“To be Loved and Cry Shame”: The Legacies of Race and Shame

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines shame in nineteenth and twentieth century texts by and about black women. I argue that black writers use black women's shame as a literary representational strategy that reveals interlocking constructions of race, gender, and sexuality in American culture and public life. I map the ways in which the writers in my study connect shame to black womanhood to mediate the social, political, and historical landscape in which each text is produced. Through this formulation, black writers mobilize black women's shame to reveal patterns of relationships between self and others and self and the world. I posit that the social forces that account for black women's shame in nineteenth and twentieth century literature expose a paradox of shame and shamelessness that black women literary figures negotiate as the afterlife of *partus sequitur ventrum*, the legal mandate which translates, "That which is brought forth follows the womb." Therefore, I examine the vicissitudes of shame as an inheritance across a broad historical range of texts and diverse cultural milieu. The chapters in this study examine how the paradox of shame and shamelessness shifts in African American literature and culture over periods of time from enslavement (1760-1865), post-Reconstruction (1865-1917), and the resurgence of black women writers (1981-1989). To examine the cultures of shame in these periods, I integrate black feminist literary and social theory with the turn to affect in the humanities and social sciences.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Eula Gandy, Roy Gandy Sr., Jacqueline Gandy, and Roy Gandy Jr., the heavenly host who kept me diligent and faithful.

INTRODUCTION

Defining a Legacy of (Black) Race and (Women's) Shame

> Let's face it. I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny," God's "Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First" or "Black Woman at the Podium": I describe a locus of confounded identities, a meeting ground of investments and privations in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.
>
> Hortense Spillers

This research is scholarly, but it is also personal—for colored girls who have inherited American ideologies of black womanhood that largely subsume what the nation wishes to disavow. Black women and feminist writers, activists, and scholars have interrogated, called out, and dismantled constructions of black womanhood, such as those that are represented in the epigraph.[1] Still, black women consistently confront an American cultural imagination that routinely misnames them. It is often noted that this misidentification reflects black women's unique racial and gendered subject position in American society. As Hortense Spillers clarifies, names that mischaracterize black women are not only common to black women's experiences, but these ideologies of black womanhood also form the fabric of America as a nation. Although

[1] For a full discussion of stereotypes of black womanhood, see Barbara Smith, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (Kitchen Table: Women of Color P, 1983); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 1991); Beverly Guy-Sheftall, editor. *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought* (The New P, 1995).

black women's misnaming has been duly studied, the affective reality that orbits around this misnaming is an underdeveloped terrain of inquiry.

My dissertation, "To be loved and cry shame: The Legacies of Race and Shame," identifies shame as the dominant affective economy in the continuous misnaming of black women. This affective economy of shame is rooted in prevailing ideologies of black womanhood. My use of "affective economy" draws upon the work of Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), who focuses on emotions as social phenomena that are "produced as effects of circulation" between individuals (8). According to Ahmed, emotions are wholly relational and not individual psychological states (9). Through this logic of the social circulation and construction of emotions, my project focuses on black womanhood to identify the interlocking dynamics of race, gender, and shame in American culture and public life. One of the best sites for analyzing these linked experiences is in nineteenth and twentieth century texts by and about black women. In my dissertation, I engage shame as a literary representational strategy of a historical legacy that is concretized at the nexus of (black) race and (women) gender, an inheritance that I trace back to enslavement. I map the ways in which the texts in my study use black women's shame to reflect the social, political, and historical landscape in which each text is produced. Through this formulation, black writers mobilize black women's shame to reveal patterns of relationships between self and others and self and the world[2] as well as internal states of consciousness. My dissertation does not aim to suggest that black women are perpetually ashamed of themselves. Neither does it suggest that black women experience more shame than any other social group, although perhaps they are more vulnerable to the affective experience of shame.

[2] See Ian Burkitt's theory of emotions in *Emotions and Social Relations* (SAGE P, 2014).

Due to what has been termed the “affective turn” in the humanities and social sciences, theories of shame abound in psychology, cultural studies, and affect theory.[3] The philosopher-psychologist Silvan Tomkins introduced the contemporary study of affect in his four-volume work *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1962). Adam Frank and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick edited a condensed version of Tomkins’s study of affects in *Shame and Its Sisters* (1995). Of all the “primal” affects, Tomkins argues, shame strikes deepest in the human heart[4] (Sedgwick and Frank 133). The following description of shame is central to my dissertation:

> While terror and distress hurt, they are wounds inflicted from outside which penetrate the smooth surface of the ego; but shame is felt as an inner torment, a sickness of the soul. It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks himself. In either event he feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth. (Sedgwick and Frank132)

This “sickness of the soul” is not unique to black womanhood, and it is particularly salient to lived experiences of people in oppressed groups. In fact, Tomkins’s theory of shame is strikingly similar to W.E.B. Du Bois’s formative theory of black racial identification in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1901). The perspective shifts of Du Bois’s seminal concept of double consciousness bear a striking resemblance to shame as a “sense of always looking at one’s self though the eyes of others,” and feeling split by “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings” (215). Du Bois further affirms the link between shame and the phenomenon of double-consciousness,

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[3] See Michael Hardt, foreword, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing The Social*, edited by Patricia Ticineto Clough with Jean Halley (Duke UP, 2007), pp. ix- xii.

[4] According to Tomkins, there are nine innate biological affects that humans engage with from birth. Once people become aware of affective response, affect is then classified as feeling. Once this feeling is indexed and recalled in memory, it is an emotion. In the growing body of theories of emotions, there are various other methods to distinguish between affect, feeling, and emotion.

positing, “This waste of double aims, this seeking to satisfy two unreconciled ideas…has sent them often wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed about to make them ashamed of themselves” (216). My project engages with the ways in which black womanhood mediates the shame of double-consciousness in literary texts. Extending Du Bois’s framework, I examine the ways in which gender adds a third consciousness through which both men and women mediate black racial identification as a paradox of shame and shamelessness. Therefore, I use affect theory to examine the shame/shameless paradox in women and male-authored texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Each chapter considers the ways in which the shame/shameless paradox is connected to sociopolitical, cultural, and legal discourses.

The lack of critical attention to race and gender in previous studies of shame has led me to pose the following questions that guide my analysis: In what ways have theories of shame been constructed in the absence of considerations of black women and blindness to constructions of black womanhood? What do meditations and representations of shame in literature by and about black women do to assist in reformulating and/or expanding understandings of shame and its workings? Why is shame so central to American culture and literary representations of black women’s identity? What is the role of shame in stigmatizing black womanhood and in the emotional response to raced and gendered markings? Can shame ever be understood as a generative force and shamelessness as emancipatory? To address these questions, I examine the vicissitudes of shame across a broad historical range of texts and diverse cultural milieu to discover patterns of shame that are long-lived. The chronological parameters of this work are vast. From the antebellum period of enslavement to the 1970s-1980s black feminist era, I explore pivotal moments within this time frame that illustrate the workings of shame and the variations

on shame-related themes. In this way, I anatomize shame through a continuum of emotions that includes humiliation, disgrace, and guilt. At the heart of this research is a pivotal question that signifies on Tomkins, by asking: what of shame and black sisters? To address this question, I offer a rounded texture of shame in relationship to black womanhood.

Although my project is grounded, at least in some respects, in previous studies of shame, I argue that black writers have been theorizing shame since the slave narrative tradition. Consider, for example, Elizabeth Keckley's reticence in describing the events of her rape in *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House* (1868): "I was regarded as fair-looking for one of my race, and for four years a white man—I spare the world his name—had base designs upon me. I don't care to dwell upon this subject, for it is one that is fraught with pain. Suffice it to say, that he persecuted me for four years, and I—I—became a mother" (39). The silences that Keckley marks semiotically with dashes denote the impulse to mute the self, a common response to shame. The pain that Keckley describes also bears witness to the psychic and emotional injury of shame that still threatens to arouse pain during the process of recollection. Through this act of non-disclosure, Keckley demonstrates the "affective gaps and illegibilities, dysphoric feelings, and other sites of emotional negativity" that Sianne Ngai refers to in *Ugly Feelings* (2005).[5] I elaborate on this experience of shame in the first chapter on Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Another formerly enslaved woman, Mary Prince, with overwhelming grief, sorrow, and humiliation, recounts numerous scenes of flogging and torture in *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831). Describing her suffering, she relays a story that I read as an allegory of black women's heritage of shame: "One day a heavy squall of wind and rain came on suddenly, and my mistress sent me round the corner of

[5] Ngai does not identify shame as an ugly feeling because of its association with codes of morality, pp. 25-27.

the house to empty a large earthen jar. The jar was already cracked with an old deep crack that divided it in the middle, and in turning it upside down to empty it, it parted in my hand" (8). No delicacy could have prevented the earthen jar from breaking; its crack preceded Prince's encounter with it. The earthen jar is emblematic of shame as a legacy; its crack suggests that its contents are always already vulnerable to exposure and separation. In writing, "…I never heard the last of that jar; my mistress was always throwing it in my face" (8), Prince further explains the violence that inheres in the earthen jar. Over a century after Prince, Nanny, the grandmother in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) similarly alludes to this inheritance of shame. After witnessing her granddaughter Janie kiss Johnny Taylor, a sign to Nanny that sixteen year old Janie is entering the vulnerable realm of black womanhood, she implores her granddaughter Janie to marry a man decades her senior. Nanny explains to Janie, "Ah don't want yo' feathers always crumpled by folks throwin' up things in yo' face...And Ah can't die easy thinkin' maybe de menfolks white or black is makin' a spit cup outa you." (20). Like Prince, Nanny alludes to the way shame is weaponized against black women. At the end of her entreaty, she embodies Prince's earthen jar, lamenting: "Ah'm a cracked plate" (20). It is a heritage that she passed down to her own daughter who was raped by a white schoolteacher, and it is a heritage from which she wants to protect Janie.

Although this study focuses on black women writers, black male writers just as frequently mobilize shame as a trope of black womanhood as do black women writers. Often, black male writers' use of shame more expressly demonstrates the affect/emotion bind. I do not mean to simplify the varied uses of shame that black women and black men equally employ; rather, I suggest that women primarily use shame to examine internal states of women's consciousness and men most often use shame in a relational context, though neither the internal

versus relational context of their engagements is meant to be exclusive. Studies of feeling that emerge in sociology and queer theory deemphasize emotions as individual experiences and prioritize the patterns of relationships that emerge in expressions of feelings and emotions.[6] Although no unanimous distinction between affect/feeling/emotion has been reached, most studies of emotions as "affect" disavow the psychological context of emotions and instead focus on forces and encounters "beyond emotion" that are not directly controlled by consciousness but are tied to conscious states.[7]

Despite the slippery definitions of emotion/affect that arise from multiple iterations of the term, I find the emphasis in sociology on emotions as affective forces and currents that affect the social group particularly useful for my investigation of black male writers.[8] An understanding of emotions as a social form is particularly useful for my reading of James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912/1927). After the un-named narrator witnesses a lynching, he spends hours contemplating his decision to permanently, albeit still ambivalently, pass as a white man. In an extended moment of rumination, it is ultimately not fear, terror, nor rage that influences his final decision. Rather, it is, as the narrator affirms, "…shame, unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals" (499). Ahmed enlightens the un-named narrator's shame as a force that has been operating beyond this moment in the text. Ahmed suggests, "Emotions are intentional in the sense that they are 'about' something… The aboutness of emotions means they involve a stance on the world, or a way of apprehending the world" (7). It seems clear that the unnamed narrator's

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[6] See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Taylor & Francis, 2004); Sally Rowena Munt, *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (Ashgate, 2008); Ian Burkitt, *Emotions and Social Relations* (SAGE, 2014).
[7] See Gregory J Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, editors, "An Inventory of Shimmers," *The Affect Theory Reader* (Duke UP, 2010).
[8] See note 5.

shame develops in response to the brutality of the lynching to which he considers himself vulnerable. However, if we also consider the way shame has circulated throughout this text, we realize that this moment of shame is the culmination of several other complex negotiations that the narrator makes concerning his racial lineage and his identification as a black man.

The un-named narrator's encounter with shame begins with a primal racial moment in a schoolroom when teachers force him to confront his black heritage. Feeling "dazed" and "in a stupor" (400), the unnamed narrator goes home to his mother seeking relief from this new awareness of his black identification. There is no consolation at his mother's hearth; instead, she concretizes his racial identification and introduces him to racial shame. Following the humiliation he experienced at school after he is told to stand with the others or, the black children, the unnamed narrator experiences the heritability of shame through his mother. The unnamed narrator becomes the other, observing his mother and "searching for defects" (401). Under her son's critical eyes, the mother engages a shame response, dropping her head in his hair and attempting to buttress his wounded pride by reminding him of his white paternal bloodline. The mother confirms her black racial identity through her own humiliation before her son. Despite the mother's attempt to buttress the unnamed narrator from the sense of humiliation and defeat that attends his discovery of his black racial identification, she symbolically passes down her stigmatized status and shame as its psychic-emotional reality.

If we consider the unnamed narrator's shame as a social form, we see that the lynching moment is the culmination as well as the accumulation of shame experiences that can be traced back to his mother. As Ahmed clarifies, "This contact [of emotions] is shaped by past histories of contact, unavailable in the present…" (7). However, Ahmed's theory of shame is based on a model of transference whereby emotions exist between individuals and never in individual states

of consciousness. The unnamed narrator's shame is clearly manifested in his consciousness of racial identity, about which Sally Rowena Munt offers further illumination in *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame* (2008). According to Munt, people embody emotions in a retraceable "archive of feelings" that sticks to a person's consciousness despite the manifestation of emotions as a process of circulation. This shame consciousness of the unnamed narrator derives from the formative moment between him and his mother. Immediately following this moment in the text, the narrator delivers a description of race that mirrors Du Bois's double-consciousness: "From that time I looked out through other eyes, my thoughts were coloured, my words dictated, my actions limited by one dominating, all-pervading idea…" which he goes on to describe as some "injury to my feelings or my pride" (403). The shame that he associates with black racial identification is un-named, but deeply felt. When the un-named narrator beholds the burning man too stunned to tremble who emits a final cry of tortured despair as he is blanketed in flames, he becomes "ex-colored" as he is overwhelmed with feelings of shame.

Black women and men writers demonstrate what shame *is* (reflecting investments in psychology) as well as what shame *does* (reflecting investments in sociology and cultural studies). Due to the multiplicative ways in which shame merges in the African American literary canon, I use affect and emotion interchangeably, in the tradition of other literary theorists such as Ngai. In this way, my work breaks with previous discussions of affect and emotions that identify theories within psychology and sociology as dichotomous and directionally opposite.[9] Black womanhood bridges these two frameworks, as the black woman embodies multiple relationships that are constantly re-negotiating history through her and manifesting her subject position; in

[9] For example, Ahmed, maintains that her study aligns with studies of emotions in sociology and anthropology that use an "outside in" model to study emotions in opposition to an "inside out" model that psychologists employ, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, pp. 9-10. Burkitt makes a similar argument in *Emotions and Social Relations*, pp. 152-153.

turn, black women frequently live out the effects of their own interpellation. Black men's and women's various formulations of shame identify the affect as an inevitable predicament of black women's sexual vulnerability, which they confront. As descendants of black women, black men also face this sexual vulnerability. As literary formulations often suggest that shame is a matrilineal birthright, I examine the ways in which *partus sequitur ventrum*, or the legal mandate that slaves follow the condition of their mothers, influences the works herein.

I argue that the culture of shame as a literary representational strategy is embedded in this law, which translates, "That which is brought forth follows the womb." This Latin phrase was added to the Virginia legislation of 1662, and it maintains that in the matter of interracial sex, offspring follow the condition of their mothers. Jennifer Morgan, in *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (2004), explains that this law forms the crux of racial slavery as well as the heritability of slave status. It confirmed the already prevailing practice of slavery's matrilineal descent throughout the new world colonies (1). Although the relationship between slavery and freedom, gender and black women's reproduction are long-standing, Morgan explains that *partus sequitur ventrum* is more than a response to interracial sex. The clause is rooted in property laws (as opposed to bastard laws) that concretize racial meaning through the public status of black women's maternity (3). In so doing, the law sutures black women's reproductive role to the marketplace. Therefore, the enslaved woman's womb is symbolically the site of kinless-ness, disinheritance, and stigmata. After enslavement, this law continues to influence American culture and the literary imagination.

The sexual vulnerability and intertwining of racism and black women's fertility that this law produces emerges in the texts in my project through a paradox of shame and shamelessness. The essence of the shame/shameless paradox is conveyed in Anna Julia Cooper's address at the

World's Congress of Representative Women in 1893, entitled, "The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Woman of the United States Since Emancipation Proclamation." Cooper describes the black women's sexual vulnerability as "…a struggle against fearful and overwhelming odds, that often ended in a horrible death, to maintain and protect that which woman holds dearer than life. The painful, patient, and silent toil of mothers to gain a…title to the bodies of their daughters, the despairing fight, as an entrapped tigress to keep hallow their own persons…" (711). Cooper expresses the inescapable predicament that black women are often forced or coerced into. Like the tigress, black women are caged in social, political, and economic dynamics that often leave their bodies vulnerable to harm and at risk of sexual exploitation. In her reference to black women's struggle to maintain and extend to her progeny the sacredness of body and personhood, Cooper identifies the matrilineal inheritance of the shame/shameless paradox, and she refers to the attendant psychic and emotional injuries that black women experience as a result of this heritage.

Shamelessness primarily refers to stereotypes of black womanhood that relegate women to a status outside of the cultural standards of morality in society. This ideology has greatly influenced perceptions of black women in American culture and imagination, typically designating black women as always already in a state of shame, or as shameful. As shame is often intended to be corrective and disciplinary, as in, "she has no sense of shame," shamelessness also refers to women figures who refuse the dominant culture of shame. Adoption of a shameless persona does not mean one is without shame, but it means that one is deliberately unbound by restrictive standards of womanhood, in some respects. I will examine the degree to which shamelessness offers a route to freedom. In addition to shame and its correlative

emotions, such as humiliation, embarrassment, and guilt,[10] the shame/shameless paradox also allows me to examine emotions that circuit the affective trajectory of shame, such as anger, rage, and love.

My project examines shame as both noun and verb, suggesting that representations of black womanhood identify shame as a state of being as well as a feeling that black womanhood mediates. In *Shame and The Exposed Self* (1995), Michael Lewis explains that there are three modalities of emotional expression: the face, the voice, and the body (22). In my consideration of the ways in which the works in this discussion represent shame, I pay close attention to the representation of voice and body in the texts under review. I read thematic references to shame as voice, focusing on when shame or the correlative emotions are directly signified. I also identify shame as voice through close readings of semiotic choices, representational strategies, acts of emotional substitution, and tone. I identify the way authors mobilize shame in the body of texts through the way in which shame is often indexed through manipulations of literary conventions and the appropriation of generic devices.

The chapters in this study examine how the paradox of shame and shamelessness shifts in African American literature and culture over periods of time from enslavement (1760-1865), post-Reconstruction (1865-1917), and the resurgence of black women writers (1981-1989). To examine the cultures of shame in these periods, I integrate black feminist literary and social theory with the turn to affect in the humanities and social sciences. This "integration" is more rhetorical than factual. The study of affects emerges out of the emphasis on the body in feminist

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[10] I am not suggesting that these terms are coterminous. Although shame is often used to describe a feeling, humiliation is also used to describe the sensation of shame. Embarrassment and guilt are often used to describe a similar feeling state as shame, but the difference is ontological. While shame attributes bad feeling to the whole self, embarrassment and guilt are ascribed to actions.

theory as well as the privileging of emotions in queer theory. Affect theorists often fail to acknowledge these lines of descent.[11] Michael Hardt in *The Affective Turn: Theorizing The Social* (2007), explains that affect theory synthesizes theories of body and emotions and refuses a dichotomy between reason and passion (xi). In this way, my study of affect and emotion engages with debates concerning the role of feeling in aesthetic judgment that have been central to philosophies of literary criticism since its development as a discipline in the early eighteenth century.[12] Shame, I argue, further realizes the aims of affect theory as it is already understood to be a social emotion that is about relationships between self, other, inside, outside, all at once. I also rely on fields of human development, including, psychology and psychiatry, sociology, history, and womanist theology. This multidisciplinary lens reflects the variety of ways that shame has come to shape notions of black womanhood as well as racialized narratives in American culture.

The multidisciplinarity of my dissertation also addresses previously neglected considerations of race, gender, and sexuality in studies of emotions and affect. Other than the work of feminist theorists and womanist theologians, the psychic-emotional violence of black womanhood has not been addressed through the logics of shame. Black women's experiences and the relationship between shame and black womanhood have been hushed and silenced, made to bear the burden of its own history of shame. To address this omission, my project bridges black womanhood with what Patricia Ticineto Clough asserts is the aim of the affective turn to

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[11] Hardt makes a similar argument in *The Affective Turn* (Duke UP, 2007), pp. ix- xii.
[12] Literary criticism is largely predicated upon the separation of feeling from judgment. For a history of debates concerning the role of emotions in literary criticism, see, W.K Wimsatt and Monroe Beardley, "The Affective Fallacy," *Sewanee Review*, vol. 57, no. 1, 1949, pp. 31-55. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27537883; Douglas Mao, "The New Critics and the Text Object," *ELH* vol. 63, no. 1, 1996, pp. 227-254. *Project MUSE*, doi: 10.1.1353/elh.1996.0007; Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Harvard UP, 2005).

"…[throw] thought back to the disavowals constitutive of Western industrial capitalist societies, bringing forth ghosted bodies and the traumatized remains of erased histories" (3). Even in those works that address race or gender, often these works do not address these social categories through an intersectional lens. Therefore, this project is revisionary as it introduces black women to contemporary discussions of shame that date back to Tomkins's work in the mid-twentieth century.

I join a cadre of literary scholars who are especially concerned with representations of feelings related to subaltern subjectivities and/or the aesthetics of emotions. Scholars such as Ngai, Kathryn Bond Stockton in *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where 'Black' Meets 'Queer'* (2006), Heather Love in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2009), Darieck Scott in *Extravagant Abjection*: *Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (2010), David Leverenz in *Honor Bound: Race and Shame in America* (2012), and Melissa Harris-Perry in *Sister Citizen, Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (2011) examine affect and emotions as representational strategies in literary texts. Ngai recuperates the aesthetic value of negative affects such as irritation, envy, and disgust. According to Ngai, these affects, which she calls minor emotions, have been overlooked in literature and philosophical discourses that privilege moral affects such as rage and shame. Contrary to major affects, Ngai argues, minor affects produce ambiguous action and their "aboutness" produces aesthetic and political ambiguities (25). However, I argue that when race, gender, and class as well as a history of oppression are fully taken into account, those emotions that Ngai identifies as major function like minor emotions as they disrupt the traditional operations of affect in studies of emotion and affect theory. Stockton, Scott, and Love examine the overlapping politics of shame in theories of black racial identification and queer theory.

Scott's emphasis on the counter-intuitive power of histories of shame and abjection is particularly relevant to my discussion in chapter three on Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). In a political science study that also relies on literary theory, Harris-Perry analyzes trends in black women's involvement in public affairs in order to consider the ways in which black women are reticent to participate in the formal political arena in response to stereotypes of black womanhood. My project offers a challenge to Leverenz's prioritization of male identity in his study. Examining nineteenth and twentieth century American literature and popular culture, Leverenz identifies black and white racial identification as "fictions of honor and shame" (2). His study is largely concerned with tracking the evolution of white honor from the civil rights movement to the political climate surrounding the 2008 presidential campaign of Barack Obama. Following a trend in studies of race, it is the black man who emblematizes the shame of black racial identification in Leverenz's work. Despite the preponderance of shame discourse in literary studies, psychology and psychiatry, and queer theory, the historical, social, and political shape of black women's shame and the influence of black womanhood on literary treatments of shame have been left unexplored.

My dissertation, "To be loved and cry shame: The Legacies of Race and Shame" addresses this elision. In *The Role of Shame in Symptom Formation* (1971), Helen Block Lewis, a pioneering shame theorist, asserts that there is an essential link between shame and women's distinct experiences under systems of patriarchy. She examines the ways in which the neglect of shame is connected to its feminization in Western cultures (4-6). Similarly in *Microsociology: Discourse, Emotion, and Social Structure* (1990), shame theorist Thomas Scheff acknowledges the ways in which modern societies use shame to maintain social bonds, but both theorists neglect to explore the far-reaching implications shame has in maintaining the intersectional

dynamics of race and gender (16). Importantly, Scheff points out the ways in which the widespread inattention to shame in social discourses repudiates the emotional content of communal social bonds and ignores the relevance of emotions to social structures (15).

The title of this project is taken from a concluding phrase in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: "In the place where long grass opens the girl who waited to be loved and cry shame erupts into her separate parts to make it easy for the chewing laughter to swallow her all away" (322). It signifies on this novel because *Beloved* has become the urtext of literary treatments of enslavement and the psychological trauma that descendants of slaves inherit. The ambiguity of this inheritance and the ambivalent narratological aims of *Beloved* have been duly examined as represented in the refrain that "concludes" the text: "this is not a story to pass on." Instead of focusing on this phrase, the equally ambiguous image of Beloved disintegrating as she awaits an affective release inspires my study. Although I do not have the space to examine it here, in many ways, Beloved embodies the shame that the formerly enslaved characters in the text confront.[13] I mark Beloved, then, as an emblem of my dissertation. She not only represents the shame that I anatomize in this work, but she also signals the affective trajectory that I chart from shame to love. Although my project flows from literary representations of the psychic-emotional injuries black women experience during slavery, this mapping is without a doubt a story to pass on and on.[14]

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[13] Consider, for example, that Sethe goes into faux-labor when Beloved initially arrives to her home. The fluid Sethe releases makes "…a mudhole too deep to be witnessed without shame" (61). Sethe is also confronted with shame through Beloved's urgent desires to hear narratives of slavery: "…she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross" (73).
[14] Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (Holt McDougal, 1970) is obviously absent from my discussion of shame. The subject of shame in this novel has been examined in J. Brooks Bouson, "The Devastation That Even Causal Racial Contempt Can Cause: Chronic Shame, Traumatic

The first chapter on *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* uses Jacobs's slave narrative to examine shame as a psychic-emotional injury. My emphasis on psychic-emotional injury derives from an emergent discourse in psychology called moral injury that attends to the psychological and emotional disturbances that emerge when a person remembers participating in an event that infringes upon deeply held beliefs and codes of conduct—ethical, moral, and/or religious. I apply this concept to the sexual conduct of formerly enslaved women under the influence of the institution of slavery to identify how the shame/shameless paradox is inaugurated during slavery. I examine how this condition of shame arises in *Incidents* as a liminal status that Jacobs's pseudonymous narrator Linda Brent negotiates through the narrative construction of Jacobs's memories of slavery. I demonstrate the ways in which Brent manages shame within a culture that has designated black women as incapable of shame to direct readers' attention to the psychological, moral, and spiritual offenses of slavery in the narrative. Furthermore, this chapter begins to develop the heritability of shame in the literary landscape as Brent manages the ways in which her status as a formerly enslaved woman can be passed down to her immediate children. This chapter considers how Jacobs's anxieties challenge her literary descendants who offer contemporary reenactments of slavery that focus on corporeal engagements with the past as well as black feminist theorists who focus on the body as the main site of healing and redress in contemporary discourses regarding slavery and its afterlife.

The second chapter is composed of two integrated parts. First, I turn to the afterlife of slavery in the post-Reconstruction era to examine the ways in which Ida B. Wells-Barnett mobilizes the shame/shameless paradox in her anti-lynching campaign *Southern Horrors* (1892).

Abuse, and Racial Self-Loathing in *The Bluest Eye*," *Quiet as it's Kept: Shame Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, (State U New York P, 2000) pp. 23-45; and Kathleen Woodward, "Traumatic Shame: Toni Morrison, Television Culture, and the Cultural Politics of Emotions," *Cultural Critique* vol. 46. pp. 210-240.

Scandal has been an often-noted pattern in her career as an anti-lynching activist, as the activist mobilized shame and embarrassment during her traveling campaigns as well as through her methods of reporting. Wells-Barnett identifies scandal as an important feature of her method of protest in "Appeal from America to the World," an essay in her second pamphlet *A Red Record* (1895). She writes that the success of her anti-lynching campaign did not occur "because there was any latent spirit of justice voluntarily asserting itself…but because the entire American people now feel, both North and South, that they are objects in the gaze of the civilized world and that for every lynching humanity asks that America render its account to civilization itself" (132). Wells-Barnett toured Europe twice to expose the dastardly deeds of America's lynching project, attempting to use an international gaze to shame the American nation. She further writes in *A Red Record*, "This crusade will determine whether that civilization can maintain itself by itself, or whether anarchy shall prevail; whether this Nation shall write itself down a success at self government, or in deepest humiliation admit its failure complete…" (155). Later chapters will further interrogate the efficacy of shame as a political tactic and will address the problems that have arisen during acts of protest that have attempted to mobilize shame, humiliation, and guilt.

Second, I use Jack Thorne's rarely studied text, *Hanover, or the Persecution of the Lowly. Story of Wilmington Massacre* (1901), to illuminate another shame-strategy whereby Wells-Barnett's dismantles the shame/shameless paradox to bring the rape of black women into public discourse during an era that marked black women already guilty of the sex-crimes committed against them. I argue that Thorne signifies on Wells-Barnett through Molly Pierrepont, a figure of shame and salvation. Furthermore, I contend that his reading of the activist prefigures and extends the socio-ethic of resistance that womanist scholars such as

Emilie Maureen Townes and Angela Sims formulate through their examinations of Wells-Barnett's campaigns. As Pierrepont is a character whose shame is a projection of the community around her, Thorne demonstrates the ways in which male authors attach shame to black womanhood to mobilize emotions as a social form rather than a manifestation of individual self-expression. Admittedly, this formulation is also in keeping with the conventions of late nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic fiction, a genre that Thorne employs.

