has been their theoretic destiny, and if perchance they have been ugly, hurt, and barren, that has been forgotten with studied silence" (181). Indeed, this is Miss Briggs' fate; by the time the story ends, "the neighborhood had completely forgotten her" (175). Her performances of purity isolate her not only from people of color, but also from other white people. This continuous purging has left Miss Briggs with starved and repressed fragments of human emotion, fragments which themselves are highly influenced by social constructions and internalized as impure.

* * *

In “Cora Unashamed,” “Berry,” and “Little Dog,” Hughes presents white female characters intent on performing the hegemonically-constructed ideal of purity; all of these women do so through an intense ordering of environment that includes abjections of all they have internalized as impure or sullied, including not only those people they read as “racial” Others, but also their own emotions. Such compulsive abjection may isolate these characters from imperfect others--represented in these stories as Greek immigrants, the physically disabled, or African Americans--but it also leaves them emotionally isolated from their closest friends and family, as well as psychologically dissociated from their own human emotions. Given such perpetual purging, it is easy to see why James Baldwin asked in “White Man’s Guilt,” “To what, precisely, are you headed? To what human product precisely are you devoting so much ingenuity, so much energy?” (325). Indeed, by the end of Hughes’ stories, the white female characters all seem incapable of acknowledging not only their shared humanity with others, but also their own capacities for human emotion, including compassion and empathy. This proclivity to enforce a false social order, even to one’s own detriment, not only serves the interests of white patriarchy, but also destroys the capacity for empathy and community. These “ways” of white women, understood through social theories of contamination and psychological theories of abjection, are not only dangerous to others, but also dangerous to women themselves, for in their persistent purging of others, they also purge vital components of their own humanity.

CHAPTER 2

THE CLASSROOM:

DECONSTRUCTING PURITY AND CONTAMINATION, ORDER AND DISORDER

In "Cora Unashamed," "Berry," and "Little Dog," Hughes exposes the ways in which white women respond to blackness and reinforce systems of white patriarchal hegemony vis-à-vis the performance of purity. These performances include an exaggerated emphasis on order and the abjection of the Other, as well as an alignment with the oppressor rather than the oppressed. This emphasis on ordering manifests itself against others, but also reflexively against the self, mandating internalized performances acceptable to the white patriarchal culture of power. Our educational systems, which Louis Althusser identifies as ideological state apparatuses that reproduce hegemonic subjects, also mandate these performances, requiring that white women order themselves and others into reproductions of dominant culture, suppressing potential contaminants and sites of disruption. Through Hughes' portrayals of his white female characters, he encourages me, a white female teacher of African American literature and African American students, to interrogate my own performative responses to blackness by asking myself, "In what ways might I perform purity by clinging to order, rejecting Others (or their perspectives), and aligning myself with white patriarchal systems of power and control? In so doing, how do I oppress others and repress myself in order to reproduce systems of white supremacy?" In this chapter, I seek to answer these questions by utilizing an autoethnographic lens and analyzing my own responses to blackness in the classroom. Ultimately, I argue that my performances have been informed by an over-

emphasis on order that subjugates other ways of knowing, and that resistance to this performance can be found by deconstructing the hierarchies of mind/body and order/disorder. By letting 'disorder'--bodies and their emotional and physiological responses--into the classroom, we can discover new sites of knowledge production. This realization demands that I adopt pedagogical strategies that resist the adherence to master scripts of purity and order, and that I search liminal spaces as potential sites of transgression.

In *Other People's Children*, Lisa Delpit demonstrates the ways in which schooling regulates and controls America's population according to dominant discourses. She argues that there exists "a culture of power" within classroom spaces, that there are "codes or rules for participating" in this culture, and that "the rules of the culture of power are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power" (24). Although Delpit doesn't name this culture of power as white or patriarchal, it is implied throughout her work, and she clearly demonstrates that the culture of power is reproduced within schooling systems that fail to acknowledge its very existence. At the forefront of these systems are white women, the primary educational force in the U.S., and the primary reproducers of hegemonic discourses of white patriarchy. In efforts to provide a material example of how white women perform and reproduce the culture of power, I return now to the anecdote with which I began this Act of my dissertation. The student who "disrupted" class, which is how I saw it at the time, was reacting to a text that highlighted America's state-sponsored abuses against African American women. At the time, I saw her outburst as inappropriate for the halls of academia; however, based on my observations of Hughes' characters, I believe that I was performing my whiteness and my

femininity through a commitment to orderliness. I wanted the disorder eliminated. Like the Studevant women, Mrs. Osborn and Miss Briggs, I wanted to order my life into clean, tidy spaces that minimized disruption. In my embodiment of that performance, I terrorized the student with what I have come to see as an oppressive force--the direct order of a white teacher who insists on conformity to hegemonic discourses of education. This anecdote is a story of one of my responses to blackness, to what I understood as contamination to classroom order. What follows is my analysis of this event after the nine years that have passed, and after I have engaged Hughes' insights into purity as a key performance of white womanhood.

Revisiting the Event

To properly analyze the event that opens this section of my study, the context is important. At the time, I was a relatively new faculty member in my second year at the institution, a private, four-year college known primarily as an Engineering and Computer Sciences school. I was hired to teach mostly English Composition, though I would also teach a Humanities Literature elective approximately every other year. During my first year, I noticed the absence of African American literature in the course catalog. While I understood that the institution did not have an English major, and that it was, in fact, lacking many of the liberal arts, I also thought that the lack of any course in African American studies was inappropriate, especially due to our enrollment, which was comprised of 24% African American students. I was, no doubt, shaped by my experience at a Quaker liberal arts college that stressed diversity, representation, and inclusion. In

my first year, I proposed that we add the course to the catalog. After successfully arguing for the addition of the course (and it was contested), I asked the Dean who he would hire to teach the course. He smiled, and said, "You'll be teaching it." I now recognize that the teaching assignment spoke to the value the institution placed on the new addition to the catalog; while the school might permit the course in the curriculum, it certainly wouldn't go out of its way to find the best person for the job. So, I found myself teaching African American literature the following fall.

I was exceptionally nervous. I was a new teacher, I was not an expert in African American literature, and the possibility of teaching the course to a primarily African American audience made me reflect upon my position as an outsider to the tradition. I must admit that I felt some sense of encroachment on both the discipline and the students. I began studying and contacting the people who I believed could help me prepare, including the editor of the anthology that I had decided to use, since she was, at that time, affiliated with the institution from which I graduated. When class met for the first time, my nervousness continued as I found myself in a new situation--the class was, as I predicted, overwhelmingly African American, with approximately 66% (8) African American students and 33% (4) white students. Of the African American students, 63% (5) were men and 37% (3) were women. All of the white students (4) were women. As one of only a few white people in the class, I recognized that my position was the inverse of what most African American students normally experience; there were fewer people in the room that looked like me and whom I might assume had shared similar experiences, and though I knew this ratio would be valuable for both me and the white students in terms of experiencing some (albeit temporary) feelings of being 'outsiders,' I was,

nevertheless, still uncomfortable. I am sure that I "stammered" in the way that Baldwin describes white people discussing race in "White Man's Guilt." I made my way through our anthology with trepidation during the first couple of weeks, emphasizing a great deal of historical context through which I could demonstrate my knowledge and level of research. I had arranged the course chronologically, so we spent time with early African American texts by writers such as George Moses Horton and Benjamin Banneker, as well as excerpts from the slave narratives of Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass. We were in the process of reading excerpts from Harriet Jacobs' narrative when Tamara,[22] a student who was friendly, intellectually curious, and highly-engaged, uncharacteristically and angrily burst out, "Why in the hell did they bring us over here anyway?"

Although much time has passed since that event, it still haunts me. I have forgotten many details, but I remember many others--what I will never forget was the look in the student's eyes after she obeyed my order to "Stop!" She chose to, or was compelled to, or felt she had to, obey me. There were tears in her eyes. Then, another student, an African American male, turned to me and said, "Ms. McGrade, I think that this is the best way to end the class." As I looked around, I saw shocked faces, many of which seemed to tacitly agree. With a quiet voice, and without really knowing why, I said, "Okay." I recall being uncomfortable with my original command, and the way in which the student became obedient to my authority in that moment; I felt that I had somehow been endowed with power over her body and her emotion, and I was at a loss with what to do with it. However, what I felt much more clearly was a responsibility to get the class back into order, into some semblance of what I understood as an appropriate learning environment. What follows is my re-reading of that event in the context of this

[22] The student names used throughout this study are all pseudonyms.

idea of an "appropriate learning environment," which is itself deeply connected to the professionalization of teaching, the feminization of the field, and the attendant master scripts that determine what constitutes order and contamination within the classroom environment. These master scripts are deeply interconnected with social constructions of race and gender, and I also excavate the power of these constructions by analyzing their roles in the opening anecdote, paying careful attention to how my whiteness and femininity informed my actions, as well as how I failed to understand the ways in which blackness, femininity, and masculinity also functioned in that moment.

Order and "Appropriate" Learning Environments

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Hughes' characterization of white women emphasizes an attentiveness to order as a method of performing the purity expected of white women. Other authors have since made similar observations. In "White Woman Feminist," Marilyn Frye argues that "whitely people"[23] "tend to believe that one preserves one's goodness by being principled, by acting according to rules . . ." (121). After analyzing texts of people of color for their insights on whiteness, she argues that

> Authority seems to be central to whiteliness, as you might expect from a people who are raised to run things, or to aspire to that: belief in one's authority in matters practical, moral, and intellectual exists in tension with the insecurity and hypocrisy that are essentially connected with the

[23] In this article, Frye studies three texts, all by people of color, to identify what she terms "whiteliness." Frye uses the term "whiteliness" instead of "whiteness" because she believes "whiteness" conflates all white people with the behaviors which she describes; instead, she uses "whiteliness" to indicate that white people have a contingent relationship with the "whitely" behaviors she describes.

> pretense of infallibility. This pretentiousness makes a whitely person simultaneously rude, condescending, overbearing, and patronizing on the one hand, and on the other, weak, helpless, insecure, and seeking validation of their goodness. (122)

Within this analysis, Frye seems to describe the white female characters of "Cora Unashamed," "Berry," and "Little Dog," all of whom perform their purity through an over-emphasis on order. The Studevant women attempt to order their children, their home, indeed, their entire community around the prohibition of contaminants; Mrs. Osborn not only segregates Berry to maintain order and perpetuate illusions of her own purity, but she also attempts to separate herself from imperfect whiteness; and Miss Briggs follows an established routine for nearly six years before changing this routine only in an attempt, as self-delusional as it is, to remove that which compromises her own sense of purity. For all of these women, their ability to maintain the dominant order determines the degree to which they will be at least peripherally integrated into white patriarchal systems, allowed to mull around the margins where they gain the protection and authority of white patriarchy.

This same insistence on order and the acquisition of white male power can also be found within the history and feminization of the teaching profession. Before the industrial revolution, the majority of school teachers were white men; however, as Madeleine Grumet observes in *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching*, by 1888, 67% of teachers in the United States were white women (38). One reason for this change was the abundance of new job opportunities for men, but another reason was an organized social movement to place women, the guardians of moral superiority, into classrooms to guide not only the

intellectual development, but also the moral development, of children. According to Grumet, Catherine Beecher, the founder of the Central Committee for Promoting National Education, "argued for placing educational responsibility in the hands of women, maintaining their submissiveness and elevating feminine self-sacrifice, purity, and domesticity into moral superiority that could be dispensed in schools" (40). Thus, the purity so valued in women became the primary reason for allowing them in school systems. In addition, these women were also expected to remain pure; there were strict guidelines of behavior and a prohibition of marriage. Therefore, the purity that requires, in my analysis in Chapter 1, so much abjection, so much insistence on order and the removal of "contaminants," became the precise reason to make women responsible for educating children. In this new role, the continual purging of contaminants that destroyed the emotional and psychological lives of Hughes' white female characters became institutionalized through the feminization of the teaching profession.

Within only twenty years of this feminization of the field, a new educational movement surfaced, one that stressed mental and emotional order, and a cleansing of sullied or disorderly dispositions. In 1909, the "mental hygiene" movement was officially institutionalized with the establishment of the National Committee for Mental-Hygiene. This movement, which reached its height from 1920-1940, provides an uncanny complement to the emphasis on domestic hygiene and order that was a result of the cult of domesticity discussed in Chapter 1 and in relation to Hughes' main characters. The mental hygiene movement stressed the control of emotions and encouraged obedient, calm dispositions in children. In *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*, Megan Boler explains that the "centerpiece of the mental-hygiene movement" was the text *Emotions*

and the Educative Process by Daniel Prescott, a book that was sponsored by the American Council on Education and reprinted ten times between 1938 and 1961 (51). Its main purpose was to instruct teachers on how to identify and tame the "labile," or overly emotional child. Boler further explains that this movement emphasized the "social values of efficiency and productivity through one's industrious nature and conduct" (48). Any behaviors that slowed down educational and industrial mechanisms were thus targets for social control. The mental hygiene movement thereby pathologized emotions and positioned emotional students as students in need of curing and purification. Women, in their own prescribed states of purity, were just the people to do the job. As Grumet writes in *Bitter Milk,* "The ideal [female] teacher was one who could control the children and be controlled by her superiors" (43). This movement thereby positioned white women to evaluate emotions as contamination and therefore extinguish this form of expression. In this manner, white women became what we might call *circumstantial* bearers of authority and order; they were utilized within the circumstance of the classroom to enact and support the hegemonic structures that eliminated acts of resistance, including emotional responses that often arise from injustice and oppression.

In *Feeling Power*, Boler argues that "histories of education have largely neglected a vast and untold story: the subterranean disciplining of emotions" (30). Much of her project successfully argues that this disciplining of emotion disproportionately affects women, an important observation that explains the ways in which hegemonic discourses have "'controlled' women's emotions and relation to knowledge as a strategy to maintain her subordinate status within patriarchal culture" (31). However, I argue that these discourses of emotion have also been leveraged heavily against people of color, and done

so by the white women who have been conditioned to support white patriarchal structures that emphasize orderly populations and prohibit disruptions. For example, although the mental hygiene movement occurred many years ago, its historical residue certainly continues to infiltrate education and is especially visible in contemporary examples that concern themselves with white teachers in classrooms with students of color. In *I have a Kind of Fear: Confessions from the Writings of White Teachers and Black Students in City Schools*, the posturing for orderliness is especially evident in the voices of white women teachers, most of whom reported that they spend "almost all day trying to maintain some order and discipline" (Larson and Olson 59). The teacher in the following excerpt, a novice white female, expresses a desire to be different, but also recognizes the institutional preferences for order. She writes,

> I am dismayed by Mrs. Schwartz, who has seven students (class of fifteen) who are flunking. Her teaching method is: lecture, write a vague assignment on the board . . . , and correct answers at her desk while the students supposedly do homework. I am impressed with Mr. Wilson; he's totally disorganized, and such questions as, "Where'd I leave my textbook, kids?" create brief bedlam as everyone shouts an answer, but he's careful to set the kids up for a lesson . . . I want to teach like him, but I would like the order that prevails in Mrs. Schwartz's class. But, do I want an orderly classroom because it's conducive to learning – or because principals and supervisors prefer this? Mrs. Schwartz is probably regarded as the better teacher. (Larson and Olson 57)

Since the book concentrates on elementary schooling, this perspective certainly provides an understanding of the early institutional emphasis on orderliness. The excerpt also demonstrates that the white female teacher feels a strong responsibility towards order--she expresses an institutionalized preference for an "orderly classroom"--but also a desire to do something different. However, she realizes that Mr. Wilson has a privilege that neither she nor Mrs. Schwartz possesses; he has the power to appear disorderly precisely because of his gender. He is part of the hegemonic structure that creates and enforces teacher expectations, and as part of that structure he experiences flexibility and power that others, including women, do not.

Other, more contemporary writers also provide examples of white teachers' impulses to order. In *Teaching to Transgress,* bell hooks recounts her experience moving from a racially segregated school system to an integrated system. She writes, "Bussed to white schools, we soon learned that obedience, and not a zealous will to learn, was what was expected of us. Too much eagerness to learn could easily be seen as a threat to white authority" (3). hooks also writes that utterances of emotion, including anger and even laughter, "were deemed unacceptable, vulgar disruptions of the social order" (3). Given the feminization of the field, hooks most likely experienced this emphasis on order at the hands of white women. Moreover, in a newly-integrated school, the students of color certainly carried the extra weight of being hyper-visible, ready targets for such social control. This phenomenon would eventually and unwittingly play itself out in my own experience. As I will discuss in detail later, my response to Tamara was not just a response to anger, but a response to "black" anger.

Before moving on, however, I will address perhaps the most contemporary example of the impulse to order and its integration into our schooling systems. Daniel Goleman's 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence*, sparked a social movement devoted to the ability to recognize, name, and control one's own emotions, and his definitions and strategies for controlling emotions have become prominent fixtures in America's cultural and educational landscape.[24] Megan Boler argues that the popular interest in Emotional Intelligence (EQ) is a reproduction of the pseudo-scientific "mental hygiene" movement, reflecting "historical roots in the most conservative versions of social control" (*Feeling Power* 59). Indeed, when I taught a section of "Introduction to College Reading" in 2010, I encountered a chapter on EQ that was designed to give students the skills needed to succeed in college.[25] The chapter emphasized managing and "soothing" emotions in a "positive way," as well as controlling impulses. As I read the text with students, I realized that this message was especially insidious because the class was full of students who had been systematically disenfranchised through the existence of structural racism; they were all students of color, all products of poor educational systems, all admitted without proper academic and financial support, and all on academic probation. As instructor of the course, I was supposed to teach them to control their responses to a world that deals them distinct, material disadvantages. However, these were students with every right to be angry. In requiring the type of emotional control the EQ movement prescribes, I, and the

[24] In her chapter "Capitalizing on Emotional 'Skills,'" Boler recounts the popularity of the Emotional Intelligence movement, noting Goleman's position on *The New York Times* bestseller list beginning in 1995 and lasting for a year and a half, as well as the international coverage of his book in *Time* magazine, *the New York Times, Better Homes and Gardens*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Life*, and *The Oprah Winfrey Show.*

[25] The text for the course was Skip Downing's *On Course: Strategies for Creating Success in College and in Life.* However, emotional intelligence is also discussed in our required freshmen class, Introduction to Psychology, which uses the book *Visualizing Psychology* by Siri Carpenter and Karen Huffman. The text discusses emotional intelligence without discussing or analyzing how rules for expressing emotions may vary according to culture, race, gender, or social class.

other white female teachers often relegated to teaching developmental reading courses, would have been asking students to deny the ethical evaluations found in their emotional responses.[26]

Boler argues that EQ curricula are "in large part behavioral modification programs" (76). She writes that

> the contemporary discourses such as 'emotional intelligence' erase gendered and cultural differences through the discourses of universal biological circuitry of emotions. In this erasure of differences, we find science by no means free from social agendas and ulterior motives. The ideal virtuous citizen is he – and again, I mean "he" – who controls his emotions through rational choice and the ruling neo-cortex. (60)

I argue that this "ideal virtuous citizen" is not only a "he," but a "white he," as the EQ movement works to quiet the perspectives of both women and people of color by not only delegitimizing any emotional reactions counter to white patriarchal culture, but also by pathologizing them. In America's school system, white women teachers, relegated to the front lines of education, perform this task; "it is largely women who have developed contemporary curricula of emotional literacy, and women still constitute the majority of schoolteachers," but "the popular embrace of emotional intelligence functions largely as a blueprint for male CEO success, and it is men who govern the public debates on emotional intelligence" (Boler 53). This emotional intelligence movement provides yet another example of white women who perform and maintain their purity in classroom

[26] Instead, I presented this type of self-management as a tool for success in a particular culture of power, one largely dominated by white men and their versions of appropriate discourse.

spaces by repressing themselves, oppressing others, and aligning themselves with patriarchal structures of dominance.

These examples provide evidence that Grumet's assertions about women and teaching--that we "have contributed our labor and our children to institutional and social organizations that have extended our own subordination"--persist into this century (45). Further, this is done so even in the physical absence of the white male; so strong is hegemonic domination that his physical presence is no longer necessary. Instead, his ideological presence is enough to make sure that white women exercise control over themselves and others, and cleanse any potential disruptions to order. As Grumet writes, it is a "pedagogy for patriarchy" (31). When I consider my own action within this framework of purity and order, I realize how harmful, how violent, my order to "Stop!" must have been--not only to the student, but to everyone in the room. Through the abjection of emotions (mine and the students') and "disorder," I was enacting education as the reconstitution of white patriarchal power.

In the pages that follow, I re-read the events that open this section of my study within the context of "order" and "disorder," and seek to disrupt what is currently read as contamination in schooling systems. The events that I read as disorder--the student's emotional response and her physicality--were made especially visible to me not only because they are traditionally and pathologically denied in the classroom, but also because of the way in which her racial identity has been socially-constructed. However, her reaction contained an ethical evaluation that was a deep source of knowledge that the rest of us had not excavated. I therefore attempt to deconstruct the idea that her actions

were disorderly and instead position my lack of emotion and dismissal of physicality as 'disorderly' conduct.

Re-Reading "Disorder"

In "Disciplined Emotions: Philosophies of Educated Feelings," Megan Boler rightly notes, "Almost anyone who has spent time in a classroom can attest that the felt and expressed emotions, and the emotional dynamics of groups, shape the project of learning and the classroom environment" (203). Yet, as demonstrated in my own anecdote and within the history of education, we have consistently purged emotions from classroom landscapes. My response to the student was certainly influenced by this history of education, a history that demonstrates the shaping of white women teachers into guardians of their own and others' orderly, obedient, "appropriate" conduct. Indeed, this conditioning informed my entire approach to the class, the texts, and the students. My insistence on order was visible even before class started, as I over-prepared and constructed a hyper-organized syllabus with no room for the flexibility that is almost always required in the classroom. Maureen T. Reddy, a white professor at Rhode Island College, makes a similar observation about her first day teaching a course on African American literature. She writes, in "Smashing the Rules of Racial Standing," that her notes for her first lecture were far too extensive for one lecture, and that, in retrospect, her "real purpose was to distance [herself] as an object of interrogation by foregrounding 'academic' material, casting black literature into the mode of literary study then dominant" (56). Reddy remembers that course as "a white way of being in the academic

world: cool, distanced, defining 'serious' as unemotional, controlled, wholly calm and rational" (56). However, this serious, distanced approach, is not just "a white way of being," but a white, patriarchal way of being that white women, including both Reddy and myself, have imitated in efforts to align ourselves with authority and order. In the context of my experience, this relentless grip on control and distance may have inadvertently made the student's outburst inevitable. My insistence on maintaining order, that is, a distance between self and other--including the perspectives and texts of people of color, and my own 'disorderly' emotions--prevented me from engaging with the material in the way that the student did. Instead, I read the text as historical artifact at the expense of the exposure of Jacobs' trauma, keeping her experience and the reality of gender and racial oppression distanced from my present reality.

This stands in stark contrast to the way in which Tamara read the text--her use of the word "us" ("Why the hell did they bring us over here anyway?") indicates that she made a connection between the past and the present, between historical and current modes of racial and gender oppression and violence. It did not occur to me until I began analyzing the way in which my socially constructed identity determined my "orderly" actions, that Tamara's socially constructed identity also informed hers. It is even possible that she may have been reading, for the first time (given the state of the traditional literary canon), a work that reflected both her race and gender. However, as focused as I was on maintaining order, I could not imagine that the student may have been seeing herself in that work. Further, my focus on order prevented me from realizing that her reaction was a way of knowing and expressing that has been historically prohibited to

people of color and women. When I sought to control her expressions and her physical movement, I denied the knowledge that her body made available to her.

My adverse reaction to the student's expression also testifies to the way in which I considered her anger to be what Allison Jagger calls an "outlaw" emotion. In "Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology," Jagger writes primarily about the experiences of women, arguing that "outlaw emotions are distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values" (160). In our society, anger and rage are not only prohibited to women, but also to people of color. The student's "blackness" therefore added another dimension, and perhaps an increased intensity, to the way in which I constructed her response as an "outlaw emotion." I witnessed not just anger, but black anger, an emotion that is particularly troubling for white culture. However, regardless of these dominant constructions of anger, the student's reaction was not pathological; it was not a sign of something wrong within her, but rather a recognition of something wrong in the material world. As bell hooks writes in *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, "Rage is an appropriate response to injustice" (26). In retrospect and from this perspective, I wonder why we weren't all as enraged as the student, for "emotions function in part as moral and ethical evaluations: they give us information about what we care about and why" (Boler, *Feeling Power* xviii). The student knew that the violence that Harriet Jacobs endured is certainly worthy of a sustained, perhaps unforgiving, rage. However, I kept this information distanced and 'in my head.' I therefore did not come to know the text in the way that the one brave student did.

Further, when I listened to the male student, Derrius, who politely and calmly suggested that ending class then was the right thing to do, I continued to enact a white

feminine script focused on orderly conduct. I responded positively to the way in which he encapsulated the tenets of emotional intelligence. When he 'appropriately' asserted that we should just end class, he presented a palatable recommendation to me. As a black male, he did not physically carry the power of white patriarchy, but his fluency in those standards endowed him, at least from my perspective and momentarily, with the ideological authority of white patriarchy. His suggestion, presented as it was, became a white male assertion. I did exactly as he suggested.

The focus on abiding by hegemonic constructions and ordering the 'other' out of my environment is precisely the ordering that Hughes' characters embody in his short stories. In "Cora Unashamed," the Studevant women insisted on ordering themselves into compliance with white patriarchy. In response, Cora performed her rage and brought to the surface subjugated knowledge. She is therefore deemed disorderly, yet she was the only character who showed any signs of empathy and concern during the course of the story. This is not unlike my experience; I ordered my classroom into conformity with white patriarchal standards and the student responded with her own subjugated knowledge. Unfortunately, my response was, like the Studevant women, devoid of emotional engagement and an attempt to prevent the student from expressing subjugated knowledge. In my authoritative response, I stole from the student the opportunity to express and process her rage; in fact, I stole the opportunity from the entire class. Moreover, I did this, like the Studevants, without the physical presence of a white male. My request for her 'self-control' was a white patriarchal method of coercion and compliance; it mandated a sublimation of her ethical evaluation, which was articulated

through her rage. As I will discuss later, I should have instead provided a framework from which to analyze and contextualize her expression.

I now recognize that my lack of emotional engagement, my lack of rage in reaction to state-sponsored abuses of black women, was itself disorderly conduct; it was not the student's reaction that was out of order, but my own. Megan Boler calls my lack of emotional engagement a type of "spectating," or "allowing oneself to inhabit a position of distance and separation, to remain in the 'anonymous' crowd and abdicate responsibility" (*Feeling Power* 184). Her definition helps explain the difference between the way in which I came to know Jacobs' text and the way in which the student came to know the text. In this situation, I chose the privilege and comfort of removing myself from the context of black women's abuse; I chose the safety and distance of whiteness. I did this not just to the text, but also to the student. The discomfort I encountered was not due to the text or even the student's pain, but due to the disruption of classroom order. Again, I position this type of concern as itself disorderly because it aligns myself with order at the expense of the student and the text. In contrast, the student's response to the Harriet Jacobs' work was what Boler calls a mode of witnessing achieved through "testimonial reading" which pushes readers "to recognize that a novel or biography reflects not merely a distant other, but analogous social relations in our own environment, in which our economic and social positions are implicated" (*Feeling* 170). The student in my class was responding to not only the crises that occurred during Jacobs' life, but also the crises of subjectivity that permeate present, everyday life. She was looking at the text, not as a static moment of history, but as a product of a violent, dominating white male patriarchy that still exists (though in a different form) today. Because of my reaction, I

missed the opportunity to make the connections between the past and the present that the student was articulating. Because she expressed herself in a manner that often disqualifies students from academic discourse, I was unable to read her reaction as insightful, relevant and appropriate. This is not a fault of the student, but a fault of the teacher. I have come to believe it is the teacher's responsibility to acknowledge and validate this way of knowing and expression, but also to contextualize it within broader cultural discourses of "appropriate" behavior.

Thus far, I have concentrated on my reaction to the student's anger; however, my reaction to her anger was inextricably connected to her blackness because both of these factors made her hyper-visible to me. Hughes reminds me, in both "Berry" and "Little Dog," that the white female characters concentrate heavily on black bodies in their midst. In "Berry," Mrs. Osborn attempts to order Milberry out of white living quarters and separate herself from of forms of Otherness, and in "Little Dog," Miss Briggs can't help but concentrate on Joe's physicality, despite her best efforts not to. The actions of these white characters remind me that the student's body was hyper-visible to me not only because of her emotional expression, but also because her identity has been socially and historically constructed alongside images of disorder and contamination. In this conceptualization, I already read her visible identity as a contamination; her expression simply intensified this. As stated earlier, I viewed the class demographics as different from what I had encountered before; the class, therefore, did not fit my understanding of a 'normal' order. Ultimately, I realize that I was attempting to perform the same type of orderliness and purity that not only marginalized Hughes' black characters, but also

defined and destroyed the emotional and psychological lives of Hughes' white female characters.

I read Tamara's black body as abnormal, perhaps even problematic, because she brought not only the physicality of her body into the classroom, but also her emotions, rather than sitting quietly through a 'purely' intellectual exercise. Physical gestures such as hers act as contaminants in schooling systems that emphasize restrained order and obedient bodies. In *Performing Purity: Whiteness, Pedagogy, and the Reconstitution of Power,* performance theorist John Warren studies the regulation of bodies in schooling systems in relation to the purity of mind produced by the mind/body split emphasized in western metaphysics.[27] He argues that the mind/body dichotomy ultimately seeks to control and erase the body by privileging the mind; when this emerges within our educational systems, it manifests itself as a desire to 'not see' bodies. However, "not all bodies have the capacity for easy absence" (45):

> In a system that demands and relies on purity absent of color contaminants, the bodies of color stand out in all their bodily excess. And in that presence, the bodies are effectively dysfunctional – not doing what is expected in a system so heavily reliant on bodily absence. (46)

As I observed the student's bodily movement, I read her as symbolic of such dysfunction. As mentioned previously, I now reverse this analysis and instead position my distanced, detached approach as dysfunctional. In a deconstruction of the mind/body hierarchy, I argue that the body that does not contribute to knowledge production is an extraneous body. Instead of reading all bodies as excess, I argue that all bodies that go unattended to are excessive. In this revision, I position "spectating" bodies as contaminants, for they

[27] See especially Rene Descartes.

hold the capacity to produce new knowledge, but remain unutilized. In my case, my body and its physiological responses were denied so that I could privilege order. Such privilege requires the destructive abjection displayed by the characters discussed in Chapter 1, an abjection that might, in fact, lead to what Patricia Williams calls in *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, "spirit-murder," a "disregard for others whose lives qualitatively depend on our regard" that "produces a system of formalized distortions of thought" (73). Williams writes that this "cultural cancer" is causing "spiritual genocide . . . in whites" and that "we need to eradicate this numbing pathology before it wipes out what precious little humanity we have left" (78). The eradication of humanity is perhaps striking white women disproportionately as they serve on the front lines of schools with increasingly diverse populations. However, it is possible to reverse this trend in order to simultaneously preserve the humanity of white women and prevent the continued marginalization of students of color. This can be accomplished by doing things differently, by changing how we conceptualize our educational practices.

"Doing Things Differently"[28]

I advocate for doing things differently, for considering the potential of letting emotion and the source of that emotion, the body, into classroom spaces. I will address, for the sake of organization, first emotion--represented through the study of anger--and then the body (though this is an artificial divide since emotions are often felt through the body). I also offer strategies for cultivating this type of engagement that include an

[28] This subtitle echoes John T. Warren's 2001 essay "Performing Whiteness Differently." His phrase continues to resonate with me because it contains a call to action, a call to do something differently.

attentiveness to physiological responses. I further suggest contextualizing these physiological responses within master scripts of obedience and discussing the political dimensions of anger, including why certain groups have been conditioned to repress it. Approaches such as these could have allowed for, in my situation, a collective emotional engagement with Jacobs' text, an action that might have prevented the pain and alienation that the student felt in my classroom. This collective engagement could have encouraged all of us to come to know the text in the way that the student did, including understanding the ways in which racial and gender oppression still operate today.

There exist few theoretical frameworks for encouraging emotional engagement in classroom spaces. Boler's book *Feeling Power* is itself a quest for a sustained philosophical inquiry into emotion and pedagogy. Having found no such tradition, she conducts what she terms a "theoretical intervention" and attempts to create a discourse around emotion and its "absent-presence" (xviii, xv). While she laments the lack of educational discourse around emotions, she does acknowledge the work of feminists who have established a politics of emotion that seeks to legitimate the ways in which private feelings can become, and are inextricably related to, public practices. Boler argues that the politics of emotion can provide a foundation for allowing emotional engagement in the classroom. In "'I Could Hear You If You Would Just Calm Down': Challenging Eurocentric Classroom Norms through Passionate Discussions of Racial Oppression," Eileen O'Brien also proposes the exploration of emotion, specifically anger, as an acceptable and appropriate learning tool. She argues that incorporating "the emotional response of *anger* in class discussions of racial oppression disrupts the normative hierarchies of white dominance in classroom space" (68). O'Brien also posits appropriate

"interventions" by which to explore the anger, acknowledging that her approach "overturns mainstream white middle-class norms of etiquette, and thus is a deeply personal challenge for many white students especially" (73). However, as her article implicitly acknowledges, such personal challenges to white students should not determine pedagogical decisions, for the comfort of white students, and I add, their teachers, is often dependent upon the discomfort of students of color who must internalize their pain and anger. O'Brien's observations remind us that

> the incorporation of emotion into the classroom process holds liberatory potential not only toward dismantling racial oppression but gender and class oppression as well, by creating a space where previously devalued forms of expression are legitimatized as equally valid in the quest for knowledge. (69)

Because emotional responses often embody ethical evaluations, an examination of these emotions can cultivate this knowledge and lead to new understandings of historical and current structural oppression.

One way of excavating this subjugated knowledge is by legitimizing the role of emotions and physiological responses in the learning process. In the case that opens this chapter, the student's reaction was entirely appropriate, and she should have been allowed to express herself in the manner that she did because the intense orderliness of her environment most likely contributed to her reaction. I have come to lament both the pain that the student encountered, as well as the unrealized potential of that moment. Due to the social conditioning I've experienced as a white woman and a teacher, I was neither personally nor professionally prepared to respond to Tamara's emotional engagement.

Had I been prepared for such a moment, I would certainly have done things differently. I would not have ordered her to stop. Instead, I think it was appropriate to do just as she did--care for own well-being by removing herself from the environment that caused her so much pain. Then, in the next class, I could have done a service to her, to the class, and to myself by recognizing the validity of her responses. Had I possessed the theoretical background, I could have presented the language and nature of spectating, witnessing, and testimonial reading. We could have discussed our reactions to encountering injustice and contextualized these reactions within possibilities of achieving social justice, and whether such anaesthetized responses might prohibit change. I could even have introduced Williams' theory of spirit murder and asked if the students had witnessed or felt this type of disregard for others. In other words, using the observations and arguments I've made during this chapter, I could have positioned myself and my pedagogical practices, not the student, as disorderly. Such a discussion would have validated the student's response as a site of valuable knowledge production rather than subjected it to a form of social control which ultimately subverts attempts to combat oppression and injustice--in the classroom and in broader contexts.

The situation provided a perfect moment to also discuss the political dimension of anger and the ways in which emotion, specifically anger, has been denied to particular groups of people. Victor Lewis, who so famously expressed his rage in the documentary *The Color of Fear*, has discussed this topic while helping audience members process difficult moments in the documentary. At the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (NCORE) in 2011, he demonstrated these political dimensions by asking a series of questions. He first asked us, "In our culture, who gets to be angry?" He

then dissected culture into smaller units, asking "In your home, who gets to be angry? In school, who gets to be angry? In our legal system, who gets to be angry? In politics, who gets to be angry?" He also asked us to relate our answers to race and gender systems, ultimately arguing that "legitimate anger is the privilege and prerogative of those in authority." In an African American literature class, it would certainly be appropriate to analyze the censorship of anger in this manner, especially since it could be connected to the scrutiny and censorship that many African Americans authors encountered at the hands of white patrons and publishing houses.

Since the event, I have come to believe that as a teacher, I have a responsibility to discern the historically-subjugated knowledge of students, even when this knowledge might be expressed in non-traditional, "disorderly" ways. Part of this challenge involves excavating what has been buried, and then legitimating the knowledge by contextualizing it within dominant discourses such as the censorship of emotion which serves the status quo. I believe that it is my responsibility to recognize that some students might be encountering, for the first time, the violent histories of injustice, or perhaps for the first time finding the language that describes their experiences. The classroom can and perhaps should provide a low-risk place where students can genuinely react to this new knowledge without fear of punishment. Unfortunately, my command to the student was indeed a form of punishment, something that brings me a degree of shame, but also an urgency to change.

A different learning environment could have altered or revised the situation so that the student did not have to be alone in her moral judgment and outrage. I could have perhaps pre-empted (though not disabled or disallowed) and processed the student's

traumatic responses to both the text, and our intensely ordered environment, asking that we all engage in her method of testimonial reading. Accomplishing this would mean approaching the course completely differently, from the initial construction of the syllabus since my focus on order prevented me from engaging with the text in more substantive ways, and from asking students to do the same. A better approach would be to build in flexibility for the time needed to emotionally and physically digest the trauma of the text. This does not mean sacrificing any learning; it means redefining learning to include paying attention to our minds and bodies as we engage the text and seek to understand the socio-historical context and its relationship to present material realities. The efficacy of learning in this manner can easily be discerned from the situation that begins this section of my study; Tamara's vehement reaction indicates a way of knowing so powerful that she physically embodied it. I would therefore approach the course as one which requires an attentiveness to the body, reading it not as excess, as something to be abjected, but as a valuable part of the learning process.

In *Performing Purity,* Warren argues that seeing the body as part of the process of knowledge production can reduce the harm of the western (read: white and patriarchal) metaphysical tradition. He offers the body as a liminal space that can reveal knowledge that is imprisoned by the mind/body dualism. In "Performative Pedagogy," he offers the following suggestion:

> A critical, performative pedagogy asks students and teachers to be embodied researchers – to take learning to the body in order to come to know in a more full and powerful way. It is to liberate the body from the shackles of a dualism that privileges the mind over the visceral. It is to ask

> students to be more fully present, to be more fully engaged, to take more responsibility and agency in their own learning. (qtd. in Warren, "Subverting Whiteness" 414)

His request for students to be more fully present and more fully engaged is something Veronica Watson also writes about in "The Next Step: Teach(ing) an African American Counter-narrative to Whiteness." In her article, she recounts a strategy that seems to correlate with Warren's performance pedagogy. She explains how she uses the body as a source of knowledge production when she teaches about white violence, which she sees as "a recurring, persistent, national, and international foundation of white identity" (152). When studying this violence with her students, Watson shares graphic images, asking students to respond corporeally, rather than 'purely' intellectually. Watson writes that "understanding intellectually, and understanding emotionally and spiritually, are often different, and I have found that when students allow themselves to connect with this material on multiple levels, their ability to think critically about the subject is enhanced" (152). After viewing the images, Watson explains that

> While [the class is] still together as a group in shock and mourning, I ask [the students] to write. My instructions are simple: 'This is tough stuff to see, it is hard to understand. I want to hurry to the analysis for some sort of refuge, just so I can continue to live in a world where this is possible. But I believe it is important to stay with the emotions that this material brings up, if only for a while. So before we begin to analyze, critique, or synthesize, or intellectualize, just feel it . . . And write.' (153)

As Watson states in her instructions to students, many students exhibit a tendency to seek "refuge" in an intellectual analysis; this is precisely the type of ordering and compartmentalization that so deeply affected Hughes' white female characters, and my own reading and teaching practices, ultimately harming the students in my classroom.

I suggest adapting this methodology based on an exercise I encountered at a 2007 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (NCORE) session on "Focusing on Whiteness and White Privilege: Re-centering White People or Dismantling White Supremacy," led by Frances Kendall and David Owens. As part of the workshop, Owens and Kendall asked attendees to read excerpts from texts on whiteness and simultaneously map our physiological responses on an outline of a body that contained the following labels: "Head (Intellectual)," "Heart" (Emotional)," "Gut (Visceral)," and "Feet (Physical)." I suggest an adaptation that might continuously remind student of the multiple ways to engage texts. At the beginning of the semester, I will narrate my previous experiences with 'orderly' reading and teaching, and explain what they taught me about engaging with the material and the multiple ways of knowing.[29] I will then ask students to draw an outline of their body on the front cover of their texts, asking them to be aware throughout the entire semester that our bodies provide us with valuable information. To demonstrate the value of this process, I plan to ask students to provide examples of moments that their bodies have given them important information. I will ask questions such as, "Have you ever felt sick to your stomach seeing or reading something? What did that feeling tell you?" Throughout the semester, I will return to this idea, especially when encountering texts that seem 'purely' intellectual (such as DuBois

[29] In Chapter 4, I also discuss significant strategies to use on the first few days of teaching African American literature, including naming and problematizing my whiteness, as well as explaining my interest. All of these strategies work together to set the tone for the semester.

chapter on the politics of Reconstruction in *The Souls of Black Folks*) or 'purely' visceral (such as some of the more radical poetry of the Black Arts Movement). In both of these examples, it is important to engage intellect and emotion in order to understand the full impact of the texts--how, in the DuBois text, the political maneuvering leads to material suffering for people of color, and how, in many of the Black Arts Movement texts, the violence and trauma relate to historical and current political institutions and practices.

With methods such as this, there is much potential to deconstruct the mind/body split that seeks to erase the body, and in so doing makes bodies of color all the more obvious to white teachers. If we position all bodies as significant, if they are not read as excess, but as critical to the learning process, every body (not just some bodies) gets attention. Perhaps in doing so, we can eliminate the harmful contrast between bodies read as raced or unraced. After all, as Warren argues, "Until we resist the desire for absence, thereby embracing various bodies in all their excesses, we will continue to reify a system that inherently serves a racist and destructive agenda" ("Bodily" 102). In my classroom, I choose to create space that allows for knowing through mind and body, for examining subjugated knowledge, and thereby challenging rather than supporting racist, sexist systems of oppression. This is a choice that runs counter to my socialization and my professional training, and therefore it is a choice that liberates both me and the students in my classroom.

Some scholars will inevitably object to such strategies, arguing that the classroom might become a place for emotional therapy or too "touchy-feely" as I have heard it described. In "'I Could Hear You if you would Just Calm Down,'" Eileen O'Brien addresses some of these objections, including the argument that emotion disrupts 'actual'

learning. She argues that "we are trapped by this deceptive either/or. A pedagogy that recognizes emotions as central to the domains of cognition and morality need not preclude intellectual rigor or critical inquiry" (110). In efforts to analyze the usefulness of emotional expression in the classroom, I suggest that at moments when emotions become heightened, we ask students questions such as, "What can we learn from this response? In what way is this emotion advancing our knowledge production?" After all, as Laurie Lippin writes in "Making Whiteness Visible," "The course is about them, their thoughts *and* emotions, and the world they live in. The course is about becoming more conscious of the legacy of racism they had inherited, and accessing knowledge and skills to work toward social justice" (125). The exploration of emotion is an exploration of consciousness and knowledge, an exploration that can ultimately lead to new territories of resistance and liberation. It is one we should pursue, regardless of, or perhaps because of, the very social conditioning we have received. The patriarchal conditioning that orders educational environments into conflict-free, emotion-free, purely 'intellectual' spaces is a conditioning that works against the interests of all marginalized and disenfranchised people.

The strategies that I describe are attempts at relieving what Gary R. Howard calls, in *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know*, the "weight of the west." They are attempts to bring what is usually deemed disorder and contamination into the classroom in order to prevent white women from reverting to performances of order and purity; to prevent the erasure of all bodies in the classroom and thereby minimize racial marginalization; and to create liberatory spaces for knowledge production. Utilizing this pedagogical approach, each day will be, should be, tough; it will be, should be, uncomfortable, for that is the

nature of encountering new knowledge. If classes are going smoothly, I am likely not excavating sites of subjugated knowledge or engaging in sites of new knowledge production. Instead, I am most likely oppressing the emotional, physical responses to texts, as I did in the fall of 2002 and have undoubtedly repeated. As O'Brien recognizes in her article, "To address emotions is risky business – especially for feminists and others already marginalized within the hierarchy of the academy," but "if we all 'calmed down,' our collective learning about oppression would likely never take place" (109, 86). I have decided the "risky" business is simply worth the risk.

I retell this story as a catalyst for change and an act of critical literacy. It is an attempt to read texts, bodies, and subjectivity in order to prevent similar events from recurring. In this retelling, I have attempted to problematize not the student's body and behavior, but my own body and behavior, positioning my actions as disorderly contaminants to the learning process. In this manner, I have attempted to engage in what Virginia Lea and Judy Helfand, in *Identifying Race and Transforming Whiteness in the Classroom*, call "vigilant praxis":

> The personal work is pre-requisite to implementing new practices in the classroom. The effects of challenging and interrupting whiteness in the classroom are made apparent as we consciously engage with ourselves and others in accessing what happened. . . . Cycling through reflection, implementation, and assessment we re-view how we engage in anti-racist teaching so that we can develop more effective activities to interrupt and contest whiteness. In this way we continually build on our experiences,

> revealing the hidden ways in which we embody whiteness and unconsciously impose that whiteness in the classroom. (19).

After engaging in such vigilant praxis, I have a new understanding of the event itself, my role as a spectator and my neglect of alternate ways of knowing. I can also offer a variety of alternate strategies for making the event one which teaches all members of the classroom. For white women, the pursuit of order in the classroom is ultimately one of the "hidden ways" we "embody" and "impose" whiteness; it is an attempt to meet the expectations of white patriarchal domination through the abjection of our own emotions, and the abjection of the emotions and bodies of students.

The pedagogical strategies that I've discussed are all strategies that take advantage of neglected liminal spaces. Within these liminal, undiscovered spaces, I have the opportunities to resist white male supremacy and experience what George Yancy calls, in *Black Bodies, White Gazes*, "profound experiences in liminality" (240). For white women, this liminality can provide a method of re-seeing our subjectivity and aligning ourselves, not with white male dominance, but with those who are subjugated by white male dominance. As Hughes' characters demonstrate, and as the history of education shows us, this is not what has traditionally taken place. As the primary educational force in the United States, white women will teach others--we must be sure that what we teach is in service to students and to ourselves, not to the discourse of white male supremacy.

ACT II: THE PURSUIT OF OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL

As I gathered my books after the first day of African American Literature, I noticed a student approaching me. Jon, an African American student I had known from a previous class, came forward. “Ms. McGrade,” he said, “Can I ask you a question?”

“Of course,” I replied.

“Why do you like African American literature?”

I was stunned. I had never thought about justifying my interest, so I simply didn’t have an answer. I stumbled. I think I told him about my first encounters with the works of Toni Morrison, and then of my appreciation for some of the themes of African American literature--freedom, independence, justice. He seemed unsatisfied. I believe he said, “Thank you,” began to walk away, and then stopped. He turned around and asked, “Ms. McGrade, are you married to a black man?”

CHAPTER 3

THE STORIES:

"REJUVENATION THROUGH JOY," "SLAVE ON THE BLOCK,"

AND "THE BLUES I'M PLAYING"

In "Rejuvenation Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing," Hughes creates white female characters who construct their identities through the consumption of Others. Unlike the middle-class women of Chapter 1 who perform their white femininity by purging the Other out of their lives, these wealthy, more privileged women perform white femininity by objectifying and transforming the Other into a consumable good, thereby attempting to reclaim all that has been expelled in the name of purity. Beginning with the first story, "Rejuvenation Through Joy," moving to the second story, "Slave on the Block," and then returning to this exploration in the seventh story of the collection, "The Blues I'm Playing," Hughes demonstrates a progression from white vicarious exploration of blackness to the black body as a commodity fetish.[30] This pursuit of ownership and control represents a modernized form of the owner/slave relationship, a response to blackness that I term a "possessive consumption."[31] This consumption of possessions, associated with an insistence on the ownership of blackness and that which it represents, ultimately possesses the consumer, rather than the inverse. At its most extreme, the possessive consumption works to erase

[30] Marx uses this term to describe the power bestowed upon goods in capitalist systems. In *Everything But The Burden: What White People are Taking From Black Culture*, Greg Tate revises the concept, applying it to not goods, but humans, and arguing that America's "original commodity fetish was the Africans auctioned here as slaves, whose reduction from subjects to abstracted objects has made them seem larger than life and less than human at the same time" (4). I use it here according to Tate's revision.

[31] I use the term "possessive" here much the way that George Lipsitz uses it in his work *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*. In addition, I build on Kate A. Baldwin's term "possessive femininity," as discussed later in the chapter.

forms of Otherness, an erasure that reinscribes white patriarchal domination and the performances of purity prescribed for white women. Ultimately, there are consequences to this pursuit of ownership and control; the women become so fixated on acquisition and consumption that they participate in their own domination by focusing their energies on that which they *can* consume (in this case blackness) rather than the white patriarchal structures that oppress and consume the white women themselves.

The characters discussed in Chapter 1--the Studevant women in "Cora Unashamed," Mrs. Osborn in "Berry," and Miss Briggs in "Little Dog"--participate in endless acts of abjection to maintain appearances of purity; through an intense orderliness in their lives, they filter out all that is unclean or 'colored' in some way, including dirt (and the physical acts of cleaning that remove it), sexuality, and immigrant and African American populations that have been racialized as Other. These compulsive, persistent acts ultimately leave these white women unsatisfied, lonely, and emotionally and physically isolated. In contrast, the characters in this set of stories--the white women portrayed en masse in "Rejuvenation Through Joy," Anne Carraway in "Slave on the Block," and Mrs. Ellsworth in "The Blues I'm Playing--all perform white femininity, and gain some degree of power, through acquisition and ownership; endowed with financial means, they begin shopping and consuming in order to fill the voids created by persistent acts of abjection. Although such assertions of ownership were a privilege historically granted to white men,[32] the 1920s and 1930s saw increased consumerism by white women as they became the primary purchasers of household goods and services. Such changes in the performance of white femininity expose the adaptability of whiteness;

[32] In "Whiteness as Property," Cheryl Harris traces the transformation of whiteness from first, a racial identity, to later a form of "property interest" that enables systems of privilege and exclusion. One example of this is the right to own property, granted only to white men in early United States history.

where the women of the working class must conform to the expectations of white purity by ordering blackness out of their lives, the women of the wealthy class have the privilege of vicariously exploring blackness by cloaking it as a commodity. In accordance with hierarchical class systems, these socially elite women experience more freedom and power than those of the middle-class, but only in the areas left to them by white men--the arts and leisure time. In these stories, the leisure time is directed towards the arts and artists of the Harlem Renaissance.

While most scholars who have published on "Rejuvenation Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing" acknowledge the white impulse to objectify, commodify and sexualize blackness, they have failed to recognize that the primary perpetrators of these acts are women. This is a missed opportunity to explore the racialized and gendered identities and performances of white women. In an article that analyzes all three of these stories, Jane Olmsted writes that "pointing out the flaws of White folks in relation to Black folks" is "a rather simple task" (65). However, I argue that interrogating and theorizing the role of white female positionality, and how it contributes to these "flaws," performs them, and justifies them, is much more complex. In these stories, the white women assert power through acquisition because they have the financial and social privilege to do so, because 'shopping' (even for blackness) is a hegemonically-sanctioned act for white women, and because they can vicariously explore that which they have purged without transgressing social boundaries. The stories demonstrate that the power delegated to wealthy white women manifests itself into a commodification and fetishism[33] that ultimately reinforces and exacerbates their own

[33] The white female fetishization of blackness is not simply about heterosexual desire. Hughes creates female characters who are drawn to both black men (Luther in "Slave") and women (Oceola in "Blues").

domination by white male supremacy and power. In "Rejuvenation Through Joy," wealthy white women fill their emptiness with the pursuit of happiness--vis-à-vis blackness and the primitive[34] qualities with which they have endowed it. It is through the white-operated 'Colony of Joy,' a residential self-help center with an African theme, that they vicariously experience blackness without transgressing social boundaries of segregation and miscegenation. "Slave on the Block" demonstrates one woman's fascination with, and collection of, the black male body. Her positioning as a painter legitimates her voyeuristic white gaze, which manages to simultaneously dehumanize and sexualize the black man that she and her husband employ; for her, the black male body serves as the ultimate commodity-fetish. Finally, "The Blues I'm Playing" continues to highlight the pursuit of ownership and control by portraying a wealthy white patron attempting to control the music, life, and sexuality of the female African American artist she supports. In this story, Mrs. Ellsworth not only seeks to own Oceola, but also to envelop and consume her to the point of erasure.

This theme of consumption is also visible in the works that influenced Hughes' short stories. Kate A. Baldwin, in "The Russian Connection: Interracialism as Queer Alliance in *The Ways of White Folks*," traces D.H. Lawrence's influence on Hughes' collection. Hughes was inspired to write many of the stories in *Ways* after reading Lawrence's collection of short stories, *The Lovely Lady*, which, according to Baldwin, portrays women who exhibit "possessive femininity." She argues that "the maternal possessiveness outlined in 'The Lovely Lady' veers into the destructive" (217). The main

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Instead, the fetishization is a result of both the commodification of blackness, as well as the historical construction of black men and women as hypersexual (discussed in Chapter 1).

[34] The primitivism of the 1920s focused on the primal, sexual, even mystical nature of human beings who had yet to be corrupted by civilization.

character Pauline Attenborough is described by her son in the following manner: "She fed on life. She has fed on me as she fed on [my brother] Henry. She put a sucker into one's soul, and it sucked up one's essential life" (217). Baldwin writes that "Mrs. Attenborough is so thorough in her possessiveness that she inhabits not only her own identity but also the identities of everyone around her. In this sense, Pauline's feeding on her children is cannibalistic, an act of consumption that repeatedly seeks to satisfy the demands of an ego for more" (217). The recognition of such possessive femininity may account for the "chills" that Hughes recalls settling down his spine as he read Lawrence's works, for they resembled his experiences with his one-time patron Charlotte Osgood Mason,[35] who he referred to as "godmother" (*I Wonder* xii). While Mason will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, it is important to note Hughes' readings of Lawrence's work, for Hughes' characters also exhibit the impulse to possess and consume as part of their identity construction. Hughes, however, further complicates such femininity by portraying the ways in which race factors into this construction. I argue that his characters participate in a possessive consumption in order to metaphysically reconstruct an identity that has been damaged through abjection in the name of purity.

White Female Consumerism, the Harlem Renaissance, and Consumption of the Primitive

The socio-historical context of the 1920s and 30s also demonstrates increased consumer habits, as well as a convergence with the Harlem Renaissance which

[35] According to Arnold Rampersad, the author of *The Life of Langston Hughes*, "In Lawrence's stories Hughes saw not only something of the face of his tormentor, Charlotte Mason, but also glimpses of his own neuroses. Setting aside his current work, he turned to write his first short stories since 1927, which was also the last time he had touched on strongly sexual, possibly autobiographical themes in this writing" (269).

inadvertently provided goods for consumption. By the 1920s white female consumerism had reached great heights. With the increase in industrialization of domestic goods and the employment of domestic laborers, wealthy white women found themselves with few activities within their homes. However, their purchasing power provided them with activities outside of the home and allowed these women a freedom of choice never before experienced. If, as David Levering Lewis asserts in *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, the Harlem Renaissance was a "crack in the wall" of racism, then this era also created a small crack in the wall of sexism, for such consumerism allowed monied white women to allocate and expend economic resources according to their own needs and desires, albeit mostly within leisure and consumer activity (48). Retailers went to great lengths to encourage this new activity; in *The American New Woman Revisited*, Martha Patterson notes that

> the period between 1895 and 1930 witnessed a revolution in the display and marketing of manufactured goods in American culture . . . Department stores worked to seduce women into purchasing. Large plateglass windows encouraged customers to gaze at sumptuously decorated displays; main doorsteps were removed and revolving doors were installed to invite customers in; . . . and a growing number of female store clerks graciously helped their customers navigate the increasingly complex but sensuous purchasing process. (18-19)

Patterson's observations not only demonstrate increased retail activity, but also the ways in which retail experiences took the form of sensual experiences, a phenomenon that capitalized on the ways in which white women were expected to deny themselves sensual

pleasure in order to fulfill expectations of purity. In this manner, America's capitalist system provided opportunities for wealthy white women to experience sensual pleasure without disrupting their performances of purity.

Patterson also notes that "Orientalism, with its notion of a feminized, primitive Asia and its accompanying 'exotic' products – Indian silks, Turkish carpets, Japanese ceramics, and Chinese florals – became a favorite aesthetic of department stores" (19). In this manner, consumerism not only provided sensual experiences to white women, but it also allowed an experimentation with more exotic products; thus, white women began to experience sensual pleasure through a vicarious experience with an exoticized Other, though in a commodified, and thereby, safe form. And though Patterson recognizes that "through consumption women could appropriate different identities," she does not examine the impetus for such experimentation or the ways in which such actions exploited and misrepresented the exoticized cultures (19). I argue that Hughes' stories demonstrate this impetus by portraying white female characters who consume in order to reclaim that which has been purged from their own bodies and projected onto bodies of color--namely, sensuality and sexuality. In these stories, Hughes' white female characters search for a cohesive identity vis-à-vis the heightened consumerism of the 1920s and 30s and its emphasis on exoticism and Otherness.

During this same time period, the Harlem Renaissance was flourishing. It was a time influenced by the continued migration to northern urban centers by African Americans, the postwar boom, and the collective energy and hope of many African American scholars and artists. However, as Lewis reveals, this outpouring of black expression was accompanied by much white interest and intrusion: "white cultural capital

and influence were crucial, and the white presence, at least in the early years, hovered over the New Negro world of art and literature like a benevolent censor, politely but pervasively setting the outer limits of its creative boundaries" (98). While the Harlem Renaissance has been explored at length, it is the white patronage and acquisitiveness of the movement, as well as the white imposition of primitivism, that are directly applicable to my analysis of Hughes' short stories. The artistic explosion of the Harlem Renaissance began to provide wealthy white people with the opportunity to experience fragments of 'othered' culture.[36] In "Stormy Weather," Ralph Ellison's review of Hughes' autobiography *The Big Sea*, he writes that the Harlem Renaissance "was marked by the 'discovery' of the Negro by wealthy whites" who were "attempting to fill the vacuum of their lives" (20). Hughes' stories suggest that this "discovery" seems to have been especially appealing to white women who, as argued in Chapter 1, had purged all things 'colored' from their lives, leaving themselves especially vacuous and destroyed by their acts of abjection, acts which essentially purged their own humanity. Through the Harlem Renaissance, wealthy white women, conditioned to consume as a way of gaining sensual satisfaction, could explore blackness, which itself had been endowed with the sensuality and sexuality that they had purged from their own bodies. In short, the consumption of the Harlem Renaissance was a way for white women to reclaim sensual experience.

These two historical phenomena, the Harlem Renaissance and white female consumerism, converge on the pages of *The Ways of White Folks*, a collection which

[36] This phenomenon demonstrates what Adorno and Horkheimer term 'the culture industry,' a term that describes the way in which cultural artifacts, even from sub- or co-cultures which challenge the dominant culture, become both the playthings and reinforcements of dominant ideology. During the Harlem Renaissance, white patrons indirectly and directly censored black artistic expression by providing compensation for either the artists themselves or for the art they produced. Such compensation influenced the nature of much of this expression by encouraging works that appealed to white patrons.

demonstrates the ways in which white women handled this newly-acquired power, using it as a way to access experiences traditionally unavailable to them. Moreover, in Hughes' stories, the consumption of African American culture is eventually transformed into the consumption of African American people. In "Eating the Other," bell hooks provides a framework for this consumption of Other; her analysis of white male sexual pursuit of women of color is analogous to white female consumption of the Other. She writes that, for white men,

> fucking was a way to confront the Other, as well as a way to make themselves over, to leave behind white 'innocence' and enter the world of 'experience.' As is often the case in this society, they were confident that non-white people had more life experience, were more worldly, more sensual, and sexual because they were different. (23)

However, while white men permit themselves this imposition, white women (lacking such 'freedom') convert this experience into the consumption of goods, thereby vicariously experiencing blackness within the boundaries of hegemonic norms; the wealthy women of this era, in their consumption of blackness, could pursue experience, and vicariously lose innocence, without risk of losing their purity and the social positioning that it secured. As hooks notes, "To make one's self vulnerable to the seduction of difference, to seek an encounter with the Other, does not require that one relinquish forever one's mainstream positionality" (23). For white women, the art and artists of the Harlem Renaissance became the locale of all that they had abjected, and the bodies of African Americans became the playground within which to experience such taboos. hooks explains such consumptive habits when she writes, "White racism,

imperialism, and sexist domination prevail by courageous consumption. It is by eating the Other . . . that one asserts power and privilege" (36). Thus, in the context of the 1920s and the Harlem Renaissance, white women could simultaneously experience the power and privilege that was denied to them in other areas, and also vicariously explore the emotions and desires (equated with the Other) that they deny for the sake of purity. Hughes' stories thus demonstrate that white female consumerism is not simply about consuming material goods, but about consuming the qualities and characteristics of Others, a method of metaphysically reconstructing the self.

The primitivization of black culture made this consumption possible, for the act of primitivization simultaneously simplified and exoticized black culture into easily consumable, even 'bite-size' fragments. When Marianna Torgovnik, author of *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* writes, "What is clear now is that the West's fascination with the primitive has to do with its own crises in identity," she could have been describing the women in Hughes' stories who were clearly attempting to fill voids in their lives left by the persistent processes of abjections (157). As Olmstead explains in "Black Moves, White Ways, Every Body's Blues," "White people . . . use 'the primitive' as a means of narrowing Black people's humanity to a misunderstood fragment – moreover, doing so for the precise reason that they can then project what they are most uncomfortable about themselves onto African Americans" (77). I argue that for white women, the acquisition of the 'primitive' is a perverse attempt at reclamation--they endow blackness with the qualities that they have abjected and denied, and then seek to purchase these qualities through the hegemonically-sanctioned act of consumerism. In this manner, primitivized, consumable fragments of African American culture provided

wealthy white women with their abjected, sensual selves. However, because this primitivization is a misreading and fragmentation of black culture, the white women never really acquire that which they seek, and thus they never reach a point of satiation.