The third chapter focuses on the ways in which black communities reproduce the shame/shameless paradox by conforming to notions of respectability and adopting patriarchal structures that depend on legacies of slavery in *The Color Purple*. I argue that the lived experience of shame emerges within Walker's reformulation of the epistolary form. I primarily focus on the I-you split (of Celie's consciousness) that Walker synthesizes with the epistolarity of Celie's letters to God. I identify this I-you split as indicative of the lived experience of shame. Through the lens of Celie's shame and Shug's shamelessness, I consider how we might imagine black women's history as a resource, to dismantle hegemonic social arrangements and reform communities around the counterintuitive power of abjection that is experienced at the height of social shame. I identify how the characters in *The Color Purple* incur shame towards their own freedom to demonstrate the human ability to move from shame into love.

The coda addresses the limitations of a feminist politics of shame that has been devised without integration of the particularities of black womanhood. To interrogate shame and a feminist future, I examine the shame-tactics that were used during the 2017 Women's March on Washington. My analysis of the march is primarily interested in the critical questions that the march raises regarding the efficacy of shame during inter-racial and intersectional acts of political protest. I root these questions in the literary representations of inter-racial shame-based

protests that this project engages. In contrast to the ways in which shame operated in the march, the coda proposes using the framework of the shame/shameless paradox to formulate a (black) feminist politics of shame. Drawing on scholars such as Brittany Cooper who interrogate the ethics and theory of a black feminist future, the coda proposes that if there is a metaphysics of black womanhood, as Cooper has questioned, then the shame/shameless paradox offers a lens through which to see the internal and external drama that inheres in black womanhood. As Hortense Spillers reminds us in "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book":

> In that regard, the names by which I am called in the public place render an example of signifying property plus. In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made in excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness. The personal pronouns are offered in the service of a collective function.

Chapter One: "The Scar Too Deep to Touch: Shame as an Injury in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*"

> If shame be attached to her conduct, it is such shame as would be elsewhere felt for a venial impropriety.
>
> William Harper, "On Slavery"

In *Women, Race, and Class*, Angela Davis documents the story of a black woman whose great-grandmother recalled her experiences of slavery through the scars on her body. The elder woman candidly recounted battles that had left impressions upon her skin. But there was one scar she refused to narrate. Her great-granddaughter questioned her about this particular scar, and her foremother only offered the following cautionary tale: "White men are as low as dogs, child, stay away from them" (Davis 26). After her death, her great-granddaughter discovered that she received this scar during a physical altercation with her master's son. She later conceived a female child named Ellen. Even without the great-grandmother's testimony, we can surmise what took place. Yet, we are still left to wonder about the particular impression of this scar as the great-grandmother protects the legacies of her memory. Perhaps the scar was too private to disclose. Perhaps the scar was too exposed to heal. Perhaps the scar still rankled. The formerly enslaved woman's refusal to relay specific details about her experience has important implications for where we locate the injuries of slavery, and most importantly, how those injuries perdure post-emancipation.

The great-grandmother keeps this particular memory to herself as she transmits to her descendants only what later generations need to know about the experience. Her nondisclosure is suggestive of "the veil" in the slave narrative tradition. The veil refers to a common phrasing in

slave narratives, such as, "But let us drop a veil over these proceedings too terrible to relate."[15] In this chapter, I will investigate "the veil" as a means through which Jacobs negotiates shame as a psychic-emotional injury[16] in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Previous scholars have understood this phrase and similar rhetorical efforts to maintain narrative distance in the text as capitulations to a white, middle class reading public. In *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, William Zinsser, for example, explains, "But because those writers wanted to elevate the argument and not anger their masters, they 'dropped a veil' over the terrible details of their daily existence; no trace of their thoughts and emotions can be found" (26). Through this logic, the veil is read as a tool for formerly enslaved authors to communicate with a white readership; thus, the preponderance of emotional language and sentimental scenes of slave narratives bear little to no relationship to authors' own distress as writers of deeply terrifying experiences. However, this chapter will consider how the veil served a dual purpose, allowing writers of slave narratives to confront internal psychic conflicts and emotional injuries that persisted after emancipation.

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[15] Robert Stepto first used "the veil" in a literary critical context in *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (U of Illinois P, 1979).

[16] My use of psychic-emotional injury appropriates an emergent field in psychology called moral injury and in feminist theory called spirit injury. I am using psychic-emotional injury in this chapter to prioritize Jacobs's sense of her own moral offense, as it is dynamically represented in the text as a corporeal, psychological, and spiritual wound. As the chapter progresses, I use psychic-emotional injury to identify a conglomerate of violations, primarily internal, that Brent identifies through shame. Psychologists use moral injury to refer to trauma-related internal conflicts that many war veterans repress during active duty and are forced to negotiate when they return home from war in order to reconcile behavior that violated their core ethical and moral beliefs. In the conclusion of this chapter, I expound how my work contributes to the concept of "spirit injury" in critical feminist discourses. For a full discussion of moral injury, see Robert Emmett Meagher's *Killing from the Inside Out: Moral Injury and Just War* (Cascade, 2014); and Kopacz, Marek S. et al. "Moral Injury: An Emerging Clinical Construct with Implications for Social Work Education," *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought* vol. 34 no. 3, 2015, pp. 252-264.

Towards this end, I will think through “the veil” as a shame response in *Incidents* that Jacobs primarily manifests through Linda Brent, her pseudonymous narrator. Through this shame response, Jacobs negotiates how she exposes the violations she experienced as an enslaved woman. She offers insight into how shame accounts for an injury that persists well after the offense has taken place, continuing to distress her through memories of slavery. Brent relays, “The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day” (49). Brent, however, does not re-objectify Jacobs, but she mobilizes Jacobs’s psychic and emotional injuries as the narrator. I consider three testimonies in the text to discover the ways in which Jacobs uses Brent to reconstruct her past experiences and mobilize the injury of shame through the narrative construction of *Incidents*, all the while she protects herself from events that continue to distress her memories of slavery. Although we can predict Jacobs’s distress as an author, we can only make sure claims about how Brent is affected, as a figure of Jacobs’s own construction of herself. These testimonies include: first, the staging of a slave auction with Brent’s grandmother, Aunt Martha; second, an inverted courtroom proceeding with Brent’s mistress, Mrs. Flint; and third, a thwarted intimate confession with Brent’s daughter. By examining Jacobs/Brent’s shame as an injury, I forward a paradox of shame and shamelessness as representative of the enslaved woman’s perilous predicament during slavery. Through this reading of shame, I also suggest how we might use Brent’s testimony of her life during slavery to examine how injuries of oppression extend beyond the initial crime of victimization. Furthermore, I conclude this chapter with a few meditations on how Brent’s recounting of shame as an injury offers a challenge to twenty and twenty-first century depictions of slavery that tend to overinvest in the body to identify slavery’s legacies. In this discussion, I will refer to both Jacobs and Brent to distinguish between the deliberate rhetorical strategies of the author and the persona of the narrator.

Jean Fagan Yellin confirmed the autobiographical basis of *Incidents*,[17] which now holds an essential place in American literature as one of the most widely read narratives by a formerly enslaved woman. Still, a critical debate continues regarding the believability of Jacobs's representation of sexual victimization. The central question of this debate is "was she raped?" which has significantly influenced scholarship on *Incidents*. Engaging this question, readers and writers seek to unearth and read between the lines of Jacobs's text in order to expose the "truth" of her relationships with Dr. Flint, her master; and Mr. Sands, a neighboring white man. These debates find plausible reasons to suggest that Jacobs does not reveal the complete "truth" of her affairs with Dr. Flint and Mr. Sands in the text. In readings that search for the "true" nature of Jacobs's sexual experiences, critics forward strategies such as masking and under-telling to disclose what Elizabeth Fox-Genovese considers "the great factual lie" of *Incidents*.[18] Another scholar, Novian Whitsitt, argues that Jacobs uses the black cultural tradition of masking to communicate her rape to a black audience as she simultaneously avoids disclosing her experiences to a white audience.[19] Similarly, Gabrielle Foreman argues that Jacobs's "under-tells" her experiences to hide the truth and maintain her modesty.[20] Through a psychoanalytical reading, Anne Dalton finds that Jacobs subconsciously reveals her rape through representations of "hearing," as the ear is the location of virginal women's molestation in research on sexual

[17] *Incidents* was not regarded as an authentic first-hand account of slavery until Yellin discovered original transcripts and documents. See Jean Fagen Yellin, "Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative," *American Literature*, vol. 53 no. 3, 1981, pp. 479-486. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2926234.

[18] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (U of North Carolina P, 1988) pp. 392.

[19] Novian Whitsitt, "Reading Between the Lines: The Black Cultural Tradition of Masking in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,*" *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 31 no. 1, 2010, pp. 73-88. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/10/5259/fronjwomestud.31.1.73.

[20] P. Gabrielle Foreman, "Manifest in Signs: The Politics of Sex and Representation in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *Harriet Jacobs and Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, edited by Deborah M. Garfield and Rafi a Zafara. (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 77.

abuse.[21] Through different frameworks, these writers offer similar challenges to the text, and although probable, these discourses problematically revise Jacobs's narrative. For example, both Whitsitt and Foreman allude to Dr. Flint as the father of at least one of Jacobs's children. To make this case, these critics disprove Brent's justification for entering a relationship with Mr. Sands and question her rationale regarding Dr. Flint's behavior towards her after she reveals her pregnancy.

As literary scholars, we are surely apt to discover gaps and inconsistencies in narratives, but the previous readings lead me to question when our quests for historical fact contradict the text's representative status. Even more importantly, in the case of *Incidents*, we must ask, how such readings violate the narratological aims of Jacobs's retelling, aims evident in the way in which she discloses a troublesome history that leaves her still deeply injured. In *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Deborah Gray White explains how difficult it is to glean information from extant sources from the colonial and the antebellum periods in America in order to gain access to formerly enslaved black women's private lives. In addition to enslaved women's virtual nonexistence in many early American records, she writes, "…so much of what we would like to know about slave women can never be known because they masked their thoughts and personalities in order to protect valued parts of their lives from white and male invasion" (24). Although White encourages scholars to make inferences from slave narratives, newspapers, interviews, and other sources in order to acknowledge the historical significance and the particular presence of black women, I argue that we should be equally concerned with how

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[21] Anne B. Dalton, "The Devil and the Virgin: Writing Sexual Abuse in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," in *Violence, Silence, and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression*, edited by Deidre Lashgari (UP Virginia, 1995), pp. 47.

we re-write the narratives that these women left behind. They wanted to protect the details of their narratives from white and male invasion, as well as from black and female exposure.

If we consider Jacobs's narrative alongside that great-grandmother's recollections in the introduction to this chapter, we are forced to grapple with how such readings of Jacobs's possible rape might stress a scar and miss essential parts of the message. In my reading, I discover what Jacobs communicates to the reader--and also what she does not communicate--through Jacobs/Brent's shame, which does not need to be unearthed in the text; rather, it begs to be duly noticed. To put it simply, perhaps we have missed the relevance of shame due to its prevalence in the text. Shame is essential to Jacobs's exposition of "the life of a slave girl," as she identifies shame as the catalyst and condition of black womanhood during slavery: "She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery, whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink" (28). Here, shame is a collective, perpetual state of slave womanhood. The illocution compounds shame with sin and misery, marking a poisonous consumption and demonstrating the mental and spiritual anguish of that which is forbidden and perhaps cannot be kept clean.

Expressions of shame are like a refrain of *Incidents*. The author promises to illustrate the "depth of degradation" during an era that ascribed domesticity, purity, and silence as ideals of womanhood for her intended readers of middle-class white women. The events of Jacobs's life, which include her master's offer for a sexual liaison, an illicit affair outside of marriage, and two children born of this affair, were sure to offend her readers' Victorian sensibilities. Therefore, expressions of shame seemingly function as requests for pardon as Brent engages a sociocultural code of morality with readers. This reading is reflected in scholarship on *Incidents* that has deftly

explored the ways in which Jacobs renegotiates the cult of true womanhood,[22] a nineteenth to early twentieth century moral ideal. Scholars have demonstrated how Jacobs crafts a narrative that would expose the moral degradation of enslaved women without offending the "decorum" of her readers, all the while maintaining her own moral integrity. This narrative is similar to Zinseer's reading of the veil as a strategy whereby former slaves mitigate the brutalities of the institution for a white readership. Though irrefutable, this reading suggests that Jacobs is primarily concerned about the niceties of nineteenth century Victorian ideals as she exposes the shameful outrages of slavery. This reading is limited in that it does not fully acknowledge Jacobs as a moral agent, irrefutably influenced by Victorian sensibilities, but also outside of its constraints.[23] If we, however, read shame as a moral injury, we can discern how Jacobs uses the veil to manage the scar too deep to touch.

In his comprehensive study of the first century of black autobiographies before emancipation, William Andrews counters Zinsser's reading of the veil and explains that many formerly enslaved men and women express an "anguishing mental and emotional struggle" (7) in their narratives. Examining the process of authorship, he continues:

> Reconstructing their past lives required many ex-slaves to undergo a disquieting psychic immersion into their former selves as slaves. During this journey backward and within, a freeperson was forced to relive the most psychically

[22] See Frances Smith Foster, "Writing Across the Color Line: Harriet Jacobs and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,*" *Written by Herself: Literary Production by African American Women, 1746-1892* (Indiana UP, 1993).
[23] Deborah Gray White asks an important question concerning the way black enslaved women were influenced by Victorian sensibilities: "[Black Women] stood beyond the boundaries of Victorian womanhood, but did they want the empty deference given to those within its bounds?" (16), See *Arn't I a Woman: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (Norton, 1985).

> charged moments of his or her past and to be reminded of thoughts and deeds about which he or she had come to feel very ambivalent. (7)

Andrews's account of ex-slave author's journeys "backward and within" insightfully describes how the psychic-emotional injury collapses space and time, recurring as a chronic internal wound that writing risks amplifying. This internal wound demonstrates that injuries of slavery include physical injuries as well as moral, psychological, and spiritual violations as slavery often forced enslaved people to transgress their own belief systems to survive.

Lydia Maria Childs introduces the dilemma of the text when she writes, "I am well aware that many will accuse me of indecorum for presenting these pages to the public; for the experiences of this intelligent and *much-injured* woman belong to a class which some call delicate subjects, and others indelicate" (my emphasis 5). On the one hand, claims to slave women's "delicacy" supported slavery as a patriarchal institution that protected the moral, spiritual, and physical wellbeing of the enslaved, allowing the master to have complete control of enslaved women. On the other hand, claims to black women's "indelicacy" justified the master's use of enslaved women for his own pleasure, often sexual. This quandary left enslaved women unprotected from the whims of their masters, and subject to the irreconcilability of their own sense of moral, spiritual, and psychological offense. Enslaved women were shamed and shameless, which hereafter I will refer to as the shame/shameless paradox.[24] Childs calls attention to this moral offense in her reference to Jacobs as a "much injured" woman. In 1833,

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[24] I refer to this predicament as the shame/shameless paradox rather than the sham*ed*/shameless paradox to identify shame as a state rather than a time-sensitive experience. Jacobs supports this decision by marking the inevitability of shame: "She [an enslaved woman] drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery, whereof her persecuted race are compelled to drink" (28); She also suggests that shame is a condition: "…she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed" (31); and she negotiates with shame as a recurring, timeless injury: "The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying day" (49).

she echoes this rhetoric of shame in *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*. She explains, "The negro woman is unprotected either by law or public opinion. She is the property of her master, and her daughters are his property. They are allowed to have no conscientious scruples, no sense of shame" (23). It is important to acknowledge that men encountered humiliations and degradations as slaves, but this chapter is concerned with shame in relationship to black womanhood, which Childs alludes to through the matrilineal lineage of shame and shamelessness in her appeal.

The shame/shameless paradox produces injuries of slavery as Brent narrates her experiences in the text in a tone that reflects her shame. My emphasis on tone relies on Sianne Ngai's formulation of tone as a formal aesthetic concept in *Ugly Feelings* (2005). Ngai moves beyond considerations of emotion that are characteristic of sentimentalism and sentimentality whereby tone refers to "purely subjective or personal experience" of reading and largely depends on the feelings of the spectator and the emotional response of the reader (29). In this way, her concept of tone is useful for my project, as I am primarily concerned with readings of *Incidents* that do not overinvest in Jacobs's white women readers. Ngai's concept of tone also differs from the approach of New Critics, which deemphasizes emotions in aesthetic judgments of literary texts (29). According to Ngai, the "feeling tone" of an artwork is "…its global or organizing affect, its general disposition or orientation toward its audience and the world" (28). The "feeling tone" raises critical questions: Who is the subject of this emotion? Where do we identify this emotion? What's the relationship between the feeling tone and the reader? In consideration of these questions, I identify the shame/shameless paradox as the feeling tone of *Incidents*.

Possessing an abundance of meanings, the ambiguity of the shame/shameless paradox points to the moral, spiritual, and psychological dilemma of Brent's predicament as suspended

between shame and shamelessness. For shame signifies the negative feelings of embarrassment and humiliation that Brent is subject to as she experiences public and private insults: "I felt humiliated that my brother should stand by, and listen to such language as would be addressed only to a slave" (Jacobs 54). To be shamed also signals her readers' social judgment, which Brent works to avoid through statements such as, "I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others" (49). Yet, the ability to feel shame is Brent's claim to moral superiority, as she maintains in the statement, "I know that some are too much brutalized by slavery to feel the humiliation of their position; but many feel it most acutely, and shrink from the memory of it" (27). Here, shame is the affective measure of the depth of degradation, and shamelessness a marker of enslaved woman's unconscious moral depravity. To shrink, or exhibit a shame response, designates the moral endurance of those who have been shamed, but are not totally degraded because they are self-aware of the effects of oppression. Importantly, the ability to manifest a full shame response is rendered retrospectively, as formative to the process of remembrance and reflection.

Therefore, I contend that Jacobs is working through her shame, anatomizing it for herself and her readers; shame sometimes seems to be an authentic expression and at other times, it is put to use for conceptual and explanatory power, reflected in Brent's resolve: "…but to be an object of interest to a man who is not married, and who is not her master, is agreeable to the pride and feelings of a slave, if her miserable situation has left her any pride or sentiment. It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion" (48). Although the language of shame is absent, shame is expressed as the "feeling" and "sentiment" motivating Brent's attempt to mitigate her "miserable situation" by entering a sexual arrangement with Mr. Sands. Although Brent describes this decision as an expression of her own agency, her

arrangement with Mr. Sands still offends her moral beliefs. It is the decision to become involved with Mr. Sands that she would "gladly forget" because "the remembrance fills [her] with sorrow and shame" (47). However, in the previous quotation, she acknowledges that her relationship with Mr. Sands allows her to escape the full depth of degradation that she is subject to as an enslaved woman. Although the arrangement with Mr. Sands leaves shame as the only option, this sense of shame is slightly palliated by Brent's agency and ability to consent. However, just moments later, she claims, "there may be sophistry in all of this" (48), frustrating any singular reading of her shame and suggesting its immutability during slavery.

The inevitability of the enslaved woman's shame grieves the narrative voice of *Incidents*; yet, the shame/shameless paradox is only reconcilable, albeit provisionally, through the construction of the narrative itself. In this way, the moral injury suggests a deep repression of experiences over time that manifests through painful remembrances. Brent demonstrates, "And now, reader, I come to a period in my unhappy life, which I would gladly forget if I could. The remembrance fills me with sorrow and shame. It pains me to tell you of it; but I have promised to tell you the truth, and I will do it honestly, let it cost me what it may" (47). The cost of Brent's telling is two-fold: she risks incurring shame from the negative judgment of her readers and compounding the shame she endured as an enslaved woman. She also relives and mobilizes her experiences of slavery affectively as she negotiates shame in order to manage the way her testimony continues to cause her pain. Her coupling of sorrow with shame suggests the intensity of deep distress as if Brent is opening the wound of her testimony for her readers.

It is this notion of a moral violation that inaugurates the text and necessitates Jacobs's entrance into the slave narrative tradition. The epigraph bears the following words: "I want to add my testimony to that of abler pens to convince the people of the Free States what Slavery

really is. Only by experience can any one realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations" (1). Jacobs identifies the institution of slavery as the epitome of irreconcilable shame, an "abomination," or as the London publication of the text designates in its title*: The Deeper Wrong: Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1862). In the epigraph as well as the London edition of the text, Brent foregrounds the psychic-emotional injury as a totalizing wound. She demonstrates the physical and psychosocial conflict of the injury through descriptions of bondage that are all encompassing: "I stood a moment gazing at the hateful man who claimed a right to rule me, body and soul" (Jacobs 35). Brent identifies mastery as a corporeal and metaphysical violation. She levels the master's claim to her body with his claim to her soul to establish both the material and immaterial violations of slavery. Through this leveling, Jacobs gives substance to the slave woman's soul, condemning the master for injuries that can and cannot be seen, as Dr. Flint attempts to master both the body and the essence of that embodiment.

Dr. Flint wants to subdue Brent and force her to "consent" by penetrating her moral resolve. Brent explains that her master "began to whisper foul words" in her ear and "peopled [her] young mind with unclean images" (26), in an attempt to "corrupt the pure principles [her] grandmother had instilled" (26). These violations are described as an injury that penetrates Brent as she is left "trembling" and "shrinking" (26). These experiences instigate a transition, from girlhood, "a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl" (26) into a state of "premature knowing" (47). This transition suggests that Dr. Flint quickens Brent into the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood. To thwart Dr. Flint's degrading behavior towards her, Brent incurs shame, as her only choice to avoid Dr. Flint is to have an affair with Mr. Sands. Brent renders this choice as a moral descent: "What could I do? I thought and thought, til I became desperate, and made a

plunge into the abyss" (47). This choice fills Brent with "sorrow and shame"(47), as she reflects on her agency: "I will not try to screen myself behind the plea of compulsion for a master; for it was not so" (47). The two children she births from this affair become her leverage against Dr. Flint, as well as the embodiment of her shame.

Brent provisionally reconciles the multi-dimensional effects of the moral injury through acts of testimony that dismantle the public/private dimensions of the shame/shameless paradox. In her seminal piece on black feminist criticism, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," Mae Gwendolyn Henderson proposes an analytical framework for interpreting what she coins as the heteroglossic voices of the other(s) within and the other(s) without black women's writings. This model allows black women to be understood as speaking through and speaking to varied subject positions including race, gender, sexuality, and other categories. According to Henderson, the creative consciousness of black women writers is "at once a dialogue between self and society and between self and psyche," which allows black women to "deal not only with the external manifestations of racism and sexism but also with the results of those distortions internalized within our consciousness of ourselves and one another" (19). Henderson's heteroglossic model draws on a pivotal tradition of testimony in black religious culture and practice. I will use this theory to illustrate *Incidents* as a form of testimony, which allows Jacobs to address her shame as an injury and to assuage her psychic pain in the narrative.

Brent effectuates reconciliation in the narrative by inscribing her scars on slave mistresses and confessing to Aunt Martha. The relevance of these two competing dialogues is structured in the composition of the text, through its opening in the epigraph and its closing at the conclusion of the narrative. The second epigraph quotes Isaiah 32:9: "Rise up, ye women that

are at ease! Hear my voice, ye careless daughters! Give ear unto my speech" (1). This rallying call is directed towards white women who are the ideal readers of the narrative. Justice, in this chapter of the Bible, comes after the women who have ignored the plight of those in bondage bear the burden of judgment. These women are incited to repent after they experience a similar impoverishment as those in bondage, which ultimately brings redemption and peace to the land. This scripture speaks of Jacobs's sociopolitical message of liberation and her aim to implicate white women in the brutalities of slavery. But the last paragraph of the text speaks to another impetus toward which the narrative moves:

> It has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet the retrospection is not altogether without solace; for with those gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea.

Brent's memory re-incites the offenses of slavery and her pain evidences the psychic-emotional injury. The narrator's ambivalent longing to forget is suggestive of "the veil," yet, beyond the veil lies possibilities for healing in recollections of Aunt Martha. Brent speaks both within and without: she has an internal dialogue for self-reclamation, as well as an outward discourse to a racist and sexist society that has legally and culturally denied her access to self-respect. In "Three Stabilizers of Memory: Affect—Symbol—Trauma," Aleida Assmann demonstrates that memories "are not preserved as encoded information but are constantly reconstructed. In opposition to the static model of storage and retention, we are presented with a dynamic model of continuous reconstruction and elastic adaptability to the demands of an ever changing present" (15). She further explains that memories are reconstructed to serve current needs, and the image

of floating, weight-less, "light, fleecy clouds" at the end of *Incidents* suggests a reach for an internal, psychological state that is unburdened by the injuries that continue to stress the formerly enslaved woman. My discussion of shame also builds on Assmann's theory that people are only conscious of memories that have emotional impact and leave emotional impressions. According to Assmann, affective memories have an "apodictic quality" that fosters a "living connection to the past" and works against the process of continuous forgetting (19, 29). As Jacobs reconstructs her memories in the narrative, she encodes her challenges to slavery through her affective manipulations of the public/private dimensions of shame.

Brent's need to reconstruct her memories to confess to Aunt Martha is evidenced in the text: "I thought I could bear my shame if I could only be reconciled to my grandmother" (51), and later, "I went to my grandmother. My lips moved to make confession, but the words stuck in my throat" (50). Such language—"words stuck in [her] throat"—is apt to describe Jacobs's predicament as the author of *Incidents*. In a letter to her friend Amy Post, an abolitionist and women's rights activist who encourages Jacobs to write her narrative for the abolitionist cause, Jacobs writes:

> your proposal to me has been thought over and over again but not with out some most painful remembrances dear Amy if it was the life of a Heroine with no degradation associated with it far better to have been one of the starving poor of Ireland whose bones had to bleach on the highways than to have been a slave with the curse of slavery stamped upon yourself and Children your purity of heart and kindly sympathies won me at one time to speak of my children it is the only words that has passed my lips since I left my Mothers door I had determined to let others think as they pleased but my lips should be sealed and no one had a right to

> question me for this reason when I first came North I avoided the Antislavery people as much as possible because I felt that I could not be honest and tell the whole truth [sic][25]

The injury is apparent in Jacobs's "painful remembrance," which her memory seemingly lacerates upon reflection. In the letter, Jacobs seems to prefer a dishonorable death to relaying the shameful degradations she endured during slavery. She emphasizes that her shame is vicarious and a generational curse; one that she passes down to her children, perhaps through *partus sequitur ventrem*, the legal doctrine holding that slaves follow the condition of their mother. In *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, Jennifer L. Morgan illuminates the "fictive biological marker conveyed by the mother" (4), which Jacobs identifies in the letter to Post as the "curse of slavery." Morgan explains that women's labor on plantations and ideas about black women's sexuality were directly linked to enslaved women's wombs and reproductive capacities (7). Although this "appropriation of black women's reproductive legacies," (9) to use Morgan's insightful phrasing, occurred immediately following African women's capture in Africa and their translocation to new world colonies, the association between enslaved women's reproductive role and the continuation of slavery was socio-politically concretized in *partus sequitur ventrum*. This mandate legally and culturally designated black women as figures of disinheritance, rooted in but also exceeding the slave's property status. The stigma of *partus sequitur ventrum* endured beyond the physical and legal state of such a condition, which Jacobs demonstrates as she laments passing down her own injuries to her descendants, even after she and her children are living as liberated people.

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[25] Jacobs wrote this letter to Post after December 20, 1852 and before February 14, 1853. This transcription, void of punctuation, is offered in Yale University's digital archive of Harriet Jacobs's letters. The original letter is housed in the University of Rochester Library.

Perhaps, it is through Jacobs's construction of Aunt Martha that she is able to return home narratologically to reconcile the psychic-emotional injury of slavery. As the letter to Post demonstrates, Aunt Martha's home marks the initial site of memory repression, as Jacobs writes that she remains silent about her experiences after she leaves her mother's door. In the narrative, Aunt Martha is the only woman in Brent's family to own a home near the plantation, but perhaps the door here refers to the door of Jacobs's moral consciousness, as Aunt Martha is the moral authority of the text. Aunt Martha symbolizes the home, the catalyst for the painful process of remembrance, and she stabilizes Jacobs's identity as the author reconstructs her scars and travels "backward and within" her experiences of slavery to speak to a public readership as she negotiates internal conflicts. [26] Aunt Martha does not remove the injury, but by her grace, shame is a bearable scar.

Aunt Martha demonstrates the combined and interrelated personal and political forms of Jacobs's speech acts in *Incidents* in the auction block scene where she is presented for sale. Aunt Martha is an old, respected enslaved woman in the community who provides services for many white families. Dr. Flint, who assumes ownership of Aunt Martha after her mistress dies,

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[26] Here, my appropriation of moral injury suggests areas to enhance current research in psychology. Military duty is served for a specific length of time and discussions of moral injury identify the return home to a place of familiarity as the trigger for internal conflict and deeply felt shame, the significance of which Jonathan Shay marks in the title of his book: *Odysseus in America: Combat Trauma and the Trials of Homecoming* (Scribner, 2002). Although current studies have not fully fleshed out how veterans temporarily reconcile or grapple with moral dilemmas at the time of the event, case studies suggest that, in most instances, morality is suspended. The suspension of morality is similar to enslaved women's negotiation of the shame/shameless paradox. It is pivotal to the "incidents" in Jacobs's life, as Brent discloses, "…the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and in fact, renders the practice of them impossible" (48). Brent's complex negotiations with moral offenses throughout the narrative suggest that future research of moral injury in psychology should examine the ways in which the "home" can be spatiotemporally refigured. What I mean here is Jacobs's narrative opens up the question, how might health care specialists use creative sources as an avenue for reconciliation most especially, when there is no "home" to return to?

decides to sell Aunt Martha in private although her previous mistress emancipates Aunt Martha in her will. Aunt Martha "understood very well that he was ashamed of the job," and she requests to be sold at the market because she "was determined the public should know of it" (13). Dr. Flint's shame is equivocal and evokes questions in regards to how the institution of slavery generates shame across the racial/power divide. It is more likely that he does not want to make a public display of his own financial distress than it is a sign of moral conflict regarding the sale of an old woman who was emancipated by her previous owner. Although Aunt Martha cannot make a legal claim to her freedom, she demands to be recognized as a subject with agency through this public act of submission to the auction block.

The auction block is a formative symbol of the shame/shameless paradox, as it enacted and instantiated the property status of black people as bodies for the market. The auction block expressed the economic rights slave masters reserved to buy, trade, and transform individuals into commodities of exchange. This exchange value of slaves was enacted through public spectacles that humiliated slaves and demanded that slaves comply with their own degradation. Slaves were often forced to participate in their own sale by appearing festive, jovial, and void of sentience as slave masters disrobed, fondled, and violated slaves to satisfy the public, white, master class. [27] Furthermore, slave auctions consummated the socioeconomic and sexual interrelations of the institution of slavery. Aunt Martha disrupts the shame/shameless paradox by submitting herself to this culture; in so doing, she undermines the usual conventions of slave auctions. In his landmark study, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Walter Johnson explains, "By law and by custom, white women had little business being in the slave

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[27] For a full discussion of slave auctions, see Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford UP, 1997); Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Harvard UP, 2001).

market…The slave market was a site of perceived sexual and social disorder, not any place for a white lady to be" (89-90). Yet, white women intervene in this scene in *Incidents*, setting right Aunt Martha's claim to freedom. As Aunt Martha "quietly awaited her fate," the white women in the audience cry out "Shame! Shame! Who is going to sell you, aunt Marthy? Don't stand there! That is no place for *you*" (original emphasis, 13). Aunt Martha transforms this public spectacle by morally implicating the white women in the audience who bear witness to the outrage of her sale. Conventional slave auctions readied women for the market and marked black women as slaves through their ability to perform sexual labor. However, Aunt Martha retains her status as a self-possessed woman. This scene foreshadows the ways in which Brent will dismantle the shame/shameless paradox by displacing the veil onto her slave mistress, Mrs. Flint, who gives partial expression to Brent's injuries. Displacing her injuries on her mistress, she exposes the complicity of white women in the racial and sexual ideologies of patriarchal power in the antebellum South.

By intervening in the usual conventions and theatrics of the auction block, Brent's representation of Aunt Martha enacts a deconstructive performance of the institution of slavery, "acting out" the possibility that white women have to address and remedy the psychic-emotional and physical violations that slave women endured. Brent illustrates, "I have myself known two Southern wives who exhorted their husbands to free those slaves towards whom they stood in a 'parental relation'; and their quest was granted. The husbands blushed before the superior nobleness of their natures" (33). Brent depicts these two southern wives as "honorable exceptions" to southern mistresses who ignore the ways in which their husbands breed their own slaves "as pigs on the plantation" (33). The distinction Brent draws between "wives" and "mistresses" is not to be missed. These wives express their indignation and outrage by shaming

the master, which the enslaved woman is without power to effect and which also seems to have been a rare occurrence on slave plantations. According to Deborah Gray White, white women rarely interfered with the degradation of enslaved women because the system of slavery established white women's own identities and instantiated their place in the community (7). Therefore, slave mistresses often reinforced the corrupt practices of slave owners through their own malevolent acts. The distinction between wives and mistresses is further demonstrated through the character of Mrs. Flint, whom Brent forces to bear witness to the scars of her testimony. In the following courtroom scene, Mrs. Flint is a foil to the women who cry out in protest at the slave auction.

Brent reconstructs a court scene that alludes to how legal conditions and cultural beliefs secure the shame/shameless paradox. Mrs. Flint learns of her husband's arrangement to move his daughter to sleep in his room in order to make Brent, who is assigned to their child as a nighttime nurse, more accessible to him at night. Mrs. Flint confronts Brent and the scene reads as a courtroom testimony: "Will you answer truly all the questions I ask?" Mrs. Flint asks Brent, and requires her to take an oath: "lay your hand on your heart, kiss this holy book, and swear before God that you tell me the truth" (31). Mrs. Flint assumes mastery over Brent's tale, further instructing her to "take this stool, sit down, look me directly in the face, and tell me all that has passed between your master and you" (31). However, in the next paragraph, Brent regains narrative authority, and importantly, affective agency through the following testimony:

> I did as she ordered. As I went on with my account her color changed frequently, she wept, and sometimes groaned. She spoke in tones so sad, that I was touched by her grief. The tears came to my eyes; but I was soon convinced that her emotions arose from anger and wounded pride. She felt that her marriage vows

> were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband's perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed. (31)

This quasi-courtroom scene is indicative of the veil of the slave narrative tradition. Only Brent and Mrs. Flint have access to the full testimony as Brent pulls back from communicating the specific details of Dr. Flint's sexual harassment and violation of her. However, Brent conveys the ordeal through Mrs. Flint's emotive response—shame, grief, anger, and outrage are expressed through the corporeality of the mistress. Brent leaves her body behind the veil, but the injuries are foregrounded in her description of Mrs. Flint's response. Brent reads her scars on Mrs. Flint, who bears the burden of Brent's injuries: her color changes as she exhibits a shame response and her "wounded pride" stands in for Brent's shame. Despite Brent's own acknowledgement that Mrs. Flint mainly feels for herself and not Brent, Mrs. Flint's body stands in for Brent's in this scene, allowing Brent to maintain her veiled narrative posture. Mrs. Flint literarily bears witness to Brent's testimony. Unlike the shame response of the women at the auction block, however, Mrs. Flint's cry is ungracious and egocentric. Through this illustration, Brent emerges as the moral authority in her ability to express compassion to Mrs. Flint. Although Mrs. Flint refuses to extend compassion to Brent in this scene, Brent forces her mistress to protect the possibility of a voyeuristic witnessing[28] of the events of her life, inscribing her testimony on the body of Mrs. Flint.

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[28] For a full discussion of the voyeuristic impulses of antislavery rhetoric, see Carol Lasser, "Voyeuristic Abolitionism: Sex, Gender, and the Transformation of Antislavery Rhetoric," *Journal of the Early Republic*, vol. 28 no.1, 2008, pp. 82-114. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/jer.2008.0014.

The slave auction and the courtroom are important arenas in that both of these spaces give literal and spatial form to the chattel status of slaves. Brent intervenes in these domains through the voices of the white women at the slave auction and the emotional disturbance of Mrs. Flint. This is not to suggest that Brent surrenders her subjectivity to white women in the text; rather, I suggest that Brent navigates her own exposure by deciding when, where, and how her injuries will be revealed. Furthermore, white women are important to the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood because they represent the crown of honor, pride, and morality in the antebellum South; in other words, the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood engenders the pristine status of white womanhood. In *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century*, Claudia Tate explains, "Black women were public commodities of exchange whose market value was exclusively indexed as the production of material wealth, whereas white women were private individuals who circulated in patriarchal society for producing heirs and regulating moral, spiritual, and emotional values" (25). Black women's status as "always public" offers another reading of the shame/shameless paradox, which manifests as a wound in the lives of enslaved women. Therefore, Brent collapses the public dimensions of the psychic-emotional conflict onto white women to dismantle their status as figures of moral authority. In so doing, she establishes equilibrium with her readers, which allows her to address her injuries in public as a readerly text and through privacy as the veiling of shameful acts.

Contextualizing her shame allows Brent to "open up" and speak to the reader about those events that deeply distress her, even as she leaves the veil in place. The chapter, "The Lover," begins with one of the most deeply affective sections of the text, as Brent describes her inability to marry a free black man near the plantation. With a soliloquy-like confession, Brent laments:

“Why does the slave ever love? Why allow the tendrils of the heart to twine around objects which may at any moment be wrenched away by the hand of violence?” (34). As marriage is a private institution that supports the public order of society, it is fundamental to the public/private dimensions of the moral injury and Brent’s condemnation of slavery in *Incidents*. Brent engages in a discourse on marriage in *Incidents* to expose legal exclusion from marriage as a principle source of enslaved women’s shame: “She [the slave woman] is not allowed to have any pride of character. It is deemed a crime in her to wish to be virtuous” (Jacobs 29). Brent connects pride, here to be understood as self-ownership and self-respect, with marriage and liberation, as it was illegal for someone enslaved to be married because this form of recognition was akin to emancipation.[29] Marriage, and the legal and socio-cultural recognition it provides, is the antithesis to the shame/shameless paradox of slave womanhood. This is not to suggest that marriage has the power to inoculate women from shame, but rather it acknowledges that enslaved women’s exclusion from this form of legitimacy caused further injury to her self-worth. Furthermore, as I will later explain, the black woman’s exclusion from legal and sociocultural forms of legitimacy mark her as a figure of disinheritance in literary history. Brent’s inability to marry the unnamed carpenter is a private, deeply experienced psychic-emotional injury, which

[29] For a discussion of the legal exclusion of slaves from marriage, see Chapter VII of William Goodell’s *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice: Its Distinctive Features Shown by its States Statues, Judicial Decisions, and Illustrative Facts* (New York: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1853). Goodell explains that the responsibilities of marriage were inconsistent with the conditions of slavery. According to Goodell, it was established in the colonial era that if a slave master gave permission for a slave to legally marry, his consent to the institution of marriage also emancipated the enslaved. Dr. Flint alludes to this discourse on slavery and marriage in his rejection of Brent’s request to marry in the following statement to Brent: “Well, I’ll soon convince you whether I am your master, or the nigger fellow you honor so highly” (35). For a further discussion of how Jacobs analyzes the law through domestic arrangements, see Mark Rifkin, “‘A Home Made Sacred by Protecting Laws’: Black Activist Homemaking and Geographies of Citizenship in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,*” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies,* vol. 18 no. 2, 2007, pp. 72-102. *DUKE UP*, doi: 10.1215/10407391-2007-003.

she describes: "If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws; and I should have been spared the painful task of confessing what I am now about to relate; but all my prospects had been blighted by slavery" (48). The turn from "I could have" to "I should have" is not to be overlooked. Here, Brent clearly foregrounds the wound in the present, as she indicates the impossibility of what she (and her readers) consider a virtuous life as a slave, and suggests that as a free woman she is still wrestling with the violation of her self-respect, illegitimacy, and inability to choose her own mate.

Brent establishes that it is marriage, as opposed to sexual ideologies of black womanhood, that secures the shame/shameless paradox. Black women's exclusion from legalized marriages fosters the divergent destinies of slave women and white women. Brent contextualizes her own transition from girlhood to womanhood by depicting two children at play, who, as children, are only distinguishable by race: "I once saw two beautiful children playing together. One was a fair white child; the other was her slave, and also her sister. When I saw them embracing each other, and heard their joyous laughter, I turned sadly away from the lovely sight" (28). In the illustration, Brent presents a romantic vision of the plantation South "blooming with flowers, and overarched by a sunny sky" (28), only to subsequently interrupt this vision into a tragedy of black womanhood. Marriage ultimately distinguishes the destinies of these two sisters as the white woman's "pathway" to womanhood culminates on "her happy bridal morning" (28). In contrast, Brent poses, "How had these years dealt with her slave sister, the little playmate of her childhood?" (28). In juxtaposition to the white sister's nuptials, the black sister "drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery" (28). The cup of sin and misery are metaphors of the shame/shameless paradox as it demonstrates the confluence of Brent's

understanding of herself as both sinner and sinned against. Although this vision is illustrated as one in which Brent witnesses, her own affective interruptions of the scene as she "turned sadly away" and knew "how soon her [the slave girl's] laughter would be changed to sighs" (28), suggests that this scene is a projection of Brent's own grief concerning her dashed hopes of love and marriage as she settles into the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood. Furthermore, the "two sisters" likely refer to Brent and her ideal readers of white women as the scene ends with the following provocation: "In view of these things why are ye silent, ye free men and women of the north? Why do your tongues falter in maintenance of the right? Would that I had more ability! But my heart is so full, and my pen is so weak! (28). Here again, Brent "appears" behind the veil, but she conveys the injury through her emotional distress concerning the preceding tragic vision.

The connection between marriage and the psychic-emotional injuries of slavery brings this discussion of shame back to the literal and figurative "home" of *Incidents*. With no legal protection and public access to self-respect and recognition through marriage, Aunt Martha is cast as the premier figure of public/private redemption and reconciliation for the narrative as the previous auction block scene emblematizes. Brent's identity and access to self-respect are grounded in Aunt Martha:

> I had been accustomed to look up to her with a respect bordering upon awe. I was very young and felt shamefaced about telling her such impure things, especially as I knew her to be very strict on such subjects…if her indignation was once roused, it was not very easily quelled. I had been told that she once chased a white gentleman with a loaded pistol, because he insulted one of her daughters. (27)

Perhaps, to be shamefaced alludes to a full expression of shame that allows for relief, as the primary indication of the affect, as well as a traditional response, is to hide the face. Continuing this formulation of shamefaced, Brent later makes mention of the burden of shame as she confronts members of her family, "Now, how could I look them in the face?" (50), and she displays a shame response in other instances before her brother, uncle, and son (Jacobs 53, 54, 65). Although she bears her shame before male figures, it is through the matrilineal lineage of her grandmother, mother, and daughter that Brent ultimately wrestles with and provisionally reconciles the psychic and emotional wounds of her experiences in the narrative. Aunt Martha has a celestial presence in the text. From the second chapter and beyond she exists adjacent to the plantation, but outside of the institution of slavery. Through her moral authority, she befriends white women and is allowed uncommon privileges such as threatening to shoot a white man who (sexually) "insulted" her daughter. Additionally, Brent finds physical freedom above Aunt Martha's cottage in the garret before she eventually escapes to the North, although she is subjected to physical ailments and the environmental forces of nature in the cramped inlet above Aunt Martha's home.

It is also to Aunt Martha that Brent must journey "back into and through" to reconcile the pain she continues to endure. I consider Brent' s depiction of Aunt Martha's rejection as a projection of her sorrow regarding her own wounded spirit. Brent goes to her grandmother to reveal her pregnancy, but she cannot force herself to confess. Instead, she sits sewing in her grandmother's yard, outside of the house. Removed from Aunt Martha's domain, Brent demonstrates her own feeling of worthlessness, which Mrs. Flint further frustrates as she storms into the house with the intent to castigate and humiliate Brent by exposing her pregnancy. Aunt Martha's response reflects Brent's own sense of shame as Aunt Martha's indignation is

totalizing: "'O Linda! Has it come to this? I had rather see you dead than to see you as you now are. You are a disgrace to your dead mother. She tore from my fingers my mother's wedding ring and her silver thimble. 'Go away!' she exclaimed, 'and never come to my house again'" (50). Aunt Martha's response echoes Jacobs's wish for death in the letter to Amy Post, and the ring and thimble suggest that Jacobs is not only concerned about her own sense of injury, but also with how she will pass down her illegitimacy to her children. Brent's mother's ring and thimble symbolize the efforts of enslaved women to legitimate themselves; unprotected by law, these objects are handed down in place of actual "legitimacy." Due to her condition, of pregnancy and shame, Brent is denied further access to this form of ancestral recognition, and in this scene, she depicts her own sense of dislocation and debasement, outside of Aunt Martha's house and without material connections to her grandmother and mother.

Banishment from Aunt Martha's home exceeds physical exile, and Brent's disconnection from the home arouses her feelings of moral and spiritual depravity. Brent ends this scene outside of Aunt Martha's home with a personal eviction that communicates her injured sense of self as an engulfing feeling of rejection that epitomizes the feeling of shame:[30] "With what feelings did I now close that little gate, which I used to open with such an eager hand in my childhood! It closed upon me with a sound I never heard before" (50). Aunt Martha's shaming of Brent brings the narrator beyond the veil, her affect and her body "pushing through" the narrative. Unlike the courtroom scene with her mistress, readers are given partial access to Brent's corporeality, as the emotional anguish of this scene is rendered through the synecdoche

[30] Shame theorists such as Michael Lewis in *Shame and the Exposed Self* (Free Press, 1992) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank in *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Duke UP, 1995) define shame as an all-encompassing emotion that can ultimately lead to self-abnegation at its most extreme state. Sara Ahmed particularly describes this tendency towards "self-expulsion" in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Routledge, 2015).

of Brent's own eyes and hand. This eviction in the narrative recalls the physical as well as the symbolic home Jacobs alludes to in her letter to Amy Post.

Brent confronts her wounds through her testimony to her grandmother, and I suggest that she reaches for reconciliation through the process of recollection in the construction of the narrative itself. As mentioned before, Brent laments, "I thought I could bear my shame if I could only be reconciled to my grandmother. I longed to open my heart to her" (51). This longing demonstrates the narratological closure that Brent offers as the narrator of *Incidents*. As Brent discloses to Aunt Martha the full nature of the events leading up to her shame as an unwed pregnant mother, Aunt Martha does not speak, and the entire confession is left behind the veil. Unlike the previous courtroom scene, Aunt Martha does not carry the affective burden of the testimony, but she offers Brent understanding and sympathy: "She did not say, 'I forgive you'; but she looked at me lovingly, with her eyes full of tears. She laid her old hand gently on my head, and murmured, 'Poor child! Poor child!" (51). Aunt Martha receives Brent back into the matrilineal fold, as Brent comments, "I begged of her to pity me, for my dead mother's sake" (51). This reconciliation is formally demonstrated at Aunt Martha's church through the christening ceremony of her two children who embody Brent's shame. The solemnity of the ceremony summons memories of Brent's mother who presented the young Brent for baptism "without any reason to feel ashamed. She had been married, and had such legal rights as slavery allows to a slave. The vows had at least been sacred to her…" (67). Brent receives familial recognition and reconciliation, but she is still deeply ashamed of her children's lack of a paternal legitimacy: "Always it gave me a pang that my children had no lawful claim to a name" (67).

The configuration of black women as symbols of disinheritance was a legal and sociocultural configuration that manifested through enslaved women's public reproductive role.

This mythic disinheritance contrasts with accounts of enslaved women's central role in enslaved communities. According to historians such as Angela Davis, motherhood often provided positive reinforcement to the status of enslaved women during slavery. Davis documents the affirmative rituals enslaved people created through egalitarian domestic arrangements that did not reflect white social networks (15-17; 108-110). Similarly White demonstrates that women were central to the plantation and respected as essential contributors to the survival of the enslaved community. Yet, White explains, "…the female slave's chattel status, sex, and race combined to create a complicated set of myths about black womanhood" (28). Despite her affirmative role in the enslaved community, the American literary and cultural imagination often represents black women as figures of disinheritance due to their legal configurations as breeders of the slave status. White further explains, "Once reproduction became a topic of public conversation, so did the slave woman's sexual activities" (31). Building on the work of both Davis and White, Morgan reminds us that examinations of black women's reproductive role demands close attention to historical and circumstantial particularity, asserting, "Childbirth under slavery must be couched in both the historical parameters of the slave trade, the physical and emotional violence of racial slavery, and an interrogation of the multiple meanings of women's reproductive lives" (10).

As a matter of public discourse, black women's reproductive (and non-reproductive) role became mired in sexual (and asexual) stereotypes such as the Jezebel, Mammy, and Sapphire figures.[31] Their public reproductive role as "breeders" of the institution of slavery entangled the procreative capabilities of black womanhood with injuries that she "passed down" to immediate children and descendants in the sociocultural imagination. The popular American imagination in

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[31] For a full discussion of these stereotypes, refer to Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 1990).

particular has cast black women through her mythic legacy rather than her historical role in slave communities.[32] These discourses mark black women as always public, and Jacobs's slave narrative offers a meditation on how the literary tradition often capitulates to this design.

Although the christening ceremony partially relieves the psychic-emotional injuries in the narrative, Brent passes down her shame as a figure of disinheritance. During the christening ceremony, Brent's father's old mistress presents Ellen, Brent's daughter, with a gold necklace as a gift. This gift seemingly substitutes for Ellen's lack of paternal lineage. Importantly, this disinheritance is only passed down to Ellen, as Benjamin, Brent's son, is not given a gift in substitution for his lack of paternal legitimacy. Brent repudiates this act, "I thanked her for this kindness; but I did not like the emblem. I wanted no chain to be fastened on my daughter, not even if its links were of gold. How earnestly I prayed that she might never feel the weight of slavery's chain, whose iron entereth into the soul" (68). In *Incidents*, the "weight of slavery" includes the injury of shame, and Brent's account bears striking resemblance to Andrew Morrison's description of shame: "Shame also feels like a weight, a heaviness, a burden, pressing down often at the top of the back…" (1).[33] The scene suggests that the injuries of slavery produce a matrilineal legacy, a weight that black women carry and pass down to their descendants. In other words, the substance of the psychic and emotional distress seems to persist not only in Brent, but also in her daughter Ellen, who represents the female descendants of formerly enslaved women, much like Ellen in the introduction of this chapter who embodies the scar of the great-grandmother. This inheritance has important implications for contemporary

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[32] Davis also examines how the matrilineal succession of slavery resembled kinship networks in West Africa. However, in matrilineal west African cultures, matrilineality ensured lineage affiliation and property inheritance, *Ar'n't I a Woman?* pp.106.

[33] Andrew Morrison, "The Breadth and Boundaries of a Self-Psychological Immersion in Shame: A One-and-a-Half-Person Perspective," *Psychoanalytic Dialogues,* vol. 4 no.1, 1994.

discourses related to racial oppression, trauma, and reparations, which attempt to locate the injuries of slavery in order to chart routes of redress. Jacobs's metaphorical reference to "iron enter[ing] the soul" suggests that the injuries of slavery are internalized and passed down, and I will consider how her narrative offers responses to how we identify the injuries of slavery in contemporary discourses.

Ellen's gold chain is conceptually suggestive of how the injuries of slavery will be carried or passed on to later generations. Toni Morrison, author of one of the most widely read neo-slave narratives,[34] alludes to a similar legacy of shame in *Beloved* (1987). According to Morrison, the novel is deeply invested in "representing the unapologetic acceptance of shame and terror" (xvii) of the trauma of slavery through Sethe, the protagonist. The reincarnated baby that Sethe kills triggers her rememories of slavery, and Sethe works through the deep distress of own shame as she transmits her stories to her daughters: "It shamed her—remembering the wonderful soughing trees rather than the boys…she could not forgive her memory for that" (7) / "She had to do something with her hands because she was remembering something she had forgotten she knew. Something privately shameful that had seeped into a slit in her mind right behind the slap on her face and the circled cross" (73) / "She hoped Paul D wouldn't take it upon himself to come looking for her and be obliged to see her squatting in front of her own privy making a mudhole too deep to be witnessed without shame" (61). Through these experiences of shame, Sethe "rememories" slavery for her daughter Denver and reincarnated baby Beloved, who embodies Sethe's shame. The inconclusive end of the novel foregrounds the complicated endeavor to

[34] See Ashraf H. A. Rushdy, *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (Oxford, 1999) for a full discussion of the neo-slave narrative tradition. The neo-slave narrative arose during the late twentieth century. Authors in this tradition used the first-person slave narrative form to connect contemporary political, social, and cultural debates to America's slave past.

remember slavery and confront its enduring legacies through the refrain, "It was not a story to pass on / This is not a story to pass on" (323-324). "To pass on" refers to the transference of Sethe's experiences of slavery, suggesting that the story should never be retold; but "to pass on" also means to overlook and disregard, marking the importance of recognition and remembrance. Although Morrison's novel seems to suggest the latter interpretation, the ambiguity of "pass on" disrupts such a reading and unsettles the motive of the neo-slave narrative genre more largely. This intervention is further reflected in the characters' forgetting at the end of *Beloved*: "Everybody knew what she was called, but no body anywhere knew her name…They forgot her like a bad dream" (323).

In response, I turn to Brent's attempt to pass on her story to her daughter Ellen in *Incidents* to consider the implications for later representations of slavery in the neo-slave narrative and speculative fiction genres. Although Brent makes two other testimonies in *Incidents*, one to her mistress and the other to her grandmother, the chapter that narrates her confrontation with her daughter is importantly titled "The Confession." Significantly, it is the only scene of testimony that begins with Brent's direct voice as she speaks to her daughter, "Listen to me Ellen; I have something to tell you!" (153). She begins to recount her "early sufferings in slavery" (153), but when Brent begins to touch on how she managed the shame/shameless paradox of slave womanhood, or what she describes as how her sufferings drove her to "a great sin," Ellen interrupts the confession with her own testimony, "I know all about it, mother" (153). Ellen *knows*, and she explains to Brent how she came into such knowledge of her mother's past. Ellen's interruption releases Brent's anxiety, and Brent expresses her relief, "…I loved the dear girl better for the delicacy she had manifested towards her unfortunate mother" (154). Brent's confession to Ellen seems to speak to later generations of

writers who *know* and endeavor to present slavery "with the veil withdrawn." If we consider this confession narrative alongside the previous testimonies in *Incidents*, it seems that Brent can *bear* her shame and reconcile her experiences by going "back into and through" slavery in the narrative because she does not have to *bare* herself in the process of recollection.

However, the exposed, wounded black body often epitomizes the metahistorical return to slavery "beyond the veil" in twenty and twenty-first century accounts of slavery. Farah Jasmine Griffin explains in "Textual Healing: Claiming Black Women's Bodies, the Erotic and Resistance in Contemporary Novels of Slavery," that black women writers reconstitute black women's bodies from a history of supremacist and patriarchal rhetoric that constructed black bodies as "abnormal, diseased, and ugly" (521). As black women's bodies have been "literally and discursively scarred, ripped, and mutilated," black women writers return to the body as a site of healing (Griffin 524). Before the body is restored, however, it is exposed as evidence to the savage schemes of slavery: Sethe bares her disfigured back in *Beloved* and history is "writ about [the] privates" of the protagonist Dessa in *Dessa Rose* (1986). Furthermore, in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Phyllis Alesia Perry's *Stigmata* (1998), the body is a conduit for "corporeal historical engagement," whereby characters descended from slaves re-enact the trauma of slavery through their own bodies. [35] In *Kindred*, Dana is transported to the past, and her arm is severed during her last time-traveling return to the present. In *Stigmata*, Ayo, a slave ancestor, reincarnates the bodies of her female descendants, Grace and Lizzie, who relive Ayo's suffering and are physically marked by her wounds. The body provides the site of healing in

[35] For a full discussion of "corporeal historical engagements," refer to Maria Rice Bellamy *Bridges To Memory: Postmemory in Contemporary Ethnic American Women's Fiction* (U Virginia P, 2015), pp. 32-35.

contemporary representations of slavery, but as we see, the body is not easily processed as limbs are ruptured and interiorities are invaded during the travails of these twentieth-century texts.

Jacobs's narrative forces us to question how this return to the body might re-inscribe and re-open those ancestral wounds even as they seek to heal them, and this chapter suggests that the injury that persists is a confluence of the mind, body, and spirit. Engaging the mind and body in her discussion of the trauma of slavery in *Embodying American Slavery in Contemporary Culture*, Lisa Woolfork identifies a "bodily epistemology" in contemporary representations of slavery in speculative fiction. "Bodily epistemology" marks a black vernacular theory of trauma. Woolfork's formulation intervenes in Greek and Freudian understandings of trauma, which are based on a mind/body split. The mind/body split forms the basis of the ways in which the trauma of slavery, as well as black people's trauma in subsequent periods, have been elided since the Enlightenment period. Aligning with Freud, black pain is thought to be merely corporeal, and therefore it is transient and short-lived.

Although my study suggests a move away from the body, it still admittedly risks reinforcing the mind/body split of traditional trauma theory in its emphasis on the psychic and emotional realm of injuries. Yet, it is within this precarious terrain that I find firm standing, as I contend that black women's shame, as a type of trauma with roots in slavery, has been rendered unintelligible and ignored. In her own discussion, Woolfork offers an important anecdote from Janet's Schaw's eighteenth-century travel narrative that is useful in explaining how my privileging of shame troubles the mind/body split of trauma theory. Intending to naturalize scenes of horror on plantations in "The Universalization of Whiteness," Montag offers Schaw's account. In so doing, he counter-intuitively demonstrates the value of shame in dismantling the mind/body spilt:

> When one comes to be better acquainted with nature of negroes, the horror of it must wear off. It is the suffering of the human mind that constitutes the greater misery of punishment, but with them it is merely corporeal. As to the brutes it inflicts no wound on their mind, whose natures are made to bear it, and whose sufferings are not attended with shame or pain beyond the present moment. (qtd. in Woolfork 5)

In Schaw's formulation, it is not only a timeless pain, but it is also a perduring shame that accounts for full humanity. Despite Schaw's intentions, I do not aim to suggest that shame must exist with pain, whether physical or psychological, in order for trauma to have occurred. What I want to suggest is that representations of shame signal that suffering is distinguished not only by one's own sense of having been wronged or wounded, but also through one's sense of that wounding in relationship to community. As a social emotion, shame challenges rigid distinctions between mind/body, self/other, and consciousness/unconsciousness. An emphasis on shame moves our questions of trauma, injury, and wounding beyond both the material and the individual level without disavowing the importance of the singular "I" and the body that contains the subject and has experienced the event.