These possessive inclinations of white women continue to serve the interests of hegemony by appropriating and simplifying African American art and artists into a "primitive" sub-culture inferior to and consumable by dominant culture. Moreover, the act of transforming the complex art of the Harlem Renaissance into the primitive is not only a method of de-centering and fragmenting a complicated, diasporic black culture, but also a method of reifying and recentering whiteness, for in the process of simplification, white supremacy is asserted, and even exercised in the power to manipulate African American culture into bite-size, consumable pieces. This act of primitivization is a manifestation of what George Lipsitz calls the possessive investment in whiteness, in which whiteness is not simply a possession, but a possession that seduces and ultimately possesses the beholder in often unknown or unrecognized ways. During the Harlem Renaissance, white consumers, possessed by their own whiteness, consumed black art, and this acquisition and control of 'primitive' others affirmed white supremacy. Thus, the acquisition of primitive art is a simultaneous possession of Other and investment in white self. In Hughes' stories, white women pursue this investment most vehemently; they transform white America's original commodity-fetish for the slave into a commodity-fetish for black artists, acquired through the 'discovery' of Harlem and its inhabitants, though with one major revision: white women displace white men as 'owners' and begin taking their own liberties with African Americans.

"Rejuvenation Through Joy"

"Rejuvenation through Joy," the longest story in Hughes' collection, was first published in 1934 in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and then later in *Ways*. Most critics agree that the story exhibits Hughes' humor and satirical voice: in "The Paradox of Modernism in *The Ways of White Folks*," Sandra Govan describes the story as "uproariously funny and highly satirical" (157); in "Black Moves, White Ways, Every Body's Blues," Olmsted writes that Hughes "satirizes a whole range of trendy, appropriative practices of the White (and Black) bourgeoisie" (72); and, in "Ask Your Mama: Women in Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks*," Susan Mayberry writes that the story "pokes fun at the condescension of spiritually impoverished whites who marvel at the so-called primitivism of black people" (20). While such assertions are indeed accurate, they conflate the white bourgeoisie into one category, neglecting to consider the role of gender in the story. Although the primary characters in the story are both white males,[37] the story is also about the masses of white women that the two men manipulate and take advantage of. It is in this story that Hughes demonstrates white women's initial 'discovery' of, and experimentation with, blackness; "Rejuvenation Through Joy" contains white female characters who surround themselves with that which is presented as primitive African culture in attempts to find joy in their lives. In the end, however, the white women become possessive of the man who leads them into this exoticized world, and their possessive consumption leads to the Colony's destruction. The story also parallels characteristics of Hughes' experience with his white female patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, who insisted that Hughes' writings also exude qualities of the primitive.

[37] The end of the story complicates the racial identity of one of these characters, but throughout the story, the female characters (as well as the readers) are led to believe that they are white.

Likewise, their relationship was ultimately destroyed by such demands and Mason's own possessive consumption.

In "Rejuvenation," Hughes continues to highlight the social construction of identity by returning to the same performance metaphor that appears in both "Berry" and "Cora Unashamed." The primary male character, Eugene Lesche, is a conman who takes on advantageous identities at will. The story describes the way in which Lesche and his partner, Sol, first developed the strategy for the Colony of Joy while on a drinking binge in Paris; after observing a wealthy white American give herself a going away party before entering a residential colony in pursuit of happiness, they decide that "a sure way to make money would be, combine a jazz band and a soul colony, and let it roll from there – black rhythm and happy souls" (80). They develop their idea into a residential treatment center for wealthy white women that promises to provide happiness through African philosophy and culture. The entire colony is a scam, and the fronts are carefully contrived by these two men, with Lesche taking the lead role as a teacher of primitive philosophy. In her study of modernism and *Ways*, Govan describes this fraud as "the primitivism hustle" (157). Lesche's performative role in this hustle is emphasized from the beginning of the story. When we first meet him, he is outfitted in costume and on stage: "Mr. Eugene Lesche, in a morning coat, handsome beyond words, stood on the platform of the main ballroom of the big hotel facing Central Park at 59th Street, New York" (69). Lesche gives a lecture and afterwards, he "bowed and bowed . . . with the greatest of grace" (72). Hughes continues to emphasize the performativity of his actions by repeating the verb, "bowed" six times within one paragraph and later reveals that "Lesche had learned to bow that way in the circus" (72). Further, Lesche and Sol not only create an identity for

Lesche, but for the entire colony; they decorate in a lavish "primitive-modernistic" style, and they hire Happy Lane's African Band, dancers and a blues singer. It is within this metaphor of performance that Hughes places his white female characters, and the contrived performances of these men provide a framework for understanding the ways in which the white female characters also perform their own identities.

In this story Hughes' white female characters are almost always described *en masse*, a device that perhaps indicates the standardization of their compliance with dominant ideology and their collective subjugation. Hughes first introduces this mass of characters at one of Lesche's lectures on "Motion and Joy." He writes that "a thousand well-dressed women," "a thousand pairs of feminine eyes gazed as one," and "a thousand pairs of female arms . . . were lifted up with great rustle and movement" (69, 70). He further writes that this mass is comprised of "the smart neurasthenics from Park Avenue right on up to New England" (88). His use of the word "smart" is clearly sarcastic, indicating something fashionable, and his use of "neurasthenics" indicates the nature of these women--nervous, easily fatigued, and bored. Even Sol comments, "It's unbelievable how many people with money are unhappy" (76). Govan describes these white masses as "sterile, jaded white folks searching for a way to save their souls" and "bored, disillusioned, and alienated rich" (156, 157). These wealthy women are just as repressed and emotionally isolated as the middle-class white women discussed in Chapter 1, but they have plenty of money with which to alleviate their malaise. Endowed with financial means, these women have the resources to transform their objects of fascination into commodities and keep them close.

As Hughes introduces these characters, he simultaneously introduces the theme of commodification and consumption, suggesting that such behavior is indeed part of the performance of white female identity. In fact, Lesche's Colony of Joy is created exclusively to cater to their consumptive habits. Most of these women have already searched elsewhere to fill the emptiness in their lives, an emptiness that I have argued is a result of the perpetual abjections meant to solidify perceptions of purity. Hughes writes,

> Of those who came [to the Colony of Joy], some had belonged formerly to the self-denial cults; others to Gurdijief; others had been analyzed in Paris, Berlin, Vienna; had consulted Adler, Hirschfeld, Freud. Some had studied *under* famous Yogi. Others had been at Nyack. . . . Others had wandered, disappointed, the ways of spiritualism, never finding soul-mates; still others had gazed solemnly into crystals, but had seen nothing but darkness; now, they had come to Joy! (88-90)

Adding to the satirical tone, the narrator even describes Mrs. Duveen Althouse's self-denial: "She denied chocolates for a whole year; kept fresh candy sitting in each corner of her boudoir – resisted with all her soul – and at the end of a year was a wreck" (89). But alas, even though "[a]lmost all of them had belonged to cults before," these experiences "had never satisfied" (89). These passages not only demonstrate the ways in which white women participate in their own repression through self-denial, but also how they persistently seek satiety through purchasing experiences. For these women, the Colony of Joy provides such an experience, but with the added benefit of the vogue of Harlem, presented within an exoticized, primitivized theme.

When invitations to the Colony of Joy are sent to a select group of these women, they are willing to pay great amounts to experience such joy--at least most of them:

> Some gasped and did *not* pay (because they could not), and so their lives went on without Joy. Others gasped, and paid. And several . . . paid without even gasping. These last were mostly old residents of Park Avenue or the better section of Germantown, ladies who had already tried everything looking toward happiness – now they wanted to try Joy, especially since it involved so new and novel a course as Lesche proposed – including the gaiety of Harlem Negroes, of which most of them knew nothing except through the rather remote chatter of the younger set who had probably been to the Cotton Club. (74)

Thus, through the Colony of Joy, the white women begin an exploration of the Other that is disguised within sanctioned consumptive habits, a disguise necessary to avoid social taboos and preserve purity. In this manner, the white female characters invite the Other in through ownership and commodification in very narrow and circumscribed ways. For these women, the Colony of Joy provides an age-appropriate, class-appropriate method of experiencing the Other. Such exploration would be appealing since it avoids the transgression of boundaries while also allowing for vicarious exploration.

In order to provide this experience, Lesche and Sol manipulate and simplify African American culture into the primitive. In Lesche's lecture, "Negroes and Joy,"

> he said, in substance, that Negroes were the happiest people on earth. He said that they alone really knew the secret of rhythms and of movements. How futile, he said, to study Delsarte in this age! Go instead, he said, to

> Cab Calloway, Bricktop's, and Bill Robinson! Move to music, he said, to the gaily primitive rhythms of first man. . . . Be all this not by turning back time, but merely by living to the true rhythm of our own age, to music as modern as today, yet old as life, music that the primitive Negroes brought with their drums from Africa to America . . . that music, which is the Joy of Life. (73)

This music was provided by "Happy Lane (*a primitive de luxe*), direct from the Moon club in Harlem, with the finest Negro band in America" (73). As Lesche lectures to the women, Happy Lane provides the background music, and Lesche asks the women, "And how can we find joy? Not through sitting still with our world of troubles on our minds; not through thought – too often only another phrase for brooding . . . . but only through motion; through life in motion" (70). This "primitive" approach emphasizes bodily motion and therefore takes advantage of the ways in which white women have traditionally repressed their own bodies and sensuality. The method appeals to the women because it works to deconstruct the mind/body split that subordinates the body for the sake of purity. At the Colony of Joy, the women felt

> all a-tremble in the depths of their souls after they had done their African exercises . . . When they had finished, the movement, the music, and Lesche's voice, made them feel all warm and close to the earth, and as though they never wanted to leave the Colony of Joy or to be away from their great leader again. (91)

The Colony, a commodified place of experimentation, provides these women with a safe, though artificial, space to recognize and experience their own bodies, as well as the

metaphorical bodies of Others (represented through Lesche and his embodiment of primitivism). This Colony of Joy demonstrates that "Western thinking frequently substitutes versions of the primitive for some of its deepest obsessions – and this becomes a major way in which the West constructs and uses the primitive for its own ends" (Torgovnik 18). For white women, their deepest obsessions can be read as that which they have purged for the sake of purity (including sensuality and sexuality), and the primitive is used as a way to gain access to those obsessions.

Indeed, while at the Colony, "many inhibitions had fallen away" (93). In the midst of moving bodies and falling inhibitions, the women begin to feel a sense of stimulation, even pleasure. In *Langston Hughes: A Study of the Short Fiction*, Hans Ostrom writes that the story "is concerned with how African Americans are objectified, patronized, labeled 'primitive,' and then used as means through which whites achieve pleasure" (12). Through the exploration and acquisition of 'primitive' philosophy, and through their own physical movement, the women begin to sexualize and fetishize Lesche, who, as a white man representing the primitive, becomes a safe replacement object of desire for the Other--as both the sexual desire that white women have cast out of their own bodies, and as the black body that has been hypersexualized through dominant discourse. As hooks explains, the "'real fun' is to be had by bringing to the surface all those 'nasty' unconscious fantasies and longings about contact with the Other embedded in the secret (not so secret) deep structure of white supremacy" ("Eating" 21-2). At the Colony of Joy, Lesche symbolizes the Other and becomes a way of experiencing these "'nasty,' unconscious fantasies." During his time at the Colony, he creates a "Private Hour" that is "devoted to the problems of each New One once a fortnight, where Lesche never advised

(he couldn't) but merely received alone in confidence their troubles for contemplation" (93). It is not long before the Private Hours create trouble for Lesche as the women become jealous of one another and demand Lesche's undivided attention. Soon, "howls, screams, and recriminations were heard to issue almost daily" (93). Hughes writes,

> To the Colony, Lesche was their Leader, their life. And they wanted him, each one, alone. . . . Mrs. Duveen Althouse was desperately in love with him now. (She called him Pan.) Miss Joan Reeves could not turn her eyes away. (He was her god.) Mrs. Carlos Gleed insisted that he summer at her island place in Maine. Baroness Langstrund announced quite definitively she intended to marry him – whereupon Mrs. Althouse, who had thrown the mask, threatened, without ceremony, to wring at once the Baroness' neck. (94-95)

This response demonstrates what I have termed a possessive consumption; the women become so possessed by the opportunity to consume the Other (vis-à-vis Lesche) that they do not see the ways in which they become controlled by that which they pursue. However, what the women also fail to realize is that the Colony, based as it is on artificial constructions, cannot meet their needs; their possessive consumption will never satiate them because neither Lesche, nor the 'primitive' culture he represents, contains that which they have abjected. Instead, the women have only endowed Lesche and African American culture with their own abjected sensuality; the women therefore cannot reconstitute their full humanity through them. Consequently, in these attempts to reclaim the abject, they consume representations and symbols of the Other to the point of destruction. They fight among one another so much so that Lesche leaves the Colony

(presumably to acquire his next role), while the women struggle to satiate themselves within their prescribed, confining roles.

The possessive consumption of the white female characters in "Rejuvenation Through Joy" parallels the desires of Hughes' wealthy patron Charlotte Mason who insisted on primitivism and attempted to possess both Hughes and his work. According to Lewis, "'primitives' had always enchanted Charlotte Mason" and she once collected American Indian materials and artifacts (152). By the time of the Harlem Renaissance, however, Mason had turned her interests towards African Americans. In his autobiography *The Big Sea,* Hughes writes, "Now she had discovered the New Negro and wanted to help him. She was intensely excited about each new book, each new play, and each new artist that came out of the Negro world. Everything born to Negroes in those days of the '20's, she knew about" (315). However, Hughes eventually concludes that Mason had equated African Americans in Harlem with the 'primitive,' and had endowed black Americans with a mystique and exotic nature that portrayed them as simple, base and natural. In his chapter "Not Primitive," he reveals Mason's construction of African Americans, "Concerning Negroes, she felt that they were America's great link with the primitive, and that they have something very precious to give to the Western World. She felt that there was mystery and mysticism and spontaneous harmony in their souls . . . She felt that we had a deep well of the spirit within us and that we should keep it pure and deep" (316). This passage exhibits Mason's response to blackness, one that both simplifies and exoticizes. Mason further insisted that 'her' artists, including Hughes, exhibit such primitive qualities in their work. Hughes writes,

> She wanted me to be primitive and know and feel the intuitions of the primitive. But, unfortunately, I did not feel the rhythms of the primitive surging through me, and so I could not live and write as though I did. I was only an American Negro – who had loved the surface of Africa and the rhythms of Africa – but I was not Africa. I was Chicago and Kansas City and Broadway and Harlem. And I was not what she wanted me to be. (325).

Like the women of the Colony of Joy, Mason wanted Hughes to provide her with experiences of the primitive, with an Otherness that was otherwise unavailable to her. Hughes' inability to provide her with such experiences contributed to the demise of their relationship, for she expected to be satisfied through him. In addition to this primitivization, Mason also developed what I would classify as a possessive consumption regarding black art and artists. She was intimately involved with major figures of the period, including Alain Locke, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, and Aaron Douglas, although most of them eventually became disenchanted with her due to her assertions of control over their art. According to Lewis, Alain Locke held position as "chamberlain in the Park Avenue court of Charlotte Osgood Mason" (151). He describes the environment created by Mason and Locke in the following manner: "Guided by Locke, Harlem's striving artists, singers, and writers ascended to the Park Avenue penthouse, one after another, to be received as votive primitives by the regal husk seated in a large, ornate chair that may have . . . rested on a platform" (151). She and Locke reportedly corresponded about "our Harlem museum," and Lewis writes that "she wanted to add Jean Toomer to her *collection*" (emphasis mine, 152). This language indicates an

objectification and commodification of African Americans, one that Hughes himself experienced before escaping her pursuit of ownership and control.

In both "Rejuvenation" and in Hughes' personal experiences with Mason, the primitivization and consumption of African American culture ultimately serves the needs and desires of white women who seek experiences different from the ones they have been permitted to have. This primitivization takes a decontextualized stereotype and packages it not only for easy consumption, but also for the reconstitution of white supremacy and power, for it uses blackness to meet the needs and desires of whiteness. However, in this configuration, blackness is used to meet the needs and desires of white women, rather than men. Thus, white women's possessive consumption provides them with new experiences of power, but it also keeps them within the powers of, on the one hand, structures of white male domination which encourage purity, and on the other hand, their own possessive consumption which consumes yet never satiates them.

"Slave on the Block"

While "Rejuvenation Through Joy" demonstrates white women's vicarious exploration and commodification of African American culture, "Slave on the Block" demonstrates how white women transform this performance into the commodification of, and experimentation with, African American people, a transformation that essentially conflates people with objects. The story centers around Anne and Michael Carraway, artists who are "quite well off," and is set in Greenwich Village, though all of its characters, black and white, make frequent trips to Harlem (20). As the story begins,

Anne and Michael meet a young African American man, Luther, the nephew of their former cook who has recently died. After musing over his appearance, the Carraways hire him, ostensibly as their gardener, but he is primarily used as an object of their voyeurism and consumptive habits. Arnold Rampersad, in his biography of Hughes, describes the Carraways as "a patronizing, fraudulent white couple in Greenwich Village who collide with reality in the form of their resentful black cook and a physically impressive but insolent black youth" (269). Likewise, most other scholars also concentrate on the Village "couple," neglecting to consider how Anne and Michael's actions differ, for Anne (in contrast to her husband) persistently and voyeuristically gazes upon and fetishizes Luther, long after her husband tires of his presence. In this manner, Hughes' story demonstrates one white woman's progression from vicarious exploration to the fetishism of African Americans, a transformation that allows for new assertions of power and privilege for white women.

The narrator opens the story by announcing that the Carraways "were people who went in for Negroes" (19). They justify this response to blackness by convincing themselves that they are different, "Anne and Michael prided themselves on being different; artists, you know, and liberal-minded people – maybe a little scatter-brained, but then (secretly, they felt) that came from genius. They were not ordinary people . . ." (28). This passage reveals that the Carraways are aware that their attentiveness to African Americans may be considered abnormal, but that they take such abnormality as a compliment to themselves, their genius, and, in fact, their superiority. In "Eating the Other," bell hooks explains that "difference can seduce precisely because the mainstream imposition of sameness is a provocation that terrorizes" (23). It may be that the

Carraways are terrorized by a dominant ideology with a strict social hierarchy, but their insistence on difference occurs at a time when such difference was a well-known fad. Anne and Michael Carraway represent what Zora Neale Hurston called "Negrotarians." In *When Harlem Was in Vogue,* Lewis explains that such Negrotarians "came in an almost infinite variety. There were Negrotarians who were earnest humanitarians, and those who were merely fascinated" (98). He writes,

> There were many motives animating the Lost Generation Negrotarians. Some . . . were drawn to Harlem on the way to Paris because it seemed to answer a need for personal nourishment and to confirm their vision of cultural salvation coming from the margins of civilization. Some expected the great renewal in the form of a political revolution, and . . . [some] anticipated that the Afro-American would somehow play a major role in destroying the old order. For others, the new religion of Freudianism, with its sexual trapdoor under the ordered mind, transformed the Afro-American's perceived lack of cultural assimilation from a liability into a state of grace . . . (99)

Hughes himself also describes white interest in the Harlem Renaissance, as well as the African American response to this interest, in his chapter "When the Negro was in Vogue," in *The Big Sea*: "Nor did ordinary Negroes like the growing influx of whites toward Harlem after sundown, flooding the little cabarets and bars where formerly only colored people laughed and sang, and where now the strangers were given the best ringside tables to sit and stare at the Negro customers – like amusing animals in a zoo" (225). He writes that these white patrons only saw fragments of African American

experience, "So thousands of whites came to Harlem night after night, thinking the Negroes loved to have them there, and firmly believing that all Harlemites left their houses at sundown to sing and dance in cabarets, because most of the whites saw nothing but the cabarets, not the houses" (225). Other writers noticed this as well. Rudolph Fisher, in his essay "The Caucasian Storms Harlem," describes Harlem after his five year absence, noting that all of the former cabarets that he visited had become completely filled with white patrons. He notes that there was a time "when white people went to Negro cabarets to see how Negroes acted; now Negroes go to these same cabarets to see how white people act" (78). Fisher's observation parallels the work of the literature of white exposure, a literature which seeks to explore and expose the consciousness and behaviors of white Americans from the perspective of African American authors. As one such work, *The Ways of White Folks* explores this white behavior, including the consumption of the art and artists of the Harlem Renaissance; moreover, the interests and actions of the Carraways in "Slave on the Block" capture the voyeuristic and possessive attitudes towards African Americans during this time period.

Like many of the Caucasians that stormed Harlem, Anne and Michael are consumed by the white pathology of supremacy and look condescendingly and amusingly upon African Americans. The Carraways believe that they are "too charming and naïve and lovely for words," and they think they should "Leave them unspoiled and just enjoy them" (19). When they meet Luther, they declare, "He *is* the jungle," and "He is so utterly Negro" (21, 22). When Luther dozes off during her painting sessions, Anne thinks "dear, natural childlike people, they would sleep anywhere they wanted to" (24). The Carraways' primitivization of Luther, which begins in the first paragraph of the story, is

part of the process of commodification, for it is in turning him into a primitive creature that they are able to justify their attempts at possession. As the narrator lists the Carraways' consumptive habits, we can begin to intuit Luther's fate:

> In their collection, they *owned* some Covarrubias originals. . . They *owned* all the Robeson records and all the Bessie Smith. And they *had* a manuscript of Countee Cullen's. They read all the plays with or about Negroes, read all the books, and adored the Hall Johnson Singers. They had met Doctor DuBois, and longed to meet Carl Van Vechten. Of course they knew Harlem like *their own* backyard, that is, all the speakeasies and night clubs and dance halls . . ." (emphases mine 19-20)

The repetition of the word "own," as well as their possession of, first, objects, then second, African American thought prepares the characters themselves, as well as the reader, for their next extension into the ownership of people.

The Carraways believe that their employment of Luther implies ownership, and their actions demonstrate the process of commodification. They create a space for Luther to sleep in the basement and Anne begins to paint him immediately. When Luther sleeps during her painting sessions, she capitalizes on this, "star[ing] at him at leisure," and painting him for a work entitled "The Sleeping Negro" (24). Anne and Michael also begin to wake Luther in the middle of the night to sing "southern worksongs and reels, and spirituals and ballads" for their guests (26). In addition, Anne insists that Luther model for her painting "Slave on the Block," which recreates the commodification that occurred during the slave trade. "She wanted to paint him now representing to the full the soul and sorrow of his people. She wanted to paint him as a slave about to be sold" (24).

She insists that he undress and stand partially nude on a block. In addition, Anne paints him from morning to night, with Michael joining her as "they played till dark, with rest periods in between for Luther" (25). In this relationship, Luther is no longer a person; in their commodification, they dehumanize and objectify him. As Marx notes in *Capital*, "It is clear as noonday, that man, by his industry, changes the forms of the materials furnished by Nature, in such a way as to make them useful to him . . . But, so soon as it steps forth as a commodity, it is changed into something transcendent" (472). This explains how Anne justifies her insistence that Luther model for such a portrait. Only through viewing him not as human, but as a transcendent thing, could she request an act in which she recreates the terror of the slave market. Moreover, Anne's interest in consuming Luther clearly possesses her thoughts--as obsessed as she is, she does not see how her actions mimic the actions of slave owners and how her use of him metaphorically positions her as owner. This positioning as owner also prepares her to take liberties with Luther, including undressing him and using him to achieve sensual pleasure, and demonstrates that the pursuit of ownership and control is one way for white women to experience a new kind of power.

While both Anne and Michael assert ownership over Luther, it is only Anne who fetishizes him. She begins to spend her afternoons languidly gazing upon him, and when she transforms him into a 'slave on the block' for her painting, she achieves pleasure through him--a voyeuristic experience that fills her senses. As Ostrom notes (though he incorrectly attributes the actions to "the couple" instead of to Anne), "the Carraways objectify African Americans, seeing them only as art objects . . . 'samples' of a culture they can perceive only in caricature, childlike entertainers, or objects of unexamined

psychosexual fantasies" (*A Study* 10). For Anne, the latter is certainly true, for as Michael tires of Luther, she grows more and more fascinated with him, attracted and attached to him. It is significant to note that hiring Luther was initially Anne's idea, and that she spends the most time gazing at him. Also, after discovering that Luther and their domestic laborer Mattie are involved in a relationship, it is Anne who "condoned them" and muses over their sexuality, declaring, "It's so simple and natural for Negroes to make love" (27). Further, the narrator tells us that Anne urged Luther to remove his clothes for her, "since slaves in warm climates had no clothes, would he please take off his shirt" (24). In addition, when Luther becomes moody and neglects his duties, Anne convinces Michael to keep him, regardless of his behavior; the narrator states, "So they kept him. At least, Anne kept him, although Michael said he was getting a little bored with the same Negro always in the way" (27). Thus, like other women of her era, Anne begins to find sensual pleasure in her consumption of exotic 'goods,' this time in the form of Luther, who has become her commodity fetish, and through whom she experiences Otherness and all the sexuality and sensuality he represents.

However, Anne's voyeuristic gaze and her consumption of Luther is eventually stopped by Michael, which symbolizes white patriarchy's regulatory power. Michael terminates Luther's employment when he begins to transgress social boundaries, despite the fact that Anne has permitted and encouraged him to do so. According to the narrator, Luther becomes "a bit familiar. . . . He smoked up all their cigarettes, drank their wine, told jokes on them to their friends, and sometimes even came upstairs singing and walking about the house when the Carraways had guests in who didn't share their enthusiasm for Negroes, natural or otherwise" (27). In addition, when Michael's mother

visits her son and daughter-in-law, she is offended by Luther's actions when Luther, shirtless, "came sauntering through the library" (29). And despite being described as "a mannish old lady, big and tall, and inclined to be bossy," Michael's mother-in-law performs her femininity and her purity in the most traditional of ways, with a "short loud, dignified scream" (29). In response, Michael performs his white masculinity by taking control of the situation to 'protect' the dignity and purity of his mother. He fires Luther and, when Anne objects, he states simply, and "with strength from his mother" (who has just reminded him of 'proper' performances of white femininity), "He goes" (30). As Luther leaves, Anne "looked at Luther. His black arms were full of roses he had brought to put in the vases. He had on no shirt. 'Oh!' His body was ebony . . . Anne looked at her black boy . . . 'Oh,' Anne moaned distressfully, 'my' 'Boy on the Block'!'" (30-31). Anne's heretofore silent, voyeuristic gaze thus reveals itself in a series of utterances that Olmsted calls a "series of muted, remotely orgasmic, 'Ohs!'" (78). This is consistent with the way in which Luther has become her commodity-fetish, her stand-in for sensual pleasure; not only are her utterances sexual, but her use of "my" is a final assertion of her right to possessive consumption. However, because the boundaries that separate white feminine purity and "other" have been transgressed, both by Anne who becomes so attached to Luther, and by Luther who fails to observe racial decorum around the Carraways' friends and relatives, the relationship is no longer sanctioned--and Anne knows this because her husband tells her so. Once her possessive consumption reveals itself as insatiable (for none of Luther's offenses are egregious enough for her to end the relationship which brings her continued pleasure), her husband, fully satiated himself,

puts a stop to it. Thus, Luther is 'sold away' by Michael in exchange for the protection of Anne's purity and the preservation of her whiteness.

"The Blues I'm Playing"

In "Slave on the Block," the white female gaze is voyeuristic and possessive, but in "The Blues I'm Playing," the white female gaze is voyeuristic, possessive, increasingly regulatory, and punitive. "Blues" demonstrates possessive consumption at its most extreme, for the white female in this story seeks to consume blackness to the point of erasure. Like the women in "Rejuvenation Through Joy" and the Carraways in "Slave on the Block," the main character, Mrs. Ellsworth, vicariously explores that which she has been denied through the acquisition of the Other, in this case, a talented African American musician. This acquisitiveness is ultimately a result of her performance of purity, for one of the ways she negotiates and tolerates her repression as a white woman is by "owning" Oceola and the sexuality with which she has endowed her. In many ways, Mrs. Ellsworth represents Charlotte Mason. In both Hughes' short story and his own life, wealthy white women respond to blackness by seeking control and regulating the terms of their relationships--namely, that the white women construct themselves as benevolent patrons and African Americans as dependent, primitive creatures in need of guidance. While "The Blues I'm Playing" in many ways reconstructs Hughes' relationship with Mason, it also contains a crucial difference: Hughes' last meeting with his patron left him physically ill, but the main character of "Blues" leaves her last meeting with a sense of freedom and pride. This difference is significant because it allows Hughes the

opportunity to conceptualize a clean break from an insatiable, destructive, white female possessive consumption.

Hughes met Mason for the first time in 1927, and although their relationship began well, it eventually unraveled largely due to power struggles between patron and artist. In *The Big Sea*, Hughes reminisces about their initial encounter: "In the living room after dinner, high above Park Avenue with the lights of Manhattan shining below us, my hostess asked me about my plans for the future, my hopes, my ambitions, and my dreams" (313). As he describes his relationship with her, he writes, "She was an amazing, brilliant, and powerful personality. I was fascinated by her, and I loved her. No one else had ever been so thoughtful of me, or so interested in the things I wanted to do, or so kind and generous toward me" (315). Mason provided Hughes "a generous monthly allowance," and he reflects that "those months that I lived by and through her were the most fascinating and fantastic I have ever known" (314, 316). Their relationship continued for approximately four years until it became strained for a variety of reasons, including the influence of other artists, Mason's dissatisfaction with Hughes' work (including its lack of primitivism), and with what she interpreted as a lack of commitment to his writing; most significantly, however, the demise of their relationship was fueled by her assertion of control over his time and his art. In a letter to Mason, Hughes wrote,

> So far in this world, only my writing has been my own, to do when I wanted to do it, to finish only when I felt it was finished, to put it aside or discard it completely if I chose. . . . I have washed thousands of hotel dishes, cooked, scrubbed decks, worked 12 to 15 hours a day on a farm, swallowed my pride for the help of philanthropy and charity – but nobody

> ever said to me 'you must write now. You must finish that poem tomorrow. You must begin to create on the first of the month.' (qtd. in Rampersad 184)

This passage clearly expresses Hughes' desire for independence and control of his work. He attempted to end the artist/patron relationship amicably in order to preserve what he thought was a friendship. He writes, "I asked kindly to be released from any further obligations to her, and that she give me no more money, but simply let me retain her friendship and good will that had been so dear to me. . . But there must have been only the one thread binding us together. When that thread broke, it was the end" (*The Big Sea* 325). In his request, Hughes attempted to determine the terms of their relationship, an assertion of control that angered Mason. Like the relationship between Mrs. Ellsworth and Oceola that Hughes creates in "The Blues I'm Playing," Mason's relationship with Hughes was ultimately destroyed by power struggles in which she attempted to control both art and artist. While I discuss the details of their split later (and in contrast to Oceola's split from Mrs. Ellsworth), it is important to note that these power struggles left Hughes emotionally and physically distraught. However, as he states in his second autobiography, "As soon as I got rid of the last dollar of the money from my estranged patron's allowances, I felt immensely better" (*I Wonder as I Wander* 4). Liberated from Mason's control and consumption, Hughes recovered from their relationship and began writing according to his own terms, including deciding to examine such performances of whiteness in *The Ways of White Folks*.

In "Black Moves, White Ways, Every Body's Blues," Olmsted writes, "I see it as a tribute to other Black artists . . . that he would, in Oceola, create a character who held

her own against a wealthy White woman with an appetite for black artists" (74). Olmsted's use of the word "appetite" is consistent with my assertions of possessive consumption and, like the character Oceola he would later create, Hughes rejects being someone else's source of nourishment. And when Baldwin, in "The Russian Connection: Interracialism as Queer Alliance in Ways," describes D.H. Lawrence's female characters, the inspiration for many of Hughes' stories in this collection, she could also be writing about the relationship between Mason and Hughes, Mrs. Ellsworth and Oceola: "Commenting on the power structure in which monied age beguiles and renders hapless dependent youth, and the ways such structural inequities comingle desire and its disavowal, Lawrence zeros in on what he portrays as the terrifying, seductive powers of a financially empowered matriarchal femininity" (217). Hughes himself concluded that "[g]reat wealth had given to a woman who meant to be kind the means to power, and a technique of power, of so mighty a strength that I do not believe she herself knew what that force might become. She possessed the power to control people's lives – pick them up and put them down when and where she wished" (*The Big Sea* 324). It is against this possessive consumption which Hughes ultimately rebels--first, somewhat passively in his own life, and then much more actively in his short story.