I maintain that the sensational uses of the body to reclaim the slave past continue to fetishize the black body as a site—for memory, for healing, for excavating flesh. Francois Pitavy demonstrates the limitations of the return to the body in "From Middle Passage to Holocaust: The Black Body as a Site of Memory," where he maintains, "Black identity, the memory that constitutes the black self, is thus inscribed in the body, in the scars the body bears…" (53). He goes on to describe the process of recovering the black body as "landmarks of historical memory" (54). Referring to black bodies as metaphorical landmarks leads me to question, what

does it mean for the black body to be a place, a locus for something other than a self? And how does such a framework continue to perpetuate the intergenerational injuries of slavery, as black bodies, most frequently and most strikingly black female bodies, continue to be scapegoated as a site of shame despite laudable efforts to heal legacies of slavery?[36] Although the great-grandmother's scars in the introduction seem to support bodily scars as conduits for historical memory, the scar too deep to touch demonstrates the necessity for more ethical routes to identify and heal injuries of the mind, body, and spirit passed down from enslavement.

The perceptive words of Deborah McDowell in "Recovery Missions: Imagining the Body Ideals" are useful to continue this discussion: "But while the skin encases the body, it does not constitute the entirety of the body's compass, is not its beginning and its end" (209). She continues to caution us as readers, writers, and critics, "cries originate in the body's 'inside' parts, even if they are registered on the outside surface," and she calls for an analytical framework that considers the "reciprocal relation between exterior and interior…visible and the invisible…outside and inside the body" (209). This chapter offers a response to McDowell's recommendation through a consideration of shame as a psychic-emotional injury that moves beyond the body and its wounded-ness as the sole carrier of the slave legacy. Shame is a rich conceptual framework to examine black life as the intellectual tradition is littered with a diversity of shame-related expressions, responses, and avoidances, most of which reverberate with the historical conditions of black people's enslavement and its lingering legacies. Furthermore, marking shame as an injury allows me to consider the body but does not reify its wounded-ness,

[36] For example, epigenetics is a rising discourse in the medical field that examines how people of color biologically inherit the effects of racism. Although the science is still emerging, traumatic and/or trauma-related events are often reported to be passed down through black mothers. For a full discussion, refer to Shannon Sullivan's "Inheriting Racist Disparities in Health: Epigenetics and the Transgenerational Effects of White Racism," *Critical Philosophy of Race* vol.1 no. 2, 2013, pp. 190-218. *Project MUSE*, muse.jhu.edu/article/520501.

as shame is deeply felt within the body and expressed externally through corporeal responses that seek to cover the self, conceptually suggestive of "the veil." I use shame then as a way around the body, but not necessarily an alternative to the body. In this way, I recall the work of Wendy Brown in *States of Injury* (1995) and Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004). According to Brown, subaltern politics often fetishize the wound, which problematically begins to stand for identity itself and overinvests in the wounded body (74). Continuing the work of Brown, Ahmed proposes that we not forget the past as the scene of wounding, but that we rethink our connections to it in the present through different kinds of remembrances that remain open in the present (33).

The concept of "injury" derives from legal theory in both contract law and civil rights law, where injury can be done to the body, property, or rights of a person, related to liability or negligence in civil law. During slavery, injury could only be enacted upon the slave owner, not the slave, due to the legal property status of black people as slaves. We reproduce this logic in that certain kinds of injury have been recognized by law and can be compensated for, such as reparations for Nazi war crimes, but others, such as the ongoing injuries to the descendants of slaves and victims of Jim Crow, are still unrecognized. Psychologist Gilda Graff identifies the usefulness of considering shame as an injury in "The Name of the Game is Shame: The Effects of Slavery and its Aftermath." She argues that to ignore the shame of slavery is to ignore an essential aspect of its trauma (139). Graff acknowledges a meaningful disparity: the Holocaust is often regarded as the quintessential site of collective shame, for those who endured it as well as the perpetrators of violence (135-136; 139), but no such acknowledgement has been extended to the era of slavery and continued racial oppression in America. This recognition of shame during the Holocaust is fundamental to international reckoning and collective healing because it

continues to recognize, affirm, and provide healing from the injuries of the past as it avows contemporary manifestations.

This chapter on Jacobs's shame as an injury is relevant to contemporary scholarship that is finding new ways to legitimate and conceptualize individual and group injuries of enslavement, Jim Crow, and subsequent events of violence against black people to influence policy action and reparation. Adrien Katherine Wing brings together insights from critical legal studies and critical race theory to discuss injuries committed against minorities through a concept called "spirit injury," the psychological, spiritual, and cultural effects of racism and sexism that can "lead to the slow death of the psyche, of the soul, and of the identity of the individual" (186). Spirit injury is useful because it acknowledges injury as multidimensional—of mind, body, and psyche—and it posits that groups are generationally affected by cultures of physical and cultural violence. Wing examines how these forms of violence are most frequently enacted upon minority women who deal with the multiplicative effects of racism and sexism in their daily lives. Wing reflects on her own spirit injuries as a law professor and black woman who has developed a multiple consciousness for survival. As she narrates her individual experiences of racism and sexism, she locates the origins of her own spirit injury "in the roots of [her] family's existence" as a descendent of a slave. Further developing the work of Wing, Nick J. Sciullo forwards in "Spirit Injury and Feminism: Expanding the Discussion," that the concept of spirit injury "may describe not only a violence done by the law, and reified in juridical structures, but also sociological, anthropological, and political conceptions of violence that move far beyond the traditional purview of critical legal and critical race theorists" (27). He promotes that spirit injury be applied to other disciplines and fields that are invested in examining forms of injury and redress, a call I have responded to in this chapter.

Enslavement constituted the initial site of the injuries related to the slave past, and descendants inherit its legacies through the sociocultural and political systems that formulated the slave status; furthermore, as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood has become inscribed in American sociocultural and political systems. The black woman's shame, then, offers a lens into injuries of the past and the present, and through work by and about black women we can begin to imagine possibilities for reconciliation among individuals, communities, and the nation. As *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* reminds us, in shame, even as we might turn away from that which is before us, we still "face," or reckon with, the interpenetrative dimensions of self and the other, the personal and the political, the body and the psyche, the social and the familial, the metaphysical and the material, as we go "back into and through" that which has informed the making of ourselves. Although contemporary black bodies have never been enslaved, legacies of slavery have been inherited as injuries that extend beyond the duration of the event that reverberate socially and psychically long after the event itself has ceased.

Chapter Two: "Women of Shame and the Culture of Lynching in Jack Thorne's *Hanover* and Ida B. Wells-Barnett's 'The Black and White of It'"

> You are no longer a symbol of Authority
>
> You are the root of all Shame.
>
> Jerry Peace, "The Lynching Tree"

As set forth in the previous chapter, black women have no choice but to navigate competing narratives of shame and shamelessness. This shame is personal, as it is commonly felt in response to degrading incidents; and political, as black racial identity ideologically emerges as a stigma of matrilineal inheritance in law, public discourse, and the collective American imagination. It is also enmeshed in both private and public arenas, as the black woman's perceived imperviousness to shame (or her shamelessness) marks her as figure whose conduct is always outside of socially acceptable norms; therefore, she is always already public, and her body is permeable. Formulations of black womanhood that are produced within the paradox of shame and shamelessness are an unlikely framework to begin a discussion of lynching. Despite the emergence of historians, sociologists, and literary critics who have brought womanhood to the fore of scholarship on lynching, the practice is still mainly considered an extralegal enforcement of nonpareil, masculine, white racial power meted out to black men.[37]

[37] See Elsa Brown, "Imaging Lynching: African American Women, Communities of Struggle, and Collective Memory," *African American Women Speak Out On Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas*, edited by Geneva Smitherman (Wayne State UP, 1995); and Deborah Gray White, *Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South* (Norton, 1985).

Shame, however, has often been attached to lynching, specifically in anti-lynching discourses, as the popular National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) image in figure one and the epigraph by Jerry Peace demonstrate. At the turn of the twenty-first century, James Allen also refers to this history of shame and lynching in his exhibition of lynching postcards and photographs that he purchased from fifteen to 30,000 dollars, remarking, "In America, everything is for sale, even a national shame."[38] Allen, the NAACP, and Peace identify the practice of lynching as a national shame. Specifically, in the case of the NAACP propaganda, the organization intended to mobilize the affect by shaming white American citizens into moral reclamation, confronting the nation with its own evil doings, a strategy that has been rendered as marginally successful in most assessments of anti-lynching activism.[39]

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed has examined (and challenged) the political efficacy of shame to motivate substantive political transformation. According to Ahmed:

> What is striking is how shame becomes not only a mode of recognition of injustices committed against others, but also a form of nation building…recognition works to restore the nation or reconcile the nation to itself

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[38] The quote is from a video presentation that accompanied the exhibit, "Witness." Access at withoutsanctuar.org/main.html.

[39] Legal historians, such as Christopher Waldrep in *Lynching Against America: A History in Documents* (NYU P, 2006), argue that campaigns against lynching were negligible at best and a failure at worst because Congress was unable to pass the Blair Bill in 1894, the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill of 1922, or any other federal legislation against lynching. The practice of lynching, however, was ultimately curtailed through private enterprises that de-legitimated the practice of terror. Wells-Barnett's crusade was one such enterprise, proving successful on a smaller, local scale where the public pressured state governments to prosecute perpetrators.

> by 'coming to terms with' its own past in the expression of 'bad feeling.' But in allowing us to feel bad, does shame also allow the nation to feel better? (102)

Ahmed's assessment is in response to collective expressions of shame in the *Sorry Books*, a collection of four books that were organized at the Museum of Contemporary Arts and the Opera House in Australia. Later, these books were circulated in other areas throughout Australia and also in London. Thousands of individual Australians wrote apologies in the *Sorry Books* to the indigenous people of Australia who were stripped of their land and separated from their children under the sovereignty of the Australian government. Because the government refused to issue an official apology on behalf of the nation, citizens of Australia apologized for the nation's history.[40] Although striking dissimilarities exist between the people who were native to Australia and the people living under Jim Crow in post-Reconstruction America, Ahmed's critique of the political efficacy of shame and the apologies that follow is useful because it demands that greater attention be given to that which is regarded as shameful in the first place. She is ultimately skeptical of a progressive politics of shame because for such a strategy to prevail, responsibility must be clearly defined by the apologist; the referent has to accept the terms of the apology; and the effect of the apology on the apologist has to be knowable and defined (113-115). Although the political efficacy of shame is not the primary subject of this chapter, it is a question I turn to in the coda of this dissertation. In this chapter, I discover that the politics of shame as it relates to lynching has been misidentified. Arguably, lynching is a practice of which the nation should be ashamed, but the referent of shame is not only the black male (or female) suspended over a blazing fire or the symbol of the noose and burning cross. What both the NAACP, Peace, and

[40] The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies estimates that over 5,000 Australians signed one of the four books.

Allen overlook are the "root[s] of shame" that are entangled in constructions of black womanhood in the post-Reconstruction era, which I argue produces the culture of lynching.

Two writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century emerge to enlighten the links between lynching and the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood: David Bryant Felton and Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Felton is a rarely studied figure, but his contributions to African American literary and cultural history include fiction, journalism, and autobiographical writing. Born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, to ex-slaves, he and his family moved to Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1867 where Felton attended school and eventually established the first newspaper owned by an African American in Wilmington called the *Record*. Writing under the pen name Jack Thorne, the defining themes and substance of his career as a novelist and journalist are racial solidarity, black pride, and black women's rights. These themes come together in his most popular work, *Hanover, or the Persecution of the Lowly. A Story of the Wilmington Massacre*. Part fiction and part exposé, *Hanover* was published a year after the Wilmington Massacre of 1898.

Reflective of his polemical style, Thorne, Felton's narrator, appropriates features of late nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic fiction[41] to document the events leading up to November 10, 1898. On this day, black citizens of Wilmington, North Carolina, sought refuge in hollowed swamps, hid themselves among the dead in a nearby African American cemetery, and escaped to surrounding cities as a horde of white men brutalized women, men, and children in

[41] See Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* (Oxford UP, 1996). Tate defines domestic fiction as texts written in the post-Reconstruction moment that reflect the viewpoint that the acquisition of full citizenship would depend on the black community's conformity to Victorian sexual and social conduct to a greater effect than protesting racial injustice.

one of the nation's most deadly and pervasive genocides.[42] The massacre, remembered as "The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898," was a strategic political plan to destroy black entrepreneurship and suppress black political leadership in the predominately African American city. After the Democratic Party loss control of the state two years prior in the 1896 election, the massacre effectively established a culture in Wilmington that was conducive to the ascendency of white supremacy.[43] A mob of white men killed hundreds of black people. Other citizens who were considered a threat to the Democratic Party were exiled from the city. The carnage resulted in the relocation of many other people who never returned to Wilmington. These events spurred a statewide disenfranchisement campaign to stifle African American political participation.

Uncharacteristic of other late nineteenth and early twentieth century domestic fiction by writers such as Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins, and Emma Dunham Kelley-Hawkins, Felton offers an unvarnished account of the Wilmington Massacre through the female heroine Molly Pierrepont. In *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire* (1996), Claudia Tate explains that although post-Reconstruction domestic novels offer dialogues about racial justice and sexual equality through virtuous heroines who undergo a series of adventures en route to marriage, family happiness, and prosperity, these texts tended to focus on happy domestic settings without directly addressing interracial turmoil (7-9). The quintessential marriage plot is also absent from Felton's text, but Pierrepont's ultimate representation as a virtuous mother subsumes marriage. Marriage was a requirement for ideal representations of motherhood during the Victorian era.

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[42] The North Carolina Digital History Organization reports that Wilmington news sources only confirmed the deaths of twenty-five people after the massacre. However, the organization strongly supports from its review of oral sources that hundreds of black people were killed and dumped into the river in Wilmington, never to be formally accounted for.

[43] For comprehensive historical reviews of the movement for white supremacy, see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (U of North Carolina P, 1996); Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (Pantheon Books, 1998).

Felton's text subscribes to these standards. Although Felton's novel excludes the courtship plot as perhaps the most defining feature of domestic genteel fiction, *Hanover* accords fully with Tate's definition of a female text: "…a female text is one in which the dominant discourses and their interpretations arise from woman-centered values, agency, and authority that seek distinctly female principles of narrative pleasure" (8).

Furthermore, the only feature of post-Reconstruction male authored texts that Felton's novel reflects is the intertwining of social justice with racial and sexual desire, a feature also found in women authored texts, though it is often marginal to the marriage plot. Tate explains that racialized patriarchal desire defines male authored texts of this era, such as Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*, which also takes the Wilmington Massacre in North Carolina as its setting (67). Typically, the narrative plot follows a black man whose frustrated patriarchal authority offers an allegory for his social justice efforts; in other words, due to civil injustice, the protagonist's black male heroic agency does not fully manifest (67). Instead of a black hero, Felton devises a black heroine who engages the personal and social meaning that characterizes domestic fiction and integrates the social justice polemics of post-Reconstruction male-authored texts.

Within this narrative matrix, Ida B. Wells-Barnett also functions as an equal contributor to the plot, themes, and resolution of Felton's *Hanover*. The lynching scheme initiates the series of events that Felton's female heroine confronts in order to transform from a woman of shame to a savior of the black community. Similarly, Wells-Barnett becomes the most outspoken and successful anti-lynching activist and women rights champion of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her national and international influence emerged after a shift from her understanding of lynching as an heinous response to rape and crime to a realization that lynching

was an act of terror against black communities that aimed to suppress economic and social advancement. Although Pierrepont is far different from the woman activist, she is emblematic of Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching campaign. Most especially, Pierrepont personifies what scholars Angela Sims and Emilie Maureen Townes have identified as Ida B. Wells-Barnett's womanist socio-ethic of resistance. [44]

A womanist socio-ethic of resistance privileges women's literary traditions and historiographies in the development of methods for black liberation. Both Sims and Townes formulate an ethic of social justice that builds on past strategies of women-led activism. Sims and Townes apply a Christian theological lens to Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching campaign to propose a socio-ethics of resistance based on Christian religious viewpoints of liberation and social justice. Building on Townes, Angela Sims delineates three features of a womanist Christian theology through the activism of Wells-Barnett: cultural interpretation, geographic relocation, and life-affirming counter-perspectives (10-12). Cultural interpretation privileges the strength of black communities as it analyzes operations of power that have been detrimental to black people. The goal of cultural interpretation is to promote transformation of black communities by emphasizing the broader moral implications of power dynamics and exposing the residual effects of American acts of terrorism, such as lynching and slavery. Geographic relocation is both literal and metaphorical; it signals a black community that has migrated to a safer location or a group of people who have undergone a transformation of thought. Life-

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[44] Emilie Maureen Townes is the first scholar to write about Wells-Barnett from a theological ethical perspective in her dissertation "The Social and Moral Perspectives of Ida B. Wells-Barnett as Resources for a Contemporary Afro-Feminist Christian Social Ethic" (1989); Angela Sims builds on Townes's study in *Ethical Complications of Lynching: Ida B. Well's Interrogation of American Terror* (Palgrave, 2010).

affirming counter-perspectives subsume all the previous elements of this framework in a creative vision for justice that re-envisions society.

I argue that Felton predates this reading of Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching campaign by nearly a century through the character Molly Pierrepont. In this chapter, I examine Felton's *Hanover* as a womanist text that builds on post-Reconstruction domestic fiction and social justice narratives. Through this reading, I argue that the shame/shameless paradox is an additional framework through which to consider the culture of lynching. Moreover, Thorne's text reveals that dismantling this construction is a necessary and essential missing feature to Townes and Sims womanist Christian theological lens. In this chapter, I build on the insights of Sandra Gunning in *Race, Rape and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1920*, who was the first scholar to identify similarities between David Felton's *Hanover, or, the Persecution of the Lowly* and Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching campaigns.[45] Extending Gunning's discovery, I read the culture of shame in *Hanover* as an allegorical representation of Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching campaign. I close read the second chapter of *Southern Horrors* entitled, "The Black and White of It," to further contend that Thorne advances the anti-lynching rhetoric of Wells-Barnett through a framework of black female honor and salvation that subverts the paradox of shame/shamelessness as a myth of black womanhood. Through this framework, Thorne redeems the black community of Wilmington by reconfiguring myths of black womanhood that extend from slavery. As I will demonstrate, these myths are supported through discursive manipulations of biblical texts, which Thorne undermines to offer a counter-mythic genealogy of race. This reformed racial genealogy ultimately signals how Wells-Barnett brings the rape of black girls

[45] See chapter 3 of Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching* (Oxford UP, 1996).

and women into public discourse in the post-Reconstruction era, which decouples the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood.

The Shameful Arrangements of the Cottage

Thorne, Felton's narrator, introduces Pierrepont to the text through her estrangement from the black community. As domestic fiction of the post-Reconstruction era reflects, home ownership and ideal family formation are symbols of social prosperity for the welfare of black communities (Tate 7-8). However, Pierrepont is presented in a cottage, a symbol of white male sexual coercion, manipulation, and exploitation, and a throwback to antebellum novels during the era of slavery. Pierrepont's cottage, owned by Ben Hartright, a white Democrat and lynch-mob organizer, is a familiar trope in nineteenth-century American literature. The cottage structures social arrangements that stem from slavery and granted white men easier and more clandestine access to black women than the plantation often allowed. Hartright "he was master there" (36), suggesting that he is a figure from the pre-1865 South. This domestic arrangement estranges Pierrepont from the black community. As a social outcast, Pierrepont is regarded as a woman of shame throughout the novel: she lives "the life of ease with shame offered by the white [man]" (36); she is coerced into "a life of shame that she might—if only clandestinely—associate with and enjoy the favors of the men of the white race" (52). To identify the similarities between her affair with Hartright and the predicament of enslaved women, Pierrepont incurs the social stigma of a "Negress" (33).[46]

The cottage suggests that Pierrepont's shame is historical, attached to a legacy of black women who are coerced into various relational and often exploitive arrangements with white

[46] The Negress is often represented in art and literature to examine intersections of race, sex, and power.

men. Her living arrangements recall the domestic arrangement of Cassie in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), Clotel in William Wells-Brown's *Clotel; or, the President's Daughter* (1853), Linda Brent in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861); and it also anticipates Alice in Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979).[47] The ties that bind these women to white men form tangled masses of abandonment, concubinage, betrayal, deception, heartache, and sexual abuse. As a miscegenated female character, Pierrepont has literary roots in the figure of the mulatta, a controversial character in nineteenth-century American literature. Her shame then is also reminiscent of female characters such as Hagar in Pauline Hopkins's *Hagar's Daughter* (1901-1902), a character who throws herself into the Potomac River, committing suicide after she is sold into slavery following a shameful discovery of her black racial heritage. Deborah McDowell explains the history of literary debates regarding the mulatta character, and her progeny the quadroon and the octoroon, in *'The Changing Same': Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (1995):

> Critics have long been locked in a fierce struggle over just how to read the representation of middle-class mulatta in turn-of-the-century fiction by black women, over just how to resolve the range of cultural tensions around race and gender/race and class attached to this figure. Their debates have been fueled by a fundamental question: Does the mulatta figure serve or subvert dominant ideologies of race and gender? (54)

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[47] Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel was the most popular anti-slavery text of the nineteenth century, inaugurating a literary tradition of plantation novels and introducing tropes of slave culture in the antebellum and post-bellum American imagination. William Wells-Brown's novel is also an anti-slavery text that fictionalizes a story of two female descendants of Thomas Jefferson. Harriet Jacobs's text is one of the most widely read slave narratives by an ex-slave and the most popular slave narrative by a formerly enslaved woman. Octavia Butler's twentieth-century speculative novel signifies on the tradition of the previous nineteenth-century texts, most notably Jacobs's slave narrative.

Literary scholars continue to question whether early black authors acquiesce to European standards through the figure of the mulatta, and in so doing, reinforce white superiority even as nineteenth-century texts laud black racial uplift. Continuing this debate in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987), Hazel Carby proposes a re-reading of the mulatta as a mediating device. According to Carby, the mulatta illuminates the sexual and social dynamics that exist between the races through the near-white physiognomy of an interracial black woman (89). Extending Carby's framework, I identify Pierrepont's status as a mulatta as fundamental to Thorne's employment of her in the narrative as a figure of shame as well as salvation through her attachment to histories, myths, and taboos that structure race as a matrilineal inheritance. Through Thorne's framework of shame and salvation, Pierrepont emerges as a figure that enlightens the culture of lynching and offers a counter-mythic genealogy of race.

It admittedly seems counter-intuitive to consider Pierrepont as a figure of both shame and salvation; yet, Thorne's text necessitates both readings. In fact, the resolution of the novel coheres around the resolution of the conundrum. The formal arrangement of the text accentuates Pierrepont's character as she progresses the text's prophetic message in the following three chapters: "Chapter V. Molly Pierrepont," "Chapter VII. Molly's Atonement" and an un-enumerated closing section "Molly's Final Step." It is important to observe that even though Hartright is presented as "master," the narrator slights his superiority by introducing him to the novel in chapter five, titled "Molly Pierrepont." Furthermore, it is through their intimacy that Pierrepont undermines Hartright and intervenes in the White Supremacy League's political plan; unbeknownst to him, Pierrepont curtails the full exertion of the mob's violence.

The intimacy between Pierrepont and Hartright brings this discussion back to the structuring of the cottage, revealing this construction to be a useful space through which to elaborate on Pierrepont as a figure of shame and salvation, who is emblematic of Wells-Barnett's anti-lynching campaign. Although Pierrepont internalizes shame in the text, decrying, "…I swear with uplifted hand to renounce forever my life of shame…" (54), and "…I spurned his offer to live a life of shame with a white man" (54), the cottage signals a relational framework through which to examine Pierrepont's stigmatized status. Hartright reminds Pierrepont that she is "no Nigger" because she is "nearly white" (37). He urges Pierrepont to claim allegiance with the White Supremacy League and keep his confidence concerning the League's plan to take control of the city and suppress black social and economic advancement. Pierrepont confronts the irreconcilable chasm between herself and Hartright, who, even after years of concubinage with a black woman, still does not recoil upon a strategic plan to disrupt black communities and murder black people. Furthermore, he considers her dwelling place a safe space to reveal his plan. As Pierrepont acknowledges "just who and what you [Hartright] are, and just who and what I am" (38), her awakening is mediated through Hartright's wife, who is eavesdropping nearby. Not only does Mrs. Hartright listen closely, she becomes part of the cottage as "the figure on the outside drew still closer, peered in, tiptoed upon the piazza, pressed the ear against the window to catch as much as possible of what went on within" (36). Mrs. Hartright emerges in the text by merging with the cottage, which suggests that she is not only privy to the conversation, but she is also implicated in the cottage affairs. Implicating white women in the cottage affairs, which includes the romantic relationship between Pierrepont and Hartright as well as the League's plan to murder black citizens of Wilmington, is the first step in dismantling

the paradox of shame and shamelessness that black women are subjected to during the post-Reconstruction era.

Although the cottage is not Wells-Barnett's dwelling place, she *goes there*, into the tangled mass of deception, betrayal, and sexual exploitation, to disengage the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood. To clarify, the cottage is not just the home of black women who are maintained in relationships with white men, but the cottage is also the space whereby the culture of black women's exploitation is fully exposed. In going there, Wells-Barnett metaphorically enters the culture of the cottage and refigures its arrangement to emphasize white men and white women's culpability in post-Reconstruction sexual politics, whereas conventionally, black women's availability has been the focus of this domestic arrangement. As symbols of honor, pride, and virtue, white women's sexual patterns are often left out of "cottage discussions." They were also often shielded in post-Reconstruction discourse regarding rape and lynching. However, Wells-Barnett boldly implicates white women in her anti-lynching pamphlet, unlike other anti-lynching activists of her day. Mary Jane Brown provides a comprehensive study of women's involvement in anti-lynching activism in *Eradicating This Evil: Women in the American Anti-lynching Movement, 1892-1940* (1998). She explains that while black men actively protested lynching, were sources of legal counsel, and served in advisory roles for institutions that funded anti-lynching activity such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), women were the primary leaders of anti-lynching movements (5). Through their activism, black women formulated models for future anti-lynching campaigns, and Wells-Barnett was the preeminent strategist (Brown 6). Often working together in women's clubs, albeit with precarious relationships to one another, black and white women led anti-lynching movements and protested against rape as the lynching

rationale.[48] Few campaigns, however, went so far as to dismantle time-honored beliefs in the virtue of white womanhood as did Wells-Barnett.

To mark her divergence in *Southern Horrors* from other contemporary anti-lynching activists, Wells-Barnett offers an account of a white southern journalist named Mr. J. C. Duke. Duke was exiled from Montgomery, Alabama, for posing in *The Herald*, "Why is it that white women attract negro men now more than in former days…There is a secret to this thing, and we greatly suspect it is the growing appreciation of white Juliets for colored Romeos" (19). The mere intimation of white women's sexual desire for black men was considered radical journalism, but Mr. Duke retracts this statement to avoid his own lynching. Wells-Barnett refuses such submission, introducing the second chapter of *Southern Horrors*, the chapter that includes unvarnished accounts of white women's affairs with black men, with the following introduction: "The editor of 'the Free Speech' has no disclaimer to enter, but asserts instead that there are many white women in the South who would marry colored men if such an act would not place them at once beyond the pale of society and within the clutches of the law" (19). Wells-Barnett offers this introduction as a proclamation, a promise that she will expose the truth of white women's affairs with black men.

Wells-Barnett was exiled from Memphis, Tennessee, because she threatened to disrupt the tacit public agreement to keep white women and black men's sexual relationships with one another a taboo topic. She reprints these inflammatory words from the *The Memphis Free Speech* in *Southern Horrors:*

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[48] See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (Columbia UP, 1993); Mary Jane Brown, *Eradicating this Evil: Women in the Anti-lynching Movement, 1892-1940* (Garland, 2000).

> Nobody in this section of the country believes the old thread bare lie that negro men rape white women. If Southern white men are not careful, they will over-reach themselves and public sentiment will have a reaction; a conclusion will then be reached which will be very damaging to the moral reputation of their women. (17)

Wells-Barnett suggests that citizens of the South are aware of the secret affairs between black men and white women. Yet, these secret affairs are well hidden behind false claims of black men who rape, omitting the reality of black women who are raped and concealing the regularity of white women and black men who engage in consensual sexual relationships. To arouse the public sentiment, Wells-Barnett exposes the reality of these affairs, the majority of which she collects from reputable black and white news sources, including *The Chicago Tribune, The Free Speech,* and the *Cleveland Gazette*, as well as through her own journalistic reporting.

In "The Black and White of It," Wells-Barnett deconstructs lynching myths, beginning with stories that highlight white women's dishonor. The confession of Mrs. J. S. Underwood launches Wells-Barnett's critique, despite the fact that it does not involve a lynching. Mrs. J. S. Underwood lives with her husband, a minister, in Elyria, Ohio. A black man, according to Underwood, broke into her house, rendered her unconscious using an anesthetic, and "[sexually] insulted her" (20). Although Underwood was a woman of high esteem in the community, the mob does not organize to brutalize and kill William Offett, whom she identifies as her assailant. Yet, Wells-Barnett uses this case as an introduction to lynching through white womanhood. Wells-Barnett reports the following confession from *The Cleveland Gazette*, an African American owned weekly newspaper in Ohio:

> I met Offett at the Post Office. It was raining. He was polite to me, and as I had several bundles in my arms he offered to carry them home for me, which he did. He had a strange fascination for me, and I invited him to call on me. He called, bringing chestnuts and candy for the children. Then I sat on his lap. He made a proposal to me and I readily consented. Why I did so, I do not know, but that I did is true. He visited me several times after that and each time I was indiscreet. I did not care after the first time. In fact I could not have resisted, and had no desire to resist. (20-21)

The confession reads like a late eighteenth-century seduction narrative. The man's "strange fascination" for Underwood is actually a projection of Underwood's own desire. It is her passion that characterizes the illicit yearning represented in the account as she invites the attention of this man; it is her flagrant transgression that disregards public sentiment; and it is her disproportionate power that subjugates the black man as he submits to her control. Yet, Underwood disavows her own decision-making and agency. Her decision to allow Offett into her house while her children were home further exposes the falsehood of Offett's presumed predatory nature, and/or further compromises Underwood's integrity as a mother.

Wells-Barnett continues to upend ideologies of white womanhood through white women who are engaged in "criminal intimacies" (20) with black men. Criminal intimacies refer to adultery and the legal prohibition of interracial marriage and interracial sex (between white women and black men). In "The Black and White of It," Wells-Barnett offers these crimes to challenge justifications for lynching. The criminal intimacies she examines involve Underwood who falsely accuses a man of rape and later admits her deception (Wells 20-21); Sarah Clark who lives with a black man in what today would be considered a common law marriage (Wells

22); Lillie Bailey who gives birth to a black baby and refuses to reveal the identity of the baby's father (Wells 22); a farmer's wife who charges three black men with the paternity of her child (Wells 24); and Mrs. Marshall who births at least two babies by her black stagecoach driver and presumably sends her husband to an early grave (Wells 25). Most of these women are symbols of the honor and prestige of white patriarchy. They are minister's wives, physician's wives, prominent citizens, and the "crème de la crème of society" (25), to use Wells-Barnett's own characterization of these women in *Southern Horrors*. Yet, these women commit the greatest sin and crime of the nineteenth century. Through these accounts, Wells-Barnett intervenes in white womanhood as an ideal upon which white men construct their own sense of racial identification. She also dismantles the way white womanhood undergirds white men's claims to honor as they construct notions of themselves as "chivalrous" protectors of white female purity.

The Counter-Mythology of Honor

Returning to the cottage scene, we can excavate Pierrepont's shame in the context of lynching rituals and find the ruins of white male honor buried beneath its soil. The narrator continues to undermine Hartright's mastery, explaining upon Hartright's entrance into the cottage that he "unbosomed to Molly the plots of the White Supremacy League in all its blood-curdling details, naming every man and woman who were to be the victims of the mob's fury" (my emphasis, 37). Pierrepont's immediate response to this plan is laced with more than sarcasm as she responds with perceptive acuity, "Do you think that a very *brave* thing to do?" (my emphasis, 37). Although the narrator does not syntactically accentuate bravery here, the South's legacy of lost honor in the aftermath of the Civil War supports my editorial emphasis as Pierrepont's illocution has to be understood within the context of the post-bellum South. Thorne mocks this Southern legacy of defeat to contextualize *Hanover*: "…no one reviewing the history of that immortal

struggle would for a moment question the bravery of the Southern soldiers. They fought like demons. They invaded the North. They made the world wonder at Gettysburg" (25). *Hanover* is a post-Reconstruction satire on the Southern soldiers who fought to maintain slavery. The legacy of these brave demons is mired in defeat, and the men of the white mob in *Hanover* are their descendants. These men search for honor to buttress their fractured identities as Southern white men. As a member of the mob proclaims, "We are going to elevate the white man to his place and regulate Sambo to his sphere, if the streets have to flow with blood to accomplish that end" (20).

In her nuanced analysis of Southern political history in *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in Jim Crow America, 1896- 1920* (1992), Glenda Gilmore examines Southern men's legacy of defeat:

> [Southern white men], born in the 1850s and 1860s, lived their lives in a long denouement, their every act diminished by the climax of the Civil War. Their veneration of the war and disappointment at missing that ultimate test of manhood have been well documented, but their resentment of their father's generation has been less examined…If victorious and sober Yankee men questioned their own masculinity in a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing culture, southern white men added a loser's shame and degrading poverty to that burden. (65)

After the Civil War, white men renegotiated their race/gender identities in response to overwhelming defeat. Grace Elizabeth Hale explains in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South*, *1890-1940* that a national reconciliation across class and between North and South, Union and Confederacy, and men and women was essential to this emergent white racial identity that soon fomented white supremacy (68-69). In contrast to the

shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood, Thorne traces a white legacy of dis-honor and dis-inheritance throughout the text as the narrator juxtaposes two bloody conflicts: the 1863 battle of Gettysburg and the 1898 Wilmington massacre. The battle of Gettysburg accounted for a major Confederate defeat during the Civil War. Lasting for three days, this encounter significantly weakened the Confederate army, and it contributed to the South's final loss. Ultimately, the battle of Gettysburg ended hopes of independence for The Confederate States of America.

The Wilmington Massacre is fostered within this historical context, as southern white men struggled to reconcile what they perceived as the continued loss of the South amidst post-Reconstruction black economic progress in Wilmington. In the novel, Hartright visits Pierrepont's cottage after he leaves the White Supremacy League's meeting, in which the mob organizers plan to redress this history of defeat by planning the massacre. As Hartright discloses the League's plan to Pierrepont, it is this repressed legacy of defeat and lost honor that he "unbosoms," though he does not articulate it. Pierrepont intuits his full disclosure, and her illocution of bravery arises as an offense to Hartright and his band of mob brothers. Hartright's decision to relay the White Supremacy League's plan to Pierrepont instead of his wife (who is the logical confidante according to the decorum of the marriage contract) suggests that honor, in this moment, depends on attachments to a debased other, in this case, Pierrepont.

Bravery is what one exhibits in order to achieve honor, but social relations in the South exploit honor as a white patriarchal inheritance; in other words, suggesting a white man of honor was almost tautological.[49] The text tropes bravery and honor, and the words brave/bravery appear

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[49] I do not suggest that acts of bravery are the only way to achieve honor in post-Reconstruction southern culture, but I am using this definition of honor to highlight the text's investment in bravery and honor as correlatives of the rhetoric of chivalry during the American Civil War and

twenty-two times, and honor appears eleven times in the novel. Most significantly, the white men who organize the mob never recover from this history of defeat, lending further insight into why Hartright needs to project his own feelings of debasement onto Pierrepont. Black and white women in the text mock this failure and characterize white men as dishonorable. White wives admonish their husbands, and black women intervene in the mob's furious course. Although the text avows the potential white women have to disrupt the mob, it is through the bravery of black women that lynching is curtailed.

One black woman, Lizzie Smith, who is named significantly after Wells-Barnett's mother,[50] interrupts the mob. Smith's interruption is reported in a letter in the novel as "an act of bravery performed by a lone woman which stopped the vulgar and inhuman searching of women in our section of the city" (95). The letter is presented as a re-print. As part of the authenticating apparatus of the text, it not only validates the novel, but it also vindicates the honor of black womanhood by offering a narrative demonstrating that the race/gender relations of black womanhood and white womanhood are constructed through a dialectical exchange between history and myth. Smith approaches the mob of white men as they strip another black woman naked in the street, humiliating and persecuting her before a crowd of white women who watch nearby. As Smith confidently confronts the mob, she echoes the words of black abolitionist and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth: "I'm goin' ter git naked; yer got ter see that I'm er woman" (95). Smith's words are redacted from Truth's 1851 speech at the Woman's Right's Convention in Akron, Ohio.

Wilmington "race war." The novel collapses the two narratives of Civil War and the Wilmington Massacre to disparage the ways in which the white mob venerated white womanhood and white masculinity through acts of supremacy masked as "chivalry."

[50] Wells-Barnett's mother was named Elizabeth Wells. She was called Lizzie.

The speech gave visibility to the confluent forces of racism and sexism that black women experience as a distinct oppressed group. As White explains, "For black women, race and sex cannot be separated. We cannot consider who black women are as black people without considering their sex, nor can we consider who they are as women without considering their race" (6). As the scene also demonstrates, we cannot consider black womanhood without also considering how it secures white womanhood. Lizzie Smith's intervention instigates a response from the white female onlookers who previously ignored the nameless black woman who the mob strip-searched in the street. The white women are brought to a sense of indignation and speak out: "Shame! how dare you expose that woman in that manner...You ought to be ashamed of yourselves for your own wives and daughter's sakes" (96). The white men yield to Smith and the white women's condemnation and "left Lizzie victor on the field" (96). This audience of white females who bear witness to the degrading experiences of shame that black women endure is reminiscent of the auction block scene examined in the previous chapter on Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Both of these scenes suggest the limited power of shame as a viable political strategy, as the cries of moral culpability from both audiences depend on a spectacle of black women's victimization. Furthermore these acts of empathy require exceptional black women to prompt acts of protest from the white women who are privy to these events.

Nonetheless, the confluence of history and myth is instructive in this scene. The history of Smith/Truth's words is mired in myth. Carleton Mabee and Nell Painter prove that a white woman named Frances Dana Gage wrote the speech famously attributed to Truth twelve years after the Woman's Right's Convention. Gage, who was the presiding officer at the meeting, aimed to write a "more engaging" speech that would rival Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the popular American imagination. She used Truth to create an idealized vision of black

womanhood as strong, dramatic, and self-reliant. In the process, however, it is Gage's voice that black writers, historians, and others echo as "Ar'n't I a Woman? / Ain't I a Woman" and other parts of Truth's speech have been used to demand that black women's distinct forms of oppression receive adequate critical examination. White, whose careful historical review of black women during slavery is titled after Truth's speech, regrets that Truth's persona is "buried under layers of mythology;" yet, she supports the mythic status of the speech as it "locates black women at the intersection of racial and sexual ideologies and politics" (12). White's position is reflected in Felton's text, as *Hanover* extends the irony of Truth/Gage's voice through a foiled relationship between Pierrepont and Mrs. Hartright that is most explicitly revealed through these two characters' resonant voices, which I will later explore. Exposing the interdependency of black womanhood and white womanhood is the second step in dismantling the paradox of shame and shamelessness that black women are subjected to during the post-Reconstruction era.

In "The Black and White of It," each of Wells-Barnett's short descriptions of black men who are lynched or nearly lynched after false claims of rape follow the previously discussed narratives of white women who are mutually engaged with black men. However, the black and white of it does not end here. In order to see lynching, mob violence, and the degenerate sexual culture of the American North and South, the nation has to confront America's most vulnerable victims: black girls and black women. However, as I have contended throughout this discussion, black women are always already culpable for their own victimization as they are caught up in the doubly binding (il)logics of shame. To circumvent and ultimately dismantle this logic, Wells-Barnett ends "The Black and White of It" with black girls who are raped by white men.

Wells-Barnett's use of girlhood can be read in several ways in "The Black and White of It," considering that both black girls and black women were victims of white male rape. Of the

six cases she reports in "The Black and White of It," one reading suggests that Wells-Barnett avoids the rape of black women because the culture regarded the black woman as over-sexed, promiscuous, and always already guilty of the sex crimes committed against her. Another reading might suggest that Wells-Barnett reports cases of black girls to garner the sympathy of her white and international audience. But these readings are unlikely, as both interpretations contradict Wells-Barnett's bold commitment to black women's rights and black women's leadership, as well as her own refusal to withdraw from public arenas based on stereotypes of black womanhood. Furthermore, as Frederick Douglass writes in a letter that Wells-Barnett publishes as the prologue to *Southern Horrors*, moral culpability rather than sympathy is the response she seems to value and want to elicit from her readers. Douglass's letter reads, "If American conscience were only half alive…a scream of horror, shame and indignation would rise to Heaven wherever your pamphlet shall be read" (18). So what do we make of the reports of black girls and the absence of reports of black women?

Through a consideration of the sociocultural meaning of black girlhood in this moment, we might speculate about Wells-Barnett's intentions. Robin Bernstein offers an invaluable historical-critical analysis of the influence of childhood on the formation of race in America in *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (2011). According to Bernstein, eighteenth-century conceptions of childhood as sinful and depraved shifted in the nineteenth-century to a widespread understanding of childhood as a period of innocence defined as "sinless, absent of sexual feelings, and oblivious to worldly concerns" (4). As do most ideologies that structure the popular American consciousness, this shift diverged along racial lines. Emergent ideologies of childhood innocence did not "redeem" black children, but polarized innocence as a state of white childhood. In contrast to white childhood, black

childhood was marked as depraved, painless, and sexually sinful.[51] This dichotomy matured, as Bernstein explains, into the cult of true womanhood, the ideological pillars of purity, piety, and domesticity that deified white women in the (white) American imagination.

Examined through the lens of childhood, the cult of true womanhood is linked to black womanhood through the elimination of black girls from a state of "innocence." Wells-Barnett alludes to this connection in the conclusion of her reports on the rape of black girls in "The Black and White of It." In the last paragraph, she explains the dichotomous relationship between white women and black girls in the following formulation: "The 'honor' of grown women…needed protection; they were white. The outrage upon helpless childhood needed no avenging in this case; she was black (27). Wells-Barnett exposes that the cult of true womanhood produced a counter ideology of black women's insouciant disregard for sexual partnership, a myth that originated in ideologies of the prurience of black girls. In *Black Girlhood in the Nineteenth Century* (2016), Nazera Sadiq Wright demonstrates that the figure of the black girl was as a nineteenth century trope that directed the attention of readers to the unlawful aspects of American society (6). One woman figure who particularly enlightens stages of black girlhood is Harriet Jacobs, whom Wright also analyzes in her study.

In the previous chapter, Jacobs offers insight into white men's role in the process of transitioning black girls into black womanhood in *Incidents*. It is important to acknowledge Jacobs's own emphasis on girlhood as the subject of the slave narrative, which is reflected in the title. Wright explains, "Reading texts through the lens of age unveils specific developmental stages for black girls and the way that slavery warped the timeline of maturity for them" (10). In *Incidents*, Jacobs reveals that black girlhood is historically fraught by a breach. Black girls do

[51] Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York UP, 2011), pp. 4-5.

not simply mature into womanhood, but they are often forced into a stage of "knowing." Linda Brent, Jacobs's pseudonymous narrator, expresses this knowingness as "a sad epoch" (26) in the lives of enslaved girls. In *Incidents*, this period of transition is marked by mental, spiritual, and psychological anguish as Brent describes her master's violation in this way:

> My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I could not remain ignorant of their import…He peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of. I turned from him with disgust and hatred. But he was my master. I was compelled to live under the same roof with him—where I saw a man forty years my senior daily violating the most sacred commandments. (26)

Her master's perverse language violates her youth as he readies her for (sexual) abuse and quickly matures her into womanhood through language. His "foul words" are penetrating, leaving images in her head that she cannot avoid. These words are meant to "instruct" Brent on a new state of being and to "project" her into a new relationship with her master. She examines childhood as a particularly fraught period for all slave girls: "Even the little child, who is accustomed to wait on her mistress and her children, will learn, before she is twelve years old why it is that her mistress hates such and such a one among the slaves" (27). As discussed in the first chapter, Brent describes her transition into black womanhood through psychic-emotional injuries related to the shame/shameless paradox: "She drank the cup of sin, and shame, and misery whereof [her] persecuted race are compelled to drink" (28). This period of transition between black girlhood and black womanhood accounts for a period when black girls/women are faced with their sexual vulnerability and limited access to privacy. During slavery, black girls

and women were prepared for the slave market and marked female through their ability to perform sexual labor.

In "The Black and White of It," Wells-Barnett builds a case against white men and white women in order to bring the rape of black girls (and later women) into public discourse without further exposing black women to the shame/shameless paradox. Through her initial implication of white women and white men, Wells-Barnett demands the innocence of black girls/women to redeem them from the paradox of shame and shamelessness. Therefore, her series of reports on the rape of black girls at the end of "The Black and White of It" is a radical political strategy that exposes the ways in which the culture of lynching orbits around the abjection of black girlhood. It is the totality of this libidinous culture that motivates white men to rape black girls and black women, but produces a culture of silence regarding the various forms of violence that black girls and black women endure. Wells-Barnett's political strategy circumvents the shame/shameless paradox at the heart of post-Reconstruction lynching culture. In so doing, I argue that she emerges as the inspiration for the figure of salvation in Felton's *Hanover*.

The Counter-Mythology of Salvation

The cottage scene stages Molly Pierrepont and Mrs. Hartright as foils to each other through binary relationships to historical legitimacy: wife/mistress, public/private, miscegenated/pure. Mrs. Hartright is a lady of the house. As "a lady of one of the first families of Virginia" (41), she is a respectable white woman with genealogical legitimacy. In contrast, Pierrepont is a "Magdalene" of the cottage;[52] she inherits ancestral shame. Pierrpont's mother, an enslaved

[52] Pierrepont is called Magdalene six times in the text as a descendant of Magdalene's mythic status in the American imagination (49, 54, 136). Mary Magdalene is recorded in the Bible as a woman who followed Jesus and witnessed his crucifixion and resurrection. In western

woman who remained on the plantation after the Civil War, gives Pierrepont away to Mrs. Wise, who becomes the secretary of the Union Aid Society. Mrs. Wise raises the young girl, sends her away to school, but the two become estranged after Pierrepont returns to North Carolina and becomes intimately associated with Hartright. Mrs. Wise conveys the following narrative of Pierrepont's genealogy at the Union Aid Society meeting, composed of women activists:

> Before the war, there lived in Bruswick a large slave owner by name of Philpot. He was the father of Molly's mother, one of his slaves. After the surrender, this woman did not leave the plantation of her master but remained there until her death. The child, Molly's mother, whose name was Eliza, at the time of her mother's death was a pretty lass of fourteen; so attractive that the father then an old man could not curb his brutal passion. It is needless for me to speak plainer ladies…Molly was then about four years old.

Mrs. Wises's rhetorical ambiguity embeds nonessential and essential clauses, frustrating any attempt to diagram Pierrepont's lineage. The beginning of the passage bases legitimacy on patrilineal descent, locational accuracy, and geographic specificity. However, as the appropriately and ironically named Mrs. Wise unravels Pierrepont's genealogy, it becomes unclear who the mothers, fathers, and children are in this passage. In other words, Pierrepont's line of descent is tangled in ambiguous fathers, illegitimate children, and variously identified mothers. Moreover, the actual text contained in my editorial ellipses confirms the riddle-like convolution of this passage. In the ellipses, Mrs. Wise interrupts her record with the following proverb from the biblical text 2 Peter 2:22: "[T]he dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed is wallowing in the mire" (49). Mrs. Wise's narrative suggests that Pierrepont

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Christianity, she is regarded as a repentant prostitute or promiscuous woman, though the Bible does not substantiate this claim.

is entangled within that which is not only unclean, but also within that which cannot be made clean, suggesting Pierrepont as a figure who bears the sins of her past. In this way, Pierrepont bears a striking resemblance to the shame/shameless paradox of enslaved women in the previous chapter. Considering Mrs. Wise's use of biblical texts within the genealogical narrative, we can read a continuum of violent acts and transgressions that are historically endemic to black womanhood—sexual abuse, incest, and pedophilia—into Mrs. Wise's message. Mrs. Wise seemingly encourages her audience to read between the lines as she speaks publically through a dialect of shame that talks around the legacies of past transgressions. It is "needless for her to speak plainer" because the women at the meeting know the details. Pierrepont's family ties are convoluted, and the lines connect to the women at the meeting who tacitly understand what is left unspoken and who also need redemption from this legacy. This moment signifies a confessional ethic that is similar to Brent's strategy of non-disclosure. It also prefigures scenes of confession with other women that I will analyze in the next chapter. In this text, redemption is realized for the black community through Thorne's recasting of Pierrepont as a figure of salvation and the rewriting of her genealogy through a reformed biblical framework.[53]

As a figure of shame as well as salvation, Pierrepont signifies on the symbolic value of the Christian crucifixion, as death on the cross was a shameful form of punishment in antiquity that later also symbolized an act of salvation in traditional Christian cultures. Pierrepont reconciles the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood through her own messianic transformation that alludes to connections between the Christian crucifixion of Christ and the culture of lynching. *Hanover* predates James Cone's seminal text on the symbolism of the

[53] I am not suggesting that Thorne reforms the Bible, but rather that he offers counter rhetoric that undermines how deliberate mis-readings of biblical text have been used to substantiate racial oppression.

Christian cross and the lynching tree in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (2011). The acclaimed theologian offers the following appeal: "Until we can see the cross and the lynching tree together, until we can identify Christ with a 'recrucified' black body hanging from a lynching tree, there can be no genuine understanding of Christian identity in America, and no deliverance from the brutal legacy of slavery" (x). Thorne's configuration of Pierrepont seems to push this point even further to suggest that before we can understand the black woman in relationship to the cross, there is no deliverance from the legacies of slavery.

The burning cross is perhaps the most recognizable symbol of white racial empowerment and white America's exploitation of Christian symbolism. During the post-Reconstruction era, and after D. W. Griffin's 1915 film *Birth of a Nation* inundated the American popular consciousness, white terrorists set crosses afire in black and white communities as warning signs representing the unmitigated authority of the fledgling white nation. This fanatic belief in the supremacy of white men found its most vitriolic outlet in lynching rituals. This chapter interprets Thorne's capitalization on biblical narratives and religious symbolism in *Hanover* as part of the author's effort to reconfigure the myths of race that undergird lynching rituals through a womanist framework.

Thorne is among a group of other writers, artists, and poets who connected lynching to the crucifixion of Christ. Artists of the Harlem Renaissance era, such as Countee Cullen, most frequently depicted the similarities:

> How Calvary in Palestine
>
> Extending down to me and mine,
>
> Was but the first leaf in a line
>
> Of trees on which a Man should swing

World without end, in suffering

For all men's healing, let me sing. (69)

The tree in this poem is both the lynching tree and the genealogical family tree, as "Was but the first leaf in a line," alludes to Christ as the father of the victim. The last line offers redemption through this legacy of suffering with Christ (or as Christ), suggestive of Cone's claim, "The final word about black life is not death on a lynching tree but redemption in the cross, a miraculously transformed life found in the God of the gallows" (23). Yet, this redemption manifests through physical death, as the Christ-centered framework in the previous poem offers transcendence and healing in creative mourning of those who died on the lynching cross. Thorne appropriates this narrative by reimaging Pierrepont as a savior figure who does not face death on a cross, but who confronts her life of shame. Similar to Christ, who prays in Gethsemane before his death, Pierrepont has her own Gethsemane, not in Jerusalem, but in the cottage, as she is transformed from a woman of shame into a redeemer and savior of the black community in Wilmington. The narrator explains, "To decide the honor with poverty offered by the black man and the life of ease with shame offered by the white one is her 'Gethsemane'" (36). Rejecting the cottage, and her alienation from the black community, Pierrepont fully emerges as a nineteenth century heroine who saves the black community in Wilmington as an informant during the riot. She is also a savior figure as the mother of a reformed matrilineal racial heritage. In this way, Pierrepont signifies on Wells-Barnett's prophetic status and merges the traditions of domestic fiction novels as well as male-authored social justice texts.

As foils to one another, Pierrepont and Mrs. Hartright not only reveal essential features of each other's character through contrast, but also through their similarities. Although Thorne casts Molly Pierrepont and Mary Hartright in opposition to one another through the staging of

the cottage scene, the synthesis of their voices reveals the ways in which these characters are enmeshed with one other. Through speeches that communicate the same message, Pierrepont is realized as a prophetic character. Pierrepont and Mrs. Hartright's voices resound to condemn white men for the shame of black womanhood. What I mean here is that Pierrepont and Mrs. Hartright speak similar words as they sever their relationships with Ben Hartright in different moments in the text. Pierrepont warns, "Go tell your hypocritical associates in crime that the deed they are about to commit will recoil upon their own heads, and upon the heads of their children" (39). Mrs. Hartright delivers a corresponding indictment: "God knows your hypocrisy and the deeds you commit will recoil upon your own heads" (42). The offenses under examination include the White Supremacy League's plan to massacre the black citizens of Wilmington and the adulterous affair between Pierrepont and Hartright; it is the hypocrisy of these two crimes that ultimately condemns white men. Similar to Thorne's demotion of Ben Hartright in the construction of the text, Mrs. Hartright is also subordinated to Pierrepont as she echoes her in the chapter "Molly Pierrepont." The duality of these women is further represented as Mary Hartright completes Pierrepont's sobriquet in the text as Mary Magdalene.[54] I do not suggest that these two characters are identical. Rather, Pierrepont's prophetic voice is realized through Mrs. Hartright, and Pierrepont accepts her own role as a savior. After subsequent confrontations with Ben Hartright, the characters' voices align, and both Pierrepont and Mrs. Hartright declare, "I [Pierrepont] shall *take it upon myself* to give the alarm, for these are my people / I [Mrs. Hartright] am *going home* to my people" (my emphasis, 47/42).

The voices of Pierrepont and Hartright speak to Pierrepont as an intermediary character who redeems the community through self-sacrifice and a home-going. It is through this process

[54] See note seven on Mary Magdalene.

of atonement that Pierrepont is realized as a prophetic character. In the seventh chapter, titled "Molly's Atonement," Pierrepont rejects her life of ease and luxury and divulges the White Supremacy League's plan to Silas Wignate, the chairman of the Republican Executive Committee. Pierrepont's decision to offer revelation transforms history. Wignate counsels, "Don't brood over the past, Molly…Let the dead past be gone" (54). Wignate's allusion to Pierrepont's own past as well as a "dead past" suggests how she intervenes in history and myth, as the past refers to Pierrepont's history as an individual as well as her heritage as a black woman. Continuing to build on the biblical mythos of the novel, which includes black religiosity, I interpret Pierrepont's prophetic voice through the black religious vernacular tradition of "home-going." Traditionally, "home-going" is used to emphasize new life rather than death at funeral ceremonies. Pierrepont needs a "home-going" because her alienation from the community and her tangled genealogy occlude her ability to redeem the black community. Her estranged status also frustrates her prophetic pronouncement to return home to save her people; before she decides to reveal the White Supremacy League's plan, Pierrepont has neither a home of her own nor a community of people.

Therefore, the text reconstructs Pierrepont as a figure of salvation whose home-going intervenes in the history of the lynching massacre. As the white mob exerts its force, burning down black-owned establishments and harassing women, children, and men in the street, Pierrepont curbs the destructive impact of the mob in the legacy of Lizzie Smith. She fights off a young white boy in a physical exchange, escapes being captured in an improbable altercation with a group of white men, and emerges as a "heavenly messenger" at the printing press (82). Black people hide at the press and prepare to avoid the mob by escaping to Dry Pond. A group of white men is stationed at the river, and Pierrepont's intervention saves the women and men at

the press from death. After her warning, she has a metaphorical death, fainting in a display of proper femininity: "…she sank in a swoon upon the floor. Tenderly the prostrate form was lifted up, and borne to a place of safety, and an effort made to revive her" (83). Afterwards, Pierrepont is reunited with her foster mother, Mrs. Wise, and she awakens in Mrs. Wise's home. It is in relationship to Pierrepont's "new life" as a savior figure that she is fully realized as counter-mythic, redressing her previous status of shame.

Through Pierrepont's sacrifice, the historicity of the text yields to the improbability of romance to establish Pierrepont's counter-mythic status. In *Mythic Black Fiction*: *The Transformation of History* (1986), Jane Campbell explains that romance allows black writers to re-envision history and culture through mythmaking. Examining the importance of mythmaking to the black literary tradition, Campbell writes: "Afro-American historical fiction, from William Wells Brown's *Clotel* to David Bradley's *The Chaneysville Incident*, has fused history and myth into a new reality that enshrines blacks' efforts to maintain their humanity despite the forces acting on them" (ix). Mythic black figures were especially didactic in nineteenth and early twentieth-century black novels, though mythmaking continues to be an essential part of the African American literary tradition. Pierrepont joins a tradition of black messianic figures who challenge American mythologies of racial oppression. Women messianic figures sacrifice their lives to black communities by means of service, intellect, and virtuous living; through this sacrifice, they dismantle racist ideologies to "effect historical transformation" (Campbell 22-23).

In addition to mitigating the extermination of the black community in Wilmington, the historical transformation that Pierrepont enacts through her counter-mythic status subverts the American mythology of the curse of Ham, a biblical narrative that is often used to substantiate slavery and maintain black inferiority as a divine ordering. For example, the League justifies

their murderous efforts to restore white supremacy through this tale: "They were to be destroyed because they were the black descendants of Ham, the accursed son of Noah…Cursed be Canaan, servant of servants shall he be…The Jew in this instance represented Shem, the blessed son, who was triumph over Ham and keep him forever in subjection" (57). During the eras of slavery and Jim Crow, this narrative was used to exonerate white men from the inhumane abuses and the systematic disempowerment of black people. In *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (2007), Lawrence W. Levine refers to the curse of Ham as "the ubiquitous Anglo-American myth" that explains the genesis of black racial identity (84). The curse of Ham is likened to a creation story in the American sociocultural and political imagination, which the novel depicts at the League's planning meeting: "...the Anglo-Saxon race was ordained by God to rule the world. It is needless for me to say that the Anglo-Saxon proposes to carry out God's decree to the letter. When God made man, he placed him over every other living creature to rule and govern, and that man was a white man" (28).