"The Blues I'm Playing" is divided into five parts, with each section displaying an increasing intensity of the possessive consumption of its white female character. The first section contains the initial meeting between Mrs. Dora Ellsworth, a wealthy white woman with an interest in the arts, and Oceola Jones, an African American musician. Part II contains Mrs. Ellsworth's interrogation of Oceola, as well as her growing objectification and fetishization of the artist, while Part III continues to demonstrate Mrs.

Ellsworth's attempts to control the professional and personal life of Oceola. Part IV contains the demise of the relationship, as Oceola chooses to disobey Mrs. Ellsworth's wishes. Part V culminates in their final meeting, as Mrs. Ellsworth continues to demand control and ownership over the artist, and Oceola makes her final assertions of independence. These sections span a number of years and a number of settings, for Mrs. Ellsworth first moves Oceola from Harlem to Greenwich Village, and then finally supports her in Paris, moving her slowly but surely away from the influences of Harlem and closer and closer to the European tradition. Olmsted notes, "The dramatic question is whether Oceola can hold out against Mrs. Ellsworth's demands that she conform to her ideas about music – this conformity, of course, will be paid for handsomely" (71). However, if we reorient our focus to Mrs. Ellsworth, we can see a different dramatic question--how far will Mrs. Ellsworth go, and at what cost, in her pursuit of Oceola and her art?

As a wealthy widow with "no children of her own," Mrs. Ellsworth can afford to pay for Oceola's conformity, as "she had no interest in life now save art, and the young people who created art" (99). From the beginning, Mrs. Ellsworth demonstrates a desire to control Oceola and her music. In "Race, Culture, and Gender in Langston Hughes' *The Ways of White Folks,*" Joyce Ann Joyce notes that "from the very outset she has every intention of possessing her" (74). She sends Ormond Hunter, a music critic, to retrieve her from Harlem and bring her to Madison Avenue. Hunter's name indicates how Ellsworth pursues her latest interest--with both hunger and a quest for consumption. Further, the narrator states that

> She began right away, treating her as a protégée; that is, she began asking her a great many questions she would not dare ask anyone else at first meeting, except a protégée. She asked her how old she was and where her mother and father were and how she made her living and whose music she liked best to play and was she married . . . (101-2)

This interrogation continues at the second meeting, and later, Mrs. Ellsworth asks for inside information from Hunter's maid, who happens to attend the same church as Oceola. After their second meeting, Mrs. Ellsworth essentially forces herself into Harlem and Oceola's apartment by insisting on driving her home and going inside her apartment. When Oceola responds that she lives on the fifth floor, Mrs. Ellsworth goes anyway, "for she meant to see the inside of this girl's life, elevator or no elevator" (108). This initial intrusion foreshadows Mrs. Ellsworth's attitude and behaviors toward Oceola for the rest of their relationship, and her insistence to "see inside" her life also foreshadows how Ellsworth eventually sexualizes and desires her. The narrator terms the duration of their relationship the "period of Oceola," indicating that Mrs. Ellsworth's life is defined by that which she acquires, and again demonstrating how one white woman becomes consumed and controlled by that which she seeks to consume and control (103).

And, what Mrs. Ellsworth seeks to control is that which is constructed as Other. Within the time frame of the story, she supports Antonio Bas, a young Spanish painter, and Oceola Jones, an African American musician. The narrator states, "She was very rich, and it gave her pleasure to share her richness with beauty. Except that she was sometimes confused as to where beauty lay – in the youngsters or in what they made, in the creators or the creation" (99). Olmsted also makes this observation, arguing that

"Mrs. Ellsworth . . . is every bit the collector – not of objects of art, but of humans as objects of art" (84). Mrs. Ellsworth is initially attracted to Oceola and wants to add her to her 'collection' not only because of her musical gifts, but also because of her appearance: Mrs. Ellsworth "was tremendously intrigued at meeting Oceola, never having had before amongst all her artists a black one" (101); "Mrs. Ellsworth couldn't recall ever having known a single Negro before in her whole life, so she found Oceola fascinating. And just as black as she herself was white" (106); finally, Oceola is described as "the blackest – and most interesting of all" (111). Ellsworth's attempts to own Oceola demonstrate bell hooks' argument that the "contemporary longing for the 'primitive' is expressed by the projection onto the Other of a sense of plenty, bounty, a field of dreams" ("Eating" 25). As I argue later, Mrs. Ellsworth sees this "sense of plenty" as a certain fertility, or even sexual fecundity, in Oceola; such projection demonstrates that Ellsworth's compulsion to consume the Other contains a sensual component that is a result of the abjection that she herself calls "sublimation."

While Mrs. Ellsworth exhibits an interest in the 'exotic,' she values, above all, the European patriarchal tradition and the "sublimation" it requires. For example, Oceola's playing at Harlem house parties greatly disturbs Mrs. Ellsworth,

> who still believed in art of the old school, portraits that really and truly looked like people, poems about nature, music that had soul in it, not syncopation. And she felt the dignity of art. Was it in keeping with genius, she wondered, for Oceola to have a studio full of white and colored people every Saturday night (some of them actually drinking gin *from bottles*) and dancing to the most tomtom-like music she had ever heard coming out

> of a grand piano? She wished she would lift Oceola up bodily and take her away from all that, for art's sake. (110-111)

Mrs. Ellsworth clearly does not approve of Oceola's less than 'dignified' approach to music, which seems to be measured and defined by its difference from the Western European tradition. She therefore attempts to assimilate Oceola into a Western tradition by directing Oceola's interests and arranging weekend trips to upstate New York "where Oceola could look from the high places at the stars, and fill her soul with the vastness of the eternal, and forget about jazz" (111). Mrs. Ellsworth would even "read aloud Tennyson or Browning" (111). These trips were, in fact, immersive experiences into Eurocentric art and isolation. They are a reflection of Mrs. Ellsworth's interests, not Oceola's. As Mayberry states, in "Ask Your Mama," "Mrs. Ellsworth represses emotion, intellectualizes living, prefers the distance of the stars, and proclaims as art the 'sublimation of the soul'" (23). Most of Mrs. Ellsworth's efforts to control and repress her own desires require what she herself terms "sublimation." Throughout the story, the narrator contrasts Mrs. Ellsworth's sublimation with Oceola's southern background in "Billy Kersands' Minstrels, and the Sanctified churches where religion was a joy" (114). Mrs. Ellsworth believes that Oceola will have a successful career, "but she must learn to sublimate her soul" (112). She states that "Art is bigger than love," and about Oceola's fiancé, she states, "She won't need him . . . She will have her art" (121, 108). This insistence on sublimation is yet another manifestation of Ellsworth's investment in Eurocentric patriarchal structures, as well as the resulting characteristics of a white femininity in search of purity. However, due to her intense conditioning in sublimation, she compulsively, perhaps even involuntarily, forces this repressive nature upon others,

asserting control over the bodies and talents of those she financially supports. In stark contrast to this sublimation, Oceola wonders to herself, "Why did white folks think you could live on nothing but art? Strange! Too strange! Too strange!" (120). Further, Oceola could never "stare mystically over the top of a grand piano like white folks and imagine that Beethoven had nothing to do with life, or that Schubert's love sons were only sublimations" (114). When Oceola goes to her fiancé's medical school graduation, Mrs. Ellsworth laments, "She thought that by now music would be enough, after all those years under the best teachers, but alas, Oceola was not yet sublimated . . ." (116). However, in this passage, Mrs. Ellsworth is not only concerned with Oceola's ability (or lack thereof) to sublimate herself, but also with the possibility of having to 'share' her ownership and control of Oceola.

Ellsworth's possessive consumption of Oceola can temporarily fill the void that is a result of her perpetual 'sublimation,' but it ultimately results in fetishism; and, if Oceola marries, Mrs. Ellsworth will lose her fetish-object. In this manner, Ellsworth's abjected sexuality unveils itself in her attraction to Oceola and her transformation of Oceola into a commodity-fetish. The narrator states "that [Oceola] looked like nothing Mrs. Ellsworth had ever been near before. Such a rich velvet black, and such a hard young body!" (112). In addition, "Mrs. Ellsworth began to think in bed about what gowns would look best on Oceola" (107). Further, when Ellsworth takes Oceola to the mountains, she is aroused when she shares a room with Oceola; Mrs. Ellsworth was "aware all the time of the electric strength of that brown-black body beside her . . ." (111). According to Olmsted, when Mrs. Ellsworth "orders dresses for Oceola in colors that look good with black skin," her "erotic imagination is at work, for in 'dressing' Oceola, she is also undressing

her" (84). This response to Oceola's blackness involves an attraction to the sexuality and fertility that 1) she has projected onto Oceola, 2) that she has attempted to purge from her own body through processes of sublimation, and 3) that she can vicariously experience through Oceola even as she herself continues to age. Part of this response involves Ellsworth's lack of interaction with people who appear to be different from herself. However, part of her response also involves the way in which she has constructed Oceola, and Harlem, as Other--through Carl VanVechten's novel "Nigger Heaven" (which she requests after she first meets Oceola) and through her own projections; for, if white femininity involves repression (and for her it obviously does), then the femininity of the Other must, somehow, be different. Thus, Oceola is endowed with the sexuality that Ellsworth denies herself. As Olmsted states,

> Mrs. Ellsworth['s] . . . consumption of Black sexuality is invisible to [her] because [she is] unable to recognize (as the readers are) that [her] own 'deepest obsessions' – and longings – have been projected onto the Black subjects (or objects – depending on how one is using the terms). . . . (78)

For Mrs. Ellsworth, Oceola is a source of sexuality, and Mrs. Ellsworth fetishizes her as a replacement object to fulfill her sexual longings through ownership and acquisition.

It is not surprising, however, that once Ellsworth acquires Oceola, she attempts to fully possess and consume her in order to replace that which she has abjected from her own body. Ironically, this action obliterates the very difference that initially intrigued her, for it is only through the erasure of Other that she can conform to hegemonic standards of purity. As hooks argues, "the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, *via* exchange,

by a consumer cannibalism" ("Eating" 31). Thus, Ellsworth's commodification and consumption is not only about acquiring the Other, but also about erasing the Other, for the standards of purity are so deeply ingrained in Mrs. Ellsworth that she attempts to control and even transform her replacement object of desire, her fetish itself. Mrs. Ellsworth will therefore never become satiated, not only because she cannot gain satiety through the artificial construction of Oceola's 'otherness,' but also because she will never allow herself to possess the abject/other. Olmsted writes that "For Mrs. Ellsworth, controlling Oceola's music is a way of controlling her sexuality . . . because she is unable to and since Oceola's music is both sensual and sexual, Mrs. Ellsworth's bourgeois sensibilities are deeply unsettled" (72). It is this unsettled sensibility that contributes to their dramatic final meeting.

By the end of Part IV, Oceola has chosen to marry her fiancé, and Mrs. Ellsworth reacts by alienating Oceola, for "when she saw how love had triumphed over art, she decided she could no longer influence Oceola's life" (120). Instead, Mrs. Ellsworth decides to support a young man who "is one of the few people who live for their art – and nothing else" (120). When Oceola arrives at Mrs. Ellsworth's apartment to play piano for her one last time, she is greeted by her former patron dressed in what appears to be a black mourning dress. Mrs. Ellsworth was "very kind and gentle to Oceola, as one would be to a child who has done a great wrong but doesn't know any better. But to the black girl from Harlem, she looked very cold and white, and her grand piano seemed like the biggest and heaviest in the world" (121). Here, Oceola sees both Mrs. Ellsworth and her piano as a deafening weight of the West, one which inhibits both the warmth of humanity and its self-expression. Oceola begins by playing Beethoven and Chopin, but she stops

when Mrs. Ellsworth begins to berate her about her choices, “I could make you great. And yet you propose to dig a grave for yourself. Art is bigger than love” (121). Ellsworth “cried that Oceola was deserting beauty, deserting her real self, deserting her hope in life” (122). In response to such cries, Oceola plays the blues:

> And her fingers began to wander slowly and softly up and down the keyboard, flowing into the soft and lazy syncopation of a Negro blues, a blues that deepened and grew into rollicking jazz, then into an earth-throbbing rhythm that shook the lilies in the Persian vase of Mrs. Ellsworth’s music room. (122)

Mrs. Ellsworth responds, “Is this what I spent thousands of dollars to teach you” (122). Oceola responds, “No . . . . This is mine . . . . Listen! . . . How sad and gay it is. Blue and happy – laughing and crying. . . . How white like you and black like me. . . . How much like a man. . . . And how like a woman” (122). Through her music and her lyrics, Oceola attempts to deconstruct social performances of race and gender, but Mrs. Ellsworth reasserts her commitment to these performances, for when Oceola sings the lyrics, “O, if I could holler/Like a mountain jack,/I’d go up on de mountain/And call my baby back,” Mrs. Ellsworth responds, “And I . . . would stand looking at the stars” (123). Thus, Ellsworth adheres to the sublimation to which she has been conditioned, and which she so values. Her possessive consumption, encouraged by white, patriarchal, capitalistic structures, prevents her from having any meaningful relationship with Oceola, and instead demands the perverse assertion of both power and privilege.

This last meeting encourages comparisons of Hughes’ last meeting with his own patron. Hughes writes that while he was being chastised, “I fought against bewilderment

and anger, fought hard, and didn't say anything. I just sat there in the high Park Avenue drawing-room and didn't say anything. I sat there and listened to all she told me, closed my mouth hard and didn't say anything" (*Big Sea* 326). This stands in stark contrast to Oceola's reaction to her patron. While Hughes endured the treatment from Mason silently, he later created a character that defiantly and unapologetically asserted her independence and her ownership of her art. Oceola asserts her freedom during the meeting, but Hughes did not feel his independence until after their meeting: "I do not remember clearly what it was she said to me at the end, nor her face as the door closed . . . But I do remember the winter sunshine on Park Avenue and the wind in my face as I went toward the subway to Harlem" (*Big Sea* 326). The sunshine and wind that Hughes felt on his face is a sign of the freedom that Oceola experiences as she playes the blues. While the end of "The Blues I'm Playing" demonstrates Mrs. Ellsworth's investment in her identity construction and in her power and privilege, it also comments on the patronage that often took place during the Harlem Renaissance. Ostrom states that the "resolution of the story makes clear that while a relationship of patronage may take longer to reveal itself as yet another relationship of racism and power, it will inevitably do so" (*Langston Hughes* 14). This is very much what Hughes had concluded about his relationship with Charlotte Mason; as demonstrated earlier, while the relationship began as a positive experience for him, he ultimately believed that it was perversely affected by the imbalance of power brought on by her financial support.

Hughes' creation of Oceola offers him the opportunity to reject the assertions of ownership and control of the white female patrons of the Harlem Renaissance. It also symbolizes a rejection of the primitivism that was an expression of the supremacy of

whiteness. It resists the vicarious exploration and exploitation of blackness, and it reclaims the autonomy of his art. In this manner, “The Blues I’m Playing” contains a declaration against the possessive consumption that characterizes the wealthy white women in all three of the stories discussed in this chapter--the women described *en masse* in “Rejuvenation Through Joy,” Anne Carraway in “Slave on the Block,” and Mrs. Ellsworth in “The Blues I’m Playing.” All of their consumptive habits result from the performances of purity mandated by hegemonic structures, for the consumption of Others is ultimately an attempt to reclaim all that has been purged in the name of white patriarchal order, including the ‘primitive’ qualities of sensuality and sexuality that are projected onto blackness. This pursuit of ownership and control of African American artists and art reflects the perversion of systems that privilege white men and leave others vying for power--ultimately, the women in these stories attempt to find that power by consuming Others.

CHAPTER 4

THE PURSUIT OF OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL IN THE READING, SCHOLARSHIP, AND TEACHING OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE

Hughes' white female characters in "Rejuvenation Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing" prompt me to examine how the pursuit of ownership and control might manifest itself in my own life, specifically within my scholarly and pedagogical practices with African American literature. The white women portrayed *en masse* in "Rejuvenation," Anne Carraway in "Slave on the Block," and Mrs. Ellsworth in "Blues" all respond to blackness with a vicarious consumption and presumption of ownership; these responses invite me to analyze how I might consume and control African American literature when I read it, and how I might attempt to control or 'own' this literature in the classroom. I began this section of my dissertation with a conversation between me and a student enrolled in an African American literature class. It was 2005, and I was teaching the course for only the second time. I had just presented a rigorous syllabus and a lecture on the pre-colonial African American presence in the United States. When Jon stayed after class and asked me what seemed like a personal question, "Why do you like African American literature?", I was surprised, not only because it seemed personal (and I had been *so* academic), but also because I felt as though I had been placed in a position to defend myself. My reaction itself was perhaps based on a presumption of ownership, or of the right to take an interest without examining the source of that interest. During the same conversation, Jon also asked me a second question, "Are you married to a black man?" As I reflect on this

question, I realize how it intimates a familiarity with the possessive consumption that can characterize white women's encounters with African Americans. In this manner, the question may have been an inquiry into the way in which I had acquired my knowledge and legitimacy, into how I had become endowed with the authority to teach about the texts, and by extension, the lives of African Americans. In addition, he seemed to want to understand my motivations. Or, as Veronica Watson suggested in an earlier draft of this chapter, his question may have been "a solicitation of [my] story, a request that [I] share/bare [myself] as he was being 'bared' through [my] reading and analysis of the literature." All of these possibilities I consider retrospectively because at the time, as a white woman, I exercised the 'privilege' of being unreflective about my racial identity.

Throughout this chapter, I offer an interrogation of my own interest in, and readings of, African American literature--when my readings have been acts of gratuitous consumption, when they have been exercises in control, and when, at times, they have transformed into acts of critical literacy made possible only after my encounters with the literature of white exposure. This analysis of my readings of African American literature has profound implications for my teaching practices. Thus, I offer here a corresponding 'pedagogy of white exposure,' developed from the insights provided to me by this genre. This pedagogy contains strategies for exposing social constructions of whiteness, as well as other racial categories, and acknowledging my racial identity and the complications it creates in the study and teaching of African American literature. In addition, the pedagogy of white exposure includes ways to decentralize my authority and power in order to resist my own pursuit of ownership and control; it is a pedagogy that resists whiteness, its capacity to go unnamed and uninterrogated, and its presumption of

authority. In other words, I practice a pedagogy that makes clear that the texts aren't "my" texts, the subject area is not "my" expertise, and the classroom space is not simply "my" space, but a shared, liminal space in which teacher and students can work together to ask questions and construct knowledge. Although I bring scholarly expertise into the classroom, I can share this expertise in alternative ways that do not presume or exercise a sense of ownership. I offer these acts, a rigorous self-interrogation of my responses to African American literature, and a corresponding and intentional pedagogical approach, as necessary complements to any white interrogation of the texts of African American authors. These acts contain the potential to resist white-centered responses to African American texts, including those specifically exposed within the previous chapter: the pursuit of ownership and control.

Before describing my own reading and teaching experiences in more depth, I must address what Michael Awkward calls the "self-referential impulse" of white scholars of African American literature. In *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality,* Awkward examines "a growing body of analyses . . . in which white critics . . . use the occasion of an analysis of Afro-American texts to discuss their own racial positionality's effects upon the process of interpretation" (60). Awkward makes it clear that, for him, the white analysis of African American literature is a welcome act, but he also provides examples of white critics who have made glaring errors in their analyses. He argues that such acts derive "from a desire . . . to limit, circumscribe, or otherwise control the range of black discourse in order that this discourse can be made to act in accordance with existing caucacentric formulations of race and difference" (85). In other words, this self-referential impulse can be a disguised

assertion of ownership and control. As noted in my Introduction, Ann duCille is also critical of such self-reference. She writes that personal stories of transformation are indulgences that are often indicative of a "different set of assumptions" in which the reader/scholar "expects to leave high theory behind when she goes slumming in low culture" (38). Let me make it clear that I consider my personal story one of ongoing transformation, not one that tells how I have 'arrived' at some static place where I might transcend whiteness. Let me also make it clear that my self-reference is not an attempt to control Langston Hughes' literature or avoid the rigor of 'high theory.' Instead, it is an attempt to interrogate my motivations, interests, and acts of reading, of exposing the very "caucacentric formulations of race and difference" that might unknowingly inform my analyses. My self-referential analysis is an act of resistance against what Trinh T. Minh-Ha, in her work, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, calls "obtrusive interiority":

> The move from obnoxious exteriority to obtrusive interiority, . . . our quest for 'the so-called *hidden* values of a person or a culture, has given rise to a form of legitimized (but unacknowledged as such) voyeurism and subtle arrogance – namely, the pretense to see into or to *own* the others' *minds*. . . (66)

Minh-Ha's use of the word "own" reflects Hughes' observation about white women's performances of whiteness. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, "Rejuvenate Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing," all contain white female characters who pursue the ownership and control of blackness, and Mrs. Ellsworth in "Blues," especially demonstrates this "obtrusive interiority," for she "meant to see the inside of

[Oceola's] life" (108). As a way of resisting the impulse to own the minds and experiences of others, I attempt to own my own mind and experiences, to examine them well enough to reveal the otherwise hidden workings of whiteness. I read the words of Awkward, duCille, and Minh-Ha as words of caution; I read them as a challenge to make sure that my analysis of self is as critical as my analysis of the African American texts I work with. The "obtrusive interiority" should first be into one's own self.

White Readers and the Pursuit of Ownership and Control

The works that examine the dynamics of white reading and scholarship of African American literature typically begin with questions. Michael Awkward asks, "What is the nature of the relationship between race and reading? In other words, how does race direct, influence, or dictate the process of interpreting both black texts and Western theories?" (25). Elizabeth Abel, in "Black Writing, White Reading: Race and the Politics of Feminist Interpretation," asks, "How do different critical discourses both inflect and inscribe racial fantasies? What rhetorical strategies do these discourses produce, and (how) do these strategies bear on the value of the readings they ostensible legitimate?" (107). In "Theme for African American Literature B," Russ Castronovo asks, "Can whites teach, research, and write about black texts without making these texts conform to a liberal agenda that validates consensus over radical critique, accord over disjunction, and quaint lessons about mutual understanding over a more insurgent pedagogy dedicated to examining enduring inequalities?" (30). In "The Outsider's Gaze," Janet Powers asks,

> Wherein lies my fascination with the other? Is it a concern for the weak, which gives me a notion of power? Is it a delight in the exotic, which makes me something of a voyeur? Is it reveling in things imagined, which causes me aggressively to explore the boundaries of what is possible? Or is it the desire for an originality, so lacking in myself, that I must appropriate another's. (74-5)

All of these questions reveal a concern with the role of (un)consciousness in white reading practices. In order to address this concern, I offer a self-interrogation of my racial consciousness, or lack thereof, during my interactions with African American literature. This autoethnographic analysis of my reading history of African American literature reveals the ways in which I have approached African American texts with varying degrees of racial consciousness, including readings that that have been acts of gratuitous consumption, and readings that have been acts of a distanced, scholarly consumption that all but erased difference.

In *Negotiating Difference*, Michael Awkward devotes a chapter to revealing what he calls "interpretive obstacles" for white readers of African American literature. In this chapter, he recounts the historical missteps of white critics of black literature,[38] writing that "white reading can mean the adoption of a posture that can be demonstrated to be

[38] Awkward's analysis includes, but is not limited to, the following examples: In *Black on White,* David Littlejohn expresses an overwhelming concern to preserve a positive white identity and protect oneself from the "guilt and pain that result as a necessary consequence of interactions with black literature" (qtd. in Awkward 63); in "Writing as Power in the Slave Narrative of the Early Republic," Donald Wesling demonstrates a scholarly deference to white critics that is "caught up in a hegemonic privileging of 'white power' and 'white thought'"(Awkward 71); in "Real Life, Literary Criticism, and the Perils of Bourgeoisification," Harold Fromm seems to assume that whiteness is the "normative intellectual state" against which African Americans writers and critics are measured (Awkward 82); and, finally, in *Feminism and Theatre,* Sue Ellen Case seems to use her whiteness as a "self-protective avoidance" and excuse not to provide a thorough more analysis of an African American text (Awkward 88).

antithetical to black interests" (7). As I will demonstrate, my gratuitous consumption and my possessive, scholarly consumption of African American literature served my own interests at particular moments in my life. I unconsciously used African American literature to meet my desires as a white woman, desires that, because they exhibit the pursuit of ownership and control, were themselves antithetical to black interests. Thus, it is important to add both gratuitous consumption and a scholarly, even possessive consumption, to Awkward's list of "interpretive obstacles." These obstacles became apparent to me only after I was introduced to white life literature; after my initial encounters with this genre, my reading habits and consciousness began to change to a more informed consciousness that interrogates how my subjectivity affects my reading and scholarly practices. What follows is an account of my own interpretive obstacles, an account that contains selective, but representative responses to African American literature and excavates my vicarious, gratuitous consumption of Other, as well as my pursuit of control over African American literature. This is my attempt to examine how race has shaped, and how it continues to shape, my readings of African American literature.

Mama Day

Mama Day by Gloria Naylor was my first experience with African American literature that I remember *as an experience with African American literature.* I'm not sure if it was because I had never read African American literature before (this is both hard to believe because I was nearly nineteen years of age, and not so hard to believe because I

was part of a predominately white community in a small town in Indiana) or because I had never experienced a text in such a way that I had felt like an outsider. When I reviewed my high school writing portfolio to look for encounters with African American literature, I found papers about *MacBeth*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, "Lament" by Shelley, and *The Sound and the Fury*. There is no evidence to suggest that I had read African American literature. In my writings about these texts by white males, I seemed to have found something that sounded to me like a "universal truth"--the paper on Dickens is about the dangers of "repression," the paper on Faulkner about the dissolution of the American family, and the paper on Shelley about the purity and innocence of youth. These papers examine themes, symbols and characters to make claims about life, claims that do not consider variables such as race and gender. While the papers are fairly well-written, they exhibit a lack of understanding of subjectivity and the dangers of assertions of universality--something whiteness certainly allows and encourages. The papers, however, also read as sterile and detached, perhaps itself illustrating that the messages of 'universality' that I had written about were not as universal or relevant to my own experiences as my papers seem to argue.

I read *Mama Day* shortly after graduating high school, and it provided me with something quite different from the white patriarchal readings I had experienced. When I finished reading the novel, I was in tears. While I don't remember much of the novel itself, I remember very distinctly that it was the first book that ever made me cry. And, I remember that I cried because after reading the novel, I felt a distinct lack--of experience, of emotional capacity, of courage, and of wisdom and understanding that would allow me to connect with the rest of the world. Through the characters, I had experienced emotions

of anguish, joy, and a love I did not know. I remember wishing I could "feel" as Naylor's characters had felt. Looking back, I read *Mama Day* in a way that Catherine R. Stimpson describes, in "Black Culture/White Teacher," as a way to "use black literature emotionally – for kicks, for a 'primitive' energy lost or missing from [white readers'] own lives" (170).[39] I projected onto the characters some of the 'spice' that my life lacked, and that bell hooks writes about in "Eating the Other." I vicariously experienced the lives of the characters, and then I put the book down and moved on. While Naylor's work obviously affected me in a very emotional (albeit temporary) way, it was an expression of my privilege that I could walk away from the book without examining the source of that affect. My experience with *Mama Day* was not one of possessive consumption, but one of gratuitous consumption--it was a vicarious exploration of blackness that provided much potential to alter my racial consciousness and understanding, but one that I did not capitalize on. Typically, when I read literature, I fill the margins with comments, underline passages, and write notes inside the cover. My copy of *Mama Day* is completely blank. I had consumed this text without reflection; I had a vicarious emotional experience, and I went on with my life, dimly aware that something was missing in my worldview, but unwilling to pursue it--probably because by virtue of my race, I didn't have to. Nor was I encouraged to.

[39] Stimpson creates a portrait of the white reader who reads black writing only for the following reasons: to "use black literature politically – to condemn Western history and white racism, and to earn credit for a would-be revolutionary future" (169); to "use black literature emotionally – for kicks, for a 'primitive' energy lost or missing from their own lives" (170); "for intellectual capital" (170); or "to dig out information about an alien culture" (170). For Stimpson, the tradition of literary criticism hides personal agenda: critics "[hide] behind literary traditions" but "such criticism is actually personal (*Jones scares me but I can't admit that*), political (*Jones is revolutionary and I can't stand for that*), or social (*Jones is unmannerly and I won't stand for that)*" (179). The year was 1970, and she essentially advocated that white readers abandon African American literature if they could not resist these motivations or responses.

Such an experience is analogous to the actions of the white female characters in "Rejuvenation Through Joy." It is a type of consumption that allowed me to take an emotional, even voyeuristic ride, and then walk away without examining my own participation in that experience. Like the women portrayed *en masse*, I explored African American culture, used it to fill my lack of experience, and never reflected upon the politics of my experience. I read the literature, and then simply moved on, just as we might assume the masses of white women moved on to purchase their next experience with Otherness. While my performance of white femininity was not about the purchasing of blackness, it was indeed about a vicarious, temporary ownership of the feelings, hearts and minds of Others; I was guilty of Minh-Ha's "obtrusive interiority." My tears, momentarily and temporarily, replicated what I lacked--emotional experience, trauma and triumph--in efforts to 'own' the experience I myself didn't have. In *Feeling Power*, Boler discusses the problems of such "empathetic" readings of the texts of Others, arguing that such readings contain pleasurable moments that she calls "affective obstacles that prevent the reader's acute attention to the power relations guiding her response and judgments" (168). My emotional response was indeed one of these "affective obstacles" as it allowed for gratuitous consumption and prevented me from analyzing the power of my own white privilege. Boler argues that such "a pleasurable reading experience abdicates responsibility and allows us to move freely to the next consumption" (164). My experience indeed testifies to such consumption, as well as the abdication of responsibility that can attend white readings of African American literature. My inability to remember any details of that novel certainly testifies to my easy, irresponsible, gratuitous consumption.

Beloved

Six years after reading *Mama Day*, I read *Beloved* and reacted quite differently. I was assigned the novel as part of an Ethnic and Minority Literature class in my Master's program. Instead of responding with an unexamined emotional outpouring, I read the novel so theoretically that I avoided virtually any emotional experience. The professor of the course was a white male known for his expertise in African American literature and critical theory--and that is exactly how he structured his course. He gave thoroughly researched lectures day after day without any student input or discussion, and with numerous references to post-structural theories. I was impressed and challenged, and looking back, my efforts to meet his challenges were clothed in mimicry. In contrast to my unmarked copy of *Mama Day*, my copy of *Beloved* was covered in my comments and markings. My essay on *Beloved* was an analysis of the cultural discourse of victimization within the novel, "both inwardly and as a larger societal challenge." The focus of the essay moves from a very quick reference to slavery as a victimizing force in society (I used the word "society" as a stand-in for "white society"), to the ways in which Sethe internalizes victimization and then reproduces it. In this case, I attempted to own and control the literature as I modeled my reading patterns according to my white male instructor's method of demonstrating expertise. I avoided any emotional involvement and invested in white patriarchal models; like Mrs. Ellsworth from "The Blues I'm Playing," I sublimated my personal, emotional response in order to privilege the white, patriarchal theoretical tradition.