This narrative of white supremacy as divinely ordered is subverted in the text through a biblical narrative that restores Pierrepont's genealogical legitimacy. At the cottage, the narrator revises a tale of King Solomon to validate Pierrepont's "Negro blood" (33) in antiquity. Through this revised historicity, Pierrepont descends from a black princess: "Solomon's most favored wife was his black princess, Naamah, the mother of Rehoboam, his successor…The marriage of Solomon to his black princess was the most notable of any of his marriages; for that wonderful poem, 'Solomon's Songs,' is many a eulogy to this one of his many wives" (34). The narrator alludes to Pierrepont's legacy as a savior by explaining that King Solomon, the highest sovereign under God, extols the black princess in life as the "Rose of Sharon," which is often translated as representing Christ in Song of Solomon 2:1. Furthermore, Pierrepont's power as

savior-figure stems from this matrilineal lineage. The narrator concludes the counter-mythology with Solomon's mournful cry after Naamah's death, which is thought to foreshow Christ's redemption of humanity in Song of Solomon 6:13: "Return, return O Shalamite; return that we may look upon thee" (34). This counter-mythology substantiates the legitimacy of black womanhood; not only does it subvert the curse of Ham through an affirmative biblical mythos, but it also responds to *partus sequitur ventrem*, the legal mandate that slaves follow the condition of their mothers. The counter-myth offers an affirmative matrilineal mythology that subverts legacies of black womanhood that extend from slavery such as the unintelligible genealogy of black womanhood that Mrs. Wise's convoluted tale of Pierrepont's lineage represents in the text.

Partus sequitur ventrum legalized the heritability of slavery as matrilineal, which socio-politically bound race to black women's reproductive role. This inheritance was the bedrock of slavery, as it allowed white men to father slaves with impunity. Thorne explains, "Upheld by the law the Southerner sold his own daughter and sister into a life of shame" (34). In *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*, Jennifer L. Morgan explains that women's labor on plantations and ideas about black women's sexuality were directly linked to enslaved women's wombs and reproductive capacities (7). According to Morgan, "Slave owners appropriated their [black women's] reproductive lives by claiming children as property, by rewriting centuries-old European laws of descent, and by defining a biologically driven perpetual racial slavery through the real and imaginary reproductive potential of women whose "blackness" was produced by and produced their enslavability" (1). This "appropriation of black women's reproductive legacies," (9) in the words of Morgan, occurred immediately following African women's capture in Africa and translocation to new world colonies. The association between enslaved women's reproductive role and the continuation of slavery was socio-

politically concretized in *partus sequitur ventrum*. This mandate legally and culturally designated black women as figures of disinheritance. Although black women's status as figures of disinheritance is rooted in *partus sequitur ventrum*, this formulation importantly exceeds the slave's property status and endures beyond the physical and legal state of the slave condition, as I examined in the previous chapter.

To belie the legal and socio-political stigma of *partus sequitur ventrum*, the narrative of the black princess offers a vision of women who ascend and reign, like Pierrepont who was "lifted up" (83) after she faints during the massacre. This counter-mythology ultimately supplants the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood. Wignate confirms this re-historicism before Molly's symbolic home-going in the chapter on her atonement. According to Wignate, "She might have been a queen, but, like the base Judean, she threw a pearl away richer than all her tribe" (56). As a savior to the black community in Wilmington, Molly reclaims this inheritance, and she is reunited with the matriarch, Mrs. Wise, who states, "You have done nobly…Your name should be placed upon the roll of honor, my dear. Go to sleep; rest serenely upon your laurels" (87).

Hanover concludes with "Molly's Final Step" in a black church in New York. This ending may understandably trouble readers. It may seem as if Molly disavows the shame of black womanhood in a final capitulation to respectability politics and religion. However, we can also consider the church as an institution that is representative of a relocated black community that has resisted the politics of terror in the South as well as escaped the (sexually) exploitive domestic arrangements of the cottage. By becoming a wife and mother, Pierrepont reunites with the black community and affirms black futurity in an affirmative image of womanhood and motherhood. Through this interpretation, Pierrepont's "final step" is toward a creative vision of a

restored black community, the importance of which will be further examined in the next chapter. Joining the church choir, Pierrepont sings her shame as "pardon[ed], cleanse[d], relieve[d]" (136), and in her song lies the promise of salvation. Yet, her sorrow song contradicts a romantic ending, expressing the necessity of further transformation.

Pierrepont ultimately offers a vision of Wells-Barnett's prophetic status. Contemporary scholars regard Wells-Barnett as a "crusader for justice,"[55] and her life work has only recently gained the respect that is due to her as a race leader, civil rights movement progenitor, and women's rights champion.[56] Wells-Barnett was often at odds with the ideologies of racial progress of her day, challenging the political philosophies of "race leaders" such as Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois. Wells-Barnett also eschewed the "ladylike" gender politics of the women-led club organizations that predominated the post-Reconstruction era in which many black women worked and agitated for racial progress. Wells-Barnett was central to, yet still on the margins of, debates regarding racial progress and gender relations; she was a spokeswoman against racial injustice who committed her life to radical social justice efforts. In the preface of *Southern Horrors*, Douglass's praise of the activist echoes the novel's ultimate reconfiguration of bravery and honor: "Brave woman! You have done your people and mine a service which can neither be weighted nor measured" (16). Similar to Pierrepont, Douglass suggests that through Wells-Barnett's bold intervention, the activist offers herself up for the black community, perhaps

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[55] Often used to identify Wells-Barnett, this phrase is taken from the title of her autobiography *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (U of Chicago, 1970).
[56] For more scholarship on Wells-Barnett as a leader in movements for social justice, see Sandra Gunning, *Race, Rape, and Lynching: The Red Record of American Literature, 1890-1912* (Oxford UP, 1996); Lynn Olson's *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (Routledge, 1991); Paula Giddings, *A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign Against Lynching* (Amistad, 2008); Angela Sims's *Ethical Complications of Lynching: Ida B. Well's Interrogation of American Terror* (Palgrave, 2010).

with specific emphasis on girlhood/womanhood in the distinction Douglass draws between “your people and mine.”

Figure

THE SHAME OF AMERICA

Do you know that the United States is the Only Land on Earth where human beings are BURNED AT THE STAKE?

In Four Years, 1918-1921, Twenty-Eight People Were Publicly BURNED BY AMERICAN MOBS

3436 People Lynched 1889 to 1922

For What Crimes Have Mobs Nullified Government and Inflicted the Death Penalty?

The Alleged Crimes	The Victims
Murder	1288
Rape	571
Crimes against the Person	615
Crimes against Property	333
Miscellaneous Crimes	453
Absence of Crime	176
	3436

Why Some Mob Victims Died:

Not turning out of road for white boy in auto
Being a relative of a person who was lynched
Jumping a labor contract
Being a member of the Non-Partisan League
"Talking back" to a white man
"Insulting" white man.

Is Rape the "Cause" of Lynching?

Of 3,436 people murdered by mobs in our country, only 571, or less than 17 per cent., were even accused of the crime of rape.

83 WOMEN HAVE BEEN LYNCHED IN THE UNITED STATES

Do lynchers maintain that they were lynched for "the usual crime"?

AND THE LYNCHERS GO UNPUNISHED

THE REMEDY

The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill Is Now Before the United States Senate

The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill was passed on January 26, 1922, by a vote of 230 to 119 in the House of Representatives

The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill Provides:
That culpable State officers and mobbists shall be tried in Federal Courts on failure of State courts to act, and that a county in which a lynching occurs shall be fined $10,000, recoverable in a Federal Court.

The Principal Question Raised Against the Bill is upon the Ground of Constitutionality.

The *Constitutionality* of the Dyer Bill Has Been Affirmed by—
The Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives
The Judiciary Committee of the Senate
The United States Attorney General, legal adviser of Congress
Judge Guy D. Goff, of the Department of Justice

The Senate has been petitioned to pass the Dyer Bill by—
29 Lawyers and Jurists, including two former Attorneys General of the United States
19 State Supreme Court Justices
24 State Governors
3 Archbishops, 85 bishops and prominent churchmen
29 Mayors of large cities, north and south.

The American Bar Association at its meeting in San Francisco, August 9, 1922, adopted a resolution asking for further legislation by Congress to punish and prevent lynching and mob violence.

Fifteen State Conventions of 1922 (3 of them Democratic) have inserted in their party platforms a demand for national action to stamp out lynchings.

The Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill is not intended to protect the guilty, but to assure to every person accused of crime trial by due process of law.

THE DYER ANTI-LYNCHING BILL IS NOW BEFORE THE SENATE
TELEGRAPH YOUR SENATORS TODAY YOU WANT IT ENACTED

If you want to help the organization which has brought to light the facts about lynching, the organization which is fighting for 100 per cent. Americanism, not for some of the people some of the time, but for all of the people, white or black, all of the time

Send your check to J. E. SPINGARN, Treasurer of the

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
70 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

THIS ADVERTISEMENT IS PAID FOR IN PART BY THE ANTI-LYNCHING CRUSADERS.

Figure 1: The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) lobbied Congress to pass a federal law against lynching. In November of 1922, the NAACP ran this full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* and other newspapers, pressing for passage of the Dyer anti-lynching bill. Although the bill passed in the House of Representatives by a two-to-one majority, it was subsequently filibustered and defeated in the U.S. Senate. The U.S. Congress never outlawed lynching, despite the NAACP's vigorous efforts through the 1930s and the introduction of several other anti-lynching bills.

Chapter Three: Letters from a Bad Girl: The Lived Experience of Shame in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

somebody/ anybody

sing a black girl's song

bring her out

to know herself

to know you

but sing her rhythms

carin/ struggle/ hard times

sing her song of life

she's been dead so long

closed in silence so long…

Ntozake Shange, for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf

Perhaps no other text reflects the climate of mid to late twentieth century black women's literature than Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982). Relative to depictions of black life that precede it, this text offers an unvarnished account of experiences that are common to black women within black communities.[57] Due to Steven Spielberg's 1985 film adaptation of the novel, discussions of *The Color Purple* have been wide-ranging. Significantly, contemporary debates on the text and film, which are often considered simultaneously, tend to divide responses to *The*

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[57] In my use of the term "black community," I do not suggest monolithic ideas of black or unitary ideas of community. Rather, I use black community to signal a diverse minority group, descended from Africa, who has responded to similar experiences of oppression and collectively fashioned distinct cultural traditions and practices that many of the people within this group follow and recognize.

Color Purple into two camps, one of women who identify with the novel and film, and the other of men who do not. Although this gendered division does not always hold securely,[58] what Jacqueline Bobo reminds readers and viewers in her 1989 article, "Sifting Through the Controversy: Reading *The Color Purple,*" is still consequential to understanding the text and its afterlife. She writes, "The broader debate over *The Color Purple* is about the authority of black women writers to set the agenda for imagemaking in fiction and film" (334). Although responses to *The Color Purple*, both mainstream and academic, have considered the ways in which the film and novel offer (differing) accounts of the black family that were like nothing seen or read before,[59] no one, to my knowledge, has directly addressed the significance of *The Color Purple's* emergence within the Cosby/Reagan era, an era defined by contrasting, but perhaps interwoven, ideas of black familial pride and black racial shame.

The Cosby Show aired just two years after the release of Walker's text and one year before Spielberg's film. From its debut in 1984 to its finale in 1992, black and white America tuned in weekly to watch the lives of Claire, a partner at a law firm, and Heathcliff, an obstetrician, and their four perfectly imperfect children, as the Huxtable clan managed palatable middle-class family drama and school-age angst in a thirty-minute sitcom. Airing for eight seasons, the show is often regarded as depicting one of "Americas greatest families" and Cliff Huxtable, a representation of America's greatest dad (until recently, that is).[60] Set in New York

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[58] See Trudier Harris, "On the Color Purple, Stereotypes, and Sielnce," Black American Litearture Forum, vol. 18 no. 4, 1984, pp. 155-161. JSTOR, http://ww.jstore.org/stable/2904291; bell hooks, "Centering on Women but Ignoring Race and Economics," *Woman's Issues in Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, edited by Claudia Durst Johnson (Greenhaven, 2011).
[59] See Barbara Smith, review of *The Color Purple*, "Sexual Oppression Unmasked," *Callaloo* no. 22, 1984, pp. 170-176. JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/2930486.
[60] See Chauncey Devega, "How *The Cosby Show* Duped America: The Sitcom That Enabled Our Ugliest Reagan-era Fantasies," 12 July 2015. *Salon*,

City, the show reflected Bill Cosby's own conservative ideas regarding black upward mobility, through dignity and proper family values. As Cherise A. Harris explains in *The Cosby Cohort: Blessings and Burdens of Growing up Black Middle Class*, "…by and large the Huxtables' affinity toward Blacks and Blackness, was toward middle-class Blacks and a very specific middle-class Blackness—a Blackness built firmly on upward mobility, the politics of respectability, and a seamless assimilation into White society" (11). These principles form the fabric of this weekly show. These same values provide the main motifs of Cosby's own lectures throughout the nation. Cosby's lectures are colloquially referred to as "call-outs," suggesting their shame-inducing rhetoric. During these "call-outs," Cosby reprimands black communities, usually of lower and working class demographics, for not meeting the expectations of social progress through personal responsibility and individual achievement. As several critics of popular culture have pointed out, these principles of black community uplift via the adoption and adaptation of proper family values were a direct response to misrepresentations of black poverty and other socio-economic disparities in black communities, such as that of Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action."[61] Moynihan's report largely scapegoats black women for social disparities and political injustices due to notions of an aberrant black family structure that women tended to head. Often referred to as "The Moynihan Report," this document, and the ideologies it produced, greatly informed public policy as well as

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www.saolon.com/2015/07/12/how_the_cosby_show_duped_america_the_sitcom_that_enabled_our_ugliest_reagan_era_fantasies/. Accessed January 1, 2017.

[61] See Henry Louis Gate, Jr., "TV's Black World Turns - But Stays Unreal," 12 November 1989. *The New York Times*, www.nytimes.com/1989/11/12/arts/tv-s-black-world-turns-but-stays-unreal.html?pagewanted=all. Accessed January 1, 2017.

the American sociopolitical and cultural imagination in the post-1965 moment, especially during the Reagan-Bush presidential eras.[62]

Two decades after Moynihan's "study" (just shy of one year), *The Cosby Show* was commonly considered transgressive in its depiction of a two-parent, "functional" family structure; however, its idealism largely undergirded Reagan era stereotypes regarding the degeneracy of black working and underclass citizens, a population that was heavily criminalized during the 1970s-1990s Reagan-Bush years.[63] The show failed to offer substantive representations of the majority of black families and largely supported popular American rhetoric of meritocracy and individual responsibility, which gave support to Reagan's policies. Although the black middle-class advanced during the Reagan-Bush years of the Cosby era, Reagan's slashing of social welfare programs that targeted the poor and his dismantling of several of the gains made during the Civil Rights Movement led to even wider disparities between the black and white middle-class population and black lower and working class families.[64]

For many contemporary readers and viewers of *The Color Purple*, these two depictions of black life—Cosby's and Reagan's—were contrasting options for illustrating black familial and social affairs; one representing the black community's pride and the other the black community's shame. *The Color Purple*, to many, fell on the side of shame. As one responder commented of Walker's novel, some black people thought that *The Color Purple* was "an airing of black people's dirty laundry" (336). Opponents of Walker's novel largely argued that Walker's depiction confirmed stereotypes of black life, such as those that the Reagan era exploited, and

[62] For a feminist critique of "The Negro Family: The Case For National Action," refer to Michelle Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of The Superwoman* (Verso, 1976) pp. 109-110.
[63] See Cherise A. Harris, *The Cosby Cohort: Blessings and Burdens of Growing up Black Middle Class*," (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), pp. 1-7; Duchess Harris, *Black Feminist Politics From Kennedy to Obama* (Palgrave McMillian, 2011) pp. 45-56.
[64] Harris, pp. 2.

they did so through rhetoric of black representation that mirrored a Cosby-esque politics, maligning most vehemently Walker's depiction of black men. In *Film Comment*, Spike Lee weighed in on the decision to adapt Walker's novel for the big screen: "…the reason that Hollywood elected Alice Walker's novel to make into a film was that Black men are depicted as one-dimensional animals."[65] What these critics did not realize, however, is that Cosby's and Reagan's visions of black life are two sides of the s(h)ame coin. In other words, the Cosby/Reagan era reveals that Cosby's brand of black familial pride and Reagan's exploitation of black people's shame are intimately linked.

Produced out of this social and political climate, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* demonstrates how the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood emerges in black communities through the politics of respectability. Often, the politics of black respectability in film and fiction require that artists sanitize their depictions of black life, usually to the detriment of black women's liberation, and most especially as representations pertain to black women's sexual freedom. For example, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), a text from which Walker draws inspiration, was condemned, at least in some quarters, for being apolitical and for presenting caricatures of black people and culture during the 1930s.[66] However, many black women readers identified with Janie's quest for voice and her journey to self-love

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[65] Marlaine Glicksman, "Lee Way," *Spike Lee Interviews*, edited by Cynthia Fuchs (UP of Mississippi, 2002) pp. 48.

[66] Reviewing Hurston's novel in 1937, Richard Wright wrote in *New Masses*, "Miss Hurston voluntarily continues in her novel the tradition which was forced upon the Negro in the theatre, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the 'white folks' laugh." Similarly, Alain Locke posited in *Opportunity* in 1938, "It is folklore fiction at its best, which we gratefully accept as an overdue replacement for so much faulty local color fiction about Negroes… Progressive southern fiction has already banished the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weap over and envy. Having gotten rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplication!"

through romantic and platonic relationships. Similarly, black women particularly embraced Walker's novel, noting the true-to-life nature of Celie's experiences.

Many women used *The Color Purple* to challenge the culture of silence surrounding black women's experiences. As one woman stated, "We don't always have to pretend that everything is hunky-dory. It could be that if I tell somebody and they tell somebody else then maybe I can get some answers to some problems I have" (Bobo 336). This woman's inquisitive voice echoes Celie's own voice and existential crisis in her first letter: "Maybe you can give me a sign, let me know what is happening to me" (1). To intervene in a discussion of the unrealistic portrayal of Mr.__, another woman whose engagement with the film Bobo reports, explains:

> My mother asked my Dad how come he would jump on her. Sometime when she hadn't done anything he would just jump on her, for GP. She asked him some years after they split up, and he told her he didn't know any better. That when he sat around with the guys... the guys would talk about how you had to keep a woman in line, you had to whip her ass every so often. And so he told Momma that's what he thought he was supposed to do to make sure he could be the man of the house. (336-337)

The father of the woman who offers the previous narrative, and the men whose patterns of abuse the father later mimics, are strikingly similar to the behavior of Mr.__, Old Mr.__ (the father of Mr.__), and Harpo in their failed attempts to actualize patriarchal ideas of proper manhood and their fragile notions of masculinity in *The Color Purple*. Although it is not the focus of this chapter, it is worth noting, for example, that Mr.__'s abuse of Celie cannot be understood outside of his inability to "domesticate" Shug; his resentment of Pa, who forbids the marriage of Mr.__ and Shug; and his hostility towards Old Mr.__, who still owns and authoritatively manages

Mr.__'s home. Furthermore, Old Mr.__ regrets his inability to produce a son who fits the proper (public) ideals of marriage. Lastly, Harpo tries to gain weight and beats Sophia because she reminds him of his perceived physical weakness. Michelle Wallace explains this phenomenon in *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (1979): "The Americanized Black man's reaction to his inability to earn enough to support his family, his impotence, his lack of concrete power, was to vent his resentment on the person in this society who could do least about it—his woman" (24). Although Wallace revises many of her claims in the 1990 forward to *Black Macho*, this text remains an important, insightful account of the sociopolitical forces that often instigate the troubled relationships between black women and black men.[67]

The woman in Bobo's article offers a lens through which to see the abusive behaviors of the male characters in *The Color Purple* as indicative of their own sense of shame in response to their failures to be "men of the house." The men in the novel as well as the men in the viewer's narrative project their shame onto women. Additionally, both of the women who respond in Bobo's article point to the ways in which women become victims to the failures of patriarchal desires. They also demonstrate the prevalence of the culture of silence in black communities, which often leaves these experiences unaddressed. The women who respond in Bobo's article play out the significant pattern of women who connect their personal stories to those of other women. This exchange is as a form of confession that offers a partial remedy to sociopolitical arrangements that often perpetuate domestic abuse because it initiates broadened perspectives and lays the groundwork for change. As women confess, they "get answers" from other women,

[67] For example, Wallace revises her claims about the drawbacks of Black Power and male leadership during the Civil Rights Movement, supporting the more nuanced discussion of race and sex in later works such as Paula Gidding's *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex* (1984).

which allows women to become agents of their own experiences and make personal transformations that ultimately have an impact on their communities.

Importantly, the violence of these men has to be understood not only through the lens of sexism, but within the racial climate that is a ubiquitous undercurrent in the text. Walker demonstrates how racism and sexism interlock, manifesting the distinct forms of oppression that black women confront. Scholars, such as bell hooks in "Centering on Women but Ignoring Race," have argued that the novel focuses on the exploitation of black women but fails to challenge race and class exploitation (110-11). However, such criticism of the text fails to acknowledge how racism and classism are rooted in intimate interpersonal relationships in the novel. Explaining the role of race and class in her essay, "In the Closet of the Soul," Alice Walker includes a letter she wrote to a woman who asked her to address her characterization of Mr.__. Walker writes:

> In the novel and in the movie…it is clear that Mister's father is part white; this is how Mister comes by his run-down plantation house. It belonged to his grandfather, a white man and a slave owner. Mister learns how to treat women and children from his father, Old Mister. Who did old Mister learn from? Well, from Old M*as*ter, his slave owning father, who treated Old Mister's mother and old Mister (growing up) as slaves, which they were. (original emphasis, 540)

Legacies of slavery are at the heart of this novel's depiction of race, sex, and class. These realities continue to emerge in the text through Celie's letters to a white God; Celie's marriage arrangement that recalls an auction block; Sophia's criminalization and imprisonment; and Squeak's rape by her uncle, a white jail warden.

In many ways, this chapter echoes the insightful readings of previous discussions of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Scholars have consistently pointed out that Celie, the writer of the majority of the letters that constitute the novel, is caught up in family dynamics and a marriage arrangement that leave her with feelings of alienation, dis-ease, and shame.[68] Furthermore, the importance of Celie's self-actualization has been equally discussed as represented in the shift in Celie's narrative addressee, from God to Nettie, and finally to a concept of God that includes Celie as part of divinity. My intervention in this chapter, then, offers a step backwards, as I not only acknowledge Celie's alienation and shame, but I also examine the nature of this experience in order to lend further insight into the ways in which the God Celie initially writes to fosters her shame. Then, I move previous discussions of *The Color Purple* forward, to uncover the ways in which Walker mobilizes the epistolarity of the text to demonstrate the psychic-emotional realities of the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood. To reiterate from previous chapters, the shame/shameless paradox refers to the inescapable predicament that black women are often forced or coerced into due to their sexual vulnerability. The shame/shameless paradox refers to social stigmas that are attached to black womanhood and the emotional and psychic realities that black women experience as a result. To conclude this chapter, I find generative possibilities for the liberation of communities through the novel's decoupling of the shame/shameless paradox in Celie, a figure who has internalized shame, and Shug Avery, a figure who mobilizes shamelessness.

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[68] See Deborah McDowell, "'The Changing Same': Generational Connections and Black Women Novelists—Iola Leroy and The Color Purple," *The Changing Same: Black Women's Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (Indiana UP, 1995), pp. 34-57; *see also* Qiana J. Whitted, "A Loveless, Barren, Hopeless Western Marriage: Spiritual Infidelity in the Fiction of Nella Larsen and Alice Walker," *"A God of Justice?:" The Problem of Evil in Twentieth-Century Black Literature* (U Virginia P, 2009), pp. 77-108.

Celie is an unlikely composer of epistles as she is a poor, marginally literate black woman whose time is divided between domestic commitments to her step-father/father, and later her husband and her husband's children. Discussions of *The Color Purple* have primarily looked to God, Celie's step-father, Pa, and her husband, Mr.__, to explain Celie's epistolary motivation. These figures have an undeniable influence on Celie's letters, which is most explicitly demonstrated in the only non-epistolary statement in the novel that serves as an epigraph to the text: "You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (1), Pa admonishes Celie before she writes the first letter. In writing, Celie seems compliantly to follow Pa's command, addressing her first letters to God as she discloses what Pa demands that she never speak about. In the first few letters, Celie writes to God about being a fourteen-year-old girl whose father impregnates her twice and gets rid of the babies; whose mother dies after years of abuse and neglect; and whose sister Nettie seems next in line to endure a similar fate.

Although Celie's letters can be read as her acquiescence to Pa's command, an alternative motivation for Celie's letter writing emerges in her sister Nettie's fourth letter to Celie. This is not to suggest that Celie does not write in partial response to Pa's command, but it is to de-center Pa's authority and turn to the (often frustrated) correspondences between Celie and Nettie to locate another motivation for Celie's decision to write. By giving priority to the exchange between Celie and Nettie, I offer insight into the psychic and emotional landscape of Celie's process of self-actualization. Additionally, by foregrounding the discursive exchanges between women, I uncover the emotional underpinnings of Celie's "Dear God" epistles through Walker's manipulation of the epistolary form. Deborah McDowell also charts the psychological development of Celie and privileges her and Nettie's correspondences to examine Celie's

epistles.[69] She points to Celie's "last resounding word to her sister, Nettie, before they separate," which is, "Write" (43), to explain Celie's letter-writing. I emphasize the undercurrent of this decision to write, which Nettie reveals in the following letter:

> I remember you said your life make you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will go on writing them, which is guidance enough for me. Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart. I am so lonely, Celie. (130)

In this epistle to Celie, Nettie identities shame as the impetus for Celie's letter writing, and she connects her own decision to write letters addressed to Celie to the same motivating stimulus. In this letter, Nettie encapsulates the lived experience of shame. She describes shame as feeling bad, closed into oneself and suffocating from feelings lodged within the self that metaphorically disconnect Nettie from a life-source as she chokes on her own heart, the vital organ that is often considered the center of a person's thoughts and emotions. The asphyxia that Nettie describes reflects the internalization of negative judgment that produces shame, and emblematizes the central role of shame in the psychological development of Celie as a writer. In other words, Nettie describes shame as a threat to her life, but she also suggests that shame prompts letter writing, and in so doing, has generative possibilities. Celie's letters increasingly allow her to document her experience and move closer to the self within as she connects her experiences with other women in the text.

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[69] McDowell, "*The Changing Shame,*"pp. 34-57.

The epistolarity of *The Color Purple* demonstrates the lived experience of Celie's shame. Furthermore, Celie's lived experience of shame offers an important lens into the psychosocial and psychosexual construction of the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood. As previously noted, although shame has recently become a heavily theorized affect due to the "affective turn" in the humanities and social sciences, its relationship to black women's experiences of patriarchy, and its offspring, misogyny and sexism, have largely been left unexplored.[70] Walker is not only invested in exposing the physical and material realities of black women's oppression, but she is also equally concerned with the psychological cost of this oppression and the spiritual and cognitive process of renewal that Celie's writing of "~~I am~~" enlightens in her first letter to God.

Although Nettie reveals Celie's letter writing as a response to shame rather late in the text, the lived experience of Celie's shame is introduced in the first letter of the novel: "I am fourteen years old. ~~I am~~. I have always been a good girl" (1). Celie's striking out of "I am" renders shame semiotically, as "~~I am"~~ not only represents Celie's self-abnegation, but it also demonstrates a breach of subjectivity. In *"A God of Justice?": The Problem of Evil in Twentieth-Century Black Literature*, Qiana Whitted describes Celie's writing of "~~I am"~~ in this way: "The initial lines…anticipate condemnation that is powerful enough to kill, while invoking a sense of guilt that leads to Celie's self erasure" (100). Much like Nettie's previously examined description of shame, the guilt and self-erasure that Whitted refers to portrays a sense of shame, which affect

[70] For a discussion of the turn to affect in the humanities and social sciences, refer to Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Haley, editors, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing The Social* (Duke UP, 2007). For a discussion of how black women are denied full citizenship through stereotypes in popular culture that shame black women, see Melissa Harris-Perry, *Sister Citizen: Shame, Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (Yale UP, 2011).

theorists corroborate.[71] As Celie's perspective shifts from present tense to present perfect, "~~I am~~" separates Celie from who she is (a fourteen year old girl) and who she is becoming (a bad girl). In other words, Celie has always been good, but "~~I am~~" forewarns and frustrates the continuity of Celie's self-perceived goodness. Therefore, Celie's letters to God materialize her shame, but they can also be likened to a shame response, as Celie writes to avoid complete self-contempt and self-abnegation. According to Tompkins, attempts to hide the face and reduce communication signal shame; people commonly demonstrate shame responses by covering their faces and/or lowering the upper part of their bodies. These are external markers of a shame response, but Tomkins explains that what remains constant are not merely the physical characteristics of shame, but also the process of self-confrontation that shame elicits.[72] In other words, a hung head and downcast eyes are merely signs of a response to the internal warring of the self and the self's negotiation with a real or imagined other that stands in judgment and/or contempt, which Celie semiotically performs in "~~I am~~."