In "White Feminists Who Study Black Writers," Katherine Mayberry addresses such use of literary criticism by white women who study African American texts, stating

that "Our training [in Western, canonical literary theory] carries risks: It instills in us a false sense of our own power and of the docility of the texts that we claim to master" (A48). Her article is a response to accusations that she herself appropriated African American literature (coincidently, *Beloved*) in this same manner; in 1994, her paper on the novel was accepted for presentation at a women's studies conference, but her panel, which consisted only of white women reading papers on *Beloved*, was cancelled when most of the African American women who were part of the audience, including the panel's moderator, refused to listen and left the presentation. Mayberry recounts her initial "indignation," but eventually concludes that "the problem is as much with our critical language as with our white background" (A48). She argues that "we are . . . in the business of controlling, organizing, and interpreting texts" and that when white women read African American literature, we "take a powerful and brilliantly rich text set within a history of racial oppression that implicates us all, and we organize it, master it, impose upon it a language and perspective utterly foreign to the culture from which it was issued" (A48). In this manner, Mayberry identifies the pursuit of textual ownership and control as part of the Western literary tradition; [40] however, she also argues that white

[40] Of course, Mayberry's observations were not new in 1994; seven years earlier in "The Race for Theory," Barbara Christian famously argued that literary theory had become a tool for supporting white, patriarchal, hegemonic structures. In her article, she states that theory has replaced literature as the subject of analysis, and that it "has become a commodity which helps determine whether we are hired or promoted in academic institutions – worse, whether we are heard at all" (2257). She writes that as a result, "some of our most daring and potentially radical critics (and by *our* I mean black, women, third world) have been influenced, even coopted, into speaking a language and defining their discussion in terms alien to and opposed to our needs and orientation" (2257). Her essay also argues that "people of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing . . . is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (2257). Christian's argument is a critique of white theoretical endeavors that do not recognize alternate methods of theorizing. Indeed, as this project shows, Hughes' short stories theorize white consciousness and behaviors in unique, insightful ways, yet in ways that have gone unrecognized in the types of scholarly circles that Christian describes.

women often mask more "authentic" responses in order to adopt this mode of critique as a method of gaining power in a field largely controlled by white men (including deans, department chairs, journal editors, acquisition editors, etc.). In "Black Writing, White Reading," Elizabeth Abel also argues that white female readers have used African American texts to gain power and advance their own agenda. Her argument echoes Catherine Stimpson's observation that some white scholars read black literature "for intellectual capital" (170). Abel's study finds

> certain pervasive tendencies among white feminists, who often read black women's texts through critical lenses that filter out the texts' embeddedness in black political and cultural traditions and that foreground instead their relation to the agendas of white feminism, which the texts alter, or prefigure, but ultimately reconfirm. (118)

Abel identifies the ways in which white women decontextualize the works of African American writers and then use them to meet their needs. Specifically, the passage explains how white women readers hope to use the texts of Others to support their own political agenda (in this case, feminism) and gain access to power. Like Hughes' characters in "Rejuvenation Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing," white women often decontextualize African American thought and culture, manipulate it, and use it to serve their own needs. And like the characters of Anne Carraway or Mrs. Ellsworth, white women have within them the potential to displace white men as bearers of power, but then take their own liberties with African American artistic expression.

My reading of *Beloved* was also an attempt to exhibit mastery and promote myself through my adeptness with theory. As a young woman enrolled in a course led by a white male steeped in Western theoretical traditions, I imitated him in order to succeed in the course. In contrast to the "affective obstacles" I encountered with *Mama Day*, I had now encountered a 'critical obstacle' that prevented me from feeling the complete impact of *Beloved*, a novel that contains so many moments of brutality and anguish, and at times, joy and love, that a completely critical reading hardly seems possible. Further, I was never encouraged--either by the instructor of the course or by the literary criticism I encountered--to examine how the text affected me as a reader or how my identity shaped my reading. Instead, I earned praise for the way in which I had assumed a degree of control over the text.

The Literature of White Exposure

My experiences with *Mama Day* and *Beloved* represent two different ways that I have read African American literature over the years--sometimes with a gratuitous consumption, and sometimes with an assertion of control that was really a retreat into critical theory. But in the summer of 2005, I experienced something completely different when I was first introduced to the literature of white exposure.[41] As I was registering for my last few courses in the Ph.D. program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, I noticed

[41] At that time, the only terminology available for the genre I encountered was "white life literature," though that term was really a misnomer because it encompassed only novels written by African Americans and populated with white characters, and not other genres such as essays, sermons, etc. Since that class, Veronica Watson has expanded the scope of the literature to include fiction and non-fiction, using the terms "literature of white estrangement" and "literature of white exposure" instead of the limited terminology of "white life fiction."

ENG773: "Topics in Minority Literature: Making Whiteness Visible: Black Writers, White Lives" taught by Dr. Veronica Watson. Vaguely aware of something 'off' in my reading practices of African American literature, and completely unaware of white life literature and Critical Whiteness Studies, I enrolled in the course because it seemed to offer me an alternative way of reading African American literature.

My notes from the first day of class are sparse--I must have done a lot of listening. The notes contain some definitions of white life literature and critical whiteness studies, and a comment that "whiteness is a cultural/racial marker that remains largely untouched." But my notes for the duration of the class are quite extensive, as I encountered texts such as Ethiop's "What Shall We Do with the White People?", DuBois' "The Souls of White Folks," Baldwin's "White Man's Guilt," and bell hooks' "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination." Something struck a nerve. This was brand new territory for me, and the texts described many of my experiences (for example, the stuttering that Baldwin describes in "White Man's Guilt," when white people attempt to discuss race with people of color), something many other texts had failed to do; my experience with Dickens and Faulkner and the rest were about 'universals' that were so broad that I didn't relate to them, and my experiences with African American literature thus far seemed to be about experiences of others that were remote from mine, or about my own imposition of critical theory. But the literature of white exposure offered something different. Faced with only white characters to analyze (in the case of fiction), and with direct analyses of whiteness (in the case of non-fiction), I began to see my own positionality, which provided me with what felt like more appropriate interactions with the texts. The literature provided me with the opportunity to

see myself--not *only* Others, and not *only* theory--in African American literature, which brought a new reality to my readings; I began to see myself as 'raced' and to realize not only the limitations of my own perspectives, but also the ways in which race had unknowingly shaped my life. Consequently, I also realized how my own racial consciousness and identity had gone uninterrogated when I had encountered African American literature.

In his Introduction to *What White Looks Like: African-American Philosophers on the Whiteness Question*, George Yancy describes this same lack of interrogation and introspection on behalf of white readers of African American texts. Yancy recounts being the only black student in an African American literature class and becoming "disappointed with the superficial readings" of the white students who had read *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (3). He spoke to the class,

> After I read these texts, I noticed how angry I became. These texts speak to me as a black male. I feel justifiably angered by the behavior of whites in these texts. . . I would like to know what the rest of you feel about the white racist behavior of the whites in these texts. Do you feel guilty? And how do you feel about the fact that your own whiteness implicates you in a structural white power system from which you are able to gain so many privileges? How do you understand your whiteness vis-à-vis the whites in the texts? (3)

Yancy reports a stunned silence, a feeling of the other students' discomfort; he concludes that "the students had been reading these very important texts without autocritique" (3). In my own experience, this type of reading is possible because white readers typically

concentrate on racial difference, that is, blackness (and the qualities with which we endow it) or on formal literary critique. Each of these approaches utilizes what Yancy calls a "key feature of the social ontology of whiteness . . . that whites attempt to avoid discussing their own social, political, economic, and cultural investment in whiteness" (4).[42] However, with its direct analyses of whiteness, the literature of white exposure makes such avoidance almost impossible. It is this genre indeed that offered me an alternative way of reading African American literature that includes the autocritique that Yancy describes, and that creates some balance for me as a reader--although I had gazed into the lives of Others in African American literature, I had never turned the gaze inward to examine the racial constructions and dynamics of my own life. My experiences with the literature of white exposure revealed to me the shortcomings of my own reading practices, bridging the gap between vicarious consumption and theoretical distancing. With a growing awareness of whiteness and a changing racial consciousness, I realized that the social constructions of blackness and whiteness are inextricably linked, and that reading African American literature (regardless of genre) is therefore not just reading about blackness, but also about reading whiteness.[43]

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[42] This lack of autocritique is analogous to the situation I recount in my Introduction, when I attended a session entitled "Focusing on Whiteness and White Privilege: Re-centering White People or Dismantling White Supremacy," led by Kendall and Owens, at the 2007 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education. I witnessed a frustrated African American women tell her story of hurt and oppression, and then turn to a predominately white audience and say, "How many times do I have to bleed for you people? How many times do I have to tell my pain to get you to understand?" Her message was to the white people in the audience, and it was about our gratuitous consumption of her story and of her pain; our consumption was gratuitous because it was not accompanied by any action or signs of changes in racial consciousness. It reveals a way of reading African American narratives without the analysis of how whiteness is implicated.

[43] Another factor that made my experience with African American literature different during this course was the racial identity of the professor. For the first time in my entire educational career, I was the student of an African American professor. Through her presence, her pedagogical style (which I would describe as extraordinarily thoughtful, intentional, gentle when necessary, but forceful when appropriate), and the genre she was teaching, I was encouraged to examine my racial subjectivity; I began

This self-interrogation of my past readings and experiences with African American literature reveals my willingness to consume and walk away, my presumption of mastery, and my inability to see my own whiteness and privilege; however, it also reveals that the literature of white exposure can balance and perhaps mitigate the white gaze, and instead promote an understanding of the workings of race that include whiteness. This reading practice can provide white readers with a new or additional approach to any work of African American literature, for it encourages thoughtful, conscious responses to representations of blackness that do not involve gratuitous consumption or the pursuit of ownership and control, precisely because they also contain thoughtful, conscious responses to representations of whiteness.

However, while the literature of white exposure provides me with a new approach to African American literature, I need to be mindful that my experiences with white life literature cannot represent or provide a model for all of my experiences with African American literature. If I read African American literature only to see myself, I will re-center whiteness. If I bring to the text only a focus on white characters, I will miss important arguments and insights about the African American characters or the African American experience. The reading of the literature of white exposure (as opposed to other African American texts that foreground the African American experience) and the analysis of white characters bring both benefits and risks because they mitigate and

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to see myself as others might see me, and understand, perhaps for the first time, the type of double-consciousness that DuBois describes in *Souls of Black Folks.* Before I spoke, I considered and reconsidered every thought and every word. Dr. Watson's racial identity increased the intensity of this because my previous experiences with African American literature had been either my solitary gratuitous consumption, or my scholarly work with white instructors, which permitted my racial identity to remain invisible and uninterrogated. I eventually began to see her presence and her expertise as appropriately discomforting to me--that is, her pedagogy, her expertise, and her visible identity led me (I believe) to more thorough analyses of the texts, *and my own readings* of the texts.

complicate the issues of white consumption and control of African American texts. This literature allows me to experience African American texts in significant, material ways because it inhibits a vicarious consumption and distanced theoretical analyses. It broadens the scope of the white gaze from African American life and experience to also include white lives and subjectivities. When I read, I now read with the discomforting weight of my own white gaze.

In Catherine Stimpson's article about white readings of African American literature, she writes, "White people, if they read black literature properly, must eventually rebel against their own world, the world which the books reveal: to do nothing but read is to be evasive, to do nothing but speak is to be unspeakable. The end of theory is the call to practice" (184). The end of theory must be the call to practice--otherwise, the reading of African American literature is a self-indulgent reification of whiteness; it is a vicarious consumption or a form of distancing and denial. I therefore consider the implications of my reading history on my teaching practices, and I develop and practice an intentional, complementary pedagogy as a critical act that struggles against the presumption of controlling African American texts.

White Women Teachers and the Pursuit of Ownership and Control

Because of the white female proclivities towards ownership and control that Hughes reveals in his short stories and that I have excavated in my own reading and scholarly practices, I find myself wondering, sometimes on a daily basis, if I should teach African American literature. I am aware, almost paralytically aware, that a corollary to

white-centric readings of African American literature is surely the white-centric teaching of African American literature. I'll never forget the first time I read the following passage from *Teaching to Transgress:* "I am disturbed when all the courses on black history or literature at some colleges and universities are taught solely by white people, not because I think that they cannot know these realities but that they know them differently" (hooks 90). hooks states that, given the option, she would prefer to have a "progressive black professor . . . because this individual would have brought to the class that unique mixture of experiential and analytical ways of knowing – that is, a privileged standpoint. It cannot be acquired through books or even distanced observation and study of a particular reality" (90). Similarly, Donna Watson writes, "I personally would be upset listening to an interpretation of a novel by Toni Morrison, for example, that lacked the rich flavor that comes naturally to black language – written, spoken, physical, academic, anecdotal, or analytical" (309). I am also particularly affected by hooks' assertion that whiteness represents "the terrible, the terrifying, the terrorizing" ("Representations" 44). hooks and Watson's words strike me (even, at me) because I am the only teacher of the only African American studies course currently at my university, and because, as a teacher at a college with a 25% African American student enrollment, I teach African American students on a daily basis. This thought, that I might terrorize students, leaves me questioning whether I should be in a classroom with African American literature at all.

Further, many scholars have noted how our educational system reproduces systems of dominance.[44] In "When Race Walks in the Room: White Teachers in Black Studies," John Ernest writes, "A predominantly white university offers, so far as I can tell, little more than a reasonably controlled and controllable theater for maintaining and

[44] See Henry Giroux, Paolo Freire, bell hooks, Lisa Delpit, Gary Howard and John T. Warren among others.

manipulating established cultural scripts" (42). As argued in Chapter 3, one of these cultural scripts for white women is the pursuit of ownership and control of blackness, which ultimately manifests itself into authoritative practices that capitalize on whiteness. In "Making Whiteness Visible in the Classroom," Laurie B. Lippin recognizes such authoritative impulses when she writes, "As [white] classroom teachers we need to realize how dangerous we are" (111). She criticizes "[white] arrogance, being right, [and] authoritative command of information," and argues that the "power dynamics that firmly establish [white] faculty authority undermine the basic concept of antiracist classrooms" (111). In addition, this "authoritative command" not only reinforces the discourse of white supremacy, but also dehumanizes both students and teachers. As hooks notes in *Teaching Community*,

> Authoritarian practices, promoted and encouraged by many institutions, undermine democratic education in the classroom. By undermining education as the practice of freedom, authoritarianism in the classroom dehumanizes and thus shuts down the 'magic' that is always present when individuals are active learners. It takes the 'fun out of study' and makes it repressive and oppressive. (43-44)

hooks writes that she has seen the results of such authoritative control: "I have known many brilliant students . . . who despair or become fundamentally dismayed because colleges and universities are structured in ways that dehumanize" (48). This dehumanization further disempowers students and decreases any potential resistance to hegemonic systems and structures.

Since Hughes demonstrates that white women have a proclivity to pursue this type of power and control, it is especially important for white women teachers (who, to recall, make up the majority of the teaching force in the U.S.[45]) to interrogate their pedagogies. This interrogation is also particularly important in places that may have been assumed to be safe spaces of communion and resistance, such as an African American literature class. John Ernest similarly recognizes that white teachers working with African American literature can exacerbate the dangers of authority because "they have it within their power to shape the text of African American literary and cultural history to the tacit imperatives of a white supremacist culture" (43). These dangers only compound my concerns about teaching African American literature as a white woman.

When I look to scholarship for insights about white women teaching in the field, I find only three collections that contain essays on white teachers (regardless of gender) of African American literature: Bonnie Tusmith and Maureen Reddy's *Race in the College Classroom*, Katherine Mayberry's *Teaching What You're Not,* and Lisa Long's *White Scholars/Black Texts*. Tusmith and Reddy's collection considers three broad categories: "authority and (il)legitimacy, rewards and punishments, and transformative practices" (v-vii); however, the essays in this collection focus primarily on teaching courses that do not directly address race (unlike an African American literature course). Mayberry's collection, *Teaching What You're Not*, is also devoted to the issues of working and teaching in the fields of others, though from a variety of boundary crossings, including race, sexuality, physical ability, and gender. Long's collection, however, specifically addresses the scholarship, training and teaching of white scholars in African American literature. In the Introduction to her collection, she summarizes many of the arguments

[45] See page 20 of my Introduction for Statistics from the U.S. Department of Education.

both against the white instruction of African American literature (the appropriation of African American texts to a white agenda, the increase of white applicants for the relatively few tenure-track positions in African American studies, and the question of whites' ability "to comprehend the nature of the black experience") and in support of white teachers teaching African American literature (the need to open literary studies across racial boundaries, the principle that race should not be a determining factor for opportunity, and the "value in having the perspectives of outsiders to a culture as participants in the critical discourse evaluating its productions") (xii-xiii). Also within this collection is John Ernest, a white scholar of African American literature who asks, "Can white teachers teach African American literature?" He responds to his own question, writing "I can't offer a simple answer to this question . . . It seems to me that white teachers have a lot of work to do in thinking about their approach to this field. . . . Whiteness is a complex web of contingencies, and white teachers have a responsibility to understand and work with and against these contingencies" (50). Yet despite these contingencies, Ernst continues to teach. Nellie McKay, in "Naming the Problem that led to the Question 'Who Shall Teach African American Literature?'" also argues that white teachers are able to teach African American literature. She bases her argument on the ability to learn:

> Contrary to much of the angry rhetoric associated with ideologies of essentialism that some black scholars engage in, there is nothing mystical about African American literature that makes it the sole property of those of African American descent. Toni Morrison reminds us that 'it can be

> learned' ('Interview' 153). To learn it is to 'know' it, and only those willing to learn will know. (24)

Ultimately, she writes that "training and learning" are at the center of proper teaching of African American literature (25). And, despite Donna Watson's opening comments that seem to exclude the possibility of white teachers teaching African American literature, she argues that when such teaching is done, it must be done with sensitivity. She states that "sensitivity – simple acts of human kindness – is called for, and indeed necessary, if the pursuit of scholarly study is truly about developing a clearer understanding of ourselves and where we stand in relation to textual analysis of the literature of 'marginal' cultures" (313). The words of these scholars provide some comfort because I know I am not alone in struggling with the topic and seeking appropriate teaching strategies; however, their words do not quiet the voices of hooks and Watson, nor do they alleviate my concerns about reinforcing and reproducing cultural hegemony.

Further, these collections do not provide clear answers to my dilemma as a white female teacher of African American literature. In fact, I have been unable to locate any analysis or discussion on the specific dynamics and challenges of white women teaching African American literature. Though several white women have written articles about teaching African American literature, they have not specifically addressed how both whiteness and gender affect their teaching or classroom dynamics. In "Making Whiteness Visible," Lippin often refers to herself as a white woman, yet her strategies for teaching (which include naming whiteness, examining racial consciousness, and adopting a specific set of texts) are more broadly for all white teachers, regardless of gender. In "Smashing the Rules of Racial Standing," Maureen Reddy recounts her days as a young

graduate assistant struggling to gain authority as a female teacher, and contrasts this struggle with her inability to see the unearned authority of her whiteness. However, Reddy also concludes her essay with a broad statement about an ungendered whiteness: "when white authority is not constantly foregrounded and interrogated in the classroom it sneaks back into silent, invisible prominence" (61). Jacqueline Jones, in "Teaching What the Truth Compels You to Teach: A Historian's View," focuses more on the issue of censorship than gender, arguing that "assigning certain kinds of people to certain historical topics . . . poses a distinct danger to our continually evolving understanding of groups and issues that have received far too little attention from scholars in previous generations" (194). Finally, in "'Knowing Your Stuff,' Knowing Yourself," April Kilinski and Amanda Lawrence argue the importance of displaying competency in African American literature, even though they recount an experience in which Lawrence's students identified her with a white character who exercised "a malicious white female power over a black male" (102). The authors write that Lawrence "did not want to acknowledge she might be wielding white power, particularly gendered white power, in the classroom" (102). However, Kilinski and Lawrence conclude by stating that they "were forced to see [themselves] as 'raced' white, which is a position [they] usually try to reject" (103). While they recognize the complications of their subject position as white and female, their conclusion deals more generally with whiteness and largely ignores the role of gender.

However, Craig Heller, in "A Paradox of Silence: Reflections of a Man who Teaches Women's Studies," provides an opportunity, although indirectly, to narrow the discussion to white female teachers in African American literature. Heller unveils the

complications and issues of crossing gender boundaries, issues that may be analogous to what white instructors face when teaching African American literature. He notes that "a feminist teacher who is a man and a feminist teacher who is a woman face different issues" (229). This observation, which at first seems simple, contains profound pedagogical implications for me; Heller's statement suggests that it's not that I can't teach African American literature, or that I shouldn't, but that I will need to teach it differently than an African American faculty member would. As a method of addressing issues of difference, Heller considers the role of gender in classroom dynamics:

> By the time they reach college, students have had at least twelve years of indoctrination and 'practice' at catering differently to male and female authority figures. Research has shown us that students have different expectations for male teachers, believing them to be more competent, more experienced, and 'tougher' than female teachers. (229)

Later, he states that, due to this conditioning, "my students expect me, as a male teacher, to overtly control the discourse and classroom environment" (232). In my experience, students are even *more* likely to challenge my authority and competence in African American literature than in other literature and writing classes that I teach. In American Literature, for example, I have never been asked or challenged about my ability to teach literature written by men. In British Literature, I've never been challenged about my competency to teach literature written by or about people of British ancestry. In contrast, when I teach African American literature, I am often asked about my background and credentials. In this manner, students seem more comfortable challenging me in African American literature, not only because I am a woman, but also because I am not African

American. My gendered identity therefore permits challenges from students that my whiteness (ordinarily, and certainly, structurally) does not.[46] This places me in a strange position--I find myself pursuing authority and control to prove my competence, yet simultaneously resisting authority and control to decenter white patriarchal practices. Positioned between the proverbial rock and a hard place, I must create new, different ways to establish my competence.

As hooks writes, "Certainly as democratic educators we have to work to find ways to teach and share knowledge in a manner that does not reinforce existing structures of domination (those of race, gender, class, and religious hierarchies)" (*Teaching Community* 45). At the same time, hooks also recognizes that faculty who resist authoritative practices "are often stereotyped by their more conservative counterparts as not as rigorous or as without standards" (44). This compounds the difficulty that women face when students (and other faculty and staff) view them as less competent than male instructors. Women who practice more democratic methods therefore run an even higher risk of not being taken seriously--by students, by other, more authoritative faculty, and by academic administration. This dilemma requires that I work to find ways to teach African American literature differently, in a manner that resists authoritative practices but also demonstrates my expertise. As I explain in the pages that follow, I offer a "pedagogy of white exposure" that resists displays of power, yet still shares my competency, not only in the African American literary tradition, but also in reading my own subjectivity. In this manner, I conceptualize my teaching of African American literature not as an ownership of Others, but with an ownership of my own positionality.

[46] The challenge to my white authority may indicate a temporary rupture to white hegemony, a moment that (as I describe in my Conclusion) might be a 'kairic' moment of great potential to enact change. I therefore see this as an opportune time to pursue counter-hegemonic practices.

Towards A Pedagogy of White Exposure

Certainly, more work needs done to explore the intersection of whiteness and femininity in the classroom. As a beginning, I concentrate on what my own readings--of Hughes' stories and of my own scholarly practices--have taught me about white women's pursuit of control, and about my own presumption to consume and teach African American literature without examining the politics of that instruction and consumption. In "Rejuvenation Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing," Hughes' white female characters attempt to consume and control blackness in the arenas left to them by white men, the arts and leisure time. The U.S. classroom is likewise one of the spaces largely abandoned by white men and left to white women. As such, it contains the same dangers that Hughes reveals in his short stories. In African American literature classes, this might manifest itself into performances of authority and dominance. It is therefore necessary to adopt a pedagogy that disrupts such performances of white femininity, that, like the literature of white exposure, attempts to "deconstruct the mythology of whiteness by revealing it as a constructed racial identity and by challenging it as a progressive and civilizing social structure" (Watson, "Lillian" 6). While this pedagogy may certainly be relevant for all white teachers of African American literature, it is especially relevant for white women teachers who are perhaps more likely to adopt authoritative strategies as a way to gain power in the classroom. These teaching practices are largely aimed at exposing and resisting the dehumanizing structures of domination, including white women's authoritative control. [47]

[47] Certainly, this pedagogy is in its incipient stages. It can be expanded to include other observations about whiteness, and even narrowed to address specificity of gender, race, and other social constructions.

I enact the pedagogy of white exposure by naming and problematizing my identity at the beginning of class, but also by working to reveal social constructions of race and gender as we discuss African American literature throughout the semester. In addition, I adopt strategies to decenter my authority and distribute power among class members by offering students the authority to choose our readings, determine writing assignments, develop individual research projects, and lead class discussions--however, I also explain that all of this should be done through thorough research to maintain academic integrity, and as a collective process to distribute power among students. In the pages that follow, I explain my initial naming of and problematizing of whiteness, as well as the text-selection process and the practice of student-led discussions. These practices especially illustrate the ways in which I integrate my competency in African American literature and Critical Race Studies (as well as my understanding of my own subjectivity), while simultaneously distributing authority in the classroom.[48] This pedagogy decenters (my) authority, problematizes (my) race and gender, positions all participants as knowers, and creates an interpretive community of learners.

Exposing Whiteness

On the first day of African American literature, I take the initiative to name the elephant in the room (if it hasn't been done so already)--my whiteness. The anecdote which began this story was about a student who indirectly named my whiteness; in his question, "Why do you like African American literature?" there was an implication that

[48] Similar efforts to decentralize authority occur in critical and feminist pedagogy; however, the pedagogy of white exposure names whiteness and connects it to the reasons for this power redistribution.

my interest was enigmatic. Other times I have been more directly 'outed,' as when one adult student asked, "Why is this little white lady teaching our class on black literature?" Many times, however, I have had to initiate the conversation myself, much to the relief of some students who commented on this later. This naming is necessary in order to position my engagement with the literature, to name publicly the way in which my body is raced, and to be explicit about whiteness as a racial construction, category and vantage point. As stated earlier, Maureen Reddy also advocates naming her whiteness, writing that such an act can make visible that which usually goes unnamed: "When white authority is not constantly foregrounded and interrogated in the classroom, it sneaks back into silent, invisible prominence" (41). Laurie Lippin also addresses the need to name whiteness, stating,

> As white teachers, we begin deconstructing whiteness when we stand before our students in recognition of our own racial identity, the underlying privileges and paradigms it carries, and the lenses that affect our teaching. To name the invisible color, the water we swim in, is an act of bold exposure. To identify oneself in this way in any class we teach is to join the discourse on racism that has been too long the responsibility primarily of people of color. (114)

Voluntarily joining this discourse is a way to say to students that I am ready to name whiteness and have discussions that may involve, expose, or even implicate 'my race.' It is a way for me to build on the insights of African Americans who have identified and interrogated whiteness as a social construction, and bring the tradition of white exposure and estrangement into the classroom. In addition, I also advocate addressing the ways in

which gender intersects with whiteness, thereby naming other social constructions and bringing attention to the ways in which these identities inform our performances and shape our lives and communities.

My opening remarks to the class involve an uncharacteristically long monologue that is itself risky because it may, at first, seem to reinforce white authority due to its uninterrupted, self-centered nature. I usually begin with a variation on the following words: "It seems important to address what some folks, including myself, might be thinking, which is 'Why is this white woman teaching African American literature?' I want to provide you with an answer and let you know that I'm aware that this might seem odd, and perhaps, even inappropriate. About ten years ago, I came to Tech and noticed that the curriculum did not contain a course in African American literature. After I successfully argued to add the course to our catalog, I asked the Dean who would be teaching it; he said 'You are.' I was shocked, but I wanted to do a good job. I began a serious study of African American literature, one that eventually manifested itself into a specialty in my formal training. This study has been the most challenging work I've ever done because it forces me to confront my own race and my own understanding of self and society. I've read a lot of books and done a lot of analysis of racial dynamics that involve both people of color and white people. However, I acknowledge that I am an outsider to the lived experience of American Americans. I recognize that my experience has been very different from the authors in our anthology, and I am well-aware of the ways in which white people, historically white men, have exploited and used black people and their labor for their own self-gain. I am also aware that white women, subordinated by white men, have often, when left to themselves, also exercised their own versions of

gaining power and control, choosing the oppressive structures of white patriarchy rather than working against these structures. My approach to this class, therefore, is to toss the white patriarchal structures aside and lead class in a much more democratic fashion. I have therefore developed strategies for decentering myself and positioning the authors, the texts, and one another, as our teachers."

I worry that these statements assume too much control and consume too much time at the opening of class. However, it is probably the longest monologue I will impose during the entire semester. I am always nervous, always wondering how I will be received, and of course, always still wondering if I should be teaching African American literature. Students' reactions to my opening statements usually vary from a few nods of appreciation to some skeptical glances (usually from students of color), to shock at making whiteness visible and problematizing it (usually from white students). While my words are important, it will be my material practices that will eventually give students a radically different experience, one that really gives meaning to my words. Nevertheless, this introduction sets the stage for naming, discussing, and deconstructing race and gender, and for letting students know that I am invested in, and understand my positionality, within these discussions.

As noted, such self-referentiality at the beginning of class does carry risks. Kilinski and Lawrence write, "We have found that, if self-referentiality is a problem in scholarship where the body is unseen, it is even more challenging when the white body is standing in front of a class" (101). One of the risks of naming whiteness is the recentering of it--by putting it before the class, I am asking students to take time *in an African American literature classroom* to discuss my whiteness. However, in my experience, it

has been more important to name my whiteness (and thereby bare myself as African American literature might bare some students) than to ignore it; in so doing, I position whiteness as an identity that must be interrogated throughout the semester. Further, when I combine this initial naming with teaching practices that support my comments, I continue to deconstruct and decenter whiteness.

Distributing Authority and Sharing Expertise

One of the most significant transfers of authority happens within the text-selection and syllabus-construction process. It is within this process that I commit, through material action, to the decentralization of authority in our classroom space. I lead students through a text selection process that simultaneously exposes them to a wide range of African American literature, but also allows them to choose many of the texts we will read in class. Given that my current university allows only for the purchase of one anthology per class, this strategy works particularly well. On the first day of class, we discuss what students have read in the past. Most students have only read a few works by African American authors, typically an excerpt from Frederick Douglass' narrative or poetry by Langston Hughes.[49] I ask them why they think we have all been assigned the same few texts, encouraging students to discuss the politics of text selection and the practices that have established the American, and African American, literary canons. Students usually reach the conclusion that they are 'token' texts, texts that are acceptable

[49] My institution does not currently offer an English major; however, all students are required to take one literature course for their bachelor's degree. This course may be their first and only literature class in college. They therefore usually do not come to class with a broad range of readings.

to the white people who control and teach school curricula.[50] I also ask students who they think published their anthology, and begin discussing publishing and censorship issues in African American literature almost immediately. With this, I send them off with their first assignment: to choose three texts that they believe should be included in our syllabus. To facilitate a purposeful process, I provide them with a worksheet that asks questions about their texts, as well as their reasons for choosing them. The worksheet addresses topics such as the writer's identity (including gender, regional affiliation, religious background, etc.), time period, genre, and significant themes. The students do enough research to become familiar with their texts and to argue for inclusion.

At the next class, students write their choices on the board, and we wrestle with what gets included and what gets excluded--this is my attempt at what Gerald Graff in *Beyond the Culture Wars* calls "teaching the conflicts." Since we will not be able to include everything, we must make decisions. Our discussions center on the following questions: How do we decide what texts to exclude? What factors might play a role in our decision? Do the headings in our worksheet have any bearing on our decision? This discussion is usually a bit tense. Students become invested in their choices, and they have well-thought arguments concerning inclusion and exclusion. After the day's discussions, I send students home with their next homework assignment: Write two essays--one that advocates for the inclusion and justification of a particular text, and one that advocates and justifies the exclusion of a particular text. When students submit their essays, I photocopy them into a booklet and distribute them so that all voices are made available in the classroom. Ultimately, however, I must use the essays to create our semester's

[50] This answer also exposes the ways in which whiteness went unexamined in their readings, for both Douglass and Hughes present some unflattering portraits of white people and often contain moments of anger.

reading list. When they return for the third day of class, the students and I dialogue about their choices: Did they have a difficult time? Why? Is this just a private matter of taste? If not, what factors affected their decisions? I emphasize that we have created our own literary canon, and that many of our beliefs about African American literature will be formulated on a reading list that they themselves have created, but that also excludes many valuable perspectives. However, I emphasize that this process at least makes us familiar with a variety of texts (including ones we won't read) and exposes us to the wide range of options in African American literature. My approach not only exposes the hidden politics and power dynamics of canon formation, but also distributes authority throughout the classroom, removing it from the hands of the white female teacher.

I am very aware that our reading list could end up lacking what I would usually call cohesion--being united perhaps by a theme or containing what I might have believed would be an appropriate emphasis on a particular time period or genre. I am also aware that seminal texts might be overlooked. Could we really have a class in African American literature and not read from *The Souls of Black Folks*? Could we seriously exclude an example of a slave narrative? To mitigate this concern, I am also involved in the text-selection process as a co-participant, and if I see a gap in our reading list, or even a potential complementary text, I make my argument for inclusion, as well. I tell the students my rationale (often pulling from my scholarly research and experience with the African American literary canon), but the decision is ultimately left to the students. This process is sometimes difficult for me, as I have favorite texts, I have texts I rely on for teaching particular time periods or topics, and I have been conditioned to believe in a survey model of American literature and African American literature. This process

requires me to materially commit to my deconstruction of authority, including the authorities that have typically controlled text publication and distribution. I must also commit to my position that the texts are our teachers, and that the literature will provide the topics of discussion for class (not my topics chosen ahead of time).[51]

After we determine the reading agenda, we also determine other assignments for the semester. I encourage student-led discussions, explaining that they are another method of sharing classroom space and decentering my authority. This is especially important to me in African American literature, as many of my students will have 'insider' experience and perspectives in contrast to my 'outsider' experience and perspective. Usually, discussion leaders are responsible for researching the author of the assigned text, the socio-historical context, and for analyzing the text's significance to the African American literary tradition. Leaders are also responsible for creating discussion questions that encourage close readings and unveil the important themes of the text. These discussions therefore allow students to gain expertise on one text and author while also determining the direction of classroom discussion, giving voice to their own interests, concerns, and usually connections to their own lives. During these discussions, I take a seat in the middle of the room with the rest of the students (our classroom spaces are all ordered into traditional classroom spaces, with a lectern at the front of the class and desks positioned towards the front). I do not want to position myself in a traditional

[51] I supplement this process with an assignment creation process. Since Patrick D. Murphy, in "Coyote Midwife," suggests that in a dialogical classroom, students often "need to be presented with a series of options if any fruitful discussion is to develop," I offer options for graded activities including in-class and out-of-class writing, formal papers, informal journaling or responses, group essays or collections of essays (165). I explain that the process of writing will help us clarify our thoughts and extend our understanding of literature beyond our initial, gut reactions. As a group, we determine what types of writing (informal journals or responses, formal interpretation and reaction papers, in-class, out-of-class) we will create during the semester. I let them know that they will be required to write a total of 20 pages, but these 20 pages can take a variety of forms throughout the semester. Together, they decide what types of writing they will produce throughout the semester.

place of authority in front of the room. When students lead discussions, they have control of the room, determining what lines of inquiry to pursue, and even what tangents to pursue. Resisting authority and control in some of these moments can be quite difficult. I am often tempted to drive class discussions in particular ways that seem especially interesting or productive to me. However, I must remember that my purpose in African American literature is not to speak for others, but to resist this presumption of control; as Linda Alcoff writes in "The Problem of Speaking for Others," "When one is speaking about others, or simply trying to describe their situation or some aspect of it, one may also be speaking in place of them, that is, speaking for them" (9). This is problematic because "certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous. In particular, the practice of privileged persons speaking for or on behalf of less privileged persons has actually resulted (in many cases) in increasing or reinforcing the oppression of the group spoken for" (7). Student-led discussions, led by different students (most of whom are African American) every day, mitigate the problem of speaking for others, as no one person is ever put in the position of always speaking about or for others.

Taking such a pedagogical approach is not without its challenges, as I am often tempted to intervene. However, I have found that when I can resist guiding the conversation, I am taken with students to productive, sometimes surprising discussions that are especially relevant to their own lives. Occasionally, I have also been tempted to intervene in order to object to particular comments. Nancy J. Peterson, in "Redefining America: Literature, Multiculturalism, Pedagogy" also discusses similar situations, stating that she has "had to try to discern instantaneously when to speak up from an ethical oppositional stance and when to let the discussion play out among students" (34).

I have found that when I can resist making objections to problematic comments, other students will eventually do so themselves, a practice more powerful for everyone involved because it requires students to articulate their concerns and formulate arguments. Finally, I have found that I rarely need to reign in tangents, as students usually do so themselves once the discussions have become unproductive.

Successful student-led discussions require that I trust the students and trust the literature we are reading to do the work that I would usually do--to guide students to thoughtful, significant, critical observations and discussions. Thus, my participation is often about asking students to provide specific passages in the texts to support their arguments, or to consider historical context, theories of social construction, or critical race theory. Sometimes, my role is simply to ask for clarification. In short, I push them a bit further than they might have gotten on their own by asking for close readings or offering them additional context or theory that they may not have encountered in their own research.[52]

[52] I supplement this practice with the individual research project assignment. I tell students that I have decided that we will benefit from not just common assignments (such as participation and writing assignments), but also individual assignments. Thus, we will have one assignment that will be individually created and executed. Every student has the opportunity to design his or her own unique assignment which is worth 10% of his or her final grade. I encourage students to be especially creative and follow their own interests. I have only two broad requirements: the project should 1) focus on African American literature or history, and 2) be shared with the class in some form. I tell students that this could be a presentation, a webpage, a project, a performance, the coordination of a field trip, a paper, etc. I encourage them to follow their own interest and skill sets. The individual projects have proven especially successful in terms of developing the students' autonomy in the midst of white, female authority. Through these projects, the students have followed their own interests and talents, not the ones I have deemed important. Examples of projects have included the coordination of an African American Read-In; a video of a student's trip to the Underground Railroad Museum and Freedom Center in Cincinnati, Ohio; an investigation of the intersection between race, education and athletics (including the reading of William Rhodens's *Forty Million Dollar Slave*); and the creation of poetry that reflected course themes. These projects are shared with the class throughout the semester and allow students' expertise and authority into our classroom environment.

Still, when I teach African American literature, I experience the same appropriate discomfort as when I read African American literature, a discomfort that comes with the weight of my white gaze.[53] There are moments in class that are also uncomfortable, perhaps more so given the amount of autonomy in class discussions; students often challenge other students as they attempt to handle difficult or controversial texts. However, I have come to believe that this discomfort is also productive. In "Theme for African American Literature B," Russ Castronovo argues for precisely such discomfort in his "negative pedagogy," which counteracts an "affirmative pedagogy, an approach that would make everyone, especially do-gooders, feel good again" (37). While a

> negative pedagogy does not make us feel good, it does enable critical readings of African American literature that will always remember the sociopolitical imbalances and historical injuries that frame and motivate so much of this body of writing. Such a pedagogy is forever sentenced to dissatisfaction. (36)

However, Castronovo's use of the word "dissatisfaction" is puzzling to me; I have grown to realize that discomfort does not automatically confer dissatisfaction. There is a great deal of satisfying work that can occur with, or perhaps, even because of this discomfort--for both teachers and students.

* * *

In "Rejuvenation Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing," Langston Hughes creates white women characters who, in the absence of white

[53] This also influences assessment practices, which are discussed during syllabus construction. In the past, students have developed collective grading practices, assessing one another's discussion participation, their discussion leadership, and their research presentations and then averaging their grades. Unfortunately, the grading of their writing has been left to me.

men, pursue ownership and control through both gratuitous and possessive consumption. In my own reading experiences with African American literature, I have also excavated these practices. However, the literature of white exposure has provided me with an alternate approach to African American literature, an approach that includes an evolving racial consciousness that is attentive to the constructions and performances of white femininity. As a white woman teaching African American literature, it is important that I bring this same consciousness to my teaching practices and struggle to deconstruct the pursuit of ownership and control that Hughes identifies in his writings. The pedagogy of white exposure, based upon the social and philosophical insights of the literature of white exposure, offers a unique opportunity to disrupt master scripts in the classroom, including those of white femininity. As a resistance to the assertion of authority, this pedagogy sets the scene for student participation and empowerment, and also attempts to reveal systems of domination and the performances that support them. This pedagogy converts my act of reading the literature of white exposure into an act of critical literacy--I transform the insights of the genre into pedagogical strategies that deconstruct white women's pursuit of ownership and control.

ACT III: THE MAINTENANCE OF IGNORANCE AND BLINDNESS

It was 2007. I was teaching a special topics course called "Black Writers/White Society" for the first time. It had been a challenging semester; as a class, we had attempted to understand many difficult topics, including the social construction of race, institutional racism, and white privilege. We were in our final two weeks of class, when Jemilla, an African American student preparing to graduate, said to her mostly white classmates (who were still struggling with the concepts of white privilege and institutional racism), "I'm sending out resumes right now. How would you feel if you thought you had to change your name or just use initials to get a job interview?" The white students reacted with surprise and distrust: "Oh, Jemilla. You really don't have to do that." "You're just paranoid." "That's over-reacting." It is with great embarrassment and shame that I admit that those thoughts also flashed through my head. I sat and listened while Jemilla educated our class in ways that I had not.

CHAPTER 5

THE STORIES: "HOME" AND "POOR LITTLE BLACK FELLOW"

In "Cora Unashamed," "Berry," and "Little Dog," Hughes presents white female characters willing to risk the well-being of loved ones and racialized Others in order to preserve their own purity. In "Rejuvenation Through Joy," "Slave on the Block," and "The Blues I'm Playing," he creates white female characters who pursue ownership and control of blackness without care or concern for the people and culture that they seek to own and control. However, in "Home" and "Poor Little Black Fellow," Hughes offers a different kind of white female character; in these stories, his characters act with good intentions towards African Americans, but they nevertheless perpetuate systems of privilege and domination. These characters actively participate in, and in some cases even create, segregated and unjust social systems, yet somehow fail to see the significance and harm of these systems. This lack of awareness ultimately leads to some of the most violent encounters in Hughes' entire collection. In "Home," Miss Reese, a white music teacher, actively pursues social interactions with Roy, a black musician, despite the fact that she adheres to segregated systems on a daily basis by teaching at an all-white school. When Roy is lynched at the end of the story, it is partially because of her interaction with him. In "Poor Little Black Fellow," the Pemberton family, represented primarily through Grace Pemberton, adopts Arnie, the African American child of their deceased servants, as a performance of their Christian duty. Throughout the story, the Pembertons are hyper-aware of his racial identity, and they enforce upon him an inferior social status. While in their care, Arnie suffers the emotional and psychic violence of segregation, domination,

and dehumanization. However, both Miss Reese and Grace Pemberton are women with good intentions. In fact, they are the only white characters in the entire collection who attempt to act outside of society's norms. But, as Richard Dyer writes in *White,* "White power none the less reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and good will, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal" (10). This is indeed the case in these two stories in which the white female characters act according to 'normal' standards of their femininity; in fact, they are expert practitioners of white femininity (a teacher and a charitable Christian), but because they cannot see past their own good intentions, they cannot see the harm that they perpetuate, nor can they anticipate the potential dangers of their actions. In the midst of visible oppression and violence, including the spectacles of Jim Crow law and the lynching era, both Miss Reese and Grace Pemberton are somehow ignorant of the potential consequences of their actions. These characters therefore provide the opportunity to interrogate the cognitive mechanisms that make such ignorance and blindness possible. They exhibit what I term a "white feminine dissociative consciousness," a consciousness that dissociates the self, by virtue of good will and attention to duty, from oppressive systems and the material conditions of such systems.

The significance of the white female characters in "Home" and "Poor Little Black Fellow" has gone completely unnoticed by scholars. As I discuss during my analysis of each story, most critics of "Home" concentrate on Roy, the African American musician, and most scholars who write about "Poor Little Black Fellow" concentrate on the Pemberton family's hypocrisy, neglecting to see Grace as the primary representative of the family. The lack of attention given to these female characters is possibly because

Miss Reese and Grace Pemberton can be read as marginal characters. After all, the main characters in both stories are black men who each undergo forms of initiation in the stories. For Roy, "Home" is about his initiation and reintegration (or lack thereof) into American culture after several years abroad. For Arnie, "Poor Little Black Fellow" is about entering adulthood and trying to assert his own wishes (which he can only do with relative safety outside of the United States) in a predominately white world. While the initiation theme for the black male characters could be pursued at length, the purpose of this study is to examine the white female characters who have been omitted from scholarship, but who serve significant purposes in the stories. Perhaps another way to understand this omission is as an unwillingness to interrogate the presumed innocence and goodness of these characters. However, Hughes makes it clear that the presence and actions of these women drive much of the plot and act as catalysts for white violence. Immediately before the lynching in "Home," the narrator states that "*everything might have been all right*, folks might only have laughed or commented and cussed, had not a rather faded woman in a cheap coat and a red hat, a white woman, stepping out of the drug store just as Roy passed, bowed pleasantly to him, 'Good evening'" (emphasis mine, 47). And in "Poor Little Black Fellow," Arnie moves from being a symbol of Christian duty to a "Negro problem" once he reaches adolescence and mingles with young white women. The narrator states that "*Everything might have been all right* forever had not Arnie begun to grow up" (emphasis mine, 137). The similarity of these two passages highlights the force of the cultural discourse that calls for segregation and the protection of white women from black men.[54] These discourses also play a profound role in both stories, for they are what make the actions of the white women so significant and so

[54] The hypersexuality of black men and purity of white women is discussed in Chapters 1 and 3.

dangerous. These women are not merely accessories to the stories; they are an elemental force. Their presence, combined with their dissociative consciousness, creates tragic results.

White (Male) Consciousness

Thus far, this dissertation has centered on white female performativity--specifically, the performance of purity and the pursuit of ownership and control. This chapter turns to the African American tradition of studying white consciousness in order to interrogate the cognitive mechanisms that enable such performativity. As discussed in my Introduction, African Americans have been theorizing white consciousness for over a century, though the subject of their theoretical pursuits has traditionally been the white male. In 1860, William J. Wilson, under the pen name "Ethiop," recounts early American history to argue that white people have "a roving, *unsettled, restless* disposition" (66). In 1920 in "Souls of White Folks," W.E.B. DuBois focuses primarily on European and American history, in which the major actors are white men, to argue that the world's white population is propelled by greed, hatred, and the understanding that "whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever" (185). But in *Black Reconstruction in America* (1935), DuBois begins to postulate a type of white blindness. In attempts to explain the omission of African American work and achievement from the history of Reconstruction, he writes, "It is only the Blindspot in the eyes of America, and its historians, that can overlook and misread so clear and encouraging a chapter of human struggle and human uplift" (577). Here DuBois recognizes a will to "overlook" or

"misread," to somehow *not see or understand* the strife (and successes) of Others. Thirty years later, James Baldwin in "White Man's Guilt" builds on this theory, describing white male consciousness[55] as a psychological state of being that reassures "white Americans that they do not see what they see" (320). This type of white consciousness enables a blindness that functions to remove white Americans from "an appallingly oppressive and bloody history known all over the world" (320). However, Baldwin also argues that despite these efforts to 'will' blindness to this history, such blindness is not actually possible: "The great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do" (321). Thus, white men, faintly aware of history but unwilling to admit white atrocities, share a "personal incoherence" and a loss of "touch with reality" (321, 323). This psychological state includes not only a detachment from history, but also a detachment from the present, and from one's own mind, a mind that is always "dimly, or vividly, aware that the history they have fed themselves is mainly a lie" (321).

It is useful here to contrast this white consciousness with DuBois' work on African American double-consciousness. In DuBois' theory, double-consciousness is a condition specific to African Americans. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, he writes,

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts,

[55] Baldwin's title specifically identifies his subject as male, and he uses masculine pronouns throughout his essay, as in the following example: "in the most private chamber of his heart always, he, the white man, remains proud of that history for which he does not wish to pay, and from which, materially, he has profited so much" (322). Further, his examples of people who possess this type of consciousness are all male, including "southern sheriffs" and "rookie cops in Harlem" (324).

> two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (5)

For DuBois, the psychological turmoil of double consciousness has "wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people" (6). Nevertheless, "the history of the American Negro is a history of this strife – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (5). Thus, double-consciousness is a result of self-consciousness. It is not only an awareness of self, but it is also an awareness and internalization of the self as racialized subject. In contrast, white consciousness involves a lack of self-awareness; it is an attempt to deny one's racial construction and participation within histories of oppression and dominance. This white male consciousness is not a consciousness forced upon them by others, but one actively adopted in order to retain a sense of superiority without acknowledging the oppression and violence that has created such illusions of superiority.

These theories of white consciousness are primarily concerned with the white male, and little has been done to develop complementary theories of white female consciousness. In much of current Critical Whiteness theory, white "people" are the subject of interrogation, regardless of the way in which people are gendered. Even as Peggy McIntosh unpacks her "invisible knapsack" in "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies," she does not interrogate how white privilege intersects with gender. In another seminal text in the field, *White*, Richard Dyer writes, "White people have power and believe that they think, feel and act like and for all people; white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people's" (9). In the

introduction to his collection, *What White Looks Like*, George Yancy writes, "Whites have a way of speaking from a center that they often appear to forget forms the white ideological fulcrum upon which what they say (do not say) or see (do not see) hinges. In short, whites frequently lie to themselves" (1). While these scholars have given much needed attention to white consciousness, they have not yet given adequate attention to the ways in which gender informs white consciousness.

However, in 1994, Ruth Frankenberg did initiate an inquiry into white female consciousness in *The Social Construction of Whiteness: White Women, Race Matters*. Through extensive interviews with white women, Frankenberg concludes that "whiteness" is a "'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society" (1). Yet, the women in her study did not seem to acknowledge or be aware of this standpoint. Her conclusion is extremely significant, and her research provides an opportunity to begin interrogating *how* white women fail to acknowledge the specificity of their standpoint. A small body of work within women's studies continues to theorize white women's consciousness a bit further. Much of this work stems from conflicts that occurred during the feminist movement in which white feminists failed to recognize the significance of their racial privilege and their bonds with white patriarchy. In Adrienne Rich's "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynephobia," she argues that white women possess a "White Solipsism" or a way of "think[ing], imagin[ing], and speak[ing] as if whiteness described the world" (299). In addition, Maria Lugones, in "Hablanda Cara a Cara/Speaking Face to Face: An Exploration of Ethnocentric Racism," describes what she terms a "disengaged stance," a position in which a white woman "is committed either to dishonest study or to ignoring deep

meanings and connections to which she has access only as a self-conscious member of the racial state" (50). Both Rich and Lugones point to a state of non-consciousness, or a lack of conscious awareness of subjectivity.[56] While these works do describe white female consciousness, I am interested in *how* white women, as members of an oppressed class (with some basis for comparison), fail to recognize, acknowledge, and understand their own subjectivity, as well as the subjectivity of Others. I am also interested in what cognitive mechanisms enable white women to retain such ignorance in the presence of oppression and injustice. Within *The Ways of White Folks,* Hughes presents two characters who exhibit these characteristics, and because Hughes has shed such light on white female performativity, I again turn to his stories for insight on white female consciousness.

"Home"

"Home" is the third story within *The Ways of White Folks*, appearing after "Cora Unashamed" and "Slave on the Block." It is a story that Sandra Govan calls "the most uncompromising, unsettling, and emotionally intense tale" in the collection (151). Perhaps due to this intensity, as well as its graphic portrayal of white violence, the story was initially passed over by five magazines, including *Scribner's, Harper's,* and *Atlantic Monthly*, before *Esquire* published it in 1934. According to Rampersad, one editor even stated that "most people read for pleasure, and certainly there is no pleasure here" (282).

[56] I will engage these texts in more detail during my discussion of Hughes' characters in "Home" and "Poor Little Black Fellow."

The story takes place primarily within the small town of Hopkinsville, Missouri, a setting that again positions the actions in middle-America with middle-class characters. The main character is Roy, a talented African American musician who has been living in Europe for over seven years, becomes ill, and returns home to see his family. However, Hopkinsville is not prepared for Roy's return, for he has become successful and unaccustomed to many of the racist norms of the United States. By the end of the story, an angry white mob accuses Roy of raping Miss Reese, a white woman who shares his interest in music. In a mad frenzy, the mob immediately and brutally lynches him.

Of the few critics who have written about "Home," most of them concentrate on Roy's character--either as a musician, as an expatriate who has forgotten his social position in America, or as a victim of a white mob that insists upon reminding him of his place in society. Govan, as one of these critics, writes,

> He has forgotten neither his family nor his roots, but so long an absence has allowed him to forget his *place*. Preoccupied by his music and his illness, he has forgotten the codes of conduct, the deferential manner, and the appearance of lesser status demanded of a black man in the main streets of small-town America. (152)

She concludes, "But neither his artistic sensibilities, nor his European training, nor his sympathies for suffering humanity are enough to spare Roy the vagaries of his de facto 'place' in American culture as a Negro" (155). Similarly, in "'Like a Violin for the Wind to Play': Approaches to Lynching in Hughes, DuBois and Toomer," Kimberly Banks argues that Roy is lynched because he "struggle[s] instead of being satisfied with [his] proscribed social place" (452). These critics emphasize not only Roy's experience as he

attempts to reintegrate into American culture, but also the white community's reaction to his presence.

While these interpretations provide insight about Roy and the white, mostly male population in the story, they neglect the presence and impact of the white female character, Miss Reese. After all, the narrator expresses, "[E]verything might have been all right, folks might only have laughed or commented and cussed, had not a rather faded woman in a cheap coat and a red hat, a white woman, stepping out of the drug store just as Roy passed, bowed pleasantly to him, 'Good evening'" (47). This passage has been sorely overlooked in the criticism, which perhaps reveals a reluctance to interrogate the presumably innocent actions of the white female character. When Govan does address Miss Reese, she states, "Respecting his stature as an artist, the woman has simply spoken politely to him on the street" (152). Indeed, it is easy to read Miss Reese as simply a polite, innocent woman. Some may even read her as 'color-blind' or even progressive, as her actions towards Roy might seem to challenge the segregationist policies of her community. Indeed, this is how Banks reads Miss Reese: "Since Roy and Miss Reese recognize one another as equals, the town must reconfigure Roy's status so that he understands his inferiority" (462). However, a closer reading suggests that while Miss Reese pursues interactions with Roy with benign intentions based on her musical interests, she also does so with a blindness and ignorance to the potential consequences of her actions. Somehow, in a place and time that was openly hostile to Roy, Miss Reese fails to consider how her actions might endanger him. Thus, this story provides a subtle commentary on white female consciousness and the ways in which white women maintain ignorance and blindness amidst racial oppression and violence.

"Home" begins "on the day that Hoover drove the veterans out of Washington" (35). This setting provides important information about the economic conditions of the time period and the status of race relations in the United States. The date was July 28, 1932, when, in the midst of the Great Depression, World War I veterans marched on Washington to demand early receipt of bonuses that were promised to be awarded to them in 1945. This economic depression exacerbates Roy's integration into American society, as he has returned more worldly, more economically privileged than most Americans. The white men of the town make this known to him immediately; as Roy, "slim and elegant," steps off the Pullman cart with his gloves and luggage with "bright stickers and tags in strange languages the home folks couldn't read," the white men call him "boy," urge him to return where he came from, and then call him "Nigger" (36, 33). The narrator tells us that Roy "felt his color" for the "first time in half a dozen years" (37). Roy is unwelcome, not only because of his racial identity, but also because he brings with him signs of success and mannerisms that assert his equality.

When the white men respond with hostility, racial epithets, and harassment, they demonstrate acts of domestic terrorism common of that era, acts that were used in attempts to secure white social and economic privileges. Especially relevant to this story is the use of the spectacle of lynching as another, more extreme, form of terrorism. According to Stewart Tolnay and E.M. Beck in *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*, lynching "had three entwined functions: first, to maintain social order over the black population through terrorism; second, to suppress or eliminate black competitors for economic, political, or social rewards; third, to stabilize the white class structure and preserve the privileged status of the white aristocracy" (18-

19). By this time in American history, lynching had developed into a widely-known and formalized public spectacle; even in the Midwest, in towns such as Hopkinsville, Missouri, millions of white people would have directly or indirectly witnessed the lynching spectacle.[57] Moreover, lynching was often predicated on accusations that black men had interacted inappropriately with white women, who by virtue of their assumed purity, needed protection and were almost always presumed innocent. In *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*, Trudier Harris discusses "Home" in her chapter on "Literary Lynchings and Burnings," and reaches the same conclusion discussed earlier in the chapter--that Roy's lynching is a reaction to his success and a sign of resistance against his integration into the community. However, Harris also recognizes that since the whites "have no rational excuse for doing him violence," the excuse they adopt "comes in the implied mythical threat to white womanhood" (83). Thus, Roy becomes a victim to the discourse that calls for the protection of white women.

[57] The lynching era in America lasted from the early 1880s until the Great Depression, primarily in the Southern states. However, while many people associate lynching with the American South, it is also true that the whites of the Midwest also performed this ritual. According to James H. Madison, in *A Lynching in the Heartland: Race and Memory in America*, 79 lynchings occurred in the Midwest from 1880-1930 (16). The last of these lynchings occurred near Marion, Indiana, in the summer of 1930. On the night of August 7, 1930, two black men accused of raping a white woman were dragged from the Grant County Jail and lynched on the court house lawn. Like in the story "Home," the accusation of rape was never proven; instead, the mob acted simply on the accusation. The mob itself may have contained over 4000 people, and the resulting spectacle was broadcast throughout the nation, made public by a now-famous photograph taken by Lawrence Beitler. The Beitler photo shows not only the bodies of two black men hanging from trees, but also the white crowd that is still gathered around the bodies. At the time, the photograph was run in several newspapers, including *The Chicago Defender* and *New York World*. This setting is particularly close to the setting of "Home" which takes place in the summer of 1932 in Missouri, a state that is separated from Indiana by only 200 miles. The Marion lynching of 1930 was widely publicized across the nation, not just the Midwest, and lynching became a highly-discussed topic throughout the nation. It was an historical event that most people would have known about, including people such as Miss Reese in small, Midwestern towns.

Miss Reese is the woman who inadvertently provides the mob with an excuse to act. She is a middle-aged, unmarried school teacher. Like the other middle-class women in Hughes' collection, she adheres to the cultural expectations of women of her time period, invests in the standards of the cult of true womanhood, and adopts a vocation that serves others. The narrator states that "it seems that one of Miss Reese's duties was the raising of musical standards in Hopkinsville," which she does "at the white high school" (43). However, despite being embedded within a segregated community, Miss Reese nevertheless pursues cross-racial encounters at least three times in the story. First, she attends a concert at Roy's mother's church, a concert which is attended by both black and white community members who sit in separate spaces. Miss Reese remains at the church after most of the crowd disperses, and she approaches Roy to speak to him about his music. Second, Miss Reese invites Roy to play for her students at the all-white high school. Roy's mother proclaims Miss Reese a "right nice woman" and explains, "First time I ever knowed 'em to have a Negro in there for anything but cleanin' up" (44). Third, when their paths cross at night, it is Miss Reese who initiates their interaction as she "bowed pleasantly to him, 'Good evening,'" and asks "if he was still working on the Sarasate" (47). During the moments in which she seeks this cross-racial interaction, she acts with the purity and benevolence expected of white women; however, in these moments she also fails to acknowledge the conventions that otherwise keep her and Roy separated, and she therefore does not consider the potential consequences of transgressing racial boundaries.

Throughout all of these encounters, Miss Reese follows her own interest in music and teaching; however, focused as she is on her own interests and experience, she fails to

fully engage Roy and his experience. Even as she seeks him out to discuss his music at the church, she directs her attentions not to Roy and his formative experiences, but to herself and her own world--one that is ultimately much smaller than Roy's: "She spoke of symphony concerts in St. Louis, of the fact that she was a teacher of music, of piano and violin" (43). Nevertheless, Roy appreciates what he sees as a genuine interest and "was glad she knew what it was all about. He was glad she liked music" (43). Throughout the story, Miss Reese continues to concentrate on her interests and consistently engages Roy only one-dimensionally in relation to his music, as she seems unaware of his deteriorating physical condition. After he performs at the school, he is visibly ill, "his throat was hot and dry, and his eyes burned. He had been coughing all morning and, as he played, his breath left him and he stood covered with a damp sweat. He played badly" (44). However, Miss Reese recognizes neither his pain nor the quality of his performance. Unable to truly engage both him and his music, she explains to the students, "This is art" (44). While Miss Reese attends to his musical talents, she also maintains a blindness to the full humanity and well-being of the man who creates the music. While she is genuinely interested in music, she is not necessarily interested in *him.*

Miss Reese's actions also demonstrate an ignorance to Roy's positionality and the dangers that their interracial association might bring him. When Miss Reese invites Roy to her school, she does so through a personal invitation, written on "a nice note on clean white paper," rather than inviting him with an endorsement from the school's administration, which puts Roy at even greater risk. Miss Reese also seems unaware of her students' potential reactions and prejudices. The students report to their parents "that a dressed-up nigger had come to school with a violin and played a lot of funny pieces

nobody but Miss Reese liked." They said that "Miss Reese had grinned all over herself" and "even bowed to the nigger when he went out!" (44). These reports intensify the animosity of the white community and contribute to the atmosphere Roy encounters on the night of his murder. On that night, Roy walks the streets for fresh air, dressed in his European clothes and carrying a cane due to his weakness. Despite his physical illness, he is spit on and yelled at by the white people in town. However, the real danger comes when Miss Reese greets him. As previously mentioned, "everything might have been all right" except for his encounter with her. When Miss Reese greets him, she is again oblivious to his physical well-being, despite his visible signs of illness, "Ashy his face was, that had once been brown. His cheeks were sunken" (45). However, her actions also demonstrate that at this moment, she exhibits an ignorance to the cultural discourses that reprove of their cross-racial interaction, especially late at night. To her, her purpose is simple; she wants to share her enthusiasm for music.