Celie casts the internalized judging other as God, a deity that she initially imagines as a "stout white man" (92-93). The *imago dei* she imagines looks like the white man at the bank, which connects Celie's initial concept of the divine to individuals who extend, enforce, and represent economic disempowerment. By alluding to the history of black women's economic exploitation, Celie identifies the connections between this notion of God and the shame/shameless paradox of black womanhood. This God perpetuates the culture of shame through public as well as domestic arrangements that demand that she remain silent, which her

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[71] See Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (Routledge, 2004), pp. 104.
[72] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, eds. *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 134.

father Pa demonstrates in the previously quoted admonishment that serves as an epigraph to Walker's text.

Although Pa and Mr.__ use rhetoric of God to reinforce their power over Celie, Celie also uses God to ensure her own means of survival. For example, in response to her mother's inquiry regarding the father of her first child, who belongs to her father/step-father, Celie manipulates the conversation to avoid disclosure and replies that the child belongs to God (2). In another letter, Celie promises to protect her sister Nettie from their father/stepfather's intention to rape Nettie "with God help" (3). As Celie and Nettie reflect on Celie's death as a potentially advantageous alternative to living with Mr.__, Celie empowers herself with these words: "…long as I can spell G-O-D I got somebody along" (18). Celie has been able to appropriate God towards her own benefit, even in the first few epistles which are usually identified as representing Celie's utter psychological decline. God, then, has a dual function in the text and cannot be completely disavowed. Although perhaps more invested in sustaining a Christian concept of God than Walker is in her own writings,[73] womanist theologians, such as Karen Baker-Fletcher**,** demonstrate the importance of black women's ability to project their own image onto the divine in order to transform the conditions of their suffering.[74] In "The Strength of My Life," Baker-Fletcher explains:

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[73] Refer to Alice Walker, "The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind (Off Your Land and Out of Your Lover's Arms: Clear Seeing Inherited Religion and Reclaiming the Pagan Self," *Anything We Love Can Be Saved* (Random House, 1997).

[74] For a full discussion of womanist theology see Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Orbis, 1993); and Emilie M. Townes, *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation, and Transformation* (Orbis, 1997). For a full discussion of womanism in black women's literature, see Kalenda C. Eaton, *Womanism, Literature, and the Transformation of the Black Community*, 1965-1980 (Routledge, 2008). For a full discussion of womanism in *The Color Purple*, refer to Tuzyline Jita Allan, "The Color

> There is something within Black culture that recognizes the wholistic nature of God, which identifies with humanity in its fullness as male *and* female. Such recognition resonates with the first creation account of humanity in Genesis and with both traditional and Christian African religious understandings of the nature of God. Such understanding must be lifted up without shame. To be ashamed of it is to be ashamed of the fullness of God and of ourselves as women created in the likeness of God. (126)

Baker-Fletcher argues that shame impedes the love of God and therefore the love of self, as self and God are interconnected. It is no surprise that Alice Walker, the mother of womanism, created a character whose inability to see herself in and as God illuminates the psychological cost of black women's separation from the great "I am." Therefore, Celie's writing to God simultaneously represents a split (of consciousness) and a suturing (of self), as she comes into an understanding of herself as part of "I am" through her letters. This self-awareness arises in the "Dear God" letters, despite Celie's shame. Admittedly, Celie's letters get more introspective as the letters progress. Yet, I contend that Celie's process of self-actualization begins with "*I am* fourteen years old" (my emphasis, 1). Although Celie strikes out and revises this "I am" statement, it still suggests that even Celie's initial letters, indeed the very first, begin the process of her self-actualization. Here, I am offering a slightly different reading than what has been previously stated of Celie's first letters. I suggest that there is a flow and connectivity instead of break and transition between Celie's initial letters to God and her later letters to Nettie and subsequently to a different notion of God.

Purple: A Study of Walker's Womanist Gospel," *Modern Critical Interpretations: The Color Purple*, edited by Harold Bloom (Chelsea House Publishers, 2000), pp. 119-137.

Many scholars have explored the ambiguous epistolarity of Celie's initial letters to God. Herein, I examine Celie's "Dear God" letters through her lived experience of shame to illustrate the nature of shame as it functions in relationship to Celie's distinct form of physical as well as psychological oppression. I contend that it is the split consciousness that centers Celie's "Dear God" letters as epistles rather than journal/diary entries. In "'Trying to Do Without God': The Revision of Epistolary Address in *The Color Purple*," Carolyn Williams identifies the similarities between Celie's letters and other forms of self-writing. She argues, "For Celie, the practice of addressing God simply reaffirms her solitude, she is essentially writing to herself. *The Color Purple* is thus an example of an epistolary novel with close affinities to the journal, diary, or autobiographical confession [narrative]" (81). While I agree that Celie is writing to herself, I contend that it is a self that she does not fully recognize as her own consciousness. In other words, Celie is mired in the split consciousness of shame, and therefore writes to a God that does not include her as part of divinity. By writing to an externalized God, Celie continuously incurs shame and the breach and splitting of her own subjectivity. Simply put, the "I' of Celie's letters does not recognize itself as also the "you."

In *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form* (1982), Janet Gurkin Altman explains the importance of the I-you relationship in epistolary novels, the I, referring to the addressor or sender, and the you referring to the addressee or receiver:

> …the interpersonal bond basic to the very language of the letter (*I-you*) necessarily structures meaning in letter narrative. Those works that we perceive as being the most 'epistolary,' as cultivating the letter form most fully, are those in which the *I-you* relationship shapes the language used, and in which *I* becomes defined relative to the *you* whom [she or] he addresses. (118)

Walker manipulates this I-you relationship by disengaging Celie from her own consciousness and then projecting this disengaged self as an external divinity. In the body of Celie's letters, she only mentions a "you," twice. Both times the "you" is mentioned, it is in relationship to lack and absence. In the first letter of the text, Celie asks the "you" for a sign, which she never receives. In the letter before Celie begins to write to Nettie, she writes, "you must be sleep." Furthermore, Celie's references to God throughout the letters further support that Celie has an ambivalent understanding of the addressee. For example, Celie writes, "long as I got G-O-D," not long as I got *you*. Due to this relative lack of a reified addressee (or a separately embodied you), I read the God of Celie's addressee as both I and you. Furthermore, Celie's letters are never meant to be mailed, and Nettie's letters to Celie initiate the kinetic role of epistles to the plot.[75] Although Celie's letters to Nettie are returned without being read, the epistles demonstrate a significant step in the process of Celie's coming into a holistic vision of her own subjectivity, as suggested by their closing with "Amen" and "Your sister, Celie."

Celie's "Dear God" letters are agents in the psychological narrative into a new way of knowing herself through shame. This process is similar to Linda Brent in the first chapter who goes "back into and through" Harriet Jacobs's psychic-emotional injuries in *Incidents*. Although the epistolary novel usually anticipates the utterance of the intended addressee, Celie's letters to God prompt the writer to internalize the utterances of other women, resonating with the correspondences of the women in the introduction to this chapter. Although the externalized God fails to complete the epistolary address in *The Color Purple*, the I-you is reconciled in the body

[75] See Janet Gurkin Altman, *Epistolarity* (Ohio State U, 1982) pp. 7-8; Altman relies on Francois Jost who categorizes two fundamental types of letters-passive and kinetic. In passive letter writing, the receiver plays a static role, and the letters exhibit a reportorial style. In kinetic letter writing, the action progresses through the letters, which functions as agents in the plot.

of Celie's letters through relationships with other female characters. These characters re-introduce Celie to the range and complexity of her emotional existence and prompt her to confess her experiences of shame.

The women in Celie's letters direct Celie to express herself as a sentient being. Emotions related to madness, specifically anger and rage, are important to recover for Celie's re-awakening. As a coping mechanism, Celie is emotionally unresponsive to Mr.__'s routine abuses of her. She writes, "He beat me like he beat the children…I make myself wood" (23). In another letter, she explains, "…I don't know how to fight. All I know how to do is stay alive" (18). Celie has conditioned herself to a stoicism that stifles emotional responses to abuse. Here, I am not positing that Celie does not have emotions, but rather that she is consciously disconnected and unable to make use of her feelings. For example, during an exchange with Sofia, Sofia encourages Celie to consider madness and retaliation as alternative responses to her stoicism:

> What you do when you git mad? She [Sofia] ast.
>
> I think. I can't even remember the last time I felt mad, I say. I used to get mad at my mammy…Then after while every time I got mad, I got sick. Felt like throwing up. Terrible feeling. Then I start to feel nothing at all.
>
> Sofia frown. Nothing at all?
>
> Well, sometime Mr.__ git on me pretty hard. I have to talk to Old Maker. But he my husband. I shrug my shoulders. This life soon be over, I say. Heaven last all ways.
>
> You ought to bash Mr.__ head open, she say. Think bout heaven later. (41-42)

Celie and Sophia discuss getting mad as a restorative condition related to, but also different from feelings associated with madness. Celie identifies her lack of feeling in response to Sophia's question about "getting mad," which perhaps refers to a state of existence. If "feeling nothing" is the condition of Celie's conscious state, then *feeling* mad has the potential to not only instigate retaliation, but also to suture the split in Celie's subjectivity.

Furthermore, Celie's stoicism is directly connected to her state of shame. Tomkins explains that shame is linked to "the whole spectrum of affect expression" and may result in the repression of affects as "the self is then made ashamed of all its feelings…" (147). In the previously quoted letter, sickness serves as a corporeal rejection of feelings and emotions related to madness, which disconnects Celie from the range of her emotional experiences while conditioning her to abuse. Audre Lorde's theorization of anger in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984) is instructive, as it offers anger as an important emotion for recovery from sexual abuse. She writes:

> For women raised to fear, too often anger threatens annihilation. In the male construct of brute force, we were taught that our lives depended upon the good will of patriarchal power. The anger of others was to be avoided at all costs, because there was nothing to learn from it but pain, a judgment that we had been *bad girls*, come up lacking, not done what we were supposed to do. And if we accept our powerlessness, then of course any anger can destroy us. (my emphasis, 131)

Although Lorde does not directly identify the relevance of shame to the recuperation of anger, I maintain that the lived experience of shame undergirds her insights. It is the fear of transgressing the ideals of patriarchy that pressures women to suppress their anger. Stifling anger, women

internalize the very ideals that often violate their sense of subjectivity and wholeness and give up their power. Therefore, women incur a chronic condition of shame and believe themselves to be "bad girls." As Sara Ahmed writes in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), shame is an overwhelming and totalizing feeling of badness and contempt that threatens self-annihilation (104).

Celie's internalization of herself as a bad girl, which we witness in the first letter in her semiotic self-abnegation, reinforces Lorde's critique and connects shame to the repression of emotions that have the potential to speak back to power. Although I do not suggest that a mere conversation enables Celie to accept Sofia's suggestion to reconsider anger and retaliation as appropriate responses to abuse, I do propose that this exchange prompts Celie to confront her conditioning and to resurrect past experiences of anger. Most importantly, through this conversation with Sophia, Celie recognizes that her perceived inability to be mad is not intrinsic to her character; rather, it has been integral to her conditioning.

Anger is an important emotion for Celie to recover because the emotion is the prerequisite to rage, which shame theorists have identified as a response to prolonged acts of shame.[76] Importantly, Celie's rage manifests when she discovers that Mr.__ has been hiding Nettie's letters from her. Nettie's letters not only telegraph the progressive action of the novel through the movement of letters but they also serve to *move* Celie, emotionally. Shug informs Celie that Mr.__ has been hiding her letters, and in spite of his mistreatment, Celie never fathoms that he would completely violate her in this way. To repeat, Nettie's letters initiate the kinetic role of letter writing; Celie's knowledge of the hidden letters also recalls the metonymic rape of women's private correspondences in epistolary novels of the eighteenth century in texts such as

[76] Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (First Free P, 1995), pp. 149.

Samuel Richardson's *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740) and *Clarissa, or the History of a Young Lady* (1748). To Celie, Nettie is a life-source, and the gravity of Mr.__'s deception is so overwhelming that she becomes enraged. Resonating with Sofia's earlier suggestion that she "bash Mr.__ head open," she resolves to kill Mr.__. She explains, "All day long I act just like Sofia. I stutter. I mutter to myself. I stumble bout the house crazy for Mr.__ blood… By time night come, I can't speak" (122). Celie expresses signs of madness, using Sofia's character to interpret her own affective transformation.

Shug's intervention during Celie's moment of rage signals her importance to the lived experience of shame in the text. As Celie recuperates from her previous inactive responses to abuse, she comes close to killing Mr.__: "I watch him so close, I begin to feel a lightening in the head. Fore I know anything I'm standing hind his chair with the razor open" (122). Shug prevents Celie from enacting her murderous impulses. However, she does not interfere with Celie's subconscious neutralization of Mr.__. Celie explains, "In my mind he falling dead every which a way" (122). Celie's subconscious killing of Mr.__ temporarily exacerbates her stoicism: "I don't sleep, I don't cry. I don't do nothing. I'm cold too. Pretty soon I think maybe I'm dead" (122). To revive Celie, Shug offers her own confession and reveals her history of familial and social disgrace. Celie's rage threatens to overwhelm her and bring about a similar self-destruction as her shame, indicating the limitations of anger and rage for substantive and sustainable acts of transformation. An alternative arises, however, in Shug, who in this moment, "talk and talk" about her past (122-123).

"Talk" and "telling" are tropes throughout the "Dear God" epistles that allow Celie to interpret her life through the experiences of other women in the text, mainly Shug, Sophia, and

Squeak.[77] The talk and telling of these women function as a form of confession, a method that shame theorists have offered as a productive method to neutralize shame.[78] It is significant that laughter and singing signal these confession narratives in Celie's epistles. In *Shame and The Exposed Self* (1995), Michael Lewis explains, "In a sense, confession is like laughter. The degree to which people confess their transgressions to others is the degree to which they join in with the others in observing themselves. This allows the self to move from the self, that is, from the source of the shame, to the other" (132). After Sophia and Celie discuss the recuperation of Celie's feelings, and Sophia suggests that Celie "bash Mr.__ head open and think bout heaven later," Celie writes, "Not much funny to me. That funny. I laugh. She laugh. Then us both laugh so hard us flop down on the step" (42). This experience culminates with the two making a quilt together: "Let's make quilt pieces out of these messed up curtains…" (42), Sophia suggests. Laughter resonates with confession, and quilting symbolizes the merging of selves that Lewis suggests as an anecdote to shame. These methods demonstrate that black women have found alternative ways to confess that do not always require the full disclosure of information, recalling the narratological aims of Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative as discussed in the first chapter. Confirming the restorative process of this exchange between herself and Shug, Celie ends this

[77] Significant examples can be found on the following pages that directly refer to "talk" and "telling," perhaps in resistance to Pa's command that Celie "better not ever tell nobody but God": After Celie confesses to Sophia that she instructed Harpo to beat her, she writes, "this open the way for our talk to turn another way" (40). The two women begin to discuss Sophia's family history, and the conversation ends with Sophia's suggestion that Celie reconsider anger and retaliation as a response to abuse. In a later epistle, Celie symbolically gives Squeak rhetorical authority as Celie documents Squeak's experience of rape through the first person "I." In this epistle, Celie does not render Squeaks confession as dialogue, but she affirms the process of self-actualization that Squeak undergoes as a model for Celie's own coming into self. Only the women are allowed to speak in this letter, as Squeak via Celie says, "Shut up Harpo, I'm telling it" (97).

[78] Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self,* pp. 132.

letter with, "I sleeps like a baby now" (42). Here, Celie alludes to a new beginning that I discuss in the conclusion of this chapter.

This movement from the self to the other progresses towards the final reconciliation of the I-You split of Celie's "Dear God" epistles. In the fourth letter to Nettie, Celie writes, "But I'm here" (210). Although Nettie never receives Celie's letter, it corresponds to Nettie's fourth letter to Celie where she reveals shame as the impetus for Celie's letter writing. These fourth letters create correspondence and cohesion between these two groups of epistles. Although these letters don't reach each other through the conventional expectations of letter-writing, these letters meet each other in intention as Celie's letter responds to Nettie's description of the lived experience of shame. The phrase, "But I'm here" recuperates the "~~I am~~" that Celie strikes out in shame and self-abnegation in her first "Dear God" epistle. The conjunction, "but," annuls contradictions, symbolically and semiotically fulfilling Celie's previously failed attempt at self-actualization. Rendered dialogically, "But I'm here" also challenges Pa's forewarning at the beginning of the narrative to "better not never tell nobody" (1), as it asserts Celie's coming into self through a speech act that tells off the symbol of patriarchy.

Celie's illocution in this moment bears further significance as it identifies how women who live through the shame/shameless paradox move beyond confession to not only connect their experiences with each other, but to recover the potential for liberation in their experiences of shame as well. In the process, women reform the communities that produce this shame. Celie's affirmation, "But I'm here," actualizes her appropriation of the shame/shameless paradox. She says, "But I'm here," in response to Mr.__'s rebuke, "You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman, Goddam…you nothing at all" (209). With these words, Mr.__ confirms that the shame/shameless paradox undergirds his ill treatment of Celie. His statement, "You nothing

at all," reflects the shame that Celie has been working through in her letters. To persuade Celie of her irrelevant existence, Mr.__ reminds Celie of the stigmas that are enmeshed within her race, gender, and social status. Instead of rejecting Mr.__'s words, Celie echoes Mr.__'s reproach, positing, "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook…" (210). By echoing Mr.__, Celie demonstrates that this moment of self-actualization is not one of disavowal. Using the language of her abuser, Celie signals that she does not need to overcome her past to self-actualize in the present. Furthermore, her editorial intervention actually extends Mr.__'s reproach of her to the domestic space. By adding that she can't cook, Celie suggests that she is also unfit for Mr.__'s patriarchal designs, and she begins to empower herself through the shame she incurs by nature of being a black woman.

Shug Avery further enlightens this manipulation of the shame/shameless paradox. What I mean here is that through Celie's relationship with Shug, Celie's history of abuse and her shame becomes a resource for her own empowerment. Theorizing histories of shame, humiliation, and defeat in *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Imagination* (2010), Darieck Scott proposes that there is "counterintuitive" power in legacies of shame and abjection (9). Although Scott's work is primarily invested in narratives of black male rape, the questions that center his work are fundamental to the way in which Celie incurs shame towards her own freedom: "…what is the potential for useful political, personal, psychological resource in racialization-through-abjection as historical legacy, as ancestral experience? How do we work with that legacy now, how do we use it to fit our own exigencies?" (6). Through the character of Shug and the triangulation between Celie, Shug, and Mr.__, *The*

Color Purple offers a response to Scott that privileges the abjection of black women, primarily through the potential of Shug Avery.[79]

Shug is introduced in Celie's initial letters to God through her legacy as a shameless woman. Mr.__ asks Celie's step-father for permission to marry Nettie, and as Mr.__ and Pa negotiate, Celie and Pa's new wife overhear the two men discussing Shug. Celie's curiosity is piqued, and she writes, "I ast our new mammy bout Shug Avery. What it is? I ast. She don't know but she say she gone fine out" (6). Pa's wife and Celie make a profound discovery: "Shug Avery was a woman" (6). They find out about Shug under the eyes of the patriarchs. As Mr.__ takes something out of his billfold to show Pa, a picture of Shug slides under the table. Simultaneously picking up the picture and grasping the counterintuitive potential of Shug, the women keep the image, both materially and metaphorically, as a resource. As the voices of the men speak of Shug's social disgrace, the women are enthralled with Shug's countenance. Celie writes, "I ast her to give me the picture. An all night long I stare at it. And now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dressed to kill, whirling and laughing" (6). Unlike traditional epistolary novels where men are potential voyeurs of the private correspondences between women, the voyeuristic impulse of the epistolary form emerges through Shug as a resource of information. Mr.__'s theft of Celie's letters can be identified as voyeuristic; however, he does not open them. My intention is not to understate Mr.__'s violation of Celie, but to acknowledge that his theft of letters does not disclose any information, whereas Celie and her step-mother are

[79] This chapter responds to Darieck Scott, who leaves his discussion open for further inquiry into the experiences of black women, but rejects the feminine. He argues that the feminine is already too close to the abject and risks further instantiating the structures that produce normative ideologies of gender. In this chapter, I agree with Scott, who admits that the limitations he places on the feminine may be self-imposed. I build on Scott's insightful discoveries to consider how the shame of black women's sexual experiences offers a potential framework for liberation from racist/sexist configurations of race and gender that prioritize the experiences of black women.

empowered by their act of subterfuge when they begin to gain an understanding of the nature of Shug.

The plot of *The Color Purple* progresses towards Celie's understanding of the freedom to be found in the shamelessness of Shug. Throughout Celie's epistles, Shug is presented through the public censure of the community. Celie explains, "Even the preacher got his mouth on Shug Avery, now she down. He take her condition for his text. He don't call no name, but he don't have to. Everybody know who he mean" (43). Shug is a configuration that serves the community through ideas of her social disgrace. As an out-cast figure, even the preacher profits from her as a resource of information. The community uses rhetoric of morbid sexuality to describe Shug: "Her mammy say She told her so. Her pappy say, Tramp. A woman at church say she dying—maybe two berkulosis or some kind of nasty woman disease" (43). The preacher has his own lists of evil illnesses that include "a strumpet in short skirts…slut, hussy, heifer and streetcleaner (43-44). Shug is not only a bad girl, but also her badness is articulated as deviant, non-normative sexuality that threatens the community.

Just as Scott indirectly theorizes the twinning of blackness to the sexual to consider how black sexuality offers a vehicle for freedom, I will expound the coupling of black women's sexuality to the shameful to articulate how liberation can be realized through black women's legacy of shame and shamelessness. Celie frequently looks to Shug in the text for counsel, even before she arrives as an embodied character. As Celie's father Pa negotiates the marriage arrangements between Celie and Mr.__, Celie pulls out the photograph of Shug: "I look into her eyes. Her eyes say Yeah, it bees that way sometime" (8). Celie also relies on Shug to approximate an emotional response during unwanted sex with her husband. In a previous "Dear God" epistle, Celie lists a litany of tasks she completed on her wedding day: cooking, cleaning,

combing hair, and nursing the wound she received from one of Mr.__'s children. Although she works until nightfall, she cannot avoid the sexual consummation of her marriage to Mr.__, writing: "By ten o'clock I'm done. They cry theirselves to sleep. But I don't cry. I lay thinking bout Nettie while he on top of me, wonder if she safe. And then I think bout Shug Avery. I know what he doing to me he done to Shug Avery and maybe she like it. I put my arm around him" (12). Initially, Celie's thoughts of Nettie effectuate the stoic conditioning to abuse that she has learned as a means of survival. She escapes her present condition, and perhaps mitigates her own violation, by thinking about the safety of Nettie. As she drifts to thoughts of Shug, Celie is brought back into the moment; however, it is not violation, but the possibility of pleasure that brings about the transition. Celie's embrace of Mr.__ symbolizes the generative possibilities of abjection in *The Color Purple*. Putting her (single) arm around Mr.__, Celie suggests the potential of an embrace of the abject, however precarious it may be.

Although lesbianism offers a useful language to analyze the sexual attraction between Shug and Celie as part of the novel's feminist project and fundamentally subversive of patriarchal power, lesbianism does not effectively allow us to probe the queer triangulation between husband, wife, and mistress as it functions in the resolution of the text. My intention is not to disavow the revolutionary importance of acknowledging the relationship between Shug and Celie as one of lesbian love and desire. Scholars such as Barbara Smith and Candice Marie Jenkins have demonstrated the importance of lesbianism to black feminism as well as to Walker's *The Color Purple*, a seminal black feminist/womanist and lesbian novel.[80] Building on

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[80] For a full discussion of lesbianism within the black feminist movement as well as Walker's importance to black feminism/womanism, see Barbara Smith, Introduction, *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology (Rutgers UP, 1983*). For a full discussion of lesbianism in *The Color Purple*, see Candice Marie Jenkins, "Queering Black Patriarchy: The Salvific Wish and Masculine

previous discussions of lesbianism in the text, I prioritize the triangulated relationship between Mr.__, Shug, and Celie to discuss how this threesome actualizes liberatory politics of shamelessness.

The moment commonly theorized as Celie's sexual awakening encapsulates the dilemma as well as the potential for liberation that can be found in this love triangle. Shug teaches Celie to look at and derive pleasure from her vagina, the object of her shame, as it relates to her sexuality and sexual victimization. Shug jests, "What, too shame even to go off and look at yourself? And you look so cute too…All dressed up for Harpo's smelling good and everything, but scared to look at your own pussy" (79). Following Shug's instructions, Celie pulls up her dress and looks at her genitals in the mirror. Refusing Shug's suggestion that she affiliate what she sees with beauty, Celie instead claims her reproductive organs as her own, affirming, "It mine" (79). "It mine" serves as a precursor to her later proclamation, "I'm here." As "I'm here" expresses Celie's self-actualization by reconciling the I-you split of Celie's shame, "It mine" inaugurates the development of Celie's sexuality through its relationship to the abject histories that her sexual experiences engender. In this way, abjection and shame are intimately linked, as they mutually bring Celie into being. Significantly, the empowerment of Celie is not Shug's sole motive in facilitating Celie's sexual liberation. Shug's intentions are also to gain Celie's approval of her relationship with Mr.__. Celie agrees to the arrangement between Shug and Mr.__. Although she cries at the sound of her friend and husband copulating in the next room, she continues to stimulate the newly found pleasure within her body as she listens to Shug and Mr.__: "But when I hear them together all I can do is pull the quilt over my head and finger my

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Possibility in Alice Walker's The Color Purple," *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 48 no. 4, 2002, pp. 969-1000. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/mfs.2002.0075.

little button and titties and cry" (80). As this moment demonstrates, the sexual liberation of Celie cannot be divorced from the history of pain and suffering it also awakens.

Importantly, although Shug is the figure of shamelessness in the text, she is not impervious to shame and is therefore equally impacted by the transformation that Celie undergoes. Shug affirms Celie's access to the public arena, encouraging Celie to open up her own business making pants; in turn, Celie maintains Shug's right to privacy against Shug's overwhelming public status in the community. Mr.__'s father demonstrates Shug's vulnerability to shame when he visits the home of Celie and Mr.__. In an attempt to convince Celie and Mr.__ to remove Shug from their home, Old Mr.__ remarks, "Celie…you have my sympathy. Not many women let they husband whore lay up in they house" (55). His performance of sympathy is aimed at manipulating Celie into rejecting Mr.__'s arrangement and ejecting Shug from the home Celie shares with Mr__. During his visit, Old Mr.__ describes Shug as a fatherless woman. As the daughter of a domestic worker, Shug is unattached to the power and privileges of patriarchy. Old Mr.__ contends that Shug is not only a sexually "loose woman" with "illegitimate" children, but her familial lineage marks her as a social outcast without links to a respectable family history (55). Because of the oppressive influence of his father, Mr.__ never marries Shug. And even when the two are reunited, with the chance perhaps to connect again, if not, in fact, to marry, Old Mr.__ intends to remind his son of Shug's social disgrace. Old Mr.__ uses his authority and ownership of Mr.__'s home to coerce Mr.__ into discontinuing his relationship with Shug once more. This time he does not succeed. Instead, Celie rejects the conventions of social and sexual propriety, and spatially mediates the tension between Shug, Mr.__, and her father-in-law. Celie never allows Old Mr.__ to enter their home, and she blocks

Shug from encountering the shame and disgrace Old Mr.__ wields as an extension of his authority.

As a result, Celie affirms Shug's access to the house and her legitimacy to Celie's relationship with Mr.__. Celie shuts her father-in-law out of the house, and closes the window to ensure that Shug does not overhear her father-in-law's contempt. Protecting Shug from the ridicule of her father-in-law, she demonstrates that Shug is not impervious to shame; rather, she is empowered by her ability to manipulate the affect. As Mr.__'s father condemns Shug and Mr.__, Celie remains on the porch to ensure that Shug is not affected by the conversation. By protecting Shug, and also by incurring shame upon their own marriage, Celie and Mr.__ foster an allegiance: "Mr.__ look up at me, our eyes meet. This the closest us ever felt (55). Celie welcomes Shug as her husband's mistress, and Mr.__ facilitates the desire that emerges between Celie and Shug.

Embracing social disgrace allows Celie to renegotiate her shame as an individual experience as well as a historical legacy. Through erotic experiences with each other, Celie and Shug experience a mutual liberation from the shame that is often associated with the sexual realties of black women and they intervene in the culture of silence that often perpetuates these experiences. Celie writes, "I work on her like she a doll or like she Olivia---or like she mama. I comb and pat, comb and pat. First she say, hury up and git finish. Then she melt down a little and lean back gainst my knees. That feel just right, she say. That feel like mama used to do. Or maybe not mama. Maybe grandma…" (53). The eroticism between Celie and Shug is recuperative in its ability to rekindle matrilineal histories as the two women enter each other's past experiences through shared feelings. Lorde explains that eroticism "provide[s] the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person" (56). Through this erotic

exchange, Celie summons Olivia, the baby she births by her step-father, the man whom she believed to be her natural born father. She connects this experience of incest and shame with a legacy of other women whom she identifies as mama and grandma. Their namelessness is instructive and intentional as these women represent a legacy of women who have borne similar experiences. Importantly, as the novel progresses, Celie and Shug increasingly allow each other to be seen by the other, both visually and emotionally. This form of exposure engages with the ocular as well as the lived emotional reality of shame.