Given her good intentions, it is difficult to understand why Miss Reese engages Roy so incompletely, or how she could fail to recognize the harm she might cause. Perhaps this is what leads Roy to wonder about Miss Reese's intentions during the last, violent moments of his life. As Roy is being beaten by the mob, he wonders "why Miss Reese had stopped to ask him about Sarasate" (48). His last thoughts are attempts to understand her consciousness--in perhaps the same way that I am now attempting. Indeed, her thoughts and actions are difficult to understand for she not only ignores Roy's well-being, but she also possesses a temporary blindness to the material realities that otherwise keep them separated. In her blindness and ignorance, Miss Reese cannot "read" her interactions with Roy as situations in which race is an especially significant factor. In

"Hablanda Cara a Cara/Speaking Face to Face: An Exploration of Ethnocentric Racism," Maria Lugones uses the term "disengaged stance" to describe a condition in which a white woman "is committed either to dishonest study or to ignoring deep meanings and connections to which she has access only as a self-conscious member of the racial state and as a sophisticated practitioner of the culture" (50). This disengagement leads to what she calls "infantilization," which is "a dulling of the ability to read critically, and with maturity of judgement, those texts and situations in which race and ethnicity are salient" (53). Miss Reese is indeed 'disengaged' and seems to ignore the significance of her behavior, precisely because she is not a "sophisticated practitioner of culture." While she has access to the experience and knowledge that might lead to more informed, responsible actions, she does not integrate that knowledge into her daily life. What is still unclear, however, is how, in the midst of the everyday spectacle of segregation and the era of lynching as a formalized practice, she cognitively and psychologically maintains this ignorance.

Hughes' story indicates that Miss Reese's performance of white femininity may contribute to her ignorance and blindness, for she seems guided by the benevolence that defines her, unable to imagine or conceptualize the harm that could result from simple acts of sharing interest and developing the "musical standards of Hopkinsville" (43). So invested is she in her cultural script of being a dutiful white woman, in this case as a music teacher for the white community, that she becomes blind to anything beyond it. Guided as she is by the pursuit of her own interests and duty, she is not only oblivious to Roy's well-being, but also to the norms that govern his existence in America. This is perhaps because Miss Reese operates within a social structure that limits her interaction

with racialized others, and because she is shielded by a social discourse that calls for her protection. She is therefore conditioned, even encouraged, to remain ignorant to the world which surrounds her. Howard Thurman writes in *Luminous Darkness*, his analysis of "the anatomy of segregation," that "[w]hen a white person accepts the fact and the status of segregation he can carry on the normal intercourse of his life without being aware of it" (64). This condition is further exacerbated by Miss Reese's gender for she lives under the 'protection' of white men. Unaware as she is, Miss Reese does not, on a daily basis, exercise the cognitive muscles that analyze her surroundings, her subjectivity, or the subjectivity of others. For her, this lack of attentiveness is her norm, not a condition granted to her by her whiteness or her gender. Further, she can afford to act according to these norms because her identity gives her a presumption of innocence, rather than an assumption of guilt (as Roy's does). Therefore, Miss Reese engages and understands the world around her incompletely and only in the fragments that are consistently presented to her. She acknowledges only particular elements of Roy's humanity and, similarly, she acknowledges segregation only at fragmented, disjointed moments. Such fragmentation enables a certain dissociation from her world, for she does not fully associate herself with the material reality of her community, nor does she associate herself and her positionality with the positionality of others.

My analysis of Miss Reese is not a criticism of her moral character, but a critique of the consciousness from which she acts, for it is fragmented and incomplete to the point of dissociation. In "Home," when Miss Reese repeatedly reaches across the color line to share an interest in music, she seems to have psychologically disassociated herself from the social norms that govern her community. When she dissociates in this manner, she

cannot anticipate how her actions might endanger the African American man with whom she chooses to interact. “Home” therefore demonstrates that white women have an enormous capacity to maintain ignorance by investing in their own performance of a benevolent feminine identity--such a performance, however, results in a psychic dissociation from the systems and discourses in which they are embedded. Had Miss Reese associated her identity with the identity of Roy, and with the cultural discourses which permeate the community, she may have been able to prevent the lynching at the end of the story. It is therefore tempting to ask, what *should* she have done?

The Conclusion to this dissertation discusses, in detail, the development of a critical “associative consciousness,” one that actively moves beyond white-centrism and maintains an awareness of one’s positionality and the social positioning of others. It is important to note that I am not advocating that Miss Reese should have ignored Roy at that moment, which would have tacitly accepted segregation and the construction of black male hypersexuality and aggression. However, had Miss Reese been interested in challenging social norms (though I do not see much evidence of this), there are choices beyond ignoring him, strategies that might work overtly or covertly towards social justice. Instead, her dissociative consciousness actually serves, supports, and reinforces hegemony because it gives to white men the opportunities to reassert their domination in more visible, more violent, and more spectacular ways.

"Poor Little Black Fellow"

"Poor Little Black Fellow" tells the story of Arnie, the 'poor little black fellow' to whom the title refers, and the Pemberton family, a white family who adopts him after the death of his parents who were their servants. The story describes the way in which the Pembertons, and the rest of their all-white community, perceive Arnie first as a symbol of their Christian duty, and then later as a 'Negro problem.' The culminating conflict involves Arnie's assertion of his own will, despite the fact that the Pemberton family, primarily Grace and her sister, has conditioned him to quietly obey them and the rules that govern their society, including segregationist practices that they themselves otherwise reject. Of the five critics who have written about "Poor Little Black Fellow," most of them rightly argue that the Pembertons exhibit religious hypocrisy and act with a patronizing, destructive sympathy towards Arnie. James Emanuel writes that the story "satirizes religious, rather than social cant in race relations, treating corrosive varieties of self-deceit with subtle complexity – although its consistent point is merely that Negroes, even little ones, want only to be treated like everyone else" ("Short Fiction" 153). Mayberry writes that "Hughes examine[s] the hypocrisy beneath the pious masks of good 'Christians' called upon to tolerate the ultimate signifier of another race – its children" ("Out of the Mouths" 53). And in his biography of Hughes, Rampersad writes that "In 'Poor Little Black Fellow,' adopted black Arnie grows up unhappily in a wealthy, white New England household that is cold, racist, and self-righteous. . . " (269). All of these readings are readily available in the story. However, like "Home," "Poor Little Black Fellow" also presents subtle commentary on white female consciousness, exhibiting the ways in which white women psychologically dissociate themselves, perhaps through their

sense of duty, from the harmful social practices in which they participate. The story also reveals how such a dutiful approach to racialized Others reinforces oppression, existing social hierarchies, and white supremacy. In this story, it is the female Pembertons who most embrace the attitudes and discourses that continue this injustice.

The Pembertons are described as "one of New England's oldest families, one of the finest. They were wealthy. They had a family tree" (133). Rooted as they are, the Pembertons rely on a well-established script to govern their family. Mr. Pemberton is the sole provider, working in Boston a couple of days during the week. The women of the family, Grace Pemberton and her sister, also follow traditional roles. On most days, "the ladies . . . sat on the wide porch at home and crocheted. Or maybe they let James take them for a drive in the car. One of them sang in the choir" (133-4). Grace and Emily very much follow the cult of true womanhood, pursuing domestic and Christian duties. Within the first paragraph of the story, the narrator reveals that the Pembertons believe that Arnie had been left to them "as their Christian duty" (133). Moreover, "the Pembertons were never known to shirk a duty" (133). Their sense of duty is therefore tied to their prominence in Mapleton. However, the fulfillment of their duty is, in this case, also tied to a sense of ownership and the dehumanization that results from such ownership. It is Grace who states that "it is our Christian duty to keep it, and raise it up in the way it should go" (135). Instead of considering Arnie their adopted son, they treat him as a thing to own, and declare him "*their very own*" (133). In this manner, they "keep" Arnie, as opposed to 'adopting' or 'raising' Arnie, and the Pembertons consistently refer to him as "it." This impulse to own belongs primarily to the female Pembertons, Grace and Emily, for when Mr. Pemberton suggests that "We can raise it, without keeping it," the women

persuade Mr. Pemberton that they must keep Arnie because he is too young to be sent away (135).

And yet, the Pemberton women do exhibit signs of progressive, kind, well-intentioned thoughts and behaviors--they raise an African American child in their home at a time when segregation policies were still supported by law in some areas of the United States; they donate significant amounts of money to African American school systems (albeit segregated ones); and they insist that the town accept Arnie, primarily through enrolling him in school and taking him to church. But despite these progressive behaviors, the Pemberton women continue to harbor thoughts of African American inferiority and the need to control the African American population:

> Sometimes they spoke about the two beautiful Negro servants they once had, Amanda and Arnold. They liked to tell poor little Arnie how faithful and lovely his parents had been in life. It would encourage the boy. At present, of course, all their servants were white, Negroes were getting so unsteady. You couldn't keep them in the villages any more. In fact, there were none in Mapleton now. They all went running off to Boston or New York, sporting their money away in the towns. Well, Amanda and Arnold were never like that. They had been simple, honest, hard-working. Their qualities had caused the Pembertons to give, over a space of time, more than ten thousand dollars to a school for Negroes at Hampton, VA. Because they thought they saw in Amanda and Arnold the real qualities of an humble and gentle race. That, too, was why they had decided to keep Arnie, poor little black fellow. (134)

This passage reveals that both Pemberton women value subservience in African Americans, at least as much as they claim to appreciate simplicity, honesty, and hard work. Their thoughts reveal an investment in perpetuating African American humility and subservience, not only in Arnie, but in the "humble and gentle race" that attends the segregated college in Virginia. Such an investment ultimately serves their own interests, not only because it provides dutiful domestic servants, but also because it enables their own feelings of benevolence and superiority.

Nevertheless, the Pembertons attempt to integrate Arnie into Mapleton and their success rests mainly with the insistence on Christian duty, which eventually spreads throughout the entire town, as Arnie becomes "a symbol of how Christian charity should really be administered in the true spirit of human brotherhood" (136). However, this insistence on duty is really about securing their own sense of superiority, not about Arnie's well-being:

> The church and the Pembertons were really a little proud of Arnie. Did they not all accept him as their own? And did they not go out of their way to be nice to him – a poor little black fellow whom they, through Christ, had taken in? Throughout the years the whole of Mapleton began to preen itself on its charity and kindness to Arnie. One would think that nobody in the town need ever again do a good deed: that this acceptance of a black boy was quite enough. (136-7)

The first section of the passage seems to indicate the pride the town feels for Arnie, yet the rest of the paragraph turns the pride of the town on itself, proud as it was, not of Arnie, but of how it treated Arnie. This passage demonstrates what Barbara Trepagnier

points out in *Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide*: "Paternalistic assumptions engender a sense of self-satisfaction in the people who operate with them" (40). While the entire town (including the Pembertons) constructs Arnie as a poor, diminutive boy in need of help, they also reinforce their own illusions of white supremacy.

Their illusions of superiority contribute to the type of conditioning that Arnie receives. Arnie is trained to be like his parents, whom Grace and her sister describe as the "perfect servant[s]" (133). Indeed, Grace says that they should "raise it up in the way it *should* go" (emphasis mine, 135). This passage reveals that the Pembertons adhere to a well-defined social structure which they attempt to enforce upon Arnie. As Mayberry writes, "They find ways to carry out their responsibilities as Christians while monitoring Arnie's status as a Negro" ("Out of the Mouths" 53). However, as Arnie matures into a young man, this type of monitoring becomes more and more difficult, and he eventually transitions from a "symbol" of Christian duty, to a "Negro problem" (137). This transition occurs, in part, due to anti-miscegenation laws and the cultural discourse which suggests that young white women need protection from African American men. Thus, it is no longer acceptable for Arnie to socialize in the same ways in Mapleton. He moves from being an ungendered "it" to a masculine "he" when he "put on long trousers and went to high-school" (138). As the narrator states, "Everything might have been all right forever had not Arnie begun to grow up" (137):

> Adolescence. The boys had girls. They played kissing games, and learned to dance. There were parties to which Arnie was not invited – really couldn't be invited – with the girls and all. And after generations of peace

> the village of Mapleton, and the Pembertons, found themselves beset with a Negro problem. (137)

The limits of the town's Christian duty have been reached as the social construction of Arnie's blackness and masculinity transform him into a threat; thus, the entire community, including the Pembertons, begins to view and treat him differently.

Interestingly, the narrator reveals that the white community, including the Pembertons, may be aware that they treat Arnie differently, for they act with an over-kindness that appears to be an almost continuously compensatory act. The narrator asks ironically, "Did [the Pembertons] not go out of their way to be nice to him – a poor little black fellow whom they, through Christ, had taken in?" (137). Other parents encouraged their young children to be nice to him: "'Poor little black boy,' they said. 'An orphan, and colored. And the Pembertons are so good to him. You be nice to him, too, do you hear'" (137). Thus, "even the children were over-kind to Arnie" (137). This treatment continues throughout the story, especially at moments in Arnie's life when he is denied privileges reserved for whites: when he is unable to go to the boy-scout camp, the Pembertons buy him a bicycle; when he is too old to intermingle with white girls, "everybody in Mapleton decided to be extra nice to him" (140); and when the Pembertons decide to send him away to Fisk without examining other possibilities, they take him to Europe as a consolation for limiting his choices and placing him back into a segregated community. Their behaviors are consistent with what Adrienne Rich calls white solipsism:

> not the consciously held *belief* that one race is inherently superior to all others, but a tunnel-vision which simply does not see nonwhite experience or existence as precious or significant, unless in spasmodic, impotent

> guilt-reflexes, which have little or no long-term, continuing momentum or political usefulness. (306)

Grace especially exhibits these "spasmodic, impotent guilt-reflexes" which only seem to increase as Arnie becomes older and is more and more marginalized in the community. However, it is precisely her insistence on performing her Christian duty that enables such "tunnel vision"; her emphasis on duty is what allows Grace to feel good about herself while neglecting Arnie's humanity, desires, and needs. But like Miss Reese in "Home," who could not anticipate the harm she might cause, Grace cannot see her own patronizing attitude, and her blindness prevents her from anticipating the racist behaviors of others. She is therefore surprised when the Boy Scouts won't allow him to attend camp in the summer, and again when he is not allowed to travel with them to Paris in first-class accommodations. In both of these cases, the Pembertons do muster a challenge to segregation policies, but they seem to do so based on their own conveniences. Arnie therefore suffers the psychological and emotional violence of segregation. He himself eventually articulates this in the final scene: "Separate, segregated, shut-off! Black people kept away from everybody else. I go to Fisk; my classmates, Harvard and Amherst and Yale . . . I sleep in the garage, you sleep in the house" (157). Arnie attempts to explain the harmful effects of their treatment, but they are unwilling to accept his analysis and his experiences as valid. As consumed as they are with fulfilling their duty, they ignore and reject the perspective of the very person that they had intended to serve, though in their own misguided ways. Like Miss Reese in "Home" who engages Roy only one-dimensionally, the Pembertons only partially engage Arnie, ignoring his own experiences and personal desires. While the Pembertons have been witness to his experiences and

have the opportunity to fully support and engage him, they instead maintain a blindness and ignorance to his experiences and full humanity.

The remaining events of the story occur in Europe, where the Pembertons transport their socio-cultural expectations and performances. It is here that Grace Pemberton's actions and consciousness really take center stage, as she desperately clings to her construction of Arnie as a poor little black fellow, and of herself as a kind, benevolent woman. After the Pembertons and Arnie arrive in Europe, they embark on a well-scripted European tour, "sticking rather strenuously to their program of cultural Paris" (147). However, their carefully controlled tour is interrupted when Arnie meets Claudina Lawrence, an African American entertainer living and working in Paris. Claudina introduces Arnie to a world in which he is treated as an equal human being. When she invites him to her parties, Arnie is pleased: "Somebody had offered him something without charity, without condescension, without prayer, without distance, and without being nice" (146). As Arnie spends more and more time with Claudina and her friends, he becomes less and less tolerant of the Pembertons' attitudes and treatment. When he asserts his wishes to socialize with Claudina and her friends rather than go to Versailles, Mr. Pemberton turns on him, calling him a "black devil" (151). However, Mrs. Pemberton takes the position that Arnie is simply ignorant of "the evils of Paris" (151). She states, "He doesn't know. He's young. Let us just try loving him, and being very nice to him" (151). Again, Grace performs her duty and the benevolence of white femininity: "So once again the Pembertons turned loose on Arnie their niceness . . . and they treated him better than if he were their own" (152). However, in the midst of this

over-kindness, Arnie finally oversteps his bounds through what is perceived by the Pembertons as a series of affronts to white womanhood.

The first of these affronts is Arnie's blossoming relationships with Vivi, a Romanian musician he meets through Claudina. When Arnie brings her to the hotel to have dinner with the Pembertons, "Grace Pemberton gasped and put her spoon back in the soup. Emily went pale. Mr. Pemberton's mouth opened. All the Americans stared. Such a white, white girl and such a black, black boy coming across the dining-room floor" (154). When Arnie introduces Vivi, it is Grace Pemberton who speaks up, stating, "There's room for only four at our table" (154). While Arnie is devastated because he has misjudged the extent of Grace's tolerance and generosity, the Pemberton women are enraged and worried, imagining that Vivi must be a prostitute if she is with a black man. Emily is angry that their family has been talked about for traveling with a "colored boy," and Grace is "afraid for Arnie" (155). They construct his relationship with Vivi as an insult because it breaks America's cultural norms--of black men dating respectable white women, and of the emphasis on white women's purity. The Pembertons therefore transport their own constructions of whiteness even into spaces that construct whiteness differently. They have asserted their own conceptualizations of race and gender into a culture which maintains conceptualizations incongruent to their own.[58]

When Grace and Arnie discuss the matter, Grace twice addresses Arnie as "poor little black fellow," "as though Arnie had done a great and careless wrong" (156). She

[58] In *Luminous Darkness,* Thurman discusses how physical segregation practices become internalized such that segregation occurs not only in physical manifestations, but also (and perhaps primarily) in psychological ones. He argues that the psychological manifestations of segregation accompany people in their daily lives and structure their realities. For example, about white Southerners, he writes, "Wherever such a white person from the South goes, he carries his Cause with him. The result of this kind of behavior is to make the Cause current wherever he goes" (68).

tells Arnie that it is time to return to America, and Arnie states that he doesn't want to go back. At that point Grace begins to cry, and the second affront to white womanhood occurs--the agitation and mistreatment of a white woman by a black man (which Arnie has now become due to his relationship with Vivi). These tears bring the final confrontation for the 'family,' as Mr. Pemberton assumes the role of protector of white women: "Anger possessed him, fury against this ungrateful black boy who made his wife cry . . . she was crying over this . . . this . . . In the back of his mind was the word *nigger*" (158). It is the perceived need to protect his wife (combined with Arnie's first display of sexual interest) that prompts the racial epithet and the transition from the diminutive "Arnie" to the adult, mature, threatening "Arnold." In the final affront to white womanhood, Arnie says he will marry Vivi; "Emily laughed drily. But Grace Pemberton fainted" (158). By the end of the confrontation, the limits of their duty, care, and generosity have been exposed.

Despite their good intentions, the female Pembertons are unable to overcome the cultural discourse and assumptions in which they are embedded, despite the fact that their experiences with Arnie tell them otherwise. When they must choose between supporting Arnie or their investment in cultural norms (including their own superiority and benevolence), they choose the norms. Confronted with social taboo, Mr. Pemberton becomes infuriated and Mrs. Pemberton conforms to the ultimate performance of feminine weakness--a faint. She is unable to handle a reality in which Arnie asserts his own desires rather than humbly accepting theirs. Because she insists on seeing him as simple, childlike, and inferior, she is unprepared for his maturation, his assertion of self,

and his desires. Further, because she insists on seeing herself as a dutiful Christian woman, she cannot conceptualize the harm she causes when she fails to fully engage him.

Is Mrs. Pemberton well-intentioned? Did she do something nice, something good, by raising Arnie? Does she seem to care for, and even protect Arnie as a child? Yes, to all of these questions. However, she is only able to do these things by constructing Arnie as a poor, little, black boy. Despite the fact that he has excelled in school (graduating at the top of his class and speaking at graduation), and despite the fact that he has proven his equality on a daily basis for over thirteen years, Mrs. Pemberton does not see him in this way. Instead, she clings to his inferiority because it allows her to 'help' him; because of his socially-constructed deficiencies, she can perform her duty, and thus secure her kindness and superiority. This thinking reveals that Grace disassociates herself from her own experience of Arnie's humanity. Because she lives with daily evidence that Arnie is an equal human being, her ignorance must be the result of psychological dissociation; she has, after all, living, breathing proof that he is other than what she has constructed him to be. If she recognized his equality, she would be faced with acknowledging that she is not superior to Arnie, a recognition that would not only challenge dominant ideology, but also her own investment in white femininity.

A "White Feminine Dissociative Consciousness"

In "Home" and "Poor Little Black Fellow," both Miss Reese and Grace Pemberton somehow remain ignorant of injustices that they themselves help perpetuate. Rich calls this "white solipsism," and Lugones "a disengaged stance" and

"infantilization." However, these terms do not include the ways in which their performances of gender inform their consciousness. While Hughes' stories do not completely explain the internal mechanisms that maintain white female ignorance and blindness, they do seem to indicate that the characters' performances of femininity and their segregated environments contribute to their ignorance and blindness, a condition that enables a psychological dissociation from material reality and racialized Others. I therefore suggest the term "white feminine dissociative consciousness" as a comprehensive way of describing the consciousness of these white women.

The word "feminine" denotes the scripts of purity and benevolence that traditionally accompany social constructions of white femininity. The consciousness of Hughes' characters is deeply informed by an unexamined investment in their prescribed roles of white femininity. After all, these performances provide Miss Reese and the Pemberton women with value in their society; as, respectively, a schoolteacher of white children, and pillars of Christian duty, these women support hegemonic structures by operating as part of the ideological apparatuses of school and religious systems. Intent on performing their roles of benevolence, and shielded within the 'protection' of white men, they do not see their actions as transgressions of social norms; in fact, their good intentions toward Roy and Arnie seem consistent with scripts of white female identity. In other words, Hughes' characters act within systems that prescribe benevolence and that limit that very benevolence. In such a position, the characters experience a dissonance between cultural expectations of good will and a cultural discourse that does not allow cross-cultural good will. Such a dissonance might help us understand, for example, how Grace Pemberton might truly care for Arnie but also fail to completely engage him in his

full humanity. The social constructions of white femininity therefore encourage ignorance and impose a psychological dissonance that may also contribute to a dissociation from others.

The term "dissociation" describes the psychological split that allows these women to separate themselves not only from systems of violence and oppression that surround them, but also their own participation in these systems. These women psychologically separate themselves from material reality, from systems of injustice, and from the harm that they inadvertently do to others. Thurman explains that such psychic separation is a reflection of the physical "walls" of segregation. He states, "It must be remembered that segregation is a mood, a state of mind, and its external manifestation *is* external" (89). This psychological 'walling off' explains how Hughes' white female characters fail to see themselves, or associate themselves, with systems of oppression and violence; it explains how they can participate in these systems (work in segregated schools, live in segregated communities), yet are somehow surprised when other characters commit more overt displays of oppression, such as when Arnie is denied first-class accommodations to Europe, or when Roy is violently attacked. The psychological fragmentation within these female characters contributes to a form of dissociation that prevents white women from understanding the ways in which white female identity is associated with (and also constructed against) the identities of others. In this manner, the ignorance encouraged by virtue of women's gender, and the dissociation encouraged by systems of physical and psychological segregation, buttress each other to create a white female dissociative consciousness that is resistant to material realities and spectacles of oppression.

Hughes' stories provide insight about white female consciousness by demonstrating that performances of femininity have the power to alter consciousness and perceptive abilities. My analysis of the stories begins to theorize how the constructions and performances of femininity encourage ignorance, and how this ignorance is reinforced through a white feminine dissociative consciousness. However, there is more work to be done to understand such a consciousness, so that efforts can also be made to deconstruct it. Though much has been accomplished in the field of whiteness, scholars do not yet adequately understand the psychological effects of gender and racial constructions, nor do we understand how these social fallacies contribute to the development of consciousness. Perhaps then, a thorough analysis of the internal workings of a white feminine dissociative consciousness is a task also suited for the fields of sociology and psychology. I offer this as a much needed new direction in Critical Whiteness Studies.

* * *

"Home" and "Poor Little Black Fellow" demonstrate that, for white women, being in the midst of oppression and injustice is not the same as understanding, admitting, or acknowledging it. Both stories highlight the dangers of a white feminine dissociative consciousness and establish the need to struggle against it. The consciousness of these characters reveals the need for white women to develop an increased awareness of the ways in which their visible identities inform their subjectivity. Moreover, these characters demonstrate the need to associate visible identities with prevailing cultural discourses, systems of oppression, and interaction with others. Even though Hughes' characters act with good intentions, their dissociation prevents them from seeing the ways in which they

endanger others and continue to perpetuate systems of physical and psychological violence. The conclusion of this study discusses the potential to develop an "associative consciousness" in order to effectively work against both psychological dissociation and institutional structures of oppression, including American schooling systems.

CONCLUSION:
THE "WAYS" OF CHANGE: DEVELOPING AN ASSOCIATIVE CONSCIOUSNESS FOR WHITE WOMEN

The previous chapter of this study describes a white feminine dissociative consciousness that enables the maintenance of ignorance and blindness to individual and institutional acts of racism. Based on Hughes' characters, I describe the ways in which white women dissociate themselves from the systems of psychological and physical violence in which they are embedded, and in which they actively participate. In "Home" and "Poor Little Black Fellow," Hughes' characters maintain ignorance to these systems of oppression, but it is also possible to create an *awareness* of the manifestations and implications of these systems. While it is true that seeing past one's historical contingencies is difficult, it is also true that people are capable of seeing beyond themselves to points of view and considerations of others, even when their culture encourages blindness, distance, and denial. However, doing so means developing an alternative consciousness that is capable of recognizing the dangers and entanglements of prevailing dominant discourses, including those of white female purity, black male hyper-sexuality, and black inferiority, discourses that play such disastrous roles in "Home" and "Poor Little Black Fellow." I argue in this Conclusion that Hughes' collection, in its entirety, recognizes that while dissociation is one of the "ways" of white women, it is not a permanent, ontological condition of being a white woman. His stories may even provide a foundation for change, for if a white feminine dissociative consciousness enables these "ways," then perhaps an "associative consciousness," one

that persistently and voluntarily associates one's historically and socially constructed identity with the historical and social construction of the identities of others, might counter it. Such a consciousness would be more apt to recognize how visible identities of race and gender intersect with one another. Indeed, such a consciousness, especially when developed by white women educators, can serve as an act of resistance to the current oppressive structures of race and gender. Further, the study of literature of white exposure, when done critically and reflexively, can be an especially effective way to cultivate this consciousness.

In the prelude to this section of my study, I recount a moment in which I acted with a white, feminine dissociative consciousness. When Jemilla opened up to the class about her racial disadvantage, she not only caught the students off guard, she also caught me off guard. Somehow, even after months of examining critical race theory and whiteness studies, and even in the final week of a special topics course devoted to analyzing whiteness through African American literature, I had willed an ignorance to Jemilla's reality. We began the course with white life literature, including Chestnutt's *The Colonel's Dream*, selected stories from *The Ways of White Folks*, James Baldwin's "Going to Meet the Man," and other short stories and essays. Throughout the semester, I complemented these readings with essays that provided theoretical frameworks for understanding race as a social construction, institutionalized racism, and white power and privilege. These texts included Baldwin's "On Being White and Other Lies" and "White Man's Guilt," Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies," excerpts from George Lipsitz's *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, bell hooks'

"Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination," and the documentary *The Color of Fear*, as well as historical information on segregation, eugenics, and the lynching era. The course was designed specifically to apply theoretical frameworks first to literature, and then gradually to our own cultural experiences and individual thought processes. However, as I was about to learn, the transition from recognizing performances of identity in the literature, to recognizing the performances of one's own identity, was more difficult than I had anticipated--for students and teacher alike.

Enrollment in the course was 73% white and 27% African American, with 59% of the class being white men. From my perspective, the class had gone fairly well despite the initial defensiveness of the young white men, a defensiveness that I have encountered often when introducing Critical Whiteness Studies and the concept of white privilege. However, by the end of the semester, many of the white students had begun to introduce their remarks with comments such as "from my experience, which has been a white experience," or some similar qualification. I had therefore come to believe that students were recognizing the role of racial constructions in their daily lives. When Jemilla asserted her experience with institutional racism, she experienced a denial from not only her classmates, but also a lack of support from her teacher. After she spoke, I looked at her silently and, well, politely. My immediate thought was that she was exaggerating. I also remember that several white, male students openly voiced objections to her assertion, telling her that she was paranoid and over-reacting. I didn't interject. Within minutes, maybe even seconds, I recognized how my whiteness had blinded me to Jemilla's reality, but I was so stunned by my initial response that I didn't articulate my thoughts. I was overwhelmed and embarrassed by my inadequacy; despite my good

intentions and my development and leadership in a class devoted to privileging the African American perspective, I had succumbed to the cultural discourses that suggest my normalcy and encourage me to remain ignorant of structural racism and white privilege. To borrow George Yancy's apt phrasing, I had been "ambushed by whiteness" (*Black Bodies* 230). I sat there, stunned, amazed, ambushed, and ashamed. I had dissociated myself from the presence of oppression and institutional racism--both within Jemilla's anecdote and within our own classroom environment. I can't even remember how the class ended.[59]

In the days that passed between that class meeting and the next, I realized that I needed to articulate my mistakes to the rest of the class. I needed to remind them that we cannot know Jemilla's experiences better than she knows her experiences; that our reaction was one that denied institutional racism, even though we had spent an entire semester studying it; and that our reaction was a product of white privilege, something else we had spent much time analyzing. I had this conversation the next class period, I publicly apologized to Jemilla, and I contextualized my reaction as informed by my whiteness. I asked the other students to also contextualize their reactions within the readings and theories we had encountered during the semester. When asked to do so, they

[59] In the early 1990's, a small group of education scholars began describing a similar consciousness among white teachers within multi-cultural educational settings. In "Dysconscious Racism: Ideology, Identity, and the Miseducation of Teachers," Joyce E. King uses the terminology "dysconscious racism" which is "not the absence of consciousness (that is, not unconsciousness) but an impaired consciousness or distorted way of thinking about race" to describe the consciousness of many white student-teachers (135). Similarly, Gloria Ladson-Billings, in *Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*, and Patricia Hill Collins in *Another Kind of Public Education* discuss white teachers' attempts to remain "colorblind," something the teachers claim as a positive attribute; however, Ladson-Billings writes that "If teachers pretend not to see students' racial and ethnic differences, they really do not see the students at all and are limited in their ability to meet their educational needs" (33). These authors argue that dysconscious and/or "colorblind" teachers need to cultivate a new awareness and develop culturally-relevant pedagogies for their diverse student bodies. My experience is certainly an example of an "impaired consciousness," but, as I demonstrate shortly, it also exposes how both whiteness and gender contribute to that impairment.

were able to call upon Lipsitz' discussion, in *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*, of employment networks that are dominated by white men, they discussed Baldwin's assertions of white men's loss of touch with reality in "White Man's Guilt," and they expressed an overwhelming desire to believe, like David did in *The Color of Fear*, that we live in a meritocracy. When students were asked to read our classroom situation, in the light of those particular texts, they were able to do so--however, this type of reflexive reading required more than just an exposure to the texts, it required that the students associate their racial identity with the power dynamics in the room, and that they do so at an opportune moment when those dynamics were more immediately accessible.[60]

While I believe that the students' analyses began to unveil the workings of whiteness, they did not excavate the dynamics of gender, largely because in our studies, we had focused on race to the exclusion of gender. However, based on my reflexive analysis of Hughes' white female characters, I have also come to realize the gender dynamics of that situation, dynamics that were particularly salient because as women, both Jemilla and I were part of the gender minority in the classroom. First, my gender contributed to my reactions by conditioning me to defer to white men (even younger white men), or at the very minimum, seek their approbation. As I attempt to recall those moments, I realize that I don't remember the timing exactly, if I reacted before the white male students, or if they reacted, and then I followed. If my thoughts came before theirs, I could possibly have felt validation from their shared reaction. If my thoughts came after theirs, then this is perhaps even more insidious, for I may have adopted their response in

[60] Jemilla's concerns had already been confirmed by a study published in *The American Economic Review.* In "Are Emily and Greg More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment on Labor Market Discrimination," Marianne Bertrand and Sendhil Mullainathan found that resumes with names that sounded African American were 50% less likely to yield inquiries for employment than resumes with names that sounded Euro-American.

lieu of considering this African American woman's experience. Additionally, gender also informed my responses to what was unfolding in the class, my passive, 'polite' silence and avoidance of conflict. I did not publicly articulate my initial response to Jemilla, nor did I, after realizing the role of my whiteness, assert my realization. In contrast, the white male vocalization was itself a sign of power and privilege as these first-year male students felt comfortable challenging a senior who was an African American female, and doing so in a classroom led by a female instructor. The intersection of gender and racial dynamics in that moment worked to reproduce the status quo, with the white men dominating the classroom experience. Within my moment of white feminine dissociation, I didn't recognize the ways in which we were all enmeshed in traditional performances of race and gender, nor did I see the ways in which I had inadvertently participated in systems of power that marginalized and denied the experience of an African American woman despite my good intentions. As a method of preventing such moments of dissociation, I advocate for what I term an "associative consciousness."

Towards an Associative Consciousness

Only a few CWS scholars have spent time exploring the possibility of a 'new' or different white consciousness. Most pertinent to this examination are three scholars who adapt DuBois' theory of double-consciousness. In "What Should White People Do?", Linda Alcoff suggests that "white identity needs to develop its own version of 'double-consciousness,'" a consciousness that acknowledges both "the historical legacy of white identity constructions in the persistent structures of inequality and exploitation" and "a

newly awakened memory of the many white traitors to white privilege" (24, 25). She asks for a consciousness that understands both white domination and the potential for white progression. In "Locating Traitorous Identities: Toward a View of Privilege-Cognizant White Character," Alison Bailey also builds on DuBois' theory of double-consciousness, suggesting the development of "a bifurcated consciousness" in order to understand how whiteness is perceived by others (29). Similarly, Marc Black, in "Fanon and DuBoisian Double Consciousness," calls for the development of a "multilateral double consciousness," "a healthy form of critical thinking with which all people can become more aware of their own assumptions, intellectual conditionings, social roles, positions and relationships with others" (401). All of these scholars call for heightened awareness of one's position within societal discourses and an ability to simultaneously hold multiple perspectives. In order to advance their theories, I suggest that we begin with recognizing the roles of both racial and gender constructions in the formation of consciousness.

Since my particular study theorizes a white feminine dissociative consciousness (in both Hughes' characters and my own experience), I argue that white women might alternatively pursue the development of an associative consciousness, a consciousness that persistently and voluntarily associates our visible identities and subjectivity with the visible identities and subjectivities of others, recognizing that we are inextricably linked and enmeshed within histories and discourses that construct our identities and designate performative scripts.[61] An associative consciousness means recognizing and understanding the interdependence of racial and gender categories and their

[61] In this study, since I identify white women's proclivity to dissociate, I concentrate here on an alternative consciousness specific to white women, though it may have broader implications for all people who are raced as white. The development of an associative consciousness is indeed an appropriate goal for all white people.

sedimentation throughout history. This includes not only an understanding of white power and privilege, but also an understanding of the ways in which white women have historically attached themselves to this power and privilege, to the detriment of themselves and others. These histories, of black and white, male and female identities are interconnected in complex, often violent ways, and these connections often locate white women within traditions of domination that inform current relationships in often unidentified or unspoken ways. Building an associative consciousness means knowing this history of identity construction and performances, including those that Hughes' stories reveal--the performances of purity, the pursuit of ownership and control, and the dissociation from material realities.

In "Home," if Miss Reese could have associated her identity with Roy's and carried an awareness of prevailing cultural discourses, she may have been able to reformulate her approach to their interactions. Admittedly, she seems trapped within social constructions and discourses on the street that deadly night (for not speaking to him would have aligned her with segregation practices), but perhaps she could have approached their entire relationship differently from the beginning. For example, she could have worked within the schooling system to gain approval of his visit, thereby creating a structural acceptance of their interaction and perhaps providing Roy with some protection from individual white animosity. Similarly, in "Poor Little Black Fellow," had the Pemberton women realized that their social positioning contributed to their patronizing treatment of Arnie, they may have been able to recognize their assumptions about Arnie's inferiority. Such a recognition may have cultivated an awareness of Arnie's humanity and his abilities. This type of awareness could have enabled open, honest

discussions with the community, anticipating and working against the ways in which Arnie's maturity changes him from a symbol of Christian duty to a "Negro problem."

With this type of associative consciousness, white women might become aware of what our actions mean to and for others. We might also begin to understand how our performances either confirm or challenge white patriarchal systems, such as in the anecdote that opens this story. What would have been different about that opening scenario had I approached it with an associative consciousness? The first possibility is that an associative consciousness could have prevented my initial dissociation from Jemilla's reality, a dissociation that caused my disbelief and my shock. As opposed to reacting with the distrust caused by my whiteness and the polite silence encouraged by my femininity, I could have accepted Jemilla's anecdote for what it was--an important recognition of institutional and (otherwise) invisible acts of racism. Armed with an associative consciousness, I could have immediately asked students to examine the power matrices in the classroom at that precise moment when Jemilla asserted her knowledge, including how it was being denied, unanimously, immediately, and vocally, by all of the white men in the room. I could have directly asked about the role of race and gender (and their attendant degrees of power) in the dynamics of our conversation, even above and beyond the content of the conversation, making the operations of race and gender visible in the moment in which they occurred.

However, if this form of white ambush would still have occurred even despite my attempts to develop an associative consciousness (and, according to Yancy, I should expect it to), the moment may not have been as startling to me, given that I might be able to, if not anticipate such moments, at least understand and accept them for what they are

when they do occur--exposures of my raced and gendered experiences, and not necessarily exposures of my own moral inadequacies. If I could have understood that my willingness to listen to the white men in the class, rather than an African American female, was a conditioned performative action of a white female, then perhaps I could have responded at that moment. This may have prevented me from participating in Jemilla's marginalization and contributing to white male domination, for it was the shock of the ambush that prevented me from thinking clearly. With a quicker recovery period, I could have responded more immediately, eliminating the gap of time between classes that may have solidified such marginalization and domination. I could have stopped the discussion and asked each individual to write down their reactions, and then connect their reactions to their own gender and race, interrogating how each construction could have contributed to their reactions and knowledge base. I could have asked for volunteers to read their analyses aloud to the class, providing opportunities to acknowledge both the limitations of perspectives and the possibility of excavating the subjugated knowledge that had emerged, but was being suppressed, in our classroom.

Even after analyzing this moment of dissociation and understanding how my consciousness had been limited by race and gender, I am still left with feelings of shame and regret, largely because of how Jemilla must have experienced that moment. In addition, I regret that I was unable to immediately capitalize upon such an opportune moment. George Yancy argues that these moments of ambush are "profound experiences in liminality" and that "thankfulness ought to be the attendant attitude as one is ambushed" because "in that moment, whites come to learn more about themselves, expanding knowledge of the self, revealing how the white self is other to itself" (*Black*

Bodies 240, 241). That experience in liminality indeed provided me with a space for knowledge production; however, it was my reflexive reading of Hughes' stories that provided me with the content with which to fill that space. I have therefore come to pause more often to cultivate an associative consciousness, to analyze the powerful discourses that inform my subjectivity and the subjectivity of others. I have become grateful for that moment, but my gratitude is also accompanied by a certain amount of guilt because such moments should not occur at the expense of those who are already marginalized by dominant culture. Because I contributed to Jemilla's marginalization, because I left her vulnerable to the white male majority, I have had a difficult time thinking of this as a positive learning experience. Moreover, it is difficult to adequately express the fear that I have that this might happen again--not simply to avoid feeling shame, but to avoid perpetuating racism and sexism. Thus, this entire dissertation is an attempt to cultivate an associative consciousness by studying the literary and historical performances of white women and interrogating my own identity for historical residue and similar performances. However, since whiteness is usually normalized and invisible to most white people, and because white women are conditioned towards passivity and dependency, this means I must exercise cognitive muscles that are not usually engaged, nor encouraged to be engaged. It means persistently and voluntarily seeing myself as raced and gendered, and understanding how these constructions not only inform my own subjectivity, but also how they intersect with the race and gender of others.

The Ways of White Folks: Exposé of White Femininity *and* Foundation for Transformation

This study, in its entirety, identifies white female responses to blackness in *The Ways of White Folks* and argues that these characters provide the opportunity, and establish the need, for white women to examine the cultural discourses in which we are embedded, as well as our own racial performances and agency within these discourses. The characters in all of these stories can help readers understand the ways in which white women still participate in systems of domination, and how the social constructions of white femininity affect the daily material existence of others, especially within schooling systems that routinely employ white women. Through Mrs. Art Studevant in "Cora Unashamed," Mrs. Osborn in "Berry," and Miss Briggs in "Little Dog," Hughes demonstrates that white female performances of purity require a relentless abjection of Other, of all that is deemed unclean or "colored" in some way. Through my autoethnographic and historical research, I have found that this purging of Other also manifests itself in classroom practices specifically aligned with white women teachers; the performance of purity transforms itself into an overemphasis on classroom order and an adherence to a 'clean' mind/body split, rejecting knowledge produced within the body as legitimate and important. This emphasis initially materialized during the mental hygiene movement that occurred almost simultaneously with the feminization of the teaching field, and continues today with a new emphasis on "Emotional Intelligence." This performance of purity insists upon subdued students and minimal disruptions to traditional classroom decorum, a performance that inhibits the learning process and discourages challenges to the status quo.

Through the white women portrayed in "Rejuvenation Through Joy," Anne Carraway in "Slave on the Block," and Mrs. Ellsworth in "The Blues I'm Playing," Hughes demonstrates that white women respond to blackness by pursuing ownership and control. This commodification and consumption is essentially an attempt to reclaim all that has been purged in the name of purity, but an attempt that is disguised within socially-sanctioned consumer habits for wealthy white women. I term this response to blackness one of "possessive consumption" because the urge to consume blackness, and all of the Otherness with which it has been endowed, eventually possesses and controls the consumer, creating fixations that result in commodity-fetishism. A similar possessive consumption has occurred in white female readership and scholarship of African American literature, with a range of consumptive habits including vicarious experiences with blackness and attempts to own and control African American literature through theoretical mastery. As demonstrated through my autoethnographic research, this type of consumption can prevent white female readers from seeing the ways in which white femininity might be implicated in the texts. This consumption therefore becomes a hindrance to exposing the operations of whiteness and gender, and also reinforces structures of white supremacy. This proclivity to control also establishes the need to develop pedagogical strategies that deconstruct white female authoritarian stances. To this end, I advocate a pedagogy of white exposure that names whiteness and decentralizes coercive authoritarian practices.

As stated earlier in this Conclusion, Hughes' portrayals of Miss Reese in "Home" and Grace Pemberton in "Poor Little Black Fellow" describe how white women maintain ignorance and blindness through the dissociation of self from material conditions and

white domination of Others. His characters demonstrate that this dissociation occurs regardless, and perhaps even because of, their good intentions. As demonstrated in my own experience, this same type of dissociation can also occur in classroom spaces inhabited by white female teachers. However, the recognition and naming of this dissociation does contain the potential to develop an alternative, associative consciousness in order to struggle against the ignorance and blindness that reinforces white patriarchal structures.

As evidenced by this study, the literature of white exposure can serve as an effective method for developing an associative consciousness capable of challenging racist and sexist structures of oppression. I therefore offer this study as a model and advocate for similar readings of the literature of white exposure. In addition, I suggest that such literary reading practices be incorporated within the field of CWS, a field that tends to overlook the contributions of literary texts. While the works broadly defined as Critical Whiteness Studies provide theoretical frameworks and language for studying whiteness, they also possess the distance of theory, and have not yet thoroughly examined the specificity of gender. In contrast, the literature of white exposure also theorizes whiteness, but does so in a way that is, in my opinion, more accessible and less offensive to white readers, while also providing opportunities to interrogate the role of gender. This literature often appears in narrative form and provides the opportunity to first examine other white identities, and then look inward to examine one's own identity. In the introduction to *White Women in Racialized Spaces,* Samini Najmi and Rajini Srikanth argue that the study of literature is an especially effective method of investigating racial constructions and dynamics. They write that

> [a] literary approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the ways in which we are constituted and constitute others in language . . . With regard to whiteness studies . . . we argue that literature sensitizes and prepares us to probe the intricacies of current structures of whiteness and to imagine and envision alternate modes of its manifestation. (14)

This especially describes my experiences with the literature of white exposure, for this particular genre has sensitized me to perspectives of alterity that are not readily available to me simply through my daily existence in a culture seemingly dedicated to preserving the invisibility of white hegemony. In addition, the literature of white exposure provides this perspective of alterity without constantly asking people of color to be responsible for educating white people about racism, for retelling painful stories, for "bleeding" so white people can "understand." The use of the literature of white exposure therefore offers the potential to minimize harm to people of color who often must re-live painful experiences in discussions about race, while also educating white people about patriarchal, institutional white supremacy.

To demonstrate the efficacy of the literature of white exposure as a method of developing an associative consciousness, I offer this entire study which stands as a sustained effort to understand the ways in which my identity construction and performances intersect with the identities of others. Such a use of literature to excavate the ways in which hegemonic discourses inform our daily practices and material lives, is an act of critical literacy. Practitioners of critical literacy[62] read texts with the intent of deconstructing power matrices and exposing the ways in which ideology informs our

[62] Critical literacy is a descendent of the critical theory of neo-Marxist thinkers Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School. Contemporary practitioners of critical literacy include scholars and activists such as Paolo Freire and Henry Giroux.

images of ourselves and others. According to Margaret Hagood, critical literacy is "a means for analyzing how powerful institutional contexts . . . act as regulating institutions for knowledge and resources" and for "exploring subjectivity by questioning the normative practices and ideologies portrayed in texts that create and sustain stereotypical identities" (248). Because the literature of white exposure provides not stereotypical images, but counter-narratives to whiteness, the literature itself encourages critical literacy because its very existence challenges "normative practices and ideologies." As this dissertation demonstrates, Hughes and other African American authors have provided me with a counter-narrative to my understanding of white women, one that exposes the uses and abuses of power, and encourages me to examine my own relationship to power, including how I leverage it in the classroom. This dissertation is, therefore, an act of critical literacy; I employ Hughes' text in order to understand the performances of white femininity and how these performances support, or provide the potential to disrupt, hegemonic power structures. This study excavates the often invisible operations of whiteness and patriarchy and allows me to build acts of resistance which hold potential to transform the classroom itself. This is especially important because, if white women, many of whom are teachers, are capable of deconstructing their own identities, they are more capable of seeing the ways in which white dominance is reproduced through hegemonic structures, including the schooling systems in which they labor.

"Ways" vs. "Souls" and the Possibility of Change

The analyses and observations of this study have broader implications that resonate beyond classroom experiences and inform ontological discussions about possibilities of change. While Hughes recognizes that racial and gender constructions entrap us within scripted performances, he also seems to argue that it is possible to escape these entrapments. His title *The Ways of White Folks* is surely an allusion to W.E.B. DuBois' titles *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) and "The Souls of White Folks" (1920). However, Hughes changes "souls" to "ways," a movement which, at first glance, appears to provide a rather bleak theory of whiteness; the souls of white folks seem to have disappeared, replaced merely with "ways." Such an absence of soul would traditionally be read as a lamentable condition, one that is unsalvageable and unchangeable. Indeed, this was my initial interpretation: I saw Hughes' characters as portraits of people who had either lost, or were in various stages of losing their souls. However, I often felt more critical of the characters than the author himself, for Hughes describes white female intentionality as sometimes innocuous, sometimes benevolent--just unfortunately, even tragically, embodied within a flawed consciousness. Since my interpretation regarding lost souls was not especially congruent with Hughes' tone or content, I returned to the short stories and to the DuBois' texts for further analysis; I have since come to believe, against my own intuition and my own experience with whiteness, that Hughes' change from "souls" to "ways" denotes not condemnation and doom, but potentiality.

In *The Souls of Black Folks*, DuBois describes a "dogged strength," an indomitable spirit that prevents African Americans from being "torn asunder" while attempting to reconcile the double-consciousness of "two warring ideals" (5). His

positioning of the souls of white folks, however, is quite different. In "The Souls of White Folks," DuBois characterizes an arrogant, pitiful soul that acts with cruelty, degradation, and a presumption of "ownership of the earth forever and ever" (185). He recounts extensive western European and North American history to illustrate this soul of white folks. According to DuBois, this spirit manifests itself in an illusion of supremacy that "has worked itself through warp and woof of our daily thought with a thoroughness that few realize. Everything great, good, efficient, fair, and honorable is 'white'; everything mean, bad, blundering, cheating and dishonorable is 'yellow'; a bad taste is 'brown'; and the devil is 'black'" (194). This illusion of supremacy thus yields hatred for those it constructs as Others, and DuBois is not shy in his expression of this hatred. He writes of "a deep and passionate hatred" (186), "this great mass of hatred, in wilder, fiercer violence" (187), "human hatred, the despising of men" (198), "the van of human hatred – making bonfires of human flesh and laughing at them hideously" (198), and "great, ugly whirlwinds of hatred and blood and cruelty" (199). Moreover, DuBois asserts a certain permanence to this spirit. While he posits this soul as "a very modern thing – a nineteenth and twentieth century matter" (184), he also argues that whites are imprisoned within it; he "has pity for a people so imprisoned and enthralled, hampered and made miserable for such a cause, for such a phantasy" (187). When DuBois concludes the essay with an allusion to Prometheus, he implies that white souls are doomed to their own imprisonment, as Prometheus was doomed to having his liver plucked daily by eagles, only to be replenished for the same act *ad infinitum*. Ultimately, this soul of whiteness, one well-worthy of losing, seems quite difficult to escape.

In contrast, when Hughes writes of the "ways" of white folks, he names some of the same characteristics--proclivities towards ownership, presumptions of superiority and paternalism--yet he positions them as actions, choices. His stories primarily describe the behaviors or performances of whiteness, rather than internal thought patterns or statements about the inherent nature of whiteness. While the characteristics described in DuBois' theory of whiteness are evident in Hughes' stories, Hughes signals a break from DuBois' analysis of perpetual doom, for as this study shows, he often writes with comedic tones, portrays white characters with sympathy, and emphasizes behaviors rather than internal though patterns. In addition, Hughes' characters demonstrate that performances of race and gender are contingent upon historical circumstances, for his portrayals of whiteness vary according to geographic location, both within and outside of the United States. While DuBois casts all white nations, including Western Europe, within his assessment of white souls, Hughes instead offers differences among white American behaviors, and positions them against a European whiteness that provides an alternative to American segregationist practices and racist ideology. This portrayal of different "ways," both within and outside of the United States, indicates the mutability of whiteness, not an unchanging spirit or soul, but instead a condition contingent upon geographic and historical location. Hughes' understanding of whiteness therefore amends DuBois' argument and shifts the focus to the historical contingency and conditioning which DuBois references early, but then abandons, leaving instead the image of Prometheus doomed to endless repetition. Where DuBois emphasizes the perpetuity of the white condition, Hughes emphasizes the possibility of change.

Within this amendment, Hughes creates the possibility for alternative white "ways," and it is the female characters of his stories, as flawed and disassociated as they are, who embody these alternatives.[63] For example, in "Home," when Miss Reese extends her hand to Roy, she makes a tragic mistake, but within this error, she also abandons recognition of racial constructions and regulations in order to share mutual interest and appreciation. In a world where such recognition is rare, her attempt is read by other white people in the community as a problem. While this situation attests to the strength of prevailing norms, it also suggests the potential of mutual recognition and interracial community. Similarly, in "Poor Little Black Fellow," when the Pembertons adopt Arnie and care for him, they create potential for change. While their attempts occur in limited ways and with a strange combination of naiveté and commitment to prevailing norms, they do take risks when they choose to become responsible for raising him and integrating him into their community. Of all the family members, it is the female character Grace Pemberton, who seems to genuinely care for Arnie and worry about his well-being. In another story, "Cora Unashamed," the white female character Jessie loves across racial lines. Although Hughes casts Jessie as "slow," he also casts her love story as parallel to the love story of Cora and Joe; within that relationship, Cora's love across racial lines is genuine and mature. All three of these women are flawed characters, characters who act out of disassociation from the world around them, who may have a tenuous grasp on the consequences of defying prevailing norms; however, they are also

[63] The few men who do exhibit alternative behaviors do so only initially, balking as soon as their dominance is challenged. For example, after providing for Arnie during childhood, Mr. Pemberton ultimately turns on Arnie as soon as he is dissatisfied with his actions. And in "Home," Charlie Mumford, a former schoolmate of Roy's who initially greets him at the train station, may be part of the lynch mob at the end of the story.

characters who show signs of a different kind of spirit or humanity than what DuBois offers in "Souls of White Folks."[64]

Based on Hughes' recognition of the potential for change in white folks, I suggest replacing the image of Prometheus with a different Greek figure, that of Kairos. Kairos was the youngest son of Zeus and known for his youth, swiftness and beauty. Due to these characteristics, he eventually became associated with a qualitative measurement of time (in contrast to the quantitative measurement, kronos), often translated as the "right time" or "opportune time." According to Amélie Frost Benedikt, author of "On Doing the Right Thing at the Right Time: Toward an Ethics of Kairos," "Kairic time . . . marks opportunities that might not recur, moments of decision" (226). Moments within Hughes' stories--Miss Reese's impulse to greet, Grace Pemberton's impulse to care, and Jessie's impulse to love--embody this concept of an opportune moment. These impulses demonstrate the recognition of shared humanity, and they represent opportunities for different kinds of cross-racial relationships. However, because the characters operate from a place of dissociation, they are not adequately prepared for these moments, and they fail to conduct themselves in ways that are truly transformative; therefore, the moments for connection pass, often with consequences tragic enough to prevent them from ever recurring. Benedickt argues that kairos "depends on a sufficient degree of *self-knowledge* to be able to assess the situational context in the first place" and that

[64] Perhaps only a white person might assert that a loss of soul is a sign of progress. I hope that I am not contributing to the mythology of whiteness as a progressive societal force. However, I read Hughes as seeing the potential for white people, especially white women, to develop *into* a progressive, if flawed, force. I do not intend here to valorize these characters' intention or potential. Instead, I mean to extricate the complexities of the actions, demonstrating that potential may reside within these ways. I am not completely comfortable with highlighting intentionality, especially when harm comes to others as a result; however, I also believe that Hughes did not wish to condemn these characters. Instead, he seems to indict the world that does not accept these behaviors.

"evaluations of timing also require evaluating the kairic sense of the readiness of others who form part of the situational context" (230, 231). If, then, the opportune moments in these stories were accompanied with self-knowledge and an awareness of societal discourses (associative consciousness), they could be moments of great change. Throughout Hughes' collection, he provides such kairic moments, and all of them involve white women characters, ultimately positioning them as potential change-agents.

Hughes' short stories demonstrate a theory of whiteness as a series of performative actions, not a stasis of condition. In a personal letter to James Emanuel, Hughes also expresses the understanding that "circumstances and conditioning make it very hard for whites, in interracial relationships, each to his 'own self be true'" ("Short Fiction" 150). However, white women can resist harmful responses to blackness--including the performance of purity, the pursuit of ownership and control, and the maintenance of ignorance and blindness--through the development of an associative consciousness as a metacognitive act of resistance. This project is especially significant for white female teachers, not only because we are both white and female, but also because we predominate the workforce of educational systems that, when left unexamined, consistently reproduce hegemonic beliefs and practices--currently, the ideology of white male supremacy. Such a position within schooling systems is indeed a kairic moment, for this quantitative presence could allow for qualitative changes to the ways in which our school systems 'educate' our students. Instead of blindly reinforcing the oppressive systems of white patriarchy, we might recognize the entanglements of race and gender, and even work to expose these constructions (and their attendant power) in the classroom. In "White Enculturation and Bourgeois Ideology," Dreama Moon adds

urgency and responsibility to such work: “As the often-silent benefactors of both white supremacy and legal protections that were made possible by civil rights movements led by people of color, white women in particular have a moral and ethical responsibility to place the abolition of white supremacy at the forefront of their personal and political agendas” (196). However, this agenda must be pursued with an associative consciousness that enables understandings of one’s subjectivity and historical identity sedimentation. This, then, is the Promethean task for white women--the perpetual development of an associative consciousness as a resistance to hegemonic discourses. Such a task might allow for the recognition and even cultivation of kairic moments that provide the potential to create and establish new “ways” for white women.

AFTERWORD

As a white teacher who has worked diligently to develop an intentional pedagogy for teaching African American literature, primarily to African American students, I am occasionally asked by colleagues for advice regarding students of color. One faculty member once asked, "Could you give me some hints for understanding how to work with my African American students?" Another faculty member stated, "I really need help connecting with my black students." These faculty have usually come to me (only) after finding themselves in uncomfortable, sometimes racially-charged situations, and they therefore want best practices to implement immediately. They have always seemed genuinely concerned and sincere, desirous of *reaching out.* Nevertheless, I am always unsettled because their inquiries assume that when working with diverse student populations, we must examine what makes *them* different--which means that the teachers' whiteness and/or gender continues to escape examination. Further, such inquiries seem to imply that I have acquired 'special ethnographic' knowledge of racial 'Others,' and that I might be able to share some secret codes of language and behavior, including what to say and do, what not to say, how to say it, what words to use, and what words to avoid. Thus, I find myself in a quandary. When they have come to me for immediate help, how do I quickly explain that . . .

. . . race and gender are social constructions.

. . . whiteness, as a racialized identity, is also a social construction.

. . . white identities have been constructed not in communion with, but *against*, the identities of others.

> . . . these constructions are maintained through our own performativity.
>
> . . . these performances of whiteness, regardless of gender, have been, and often continue to be, oppressive, violent and terroristic to the minds and bodies of people of color.
>
> . . . these enactments carry historical residue that inform current cross-racial relationships in often unknown and unspoken ways.
>
> . . . for those of us who are constructed as white, this means recognizing that our identities are inextricably linked with a coercive power and unacknowledged privilege.
>
> . . . the work of 'connecting with' and 'understanding others' begins with examining one's own experience, as a *racialized* and *gendered* experience.

While I recognize my colleagues' desires and the need for concrete suggestions that can be implemented quickly, I also feel the need to resist the continued practice of studying 'difference,' and to resist an oversimplification of my teaching philosophies and practices. Instead, what I really need to explain is that my own best practice doesn't necessarily involve an immediate *reaching out,* but rather a deliberate and sustained *reaching within.* My work is not so much about understanding a 'secret' and otherwise inaccessible culture of racialized Others, but understanding *myself in relation to* others.

For me, reaching this conclusion has required an extensive, sustained study of the literature of white exposure, Critical Whiteness Studies, and performance theory, combined with rigorous, and at times unpleasant, autoethnographic research. It is only through this work, and specifically through my readings of *The Ways of White Folks*, that

I have been able to witness, from an outsider's perspective, white women enacting scripts of white femininity. Through my readings and re-readings, I have been able to watch the events of the short stories unfold in a slow motion that enables me to envision alternative performances of whiteness and femininity, performances that might have altered the tragic, over-scripted, and over-determined moments in those stories. Such literary study has enabled me to understand the ways in which discourses of race and gender entrap us within narrow performative scripts. However, while the characters in Langston Hughes' short stories are forever entrapped, they can nevertheless provide readers with the knowledge to understand their own social entrapment and to envision methods of escape. This dissertation has been my attempt to create alternate, more liberatory ways of living and teaching for myself. This work is my way of looking *in*, to find a way *out*--both for myself and for students.

Such internal work ultimately informs my external practices. And though I again want to resist the over-simplification of my research, I can distill my findings into strategies that have been particularly effective for me as a white, female teacher of African American literature and African American students. However, these strategies require a willingness to inhabit marginal, liminal spaces that we are often accustomed and conditioned to view as uncomfortable and unstable. The strategies that follow require a willingness to seek out, and remain within, the spaces that attempt to distinguish mind from body, order from disorder, and self from other:

Legitimating Alternate Ways of Knowing

In the Western metaphysical tradition, the mind has been divorced from the body. However, as discussed earlier in this study, the body can contribute to our knowledge and wisdom. In our classrooms, it is possible to recognize the body as a legitimate site of knowledge production. Correspondingly, we can construct classroom spaces with the vitality and charge of emotion and intellect, arguing that the two forms of knowing are inextricably linked. This means allowing displays of emotion (including anger, joy, sadness) in the classroom, and then analyzing how these displays help us understand the texts we are reading--and the lives we are living.

Decentralizing Authority

Because whiteness has been historically maintained through an oppressive authority and strict adherence to order, white teachers, regardless of gender, must begin to see ourselves as part of this history and envision an alternative presence in the classroom. It is possible to teach course content and share expertise, not through rigid, authoritative practices, but from the "margins" of the classroom. It is also possible to find a balance between what matters to us and what matters to students, for there is power and knowledge in allowing student perspectives, including those of alterity and those of dominant culture, to manifest themselves in the classroom. This often requires recognizing that there is value to spontaneity and digressions from the day's lesson plan. However, the teacher has a responsibility to balance course content with spontaneous dialogue. This can often be accomplished with a simple question to students, "Could someone summarize how this discussion is adding to our understanding of the subject

matter?" Ultimately, the decentralization of teacher authority can create safe spaces for exploration, for the pursuit of individual and collective interests, and for the critical thinking that can liberate teachers and students alike from hegemonic discourses.

Cultivating a Fluidity of Consciousness

As a result of the dissociation revealed earlier in my study, it is important to understand the limitations of one's perspective, so that individual experience does not become representative of 'human' experience. Further, it is important to recognize that our minds should not rest in static, comfortable spaces, but within a fluidity of consciousness, one that is unresting, moving among perspectives both within and outside of ourselves. This is an attempt to diminish the gap between perspectives of self and other. In the classroom, a fluidity of consciousness might manifests itself in pauses, in questions, in thinking before asserting rightness and authority, and in being mindful of the dynamics of the classroom. It means allowing oneself to hesitate before speaking, and to ask questions before answering them.

These are some of the tenets of my pedagogical philosophy, regardless of course content, but particularly important in African American literature, and particularly important with students of color who have been systematically marginalized by the oppressive operations of white patriarchal power. These strategies are also important for white students so that they too can experience and envision alternative performances of whiteness. Such strategies, when performed intentionally and openly communicated within the classroom, can contribute to students' understanding of the ways in which we

are embedded in hegemonic scripts, and how our performativity can support, reinforce, or counter hegemony. Further, through these strategies, I can model a resistance to the oppressive constructions of race and gender and the performative scripts that they mandate. Such strategies can reveal the transformative power of the margins.

And so, the next time I am asked for advice from a white colleague, I will speak about the limitations of our perspectives, of the experiences of the students in a world dominated by white patriarchal power structures. I may ask what emotions (of both teacher and student) have filtered to the surface and what we can learn from those emotions. I will also speak about authority and the subjugation of knowledge and perspectives of alterity. However, I will also state that our discussions are only the beginning of a much larger task. Then, I will offer them my well-worn copy of *The Ways of White Folks*, scheduling a time to envision, together, alternate ways for white teachers.

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