Shame fosters an exaggerated self-consciousness that is symbolized by the avoidance of eye contact. According to Tomkins, in shame, "We may then not look too closely at each other, because we cannot be sure how we might feel if we were to do so" (147). Although the culture of shame motivates people to avoid eye-contact, even when they are not currently experiencing shame, Tomkins explains that we actually desire to let down the shame response and be exposed: "Indeed, many of us fall in love with those into whose eyes we have permitted ourselves to look and by whose eye we have let ourselves be seen" (147). I extend this emphasis on looking metaphorically to allow the relationship between Celie and Shug to further enlighten possibilities for liberation. Tomkins continues, "This love is romantic because it is continuous with the period before the individual lovers knew shame. They not only return to baby talk, but even more importantly they return to baby looking" (147). This baby talk and baby looking occurs through full disclosure, or, what Tomkins calls exposure. Celie arouses this natal period by summoning her history of abuse with Shug who expresses her empathy by listening, holding, kissing, and touching Celie. Celie explains, "Seem like it all come back to me, laying there in Shug arms" (114). The final words of this epistle demonstrate a new state of being that Tomkins describes: Celie concludes, "Way after while, I act like a little lost baby too" (115).

Although Tomkins suggests that romantic love obviates the culture of shame through an ontological transformation, *The Color Purple* redefines love to extend this shift in dyadic relationships to encompass entire communities. In this way, my reading of *The Color Purple* responds to scholars such as bell hooks who argue that beyond personal relationships, sexuality has no bearing on the outside community and panders to hegemonic sexual politics through Shug's final relationship with Germaine.[81] I contend that the culture of shame connects the public and the private as Shug's character demonstrates the ways in which power operates co-operatively. Furthermore, the text realizes what Barbara T. Christian eloquently states as Walker's ability to "[express] with graceful and devastating clarity the relationship between the degree of freedom black women have within and without their communities and the 'survival whole' of black people" (16-17).[82] Shug's shamelessness instructs characters on new ways of loving and forming communities. Celie reveals how Shug's way of being informs her reconciliation with Mr.__: "After all the evil he done I know you wonder why I don't hate him. I don't hate him for two reasons. One, he love Shug. And two, Shug use to love him. Plus, look like he trying to make something out of himself" (264). To love Shug is to actualize non-normative sexual and social arrangements and to divest from the relationship between sexuality and social power. Loving Shug requires that Mr.__ and Celie as well as Shug undergo an epistemological transformation. Mr.__ affirms his detachment from previous ways of knowing: "I think us here to wonder, myself. To wonder. To ast. And that in wondering bout the big things and asting bout the big things, you learn about the little ones, almost by accident. But you never

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[81] See bell hooks, "Writing the Subject: Reading *The Color Purple*," *Modern Critical Interpretations of Alice Walker's The Color Purple,* edited by Harold Bloom (Chelsea House Publishers, 2000), pp. 53-66.
[82] See Barbara Christian, "Walker's Childhood, Education, and Crusade for African American Women," *Woman's Issues in Alice Walker's The Color Purple*, edited by Claudia Durst Johnson, (Greenhaven P, 2011).

know nothing more about the big things than you start out with. The more I wonder….the more I love" (288). Mr.__ actualizes what Ahmed identifies as a feminist pedagogy that locates new epistemologies in acts of wonder that "…[opens] up the world…not as a private act, but as an opening up of what is possible through working together (180-183). Mr.__ rejects his desires for patriarchal control in exchange for a new ethics of love: "When it comes to what folks do together with their bodies…anybody's guess is good as mine. But when you talk bout love I don't have to guess. I have love and I have been love. And I thank god he let me gain understanding enough to know love can't be halted just cause some peoples moan and groan" (274).

As the novel ends with a new understanding of God that extends Celie's self-actualization to a communal spirit that is "[m]ore spirit than ever before, and more internal" (261), it also affirms a concept of love that, similar to James Baldwin's theory of love in *The Fire Next Time* (1963), is antithetical to the previous culture of shame.

> Love takes off the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within. I use the word love here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth. (Baldwin 95)

In other words, to live without shame is to live with love, exposed to the perils as well as the triumphs of a new existence. As previously examined, Nettie's letter describes shame through feelings of alienation, suffocation, and defeat, "locked up" in the self and "choking" on the self. In contrast, Celie articulates a new existence for herself and Nettie within community in the final line of the novel that finds relief from shame in a communal orientation: "And I see they think

me and Nettie and Shug and Albert and Samuel and Harpo and Sofia and Jack and Odessa real old and don't know much what going on. But I don't think us feel old at all. And us so happy. Matter of fact, I think this the youngest us ever felt" (294). This fledgling community embodies the God of Celie's last epistle and symbolizes Celie's connection to herself as well as to everything around her. It also confirms Baker-Fletcher's emphasis on God-in-self-and-God-as-self. As she states, "If the likeness of God is within us, surely we can find God in ourselves, realizing empowerment and our full potential as we learn to love God and ourselves. Such love is the first order of business before we can go on to love others…" (126). In contrast to the I-you split of Celie's "Dear God" epistles, Celie returns to her original addressee in the last letter to affirm a God, without shame, that unites: "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. Dear God" (291).

This ethic of love that transforms Celie's immediate community has important implications for black communities in the twenty-first century that the figure Bill Cosby again helps to enlighten. In response to recent news of Cosby's alleged sexual assault of at least sixty women since the 1960s, many people in the black community felt particularly let down as one of the most vocal spokesmen for black upward mobility was revealed to be a sexual predator and brought shame upon himself, the Huxtable/Cosby dream, and the black community. In "Black America's Bill Cosby Nightmare: Why it's so Painful to Abandon the Lies that He Told," Brittany Cooper explains, "Ever the optimists of the American Republic, Black people by and large agreed with Cosby. We internalized the shame that Cosby pedaled over our inability to get our men to act right and marry us, our penchant for having more babies than marriages, and our love for children named sometimes after what we perceived to be top-shelf liquor" (4). Cooper directly engages with the shame embedded in the politics of respectability, suggesting that

Cosby's rhetoric resonated with the majority of black people. She also identifies the culture of shamelessness that continues to be endemic to black life—non-heteronormative, plural domestic arrangements; non-traditional parenting; and naming practices that signal and or laud connections and or ethics outside of the black middle and upper class. Cooper insightfully echoes Walker's narrative project in *The Color Purple*, as both of these feminist/womanist scholars seem to suggest that we look to these shameless black traditions to locate possibilities for our own liberation. Cooper goes on to write, "… it has long been time to throw off the vestiges of our belief in a shiny Black patriarchy that will anchor us, grant us stability and save us" (6). As black patriarchy often perpetuates ideals extended from American capitalism and legacies of slavery that violate black communities, *The Color Purple* reveals that perhaps salvation can be found in the shame.

CODA

The Politics of Shame and the Future of (Black) Feminist Theory

> Shame…can lead us either toward new and subtler forms of tyranny and despotism in our psyches and our polities, or toward new and subtler forms of liberty, democracy, and reciprocity.
>
> Christina H. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's* Gorgias *and The Politics of Shame*

> i want to put an end to guilt
> i want to put an end to shame…
> to heal
> and re-create
> ourselves.
>
> Alice Walker, *Meridian*

The previous chapter makes a seemingly drastic claim. After demonstrating throughout this project the harm that shame causes in the lives of black women, it suggests that models for progressive sociopolitical frameworks exist within the paradox of shame and shamelessness that black women consistently confront. I do not intend to retain a rigid distinction between shame and shamelessness, but to acknowledge the dialectical relationship between these formulations in the lives of black women. The project engages with both the personal and the political, acknowledging that there is no definite distinction between the two realms. This coda, however, primarily focuses on the efficacy of shame in public politics, and it is in conversation with

feminist theorists who have also taken up this concern.[83] It ends with a consideration of the role of shame within black feminist theory, and in so doing, it bends back towards "the personal" to further emphasize what black feminist theorists have argued since the 1970s: the personal is political.[84]

Although a framework that attempts to recuperate shame for both personal and political purposes admittedly seems counter-intuitive, it is not the first time that the ugly nature of shame has been acknowledged alongside its potential for generative social and political change. Two theorists who have been particularly important to examining the role of shame in public life are Gabrielle Taylor in *Pride, Shame, and Guilt: Emotions of Self-Assessment* (1985) and Christina H. Tarnopolsky in *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants: Plato's* Gorgias *and The Politics of Shame* (2010). Although these studies are useful in identifying various types of shame, Taylor and Tarnopolsky often overlook pertinent complications of race and gender. On the matter of gender, Jill Locke in "Shame and the Future of Feminism," and Jennifer C. Manion in "Girls Blush, Sometimes: Gender, Moral Agency, and the Politics of Shame," offer important interventions into the work of Tarnopolsky, Taylor, and other theorists, such as Hannah Arendt and Sigmund Freud, who fail to give account of the ways in which shame affects the lives of women in particular (though Freud identifies shame itself as a feminine emotion). I will offer an overview of these various discussions and demonstrate the ways in which scholarship on shame in the political arena mirrors the discussions of shame that have grounded this work in literary studies, psychology and psychiatry, and sociology, as they also suffer from a critical interrogation of

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[83] My aim is different from Melissa Harris-Perry, who analyzes how shame hinders black women's participation in politics in *Sister Citizen: Shame Stereotypes, and Black Women in America* (Yale UP 2011).

[84] See "A Black Feminist Statement: The Combahee River Statement," reprinted in *Still Brave: The Evolution of Black Women's Studies*, edited by Stanlie M. James, et al. (The Feminist P, 2009) pp. 3-11.

race, gender, and class as intersectional social categories.[85] Locke and Manion introduce race into their discussions, but because both scholars place a higher priority on gender, their analyses of race fall short of substantive critical examination. Manion distinguishes her work from previous theories of shame based on the broader implications of her work to address "aspects of shame within and across divisions such as age, socioeconomic class, race, sexual orientation, and other cultural contexts" (22). However, I posit that it is this very milieu that Manion and others seek to address that ultimately produces spurious frameworks that universalize the particularities of the politics of shame. Bringing race, gender, and class to the fore of these discussions, I use the 2017 Women's March on Washington to raise key questions regarding the politics of shame towards defining what feminist theorists have termed a (black) feminist future.[86]

Shame: Good or Bad?

Its negative feelings and effects are undeniable. Shame theorists and others who study shame agree that shame arouses feelings that cause people to make comprehensive self-negating assessments that, if prolonged, can lead to self-destructive measures such as suicide. Despite the vicious nature of shame, some find its connection to ethics and codes of morality useful to public life and politics.[87] Taylor's formulation is based on concepts of genuine shame and false shame,

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[85] Kimberlé Crenshaw coins the term "intersectionality" to refer to overlapping social identities and multiple points of oppression in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics (*U of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989). Barbara Smith and other black feminists promoted analyses that considered the simultaneity of black women's oppression since the 1970s; refer to the "A Black Feminist Statement: Combahee River Collective Statement."

[86] See Brittany Cooper, "Love No Limit: Towards a Black Feminist Future (In Theory)," *The Black Scholar*, vol. 45 no.4, 2015, pp. 7-21.

[87] Refer to Leonard Boonin, "Guilt, Shame and Morality," *Journal of Value Inquiry* vol. 17, 1983, pp. 295-304; Jennifer Manion, "The Moral Relevance of Shame," *American Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 39 no.1, 2002, pp. 73-90; Donald Nathanson, *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex and the Birth of the Self*, (WW Norton and C, 1992); John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard UP, 1971).

where genuine shame has the capacity to produce "moral goodness" and false shame, the type of destructiveness that I previously noted. According to Taylor, genuine shame is a measure of self-respect and has the capacity to reduce the frequency of false shame in society, because genuine shame arises when we transgress moral cultural expectations to which we subscribe (81, 161). Herein lies the most questionable and complex premise of Taylor's study, as it assumes a broad cultural standard that is inflexible to the dynamics of race, gender, and class. Furthermore, it falsely assumes that negotiating shame is the only way a person can measure whether he or she has lived up to his or her own values.

Although Manion demonstrates the limitations of Taylor's work in relationship to gender, her own effort to highlight the ways in which constructions of masculinity and femininity hinder women's "moral agency" (22), or their ability to aspire to healthy codes of conduct, still largely belies the social context of shame. For example, to make her case, Manion uses Carrie, a middle-class white woman in Taylor's study, to illustrate how Taylor's work ignores how shame can appear genuine even when it arises from social narratives such as the 1950s Perfect Mother-Good Wife ideal, a code of morality that resembles the nineteenth and early twentieth century Cult of True Womanhood. Instead of "genuine shame" and "false shame," Manion opts for a model of "self-concern" that is equally ambiguous. According to Manion, "…a person having self-concern necessitates her adopting a feeling-based attitude of investedness or an affectionate interest in her own welfare" (30-31). Manion does not acknowledge that most, if not all, ideals, standards, and concerns are based on multiple internal and external forces that are constantly shifting and changing depending on location, social position, and also confrontation with a real or imagined other. Simply put, self-concern is always a negotiation between self, other, and society. Perhaps, Manion's inability to truly intervene in Taylor's work is based on the fact that

she uses the same subject that Taylor uses to make a case against Taylor: a middle-class white woman. Taylor is correct to point out that stereotypical gender roles and expectations of self-sacrifice, altruism, femininity, motherhood, and caretaking make women more susceptible to shame, but her argument suffers from inattention to the ways in which race, gender, and class increase this vulnerability. Furthermore, she does not consider the ways in which black womanhood particularly shapes the very social narratives that often generates shame in society.

In *Prudes, Perverts, and Tyrants,* Tarnopolosky demonstrates the ways in which black women inform the politics of shame in public life. Quoting Erving Goffman, Tarnopolsky argues that the only “normal” or “completely unblushing *male* in America [is] a young, married, white urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed of good complexion, weight and height, and a recent record in sports” (my emphasis, 146). Tarnopolsky points out that shame exists on a continuum, which social location, race, gender, and cultural capital consistently influences. Building on this logic, I argue that black women offer an important lens into the politics of shame as they are most often always already “blushing,” or negotiating with the standards to which society ascribes goodness and morality. Tarnopolsky importantly contends that previous discussions that either support getting rid of shame or maintain the importance of shame within contemporary society are misguided as they often rely on ambiguous and inconsistent claims (144). According to Tarnopolsky, we must continue to ask, “…what kinds of shame are there and what should we do with these different types of shame?” (144). In this coda, I consider how these questions are imperative to understanding the 2017 Women’s March on Washington, as well as how our current political moment reflects back to previous raced-centered acts of political protests.

Shame on You/ Shame on Who?

A day after the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States of America, protesters gathered in Washington D.C. for the 2017 Women's March on Washington. An estimated half-a-million people, women, men, and children, met on Independence Avenue at the southwest corner of the Capitol building and marched along the National Mall. Throughout the nation, and across the world, people demonstrated against the results of the election and also protested the ascending Republican agenda, most especially its explicit intent to withdraw rights that would directly and indiscriminately impact the lives of women. As the Women's March on Washington website reports, its primary mission was to proclaim "women's rights are human rights,"[88] and set in motion a women-centered agenda that would bring more awareness to issues that disproportionately affect women, such as reproductive rights, worker rights, immigration reform, and environmental protection. The march promoted inclusion and eventually highlighted LGBT rights and racial equality. However, for many, the women's march recalled the glaring discordance in the early formation of feminist and black feminist movements during the 1970s-1980s, as well as its current incongruences. In an online blog article, "Not Your Mule: I Will Not March for White Women," Lasha, an online blogger and critic of popular culture, explains on her website *Kinfolk Kollective*:

> Were I not all too familiar with white women's penchant for employing language ideal for giving the appearance of a sisterhood not divided by the very real boundaries of race and class when the support and labor of Black and brown women is useful to their agenda, I would have been moved to join them. But actions speak louder than words, and as the saying goes, 'Fool me once, shame on

[88] See the 2017 Women's March official website, https://www.womensmarch.com.

> you. Fool me twice, shame on me. White women won't pull me into their demonstration under the guise of standing for mutually-invested causes only to accuse me of being divisive and combative when I make known the struggles unique to me as a Black woman.

Signifying on Janie's grandmother in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* who calls black women "the mule of the world," Lasha echoes sentiments that in many ways fueled a black feminist movement.[89] In particular, she and others, such as Angela Peoples (pictured in fig. 3), the director of GetEQUAL, an LGBTQ equal rights organization; and Brittany T. Oliver, a women's rights activist in Baltimore, Maryland, called out the march's late rhetoric of inclusion. According to reporters and bloggers, the march shifted its focus towards black women and other women of color after accusations that it prioritized the voices of white women all the while it signified on both the 1963 March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom and the 1997 Million Woman March in Philadelphia.[90] The leadership then shifted to three black women who officially led the march. Although notable black women activists and organizers such as Angela Davis and Melissa Harris-Perry were among the invited guests who spoke at the rally, many black women and other women of color were not convinced of the march's claims of solidarity and inclusion. To further demonstrate the disparate agendas of the march, I will consider acts of protest through the lens of shame. My intention in this coda is not to be prescriptive, but rather to

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[89] This is not to suggest that the black feminist movement is only a reaction to exclusion within the feminist movement, but it is to assert that black women's marginal place within both feminism and race movements of the 1960s prompted black women to make inroads in politics based on their own unique experiences. Although black feminism was most clearly defined during the 1970s, most specifically in the "Combahee River Collective Statement," black feminism has a longer history in women led movements through figures such as Harriet Tubman, Anna Julia Cooper, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett.

[90] See Lasha, "Not Your Mule," *Kinfolk Kollective*; Brittany Oliver, "Why I Do Not Support The Women's March on Washington."

use the insights of previous chapters to raise pertinent questions regarding a (black) feminist future as it relates to the politics of shame.

The New York Times reports that marchers surrounded a large float and yelled, “Shame!” as they passed a float with “TRUMP” plastered in bold letters on its side.[91] *The Talking Points Memo* also describes that the “…crowd grew especially loud as they passed the luxury hotel. Marchers began yelling chants like “Shame,” “Lock him up,” and “We need a leader, not a creepy tweeter.”[92] Most memorably, pictures of the march reflect women in “pussyhats” and other garments that resemble the female reproductive system, as depicted in figures one and two.[93] These screams of protest were clearly meant to invoke shame, but in whom, is the essential question. Furthermore, the costumes reflect perhaps the most spectacular shame-tactic and they illustrate the problematic dynamics of shame at the women’s march. These vagina-inspired costumes representing the protester’s own reproductive and sexual practices symbolize what Tarnopolsky identifies as a breach in the boundary of shame: “…individuals who parade their sexuality or intimate lives in the public breach the ‘boundary of shame’ because they transpose the bodily functions, feelings, and interpersonal relationships that are meant for a private audience into the public sphere” (4). In *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt agrees, stating that activities of the private realm are shameful by definition (73).

What is most notable about these particular acts that breached the boundary of shame during the 2017 Women’s March on Washington is that it was primarily white women who

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[91] See Anemona Hartocollis and Yamiche Alcindorjan, “Women’s March Highlights as Huge Crowds Protest Trump: ‘We’re Not Going Away,’” 21 January 2017. *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/21/us/womens-march.html?_r=0. Accessed 1 February 2017.
[92] See Michael McAuliff, “Trumps Hotel was the Perfect Target During The Women’s March on Washington, 22 January 2017. *The Huffington Post*, www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-hotel-womens-march-washington_us_588422b2e4b070d8cad31d05. Accessed 1 February 2017.
[93] The “pussyhats” became a defining characteristic of the march. Refer to the Pussyhat Project at https://www.pussyhatproject.com.

participated in them. Furthermore, as Katherine Timpf, a writer for the *National Review*, and Susan M. Goldberg, a writer for *PJ Media* explain, the vagina-inspired paraphernalia of figures one and two undermine the march's claims of inclusion as they reduce womanhood to women's sexual organs and elide the womanhood of trans and queer people. Although I have no evidence to suggest that black women and other women of color did not participate in the screams of shame, the pictures of mainly white women in pussy paraphernalia offers insight into the dynamics of such spectacles of shame that often form the fabric of white women's methods of protest around inter-racial and intersectional causes.

The texts in this study have gestured towards the problematic dynamics that arise during spectacles of shame. Consider, for example, the white women in the audience during Aunt Martha's sale at the auction block in *Incidents*. They too cry out, "Shame, shame," but these cries of shame only extend to "Aunt Marthy," a black woman with exceptional influence in the community and long-developed intimacy with the white women at the slave auction. Also consider the white women who speak out and yell, "Shame," against the white mob as Lizzie Smith strips in the street in *Hanover*. Lizzie enacts a spectacle of her own blackness and womanhood, with which the audience can identify. Using the language of shame, the women cry out in Lizzie's defense; however, they are silent witnesses to the nameless woman before Smith who the mob strips bare in the middle of the street. Historically accurate or not, it seems that Sojourner Truth's exposed body as she delivered her speech, "Ain't I A Woman/ Ar'n't I a Woman," symbolizes the limitations of white women's ability to empathize with the humanity of black women. As I noted in previous chapters, these acts of protest only ever redeem exceptional black women who are subjected to public humiliation. These spectacles force us to question, how

is shame being mobilized in these moments? What is the efficacy of such events for substantive, everyday commitments towards change?

Figure three went viral after the march. It was especially popular on social media, as men and women of color questioned why current protests such as the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Dakota Access Pipeline had not received similar animated displays of dissent and participation from white women. The figure demonstrates the complicated shame-dynamics at work at the march. Peoples, the woman holding the poster, intends to shame white women at the march who voted for Trump. In this moment, her participation in the march is in stark contrast with the white women behind her in pussy hats. This juxtaposition demonstrates the incongruent politics of the marchers that tended to divide along racial lines. Peoples's message, "Don't forget, white women voted for Trump," seems to be directed towards these women behind her who are oddly both in and out of focus in this image. Photographically, they are in focus; the camera has clearly captured them as participants of the march, and they are the initial focal point of this image. However, as Peoples comes into view, the women are understood to be ideologically un-focused, maybe even ill-focused. In light of Peoples's poster, the viewer is encouraged to see the women's behavior as out of place, superficial, and shameful. For these women, the image seems to suggest, the march is a spectacular event where performances of protests, such as those in figures 1 and 2, abound for the marcher's own joviality.

The culture of the 2017 Women's March on Washington requires us to consider the ways in which shame in relationship to the future of feminism often fails to address the ways in which shame operates multi-directionally. Therefore these acts of protests are limited at best, null at worst, and harmful in their propensity to be self-interested. In the case of the white women at the march, we must ask, who is being brought to shame? What shared codes of morality emerge in

this moment? Furthermore, black women's own attempts to shame white women evokes the question, do white women recognize their own complicity in the ascendancy and election of Donald Trump? Can black women actually shame white women and what forces allow or inhibit the phenomenon? Most importantly, how do black women figure into the various codes of morality at work in shame-tactics when American society is largely built around black women's perceived perversion?

Black Feminist Politics of Shame

Shame continues to be a frequent topic of contemporary feminist and other political discussions. Often, these discussions, though useful in nuancing the work of shame, still fall into the same pitfalls of race/color-blindness, vague rhetoric, and ahistoricism of the women at the 2017 Women's March on Washington. Scholars such as Jill Locke have been primarily invested in the ethical value of shame, especially as it relates to the potential of the emotion to generate what Locke marks as a more "feminist future." According to Locke, this feminist future requires feminists and democrats to "redirect their efforts toward building a world for the shame-ridden and shame prone—creating counterpublics and spaces where alternative images of life can emerge" (159). Although I find Locke's vision of counterpublics attractive, I am not convinced that it can contain the particularities of black womanhood. She bases this counterpublic on Hannah Arendt's narrative of the life of Rahel Varnhagen, a German-born Jewish American political theorist who internalized anti-Semitic views. Rahel claimed to use her experiences of shame to become politically active, but Locke argues that shame has nothing to do with Rahel's

transformation from a shamed individual to a politically aware "conscious pariah."[94] Instead, she argues that the political solidarity that Rahel found in a subaltern salon "provided a space in which to imagine and create a livable world" (148). However, Locke's refusal to see the potential of Rahel's shame is short-sighted, causing her framework of counterpublic to be limited by the privileges of color and class that allows Rahel to create alterative spaces to thrive in the first place. Arendt emerges as a "conscious pariah" through her ability to pass into white society on the one hand and to create counter-public spaces among similar groups of social outcasts on the other hand, a socio-cultural mobility and anonymity that black women are frequently without power to realize.

Furthermore, Locke's study, though insightful, does not extend beyond the good shame versus bad shame formulation that Tarnopolsky encourages that our analyses of shame move beyond. Therefore, it does not address how the politics of shame demands that we address the ways in which power operates upon us differently, at different moments, and in different times. As I have sought to demonstrate throughout this project, this inattention to the various forces of shame that move, shift, and play out variously as it plays upon individual subjects in different times severely cripples previous discussions of shame in psychology, sociology, and feminist theory. Locke argues that we "concentrate on creating a world that is open to the voices, dreams, and imaginations of those who live within the shadow of shame" (148), but I contend that our examinations must also be attuned to history. Often, the narratives that are within the "shadow of shame" are not only hidden, but the bodies at the center of shame have been buried under claims of normalcy and (im)morality. Previous discussions of shame that have not interrogated the lives and experiences of black women have proven to suffer from myopic envisioning.

[94] Locke defines a "conscious pariah" as someone who never escapes shame altogether, but learns to live with shame as a politically engaged individual, pp. 147.

With a view towards black women, I have attempted to exhume an important aspect of herstory, to offer insight into the effects of experiences that are part and parcel of black womanhood, its formulations and its history. I have addressed the ways in which standards and values related to shame are rooted in racialized American narratives, such as the cult of true womanhood and ideas regarding the pathological nature of black matrilineal family structures, that compound black women's vulnerability to abuse, sexual violence, subordination, and stigmatization. Thereby, I have marked a distinct legacy of black womanhood and shame. As Barbara Smith asserts in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (1983), "A Black feminist analysis has enabled us to understand that we are not hated and abused because there is something wrong with us, but because our status and treatment is absolutely prescribed by the racist, misogynistic system under which we live" (xxxvi). Though I acknowledge that this legacy of shame does not always emerge in the same way, I identify the essential nature of shame to black womanhood. Smith further explains, "There is not a Black woman in this country who has not, at some time, internalized and been deeply scarred by the hateful propaganda about us. There is not a Black woman in America who has not felt, at least once, like 'the mule of the world' to use Zora Neale Hurston's still apt phrase" (xxxvi). Lasha, who I previously quoted, and Smith, both point to the way Hurston's phrase captures an essence of black womanhood. Of course, by essential nature and essence I do not suggest that shame forms the whole of black women's experiences, as the narratives herein also reflect how black women experience a spectrum of emotions, including love, joy, anger, and grief, that accounts for the full humanity of all beings. We do well to note, however, that shame has an insidious character, and it often deflects from and influences the full manifestation of these other emotions. Smith's language

demonstrates that black women's participation in a world that subjugates them comes with an inevitable price that I have identified as the shame/shameless paradox.

The shame/shameless paradox has important relevance to the future of black feminist theory and theorizing. In Brittney Cooper's evaluation of black feminist theory in "Love No Limit: Towards a Black Feminist Future (In Theory)," she addresses questions that have been central to the development of black feminist (and womanist) traditions, positing:

> ...Black Feminism writ large has failed to think through critically more basic questions like our conceptions of freedom and justice. We have failed to fully lay out our own accounts of race and gender, of blackness and womanhood. We have also failed to attend to some of the underlying philosophical questions raised by Black feminist theorists in the 1980s, such as whether Black feminism needs its own metaphysics. (8)

As a response to Cooper, I offer the shame/shameless paradox, as I believe it to be fundamental to future formulations of black women's experiences and liberation. The shame/shameless paradox allows us to address questions that have been pivotal to black feminist theory/theorizing. It offers a lens through which to examine, simultaneously, the intersectionality of black women's oppression; the personal effects that this oppression has on individual black women; and the social, political, and economic factors that implicate various other actors in black women's physical and psychic abuse. Indeed if there is a metaphysics of black feminism, it seems that the shame/shameless paradox offers a fruitful terrain through which to foray. Attention to this phenomenon grounds our theorizing in emotional and affective economies that circuit black womanhood. In other words, the shame/shameless paradox allows us to develop epistemologies

rooted in black women's lived experiences, and it engages how others use and/or disavow black womanhood to engage with the world.

Importantly, as black feminist politics prioritize strategies for empowerment based on the experiences and needs of black women, my investigation of shame offers interventions into the remedies for shame that shame theorists have formulated without serious considerations of black women. The texts herein highlight the creative energy that emerges within the self-confrontation that shame elicits and offers various forms of confession that do not require full disclosure to respect the particularity of black women's experiences. The paradox of shame and shamelessness, then, becomes generative, not as a measure of moral agency or a barometer of values to which the self subscribes, but it offers a space for imaginative self re-creation that demands a transformation of society.

Figures

Fig.1 This image also went viral online after the 2017 Women's March on Washington. See Katherine Timpf's article for *National Review*, "The Vagina Imagery at the Women's March Was Offensive to Women Without Vaginas," (January 24, 2017).

Fig. 2 Participants at the women's march display a knit replica of the female reproductive system. Refer to Susan M. Goldberg's article in *PJ Media*, "How the Women's March Reinforced Every Negative Stereotype about Women EVER," (January 21, 2017).

Fig. 3: This image was taken of Angela Peoples at the 2017 Women's March on Washington, and quickly went viral on the Internet to symbolize the sentiments of many black women and other women of color. This image, as well as an interview with Peoples, can be found in article on *The Root* by Brooke Oble, "Women in Viral Photo From Women's March to White Female Allies: 'Listen to a Black Woman," (January 23, 2017).

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